The Theological Anthropology Underlying Libermann's Understanding of the "Evangelization of the Blacks" in Dialogue with the Theological Anthropologies of the East African Context: Implications for the Contemporary East African Catholic Church

Gerard Majella Nnamunga

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2013

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ABSTRACT


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December 2013

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Gerald Michael Boodoo.

This study was conceived primarily as an attempt to evaluate and critique the common assumption that Francis Mary Paul Libermann (1802-52) like any missionary during his age who went to Africa brought Good News of salvation, recreated self-esteem, confidence and self-respect in Africans who had been dehumanized by slavery. This tendency to overemphasize heroic exploits and contributions of self-sacrificing European missionaries and founders of missionary Religious Congregations often overlooks the part played by the people who were evangelized and their influence on the so called Christian heroes. Far from being a hagiology of Libermann, this study engages in an ideological dialogue by first, evaluating Libermann’s theological anthropology of l’œuvre des noirs in sitz im leben of the nineteenth century with its prejudices against Africans which can also be easily discerned in Libermann’s writings and second, underlining important underpinnings of the East African religious traditions which played a critical role in the reception and acceptance of the Gospel message.
Drawing from Emmanuel Levinas’ concept of the “other” sometimes referred to as the “face” which cannot be conceptualized, speaks to us, and is inviolable, I argue that Libermann too allowed the “other” that is, Africans, to speak to him. Using this insight I explore the relational notion of human being which is very prominent in the East African concept of person and its impact on Libermann’s relationship with Africans, the primary object of his mission. Missionary activity in the East African context, I conclude is a dialogue, a listening experience that leads to *metanoia (conversion)* of both the evangelizer and the evangelized.
DEDICATION

To my beloved sister, Christine Nnazziwa who passed on to eternity on April 11, 1991.
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INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this dissertation is to engage in an ideological and theological anthropological dialogue between Libermann’s understanding of *l’œuvre des noirs* (evangelization of the Blacks) and the East African (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) context. Who and what is the human being that is in need of God’s salvation? This is a fundamental theological anthropological question that this dissertation will dwell on. This key question will lead us to address further questions: How do East Africans understand themselves and what constitutes human wholeness for them? How is God experienced by East Africans? How do East Africans understand themselves as people who are in need of God’s salvation? What concept of human being and particularly Africans did Libermann have? How and why is Libermann’s understanding of human being relevant to the East African Catholic Church? This dissertation proposes first, to show that both parties of the dialogue are conducive to dialogue and second, to engage in dialogue through the lens of a relational and holistic understanding of person.

There are three underlying characteristics of dialogue which I am proposing for this study. First, dialogue presupposes differences between the two parties. The geographical, historical, and cultural distance between Libermann and the East African context is very large. Libermann never visited East Africa, never sent missionaries to East Africa and never wrote anything specific concerning East Africans. Indeed these differences make dialogue possible.

Second, dialogue presupposes that there are similarities between the two. I propose to study the similarities derived mainly from the historical experience of Libermann and the East African context. The main axes of my treatment are determined by the facts of Libermann’s life, namely his twofold experiences: first, in the ghettos of Alsace-Lorraine characterized by social
curtailment and discrimination, and second, in the cloisters of St. Sulpice and the Eudist novitiate characterized by physical suffering (epilepsy). I propose to delineate how these experiences played a critical role in Libermann’s understanding of *l’œuvre des noirs*. East Africans, like Libermann, are no strangers to suffering, curtailment, victimization, and being marginalized. East Africans have gone through three major phases of dehumanization: slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. East African cultural heritage has been desecrated and marginalized by colonialism and missionary evangelism. The first Christians in East Africa were ransomed slaves at Zanzibar and Bagamoyo.¹ They were cloistered in Christian villages and evangelized by the Spiritans. I am therefore proposing to study these East African experiences to show how they resonate with Libermann’s life. Drawing from phenomenology, I will argue that despite the discrimination and victimization, East African religious and cultural heritage has been resilient and has survived the onslaught of colonialism and missionary evangelism.

Third, dialogue aims at mutual enrichment and learning more truths about the other. I propose to show that both parties of the dialogue can mutually enrich each other. As I progressed in my study, I became more and more disenchanted with the common assumption that Libermann like any missionary during his age who went to Africa recreated self-esteem, confidence and self-respect in Africans who had been dehumanized by slavery. This tendency to stress heroic exploits and contributions of self-sacrificing European missionaries and founders of missionary Religious Congregations often neglects the part played by people who were evangelized and their influence on the so called Christian heroes. Rather than being a hagiology of Libermann, this study proposes that Libermann was informed by Africans whom he sought to evangelize

¹ Paul V. Kollman, *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in East Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), xx. Kollman prefers to call them “slaves” before and after being ransomed by Spiritans because according to him, Spiritans never declared them to be free. The Spiritans called them “ransomed slaves.”
through his missionaries. Conversion, I will argue, is for everyone, the evangelizer and the evangelized.

The principal aim of chapter one is to analyze major influences in Libermann’s life story and their impact on his understanding of *l’œuvre des noirs*. The original founders of *l’œuvre des noirs* were Frédéric Le Vavasseur and Eugène Tisserant who entrusted Libermann with the leadership role of this project after recognizing in him the necessary organizational skills to give direction to their project. I am proposing to focus on three major experiences in Libermann’s life that influenced his understanding of *l’œuvre des noirs* which also motivated him to be a driving and pivotal force in its implementation.

First, Libermann was born a Jew and practiced Judaism up to the age of 24. He lived during a period of transition after the 1789 French Revolution when the Jewish ghetto was crumbling and Jews were required by Napoleon Bonaparte to naturalize as French citizens. Libermann’s father, Rabbi Libermann, disdained Napoleon’s reforms. The marginalization and seclusion in ghetto life ensured, paradoxically, the preservation of the Jewish faith, since it provided clear group boundaries and a strict control of the rabbis. Rabbi Libermann had a firm grip on his son, Jacob Libermann, shielded him from outside influence, and confined him to ghetto life. I propose that this life of exclusion and marginalization played an important and critical role in Libermann’s understanding of *l’œuvre des noirs*.

Second, Libermann experienced physical suffering in the cloisters of St. Sulprice and the Eudist novitiate at Rennes. For twelve years, epilepsy impeded Libermann from becoming a priest. I propose that suffering was educative and enabled him to be in solidarity with those who were suffering, especially Africans, and at the same time Libermann imitated Jesus’ suffering.
Third, Libermann had two conversion experiences: the first from Judaism to Christianity and the second a conversion to mission. The first conversion was a result of Libermann’s realization that God cannot be confined to an ethnic group. God is for all people and has no favorites. We can read from this conversion experience Libermann’s nascent idea of mission which was suffocated in the cloisters of the seminary and novitiate, resurfaced when he was approached by Frédéric Le Vavasseur and Eugène Tisserant to give direction and guidance to l’œuvre des noirs.

It is important to note here that human wholeness needs open space to flourish. For Libermann there was a notable transition from “closed-in” spirituality and anthropology to mission spirituality.

The second chapter situates Libermann in nineteenth century dualistic theological anthropology which had an influence on him and his attitude to Africans expressed in his language which today gives an impression of condescension. The same chapter underlines the importance of relationality in the understanding of person. The purpose of our study of relationality is to show that Libermann’s understanding of person is not to be derived from his concept of nature or substance of person but rather from the relationship he had with others and particularly Africans. Nineteenth century anthropology was dominated by Boethius’ definition of person as an “individual substance with a rational nature.”

This definition lays emphasis on independence and autonomy of an individual, feeds scholastic philosophy and theology but does not do justice to Libermann’s concept of person which was relational. I will insist that the relational approach offers a better explanation of Libermann’s understanding of l’œuvre des noirs.

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Furthermore, I will show that the phenomenologists’ concept of the other offers a better way of showing how Libermann was informed by Africans. The rest of his teaching on what today we would call inculturation is to be understood from the point of view of being informed by Africans he sought to evangelize.

The third chapter identifies and describes important underpinnings of the East African theological anthropology through the lens of African Religions. I recognize the complexity involved in studying the methodology of African Religions which lack a centralized tradition. I will labor to present a case that relationality is an important underpinning in the understanding of the anthropology of the African Religions, and an important way East Africans understand the concept of person. Relationality is also important for our study because it is dialogic and this study deals with dialogue.

In the same chapter, I propose that the best way to describe God and divine beings in the East African context is by use of attributes. I draw from John Mbiti’s book, *Concepts of God in Africa* which gives numerous attributes of God from more than 270 African ethnic groups. Mbiti uses scholastic categories to describe African attributes of God but his main aim is to prove that traditional Africans believed in a Supreme Being. However, the examples he gives to describe these attributes show that Africans understand God and divine beings in ways that cannot be encapsulated by Mbiti’s scholastic model.

Mbiti’s assertion that African concept of time is key to understand their ontology will be analyzed. I will criticize his claim that African concept of time virtually has no future, but the present (*sasa*) and long past (*zamani*). East African history will be studied to show that East

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Africans despite the lack of written history before the advent of colonialism and Christian missionary evangelism have a history which was narrated by oral tradition. History for East Africans is a lived experience that creates a strong bond of relationship between the narrator and the person or event which is narrated. In addition, I will insist that from East African understanding and concept of time flows the human value of hospitality and relationality.

The last and final chapter deals with dialogue. Employing Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder’s concept *prophetic dialogue*, I propose to lay emphasis on what they refer to as a tripartite dialogue with the poor, culture and other religions. First, dialogue with the poor is put in the context of a historical dialogue featuring early Spiritan missionaries and ransomed slaves at Bagamoyo, Tanzania and Zanzibar. I am dependent on two historical studies done by Paul Kollman and John Kieran on Spiritan evangelization method. These authors are also credited for their efforts to reconstruct the voices of those who were evangelized. It is important to study Libermann through the lens of his missionaries because he never went out of France for mission. His knowledge about Africans was mainly drawn from his missionaries who were mandated to implement his teaching in their evangelizing ministry. The ransomed slaves represent the poor.

Second, dialogue with culture draws from the fact that the hallmark of Libermann’s teaching and understanding of *l’œuvre des noirs* is his insistence on what today we call inculturation, epitomized in Libermann’s phrase “be Black with the Black.” For East African anthropology, I propose that *ubuntu* (humanness or humaneness) is the fruition of East African human

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5 Kollman, *The Evangelization of Slaves*.

wholeness. Despite centuries of desecration of East African cultural and religious traditions, **ubuntu** still survives clearly manifested in human values of hospitality and reconciliation.

Third, I propose that dialogue with other religions draws its strength from the relational Trinity. Our discussion of the Trinity reiterates what has been underlined in the previous chapters that the focus of this study is on relationality rather than essence. For that reason, in studying the Trinity the main focus is on the relational Trinity and economic Trinity rather than ontological Trinity which analyzes the essence of the Triune God. This argument draws its strength from the fact that Libermann does not engage in discussing the essence of the Triune God but rather his **l’œuvre des noirs** is founded on the Trinitarian economy because it is aimed at bestowing human wholeness to Africans living under the yoke of slavery. He wanted them to participate in the Trinitarian love of God. God for East Africans is a relational God who relates with human beings to bring about human wholeness.

*The implication of this argument brings us to two important considerations; first, Triune God is relational which means that God cannot be encapsulated by any religious belief and calls for tolerance particularly in the East African context where Christians coexist with people of other faiths. Second, it calls for an understanding of ministry that recognizes the power of the Holy Spirit who empowers each and every member to be an active member in the ministry of the Church. It is also a critique of the traditional hierarchical model which is clerical and Christocentric emphasizing the difference between the active “alter Christus” clergy and the passive laity.*

The second part of chapter four dwells on implications of the dialogue to the East African Catholic Church. This discussion begins with identifying **anthropological poverty** as a reality
and an enormous challenge which the East African Church has to deal with. I suggest a number of ways to address this challenge. First, there is a need to move from dependency to interdependency which is also emphasized by Libermann’s teaching. Second, there is a need to redefine inculturation to shade off the assumed presumption that it is about retrieval to negotiating new frontiers of culture located at interstitial spaces. Third, Small Christian Communities (SCC) must make a transition from just being prayer groups to embrace a social agenda basically because East African holistic understanding of person warrants it. Fourth, East Africans are faced with a challenge of redefining their faith in their understanding Jesus Christ.

Libermann’s positive outlook toward his physical suffering from epilepsy offers East Africans inspiration to develop a positive attitude toward the challenges of HIV/AIDS. I have drawn considerably from Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator’s research on HIV/AIDS in East Africa.7

Lastly, I have addressed the ecological challenge which does not feature explicitly in Libermann’s teaching but has strong foundations in East African cultural and religious traditions. Nobel Peace Prize (2004) laureate, Wangari Maathai is convinced that for traditional East Africans the “world is animated by the Spirit of God.”8 This understanding offers an important starting point for the study of ecology in the East African context and at the same time undergirds the preeminence of the life-giving Spirit in the cosmos. The purpose of this study is to show that human beings cannot live human wholeness without taking care of the environment. It also reinforces the idea that we are interconnected not just with our fellow human beings but with the whole creation. The challenge of anthropological poverty cannot be adequately addressed without taking into consideration the ecological issue.


CHAPTER ONE
LIBERMANN’S LIFE EXPERIENCE

1.1 Introduction

Francis Libermann’s experience as a Jew, Christian and missionary leader offers an indispensable background to his anthropological understanding of Africans and his perspective on their need for salvation. This chapter will analyze Libermann’s Jewish context, his conversion, and suffering, and the motivation of his mission \textit{l’œuvre des noirs} which determined his understanding of human being created in the image of God in need of God’s salvation.

There are basically three major phases in Libermann’s life. First, Libermann was born a Jew during a time of transition in Jewish societal life in France from the ghetto to the emancipation of Jews. His experience as a Jew, a group of people secluded and looked down upon by wider society, together with their emancipation were significant experiences that not only influenced his conversion to Catholicism but also had a great impact on his attitude toward Africans who were marginalized and enslaved. Second, Libermann became a Christian and immediately began a fourteen year long journey toward priesthood which was interrupted by illness. He was physically impeded by epilepsy and socially curtailed by seminary and novitiate life. Physical suffering enabled him to understand better the marginalized; at the same time he had to extricate himself from an intramural mentality. Third, Libermann was a founder and leader of the Society of Holy Heart of Mary and also a leader of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit after the merger and dissolution of the former. He underwent what Bernard Kelly calls a second conversion.\textsuperscript{9} We will focus on how this conversion influenced his life and his attitude toward mission, opening the door for him to see enslaved Africans as human beings in great need of God’s mercy.

1.2 Brief History of Libermann’s Life

Jacob (Jagel) Libermann, as he was called before his conversion, was born at Saverne, Alsace, France, on Monday, April 12, 1802. He was the fifth son of Rabbi Lazarus Libermann and Leah Suzanne Haller. Jacob’s mother died on April 4, 1813. His father remarried a widow, Violette Weill, and had two more children.

Rabbi Lazarus Libermann was a strict, ultra-conservative Jew who never allowed his children to study anything else except Scripture. He was also a loving father admired by many people of different faiths at Saverne. He was kind toward the poor whom he welcomed in his home. As a young boy, Jacob was introduced to Scriptures, Talmud and Mishnah. Jacob’s eldest brother Samson was destined to succeed his father as a rabbi at Saverne Synagogue. However, to the disappointment of his father, Samson opted for medicine and later was converted to the Catholic faith. Rabbi Libermann then groomed Jacob to succeed him as Rabbi.

Jacob Libermann studied at Saverne under the supervision of his father. In 1822, at the age of twenty, his father decided to send him to Metz to complete his rabbinical studies. Jacob needed to get a diploma from a Talmudic School. The establishment of Jewish consistories in France had made this a requirement for being a rabbi. The school received a government grant and students were obliged by the government to learn French and arithmetic.

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10 ND 1, 6. Bonaparte Napoleon’s imperial decree of 1808 obliged the Jews to have family and proper names. For this reason, Rabbi Lazarus Libermann had to make a declaration of his children to the mayor of Saverne. According to this declaration these are the names of his children in order of birth: 1. Samson (Francois Xavier) 2. David (Christophe) 3. Hénoch 4. Felix 5. Jacob 6. Nathanael (Alphonse) 7. Esther. The two children from the second marriage were: Isaac and Sarah. In other sources the last son Nathanael of the first marriage is referred to as Samuel. Cf. ND I, 11, Letter by Dr. Libermann (Samson) to his children of April 26, 1854. Also ND I, 12, Letter by Rabbi Isaac Libermann of October 27, 1871. Two of the brothers of Libermann, David and Alphonse settled in the US. Alphonse Libermann settled in New Orleans, Louisiana, 53rd Street, North District. Cf. ND I, 28f.

11 ND I, 9.
It was also at this time that Libermann was communicating with his brother Samson who had converted to the Catholic faith. Jacob’s first reaction was to rebuke him for abandoning the faith of their Jewish ancestors, thereby causing much pain to his father. Libermann thought that the reasons for his brother’s conversion were human not supernatural. However, for Samson it was a great sacrifice, for he lost many clients due to Jewish anger against his conversion.

Jacob Libermann like his brother gradually became attracted to the Catholic faith. Through the influence of Drach, a Jewish convert to the Catholic faith, he was converted to the Catholic faith and baptized in the chapel of St. Stanislaus Seminary by the director of the Seminary, Jean-Baptiste Augé, on December 24, 1826. He took the names: Francis Mary Paul. Reporting what he felt during his baptism, he says:  

When the holy water flowed over my head, it seemed to me that I was in another world, in the center of an immense ball of fire. I no longer lived my natural existence; I neither saw nor heard what was happening around me. Things went on inside me that I cannot describe, and this lasted through much of the ceremony.

Immediately after his baptism, he decided to become a priest. Libermann started his seminary training in 1827 at St. Stanislaus where he spent a year before he moved to St. Sulpice Seminary. At St. Sulpice on March 13, 1829, the eve of his ordination to sub diaconate, Libermann had a strong seizure of epilepsy and it was recommended that he should not be ordained. Libermann reacted to this sickness by putting his trust in God. “God who feeds the birds of field,” he said, and then asked, “have we not much more reason to believe that He will not neglect His servants who are of much more value than birds?” After being impeded from becoming a priest because of epilepsy, he remained at St. Sulpice doing theology until the Archdiocese of Paris withdrew

12 ND I, 72. This baptism was so important that it was also reported in Ami de la Religion, (Vol. 50, 1826), 215.
13 ND I, 90.
14 ND I, 18. Letter to Dr. and Mrs. Samson Libermann, November 7, 1831.
his scholarship in 1831. The Sulpicians took him in and assigned him to their seminary of
philosophy at Issy where he served as assistant bursar between 1831 and 1837. Libermann
organized and animated various groups of piety (les bandes de piété) aimed at personal
sanctification and doing works of charity. He was particularly impressed by the spirituality of
Olier, founder of the Sulpicians.

Adrian van Kaam speaks of Libermann’s talent of “psychological analysis” that enabled him
to “probe deeply and accurately into the souls of those who came to him with their difficulties.”
He received many requests for guidance. He replied to them with personal attention. “This
respect for another’s personality was the hallmark of his direction.” Perrée, one of the
seminarians who approached him for assistance had this to say:

He knew a soul through and through in an instant. It was as if he had known you. You
couldn’t help wondering if it wasn’t a sort of inspiration. Thanks be to God, I have had
very good spiritual directors in my life, men of great reputation, but I must admit that no
one knew me so well from the beginning of the first interview as Fr. Libermann did. He
went right to the basis of my character and to the source of my trouble.

In 1837, still a seminarian, he was appointed novice master by the Eudists, a position he held
until 1839 when he was called to be a founder of a new society. Here he was influenced by the
spirituality of their founder, John Eudes whom he tried to imitate, even his handwriting.

The last years of Libermann’s life were dedicated to the founding of the Society of the Holy
Heart of Mary for the “evangelization of the Blacks” l’œuvre des noirs, and to the animation of
his missionaries. The idea of founding a Society was suggested to Libermann by two
seminarians, Frédéric Le Vavasseur (1811-82) and Eugène Tisserant (1814-46). The two

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15 Adrian van Kaam, A Light to the Gentiles: The Life Story of the Venerable Francis Libermann (Milwaukee: The
16 Ibid. 63.
17 ND I, 303f. Témoignage de l’abbe Perée, July 9, 1853.
seminarians had come to know Libermann through *les bandes de piété* which Libermann animated at the Sulpician seminary of philosophy.

Le Vavasseur was born in Reunion (by then Bourbon), a French colony, off the coast of East Africa in 1811. His father owned many slaves who worked on his big plantations. Le Vavasseur was sent to France for studies. From a European perspective, Le Vavasseur foresaw terrible consequences to the pending emancipation of the slaves if they were not morally prepared for freedom. He presented his proposal for their evangelization to Libermann. At the same time, another seminarian, Eugène Tisserant made a similar proposal to Libermann. Tisserant’s mother was Haitian. He looked at the effects of the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath due to lack of proper Christian instruction. It should be mentioned that Tisserant too, like Le Vavasseur, looked at the situation of Africans from a European perspective that was negative about the effects of the Haitian Revolution. At this point in time, the realization had not dawned on Tisserant and Le Vavasseur that mission begins with oneself; they too had to be converted to get rid of racial prejudices against Africans. Libermann too will make a similar journey of conversion.

Tisserant and Le Vavasseur together with Maxime de la Brunière wanted Libermann to be the leader of the new society which they wanted to found. Libermann considered this to be a major breakthrough in his life. He prayed and waited for a sign from God before accepting this important mission. He received a supernatural enlightenment from God on October 28, 1839 (feast of St. Jude) and from that moment on, Libermann was imbued with a zeal for mission. He accepted the leadership of the new Society which was given a name: *Society of the Holy Heart of Mary*. Libermann presented the first memoir of the new Society to Propaganda Fide in Rome in

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18 The dedication of the Society to the Holy Heart of Mary got a strong impetus from Eugène Tisserant. The first major inspiration of *l’œuvre des noirs* came from a visit to Our Lady of Victories (Notre Dame des Victoires) by Tisserant and Frédéric Le Vavasseur in 1839 and later where Tisserant was ordained a priest on September 18, 1841.
1840. Propaganda Fide accepted Libermann’s memoir but wanted him to be ordained a priest first before he could continue with his new society. It was during his sojourn in Rome, between Epiphany 1840 and Epiphany 1841, when he was waiting for a response from the Roman authorities, that he wrote a Commentary on the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John.

Libermann was ordained a priest by bishop Mioland of Amiens, France, in his private chapel on September 18, 1841. Bishop Mioland gave him a house at La Neuville. Laying the foundation is not always easy. Libermann’s first cross was his closest companions. In this community, Libermann lived with Le Vavasseur and Tisserant, newly ordained priests, together with Mr. Collin who aspired to join their new Society. The greatest challenge was that Le Vavasseur and Tisserant had a misguided understanding of asceticism emphasizing extreme mortifications, abject poverty, penance and poor meals which they wanted to impose on the community. Libermann rebuked them for this indiscretion insisting that a missionary had to be healthy and alive before he could minister to others. “He mistrusted the unhealthy atmosphere in which these practices are apt to flourish, and he was particularly apprehensive about their effect on the young people. He saw that all too often they end in pride, conceit, nervous tension and a distorted scale of spiritual values.” What the Lord wanted was the heart. Eventually in 1842, La Vavasseur was sent to his mother country Reunion where he did a commendable ministry. After a failed mission to Haiti, Tisserant was sent to West Africa but never arrived there due to a storm that destroyed their vessel in 1846. Meanwhile, at La Neuville, Libermann and his community were and Libermann celebrated his thanksgiving Mass. Due to his strong devotion to Our Lady, for Tisserant l’œuvre des noirs can justifiably be called l’œuvre de Marie.

19 Propaganda Fide is the Vatican Congregation that oversees missionary work. It was sometimes referred to simply as Propaganda. Today it is known as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

20 Van Kaam, A light to the Gentiles, 112. Cf. ND IV, 315. Libermann was not only against La Vavasseur and Tisserant, but also against the prevailing thought and spirituality of the day.
gaining a reputation of being kind and hospitable to their neighbors who knocked at their door for help.  

By 1842, Libermann did not have problems in getting vocations but rather his problem was where to send them for mission. Already he had five missionaries to go to Haiti but they were unable to leave because of political problems there. An occasion provided itself in December 1842, when Bishop Barron from the United States visited France to look for missionaries to accompany him on the journey to his new mission to West Africa. All Congregations turned down his invitation to send missionaries to West Africa except Libermann’s Society.

Libermann provided seven priests for the expedition. They departed and arrived at Cape Palmas, the present Liberia, on November 30, 1842. On their arrival, they embarked on learning the local language Grebo. They presented themselves as men of God, not as representatives of any European government. They did a terrible mistake when they tried to adapt themselves to the natives by having a poor diet. The provisions that Libermann had shipped for them were left untouched. They refused to listen to the advice of Fr. Kelly who had some knowledge of the country. Two weeks after their arrival, they contracted fever. Fr. Regniér died on December 30, 1842. By August 1843, there were only three survivors, Father Bisseux, Brothers Gregory and Jean. Bishop Barron was so much discouraged and disappointed by the disaster that he gave up the whole mission and returned to the United States via Rome.

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21 It should be noted that Libermann’s father was also very charitable to his neighbors. Intuitively, Libermann might have been following the good example of his father.

22 Bishop Barron was born in Ireland, became Vicar General of Philadelphia archdiocese. After the abolition of slavery in several American States, some African Americans were sent back to West Africa which gave birth to the country of Liberia. This aroused interest of the Catholic Church to evangelize these “freed slaves”. Fr. Barron volunteered to lead this initiative. He was consecrated a bishop and placed in charge of a Vicariate of the Two Guineas and Sierra Leone, a mission that stretched between Senegal and Orange River in South Africa.

23 Henry Koren, The Spiritans: A History of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University, 1958), 81. The seven priests were: Bissieux, de Regniér, Bouchet, Paul Laval, Roussel, Maurice and Aubert. The other three: Jean, Andrew and Gregory sometimes referred to as “brothers” were laymen. Only Gregory was to take the vows as a Religious brother later. The three were handpicked without any preparation of any kind.
Libermann’s critics seized this opportunity to attack him for sending missionaries to a slaughter house in West Africa for his personal glory. When Libermann conveyed the sad news to La Neuville community on October 8, 1844, to his great surprise, “All of them begged to be sent to Guinea. I had to forbid them to torment me any more with the request.” Nevertheless, Libermann resolutely decided never to abandon Africa but was also cautious:

My determination to save those huge areas is stronger than ever; I have decided, by the grace of God, never to abandon those poor people, at least as long as that seems to be His will. But I do not think that Providence will ever indicate that I should not continue to be involved with that country. However, do not worry: I shall not send any more of our missionaries to that particular place. I hope the decisions I will now make will mean that there will be no more victims. I trust that the good God is satisfied with the sacrifice we have already made.

Despite the first disaster, Libermann’s missionaries were even more determined to do ministry in West Africa.

In 1848, at the behest of Rome, Libermann fused his Society with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, which had been founded by Claude-Francis Poullart des Places in 1703. Libermann became the 11th Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. De jure, the fusion meant that the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary ceased to exist. De facto, the spirit and vision of Libermann’s Society continued to live in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit which he animated as Superior General until he passed on, on February 2, 1852.

1.3 Libermann and the Jewish Context

Libermann’s Jewish religious heritage had taught him that we encounter God in the ever changing situations of life: “what counted was unconditional availability before God and the

24 ND VI, 511.
26 Koren, The Spiritans, 134. Koren says that Libermann’s soul went to meet God whom He had loved and dedicated his life to, in an upper room adjoining the Chapel where his confreres were reciting the Vespers. When they reached the words of the Magnificat, et exaltavit humiles (and has exalted the humble) at 3:15 p.m., he breathed his last.
concrete events that should be perceived as indications of God’s will.”27 The “concrete events” showed that there were many Africans suffering under the yoke of slavery. Drawing from his Jewish life experience, Libermann realized the inadequacy of emancipation and the importance of true freedom that comes from God. What Africans needed was not just emancipation but true freedom from all forms of servitude.

1.3.1 Emancipation of Jews

Libermann was born at a time of social, political and religious changes in France due to the 1789 French Revolution. Jews had been expelled from France by Charles VI in 1394 but later a handful obtained permission to live there. However, it was through French annexation of neighboring territories that large numbers of Jews settled in France. Before the 1789 Revolution, Jews in France as Schechter points out, “were a nation within a nation” because they lived “in closed corps governed by internal laws and customs.”28 These “corps” are often referred to as ghettos. On the eve of the French Revolution, there were approximately 40,000 Jews living in France, almost half of them in Alsace.29 Although the ghetto was imposed on them from without by civil authorities, it was also an accepted way of life by the Jews that helped them to cement their Jewish identity. Many Jews were traders but, “despite the profitable money trade, the Jewish population of Alsace in general was poor.”30 Rabbi Libermann too was a poor man though generous.31 Posener sums up the impact of the 1789 French Revolution on the Jews:32


29 S. Posener, “Emancipation of Jews in France,” Jewish Social Studies, (Vol. 1: No. 3, July 1939), 281. He says that in 1784 there were 19,701 Jews in Alsace. In 1815, there were 47,166 Jews in France of whom 26,070 lived in Alsace. Alsacian Jews spoke Yiddish. Alsace was annexed to France from Germany in 1648.

30 Ibid. 273. Jews were charged for crossing into French territory, especially the peddlers who traded their merchandise. Up to 1784, they were subject to a head tax on entering the city of Strasbourg, thus being classified
On the eve of the revolution the legal and economic situation of the Jews of France was characterized by the restrictions upon their free movement and settlement, upon them engaging in arts and crafts and by special assessments imposed upon them. In the Jewish as in all other phases of national life, however, the *ancien régime* had become undermined, rusted and shaken. The liberating influence of the idea of tolerance, already active in the seventeenth century and increasingly dominant in the century following, the spread of philosophical concepts of equalitarianism and individualism had paved way for the abolition of the system of exclusion...the ineluctable denouement was on its way, the revolution was approaching, and with it the great law of liberation for the Jews, heralding great changes in their life.

In 1789, during the French Revolution, the National Constituent Assembly adopted the *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen* (*Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*) which was revised in 1793. The principle tenets of this declaration were: *equality*, *liberty* and *fraternity*. The document defines individual and collective rights, stipulating that the rights of Man are universal, valid at all times and in every place, pertaining to human nature itself. In 1791, Jews in France were emancipated, granted equal rights before the law and became full citizens. In 1808, Jewish consistories were set up aimed at having centralized authority for the Jews which at the same time would be controlled by the French Government. Many Jews realized that this autonomy had come at a price. The bitter fact was that “emancipation and autonomy were inherently contradictory; that once an individual Jew is

with animals. Jewish economic activity was known for lending for a profit or usury. This was a controversial business condemned by the Catholic Church.

31 ND I, 9. Jean Bosch, a Spiritan who was born at Steinbourg near Saverne in 1844, says that Venerable Libermann and his brothers had low professions, one a tailor, another a musician and Venerable Libermann a shoemaker. He adds that Rabbi Libermann was a very poor man who depended on the generosity of his Jewish community at Saverne. According to Saverne records, before the birth of Esther, Rabbi Libermann’s profession is listed as trade and commerce. After the birth of Esther his profession is a rabbi. Cf. ND I, 7.


33 The Declaration does not address the rights of slaves and women.

34 ND I, 37.
granted equal rights, he can no longer claim group privileges.”

Hence, when Napoleon by the “infamous decree” obliged the Jews to conform to the laws of the state and dismantle communal organizations of the ghettos, some Jews including Rabbi Lazarus Libermann rejected it because he regarded the emancipation of the Jews dangerous to the Jewish religion and identity. He would be proved right as history unfolded. As Christy Burke points out, “there was a certain irony in the ‘liberty’ granted to the Jews… Ironically, the abolition of the ghetto seemed to herald the death of Judaism as it existed in France.”

Judaism had survived centuries of persecutions and injustices but with emancipation of the Jews, many abandoned the religion of their ancestors and became Christians including all Rabbi Lazarus’ six sons from his first marriage. The desire for freedom on the one hand, and its effects on those who were once enslaved or secluded by wider society is what Libermann is going to wrestle with in his life. He is going to be cautious in his instructions to his missionaries about the emancipation of slaves.

1.3.2 Libermann’s Attitude to Freedom and Emancipation

Libermann made a distinction between freedom and independence. People ought to be free but cannot be independent. He argues:

Freedom is given to people by the Creator. Independence is contrary to nature and is destructive of every principle of the Christian Faith. The fanatical urge for independence led to Protestantism. It has led, too, to a modern philosophy that promotes egoism to a frightening extent that led to barbarity of the past century. Christianity has come to bring

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36 Between February 9 and March 9, 1807, Napoleon convoked the Grand Sanhedrin in which he sought consensus from the notables of the changes he wanted to implement. Rabbi Lazarus Libermann attended this meeting. He was one of the few who rejected outrightly Napoleon’s proposals.

37 Christy Burke, No Longer Slaves (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2010), 12f.

freedom to the world and at the same time wage war on independence which is contrary to the faith and moral principles.

Libermann is aware that we are necessarily dependent on each other. Independence may lead to egoism, individualism and neglect of others who are in great need of God’s mercy. Commenting on the above passage, Christy Burke says, “The egoism or individualism of Western culture is often sharply contrasted with the importance of community that one finds in African cultures.” This idea of community resonates well with African cultures’ understanding of a human person. It will be an important point of discussion in the second and third chapters. When Libermann was baptized, Christ made him free but his freedom was to be found in the Body of Christ. He became a member of a community of Christian believers, a member of the Church. He was also aware of the fact that independence or emancipation leads to “a philosophy that promotes egoism.” His Jewish experience had taught him that it is not enough to be emancipated in law, but in fact as well. This experience will help him to understand and teach that Africans must be free, not to do what they like, but to have that sense of worth and dignity for they are created in the image of God.

Marx, a fellow Jew, dwelt extensively on the difference between political emancipation and human emancipation of the Jews in Prussia (Germany) and France which resonates with the difference which Libermann makes between independence and freedom. In his famous essay, “On the Jewish Question”, Karl Marx criticizes Bruno Bauer’s stand which states that Jews can achieve political emancipation only if they relinquish their particular religious consciousness. In criticizing Bauer’s position Marx argues that political emancipation does not require that the

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39 Burke, Morality and Mission, 71.

40 Karl Marx, A World Without Jews, trans. Dagobert D. Dune (New York: Philosophical Library), 1843. Cf. http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/index.htm (accessed on December 2, 2010). Karl Marx critiques Bruno Bauer’s work, The Jewish Question, (Braunschweig, 1843). He also uses this article as a launching pad to his critique on capitalism. Bauer, according to Marx, had argued that a secular state does not have any room for religion. True political emancipation, for Bauer, requires the abolition of religion.
Jews give up their identity as a separate group of people identified by their faith. Political emancipation for Marx meant the achieving of political rights which is desirable but insufficient because it is linked to egoism and private property.

Marx called for human emancipation which requires the transcendence of what he termed as commercial property (later to be referred to as capitalism) calling for a social analysis of the human condition. Marx’s social analysis shows an imbalance in the distribution of wealth which needs to be addressed. He traces the history of the Jews and their attachment to trade, commerce and usury which gave them real economic and political power. This made it possible for them to press and demand for civil equality and to infiltrate their social and commercial values into civil society. The state was dependent on them for its own financial survival and stability. For Marx then, civil society provided the material basis for the existence of the Jews as a separate group because it needed traders and money lenders. Human emancipation for Marx meant that the economic power which the Jews had accumulated and enjoyed needed to be addressed by redistribution of wealth. It will be achieved when social contradictions like that of the Jews and class antagonisms produced by capitalistic production methods are overcome which would lead to fulfillment of freedom of morality. This goal would be achieved by a class struggle when the revolutionary movement of the socially repressed rises to revolt.

Even though Marx’s advocacy of class struggle to achieve human emancipation was not accepted by Libermann, 41 nevertheless both Libermann and Marx agree that emancipation had led to egoism which is the root cause of many evils including the enslavement of others. The spirit of emancipation had driven many people to acquire property at all costs and to enslavement of their fellow human beings. Both Marx and Libermann widen the meaning of slavery. “Slave

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41 Libermann taught his missionaries to be prudent when dealing with slave masters.
masters” were not only those who deprived Africans of their freedom, but also those who had acquired monopoly of wealth and economic power. The Jews, according to Marx, had to be ready to give up their “economic power” created by their wealth for the sake of wider community. In a sense, even though, according to French law, Jews were not allowed to possess slaves, they had enslaved others by their monopoly on trade, commerce and usury.

In 1848, the Communist Manifesto was published by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It affected the lives of many people in Europe. Communism was condemned outright by the Catholic Church. However, for Libermann, “communism is not to be feared. It will attack and disperse riches that have been accumulated … The system is not directly in opposition to Christianity. The hatred of communism and their programs are not directly against religion, but against capitalism.” What was important for Libermann was that communism had engaged the structures which dehumanized people. The Church too should not be satisfied with the status quo but always speak out for the marginalized.

In May 1848, France witnessed the Socialist Revolution. Libermann was very pleased with this Revolution. He says:

I think it was an act of God’s justice acting against a decadent dynasty that had worked to establish its own power rather than promote the welfare of the people under its care. The pride and pretensions of the regime sought to make it superior to God… And another group that was hit by the storm was the aristocratic bourgeoisie that once trampled underfoot the rights of the poor and sold their souls and country to egoism and self-interest.

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43 ND X, 182.
44 Burke, Morality and Mission, 76f.
45 ND X, 144f. Cited by Burke, No Longer Slaves, 103.
Henry Koren draws up ten parallels or sympathies between Libermann and Karl Marx. One of them depicts Libermann’s satisfaction for the downfall of the bourgeois aristocracy in France because they were egoistic, and accumulated wealth at the expense of the poor, thereby violating the rights of the poor. In the same vein of thought, Marx in his *Communist Manifesto* says that in a capitalistic society, people become mere means by which the greedy gain money and fortune. People are commoditized in a capitalistic society.

According to Marx, Hegel had revealed the limitations of the bourgeois emancipation movement whose main objective was political liberation alone. Hegel notes further that it failed to address the new forms of social injustice and repressive circumstances at the time, leading to another repressive class. However, to Marx’s surprise, Hegel still maintained that the bourgeois state is the highest fulfillment of human morality. Marx criticizes Hegel for failing to realize that the bourgeois state creates a new class of socially repressed and exploited people tied to their work. It cannot be abolished by political or civil freedoms. Marx proposes an evolutionary revolt whose goal is human emancipation beyond the limits of bourgeois-political emancipation, the building of a human solidarity, society of free individuals and humane world society. The irony of such revolt and other violent human struggles for freedom whether it is the bourgeois emancipation or Marx’s class revolutionary struggle or otherwise, is that it often leads to repressive regimes. That is why for Libermann true freedom is to be found only in God.

**1.4 Libermann’s Conversion Experience**

Libermann’s understanding of human freedom played an important role in his conversion from the Jewish faith to the Catholic faith. The journey to conversion started with the movement from the ghetto of Saverne where his freedom was curtailed to Metz where he experienced some

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freedom but also with a sense of rejection and loneliness. Libermann discovers that, first, freedom to think comes from God and second, he has to worship God in freedom and truth. This led him to reach out to others exemplified in his passion for mission. Libermann not only wanted those who were enslaved to be free, but also wanted them to practice their faith in freedom.

Libermann started his journey of conversion by questioning about his Jewish faith. He was particularly repelled by the miracles in the Hebrew Bible and those attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Eventually he read Jean Jacque Rousseau’s Emile and particularly the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar which played a significant role in his conversion. He says, “Who could believe that this book was an opening, that shook my faith as a believer, was one of the ways in which God was using to draw me to the true religion.” The Savoyard Vicar is a lonely priest who narrates his Profession of Faith to a young man who also felt lonely and dejected. The Savoyard Vicar addresses the existence of God, the basis of his profession of faith. He stresses that God should not be confined to a certain religion or ethnic group because God is all loving and universal. True religion is the religion of the heart. God requires us to worship Him in spirit and truth. What unites us as human beings is Christian charity which should be the guiding principle of all our lives.

47 N.D. I, 63.

48 Jean Jacque. Rousseau, Profession of Faith of Savoyard Vicar, Harvard Classics, http://www.bartleby.com/34/4/2.html (accessed on October 11, 2010). The Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar depicts a young man of about 30 years who was raised up a Calvinist, went to Italy, but found himself in untold poverty, misery and distress. He was induced to change his Religion to become a Catholic for the sake of surviving in Catholic Italy. As a catechumen, he was badly treated, pleaded everywhere, but no one attended to his plea. In his misery, he found a good and honest priest who listened to his plight. This priest, the Savoyard Vicar, after breaking the vow of celibacy, incurred the displeasure of his bishop and was prohibited to function as a priest. After a long time, he was reinstated but lived alone and was poor. The Savoyard Vicar turned out to be a “good Samaritan” to the young man who was in great need of mercy and compassion. He welcomed him, and the two lived in good company. The life of the Savoyard Vicar was so appealing that the young man wanted to know the principles on which his life and conduct were founded. The Savoyard Vicar then decided to make his Profession of Faith to the young man so that he could know the innermost of his heart and if he may judge it a good experience, then he would do likewise.
The Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar was appealing to Libermann for a number of reasons. First, like the young man who was mistreated and the Savoyard Vicar who was banished by his bishop, Libermann too as a Jew and like any other Jew at his time had suffered discrimination from the wider community. Second, the Savoyard Vicar insists that God has no favoritism. He cannot be confined to an ethnic group or a religion. This too was a major revelation for Libermann which is going to play a vital role and a hallmark in his understanding of God who is not confined to the Jewish religion and nation. Third, the Savoyard Vicar detested miracles in the Bible. Rousseau believed in a deistic God, a watch maker, who created the world and then left it to move on its own. What governs us is reason. He rejected an interventionist God. What matters in life, as the life of the Savoyard Vicar reveals, is to be just and humane. Even though Libermann might not have accepted Rousseau’s deism, like Rousseau he believed in a humane God and disliked miracles in the Bible. Fourth, we have but one letter which Libermann wrote before he became a Catholic. He wrote it to his brother Samson on January 6, 1826. In this letter, he shows that he was influenced by Rousseau’s idea of human reason. He also shows that he had begun the journey to conversion. He has begun to doubt, to question but not yet to accept. He says: “God gave us power to think. This power should be put to use and not left idle. If a person had to allow his mind grow dull, if he had to surrender blindly to the chains of religion, how could he differ from a brute?” Libermann realizes the importance of freedom to think, to reflect, and above all not to be enslaved by any tradition. This freedom of thought is necessary for true religion. Libermann uses his freedom of thought to challenge the Jewish religion. He continues:

49 ND I, 52.
50 ND I, 53.
Would it not be an injustice for God to choose just one race from among all the peoples of the earth and enlighten them and reveal to them the true principles of religion while leaving all others steeped in ignorance and idolatry? Were not other people God’s creatures just like the Israelites? From all this I come to the conclusion that what God requires of us is to recognize Him, to be just and humane…It matters little whether I be a Jew or Christian; what matters is that I adore God, whether in one person or three. In any case, I assure you that I would be no better as a Christian than as a good Jew.

We can notice here that even before his conversion, Libermann had a missionary dimension in his thinking. He is not comfortable with a God conditioned to an ethnic group. He is not satisfied with a God that is confined to a particular religion. Libermann reveals an ecumenical spirit in his thinking. All people are God’s creatures, nobody is excluded from God’s love. The Jews cannot have a monopoly of God. The Europeans too cannot have exclusive rights to Christianity. This understanding will help him to emphasize the importance of inculturation in the evangelization of Africans which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

At the heart of conversion, the grace of God touches the human heart. As Kelly points out, it is always God’s grace that leads to conversion. “And yet this grace does not destroy but only transforms him. Jacob’s ambition, his tenacity, his resourcefulness, his tact, all the inner resources developed in the service of evasion, will not disappear. They will instead be transformed and purified in the service of life.”51 The grace of God is a free gift. Libermann had been open to it so that it could work in him. This grace is now going to be a guiding motif of his life. God’s grace worked through others like Mr. Drach who facilitated his process of conversion but the final decision came from Libermann.

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51 Kelly, Life Began at Forty, 25.
It was a radical transformation for Libermann, not just sentimental, but a real *metanoia*, a change of one’s way of life.\footnote{The Greek word *metanoia*, is often translated as “repentance” or “conversion” literary means “beyond perception” or “beyond understanding” (*metá*, meaning "beyond" or "after" and *noeō* meaning "perception" or "understanding" or "mind"). In the Gospels, *metanoia* means “repentance” or “change of heart/mind” or “change of one’s way of life”. It is a fundamental call to discipleship. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ first words are: “Repent (*metanoiete*) and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). Peter and Andrew respond to Jesus’ call by leaving their profession and later the sons of Zebedee, James and John, do not leave only their profession but also their father (Mk 1:16-20).} Like the disciples who were called by Jesus, left their profession, their parents and relatives and followed Jesus, for Libermann too, left his father and the Jewish religion to become a Catholic. Commenting on the call of Andrew and Peter (Jn 1:35-42), Libermann says that the initiative comes from the Lord. “In the whole story of the call of the two disciples, the evangelist shows in what way our Lord calls souls to himself and has them follow the perfection of divine love.”\footnote{Francis Libermann, *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: A Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part 1: Chapters I-IV, trans. Myles L. Fay (Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1994), 38ff.} The disciples have “good disposition”, “simplicity” and “docility” of heart which are essential for conversion. They are attracted to their master, Jesus who is full of “goodness, gentleness and love for them.” Then, they make a movement towards him and finally they are committed to him “entirely and definitively.”\footnote{Ibid. 42. Libermann says that Andrew after being possessed by the Lord goes to announce to his brother Peter whom he draws to the Lord; in other words, he becomes a missionary.} Above all, the conversion of Libermann shows that it is a life long journey.

**1.5 Libermann’s “Second Conversion”**

Libermann was free from the Jewish ghetto and became a Christian but needed self-determination. Soon after his conversion, circumstances impose restrictions on his freedom. These circumstances, physical illness and enclosures influenced his outlook at himself as well as others, particularly the marginalized and enslaved. He is still in another ghetto, he needs another breakthrough. Donald Cozzens reflecting on his own experience of priestly training says that...
seminary enclosures have a danger of forming a priest who remains *puer aeternus* – an immature adolescent who needs attention and shuns the responsibilities of the world.\textsuperscript{55} Drawing from the Freudian oedipal myth, particularly the oedipal triangle, Cozzens describes the father–bishop who threatens a priest’s independence, mother-church who rewards the priest for conforming to the norm, and the end result is son-priest who according to Cozzens remains immature, unable to take responsibility. Libermann too after being in the seminary and the novitiate for fourteen years was in danger of being *puer aeternus* due to intramural experience.

During his stay at the novitiate, Libermann had a mystical experience. Majority of those with such experience live in enclosures, especially monks and nuns. He describes it to Fr. Carron:\textsuperscript{56}

> It is the night of the cross, of privation, of interior obscurities, when the senses no longer act and are null and dead. It is the moment when one has to live by faith, but a faith that is full of hope in God’s goodness and at the same time full of fear and distrust of oneself… This night is excellent for it is in it and through it that our souls are perfected and gradually lose defects that cling to them.

Sooner or later, Libermann discovered that a mystical experience was not enough to spur him to continue to live at the novitiate. “He has come to realize that a seminary or novitiate does not by itself produce sanctity.”\textsuperscript{57} He has to move out and move on to a wider perspective.

Kelly sees the period between 1839 and 1841 as the “Second Conversion of Libermann.”\textsuperscript{58} We have noted that the “First Conversion” was sparked off by Libermann’s realization that God cannot be confined to a certain belief. From that time up to 1839, cloistered experience had curtailed his outlook to life and to his spirituality. The “Second Conversion” is of vital


\textsuperscript{56} LS II, 266. Letter to Fr. Carrot, June 15, 1839. His mystical experience is similar to that of St. Theresa of Avila.

\textsuperscript{57} Burke, *Morality and Mission*, 18.

\textsuperscript{58} Kelly, *Life Begun at Forty*, 86ff.
importance in Libermann’s life. It is a transition from a “closed in” spirituality to spirituality of mission.

In 1839, when Libermann was accompanying the novices, he felt the urge to move out to the world and move on. “The years pass, death is approaching, and still there are so many souls to be saved.” According to Burke “many souls to be saved” is what saved Libermann at the moment of frustration and depression in the novitiate. He continues: “a new vision of life, a new meaning for life, is presented to him. The troubles of the small novitiate community are put into context when he looks out from his little ghetto and sees the world around him. What brings this view into focus is a visit of two confidants from his days at Issy.” As we have seen these two were definitely Frédéric Le Vavasseur and Eugène Tisserant whom he had known through les bandes de piété.

Conversion is not a once for all experience but rather an ongoing process for the whole of one’s life. Sometimes Luke’s narrative of St. Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16 and 26:2-18) is given as evidence to show a once for all conversion. However, Paul’s version of his conversion reveals that it was a long process (Gal 2:11-17). Interestingly enough, for Paul, his conversion did not only influence his understanding of justification by faith but also influenced him to become an “apostle of the macrocosmic universe per excellence.” For Libermann like St. Paul, his conversion widened his scope from seminary clerical life to a worldwide missionary and universalist vision of the Church. It should be emphasized that Libermann’s conversion was not instantaneous, identified with “important” dates (December 24,

60 Burke, Morality and Mission, 19.
1826 or October 28, 1839) of his life, but rather a process for the whole of his life. The rest of Libermann’s life was a life of conversion for first, as we will see Libermann too under the influence of French society at the time had some prejudices about Africans. He needed an *epoché*. Second, conversion is a mutual process. A missionary does not only convert others but is also converted by the people he evangelizes. He is like a teacher who is taught by his students.

1.6 Libermann’s Suffering, Rejection and Living Positively

Libermann’s life was one of suffering, rejection and sometimes loneliness. Most of his suffering was due to epilepsy from which he was never fully recovered. At the same time, his sufferings were also educative, helped him to cope positively with life and were a determining factor in his understanding of Africans and their need for salvation. We will dwell more on epilepsy which for a long time impeded him to become a priest, a requirement for continuing his project for the evangelization of Africans.

Libermann’s illness did not incapacitate him from physical strength as such. He could walk long distances. He made pilgrimages from Rome to Loreto and, from St. Sulpice to Notre Dame de Chartres, journeys that involved at least a hundred miles on foot. He had suffered from nerves\(^62\) since childhood. At Metz, where he was studying to become a Rabbi, there were already signs that he was epileptic.\(^63\) At St. Stanislaus, he had a nervous attack though it was not diagnosed as epilepsy and was allowed to receive the tonsure in June 1827. The first documented strong seizure of epilepsy was at St. Sulpice Seminary, on March 13, 1829, the eve of his subdiaconate ordination. He had it in front of his spiritual director, Fr. Carbon who advised him not to be ordained. This was a trying moment for Libermann. It was also a critical moment in his life

\(^{62}\)The word “nerves” here is connected to epilepsy and should be distinguished from nervous problem which means a psychological problem.

\(^{63}\)ND I 57. Letter by M. Titercher, October 28, 1854.
at a time when clericalism was very strong. He was granted permission by Fr. Auge to have a
rest at St. Stanislaus so as to recover from his illness. On April 8, 1829, Francis wrote to his
brother Samson about his health. He says:64

My health is not yet completely restored, but it is better; my nerves gave me no trouble
for eighteen month, but they made me suffer a great deal towards the end of last year and
during the last winter. I believe the mental stain wore me out. I was continually occupied
with theology all day long. Even now, every time I do a little work, I feel a lot of pressure
in my head as if my forehead and temples were encircled with an iron band. All this will
oblige me to take it easy for a number of years until my health is completely restored. I
have resolved to withdraw for a while from the seminary.

Libermann realized that he was straining himself by studying too hard. Later in his life, he
will be careful to have a balance between studies, health and one’s vocation. Despite the
suffering he was going through, and the uncertainty of his future, he put all his trust in God. He
continues: “I am always satisfied, and I can assure you that I never was as happy as I am now.
How true it is therefore that the more we love God, and the more we seek to serve Him well, the
better we fulfill the end for which He created us.”65

In his first year of theology at St. Sulpice, Libermann had another strong epileptic attack in
February/March 1830. Again he was confident that God would take care of him. On July 8,
1830, he wrote to his brother Samson insisting that as Christians we should be carrying our
crosses ungrudgingly.66

True Christians are satisfied with everything that their heavenly Father gives them,
because they know that whatever He sends is good and useful to them, and that it would
be real misfortune for them if it were otherwise. … But I can assure you, my dear friends,
that my beloved sickness is for me a great treasure, preferable to all the goods of the
world offers for its votaries, because these pretended goods are but filth and wretchedness

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64 ND I, 150. Letter to Samson Libermann, April 8, 1829. Also LS I, 5.
65 Ibid.
66 LS I, 8. Letter to Dr. and Mrs. Samson Libermann, July 8, 1830.
in the eyes of a true child of God; and they serve only to draw him further away from his Father, who is in heaven.

Francis continued to put his trust in God’s hands even though the odds were against him.

Again he wrote to his brother Samson:67

As for myself I am always about the same. I am still at the seminary and will remain here until the superiors judge it proper to dismiss me…I beg you once more not to grieve or worry in any way for me. My Father in heaven knows what to do for me. My body, my soul, my whole being belongs to Him…I recently quoted for you the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said that His Father feeds the birds of the fields. Have we not much more reason to believe that He will not neglect His servants who are of much more value than birds?

Libermann suffered five epileptic attacks between 1829 and 1831. There are no major epileptic seizures reported between 1831 and 1837. The pressures from the confrontations which Libermann had in the Eudist novitiate had a heavy toll on his fragile health. On February 7, 1838, the eve of the feast of the Holy Heart of Mary, Libermann experienced perhaps his worst epileptic attack. He was giving a conference to the superior and community as prescribed by the Rule of the Eudist Congregation. As he began to speak, he fell heavily on the ground with foam on the mouth and loss of consciousness.68 He recovered after some days but with difficulties.

One of the reasons why Libermann left the Eudist novitiate was that there were tensions in the community and he feared that they might lead to another epileptic attack. He wrote to Fr. Louis, the superior: “I have decided to leave next Monday, this is important and necessary. You know… how weak my nerves are. I am afraid that the extreme tension I am under may bring a

67 ND I, 18. Letter to Dr. and Mrs. Samson Libermann, November 7, 1831.

68 ND I, 355f. Fr. Maignan, a Eudist who witnessed the attack gave this testimony dated May 11, 1872. Later on, May 7, 1878, responding to a letter by which he was asked to clarify his comments, he says, “I uphold just as it is and with no alteration: epilepsy in the full sense of the term, with foam at the mouth and loss of consciousness.” Another witness to the same incident, de Brandt says, “The superior was impressed by the way in which the countenance of Libermann had become radiant like that of an angel. This is what he told me repeatedly, and I myself received the same impression for it was I who received him in my arms.” (ND I, 479).
bad seizure. May all be done according to the good pleasure of my Lord Jesus.” 69 Libermann’s experience at the novitiate was so sad that he felt he was ready for death. He says, “I began to believe that our Lord wanted to keep me in this state to prepare me for death. And I was prepared to let all things take their course, as they were in the hands of God, and to content myself with preparing for death.” 70

It is often reported that Libermann received a miraculous cure to his epilepsy from Our Lady of Loreto where he made a pilgrimage from Rome in November 1840. However, this is not true simply because he continued to suffer from epileptic attacks up to the end of his life. In August 1841, he says: “My health is much better. It is now three years and half since I have had an attack and even the slighter symptoms have lessened. Still I am not cured. I still have problems with my speech…” 71 It is true that Libermann prayed to Our Lady of Loreto to lessen his suffering and to be ordained a priest which was necessary for his project l’œuvre des noirs to continue. What was important for Libermann was that his epilepsy would not become an impediment to his ordination. When he went back to Rome from Loreto, he received the good news that the bishop of Strasbourg was ready to ordain him.

Libermann had another epileptic attack at Strasbourg which incapacitated him for some time in 1846. From then, it seems he did not have any major epileptic attack until his death. However, he always had other kinds of illness connected to the nerves. He often complained of headaches and migraine. In May 1847, he wrote to M. Dat: “I just had a bad attack which lasted eight to ten

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69 LS I, 298.


days. I do not know if it was my dear migraine or some other friend which resembles it. The fact is that it hit me hard. I am still very weak and unable to work.**72

Nineteenth century French School looked at suffering as a way of purification. The French School encouraged self-inflicted mortification like fasting. We have noted that Le Vavasseur and Tisserant were influenced by this spirituality. Although Libermann has traces of the French School, nonetheless, he also shows that he went beyond it. He encouraged his confreres to have good meals for the “first rule” of a missionary is to be alive.

What was important for Libermann was that he saw himself participating in the suffering of Christ. On October 16, 1830, in reply to a seminarian who had expressed sympathy and wished him happiness, Libermann responded to him:**73

You told me that you wished to see me happy. I do not know what you mean by that. Is it that you want to see me rich, in good health and without anything to suffer here below? That would be unfortunate, for then you would be wishing to see me in hell! My friend leave my beloved poverty, my dear illness and the thousand other sufferings that I have, for it is these alone that make me like our Lord Jesus Christ… I am a Christian. Our Lord Jesus Christ died for me and has filled me with his gifts and his grace. I share a little in his sufferings and his cross. I hope that I will share them even more.

For Libermann, suffering helps us to imitate Christ who suffered on the cross. One of the most significant texts that Libermann quotes in his Commentary on the Gospel of John is Philippians 2:6-11. This was also a favorite text for the French School. The text brings out the idea of kenosis which means emptying oneself by sacrificing oneself on behalf of others. It is rooted in the life of Jesus who emptied himself until death but God exalted him. Christian understanding of divine power is to be found in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The cross reveals divine power as self-emptying limitless love. It reveals the omnipotence of love. Libermann does not accept suffering for fatalistic motives but out of love.

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72 ND IX, 144-145. Letter to M. Dat, May 18, 1847.
73 LS I, 17. Letter to a Viot, October 16, 1830.
Libermann believed that it was the will of God that he was suffering. Obedience to God’s will is an idea that is very strong in Libermann’s understanding of suffering. It is also based on the obedience of Jesus who was obedient by accepting to be a human being and also by willingly accepting to suffer and die on the cross. In his suffering, Jesus “offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his reverence.” (Heb 5:7). This text is referring to what happened at Calvary when Jesus asked his Father, “take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.” (Lk 22:42). According to the author of Hebrews, Jesus’ prayer was “heard” yet as we know Jesus died. Jesus’ prayer was heard because he left it open to the will of God. Humanly speaking, Jesus might have wished that God remove the cup from him yet at the same time he had to be open to the will of God and the will of God was that he should die. Libermann too realized that humanly speaking it was painful to carry the cross of epilepsy, yet he was also aware that he had to do the will of God. In his Commentary on John’s Gospel, he uses Hebrews 5:7 to highlight the importance of obedience.

Education and solidarity are important elements of suffering. According to Cardinal Albert Vanhoye, Greek literature uses the words, pathein/mathein which mean “in suffering one learns.” These two words are also used by Heb 5:7-10 to show the educative value of suffering. This text gives a deeper “fundamental fact of human experience, for it draws to the role played in suffering by the personal relationship with God.” Suffering helps us to have a closer and more fundamental relationship between God and humankind for “by suffering we learn the obedience

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74 Libermann says that Mary was heard because of the reverence due to her. (Jn 2:4).
76 Ibid.
that unites us with God.”

It also helps us to have a closer relationship with those undergoing similar experiences of injustice. The crowning glory of Jesus’ obedience was priesthood. (Heb 5:10). According to the Letter to the Hebrews, the priesthood of Jesus was based on two realities: faithful and merciful high priest (Heb 2:18). First, Jesus was faithful to God by being obedient to Him. Second, Jesus was a merciful high priest, in solidarity with human beings. For Libermann, in suffering he did not only discover the will of God but also he learned to be in solidarity with the afflicted and marginalized. He was able to understand better those who were undergoing suffering because he, himself, was also experiencing it in his own body.

Pierre Blachard, a renowned Libermann scholar says that Libermann provided a foundation to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. He quotes Libermann, “we must aim straight at the things themselves.” This phenomenological trend noticed in Libermann by Blachard can be read in Husserl, a fellow Jew, whose phenomenological method is “going back to the things themselves …in their mode of givenness.” Husserl noted that when human beings perceive things, they bring to their experience their biases, preconceived ideas to bear upon the phenomena which he calls “natural attitude” that operates on the level of the subconscious. It darkens and blurs us from perceiving phenomena in their pure mode of givenness. Hence, this “natural attitude” has to be removed. He calls the removal “phenomenological epoché or suspension of the natural attitude.” For Libermann the phenomenological epoché enabled him to see the world through

77 Ibid. 129.
80 Ibid. 11. Author’s emphasis in italics.
the eyes of the poor because “the ‘epoché of the poor’ enables us to unmask the political and social structures that oppress the poor.” 81

More important for our discussion on the suffering of Libermann, phenomenologists are drawing our attention to the other and our responsibility toward the other. St. Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Christianity who was killed by the Nazis for her Jewish and Christian beliefs, discusses the knowledge of empathy which she says is the “key to unlock the secrets of personhood.” 82 She uses the German word Einfühlung which literary means “feeling with”. “An empathizing experience then occurs for me when the current of my life runs along the current of someone else’s life. Thus there are two aliveness within it: my own reception of aliveness, and the originary (sic) aliveness of the other person.” 83 There was always a strong connection between Libermann and Africans to whom he dedicated his project. Libermann became aware of the pain of the other and this awareness became an empathic experience, an ethic of relationship and responsibility. For Libermann, the concept of empathy is rooted in what Paul Ricoeur calls “flesh of the feelings” but since it is directed to others, its ethical aim is solicitude, the concern for others. 84 Ricoeur using a linguistic analysis stresses the mutuality involved in the relationship between I and the suffering other. The other is now a being suffering not necessarily physical pain nor mental pain, “but by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act, experienced as a violation of self-integrity.” 85 Ricoeur then concludes: 86


84 Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as the Other, Kathleen Blamey trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1992), 192.

85 Ibid. 190
In true sympathy, the self, whose power of acting is at the start greater than that of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return. For from the suffering other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing but from weakness itself. This is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in authentic reciprocity in exchange…

Ricoeur brings to our attention the moral injunction coming from the suffering other that calls to the self to react. “Weakness” here is not to be understood as inferiority but rather caused by suffering. *Mutuality is important because as we shall note later on, there is a danger that works of charity become paternalistic.* Libermann was aware of that. His experience had taught him that authentic reciprocity and mutuality were absolutely essential for mission.

We often see physical incapacity and suffering from a negative point of view. This normally leads to a litany of complaints and sometimes misgivings of the past or putting the blame on those whom we presume to have caused the injustice and suffering. *We often fail to look at it from a positive point of view. The best attitude to physical incapacity is to live positively and build on that for our own advantage.*

Libermann utilized what were seen by others as disadvantages and misfortunes into advantages and fortunes. *By accepting suffering knowingly and willingly, he was able to use it as a springboard to a higher rung in his life.* He did not have to harbor negative complaints about his health. He even discouraged people from consoling him. We will come back to this point when we will deal with East African chronicle problems, poverty and disease and see how a negative outlook, and putting the blame on past perpetrators of injustices can blur our vision to the injustice taking place now. For instance, there is a growing awareness campaign to see that those living with HIV/AIDS live positively with the disease.

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86 Ibid.

87 We often say: “He/She has a speech impediment, yet he/she was the best student in his/her class.” But it is better to say: “Due to his/her speech impediment, he/she was the best student in his/her class.”
1.7 Libermann’s *L’Œuvre des Noirs*

Jewish experience, conversion and the life of suffering transformed Libermann’s life into a unique mission dedicated to the poor and marginalized. Once the missionary vista was on his horizon, he is going to see life through the lens of mission. Due to these experiences, his perspective did not only change but was transformed into a life dedicated to others. It’s worthwhile to start off our reflection on Libermann’s missionary experience by looking at his motives at the beginning of *l’œuvre des noirs*.

1.7.1 Motivation

The driving force behind *l’œuvre des noirs*, the direction it took and the challenges it faced will be better understood by looking at what Libermann calls the *dessein* or motive behind it, expressed in his memoirs and letters. Paul Kollman cautions us that any missionary work and the judgment of that work and indeed of people who lived centuries before us is “a cautionary tale in a double sense.”88 First, we ought to be cautious of helping other people on terms set by ourselves. There was a danger that Libermann’s missionary project would be paternalistic. Second, the challenge facing the one making the judgment on people who lived in the past runs the risk of being anachronistic. Kollman calls this “presentism”, thus judging the past with present-day perspective, or better still, employing Thompson’s expression, “*the enormous condescension of posterity,*”… Such condescension is a particular temptation in a study of missionary activity with slaves.”89

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It is clear that Libermann had a dessein, “design” or “intention” for his mission. At the beginning of his mission, on December 20, 1841, he writes to Firm-Régis Gamon a trusted confidant, explaining to him the dessein of his mission: ⁹⁰

Our intention (dessein) is to come to the aid of the black slaves or those who have been freed in the French and English colonies. These poor people are the most miserable on earth. They are totally ignorant of anything concerning religion. They have no idea of what ought to be done to be saved. Because of their ignorance they are steeped in all kinds of vice…The vast majority are not married, but live like dogs and change their women at will.

Libermann had a good dessein but the language he used and the mentality he had of Africans particularly at the beginning of his project can be questioned. We have already presented Pierre Blachard’s contention that Libermann provided a foundation to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. I do believe that Husserl’s phenomenology is also a critique on Libermann as well. When Libermann and companions conceived their project l’œuvre des noirs, they too had their “natural attitude” that prevented them to see Africans as they should be seen, derived from Western mentality and the way French society looked at Africans at the time. Traces of the “natural attitude” can be read in the language which Libermann used to describe West African society. Today, Libermann’s language gives an impression of condescension and racial overtones. Expressions like Africans “are not married”, “live like dogs”, “are steeped in all kinds of vice” show that Libermann too needed a phenomenological epoché because his attitude toward Africans was influenced by racial Western stereotypes against African society. Consequently, any reading of Libermann as “a man ahead of his time” or “beyond his time” should first and foremost be looked at with caution, and second, be coupled with a recognition

⁹⁰ ND III, 76. Translation by Burke, Morality and Mission, 36. The word dessein is translated as “intention” here.
that he was a man of his time. Libermann was first and foremost, a man of his age who interpreted carefully the signs of the time. He was also a prophetic voice not in the sense of foretelling what might happen in the future but rather a critical voice of the structural injustices in the first half of nineteenth century Europe. A prophet is a juridical conscience of the people because he addresses the injustices taking place in society *hic et nunc*.

In 1846, Libermann shows a more positive outlook to the Haitians. Referring to a failed mission there, he says: “We would have been able to show the detractors of the black race that not having a white skin does not mean that they are any less children of God than themselves, that they have the same nobility of soul and are just as capable of accepting faith and morality.” This clearly shows that Libermann’s reading of the situation of the African Haitians had changed significantly, a change that shows that his conversion was lifelong process.

A more refined perspective of Libermann’s motives is found in the memoirs he wrote addressed to Rome seeking authorization to start his missionary project *l’œuvre des noirs*. These memoirs show a development in thought with regard to his perspective of Africans. On March 28, 1840, Libermann submitted his first memoir to Rome. In this memoir, Libermann and companions knowing that there is much suffering, humiliation and contradictions that await them, resolve to give themselves to the Lord, “for the salvation of Black People, who are the most unfortunate, the furthest from salvation and the most abandoned in God’s Church.” They would be open to mission among the “Blacks” anywhere in the world but in the beginning, their

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92 ND VIII, 333. Letter to Percin, Nov 2, 1846.

93 ND II, 69. We can easily see the European influence here: Africans are conceived as being “the furthest from salvation.” Indeed, the people who were “furthest from salvation” were those who oppressed Africans.
prime focus would be Haiti and the Island of Reunion. They were to live in community and by
community life they would inspire vocations for the local clergy.

As mentioned above, to say that Africans are “furthest from salvation” is an idea which may
not be tolerated today because it has racial overtones, and exaggerates the misery of Africans.
Nevertheless, it is used to build a case that there was an urgent necessity to take on this mission
of evangelization. The slave masters and those who participated in slave trade would be the ones
who were “furthest from salvation” because by their acts of injustice they had distanced
themselves from their fellow human beings who were created in the image and likeness of God
and at the same time, they had alienated themselves from God.

More positive outlook to Africans is found in Libermann’s second memoir to Propaganda of
November 1844 in which he calls for the training of indigenous clergy. The formation of the
indigenous clergy is reiterated and developed in another memoir to Propaganda dated August 15,
1846. This memoir is by far the longest and most important one. It is sometimes referred to as
the “Great Plan for the Apostolate.” It calls for the establishment of schools so that Africans may
be trained as teachers, farmers, catechists and artisans in a number of trades. To be noted in this
memoir is a proposal that catechists should receive minor orders, an idea which some have
interpreted to show that Libermann was ahead of his time.

Paul Coulon says that in January 1988 he found Libermann’s “original” memoir in
Propaganda archives which was changed from asking for bishoprics under one metropolitan see
to establishment of one vicariate with five pro-vicariates in West Africa.94 In a covering letter to

94 Paul Coulon, “Un mémoire secret de Libermann à la Propagande en 1846? Enquête et suspense,” Mémoire
Spiritaine, No. 3, 1er Semestre, 1996, 19-50. Paul Coulon says that Libermann’s “secret” or original memoir was
changed due to advice from Msgr. Brunelli who was by then the Secretary of Propaganda. The “original” memoir
proposes the following bishoprics: Senegambia - residence in Dakar, Sierra Leone and Liberia - residence in Free
Town, between the Rivers Cavally and Volta - residence in Kumasi, Gulf of Benin - residence in Abomey, between
river Niger and Congo - residence in Gabon.
the official memoir, Libermann says that he had to make that change working on advice from the Secretary of Propaganda. Libermann’s official memoir was approved unanimously by the Propaganda and is now regarded as one of the greatest missionary texts of the 19th century.

In 1840, Libermann wrote a Provisional Rule of Life after receiving the good news that he could start to work on his project. This Rule underwent several revisions until the 1845 Rule which then was used in the formulation of the 1849 Règlements (Rules) after the merger with the Spiritans. The 1849 Rule became the foundation of future Spiritan Rules.

Some of the important points of Libermann’s Rule include: First, Libermann widened the scope of the Congregation to include the whole Church. His missionaries are to give themselves totally to announce the Gospel and establish His reign among the poorest and most neglected souls in the Church of God. Second, the Rule says that although the primary focus was to Africans, the missionaries should not neglect “all those who were in danger of being lost.” These definitely included slave masters. By enslaving others, they were in danger of being lost. Third, concerning “the salvation of souls”, the Rule makes it categorically clear that missionaries should lead holy lives. “We consider the sanctification of the priests as one of the important characteristics of our ministry.” Fourth, the manner of conduct of the missionaries towards those to be evangelized should be characterized by charity and an earnest desire for their sanctification. “They are to avoid as detestable shortcoming any manner of superiority ... or anything similar that is often very common when dealing with people of lower classes.” Fifth,

95 ND II, 235f. Article I of the text of the provisional Rule which was edited in 1845.

96 ND II, 211. Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, Chapter III, Art. VII. One interpretation of this is that “all those who were in danger of being lost” included slave owners.

97 ND II, 250. Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, Chapter VII, Art. I.

98 ND II, 256f. Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, Chapter IX, Art. VIII. Italics mine. Libermann is aware of the danger of paternalism.
missionaries are to make themselves “the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them.”

Three important elements can be observed in Libermann’s Rule which were a hallmark in his understanding of human beings particularly those marginalized and enslaved. First, sanctification of missionaries is important for the ministry. Evangelization begins with the evangelizer. As a Latin axiom says: *Nemo dat quod non habet*, (One cannot give what he or she does not have), a missionary too must first preach to himself/herself. Conversion like salvation is for every person. We all need God’s grace. Second, missionaries should do their ministry out of charity. This means that they had to respect the people whom they evangelized. Third, missionaries should be humble. There was a danger of missionaries seeing themselves as superior to Africans, going to Africa to assist “poor Africans.” This approach often generates paternalism. In addition, Libermann discouraged *tabula rasa* approach to mission that was so common during his time.

Libermann had come to know that the condition of slaves was a human tragedy. He had sympathy and pity on them. He noticed that although slaves had a right to be baptized and indeed many were baptized, they needed to practice their religion in freedom. They needed emancipation not only in law but in fact as well. They needed liberty that would restore their true human dignity as children of God. Libermann anticipated that the emancipation of slaves in French colonies was close at hand but this emancipation he argued would be detrimental to them if they were not prepared morally. As we will see, the French government had a similar idea but mainly for political motives. It was only through a gradual process that Libermann came to realize that the problem of slave trade and slavery had to be dealt with holistically. Slaves, slave owners and evangelizers needed conversion; they needed God’s salvific grace to get rid of all prejudices against Africans. This conversion as we have already noted is a lifelong process.

99 ND X, 517. Rule of 1849, Chapter III, art. IX.
What was very clear to Libermann at the beginning of his mission was that this work was a work of the Holy Spirit. He was aware that the Holy Spirit does not give straightforward answers to all our questions. “When the Holy Spirit inspires a project, hardly ever does He give the whole scheme from the outset. It is only as the work develops that this is given. However, the whole project is enshrined in the principle by which he inspired the author of the project.”

1.7.2 A New and Unique Approach to Mission

Founders of a project or a society are often challenged to show proof that there is originality, novelty or uniqueness in their undertaking. Libermann and companions faced the same challenge from Rome. In 1840, when Libermann presented his first memoir for l’œuvre des noirs, he was challenged by Propaganda: “You want to raise altar against altar. The Society of the Holy Spirit takes care of this work. You are not needed.” Perhaps what the Roman officials were not aware of at that moment was that Libermann’s project was completely different from the ministry done by the Spiritans. Libermann’s Society had a far better anthropology than that of the Spiritans. A brief look at the Spiritans will do more justice to substantiate this point.

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritan) had started off with an anthropological perspective that focused on the poor and marginalized. Their focus shifted from serving the marginalized and poor to ministering to French colonialists. There are also questions whether they did their ministry among the colonialists adequately. We are told that Libermann’s companion, Le Vavasseur, a son of a colonialist in Reunion, received little Catholic education as a youth due to lack of clergy. This shortage of the clergy was attributed to the 1789 French Revolution that almost decimated the Spiritans and many Religious Orders in France.

100 LS III, 158. My Italics.
101 ND X, 339.
The Congregation started as a Seminary founded on Pentecost Sunday, May 27, 1703 by a seminarian, Claude Francis Poullart des Places aged 24.\textsuperscript{102} According to the 1734 Rule of the Congregation, after their ordination to priesthood, those trained by the Seminary had to consecrate themselves to “serve in hospices, to evangelize the poor and infidels, and not only to undertake but to love wholeheartedly and to prefer to everything else the meanest and most toilful ecclesiastical duties for which ministers are only found with difficulty.”\textsuperscript{103} The Spiritans, as they came to be called under the leadership of Fr. Louis Bouic, transformed the Seminary into a Congregation.\textsuperscript{104} During the French Revolution, the Congregation was suppressed by the law of August 10, 1792.\textsuperscript{105} On February 3, 1816, by a royal decree, Louis XVIII reestablished the Seminary and charged the Spiritans “not to educate poor clerics” but with a task of training and providing priests for the colonies.\textsuperscript{106} With this new development, the Spiritans owe their missionary charism to an unlikely source, the French government. Due to government interference, the Holy Spirit Seminary came to be known as the “Colonial Seminary.”

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\textsuperscript{102} Claude Poullart des Place’s aim was to house poor seminarians, give them a conducive environment for studies but above all, give them a solid moral and spiritual education and guidance to serve the marginalized in society.
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\textsuperscript{103} \textit{1734 Rules and Constitutions of the Society and Seminary of the Holy Spirit}, art. 2. This Rule was first written by Poullart des Places for his Seminary community. It was completed in 1734 and approved by Archbishop de Vintimille of Paris. Father Bouic the third Superior General added one specific aim to the text, the Seminary was to prepare students for foreign missionary work. Cf. Koren, \textit{Spiritans}, 23f.
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\textsuperscript{104} Letters of Patent were received in 1726 but not approved by the French Parliament until 1733. The Seminary opened at a new place, in Rue Lhommond, Paris, the present motherhouse, in 1734. For this to be achieved, there were legal battles that had to be overcome. The edict of Louis XIV (1666) forbade establishment of colleges, monasteries or religious communities without Letters of Patent of the King. Indeed, Poullart des Places had tried to avoid the use of words like “seminary” or “community”. Seminaries could be opened without these letters but had to be under a diocese. Prior to Vintimille, the Archdiocese of Paris had been infiltrated by Jansenism and that is the reason why Spiritans were reluctant to be under it. The Chambres des Comptes granted the Seminary approval on July 30, 1734. That is when the Holy Spirit Seminary had legal status in France.
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\textsuperscript{105} Koren, \textit{The Spiritans}, 31f. By this Act of the National Assembly, the assets of the Congregation were put on sale. A group of Revolutionaries descended on the Spiritan Seminary but first went to the basement, had some bottles of wine, and eventually did not have enough energy to execute their evil plan of killing the seminarians and priests.
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\textsuperscript{106} Since 1802, the French government had agreed to pay bursaries for the education of seminarians which rendered the Spiritan charism of “training poor clergy” redundant.
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Meanwhile, in 1824, the *Rules and Constitutions* of the Spiritans were approved by Propaganda in Rome which meant that the Congregation was not purely a diocesan institute but immediately dependent on the Holy See.

During the early 1840s, the French government wanted to suppress slavery “to make 300,000 slaves into men worthy of the liberty which has been promised to them and worthy of the title of French citizens which will be theirs and to ensure the tranquility of the former slave owners and the prosperity of the French overseas’ possessions.”¹⁰⁷ They wanted missionaries to do this work but found the Spiritans wanting in many respects.

The 1848 French Revolution made matters worse for the Spiritans. Mr. Victor Schoelcher, the new director of French colonies was an abolitionist, wanted to suppress the Spiritans because they sided with slave owners and neglected the slaves. He was only appeased by the appointment of Father Alexander Monnet as Superior General who had worked in Reunion where he earned the reputation of “the Father of the Negroes” or a “second Peter Claver.”¹⁰⁸ Mr. Schoelcher had an unstable temperament and often renewed his threats of suppressing the Spiritans. Fr. Monnet then realized that the best option for the Spiritans to survive was to merge with the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary which had a good reputation of working with the slaves.¹⁰⁹

The history of the Spiritans before the merger then shows that due to French government influence, Spiritan ministry ceased to be a ministry for the poor and marginalized but rather for the colonialists. It is also interesting to note that the impetus to work among the slaves came

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¹⁰⁸ Koren, *The Spiritans*, 65. Fr. Leguay was accused of being lukewarm to the emancipation of slaves. He resigned on March 2, 1848 and was replaced by Fr. Alexander Monnet (1812-49).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 98. In 1848, a Ministry of Ecclesiastical affairs was created. It was charged with religious service in the colonies. It was headed by a Catholic, Mr. de Falloux, who wanted the Church to have some latitude in dealing with its affairs in the colonies. (Cf. N.D. 10, 356). This new development made Fr. Monnet reluctant for the union.
from the French government. However, as might be expected, the French government had its own motives: not so much interested in the liberation of the slaves as such, but rather wanted precautionary measures to be put in place to prevent a violent revolution that may ensue if the slaves are not “well prepared” for liberation. A violent Revolution similar to the one in Haiti was detrimental to French colonial interests, so they wanted a “smooth” transition from colonial occupation to independence but on their terms.

Libermann was aware of the Spiritan history; that is why he wanted to start a new Society that would serve the poor and address the structures of social injustice. He was aware that the Spiritans had lost their original anthropological perspective of serving the poor and marginalized. Libermann was also aware of the French government’s influence. He needed their material support because the mission could not be sustained without financial support. When Bishop Truffet who was sent as a missionary to West Africa wanted to break away entirely with the French government because he feared civil interference in mission work, his actions jeopardized the French government’s subsidies and support to the Congregation and missions.110 Relations between the French authorities and the Congregation were normalized after the death of Bishop Truffet thanks to the diplomacy of Libermann. At the same time, if the history of the Spiritans could provide a lesson, Libermann was careful not to allow the French government to dictate the management and vision of his ministry and his Society.

When approbation of his Society by Rome was not forthcoming, Libermann became convinced that the best way for the future of his Society was to merge with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. He was aware that sacrifices had to be made. One of the sacrifices he had to pay

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110 ND X, 79ff. Letter to Le Vavasseur, February 24, 1848. According to this letter, the French Navy provided free transportation, hospital care, rations, and an annual subsidy which included an indemnity of 1,000 Francs allocated to the Superior for each missionary who would leave for the mission, and an annual subsidy of 1,500 francs was granted to all the priests. A place for a Spiritan missionary would be guaranteed on all ships of the State.
and was painful to many of his members was the dissolution of his Society by Rome.

“Henceforth the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary ceases to exist and its members and associates are aggregated to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, thereby becoming its members and associates, sharing the same rights and privileges and being subject to the same disciplinary rules.”

Libermann was aware that sometimes we become so much attached to names and places that we lose focus of the main objective. The mission was *missio Dei* for the evangelization of Africans. It did not matter whether Libermann’s Society maintained its name or not as long as the main objective was in focus.

There were also other benefits of the merger that included material and numerical growth. Adrian van Kaam points out, “the most significant feature of the proposed meager … lies in the fact that it finally gave meaningful reality to Libermann’s constant preoccupation with the problem of developing leaders in the Church. This was an interest that antedated his love for the missions.”

The anthropological question deals with leadership. Libermann realized that he could not have a sound foundation of the mission church without sound leadership; that is the reason why he encouraged the training of the local clergy. The Spiritans had a long tradition of training priests. The merger then was an anthropological convergence of two traditions important for human beings and which became important in the Congregation: education and missionary outreach. Anthropologically, the Congregation was renewed after the merger.

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111 ND 10, 375f. Translated by Adrian van Kaam, *A Light to the Gentiles*, 227.

112 Koren, 103f. Numerically, Libermann’s Congregation had 62 members (34 priests and 28 brothers); and the Spiritans had 13 members all of whom were priests. Both Congregations had a good number of aspirants. Materially, Libermann’s group profited from the assets of the Spiritans. Koren points out that the Spiritans were in a far better economic situation than Libermann’s group. Indeed Rome had expressed fears of the latter’s financial insolvency and wanted to disband the group. Libermann himself acknowledges that through the union his Society became economically viable.

1.8 Conclusion

Inasmuch as the crucial anthropological question is the nature of a human being in search for God’s salvation, Libermann’s primary focus was God’s salvation for the marginalized Africans. Prior to arriving at this development in his life, he was aware that he had to make a similar journey; that is why his life experience of being born a Jew, his process of continual conversion and his suffering were significant experiences that opened the vista of mission to the poor and marginalized. In his seminary and novitiate experiences, his notion of human being was from a psychosomatic point of view, or in his days, spiritual point of view. That is the reason why during his seminary and novitiate days, he gave spiritual guidance to many seminarians and many others who sought his advice. His concept of human wholeness, mind and body, by then, was achieved by providing counseling until a great passion for the salvation of Africans, *l’œuvre des noirs*, set in. With it came the relational approach to a human being which is going to be our main point of discussion in the next two chapters.

From then on, he realized that a human being is a social and cultural being who has to relate and interact with others. This then widened his scope of salvation that it is service. As Bevans points out, “salvation is ultimately about service, about identifying with God’s saving mission in the world.” He continues:

Such an understanding of salvation implies an *anthropology* that is certainly holistic but places its main emphasis on human beings’ transcendent, spiritual dimension. Full humanity is achieved not only through economic security or political autonomy, but also and most fundamentally through communion with God in Christ and transformation by the Gospel.¹¹⁴

We have observed that “economic security” and “political autonomy” cannot guarantee true freedom but rather can lead to egoism and greed. True freedom comes from God. That is the

¹¹⁴ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 345.
reason why in his passion for *l’œuvre des noirs*, Libermann still puts emphasis on the “spiritual dimension” of a person and for that reason “salvation of souls” remained for him the first and foremost motive for carrying out his project. He realized that he couldn’t achieve this objective without a good working relationship with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. In all of this we can say that despite the surrounding European context, Libermann’s understanding of the human person and particularly those who were marginalized had been informed by his own personal and social experiences.

Mission today is understood as an exercise of dialogue. Fundamentally it is a participation in the dialogical life of the Trinity. In the next chapter, we are to assess how Libermann’s anthropological understanding of mission was a prophetic dialogue with the poor, society and with culture.
CHAPTER TWO

LIBERMANN’S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

Discussing the theological anthropology of Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs* through the lens of nineteen century Western theological anthropology which this chapter intends to do, will help us to gain many insights of how Libermann was not only informed by that anthropology, but also was informed by Africans whom he sought to evangelize. This discussion will also situate us in a better position to have a constructive dialogue between his anthropology and East African theological anthropologies which will be the main discussion of the fourth chapter. In the previous chapter, we presented three fundamental experiences that grounded Libermann’s theological anthropology: first, he was born a Jew at a period of Jewish emancipation in France. Jews were looked down upon by wider society. Libermann’s Jewish background and experience had a substantial impact on his attitude to those whose freedom was curtailed. We noted that Libermann made a distinction between freedom and independence. *People ought to be free but cannot be independent because we are necessarily dependent on each other*. Independence may lead to egoism and individualism. Second, Libermann’s conversion experience was sparked off by realizing that *God is not confined to an ethnic group, or to a culture or to a religion. God is for all people and had to be worshipped in freedom*. God is manifested and revealed in each and every culture and religion. Libermann also underwent a second conversion that opened his vista for mission. Third, we have seen that Libermann experienced physical suffering. He suffered from epilepsy which impeded his ordination to priesthood. We noted that *suffering has an educative value*. Libermann was not only sympathetic and empathetic with those experiencing suffering but also was in solidarity with them, at the same time, trying to imitate the suffering of Jesus Christ.
This chapter proposes the African experience to be the determining factor that influenced Libermann’s relationship, attitude and understanding of Africans. We noted that Libermann imbibed European racial stereotypes and for that reason needed an *epoché* to get rid of nineteenth century racial mentality that looked down on Africans. As we will see, Libermann harbored these racial stereotypes throughout his life. However, what brought significant transformation in his life was that he was *informed* by African experience and *listened* to it. We will examine how this insight enabled him to instruct his missionaries to respect African cultures. “Become black with the Blacks”,¹¹⁵ he said. He also realized that conversion is a lifelong journey for everybody including himself. *Missionaries should not only convert those whom they seek to evangelize but missionaries too should be converted by the evangelized.*

We will explore Libermann’s concept of person which was influenced by nineteenth century ecclesiological anthropology which localized the ideal person in the confines of the Catholic Church outside of which there was no salvation (*extra ecclesia nulla salus*). This led to an urgent missionary drive and competition to reclaim souls before other religious denominations could lay hold on them. Libermann too was entrenched in this ecclesiology, but at the same time, realized that *l’œuvre des noirs* was not only to plant the Word of God and the Church in West African milieu, but also that Africans should be masters of their own church and for that reason he urged Rome to establish local churches ministered by Africans.

This chapter will assess the importance of the relational approach to the understanding of human beings because it is going to be used as one of the main tools of our argumentation for this study. This understanding has a biblical basis in the creation accounts, because human beings were created to live in community (Gen 1-3). However, Hellenistic thought shifted the

¹¹⁵ ND IX, 330.
emphasis of the understanding of person from person in relationship to person as an individual substance, almost a monad. It was furthered by dualism that dichotomized person between matter and spirit, body and soul, evidenced in Augustinian anthropology dominant during the time of Libermann. We will look at the philosophical and theological turns to relationality which have shed light on the importance of our relationship with God, with each other and with all creation. Particular attention will be paid to Levinas’ concept of the “other”. For him the “other” sometimes referred to as the “face” cannot be conceptualized, speaks to us, and is inviolable. Libermann allowed the “other” that is, Africans, to speak to him. Using this insight we will explore the relational notion of human being and its impact on Libermann’s relationship with Africans, the primary object of his mission. Relationship is an essential element of being human and a common characteristic in East African societies as we will see in the next chapter.

2.2 Theological Anthropology and the Turn to Relationality

The word anthropology is derived from the Greek anthropôs which means “human being” and logos which means “word”, “discourse” or “study.” Anthropology is a study of our humanness with a view of arriving at an integrated and holistic concept of what we understand by anthropôs. Anthropology addresses the basic questions of human beings, what they are, how they behave, why they behave as they do, and what is their destiny. Theology from the Greek theos and logos literally means “study of God” or “speaking about God” or “God talk.” It is a study of our relationship with God and with all His creation. Every religion has a theology, that is why it is appropriate to speak of theologies rather than theology. For instance, there are theologies of liberation, theologies of African religions, and theologies of inculturation.


Theological anthropology today is best understood in terms of relationships because human beings are formed in and through interactions with God, other persons and the cosmos. The theological understanding of human being has centered on our need for God’s salvation. This understanding has undergone various changes due to philosophical and theological turns and shifts. Jürgen Moltmann says that earlier civilizations, sometimes erroneously referred to as “primitive” or “simple” were not “under-developed”. “They were highly complicated systems of equilibrium – equilibrium in the relationship between human beings and nature, equilibrium in the relationship between human beings and human beings, and the equilibrium in the relationship between human beings and the ‘gods’”\textsuperscript{118}

Hellenistic systems of thought which still have a substantial impact on Western civilization changed from this earlier equilibrium of relationships to individual substance. It was dominated by Aristotle’s analytical tradition of categories. “His [Aristotle] model led to a hard distinction between “substance” and “accidents” … in which the latter are not essential to what a thing is, and so less real.”\textsuperscript{119} Relation, according to Aristotle was relegated to the level of accidents. Hard on the heels of Hellenistic philosophers were the Romans who developed the idea of knowledge as dominance through divide et impera “divide and rule”. Hence, the more I divide and dissect substance to its smallest parts, the more I gain knowledge and control of it.\textsuperscript{120}


\textsuperscript{119} LeRon Schults, \textit{Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn of Relationality} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 15.

\textsuperscript{120} This way of thinking has influenced our understanding of knowledge even today. For instance, an expert is often referred to as one who knows more and more about less and less. Newtonian mechanics was developed on the same principle that the behavior of bodies is to be explained in terms of their component parts.
Plato’s divisions of matter and form led to a sharp division of a human person as composed of body and soul, matter and spirit, the former basically imperfect and even evil, and the latter the true seat of personality. The Gnostics became the main protagonists of this dualism but “because they disparaged the human body, the material universe, and the historical process, they could not do full justice to the central doctrine of incarnation and their anthropology was wholly incompatible with the Judeo-Christian vision.”\[121\] Origen who had some Gnostic tendencies insisted that the best way to be human was to rise above the body in contemplation of the spiritual. Origen’s doctrine would eventually have an impact on mortification and ascetic practices that were very common during Libermann’s era.

Among the important figures in the anthropological dualistic controversy was St. Augustine whose fundamental question was: “What is the nature of the human person who is the captive of sin and in need of liberating grace?”\[122\] Augustine developed the notion of original sin and the doctrine of grace which meant that fallen humanity by itself is incapable of achieving any relation with God at all. We all need God’s grace. Grace moves one to love God and neighbor and to delight in created goods according to their relation to God. “The anthropology of Augustine became the matrix of Western thought on human nature.”\[123\] It was the predominant anthropology during the time of Libermann. However, Stephen Duffy contends that the understanding of relationality of person is an insight latent in Thomas Aquinas’s thought-form


\[122\] Ibid. Despite the dualistic tendencies which Augustine is known for, his theology of grace still influences Western anthropology even to this day.

\[123\] Ibid. 75.
(Denkform) but remained unnoticed because it was obscured by Aristotelian categories which St. Thomas used. This is what Duffy has to say:  

Between the thirteenth and the twentieth century this Denkform became increasingly acknowledged. The person in relationship was to be the primary lens of the tradition … But Aquinas is the first theologian in whom personalistic or anthropocentric Denkform shaped the entire theological vision; this marks a breakthrough from the patristic world of common sense to the medieval world of theory as the first Summae appear.

Duffy argues that commentators on Thomas Aquinas misinterpreted his position and accentuated what they thought was lacking in his thought; freedom, transcendence and self-sufficiency of a person. This distortion ended up with “a person so self-sufficient and autonomous as to be monadic and with a universe no longer organic and relational, but disjointed, atomistic, and mechanical.”

Perpetuating the dualistic anthropological tradition, the Cartesian theory which identified the human being as res cogitans as opposed to nature res extensa differentiated human beings more from non-human beings leading to more plundering and destruction of nature. Thanks to the philosophical turn to relationality, “a person is no longer defined as an ‘individual substance of rational nature’ (Boethius) … Instead of autonomous subjects, today human consciousness is understood as always and already embedded in relations between self, other, and world.”

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124 Ibid. 125f. Italics are authors. It was after Thomas Aquinas that this Denkform became more implicit. Otherwise, relationality and self-sufficiency appear to be in conflict rather than in dialectic of mutual enrichment.

125 Ibid. 127.

126 Moltmann, God in Creation, 27.

127 Schults, Reforming Theological Anthropology, 31. He cites Anacius Boethius (480-524) who was a Christian philosopher and Roman Senator. He was very popular among scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with his definition of a person in Latin: “Persona est naturae rationalis individual substantia.” Cf. “Contra Eutychen et Nestorium”, Section III, col. 1343D-1344A, from Parologia Latina Database, Vol. 64. (Accessed on November 5, 2010). This axiom of Boethius became an accepted way of defining a person. Descartes’ Cogito is influenced by Boethius’ definition of a person.
Boethius’ definition derives from a worldview that is static and fixed. Humanity was the center of the earth, the pinnacle of creation. What it means to be human was to be a being with a particular and rational nature determined by God at creation. However, today our understanding of humanity is no longer as stable or so fixed. We are more aware of relational aspects of human interaction. Relations are not accidental or irrelevant but rather constitutive of a person. LeRon Schults traces this “philosophical turn to relationality” that has shaped our knowing and understanding of a human person and human activity, from an American philosopher, Charles Sanders, who developed his own categories of relations in 1867. Nevertheless, relational thought-forms were there already in the biblical tradition and in the early Christian theological debates which focused on the relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are the essence of divine being.

David Smith argues that because of his Jewish background, Libermann overcame the Cartesian dichotomies prevalent during his time. He says:

Libermann was immunized against the prevalent philosophical anthropology of his day, the dichotomized world-view of René Descartes. Descartes’ philosophy had tainted Western thought-categories since the early seventeenth century. Under its all-pervasive influence all things spiritual – mind, soul and spirit – had metamorphosed into disembodied entities. A language of mind vs. body, spirit vs. spirit, natural vs. supernatural, and secular vs. sacred became the coin of religious and spiritual realms. In many ways human spirituality had evolved into angelic perfectionism.

As pointed out in the last chapter, traces of the spirituality of angelic perfectionism were evident in Libermann’s companions Frédéric Le Vavasseur and Eugène Tisserant who insisted on mortification and asceticism for the community. Libermann rebuked them for this spirituality.

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and encouraged his missionaries to take care of their bodies by having a good diet. By so doing, Libermann was rediscovering his Jewish roots, and at the same time was going beyond “self-conscious mortification” of his contemporaries. Smith continues:\(^{130}\)

Libermann escaped the pernicious influence of this Cartesian philosophy, in large part thanks to his early education…he would have learned early in his life that the Hebrew has no one word for the human body…The closest Hebrew cognate is basar sometimes translated as body, but its essential meaning is flesh…it was not the flesh-body that made us separate individuals; it was rather the flesh-body that connected us to a web of life tissue to all other human beings. This flesh-body animated flesh, is the total human being, and foundation of our corporate identity, our solidarity with one another and, above all, the ground of our common bonding to God.

Due to his Jewish background, Libermann understood human relationality as an essential part of being human. It should be mentioned that Libermann was not “immunized” against the prevalent dualistic tendencies of his time as Smith would like us to believe. As we will see, Libermann’s Commentary on the Gospel of John is tainted with dualistic theological anthropological tendencies. What is clear, however, is that first, Libermann did not believe in mortification as a way to holiness. Second, Libermann’s understanding of person is to be drawn from relationality thus, in the relationship he tried to create with others. A better and more refined concept of Africans and their need for salvation by Libermann is to be drawn from relationality. Relationality draws its ultimate strength from the relational Trinity.

Many theological discussions today are discovering the importance of the relational approach and its Trinitarian foundations. Edward Hahnenberg advocating for a relational approach to ministries suggests that the Church should move away from the dividing line model to concentric circle model because the latter situates a minister within an ecclesial community to serve the

\(^{130}\) Ibid. Italics are the author’s. Also, Henry Koren, *The Spiritans*, 157.
church and its mission to the world.\textsuperscript{131} He adds that the relational approach draws its strength from the Trinity who is a mystery of relationships. “The early development of the Trinitarian doctrine witnesses to a belief in a God who is personal and relational; God’s ultimate reality lies not in nature or substance (what a thing is in itself), but in personhood, relationship and love.”\textsuperscript{132} The source of all ministries in the Church is the Triune God.

The philosophical turn to relationality got a more refined insight in the theology of Karl Rahner. First and foremost, according to Duffy, the starting point of theology for Rahner is not God nor Jesus but rather anthropology.\textsuperscript{133}

Rahner feels, therefore, that a meeting ground for believers, skeptics, and the perplexed can be found only in an area all have access to: the “original” or basic experience of transcendence that wells up from the depth of ourselves in interaction with the world. Hence we must begin where Rahner begins, with anthropology, the most accessible point of entry to all theology.

Human transcendence became the starting point of Rahner’s theology. It is drawn from Augustine’s axiom: “Thou hast made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it rests in thee.”\textsuperscript{134} The “restless heart” is a fact of experience that leads to God as the radical answer. Rahner insists that for the human person every act of knowing is projected towards God, the highest principle of all reality, \textit{das Sein}.

\textsuperscript{131} Edward P. Hahnenberg, \textit{ Ministries: A Relational Approach} (New York: Herder and Herder Book, 2003), 10f. Hahnenberg provides a relational approach to ecclesial ministries by trying to bridge the gap between the Christ centered approach which has dominated the understanding of priestly ministries for centuries and the pneumatic approach characterized by charisms. He suggests that traditional linear model for ministry - clergy and laity should be replaced by a service model. This point is to be developed in chapter four.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. 77.


\textsuperscript{134} St. Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, I: 1,1.
Second, according to Duffy, Rahner grounds his analysis of human transcendence on epistemology, expressed in acts of predicative knowledge. Rahner, retrieving Thomas Aquinas’s theory of knowledge argues that the process of knowing involves a complete return to the self, *reditio completa in se ipsum.* However, according to Duffy, “*completa*” does not mean that a person is a monadic subject but rather a “heuristic term indicating the partial self-presence (*Beisich-sein*) achievable by human being, a self-presence that always entails a double absence.”

For Rahner, self-presence is based upon sensibility. It is possible only in and through the fact that a person knows the other. Rahner devotes noteworthy space in trying to explain “double absence” involved in the process of human knowing. It shows a deep relationship between human beings, the material world around and God and at the same time, a delicate balance between the self, self-transcendence and self-absence. Duffy’s reading of Rahner is that a human person is a “bivalent, kinetic being… intrinsically structured by a self-unifying dual movement”, first, toward “the absolute mystery” and second, toward “self-abandonment, openness to the material world (*conversion ad phatasma*)”.

Phenomenologists conceive the world to be a web of functional relations. They criticize scholastic ontology for totalizing being and seeing the ego as the source of all meaning and knowledge. Phenomenologists have redefined the philosophical turn to relationality from a turn to subjectivity which is a characteristic of the Cartesian ego, and also a characteristic of the transcendental and ontological tradition that centers on the thinking subject, to a turn to the other which also includes ethical responsibility to the other. Emmanuel Levinas, who was Jewish, is a

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137 Ibid. Author’s italics for emphasis.
prominent phenomenologist who has explored the ethical relation to the other and made it the hallmark of his philosophy.\footnote{Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), was a Jew. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was recruited in the French army as an interpreter because he was fluent in both German and Russian. In 1940 Levinas became a prisoner of war in a camp in Germany together with other French army officers. He read mostly Hegel, Diderot and Proust. Though Jewish, he was not noticed by the Nazis who mistook him to be French. However, he was deeply affected by the massacre of most of his family members in Ukraine and six million Jews in the concentration camps by the Nazis. This tragic experience played a pivotal role in his thought, particularly his emphasis on ethical relation to the Other and the inviolability of the Other.}{138} He criticizes Western philosophy for its totalizing tendencies. “Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the Other to the Same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being.”\footnote{Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity, An Essay in Exteriority}, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 33, 71. For Levinas there is a difference between “other” and “Other”. The French \textit{autrui} rendered in English as “Other” with the capitalized “O” refers to the other person, reveals infinity and can mean God, whereas \textit{autre} rendered as “other” with lower case “o” refers to non-personal other in general, e.g. language and culture. “The other qua other is the Other”. See also, Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Time and the Other}, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), vii.}{139} Levinas goes on to describe the encounter with the Other or the face. He says that the face does not entail the absorption of the Other by the self because the Other resists my attempts at appropriation and domination.\footnote{Ibid. 194. Levinas’s concept of the face is critical of sensation because sensation can “contain” or “envelop” the Other. The face eludes vision, seeing forms, even hearing, does not appear, not a phenomenon but an epiphany. See Simon Critchley, \textit{The Cambridge Companion of Levinas} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11. See also Davis, \textit{Levinas}, 46.}{140} The Other resists my power to possess it or even understand it.\footnote{Ibid. 217-219. Levinas is of the opinion that the totalizing nature of Western philosophy leads to domination and murder. It is the root cause of the Holocaust. However, Levinas contends that the Other cannot be annihilated completely for the Other remains inviolable and inviolate. Hence, violence cannot achieve its targets.}{141}

Levinas insists on the asymmetrical nature of the ethical relationship. According to Collin Davis’s reading of Levinas: “The Other, which Levinas characterizes by a biblical formula as a stranger, widow or orphan, does not share my powers or responsibilities. The decoupling of responsibility from reciprocity has been described as the decisive act which distinguishes
Levinas’s ethical theory from virtually all others.”¹⁴² This means that I do not assist another because I expect something in return. Levinas insists that responsibility is not only enacted in offering one’s properties or one’s possessions to the Other but also by giving one’s substance to the Other. The figure of maternity for Levinas is an authentic figure of responsibility.¹⁴³

However, ethical responsibility can be symmetrical as well. We mentioned in the last Chapter that Paul Ricoeur and Edith Stein insist that there is always mutuality involved in a relationship. We noted Stein’s argument that in an empathic act, I divest essential characteristics of myself into the life of the other in order to feel-with him or her.¹⁴⁴ Ricoeur from a linguistic perspective criticizes Levinas’s assertion that ethical relationship is asymmetrical.¹⁴⁵ Ricoeur says: “What language teaches, precisely as practice, is verified by all practices. The agents and patients of an action are caught up in relationships of exchange which, like language, join together the reversibility of roles and the nonsubstitutability of persons.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Collin Davis, Levinas: An Introduction (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 51. According to Levinas, the ethical responsibility entails an obligation which is incumbent on me alone. Morality is not moral if it is maintained because I have no choice in the matter and for that reason ethical relationship cannot be universalized and transformed into a moral code.


¹⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1992), 188ff. Ricoeur argues that first, Levinas’s initiative has no relation at all, because “the other represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego defined by the condition of separation. The other, in this sense, absolves himself of any relation. This irrelation defines exteriority as such.” Second, Ricoeur says that Levinas’s concept of the face of the Other forbids murder and commands justice. He adds that whereas friendship involves reciprocity, Levinas’s injunction is dissymmetrical because “I” who is summoned to its responsibility by the Other is passive. “Taken literally, a dissymmetry left uncompensated would break off the exchange of giving and receiving and would exclude any instruction by the face within the field of solicitude... This is why the Other … has to storm the defenses of a separate ‘I’”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 193.
There are many arguments for or against Ricoeur, and whether ethical relationship with the other is symmetrical or asymmetrical, which is beyond the scope of this discussion.147 However, ethical relationship can be symmetrical in a sense that each party in a relationship is an active dialogue partner. Marriage for instance, is a covenant of love. Each partner is called upon to love the other. The mutuality of love shows that the ethical relationship is symmetrical. Yet, the ethical relationship in marriage can be asymmetrical as well. *My love for the other in a marriage relationship is not dependent on his or her love for me. I love the other because he or she is the other. I love you because you are you. I do not love you because I expect anything in return from you. We must always give without expecting anything in return.*

What is then clear and important for our argument of relationality is first and foremost, the phenomenologists’ insight that the face of the other is inviolable. *African cultures have survived despite efforts by Western colonialism and Christian missionary evangelism to deny Africans of their person, their culture and their world view. As Levinas points out, the face of the other transcends all emotional, historical or unforeseen events that could limit it.*148 *The face transcends all prejudices.* As we noted in the previous chapter, Libermann had his own racial prejudices against Africans. The face of Africans transcended and transformed these racial prejudices which Libermann had.

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147 Richard A. Cohen, “Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas” in *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*, eds. Richard Cohen and James Marsh (New York: State University New York Press, 2000), 127ff. Cohen points out that Ricoeur misunderstands the significance of the alterity of the other in Levinas and the passivity of the self that responds to alterity. Cohen argues that Levinasian alterity does not leave the other unmoved but rather “reconditions” it “into moral responsibility.” In this same volume there are also admirers of Ricoeur’s arguments like Patrick Bourgeois who at the same time admits that Ricoeur’s criticisms of Levinas are too severe. See, “Ricoeur and Levinas: Solicitude in Reciprocity and Solitude in Existence”, 106-126. It should be mentioned that part of the problem is due to Levinas’s linguistic expressions which are complicated and difficult to understand and to translate from original French to English.

Second, the face of the other calls for ethical responsibility and respect. Evangelization should be based on a mutual relationship between the evangelizer and the evangelized. European missionary activity in Africa was based on domination, and on a *tabula rasa* approach, rather than mutuality. According to this European mentality, Africans were supposed to be converted and therefore passive. We are to reconstruct this argument to show that it was Africans who actually converted Libermann. As a result, Libermann taught his missionaries to adapt to the culture of the people they evangelize. The culture and face of those the evangelizers sought to evangelize, evangelized the evangelizers. Libermann encouraged his missionaries to develop a service relationship with the people they minister.

The foregoing discussion has shown us how the relational understanding of human beings is shaping philosophical and theological thinking. This argument will be furthered when we deal with East African traditions. Relatedness is a common characteristic of these traditions. We are now going to look at the relational understanding of human beings from a biblical perspective.

### 2.3 Human Relationship in Biblical Creation and Covenant Accounts (Gen 1-3,9,15,17)

The two biblical creation stories in the book of Genesis: the Priestly (P) account (Gen 1:1-2:4a) and the Yahwistic (J) account (Gen 2:4b-3:25) lay emphasis on three fundamental human relationships: first, between human beings and God, second, between human beings and human beings and third between human beings and nonhuman creation. The Priestly account of creation shows a deep and profound relationship between human beings and God. Genesis 1:27 says: “God created the human being in his image; in the divine image he created humankind; male and female he created them.”

149 *Adam*, translated as “human being”, can also mean “individual

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149 My translation. Many translations render *adam* for *man*. But it is appropriate to translate *adam* for *human being* because the word *adam* does not necessarily mean man as a male.
person” or “person’s name” or “humankind”. “Divine image” selem elohim points to a strong relationship between human beings and God. Human beings are to understand and define themselves in the light of this relationship, that they are images of the divine.

The Yahwistic tradition looks at the relationship between God and human beings in connection to the two other relationships: between human beings and human beings and human beings and the earth. “Yahweh God formed the human being out of soil of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so the human being became a living being.” (Gen 2:7). To be noted here is the Hebrew word adama which means “ground” or “earth” or “soil”. The human being, adam, comes from the ground, adama, which shows a deep and strong relationship between the two.150 Adam receives the breath of God and becomes a living being, nepes.151 This J tradition shows a strong relationship between earth, human beings and God and at the same time, in relation to the P tradition, expands our understanding of imago Dei.

The J tradition highlights the relationship between human beings and human beings because they were created to live in community. The word that is often used to show this fundamental relationship is basar. Gen 2:21-24 (NAB) says:152

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150 The special status of human beings in the creation stories tends to undermine their mutual relationship with non-human creation. Human being is not only created in the image and likeness of God, but also is given the earth to “subdue it.” (Gen 1:27f). Some scholars claim that this has led to the exploitation of nonhuman creation. The importance of the relationship between human beings and nature will be discussed in later chapters especially when we will deal with ecology. We are all children of God and therefore interconnected and interrelated.

151 The word nepes appears 755 times in the Bible and out of these the Septuagint translates it by psyche on 600 occasions. This gave rise to the word “soul” in some English translations. However, in all the occurrences there is little to suggest that nepes means soul. Certainly not in Gen 2:7. Nepes here means the whole person with breath from God and soil from the ground. Nepes can mean breath, life, desire or being. Sometimes nepes means the living body that takes in food to satisfy the hunger. (Ps 107: 5, 9). In a few instances nepes also refers to God (Jer 6:8, 9:8).

152 My italics. Basar occurs 273 times in the Bible and normally refers to the physical aspect of human beings; that is why it is often rendered flesh. Whereas nepes can refer to God, basar does not but rather refers to human beings.
So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out
one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a
woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the
man said: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall
be called ‘woman’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.” That is why a man
leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one
body.

The strong bond between man (ish) and woman (ishshah) is intended to underscore the
communitarian aspect of a human person. Human beings according to the Yahwistic tradition
must be social beings. They are incomplete if they are in isolation from other human beings.
Persons are persons when they are in community, in relationship. Basar indeed binds people
together in a relationship of responsibility. Judah reminds his brothers that they should not kill
their brother Joseph because he is their basar, “flesh” (Gen 37:27).

The deep and mutual relationship between God and creation is cemented by the meaning and
importance of biblical covenants. The Hebrew word berith, translated as “covenant” means a
bond of relationship. The many covenants in biblical accounts (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic,
Davidic) show a deep and loving relationship between the two parties involved: between God
and human beings, between human beings and human beings and between God and all creation.
The loving relationship between man and woman described above is portrayed as a marriage
covenantal relationship even though the word berith is not used. “A man leaves his father and
mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gen 2:24).

153 The Hebrew word berith often translated as “covenant” appears 286 times in the Old Testament. The Hebrew
root bara means “to bind” which gives rise to the idea that covenant means “bond”. Berith is translated as diatheke
by the Septuagint which also means testament. The concept of Old and New Testament is based on the idea of
covenant.
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson\textsuperscript{154} examines the biblical covenants as the foundation of integrity of creation and the basis of the Church’s response to environmental despoliation. He says that studies and theological reflection about biblical covenants have limited the meaning of covenant to the relationship between human beings and God. He widens the meaning and scope of covenant to include all creation. The covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8-17), for instance, embraces every living creature. The Abrahamic covenants (Gen 15, 17) involve the promise of land. These covenants in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus Christ through whom all things were created. (Jn 1:3). God’s redemptive action through Jesus Christ reaches to all creation. God’s covenant with Noah’s family and their descendants and with every living creature (Gen 9: 9-11) is a symbol of the unbreakable bond between all creatures and their Creator. There is also a relationship of interdependence between human beings and the rest of creation in this covenant. Hence, Granberg-Michaelson insists that the meaning of the biblical covenant should be redefined to include all creation.

A covenant relationship is based on \textit{listening}. The Mosaic covenant (Ex 19-24) between God and the Israelites was stipulated by laws and commandments. The people agreed to comply by them. “Everything the Lord has said, we will do.” (Ex 19:18). The greatest of all commandments is the commandment of love. “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (Dt. 6:4). This greatest commandment is epitomized in the Hebrew word \textit{shema}, to listen, which is the first word of this verse. \textit{Shema} encapsulates God’s relationship with Israel. The whole Bible is based on the idea of listening. God speaks and we

are called upon to listen to his word with our whole heart (Ps. 95). *This biblical teaching helps us to appreciate the fact that missionary experience is a listening experience. When a missionary goes out to other cultures, he or she goes out to listen to the other.* Libermann encouraged his missionaries to listen to Africans whom they sought to evangelize.

This brief survey of biblical foundations of human relationality together with an overview of relationality in modern scholarship helps us to appreciate the fact that to be human is to relate to God, to fellow humans, and to all creation. Libermann grew up in a Jewish tradition that treasured the Bible. He was aware that relationship characterizes our dealing with others and our response to their needs. Our world is a world of interactions. Relationship is always there despite our prejudices against the other. Our relationship with the other can transcend our prejudices against the other even beyond our imagination.

### 2.4 Libermann and Nineteen Century Racial and Dualistic Theological Anthropology

Africa was erroneously conceived by nineteen century Europeans to be a land of misery, idolatry, fierce beasts, and savage customs like infanticide and cannibalism. Europeans thought that due to these ills that had bedeviled Africa, Africans needed immediate attention and remedial help. The cause of this misery was attributed to the *curse of Ham* which is derived from an erroneous interpretation of Genesis 9:20-27. This passage is meant to explain the hostility that existed between the Canaanites, the indigenous dwellers of the land, and the Hebrews who, returning from Egypt, defeated the Canaanites and took their land. The story depicts Noah after the deluge. He was an agriculturist who planted a vineyard, drank wine, became drunk and slept naked. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his brothers, Shem and Japhet, who covered their father without looking at him. When Noah woke up and knew
what had happened, blessed Shem and Japhet but cursed Ham’s son Canaan and his descendants to slavery. It may be asked, why did Noah curse Canaan and his descendants when in fact it was Ham who sinned? According to Sidbe Simporé, the wrong application of this curse to Africans can be traced in Martin Luther’s Commentary on Genesis. Simporé writes: 155

“… ever since Luther’s Commentary on Genesis, the Christian West has found in Chapters 9 and 10 of Genesis the biblical justification it sought for the slave trade, for colonial conquests, and today for apartheid: the Blacks, they said are the object of a special curse from God, a curse uttered against Ham, son of Noah, and declared to be “the father of the Black race.”

The curse of Ham though erroneously used to refer to Africans was basically used by nineteenth century Europeans in two ways. First, for those who enslaved and colonized Africans, it was a justification for their injustices against Africans. Those who were engaged in the slave trade found a justification for their evil acts. The Boers in South Africa used the same explanation to discriminate and oppress Africans. Colonizers too tried to obliterate African culture and impose their own culture on the colonized using the same pretext.

Second, for European missionaries the curse of Ham meant that there was urgency to reclaim lost souls in Africa and Africa was an object of particular pity. European missionaries including Libermann described Africa as the most unfortunate and most abandoned place in the world. In addition, faced with financial pressures to sustain the missions, missionaries often exaggerated the miseries of those they evangelized in order to encourage donations to finance the missions.

155 Sidbe Simporé, “Les Eglises d’Afrique entre leur passé et leur avenir,” Concilium, 126 (1977), 14. Cited in Joseph Lécuyer, “Father Libermann and the Curse of Ham” Spiritan Papers, No.6 (May-August 1978), 33. Martin Luther’s Commentary does not limit Ham’s posterity to Africans. He speaks of Egyptians as Ham’s offspring because they enslaved the Hebrews. The Pope too according to Luther is an offspring of Ham because he oppresses others and is enslaved by sin. Other offspring include: Arabia, Assyria and Babylon. Babylon for Luther is of particular interest because according to him, Ham founded that city and built a tower there. Luther develops many affinities between Babylon which was destroyed by God and the Catholic Church led by the Pope. He says that the Church and the Pope are under Babylonian captivity. Cf. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27978/27978-h/27978-h.htm (Accessed on November 27, 2010).
2.4.1 Libermann and the “Curse of Ham”

In dealing with Libermann’s teaching, it is important to note that he held racial views against Africans. Libermann believed that Africans are bedeviled by the *curse of Ham*. On January 3, 1843, after accepting the mission to Guinea offered to him by Bishop Barron, Libermann wrote to his friend Gamon, director of the seminary of Mont-Ferrand. He reiterates his belief that Africans should be pitied because the *curse of Ham* is on them: ¹⁵⁶

We are going to have a very important new mission, but it is also a very difficult one. It is Guinea. That is the home of our poor Blacks. These Blacks, children of Ham, are abandoned there, just as they are everywhere also, and are just as poor. They go naked… Their beliefs resemble those of the Manicheans. And yet they are gentle and docile people… They believe in a Great Spirit who they say is good and benevolent towards them. They also believe in the existence of a demon, an evil spirit whom they fear greatly. They frequently offer superstitious sacrifices to this demon. This fear could help them to accept the Christian religion.

We can notice here that at the beginning of the mission to West Africa, Libermann had some vague ideas of West Africans and their beliefs, probably from Bishop Barron. For Libermann, West Africans needed urgent attention because they are poor and abandoned. They have some beliefs in God (Great Spirit) and the existence of demons which can be used as a stepping stone to Christianity. The religious orientation of those evangelized is important for a Christian missionary. Libermann notices that a missionary does not begin with *tabula rasa* but should use the existing beliefs as a foundation for his/her message.

In a letter to Belgian priests dated November 15, 1844, Libermann reiterated that the *curse of Ham* still rested on Africans and then resorted to prayer. He had this to say: ¹⁵⁷

Our mission is to embrace the entire Black race scattered over the world… They lack everything. One would say that the *curse of God* still rests on their heads up to the

¹⁵⁶ ND IV, 63. My italics.

¹⁵⁷ ND VI 433f.
present time. O divine goodness of Jesus, you are at last going to have pity on those unfortunate souls and you will choose your elect from among them just as from the rest of humankind and, just as they have been deprived of your favors up till now, you will be bountiful toward them from now on.

As we can see in this letter, Libermann was convinced that the curse of God (la malediction de Dieu) which is the curse of Ham did not only refer to Africans on the continent but also Africans in diasporas.

Joseph Lécuyer points out that according to Libermann, the curse has no place from now on. Lécuyer’s reading of this text is rather suspicious because as we are to learn, Libermann continues to express the same idea that the curse is still on Africans up to the end of his life.

However, sometimes there is some ambivalence in the way Libermann conceived this curse. On the one hand, he portrays Africans as people cursed by God and on the other hand, he says that Africans are God’s children, made in the image of God. The opening paragraph of his Memoir to Propaganda dated August 15, 1846, expresses this paradox:

When we look at the condition of the black people anywhere in the world today, we may be tempted to think that they are cursed by God from the outset and oppressed beneath a burden of ignorance and suffering. Everywhere, they are in a truly miserable condition of ignorance and superstition. Nobody stretches out a hand to free them from the internal power that holds them from bondage …And yet they are made in the image of God like all other people, and they are ready to welcome the gift of faith that they have never known.

Libermann saw the need of suffering as a means of purification which was a common belief during his time and a teaching of the French School. We noted in the previous chapter that drawing from his own life-experience as one who suffered from epilepsy, suffering enabled him to be in solidarity with those who are suffering. On January 26, 1848, after learning about the

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158 Joseph Lécuyer, “Father Libermann and the Curse of Ham”, Spiritan Papers, No.6 (May-August 1978), 35.

159 ND VIII, 223. My italics.
death of Bishop Benoit Truffet he wrote to the community of Dakar consoling the members that their suffering may be necessary to atone the curse that bedeviled Africans:160

God will bless you. He will bless your patience. He wants to sanctify your souls, and by your own sanctification, he wants to bless our poor dear Africa. How much care, and how much suffering will be needed to wipe out the curse which even till our day rests upon that unhappy and desolate land in the clutches of the devil for so long!

The “curse” here definitely refers to the curse of Ham. Again Libermann expressed the hope that this curse will be removed from Africans but it is still there.

In a letter to Fr. Charles Lairé, dated May 8, 1851, Libermann again expressed the idea that missionaries should be ready to suffer not only for their own sanctification and salvation but also for the salvation of Africans as well. More importantly this suffering had to be united with the suffering of Jesus so that the curse could be removed. He wrote:161

The people of Africa do not need and will not be converted by the efforts of clever and capable missionaries: it is the holiness and the sacrifice of their priests that will be the means of their salvation. The blindness and the spirit of Satan are still too much rooted in those peoples and the curse of their father still leaves its mark on them. They can only be saved by your trials, united to the sufferings of Jesus Christ; that alone can expiate these abominable sins. The missionaries must possess a holiness which draws down upon the Africans the all-powerful and merciful merits of Jesus to wash away God’s curse from them. Be holy and urge your confreres to be holy. On this depends the salvation of those wretched souls for which you suffer and immolate yourselves.

On May 30, 1851, a few months before his death, Libermann wrote a letter to Father Dom Salier in which he was still convinced that the curse of Ham was still on Africans:162

160 ND X 27. My italics. These days, there is some skepticism concerning the theology of atonement. How can the suffering of one person atone the sins or in this case, the bad fortune of the other? The whole theology of atonement however has its foundation in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ. “They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Jesus Christ, whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed.” (Rom 3:25). Atonement enables us to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering and those who are marginalized.

161 ND XIII 143. My italics.

162 ND XIII 172
The *curse* placed on the *children of Ham* is indeed terrible and the devil still reigns amongst them until today. You have no idea what this struggle entails; we are engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with this fierce enemy of souls. It is a terrible battle, but Jesus is with us and Mary is protecting us, so we will win in the end.

What is clear from the above quotations is that Libermann like many European authors during his time harbored the prejudiced racial concept that Africans were *offspring of Ham* and therefore the *curse of Ham* was on them. Fr. Joseph Lécuyer points out that the *curse of Ham* was a widespread nineteen century conviction of the Catholic world which was discussed by Vatican I Council in 1870. Lécuyer adds that Jewish tradition carried the same conviction. Libermann grew up in Jewish tradition, read the Talmud which applied the curse to Africans and the Black race.

The foregoing discussion helps us to understand the fact that Libermann was a man of his age sharing the same racial stereotypes against Africans like any other Europeans. What transformed Libermann’s life was not that he abandoned these racial ideas but rather he was transformed by the encounters of his missionaries with Africa and Africans.

2.4.2 Anthropology of Libermann’s Commentary on the Gospel of John

Libermann’s Commentary on the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John is the longest known document that he ever wrote and reveals a lot about his theological anthropology and his understanding and concept of human beings. The best work done so far on this Commentary is by Michael Cahill who as we have pointed out in chapter one, concluded that Libermann’s use of

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163 Lécuyer, “Libermann and the Curse of Ham”, 42f. Lécuyer quotes a petition addressed to Vatican I Council in June 1870 written by Daniel Comboni, the founder of the Institute of African Missions. It reads in part: “Upon the heads of the children of Ham, so loaded down with miseries, there still weighs that curse, the most ancient ever uttered against a people; and the burning lands in the interior of Africa feel more violently and more cruelly the evil force of that curse… Since it has been established that the solemn blessing of the new Covenant is to wipe out all the curses of the Old Covenant, it is up to the Vatican Ecumenical Council to make a solemn proclamation that the time has come to bring this about.”
the Rabbinic sources is extremely limited but what is overwhelming is the use of French School method and sources.\textsuperscript{164}

Cahill’s conclusions point to dualistic tendencies in Libermann’s understanding of Christ and his divine and human natures. Cahill notes that even though “he (Libermann) never explicitly quotes Olier or Eudes, his writing is in the idiom and categories of the French School.”\textsuperscript{165} He adds that the French School emphasized a high Christology which can be easily read in Libermann’s Commentary. This Christology acknowledges the humanity of Jesus, but its starting point and central concern is his divinity. The emphasis on divinity is often done at the expense of Jesus’ humanity. This was indeed fostered by Greek philosophy which insisted that what was true and good was what remained unchanged. As Bevans and Schroeder point out, “For the most part, however, the Christ of the nineteenth-century missionaries was more divine than human, and missionary motivation was fueled by the theology of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross.”\textsuperscript{166} This was particularly true for Libermann as well which shows that he was a child of his age imbued with the French School. Cahill then concludes:\textsuperscript{167}

Jesus in Libermann’s view is a divine person, the Son of God who becomes incarnate by taking a human nature in an extremely metaphysical sense. The human nature is humanity without the human person… As regards this topic there is no originality in Libermann’s Commentary. He follows exactly the teaching of the French School masters. Their emphasis is summed up in their fondness for almost always speaking of the divine, adorable, saintly or sacred humanity. It is rendered so sacred in their view that it almost ceases to be genuinely human.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid. 217. Cahill makes affinities between Libermann and three important figures of the French School, Olier, Eudes and Bérulle.

\textsuperscript{166} Bevans and Schroeder, \textit{Constants in Context}, 236.

\textsuperscript{167} Cahill, \textit{Francis Libermann’s Commentary}, 226.
The dualistic tendencies of the French School which Libermann allowed to influence his understanding of Jesus Christ led to mortification and asceticism so common in the nineteenth century. There are a number of factors that might have led Libermann to be in conformity with the French School. Let us enumerate some:

It must be recalled that first, Libermann wrote the Commentary on John’s Gospel only nine months after leaving the Eudist novitiate at St. Gabriel, Rennes. Therefore, he still harbored the spirituality of Jean Eudes and Jean Jacques Olier who are prominent authorities of the French School. At the Sulpician seminaries where Libermann lived for almost ten years, the spirit of Olier the founder pervaded the atmosphere. Kelly points out that due to Olier’s influence, Libermann followed Olier in his depreciation of all that is simply human.¹⁶⁸

Second, the Gospel of John has some dualistic tendencies: the divisions between light and darkness, spiritual and material, worldly and heavenly, believers and non-believers, above and below are more pronounced in the fourth Gospel than in any other Gospel. It would seem that this Gospel was more attuned to the theological thought of the day than any of the Synoptic Gospels. Libermann too is aware of this fact. In the preface to the Commentary, one of the reasons he gives for his preference to the Gospel of John to other Gospels is that he sees in it “the Son of God speaking and acting in the son of Mary whereas the other evangelists represent the son of Mary speaking and acting by virtue of being the son of God.”¹⁶⁹ This then reinforces the argument that Libermann saw the divinity of Christ more enhanced at the expense of his humanity in the Gospel of John than in any other Gospel.

¹⁶⁸ Kelly, Life Begun at Forty, 33.
Third, another way of looking at Libermann’s Commentary is to see him as one who contextualized the message of the Gospel to the Church of his day aided by the theology of the time. That is indeed what we do today by incarnating the Word of God in various cultures or inculturation or to use Vatican II language, “adaptation”. Although Myles Fay laments that Libermann with his fluency in Hebrew “allowed so little of his vast knowledge of the Old Testament to appear in this Commentary”, he also recognizes that the Commentary is good for meditative purposes, written at “a time when Catholic spirituality underplayed the value of the Old Testament.”170 Claude Tassin commenting on Libermann’s Commentary says, “If Fr. Libermann tries to find the theology of his day in the Gospel, it is not in order to reduce the Gospel to that theology. It is rather so that that theology, often abstract and uninvolved with real life, may take on the Flesh and Blood of the living Christ as met in the Gospel scenes.”171 The Word of God becomes real nourishment when it enriches our faith.

Fourth, there was a deep anthropological reason for Libermann’s Commentary. At the beginning of this Commentary, Libermann says that when he was in Rome waiting for a response from Propaganda, he wanted to occupy himself by utilizing the time to advance his spiritual life by meditating on the Word of God. He adds, “I chose the Gospel of John which


171 Claude Tassin, “How Libermann Read the Gospel: A Study of the Commentary on St. John”, Spiritan Papers, 4 (September – December 1977), 40. In the Commentary, Libermann shows that he was aware of the various senses of interpreting Holy Scriptures used during his time: first, the literal sense, whereby he tries to explain the meaning of words, the tense, chronology of events and the geography. Second, the figurative sense, he looks at the hidden meaning (sens caché) i.e. the meaning of thirst (Jn 4: 13-14). Third, the allegorical sense which seems to be the most important sense for Libermann. The message is applied to the spiritual and moral lives of people. The allegorical sense was also widely and effectively used by the early Fathers of the Church. For them, the Word of God is dead for those who study it for just gaining knowledge. Drawing from Prophet Ezekiel’s imagery – he ate the scroll and in his mouth “it was as sweet as honey” (Ez 3:1-3; also Rev 10:8-11), the Word of God is for our nourishment of faith. For those who get inspiration from it for their spiritual and moral life, it becomes as sweet as honey. The Fathers insisted that we should not just chew and swallow like a horse, but rather like camel, chew, swallow and regurgitate. Libermann too believed that the Word of God needs to be regurgitated.
touches me strongly, because in it the divine Master always speaks and instructs us concerning
the deepest and most interior truths, the most capable of touching a soul.” It would then mean
that the Commentary was meant for our meditation and spiritual nourishment and that is why on
numerous occasions, Libermann interrupts or rather supplements the Commentary with prayer.

Fifth, we pointed out in the first chapter that Libermann had undergone a fundamental change
in his life at his “second conversion”, at the end of 1839. However, this change or conversion
was not instantaneous but rather a gradual process for the whole of his life. Myles Fay in his
introduction to the Commentary points out that Libermann’s “missionary and universalist
spirituality” matured over the last ten years of his life. Coincidentally for Fay, this conversion
or metanoia can also be read at John 12:23 where Libermann decided to end the Commentary.
He says:

Whether deliberately or not, this turning point had been clearly indicated by the
moment in St. John’s Gospel where Fr. Libermann stopped and, it would seem, never
felt the urge to continue beyond. “Some Greeks” had come to Jesus, and Jesus says,
“Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.” (Jn 12:23). The
missionary work of the Church was starting; so was Francis Libermann’s.

This ‘hour” was indeed the kairos, the proper time to start anew, a fresh start, a new
beginning with a new spirituality of mission.

As we have seen, Libermann’s Commentary on the Gospel of John reinforces the fact that he
was a man of his age. Besides the Commentary, Libermann’s other writings show little attention
to the humanity of Christ. “Everything in Jesus was divine: all his desires were divine desires, all

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173 Myles Fay, Introduction to Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: A Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Part I

174 Ibid.
his affections, all his love, were in the Father.”\textsuperscript{175} The same tendency to depreciate what is human is seen in his emphasis on the soul, “the beneficiary of Christ’s redeeming action during our earthly life.”\textsuperscript{176} When the vista for mission appeared on the horizon, he never abandoned these ideas but what transformed him is the face of the other, “the African face.”

\subsection*{2.5 Libermann and Mission}

\textit{L’œuvre des noirs} was a missionary endeavor. “Mission” basically describes the activity of Church members in spreading the Gospel. During the nineteenth century, Europeans moved to almost every habitable part of the world to colonize, to teach the Gospel and to spread European “civilization”. During this period, the term “missions” was used but was replaced by “mission” after Vatican II. According to Lawrence Nemer, the word “missions” started to be used widely beginning with the nineteenth century to refer to the “outreach of the Church to those who were not Christians and with the places where Christian communities were only starting or had not yet achieved the full structure of the Church.”\textsuperscript{177} Mission is basically a participation in the life of the Trinity, a continuation of the mission of Jesus to preach, serve, and witness. Mission is a proclamation of Jesus as the world’s savior. Mission establishes a relationship.

Nemer outlines the Trinitarian paradigm of mission to include the following: first, mission begins with the life of God who sent Jesus Christ to bring the kingdom of God on earth; second, the Church continues Christ’s mission; third, mission is continued under the guidance of the

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\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{175}] ND I, 240. Cited by Kelly, \textit{Life Begun at Forty}, 30.
\item[\textsuperscript{176}] Kelly, \textit{Life Begun at Forty}, 30.
\end{itemize}
Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit; fourth, the Church is missionary by nature; and fifth, mission includes evangelization and bringing the Gospel to those who have never heard it.\textsuperscript{178}

The “outreach of the Church to those who are not Christians” gave rise to the traditional geographical understanding of mission which was prevalent ideology during the time of Libermann. There is no doubt that Libermann’s understanding of mission involved geographical movement but at the same time, it was first, a movement to the margins, to people who were marginalized and second, a dialogue with culture.

The nineteenth century understanding of human being was dichotomized between body and soul which eventually influenced the outlook on mission and outlook on people at the margins. We have already noted that dualistic tendencies influenced the nineteenth century Catholic Church’s high Christology. The purpose and value of the body was to be a “vehicle of the soul.”\textsuperscript{179} This dualistic anthropological understanding was closely connected to the ecclesiological notion of an ideal person. An ideal person was one within the visible Catholic Church outside of which there was no salvation, \textit{extra ecclesiam nulla salus}. This led to a twofold missionary anthropological strategy, “to save souls and establish the church.”\textsuperscript{180}

However, prior to the Protestant Reformation, mission was defined as “\textit{conversion gentilium} – the conversion of individual persons.”\textsuperscript{181} \textit{However, with the Protestant Reformation and creation of different Christian Churches, each competing to baptize as many people as possible,}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{178} Ibid. 684.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Kollman, \textit{The Evangelization of Slaves}, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{180} David J. Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 331.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Ibid. 331.
\end{itemize}
there was a shift to “plantatio ecclesiae – church planting.”\textsuperscript{182} This was a dangerous turn as Bosch points out: “The church had, in a sense, ceased to point to God or to the future, instead, it was pointing to itself. Mission was the road from the institutional church to the church that still had to be instituted.”\textsuperscript{183} For Christian missionaries, therefore, Africa was a land of opportunity, as each Christian denomination tried to extend its influence, to win as many souls as possible. Libermann too was definitely imbued with this ecclesiocentric anthropology but at the same time, he was aware as Bosch points out that mission should be understood as missio Dei.\textsuperscript{184} He always emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in missionary work.

2.5.1 Libermann and His Attitude to Liberation of Slaves

Anthropology deals with human freedom. Slavery is an infringement on human freedom. Mission is aimed at holistic human liberation. Mission is not just to save souls for heaven or to establish churches but as Koren points out: “to announce Christ the Savior whose whole life was a revelation: it showed that it is really possible for us human beings to begin to live together as God’s loving sons and daughters…”\textsuperscript{185} Libermann’s mission was basically a mission aimed at establishing a strong bond of relationship with Africans who were enslaved by various forces.

Slavery or slaveholding is a very ancient human institution practiced by almost every known society up to our present age. Slaveholding is so shameful that many societies and institutions would prefer to be silent about it. As John Noonan points out, “slavery is, if you like, the elephant in the room, so large, so awkward, so threatening that everyone would prefer not to

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid. 331f.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid. 332.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid. 389.
\textsuperscript{185} Koren, “Faith, Science and Evangelizing the Poor”, in Essays on the Spiritan Charism, 73.
notice it or to speak of it.”  

Noonan has the guts to speak out on slavery. He says that even though the Catholic Church teaches today that slaveholding is always intrinsically evil, there is abundant evidence to show that “the right of the owner to determine the identity, education and vocation of the slave and to possess the fruit of the slave’s body … were once accepted by the teaching of the Church as without sin.”  

He traces the institution of slavery from the Old Testament where it existed save that the Israelites were not allowed to enslave their own people. In the New Testament, Noonan says that Jesus presented himself as a slave/servant who came to serve, not to be served, adding that Jesus denounced sin as moral slavery. Jesus came to set people free (Lk 4:18), yet he did not preach against the abolition of slavery as an institution. St. Paul too recognizes the existence of the institution of slavery, challenges masters to treat slaves justly but at the same time, tells slaves to be obedient to their masters (Eph 6:5-9). He urges Philemon to treat his converted slave Onesimus as a brother but falls short of telling Philemon to set him free. Noonan insists that medieval theologians followed Augustine’s stand that slavery was not absolutely forbidden by natural law. St. Thomas too according to Noonan taught that slavery was appropriate and socially useful in a world tainted by original sin.

Noonan’s analysis shows that the Catholic Church participated in the perpetuation of slavery. The popes themselves held slaves including Muslim captives who worked in their alleys. A much quoted Papal Bull, Romanus Pontifex by Nicholas V (1441-1455) authorizes King Henry of Portugal to go and conquer the “infidels” and subject them to Christ. It reads in

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187 Ibid. Noonan is referring to Pope John Paul’s Encyclical Veritatis Splendor, no. 80 which states that slavery is intrinsically evil. The Pope is reiterating Vatican II’s teaching, Gaudium et Spes, 27.

188 Ibid. 56f.

189 Ibid. 37.
part: “We … grant full and free authorization to invade, conquer, battle, defeat, and subject any Saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ wherever they may be,…and to reduce to perpetual servitude their sons.”190 This authorization led to the conquest of the New World, the enslavement of West Africans and Indians and the Atlantic Slave Trade. Slavery had existed for centuries, but the Atlantic Slave Trade took a racial turn and was brutal in the way it was carried out. Noonan however, is very selective in his sources and gives an impression that there was no teaching against slavery in the Catholic Church: Pope Eugene IV in his bulls, Creator Omnium of December 17, 1434 and Sicut Dudum of January 13, 1435 condemns enslaving Blacks of the Canary Islands under the pain of excommunication.191 Equally selective was the Church’s condemnation of slavery. For instance, when Pope Eugene IV condemned slavery, he condemned those who enslaved baptized Christians leaving the unbaptized slaves unprotected.

Libermann grew up in a Jewish society that treasured liberation. However, like the Catholic Church which ambivalently supported slavery and condemned it for its own interests, the Jews too looked at liberation from slavery from their own perspective. For them, the most important event was the exodus experience, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt.192 As noted earlier, it

190 Nicholas V, Romanus Pontifex, January 5, 1455. This Bull was a reiteration of his earlier one Dum Diversas of June 18, 1452 granting King Alfonso V of Portugal the same authorization. However, this authorization was restricted by Alexander VI’s Inter Caetera of 1493 stating that one Christian nation did not have the right to establish dominion over lands previously dominated by another Christian nation that gave rise to Law of Nations.

191 Pope Paul III in 1537 condemned the enslavement of Indians in North and South America in his bull, Sublimus Deus of 1537. Gregory XIV issued Cum Sicuti in 1591 ordering the freeing of all the Filipino slaves held by the Spaniards. Urban VIII in 1639 issued a bull Commissum Nobis applying the principals of Paul III to Portuguese colonies in South America and requiring the liberation of all Indian slaves. Benedict XIV’s Immensa Pastorum, of 1741 condemns slavery under the pain of excommunication.

192 At the celebration of the Jewish Passover, the youngest person asks the head of the family. “Father, why is tonight different from other nights, why eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread?” The father replies: “We celebrate tonight in this special way so that we can remember how God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt.” The people then chorus, “Alleluia”.

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was during the process of his conversion to the Catholic faith that Libermann came to realize \textit{that a just God cannot liberate just one nation. God is a liberator of all peoples.}

Turning our attention to France and French colonies, we notice that at the time when Libermann and his companions were planning \textit{l’œuvre des noirs} in 1839, slave trading in France was still governed by “\textit{Code Noire}” or “\textit{Black Code}” which was issued by Louis XIV in 1685, revised in 1724 and implemented until 1848 when slave trading was outlawed in France after a Socialist Revolution. “\textit{Code Noire}” gives the slave owners total power over the slaves, including branding, mutilation and using the lash.\footnote{http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335/ (accessed on September 24, 2010). This document contains the King’s edict concerning the discipline of the Church and State, the status of the slaves and policing of slavery right in the islands of America. It states that slaves are property of their masters. Masters under the pain of a fine are responsible for seeing that slaves are baptized and instructed in the Catholic faith, and kept alive. Theft by a slave is punishable by death; fugitives when captured, were to be executed, or in the case of a short absence (one month or less), to have their ears cut off. Slaves were not to be forced to work on Sundays and Feast Days. Jews were not allowed to own property or slaves in French colonies.}

We have pointed out that Libermann and companions anticipated that the emancipation of slaves in French colonies was close at hand but this emancipation they argued would be detrimental to the slaves if they were not prepared morally. This was also the thinking of the French government whose approach was called a “moralization campaign” so as to avoid a repeat of the Haitian Revolution. In 1840, the French Minister for the Navy which was responsible for French colonies sent an appeal to bishops and Religious Institutes to supply missionaries to “promote a program of moral, religious and social instruction.”\footnote{Burke, \textit{No Longer Slaves}, 27. According to Burke, by 1840 the French territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Bourbon and Guyana had a total of 251,971 slaves and 12,447 emancipated people of African origin.} This program was aimed at controlling the emancipated slaves and to make sure that the interests of the slave owners are safeguarded.
Burke enumerates some reasons why France outlawed the slave trading which include:  

First, slave trading became economically unviable as Europe depended less and less on goods from foreign colonies. Second, abolitionist movements became vocal and strong in France as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Third, though not well documented, emancipated slaves played an important role in the process of liberation by challenging this unjust system that dehumanized them. We have pointed out that studies of Christian missionaries in Africa are usually dominated by exploits of self-sacrificing European missionaries who played an important and vital role in the liberation of Africans. These studies often neglect the part played by those who received the message and their response. Libermann recognized the part played by Africans in the liberation struggle of Haiti. He sought advice from Isaac Louverture, son of a renowned freedom fighter and father of Haiti, Toussaint Louverture. In addition, Libermann realized that slavery was a complex reality affecting people’s lives that needed a comprehensive approach to it.

When Libermann and companions were planning l'œuvre des noirs, Pope Gregory XVI issued a bull, In Supremo Apostolatus, on December 3, 1839, condemning slavery and the slave trade. The Pope warns all those who buy and sell “Blacks” and reduce them to servitude that this is in

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196 Ibid. 86. Toussaint Louverture was an ex-slave.
contempt of the rights of justice and humanity. This condemnation came rather too late, and although it deals with the slave trade, it does not address the liberation of slaves.

Paul Kollman says that Libermann was a “committed abolitionist” but the Catholic Church in France tended to be against abolitionists because of their anti-clerical outlook. He notes that many of Libermann’s missionaries in French colonies advocated abolition, theologically linking “worldly freedom and the possibility of eternal life.” It is true that Libermann was against slavery but his abolitionist stance has to be qualified. Arsène Aubert argues that Libermann was not an abolitionist but rather encouraged his missionaries to be prudent in dealing with slave masters. Let us look at some of Aubert’s arguments by examining Libermann’s writings on his attitude to the slave masters to clarify this point.

In 1840 Libermann composed a Rule for his Society. In this Rule he says:

The missionaries will be the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the small and weak against their oppressors. When faced with such situations, the love and strength of Our Lord, Jesus Christ must increase in them. But their actions must be

197 Pope Gregory XVI, In Supremo Apostolatus, December 3, 1839. Pope Gregory XVI became a pope in 1831 at a time of considerable instability for the papacy. Gregory struggled to maintain his authority over the Papal States which wanted a reform. He had a great passion for mission activity as well. He encouraged establishing the local clergy and creation of new dioceses in mission territories. He disdained government interference in church matters. http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16sup.htm (Accessed on September 22, 2010).

198 Claude Prudhomme “La pauvreté face à l’esclavage: quelle condamnation?” in Memoire Spiritaine, (No. 9, 1999), 135-160. He questions the Encyclical’s condemnation of slavery. He says that whereas the Encyclical condemns those engaged in trafficking of slaves, it does not address the liberation of slaves.

199 Kollman, The Evangelization of the Slaves, 62, 65. Kollman is also critical of the first Spiritan missionaries to East Africa for departing from Libermann’s abolitionist approach to slavery. Kollman analyzes the strategy of these missionaries which he says was “morally dubious” because among other reasons, they never declared the ex-slaves free and used slavery as an opportunity to win converts to Catholicism.

200 Ibid. 65.


202 ND II, 256. Cited by Arsène Aubert, “Libermann in Conflict With Authorities”, 4, Règle Provisoire, First Part, Chapter IX, art. VI. This article is reiterated in Libermann’s 1849 Rule (ND X, 517) and in the present Spiritan Rule of Life, 14.
inspired by a gentleness and prudence which their Master will give them if they are faithful.

We can notice here that Libermann calls for prudence in dealing with situations of injustice.

He continues in the same Rule:  

They will do all they can to establish this Christian charity between the rich and the poor, the whites and the blacks, so that all will see one another as brothers in Jesus Christ and overcome the disdain and indifference on the one side and the jealousy and hatred on the other. But this requires great prudence or all could be lost.

M. Bissette, a native of Martinique, launched a petition for the immediate abolition of slavery and sent a copy to Libermann, hoping for his signature and help in its distribution. Libermann replied that he was not prepared to do so because any intervention on his part could lead to the expulsion of his missionaries, who were almost the only ones who mixed with the black slaves.

His reply to Bisette reads in part:  

I received your packet at the end of July. I am honored by the trust you have put in me, for you rightly treat me as a friend of the black race and as one who desires their emancipation above all things. I am proud of this and I will be immensely happy if God in his goodness allows me to live long enough to see my desires fulfilled. I have forwarded the brochures to the priests to whom they were addressed. I would dearly love to have signed the petition myself, but I have declined to do this for very serious reasons which I will explain to you when I next come to Paris. I tried to find somebody else to take on the distribution of the petition but without success, but I am sure that the clergy of this diocese would be happy to sign. I am sorry not to be able to satisfy our shared desire, but I have given some of the brochures to M. Germainville who will distribute them to the clergy of Bordeaux.

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203 ND II, 256. *Règle Provisoire*, First Part, Chapter IX, art. XIV.

204 ND IX, 253ff. Letter to M. Bissette, August 17, 1847.
After becoming Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Libermann wrote a Memoir to the bishops of Guadaloupe, Martinique and Reunion. He encourages them to be neutral in dealing with Blacks, Whites and Colored. He wrote:

Treat the Whites with honor and consideration according to their rank and social position. If they talk of the state to which they have been reduced, you can show your sympathy without giving the impression that you approve of slavery, because this would not be worthy of a Bishop. *Remain independent on this question of rights as well as on the fact of abolition.*

If a Black wants to speak to you, welcome him with the tenderness of a father. In this case, the tone of your conversation will be simpler. Such conversations will rarely be embarrassing: these are very good children who are talking to their father, so they must be treated as such.

In relating to a colored person or a friend of the black people, relate to them according to their rank and position in society, remembering that they too can be very sensitive because of their ambiguous position. You can tell them that you are greatly interested in the black people, that you will take particular care of them and work to do everything possible to improve the religious instruction and human development of these poor children.

We can see here that Libermann is instructing the bishops not to approve slavery but at the same time to remain independent on the question of its abolition. Libermann knew that his mission depended on two important factors. First, he had to maintain a good working relationship with the French government which offered financial support and security to his missionaries. Second, he had to avoid confrontation with the slave masters because they wielded massive power derived from their financial support to the French government. Exploiting slave labor, slave masters minimized the cost of production and maximized profit which enabled them to be a great source of income for the French government. Libermann urged his missionaries not to “irritate the slave masters” not because he supported their exploitation of the slaves, but rather for the good of his mission. For Libermann *prudence* was the key attitude, as he tried to keep a

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205 ND XII, 285f. My italics.
fine balance between the slave masters who were powerful and the slaves who were the primary object of his evangelization. Third, Libermann was very practical in his approach to mission. He had a practical concern for those who were enslaved as well as his own missionaries. He knew that slavery was immoral but at the same time, there were practical steps to be taken to get rid of it for there is always a danger of countering immoral behavior by immoral means. Burke points out that slavery could not be justified yet “it was not possible to dismantle it with moral indignation and condemnation.” Eventually what was needed most was *metanoia*, a change of heart and mind. Burke continues:

> What Libermann considered to be of the utmost importance was to have truly Christian people minister to the needy in such a way that they in turn would become true Christians. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is what is required above all else in those who go to help and in those who are helped.

Therefore *Libermann’s abolitionist stance has to be qualified with prudence*. He was more of a pacifist than an abolitionist. Even though we can say today that by not confronting the slave masters, Libermann kept a blind eye to the evils which were taking place, at the same time, we have the practical situation which he had to deal with. Libermann realized that conversion was for everyone. The evangelizers needed *metanoia* to have the Spirit of Christ so that they can minister the afflicted with love. The slave owners needed *metanoia* to treat slaves with brotherly and sisterly love and eventually let them free. The slaves too needed *metanoia* first, to the light of Christ, and second, to desist from carrying out vengeance on the perpetrators of injustice.

Libermann, believed that the hour had not only dawned for the Gospel to be preached to Africans, but also the time had come for the perpetrators of injustice to realize that Africans are

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207 Ibid, 53.
children of God. On November 2, 1846, Libermann wrote a long and important letter to Pierre
Northum Percin whom he was sending to Haiti where Eugène Tisserant had tried unsuccessfully
to establish a mission for the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary between 1843 and 1845.
Libermann outlines the vision of the mission in Haiti. One of the objectives was to expose the
injustices done to African Haitians. He wrote:\textsuperscript{208}

\begin{quote}
There was an even stronger reason why I was keen to undertake this work: if we could have made a foundation in the Republic, I am sure it would have been very successful. After a few years, we would have been able to expose to the world the calumny and bad faith of those who were denigrating such a large number of people. We could have destroyed the ridiculous prejudices of a handful, who only think of their own ambitions and interests, to the detriment of millions of people created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. I am convinced that we could have proved to the detractors of the African race that not having a white skin does not mean that they were any less the children of God, that their souls are less noble, that they are less capable of receiving the faith, Christian morality and the principles and practice of civilization. In other words, we would have shown them that the color of one’s skin in no way denotes any inferiority.
\end{quote}

As one of the ways to destroy the prejudices of those who looked down on Haitians, Libermann proposes the establishment of a local church. Libermann says that the church in Haiti should no longer be considered a missionary church but rather an official and regularized church with a resident bishop like the churches in Europe. Libermann was very eager to see that the church in Haiti is granted the same status like the churches in Europe and this was good for boosting self-esteem.

The foregoing discussion shows that although slave trade or slave holding is intrinsically evil, for many centuries it was unchallenged in each and every society. Even when people started to confront slavery, they were divided on how to deal with it. Abolitionist movements started to challenge slavery during the first half of the nineteenth century. Libermann did not stand out as

\textsuperscript{208} ND VIII, 334.
an abolitionist because he wanted to safeguard his mission. He also realized that there are many forms of slavery. It was the encounter he had with Africans through his missionaries that enabled him to find other means to challenge and confront slavery. These means included empowerment of Africans with education, priestly training, and establishment of the local church administered by Africans. Above all, he narrated the story of the misery of Africans.

2.5.2 Libermann and Inculturation

Vatican II gave immeasurable impetus to inculturation, but used the term “adaptation” which later came to be understood as inculturation. Although the term “inculturation” is relatively new terminology, not in Libermann’s vocabulary, inculturation as a practice has been there since the beginning of the Church. Whenever the message of the Gospel encounters a new culture, there is definitely a process of inculturation with that culture. Eugene Hillman says that inculturation “often called a missionary principle of ‘contextualization’ or ‘indigenization’ of the Gospel into local cultures” is rooted in the incarnation of Christ, the paradigm and model of all inculturation. The incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth “entails the full acceptance of an historically conditioned culture, because no human being exists outside of a specific historico-cultural context.” Jesus Christ was born a Jew in Palestine which was politically ruled by the Romans but dominated by the Greek culture. Christianity was therefore born into Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures. The process of inculturation has continued up to the present age even though the culture of those who wield economic, military and political power usually dominates the weak. Christianity today is dominated by Western culture.


210 Ibid. 2.
During the time of Libermann, French Catholic missionary zeal had drawn on nationalistic pride to generate an obsessive urgency to reclaim the lost souls for *les salut des âmes* (the salvation of souls). Libermann was aware of this nationalistic pride that influenced French missionaries to look at their culture as the “standard” one, and at the same time, to look down on other people’s cultures. The French system of assimilation encouraged people in the colonies to adapt to French culture and language in exchange for French citizenship. Libermann, on the other hand, calls on his missionaries to assimilate African culture. Before we examine his inculturation strategy, let us look at his cultural background.

**2.5.2.1 Libermann and Culture**

Culture is an important part of anthropology. According to Vatican II: “Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture; that is, through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature.” Libermann is widely known for his teaching on inculturation even though his cultural identity kept on changing. He grew up in a Jewish ghetto, began learning Hebrew as early as five, read the Torah, and later Mishnah, and Talmud commentaries on Jewish laws. He spoke Yiddish which he wrote in Hebrew characters. Libermann came into contact with the European culture at the age of 20 when he went to Metz to study to become a Rabbi where he secretly read French, Latin and Classics. After his conversion, Libermann got acclimatized to French culture and devoted a great deal of his private time improving on his French during his seminary days.

We have noted that during his seminary and novitiate experiences, Libermann imbibed the spirituality of the French School with its dualistic tendencies which influenced his outlook at life. He criticized the Sulpicians for overemphasizing academic achievements at the expense of

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212 *Gaudium et Spes*, 53.
Though there is nothing wrong in giving preeminence to spirituality in our lives, the problem with Libermann at that time and the French School of thought was the “excessive pessimism about the ‘natural’…All of this, however, went contrary to the optimism and the absolute confidence in God that had become deeply ingrained in him during his Orthodox Jewish period.”

It was after Libermann’s seminary and novitiate experiences that his earlier “Jewish spiritual attitude became again predominant in his outlook.” The relationship which Libermann had with African context widened his horizon and his outlook on culture and spirituality. As Koren points out, Libermann was a “Jew and Christian”; as a Jew he could see God in each and every event of his life, and as a Christian, he “wished to live under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, manifesting himself in the concrete situations of life.” Holiness was to be sought in the real situations of life, not in shying away from them to some secluded places. The real situations of life presented themselves in the missions where there were structures of injustice which had to be challenged by the Gospel message - many people’s rights were abused and denied.

At the same time, Libermann realized that the Gospel can be “incarnated” in any culture. It must be recalled that Libermann’s conversion was motivated by the realization that God cannot be monopolized by one ethnic group but rather, he is for all people. For that reason, for Libermann no culture had an exclusive right to the Gospel.

Libermann’s knowledge of West African cultures was limited. It was mainly drawn from his missionaries and from widespread European racial stereotypes against Africans. That is the

213 ND I, 384f.


215 Ibid.

216 Ibid.
reason why we pointed out earlier that Libermann too needed an *epoché* to get rid of these racial stereotypes which influenced his outlook on Africans. This was indeed a life long struggle. Despite this weakness, Libermann’s teaching on inculturation outshined the mentality of many of his contemporaries. He respected all cultures and invited his missionaries to be flexible in adapting to each and every culture. It is Libermann’s teaching on culture that shows that he had been transformed by African context. We have noted that according to Levinas, when the face of the Other looks at me, I am immediately placed in a position of infinite responsibility. He continues that in order to receive the Other, I need to be in a position of response-ability.

Libermann found himself in the position of response-ability when he was visited at the Eudist novitiate by de la Bruniére, one of the initiators of *l’œuvre des noirs*, to convince him to take leadership of this project. In his acceptance letter to Le Vavassuer of October 28, 1839, Libermann referring to de la Bruniére says: “de la Bruniére is all black.” In the same letter he goes on to say: “I will offer Holy Communion for our dear Black people on the feast of all the Saints.” This is a clear indication that Libermann is beginning to be influenced by the African context which is going to transform him for the rest of his life. He too like de la Bruniére became “black” and instructed his missionaries to be “black with the Black.”

In a long letter to his missionaries in Dakar, Libermann outlined the attitude of his missionaries to those they sought to evangelize:

> Do not act according to what you see in Europe nor according to European customs. Get rid of Europe, its customs and its spirit. *Become black with the Blacks*, and then you will know them as they should be known and not the way they are known by the Europeans. Let them be themselves. Become their servants. As servants, adapt to their customs and their way of life. Do all this with the aim of improving them, sanctifying

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217 ND I, 661.

218 ND IX, 330. My Italics.
them, ennobling them, and finally forming them into God’s people. That is what St. Paul means by becoming all things to all in order to win all for Christ Jesus.

This is one of the most quoted statements of Libermann writings. It is indeed a very strong statement at a time when what was “black” was demonized. Missionaries are to get rid of Europe and become “black with the Blacks.” Despite the racial prejudices Libermann had about Africans, he was transformed and informed by Africans.

Libermann’s missionaries were to get rid of French nationalistic pride that often looked down on other cultures. Libermann called upon his missionaries to learn and be immersed in the culture of the people whom they were ministering. The purpose of inculturation is to ennoblement people and make them aware that they are God’s people. It makes them aware of their human dignity. Those who were evangelized needed ennoblement which would help them to become self-regulating, self-reflective, autonomous individuals, whose commitments derive from voluntary choices. As Libermann points out, there is also a social dimension to ennoblement. The evangelized should become “God’s people.” They should not see themselves just as individuals with self-determination but members of the people of God, members of the Body of Christ. The same call is made by Pope John Paul II:

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Evangelization must promote initiatives which contribute to the development and ennoblement of individuals in their spiritual and material existence. This involves the development of every person and of the whole person, considered not only individually but also and especially in the context of the common and harmonious development of all the members of a nation and of all the peoples of the world.

Christy Burke points out: “People are not, must not be thought of, as ‘objects’. Hence, to know a person is to establish a relationship with such a person … In the final analysis, the missionary is concerned with helping, but those who are being helped are never the ‘objects’ of

219 Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, 70.
his care.” There is always a danger that a good work of charity may become paternalistic. That is the reason why Libermann calls upon his missionaries to be servants of those they are called to minister thus imitating Jesus who came not to be served but to serve (Mtt 20:28). As servants they were to listen to the other and allow themselves to be transformed by the other.

In addition, Libermann insists that a missionary should become all things to all people. This meant that the basic principle of adaptation should be applied to other spheres of life as well. For instance, to a missionary who took pride in resisting a French military officer he told: “Those who are charged with the salvation of people should know how to adapt to others without, however, being broken or breaking others.” Libermann’s attitude on inculturation was part of his general attitude of tolerance and prudence noted earlier on concerning the liberation of slaves.

As part of adaptation, missionaries had to learn the local language. To their credit, missionaries composed scripts, grammars and dictionaries of many African languages which were otherwise oral. In order to realize the objective of incarnating the Gospel into the West African cultural milieu, Libermann proposed two strategies for the success of the mission: first, training of the local clergy, and second, education of Africans.

2.5.2.2 Libermann and Formation of the Local Clergy

Libermann was aware of the value and importance of seminaries to the Church. He had lived in seminaries for twelve years. He had assumed charge of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris at the time of the merger in 1848. He knew that his missionaries were doing a

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commendable ministry in the missions. However, for him, the success of the missions depended not on expatriate missionaries but on the establishment of the local clergy. According to Paul Coulon, the origin of this idea can be traced from Libermann’s friend, Fr. Jean Luquet (1810-1858), a member of the Foreign Missions of Paris and missionary in Pondicherry, India.\textsuperscript{222} Luquet was a secretary of a diocesan synod of Pondicherry which produced a document entitled \textit{Éclaircissements sur le synode de Pondichéry}. This document has striking similarities with Libermann’s 1846 Memoir. The document calls for the establishment of episcopates in the mission territories and the training of the indigenous clergy. Luquet was chosen by Propaganda to be the principal editor of the Pontifical Instruction, \textit{Neminem Profecto} which calls for the establishment of local episcopates and training of local priests in the missions.

Libermann knew of many flourishing missions in the past that collapsed because they depended almost exclusively on expatriate clergy. There were already ruined missions in Angola and Congo where the Capuchins alone, in the sixteenth century, had more than four hundred missionaries there.\textsuperscript{223} In his 1846 Memoir to Propaganda, this is what Libermann has to say referring to failed missions in Angola:\textsuperscript{224}

\begin{quote}
Religion once prospered there. There were then the beginnings of a civilization. But now the country has reverted to barbarism. Blacks are therefore fickle and committed to their state of barbarism… We believe, however, that this lapse is not due to something inherent in the people, but rather in the policy being followed in the establishment of the mission... The early missionaries …must have made manifold
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{222} Paul Coulon, Paule Brasseur and Others, \textit{Libermann 1802-1852: Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires} (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1988), 383-455. Bishop Jean Luquet of the Foreign Missions of Paris, was born in the diocese of Langres in 1810. He joined the Sulpician Seminary at Issy in 1838 where he came to know Libermann and his project for Africans. Luquet and Libermann maintained correspondence. Luquet was made auxiliary bishop to Bishop Bonnard of Pondicherry in 1845. Struck down by cancer, he retired to the French Seminary in Rome and died there on September 3, 1858.

\textsuperscript{223} Koren, \textit{The Spiritans}, 165.

\textsuperscript{224} ND 8, 234f. Cited by Koren, \textit{The Spiritans}, 165.
conquests for Jesus Christ and his Holy Church …and produced numerous Christian communities, but perhaps without using sufficient means to consolidate the fruits of their labors by giving to these communities the stable force of a Church.

We can notice that Libermann refers to Africans as people “committed to their state of barbarism” which reinforces what we have said that he had a racial attitude against Africans. Yet he says that Africans are not the cause of the lapse of “civilization” but rather the method which was used in evangelizing them. However, the main point is clear, Libermann was aware that the best way to consolidate the Church in West Africa was to form native clergy and native hierarchy rooted in the country. As noted earlier, he even suggested that catechists should receive minor orders.

In the same 1846 Memoir, Libermann insists that the purpose of the missions is “permanently to implant our holy religion” by “beginning the construction of the stable edifice of a canonically established Church.” He continues: 225

The newly established bishop should not be satisfied with having a “flying column” of missionaries, but should form a native clergy rooted in the country, a native hierarchy. Undoubtedly, in the beginning he would need white priests, but if the preservation of an exclusively white clergy would be a policy adopted permanently or at least for too considerable a time, decay [of the new Christian community] would be inevitable.

The formation of local clergy was for Libermann a sine qua non for the success of the West African Mission. In his 1844 Memoir to Propaganda, Libermann proposes that Africans would be brought to Europe for instruction. He says: 226

We would choose the more religious and capable amongst them for further studies with a view to eventual ordination to the priesthood… The priests could do much good work and would soon gain the confidence of the people from which they come


226 ND VI, 392. It must be remembered that the first tentative steps towards religious dialogue took place only in the early years of the following century.
themselves. They would not find it difficult to abolish their superstition and idolatry; they would be better placed than Europeans to destroy Islam in the many countries where it is to be found and to fight against Protestantism.

Luke Mbefo points out that sending Africans to Europe to study may be seen by some nationalists as “colonial arrogance enshrined in their self-given task of showing the Blacks how human life is to be lived, the so-called ‘white man’s burden,’ the colonial policy of the British or to ‘moralize’ the noble savage as the French articulate it.”227 Despite this reservation, Mbefo is of the opinion that it was necessary for Africans to learn “European ways” so as to master their own destiny.

The training of the local clergy was taken seriously by the early Spiritan missionaries to Africa, even though as we will see later, it encountered many challenges.

### 2.5.2.3 Libermann, Education and “Civilization”

Training of local clergy was important for Libermann but it should be seen in the whole context of education. Libermann uses the term “civilization” frequently in connection with education. For him, education is supposed to bring civilization to people. In the nineteenth century, the term “civilization” was used to refer to Western cultures, considered to be “civilized” because they were regarded as complex, technologically and scientifically advanced and superior to cultures of other peoples often referred to as “primitive”, “barbaric”, “uncivilized”, “savage” or “uncouth”. For that reason, the term “civilization” today has racial overtones. Libermann too, believed that “civilization” meant “European civilization.” He says: “The mission does not consist solely in the message of faith that we proclaim but also in the

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initiation of the people to our European civilization.” European civilization meant general education that embraced agriculture, literacy and technical skills.

Despite the misconception Libermann had about education, there is abundant evidence that he was aware that first, education was a necessary tool to empower Africans to become self-sustaining. Second, Libermann believed that education or “civilization” was part and parcel of the Gospel message. “Religion will influence their minds and their morals. It will develop in them a spiritual and supernatural well-being. Civilization will influence their social and civil life and help them to achieve natural well-being.” According to Libermann, education is supposed to bring civilization and should not be divorced from religion. Contrary to the dualistic tendencies during his age, Libermann was aiming at a holistic development of human person. “It is the duty of the missionary, it is his bounden duty, to work not only in the domain of morals but also in the intellectual and physical fields, that is, in education, in agriculture and trades.”

Henry Koren challenges the traditional way of looking at mission that dichotomizes it between direct and indirect evangelization as unacceptable. According to this traditional view, direct evangelization consists of preaching the Gospel of salvation to people and indirect evangelization refers to other means that foster evangelization like education, economic development and agriculture. Koren says: “If we feed the hungry, heal the sick, teach the ignorant only as a means to make them accept Christ’s salvation, and attain the happiness of

228 ND VIII, 318.
229 ND VI, 66. Cited by Burke, No Longer Slaves, 115.
heaven, then we are offering them worldly bribes for their conversion.” The traditional approach to mission suffers from anthropological dualism. Koren then calls for a holistic approach to mission that looks at heaven disclosed in love here on earth in the lives of Christians."

“Civilization” is basically good but it is religion which gives it true meaning. Libermann said:

It is of the greatest importance that the civilization brought to these countries produce a deep unity among the indigenous people. If it brings disorder, they are not being offered any gift of value. For this unity to be brought about there has to be a unifying foundation which is to be had only in religion. To bring to Africa irreligion, immorality and the many vices so sadly found among the working classes with civilization, then it would be far better to leave them in their uncivilized state.

Religion ought to be integrated with education because religion is the foundation of “civilization.” Libermann believed that civilization without religion is really weak and cannot penetrate into the people for it is religion that brings it to perfection. Libermann was also aware of the danger of elitism that can easily divide the people between those who are learned and those who are not or who have received little education. This problem was experienced in Post-Revolution France, a country which was supposed to be built on the Revolutionary principles of liberté, égalité et fraternité. Libermann reasoned that it would be disastrous for Africans who are despised by the Europeans, to be despised by their fellow Africans. In addition, “civilization” should not be superficial but should penetrate the culture of the people so that it becomes their way of life. People should feel at home with civilization and thus it must aim at

\[\text{232} \text{ Ibid. 71.}\]
\[\text{233} \text{ Ibid. 73.}\]
\[\text{234} \text{ ND VI, 66. Cited by Burke, } \textit{No Longer Slaves}, \text{ 116.}\]
\[\text{235} \text{ ND VIII, 236.}\]
the integral development of people. Education should help Africans to learn the importance of freedom. Libermann writes:236

Help them to appreciate the beauty of freedom and the equality they share with all the children of God. All ideas of inferiority must be got out of their minds. This would weaken them and debase them in their own eyes. Study their character, their mentality, their fundamental vision of life.

At the conclusion of this discussion, it is evident that Libermann looked at liberation in a wider context. He looked at poverty, ignorance and disease as forms of slavery. The relationship he developed with Africans through his missionaries enabled him to realize that Africans needed to be empowered to overcome these ills. They needed European education, medical care and skills in industry and agriculture to widen their horizon and to be more competitive.

2.6 Conclusion

Far from being a hagiology, the current study of Libermann’s theological anthropology of l’œuvre des noirs has tried to situate him in sitz im leben of the nineteenth century with its prejudices against Africans. Some of Libermann’s teaching would give an impression of condescension today. However, our main purpose was to substantiate that despite the racial prejudices Libermann had against Africans, his relationship with Africans through his missionaries transformed him to see them as children of God in need of God’s salvation. I have labored to look at Libermann through the lens of relationality because that is the best way to understand his theological anthropology which shows tendencies of being dualistic and at the same time humane.

Libermann realized that humanity shines brightly in the poor and abandoned, they are a sign that being human is not a matter of what a person has but rather what kind of person he or she is. The face of Africans which was abused offered Libermann an indelible character to his mission

236 ND IX, 360.
that the culture of Africans is of great worth. It should be assimilated by the European missionaries. As Elochukwu Uzukwu points out, Libermann was “penetrated and grasped by the humanum; this led him to have profound trust in the value and giftedness of each human group, especially the most oppressed Blacks.”237 We have argued that the “humanum” of Africans touched him and converted him to dedicate his life to those who were oppressed.

Finally, relationality is an important characteristic of the way human beings live in East Africa. In the next chapter, we are to explore East African traditional religions and philosophy through the lens of relationality.

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237 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, “Inculturation and the Spiritan Charism,” Spiritan Horizons (Issue 2, Fall 2007), 52.
CHAPTER THREE

UNDERPINNINGS OF EAST AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGIES

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to underline and identify important philosophical and theological underpinnings undergirding East African theological anthropologies which are relevant to the dialogue with Libermann’s theological anthropology of *l’œuvre des noirs*. This chapter argues that East African theological anthropologies hinge on relationality as an indispensable and important East African traditional religious view of personhood. Relationality is also a major point of discussion in the previous chapter. In the same chapter, we have seen how Libermann’s theological anthropology of *l’œuvre des noirs*, despite his racial prejudices against Africans, was informed by Africans whom he sought to evangelize through his missionaries. From the point of view of Christian theology, the last chapter examined the relational approach to the understanding of human beings, particularly the importance and inviolability of the other. Libermann accepted the other, that is, Africans, to speak to him and he listened to them. For that reason, he was able to teach his missionaries that they should expect to be evangelized by Africans, learn their cultures and languages and become Africans with Africans. As Uzukwu points out, this teaching shows that Libermann was attentive “to the ‘signs of the times’ – remarkable events that reveal the ‘hand of God’ or at least traces of the ‘passage of God’”.

For example, Libermann sought the traces of the passage of God by making contact with Isaac Louverture, a Haitian by birth, and asked “for his advice over his vision and strategy

\[238\text{Ibid. 55.}\]
This chapter proposes to study theological anthropologies of the East African context through the lens of African Religions or African Ancestral Religions or African Traditional Region (ATR). The East African ancestral religions are still prevalent in East Africans’ view and understanding of God, of the universe, of the human person and practice of Christian religion. Furthermore, ancestral religion is so engraved in the traditions, cultures and philosophy of East Africans that it is extremely essential for the understanding of the concept of person. We will begin our study with describing the meaning of religion in African context and how it is interwoven with culture. We will outline important approaches to the study of African Religions and propose the best approaches for this study. Because relatedness characterizes East African experience of the living person, we will explore relationality in East African traditional religious context and how it has survived in East African understanding of person up to today. Interpersonal relationships will play an important role in our discussion primarily because religion for East Africans is anthropocentric, aimed at the wholeness of the human person. We shall describe East African notion of person and then discuss and critique the rites of passage which involve birth, naming, initiation, marriage, and funeral rites. Despite the fact that some rites of passage viewed today carry elements of infringement on human rights and human dignity, nonetheless, they play a vital role in initiating a person into full personhood that enables one to socialize fully with others in community.

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239 Ibid.

240 There are discussions about the use of qualifiers “Traditional” or “Indigenous” or “Ancestral” because they have pejorative implications. Cf. Frans.T.S Wijsen, There is Only One God, A Social Scientific and Theological Study of Popular Religion and Evangelization in Sukumaland, Northwest Tanzania (Kampen, Uitgeverij, KOK, 1993), v-xi.
We will identify attributes which are important in understanding God and divine beings in the African context. We will also underline dynamism and plurality as core values which characterize East African understanding of divine–human relationship which points to first, the multidimensional nature of human flourishing and second, a realization that God, the source of vitality and life is Spirit.

The East African concept of time is a key to the understanding of East African anthropology and ontology.\textsuperscript{241} It influences East African understanding and concept of human being, interrelatedness with the living and the dead, and the necessity to give time to others thus to be kind and charitable to each other. A pertinent theme and value that emerges from this discussion of East African concept of time is hospitality which is a vital aspect of existence. The practice of hospitality in different East African societies presents common general features which will be analyzed. Related with the concept of time is the history of East Africa which will be outlined and delineated focusing on important cultural religious aspects of Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms with an aim of showing that East Africans have a history. In our study, instances will be drawn from East African societies and cultures.

### 3.2 East Africa

In this chapter, we are to limit our study to East Africa, to wit: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. These East African countries are interconnected geographically and have strong political, social, economic and cultural affinities. East Africans speak Swahili as \textit{lingua franca}.\textsuperscript{242} These countries


\textsuperscript{242} Swahili also known as Kiswahili (in Swahili itself) is a Bantu language which assimilated many Arabic words. Even the word Swahili is from the Arabic word \textit{sahil} which means “coast”. Swahili was first developed and spoken on the coast of East Africa when the Arabs interacted with East Africans around the 16\textsuperscript{th} Century. It was first written in Arabic alphabet but with the advent of Christian missionaries, it changed to Latin alphabet. Swahili penetrated to the interior of East Africa following slave trade routes as far as modern Congo Kinshasa. It is a national language of Kenya, Tanzania and Congo Kinshasa. It is also widely understood in Uganda even though many Ugandans are reluctant to speak it. The main reason for the reluctance is that during colonial days it was spoken by men in the
were colonized by Britain. In the scramble for Africa, the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference partitioned Uganda and Kenya to be British colonies while Tanzania, or Tanganyika by then, became a German colony. It was after the defeat of Germany in the First World War (1914-1918) that Tanzania became a British trustee. From then, the three countries have developed close ties.

In 1967, after independence, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda formed the East African Community based on economic and social integration. The main purpose was to regulate the commercial and industrial relations and transactions between the three countries. The East African Community was dissolved in 1977 first, due to lack of strong political will; there were political differences between Uganda’s dictator, Idi Amin and Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania, and ideological disparities between “capitalist” Kenya and “socialist” Tanzania. Second, there was lack of strong participation of the private sector and civil society in the co-operation activities. Third, there was disproportionate sharing of benefits of the community among partner states partly caused by differences in levels of development and lack of adequate policies to address them. The assets of the Community were divided in 1984. In 2006, the East African Community was re-established by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Since then, Rwanda and Burundi have also joined the East African Community.

uniform: army, prison and police. However, during post colonial era when the army controlled power in Uganda, soldiers who brutalized people used Swahili in giving commands, hence the language acquired a negative connotation of being associated with thieves and murderers and for women, prostitutes. In Tanzania where Swahili is spoken by almost every native, it has become so strong that it is killing tribal languages.

Kenya was a colony, Tanzania a trustee, and Uganda a protectorate.

East African integration commenced with the construction of the Kenya, Uganda Railway (1897-1901), then the establishment of the Customs Collection Center in 1900, the East African Currency Board in 1905, the Postal Union in 1907, the Court of Appeal in 1909, the East African Governors’ Conference in 1926, the East African Tax Board in 1940 and the East African Joint Economic Council in 1940. Cf. http://www.eac.int/ (accessed on April 25, 2011).

Kenya was the main beneficiary of the East African Community because of its higher levels of economic development compared to Tanzania and Uganda.
The total population of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda is 129.6 million people. 246 Most of the people in East Africa are Bantu speaking. In Tanzania the Bantu account for over 95% of the population, in Uganda for more than 70%, and in Kenya for at least 60% of the population. As we will see, there are also Nilotic speaking people in all the three countries, Cushite in Tanzania and Kenya and Khoisat in Tanzania.

### 3.3 Fundamental Aspects of East African Theological Anthropologies

Exploring the fundamental aspects of East African theological anthropologies through the lens of African Religions will be laid on the following foundations which will guide our discussion: First and foremost, we must recognize the integration of culture and religion in the traditional African milieu which means that this study deals with African culture and religion. Our study of the integration of culture and religion and methodology of African Religions will lead us to the understanding of unity within diversity in African Religions. This is necessary because geographical demarcations and demographical composition of East Africa show that there are numerous East African ethnic groups each with its own cultural and religious expressions and heritage which means that our understanding of culture in this sense is rather plural and relative, because as Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer point out, “the world is divided into different cultures, each worthwhile in its way.” 247 Our anthropological outlook emphasizes cultures as wholes, hence the relativity of cultures which means that in order to

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246 According to 2010 UN estimates, Kenya has a population of 40.8 million, Tanzania 45 million and Uganda 33.8 million. Kenya has 224,961 square miles, Tanzania 364,900 square miles and Uganda 93,072 square miles. Kenya has GNI per capita $ 770, Tanzania $ 500 and Uganda $460.

understand the practices of a culture and evaluate them properly, we must relate them to the
cultural context in which they operate and exist.\textsuperscript{248}

Second, relationality is a core value of what it means to be human in East African cultural and
religious context. \textit{Relationality will be examined by exploring the notion of person in
relationship: inter-human and human-divine relationships which are essential in defining East
African human existence. In East African traditional conception, human being is defined
essentially in terms of complex vital relationships linking him or her to God, to his or her
neighbor, and to the universe. The encounter with God and the cosmos which is based on a
relational outlook to reality, allows openness to other religions as opposed to the Christian
tradition that claims to be universal and absolute.}

In the last chapter, we noted Luzbetak’s definition of anthropology as a study of our
humanness and human destiny with a view of arriving at an integrated and holistic concept of
what we understand by being human.\textsuperscript{249} East Africans’ view of integrated and holistic concept of
human being is characterized by relationships: relating with God, the other, and all creation. The
understanding of human being in relationship is also underlined by Shorter’s definition of
anthropology as “\textit{the study of man – not man as an isolated individual, but man in his own
community, man as a product of society.}”\textsuperscript{250} Shorter’s definition is mainly derived from a
pastoral anthropological point of view and from East African experience, stresses the importance
of an individual in community. He adds that though anthropology differs from philosophy and

\textsuperscript{248} Cultural relativism in this sense is to be understood in terms of relation which means that no living culture exists
exclusive of other cultures. Cultures are always interacting.

\textsuperscript{249} Luzbetak, \textit{The Church and Cultures}, 23.

\textsuperscript{250} Aylward Shorter, \textit{African Culture and the Christian Church: An Introduction to Social and Pastoral
Theology, “it can and should provide material for philosophical and theological anthropology.”

The connection between theology and anthropology is very important because theology has a special focus on human destiny. Human destiny for East Africans is not individualistic but rather to be understood in terms of relationships. Salvation, for instance, is not individualistic (“my salvation”) but rather gets its fuller and nuanced meaning when it is seen in the context in a wider context of relationships (“our salvation”).

Furthermore, relationality is characterized by plurality, malleability and dynamism as underlying values of the East African reality. East African religious understanding of person stresses dynamism, promotes integral human development and freedom and dignity of all human beings with an underlying plurality which is the basis of understanding being. Therefore, East African concept of human being in relationship has a great deal to contribute to the theological anthropological discourse on human identity and will undergird our discussion of East African theological anthropologies.

Third, East African religious ontology is anthropocentric in a sense that it is focused on the realization of fullness of human life and human destiny. According to Mbiti, African religious ontology is basically anthropocentric because everything is seen in terms of its relation to human beings. “Africans have their ontology, but it is a religious ontology, and to understand their religion we must penetrate that ontology. …it is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the

\[\text{251} \text{Ibid. 3}\]

\[\text{252} \text{There is a difference between anthropocentric religion and anthropocentricism. Anthropocentricism puts human beings at the center of creation and reduces reality to human beings at the expense of non-human creation. It can lead to the destruction of nature to serve human needs. On the other hand, East African ethic religions are anthropocentric not that they limit God’s encounter with creation to human beings but rather, God’s dialogue with human beings characterizes all spheres of life.}\]
sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man.” Charles Nyamiti points out that the centrality of the human person in African Religions indicates that “religion is chiefly functional, or a means to serve people to acquire earthly goods (life, health, fecundity, wealth, power and the like) and to maintain social cohesion and order.”

The divine–human dialogue imbued in every aspect of creation is purposely for the human flourishing. *East Africans then encounter God relationally as one who understands, listens and answers their needs.* The earth is imbued with spirits and for that reason it is not just a source of food for human beings but is also considered to be sacred and provides sacredness to humans.

Hence, any theological discussion in the East African context should engage anthropology.

Fourth, the study of theology should involve culture. This is not only true for East Africans, but also for any God-talk as Magesa explains:

> The connection between the study of theology and anthropology, as indeed between theology and other social sciences, is critically important. The majority of Christian theologians recognize that human beings cannot describe the reality of the Numinous except by imaginatively using the symbols, images, and signs of their own existence and experience, and stretching them to the limit… Consequently, to understand a people’s God-talk, one has to be familiar with the symbols and the entire system of the language they employ for this purpose; thus the necessity of studying the people and their culture.

Our humanness is by and large determined by our culture but for East Africans, culture is also interwoven with religion so much so that it is practically impossible to speak of one without

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255 Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 55. According to Shorter, the Kimbu (an ethnic group in Southern Tanzania) thought the earth was a female symbol, and it was women who traditionally planted seeds in the earth, made pottery and earthenware and carried on mud plastering when a building was constructed. Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 67.

256 Ibid. 30.
implicating the other. The most important principles of African Religions revolve around the
purpose or goal of human life. That is why it is of paramount importance to study East African
theological anthropologies through the lens of African Religions and cultures.

3.3.1 Integration of Culture and Religion in East African Context

East African religious and cultural heritage integrates culture and religion. Culture is an entire
way of life of members of community or social group manifesting itself in norms, traditions,
customs, language, mentality, symbols, religion and social relationships shared by members of
that social group. Each person is born within a culture and is a product of a certain culture in
which he or she lives or lived. To be human then is to accept one’s ethnic, cultural, and historical
identity as a gift of God and to recognize that “[i]t is within every person, and every society and
culture, that God manifests the divine presence.” East African ethnic groups are communities
made up of members who are called upon to interact in harmony for the sake of the wellbeing of
that community. Members not only live in community but also are in communion with others for
communion is a mark of a reconciled community. Religion is an aspect of culture but the
fundamental difference between the two is that whereas “culture is the domain of human
creativity” religion is fundamentally related to the sphere transcending natural experiences of
human beings. Let us now highlight some fundamental factors why culture and religion are
integrated in the East African context.

257 Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 135.


259 Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Christian Theology and Inculturation* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università
Gregoriana, 1997), 33.
First, for the word “religion”, many East African languages use a foreign word from Arabic, *dini*.\(^{260}\) This does not mean that there was no religion in pre-colonial East African traditional societies, but rather, religion was part and parcel of the culture of the people, it was a way of living in Africa.\(^{261}\) As Shorter points out, “African Traditional Religion has always been, to some extent, a submerged religion, indistinguishable from cultural tradition.”\(^{262}\) It is a religion that is taken for granted within the community, an entirely lived religion, not a doctrinal one. One is born into it.

Second, religion was and is still the determining factor of the philosophy and ethical norms of the people in East Africa. Mbiti says, “Africans are notoriously religious.”\(^{263}\) However, Jesse Mugambi thinks that the word “notorious” is not appropriate in this context and rightly suggests that “Africans are *reputably* religious, because there is nothing notorious about the religiosity to the Africans.”\(^{264}\) Mbiti and Mugambi despite the difference in vocabulary are emphasizing the point that religion permeates all spheres of African way of living for it is integrated in the culture of the peoples and part and parcel of their lived experience.

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\(^{260}\) Originally the word *dini* comes from the Arabic *din* which means “religion”. It passed on to Swahili and then into many East African languages, particularly Bantu languages.

\(^{261}\) Samuel G. Imbo, “Okot p’Bitek Critique of Western Scholarship on African Religion” in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwesi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 365. According to Imbo’s reading of Okot p’Bitek, “the absence of the word ‘religion’ in all African languages means that there is no special compartment that the African calls ‘religious’ that is separate from the day-to-day participation in the life-process. It is from this all-encompassing view of religion in African traditional life that Okot criticizes Western scholarship.”


Hans Kung describes religion as:  

*A believing view of life, approach to life, way of life, and therefore a fundamental pattern* embracing the individual and society, man and the world, through which a person (though only conscious of this) sees and experiences, thinks, feels, acts and suffers, everything. It is a transcendentally grounded and immanently *operative system of coordinates* by which man orients himself intellectually, emotionally, and existentially.

_Religion particularly in the East African context is not simply a belief, or morality, or ritual, or structures but basically a way of life, a day-to-day participation in the life process. Religion is a prayer not a prayer as a formal communication with spiritual beings in worship but the essential disposition of a person of faith.* "Religious experience is both the inner experience of an individual and a mutual affirmation by a community of common insights. It has to do with ordinary life, and it is to a greater or lesser extent determined by the factors of ordinary life, psychological, sociological, economic, and historical."  

"*For Africans, religion is quite literally life and life is religion.*" Life gets fuller and more comprehensive religious meaning when it is open to others, what Shorter refers to as “a transcendent quality of life,” because it involves transcending oneself and listening to others. We are to contend that this element of sharing and welcoming others as expressed in hospitality is indeed a hallmark of East African traditional heritage.

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265 Hans Kung and others, eds. _Christianity and World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism_, P. Heinegg trans. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), xvii. Italics are author’s. Cited by Laurenti Magesa, _African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life_, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 24. Magesa argues that by the fact that African Traditional Religion does not have written scriptures and does not proselytize does not disqualify it from being a Religion. He insists that understanding the meaning of religion is the most important criteria of religion. He concurs with Hans Kung’s description of Religion because it highlights the meaning of Religion as a way of life.

266 Shorter, _African Christian Theology_, 96.

267 Magesa, _African Religion_, 26. Magesa insists that “revelation” or “inspiration” for Africans is not to be found in a book, not even primarily in people’s oral tradition but in their lives.

268 Shorter, _African Christian Theology_, 96. Shorter compares life to an artist or musician who interprets an ordinary human experience and opens his ears to his audience to new qualities which were dormant and undeveloped in the minds of the audience. Quality of life is even more enhanced when the artist also learns from his or her audience.
Third, for East Africans, the concept of life of a human being is holistic which means that a human being is seen as an entity in himself or herself. This concept is quite different from Western mentality which exhibits dualistic tendencies. The inseparability of body and soul, matter and spirit of African existence has been very vital in the integration of culture and religion.

Fourth, as a result of integration between religion and culture, East African ancestral religions have been absorbent and tolerant to new world views and new religious elements including Christianity which has always been threatening the very existence of traditional religious expressions. Tolerance is not only a hallmark of East African traditional experience, but also has contributed a vital role to its survival. East African traditional religious expressions then are more tolerant and open to dialogue than Christianity which as we have noted in the previous chapter claims “absolutism”. The worst desecration of the African Religions in East Africa at the first contact with Christianity was Christianity’s intolerance to African religious expressions. Worst of all, the different Christian denominations were intolerant to each other, for example, Catholics against Protestants. European religious conflicts were imported to East Africa and bred to religious wars that hitherto had never existed in East Africa. In Uganda, for instance, there were religious wars, between Moslems and Christians in 1890, by which the Moslems were defeated, and between Anglicans and Catholics in 1892 which ended in the defeat of Catholics thanks to the presence of Captain Lugard who supported the Anglican party with advanced weaponry. Many lives were lost in these wars.

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269 We have noted the claim by the Catholic Church that outside the Church there is no salvation.

3.3.2 Unity within Diversity of African Religions

One of the challenges of the study of African Religions is that there is a great variety and multiplicity of peoples in Africa lacking a centralized tradition. In East Africa, there are more than 255 ethno-linguistic groups divided into four major language groups: Bantu, Nilotic, Cushite and Khoisan. Tanzania has at least 129 ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{271} Kenya has more than 70 ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{272} Uganda has 65 ethnic groups recognized by the Uganda Constitution.\textsuperscript{273} The unity and diversity of African Religions due to multiplicity of ethnic groups has raised a question whether we should legitimately speak of African Religion as one or as many.

Laurent Magesa discusses the homogeneity and multiplicity of indigenous religious beliefs in Africa and his overall conclusion is that although there are varieties, African Religion is fundamentally the same and “one in its essence.”\textsuperscript{274} He uses the term “African Religion” which is also the title of his book, rather than “African Religions”, to stress the underlying unity at the core of African Religion.

\textsuperscript{271} In Tanzania, there are four different language groups: Bantu (Sukuma, Chagga, Haya, Nyanwaezi, Ha, Hehe, and Swahili being the major ones), Nilotic (Luo and Maasai), Cushite (Iraqw, Mbugu, and Sanye) and a very small population of Khoisan (Sandawe). http://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/tethnic.htm (accessed on May 10, 2012).

\textsuperscript{272} In Kenya, Bantu speakers are divided into three groups: central (Kikuyu, Kamba, Meru, Embu, Mathaka and Mbere), and western (Luhya, Kisii, and Kuria). There are also Nilotics (Luo, Iteso, Maasai, Samuru, Pokot, Kalenjin, Nandi, Njemps, Sabot, Marakwet, Tugen and Terik) and Cushites (Somali and Galla). Cf. http://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/kethnic.htm (accessed on May 10, 2012).

\textsuperscript{273} Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, (Kampala: Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation, 2006), 212f. In Uganda, there are basically two main language groups: Bantu (Baganda, Basoga, Banyankole, Banyoro, Batoro are the main ethnic groups), and Nilotic (Luo, Acholi, Lango, Alur, Teso, and Karimajong are the main ethnic groups).

\textsuperscript{274} Magesa, African Religion, 14ff. He believes that the varieties are more of expression than basic belief. These varieties are comparable to Christianity with many denominations: Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and many others. Magesa says that he has a number of followers including Mbiti who in his earlier writings defended the multiplicity of African Religions but more recently has reversed this position to one.
However, there are also arguments for African Religions. First, modern theological discourse aware of the danger of absolutism has emphasized unity within diversity. There are many different ways in which ethnic groups express their religion and these ways have to be recognized rather than subsumed in one religion.

Second, since in African traditional society religion is integrated with culture and Africans recognize cultural pluralism, this means that there are different religious expressions which are not necessarily a threat to each other.275 Before the advent of Christian missionaries, there was no missionary activity, no proselytizers, no converts, and no need of induction into a religion. People of different cultures were free to worship any God or spirits they liked. Even people who migrated or were taken captive in war, were not required to abandon their spirits and ancestors.276 Among the Baganda divinities, for instance, there are some which are recognized to be of neighboring ethnic groups.277

Third, as we are to observe, some African scholars who have advocated for one African Religion have done so because the argument for diversity had been tarnished by a racial bias of anthropologists who used it to erroneously claim that African ethnic groups are fragmented and different from Europeans. In our discussion, we will therefore use the term “African Religions”, laying emphasis on how different East African ethno-linguistic groups express their religion. At the same time, we will be aware of the fact that the two terms “African Religion” and “African

275 For believers in African Religion, the question of Religion or Religions does not even arise because the different cultural religious expressions were not a threat to each other.

276 Magesa, African Religion, 58.

277 Although Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms were at loggerheads, nevertheless they shared divinities: Ddungu the guardian of hunting and Nabuzaana the guardian of obstetrics venerated in Buganda were from Bunyoro, the latter always had priestesses from Bunyoro. Cf. http://www.buganda.com/eddiini.htm (accessed on July 9, 2011).
Religions” may overlap due to the unity within diversity in the understanding of African Religions.

Before we discuss the importance of the relational approach to the understanding of person for East Africans, it is worthwhile to discuss some pertinent approaches to the study of African Religions and philosophy. These approaches have evolved since the advent of Western colonialism, Islamic, and Christian missionary activity to East Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century.

### 3.3.3 Approaches to the Study of African Religions

The question of methodology is very important if there is to be any genuine dialogue between African Religions and Christianity, between Libermann’s theological anthropology and East African theological anthropologies. The study of African Religions needs its own methodology *sui generis* because earlier studies were done through the lens of anthropology. Anthropologists noted that variety and multiplicity of peoples in Africa and lack of written documents were major obstacles to the search for methodology of African Religions.\(^{278}\) In addition, another challenge of the anthropological method was that the history of anthropology as a discipline shows that it emerged along with the expansion of European colonization of non-Western world. Many early European anthropologists colluded with ethnocentric tenets of Western colonialism and studied African religious traditions from the vantage point of the colonizers but paid little attention to constructing an idea of how Africans looked at themselves. Diane Lewis argues that due to this bias against Africans, the methodology and findings of these anthropologists stressed the gulf between the cultures of the colonialists and the colonized and exploited the difference for the

benefit of the colonialists.\textsuperscript{279} Instead of portraying Africans as they are, emphasis was often put on their uniqueness. Udobator Onunwa points out that the study was influenced by evolutionalism, nationalism, theological and philosophical assumptions and over-generalizations from a particular point of view.\textsuperscript{280} Despite the bias that almost all early anthropological studies exhibit, particularly in their use of condescending and even insulting language, I believe that they offer valuable information which cannot be discarded altogether. In East Africa, these early anthropologists and missionaries composed the first written documents which are valuable historical records offering a starting point for methodology.

In the search for methodology to the study of African Religions, Udobator Onunwa points out that Aylward Shorter offers the most comprehensive survey and criticism of different approaches to the study of African Religions.\textsuperscript{281} Shorter, drawing from mainly East African experience and from his anthropological and theological background formulates, describes and critiques eight approaches which he claims were used by anthropologists at different periods in history to study African Religions and which will offer us a compass to study these religions.\textsuperscript{282} These are: particularistic, enumerative, hypothesis of unity, historical, limited comparative, categorical, thematic and multi-dimensional approaches.\textsuperscript{283} Benjamin Ray identified seven perspectives to the study of African Religions by early anthropologists to which he added his


\textsuperscript{281} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{282} Shorter, \textit{African Christian Theology}, 38 – 58.

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid. These are Shorter’s terminologies. The scholars who used them did not lay out theological principles of each of the methodologies.
own, the poly-methodic approach. Both Shorter and Ray agree on three approaches: comparative study approach, historical perspective approach and multi-dimensional approach or poly-methodic approach which in my view are extremely important in the study of African Religions.

According to Shorter, the classic approach of social anthropologists was the particularistic approach which “insisted on a through-going study in each and every ethnic group, and professing an almost total agnosticism in respect to any similarities or links between them.” It also influenced other approaches. For instance, the enumerative approach enumerates traditions, beliefs and practices of major importance and according to its outstanding exponent, Parrinder, it should be done with a particularistic slant because there is a variety and multiplicity of peoples in sub-Saharan Africa who lack a central tradition. Shorter points out one major drawback of the particularistic approach by arguing that although ethnic groups enjoyed political and economic autonomy, religious beliefs and practice were often widely shared with neighboring groups. Indeed, there is nothing wrong in concentrating on a small area for effective and in-depth research as also African scholars like Idowu Bolaji advocated; the problem is to look at this area


286 Parrinder, Religion in Africa, 17. Parrinder’s assertion that diversity of traditions and beliefs in Africa warrants a particularistic approach coupled with his historical agnosticism meant that he had to abandon his earlier leaning toward the comparative approach to an enumerative approach. In his earlier work, African Traditional Religion, (1954), Parrinder uses such headings as “Nature Gods” and “Ancestors” and admits that there is great comparative homogeneity in African society, whilst in his 1969 work cited above, he uses more general headings such as “Philosophy and Cosmology”, and “Society and Morals.” Diversity of traditions and beliefs exits everywhere in the World, even in Europe, but in Africa this problem was accentuated to show how African peoples were fragmented and thus different from European ethnic groups. For that reason, there was a tendency among early European anthropologists to see African ethnic groups as politically autonomous and culturally and linguistically isolated from each other.

287 Shorter, African Christian Theology, 42.
in isolation from the neighboring ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{288} Dealing with social institutions, comparison is absolutely essential and for that reason an absolutely particularistic stand is untenable.

Shorter and Ray criticize scholars who deny history to African Religions. Parrinder, for instance, maintains that the history of African Religions is unknown because of lack of written documents in pre-colonial days.\textsuperscript{289} He has enormous reservations about oral traditions and oral methods in historical research. Mbiti, an apologetic theologian and under the influence of the same European mentality, is also skeptical of African history insisting that Africans do not have a historical view of the world because their actions, decisions, and mentality are too dominated by myths and uncertainty that it is difficult to draw any history out of them.\textsuperscript{290} Mbiti’s skepticism is very fundamental because he is not only suggesting that we are not able to know African history but also Africa has no history worth recording. Mbiti’s position is rightly criticized by Terrence Ranger and Isaria N. Kimambo who accuse him of propounding an African religious philosophy that is “a-historical and even anti-historical.”\textsuperscript{291} Ranger and Kimambo have cogently shown the possibility of the historical study of African religious systems and the re-integration of religious history into African historiography because religious ideas are interwoven with every

\textsuperscript{288} Idowu Bolaji, \textit{African Traditional Religion: A Definition} (Maryknoll: NY, 1973), 106. Bolaji also insisted that the scholar doing the research should come from the same ethnic group under study. He was reacting against European scholars who studied African traditions but with colonial interests at heart.

\textsuperscript{289} Parrinder, \textit{Religion in Africa}, 9. Parrinder labors to avoid the separate treatment of African Traditional Religions, of Islam, of Christianity but his work is undercut by his attempt to deny a historical approach to African Traditional Religions thereby enforcing the distorting impression of the dynamic historic religions of Islam and Christianty confronting passive African traditional cosmologies.

\textsuperscript{290} Mbiti, \textit{African Religions}, 23. According to Mbiti, African Traditional Religions have no founders, no reformers, no missionaries, and no converts.

\textsuperscript{291} Terrence Ranger and Isaria N. Kimambo, eds. \textit{The Historical Study of African Religion} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 2. This book contains a number of papers delivered at the Dar es Salaam conference on the historical study of African religious systems especially in East and Central Africa. These papers show that religion was at the heart of African holistic existence and for that reason its study offers clarity to African history.
aspect of traditional African existence.\textsuperscript{292} They argue that African Religion cannot be fully understood without the historical dimension and the study of African history is given extra clarity if the religious dimension is included.\textsuperscript{293} As we will see, Mbiti encapsulates Africa’s history in the Swahili word \textit{zamani} which means “in the past” and which for him “is a graveyard of time.”\textsuperscript{294} Mbiti concludes: “With our incomplete knowledge of African religions, it is impossible to describe their history.”\textsuperscript{295} When Mbiti questions the basis of the historical study of African Religion, he is questioning the basis for the study of pre-colonial Africa as a whole. We will dwell on the question of African religious history when we deal with the concept of time in the East African context, and with the history of Buganda and Bunyoro, but what has to be noted here is that it is no longer plausible and tenable to maintain that African Religions have no history.

Shorter proposes multi-dimensional approach as a viable methodology to study holistic African Religions and cultures. The underlying strength of Shorter’s multi-dimensional approach or Ray’s poly-methodic approach is that it presupposes that no single approach is exhaustive and recognizes the need to combine all the approaches. However, Shorter’s multi-dimensional approach has been vehemently criticized by Harold W. Turner who insists that religion is interwoven with all aspects of human life which then suggests that its study should involve all human sciences.\textsuperscript{296} Turner then proposes that the study of religion should be poly-methodological implying that such a study should be integrated with other dimensions of human

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[292] Ibid.
\item[293] Ibid. 3.
\item[294] Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy}, 20.
\item[295] Ibid. 5.
\end{itemize}
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life namely, historical, anthropological, ecological, and political. Turner’s views are also shared by Ray. What Turner is trying to highlight here is that the study of African Religions must not only dwell on religion in its total milieu but what is interwoven with all other dimensions of human life should be analyzed and studied critically. What is interwoven brings in the idea of relatedness and dialogue which are essential for this study.

In our study, basing on Shorter’s approaches, we will use the multi-dimensional approach basically because it pools together the strengths of all the other approaches. This approach will definitely take into consideration Turner’s view that African Religions are diffused and interwoven in all aspects of African human life and existence, as we have already noted. Indeed, the interwoven elements will definitely provide us with major themes of discussion for dialogue between Libermann’s theological anthropologies and the East African theological anthropologies.

Of particular importance to our study too, is the limited comparative approach because this study is basically a comparative study, a dialogue between Libermann’s theological anthropological understanding of l’œuvre des noirs and East African theological anthropologies. Both Shorter and Ray emphasize the importance of limited comparative approach because comparison is one of the elementary processes of human thought.297 In using the comparative method, scholars have recognized unity within diversity. Some have emphasized the differences between African ethnic groups. Edward Evans-Pritchard298 for example, said that emphasis should be placed on the differences rather than on the similarities. At the same time, he also

297 Shorter, African Christian Theology, 51.

298 Edward Evans-Pritchard, Essays in Social Anthropology (London: Free Press, 1963), 55. He studied the Nuer and Dinka in southern Sudan. He proposed a limited comparison between these two ethnic groups because they have strong structural and cultural similarities and they are geographically contiguous.
admits that institutions must be similar in some respects before they can be different in others. Others, however, have put the emphasis on similarities. The hypothesis of unity approach works under the assumption that there is a basic cultural unity that cuts across Africa, for example, relationality which is a common characteristic in African cultural traditions. Wille Abraham uses the paradigm of “family resemblance” to show that “resemblances between cultures of the same type are rather to be thought of in terms of family.”

Consequently, the greatest strength of the comparative approach is that basically it deals with unity within diversity of African Religions and at the same time, it is in conformity with dialogue which is the main purpose of this study. The goal of comparison is dialogue and dialogue in turn would lead to religious and cultural tolerance and co-existence which is discernible in African Religions. Furthermore, the comparative approach is therefore a suitable method for the study of African Religions because it does not only examine the relationship between anthropology and other disciplines like history, but also looks at the interaction, similarities and differences between different ethnic cultural and religious expressions. In Africa, there has been a great deal of interaction between ethnic groups; that is the reason why many aspects of culture and religion are widely shared by neighboring groups.

The limited comparative approach can easily be integrated with Shorter’s other approaches; i.e. categorical, thematic and hypothesis of unity. For instance, we will use categories putting an emphasis on their comparative value and relative importance because first, East African existence is relational and second, religion basically deals with relationships. The basic

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300 Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 50. According to Shorter, the integration was seldom a result of great conquests but rather a filtering movement of small groups of people from every possible direction.
relationship is our relationship with God and with the other. However, there is always a need to
go beyond categories and beyond describing external cults and rituals because long after the
visible aspects of African Religions cease to be performed, values and themes survive in the
minds and hearts of Africans. Many scholars of African Religions have tried to construct themes
and categories which they claim to be fundamental to the study of these religions. Indeed,
dialogue between religious traditions is a meeting of meanings, themes and values.

The comparative approach is also consistent with the notion of person for East Africans. As
we have noted and are going to explore, relationality is an important and common characteristic
of the way human beings live in East Africa. A person is linked with God, the spirits, and all
creation including ancestors who have passed on. Comparison is based on relationships and there
is no comparison that can be done without establishing some kind of relationship between the
parties in question.

African response to Western Scholarship features in Ray’s approaches to the study of African
Religions but does not feature in Shorter’s approaches perhaps due to the fact that Shorter was
dealing with earlier anthropologists’ approaches to the study of African Religions and for that
reason, did not see any reason why respondents’ views to these anthropologists should deserve
an approach. In any case, Shorter criticizes those who subscribe to African Response to Western
Scholarship. One of the notable reactions to European bias by earlier anthropologists against

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301 Frédéric-Marie Bergounioux, and Joseph Goetz, *Primitive and Prehistoric Religions* (London: Hawthorn Books, 1966). Joseph Goetz from a social structural point of view formulated categories based on theism and deism in the light of which other categories can be studied - spirits, myths and symbols, rites and cults. He claimed that these categories are based on religious beliefs and practices of some African societies. He added that theism is the experience of the Supreme Being as both one and many, as overwhelming, having a direct and effective influence on human beings in their daily life. At the other end of the spectrum lies deism, a concept of God without any religious reality – a Supreme Being acknowledged but not seen to play an explicit role in the life of human beings. These are Goetz’s categories and they fail to encapsulate the mind of Africans. It is highly improbable whether Africans ever raised the question of deism or theism. See also Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 2003).
African Religions has been in a form of apologetics that defends African Religions but using Christian and scholastic modes. Its aim, the protagonists say, is to build a rational, conceptual system out of African traditional thought comparable to Western scholastic philosophy. The founding father of this apologetic stance is Placide Tempels, a Belgian priest who did extensive research among the Baluba in Democratic Republic of Congo. He coined the term vital force which he said was the foundation of Bantu philosophy. Alex Kagame, for instance, admitted that without European philosophy, the question of an African philosophy would never arise. Kagame accepted Aristotle as his guide. Others who have followed this approach include Nyamiti and Mbiti. One major weakness of this approach is that it demeans African Religions as faiths without viable expressions of their own traditions unless they are explained using Christian or scholastic categories.

Okot p’Bitek is very critical of Western scholarship on African Religions. He criticizes Tempels’ Bantu philosophy and all who subscribe to it seeking to correct the past mistakes which deny abstract thought to Africans but ends up dressing African Gods in European robes. First, p’Bitek accuses Tempels of generalization because he derives his experience from one ethnic group, Baluba, from which he claims to construct Bantu ontology. Second, p’Bitek

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304 Okot p’Bitek was born on June 9, 1931 in Gulu, Uganda. He was educated at Oxford University where he studied social anthropology. His songs; Song of Lawino (1966) and Song of Ocol (1970) are both poetic satires of the negative influence of Western culture on African culture. This theme was taken up again in prose in his Africa’s Cultural Revolution (1973). His other works carry the same theme of ongoing tensions between tradition and modernity and point to the difficulties inherent in translations between European and African languages. p’Bitek addresses Western scholarship of African Religions in African Religions in Western Scholarship (1971), Religion of the Central Luo (1971) and in a number of essays finished before he died in 1982, in Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture, and Values (1986). p’Bitek criticizes those who subscribe to Western scholarship. These include social anthropologists, missionaries, historians, ethnographers, philosophers, and African apologists.

believes that Tempels is not presenting African view but his own view. He thinks that Tempels was looking for local confirmation of his cherished preoccupations, forgetting that “Bantu ontology” and “vital force” were merely tools constructed by him and not really what the people believe.  

Third, for p’Bitek, the concept of Bantu philosophy is a “blind alley” because it was “erected through intuition and not by methods of direct observation and comparative data.” Although p’Bitek poses valid criticisms, it should also be remembered that Tempels’ book is meant for colonialists and missionaries. Tempels says: “It therefore concerns all colonials, especially those whose duty is to hold administrative and juridical office among African people…it concerns those who wish to civilize, educate and raise the Bantu…it concerns most particularly the missionaries.” With that audience in mind, Tempels uses a language familiar to them and to prove to them that Bantu ontology is similar to Western ontology. However, what Tempels fails to understand is that Bantu philosophy does not need a Western garment to claim to be authentic philosophy. Whereas Tempels can be exonerated for using a scholastic garment to package Bantu philosophy due to the nature and mentality of his audience, African scholars addressing Africans should use an African robe to explore Bantu philosophy. Nevertheless, I still believe that there are some useful categories used by apologetic theologians that can be of help in our study, one of these is vital force which I believe can offer useful analysis of East African relational understanding of reality.

In concluding this section, it is important to note that first and foremost, any approach to the understanding of East African traditional religious expressions should start at the vantage point

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307 p’Bitek, Africa’s Cultural Revolution, 63.

308 Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, 17.
of East Africans, at the way they describe their reality and understand their religion. Evidently there have been efforts to obliterate symbols of East African Religions, but the underlying philosophy still exists. Thus an East African may do away with visible symbols but his or her mindset is still embedded in traditional symbols.309

Second, we have noted in the last two chapters the importance of the phenomenological method by which that which shows itself is let to be seen from itself just as it shows itself without any pre-conceived ideas and prejudices. We also noted that Libermann needed an African epoché so that he could understand Africans on their own terms free of nineteenth century racial preconceptions and interferences. Anthropologists and theologians too studying African Religions need an African epoché to understand Africans as they are. An interpretational scheme is needed that would render traditional religious faith of the people meaningful and in a way that most approximates the indigenous understanding. Wilfred Cantwell Smith insists that the study of religions involves a personal relationship.310 It is no longer enough to talk about people of other religions, or to them; now we must talk with them.311 We are moving from referring to other religions in terms of “it” or “they” or “you” to “we”.312 In a similar vein, Newell Booth says:313

309 Okot p’Bitek, Artist, The Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986) 66f. He says: “The African of tradition who went to church did not reject his culture…He saw the church as a necessary ladder to power and material gain.”


311 Ibid.

312 Ibid. 46, footnote 31.

Anyone who tries to study African religion from an assured position of superior revelation or superior rationality will only produce distortions. Of course, one does not have to accept the truth of the religion in order to study it, but one must respect it as a system of belief and practice which makes sense to people who are as intelligent and honest as oneself.

There is a growing consensus and general awareness among anthropologists that earlier derogatory terms used to refer to African Religions as “superstitious”, “pagan”, “primitive”, “animistic” and “fetish” are no longer used in that context.\(^{314}\)

Third, Charles Curran discussing Catholic theological methodology says that it tends to be inclusive rather than exclusive. “Thus, Catholic theology has insisted on ‘both-and’ rather than ‘either-or’ approaches. The most distinctive aspect of Catholic theology is the Catholic ‘and’. Catholicism has insisted on the Scripture and tradition not the Scripture alone, grace and works, not grace alone…”\(^{315}\) However, Curran points out one problem in the Catholic tradition that sometimes the tendency has been to put more emphasis on what comes after “and”. Thus, Jesus and Mary but emphasis is put on Mary. African traditional religious thinking has also insisted on “both-and” approach not only in its understanding of religious concepts but also in accommodating all people of various religious backgrounds. For example, in African Religions God and other divine beings are complimentary rather than mutually exclusive. Dickson points out that Western categories of polytheism and monotheism which are often applied to the

\(^{314}\) Georg Wilhelm F. Hegel (1770-1831) was of the view that Africans were in a primitive state, have no code of conduct, no God, no morals, their society characterized by tyranny and cannibalism. He says: “The Negro …exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state and we must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality …there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.” Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 93. For Lucien Levy Bruhl, Africans cannot form concepts because abstract reasoning is very tiresome to them and harassing. Cf. Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks of Primitive Mentality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 126. His ideas are also shared by Diedrich Westermann who said that Africans have a different mental activity distinct from European mentality. He believed that for Africans, emotional thinking outweighs logical thinking. Cf. Diedrich Westermann, *The African Today* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 39ff.

understanding of God or gods in traditional African societies may not do full justice to the concept of God in those societies because these categories are basically exclusive.\textsuperscript{316} “One element which is missing in the discussion hitherto of the relation between God and the lesser divinities is \textit{a consideration of how the relation is conceived and described in African religion itself.}”\textsuperscript{317}

Part of the problem of Catholicism, despite its “both-and” approach, has been its claim to a universal validity which weakens its argument for inclusiveness. East African ethnic religions, on the other hand, derive their strength not from claiming to possess absolute and universal truth but rather from being flexible and accommodative to other cultures and religious expressions. The “all embracing” approach of East African ethnic religions underscores the attitude of religious pluralism in all aspects of life and strengthens the argument for dialogue.

Fourth, Dickson points out that African approach to the universe which he terms “undifferentiated and unspecialized” poses a challenge to Western mentality.\textsuperscript{318} It is customary in the West “to systematize and label, distinguish the animate from the inanimate, the physical from the metaphysical … To the African such distinctions are not as meaningful as one might expect, for the unseen powers are held to be active also in the natural order.”\textsuperscript{319} For example, disease may be caused by bacteria as the Western doctor may diagnose and explain it; for Africans disease and death are caused ultimately by the spirit powers. The universe is full of spirits which may act for or against human beings. “\textit{The African predominantly interprets his}

\textsuperscript{316} Kwesi A. Dickson, \textit{Theology in Africa} (Maryknoll: NY, Orbis Books, 1984), 54.

\textsuperscript{317} Ibid. 55. Italics are author’s.

\textsuperscript{318} Ibid. 49.

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid.
world theologically, rather than in scientific terms, in terms of final rather than material causes."³²⁰

3.4 Relationality and Human Wholeness in East African Societies

Relationality deals with relationships and is a major and important leitmotif of our analysis of East African theological anthropologies because first and foremost, human person is conceived in terms of multifaceted relationships. Second, human wholeness is achieved through relationship with God, with people and with the cosmos, for to live means to relate with this tripartite relationship. Consequently, there is always a strong connection between relationality and human wholeness in East African mentality. Relationality, as we pointed out in the last chapter, is increasingly becoming important in Western thought too. It is strongly biblical and theologically connected to the doctrine of the Trinity whose true identity is a communion of relationships. However, in dealing with fundamental aspects of the tripartite relationship, I have decided to dwell on interpersonal and divine-human relationships. The human-cosmic relationship which is also very important and crucial for East African existence and understanding of human person will be dealt with under those two vital relationships and particularly under the divine-human relationship basically because of the inherent understanding among East Africans that non-human creation is a manifestation of the divine. The cosmos is imbued with divine spirit.

Jean-Godefroy Bidima describes relationship as a movement from the self to the other and the other here can mean human being, God or the cosmos. He says:³²¹

³²⁰ Ibid. 50.

Relationships are the making of connections. They are the frame by which the determination of the self breaks away from solitude and integrates itself into the game of losing one’s self-sufficiency and gaining a supplementary determination. The relationship is the game that mediates the known and the unknown, the same and the other … The relationship shows that the subject is nothing without dialogue and without the intersubjectivity, which is itself the condition of language.

“Losing one’s self-sufficiency and gaining supplementary determination” has different emphases between African concept of personhood which views persons as fundamentally shaped by being in relationship and not just having relationship, and Western concept of personhood which stresses individuation. First, whereas Western concept of being stresses essence and substance, African concept of being is interpreted in terms of holistic communal relations.\(^{322}\) Second, Bénézet Bujo points out that unlike Western rationality where discursive reason is central, African mode of thought sees relatedness as the decisive issue for what it is to be human.\(^{323}\) For Africans then, interconnectedness provides an essential component for the social definition of person and human wholeness.

### 3.4.1 Interpersonal Relationships

In this sub-section, we are to identify fundamental aspects of East African human existence by drawing instances from East African ethnic groups. Our main purpose is to show how the theme of relationality is important in understanding the East African notion of human being and human wholeness. We have noted in the previous chapter that Aristotle made a hard distinction between substance and accidents. Relation for Aristotle was relegated to accidents which meant that it was not important in understanding the essence of a subsistent being. This perspective also led to emphasis on individuation which is of paramount importance in Western thought. We also

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noted that nineteenth century Christian anthropology influenced by Boethius’ ontological definition of person (Latin *persona*) as *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (individual substance of rational nature) accentuated the principle of individuation and self-sufficiency of understanding of person in Western thought. This concept of person is quite different from Black African personality which sees relatedness, dynamism and coherent pluralism as essential and constitutive characteristics of being person.\(^{324}\) Human being only discovers full personality and human wholeness in a group of relationships because in relationship is “both an end and an entity.”\(^{325}\) Relatedness promotes tolerance and integral human flourishing. A much quoted South African proverb: *Motho ke motho ka batho ka bang*, which means “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am,” epitomizes essential personhood for Africans.\(^{326}\) This proverb affirms the understanding that identity arises out of inter-subjective interactions between persons. It articulates the conviction that each one becomes a human being only in fellowship with others. In addition, as Uzukwu points out this proverb indicates “[t]he tension toward (motion) is a constitutive dimension in the emergence of the human being”, \(^{327}\) whereas the Greek classical notion exemplified in Aristotle’s analytical categories which we alluded to in the last chapter emphasizes *stasis* and considers motion accidental.

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\(^{326}\) Mbìti, *African Religions*, 106. Another version of the same proverb says: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means “a person is a person through other persons.” By this proverb, Mbìti speaks of the traditional African view of the human being. It means: “Whatever happens to an individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual.” It resonates with the holistic understanding of the human being. It is also a critique of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, “I think therefore I am.” Descartes puts the emphasis on “I” whereas the proverb’s emphasis is on “We”. Also cf. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 37. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. 1st Edition. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31-2, 45, 54.

We noted in the last chapter as well that the turn to relationality is becoming increasingly important in Western thought. We also noted that there has been a shift from a turn to subjectivity to a turn to the other, thanks to the phenomenologists. However, as Dion A. Foster points out, “an appeal to the self (personal subjective experience), or appeal to the other (a momentary objective encounter) will never reveal true identity,” but rather “what is required is the ongoing continuum of inter-subjective relationship in community.”328 This is indeed where African understanding of person has made a great contribution to the rest of the world.

According to Jean-Godefroy Bidima “Western philosophy has placed too much value on the ‘I-Thou’ relation at the expense of the dialogical community where intersubjectivity is the foundation. The ‘we’ … has a logical and ontological priority over the ‘I’ of ‘I-Thou’”329 “We” has connections to relation. It resonates with East African concept of person. The other is not just an individual but truly a person in community because a person is nurtured in community which includes the living and the dead.330 It is very common among the Baganda in Uganda, for instance, for one to introduce herself as so and so, daughter of, granddaughter of, great granddaughter of… up to the fifth generation to highlight the fact that we are not only related to the living but also to those who have passed on.


330 John Ssebunya was born at Kabonge about 15 miles from Kampala, the capital of Uganda. He ran away from his home when he was a young boy of 4 or 5 years of age after his father had killed his mother, and decided to live in the nearby forest inhabited by monkeys. He was discovered in 1989 after living with the monkeys for probably almost one year. He could not speak but had acquired the mannerisms of monkeys, grunting and squealing. Ssebunya socialized with the monkeys and was accepted as a peripheral member of the group. He raided fields and stole food with the monkeys. The life story of Ssebunya shows how socialization with people is important. He had lost speech because he was cut off from human beings and had acquired the mannerisms of monkeys because he shared company with them. Ssebunya’s story was made into a documentary by the BBC entitled Living Proof screened on October 13, 1999. Cf. http://www.angelfire.com/oz/uv/fcsseb (accessed on May 9, 2011).
3.4.1.1 East African Concept of Human Being

The Bantu of East Africa use the word mtu which means human being, a plurality of relations.\footnote{The word mtu is a Swahili word which means “person”. There are variations in pronunciation and spelling of this word among the Bantu. The Bantu of Uganda and western Kenya use the word muntu. Bantu is the plural of muntu. By adding the prefix “ba” (plural) we get bantu which means “human beings”. Muntu means a being in relationship hence human being is a living being, possessing a life relationship. The root utu (Swahili) or obuntu (in many East African Bantu languages) or ubuntu (South African Bantu languages) means “humanity”, “humaneness” or “kindheartedness.” It also means that which gives life meaning. For that reason a person who is aggressive and unkind to others is often referred to as a person without ubuntu. Bantu also refers to African ethnic groups with linguistic bonds. These ethnic groups are found in Sub – Sahara Africa from Cameroon east across central and eastern Africa to southern Africa.} One of the essential relations of mtu is mwili (body) and the other is moyo (spirit or soul or self or breath of life or heart in Swahili).\footnote{The Baganda also use another word meeme, which can be translated as “seat of feelings and emotions”. It can also mean human spirit as distinct from mwoyo (Swahili moyo) which is more generic referring even to God. It should also be mentioned that these are loose translations which have a strong Christian influence.} Mwili refers to bodily characteristics and potentialities of a human person drawn from parents. Harvey J. Sindima drawing from Malawian (Chichewa) background which is also true for the East African Bantu ethnic groups says that moyo\footnote{Harvey J. Sindima, “Moyo: Fullness of Life, A Hermeneutic of the Logos in John’s Prologue”, African Christian Studies (Vol. 6, No. 4, December 1990), 50-62. For the Bantu of Southern Tanzania down south to South Africa, the concept that moyo means life is even more pronounced in these ethnic groups than the rest of the Bantu societies in East Africa. In Chichewa, blood symbolizing moyo is itself called moyo. Breath, being a vital sign of biological existence is also called moyo. Moyo means physical well-being or health. Moyo also refers to cosmological order since it inhibits life. Moyo symbolizes both physical and spiritual realities.} means human life (material, mystery or spiritual) that has capacity for self-transcendence and the ability to seek and respond to spiritual things. Moyo connects us with God, the ancestors and all creation. The idea underlying the concept of bondedness or relatedness is rooted in moyo. Moyo is the foundation of all creation and has no end because it transcends life.

Because to be a person is to be related, pairing has a special significance in some East African societies. That is why twin births among the Baganda, Banyoro, Basoga, and Bahaya symbolize a special identity and a privileged status in society, a realization of personhood. Among the Baganda, for instance, a father of twins automatically gets a special name, Ssalongo and a
mother, Nnalongo. Twin boys are either Wasswa (first to be born) or Kato (second to be born) and similarly, twin girls are either Babirye or Nnakato. Founders of Buganda kingdom, Kintu and Kimera are also called Kato to highlight their special identity, status, and relationship with the rest of the Baganda. A twin like a king does not die but “flies away” and a king “disappears”. In some East African societies, e.g. Bagisu, Nyakyusa, and Chagga, however, twins are either killed or controlled by special sacrifices because these societies believe that relating is an essential element of personhood and for that reason, preassembled pairing is a disruption of normal order which is to have one child at a time. Despite the contrasting attitudes to twins in East African societies, one notes the importance of relatedness in the perception of personhood; whilst for some societies twins are different and therefore cannot fit in the social network of society, for others, twins are a perfection of personhood and therefore have a privileged position and status in society.

### 3.4.1.2 East African Rites of Passage

For a person to be fully socialized in East Africa, it is necessary that one performs or undergoes the rites of passage. These include naming, initiation, marriage, funeral and last funeral rites. Again the underlying idea here is relatedness and human wholeness.

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334 In Luganda, twins are called balongo. A brother or sister to a twin born before or after them has a special name (Kigongo for the elder and Kizza and Kyaluzi respectively for those who are born after the twins). For Baganda, Basoga, Banyoro, and Bahaya, twins are considered to be brothers and sisters, therefore marriage between any twins (regardless of clan affiliation) is strictly forbidden. Similarly, marriage between a parent of twins (Ssalongo or Nnalongo) and any twin is also forbidden. There are special initiation rituals of twins (okwalula abalongo) that have to be performed immediately after the birth of twins. It is believed that failure to perform them may cause sickness or even death of the parents. Early Christian missionaries prohibited Christians from performing this ritual. This prohibition is also reflected in the local baptism rite which has this addition: “Do you renounce all practices that are against the faith of the Catholic Church in which you were baptized, particularly rituals of twins, rituals of elders, rituals of traditional shrines …?” The parents and godparents are required to answer: “We do renounce them completely”. Cf. William Mpuuga, *Ekitabo Ky’Omukristu*, (Kisubi: Marianum Press, 1975), 702. However, many parents of twins are afraid of the grave consequences of not performing the traditional rite altogether. Some Christian parents consider Christian baptism to be a substitute to the traditional ritual of twins and as a result make sure that their twins are baptized as soon as they are born and by so doing they feel that they have fulfilled the obligation of the traditional ritual. Others perform a simple initiation ritual with Christian prayers which is accepted by the Catholic Church.


3.4.1.2.1 Naming

Naming for any society is an important event because it is an essential characteristic of the identity of a person and it has a social character. Sociologically, we can note a difference between naming in the West and in East African societies. Whereas in Western societies naming is restricted to the nuclear family, thus a child gets the name of his or her father which gives rise to a family name and a family line for a child must propagate the name of his or her father, in East African societies a name of a person is not restricted to the nuclear family because a child belongs to an extended family or to a clan and to ancestors. Instead of a family name, for East Africans, it is a clan name. Among the Baganda, Banyoro, and Basoga for instance, a child belongs to a clan and the responsibility of naming falls on the paternal grandfather who selects a clan name.\(^3\)\(^3\)

Therefore, a child propagates a clan, not just a nuclear family, and a name symbolizes not just a nuclear family but the whole clan.

Naming has a special significance among the Kikuyu of Kenya because names of all the members of their society are predetermined according to a comprehensive scheme designed to help people establish a powerful and pervasive relationship and sense of belonging to one another in the unity of family, clan, ethnicity and culture. The names also bespeak of the mutual responsibilities. The first born is given the name of his paternal grandfather whose memory is thus perpetuated generation after generation. The second son has the name of his maternal grandfather, while the third boy perpetuates the name of his father’s eldest brother. The fourth male child is named after the mother’s first brother. The fifth son gets the name of his father’s

\(^3\) Members of a clan claim to have a common ancestor and for that reason they consider to be brothers and sisters. Marriage within the same clan is strictly forbidden. They also have a totem which can be an animal, bird, fish, or natural object. As we shall see later, before the arrival of Kabaka (King) Kintu in Buganda, the Baganda were ruled by clan leaders.
second brother, and the sixth boy continues the name of his mother’s second brother. The same parallel scheme is used in relating each daughter to a paternal or maternal relative whose memory is to be perpetuated. Thus the name of the first daughter is that of her father’s mother. The second daughter is named after her mother’s mother and so on. According to Eugene Hillman, this naming system is meant to bind together people of different generations and create duties that are lifelong and supportive. He says:\footnote{Hillman, \textit{Toward an African Christianity}, 14.}

\begin{quote}
Beyond the relationships of the nuclear family, each child has also a unique connection with another person in the extended family. The one whose name is perpetuated in the child is expected to be for that child a model human being, a caring friend and educator. In due course, the child is expected to reciprocate, as persons are supposed to do in such relationships, in accord with their cultural self-understanding and in response to the exigencies of the human condition.
\end{quote}

What can be observed here is that whereas for the Kikuyu naming is both patrilineal and matrilineal for many East African Bantu ethnic groups (i.e. Baganda, Banyoro, and Basoga), naming is patrilineal with a strong emphasis on the clan. Due to Western influence, in many societies in East Africa, many children are acquiring the name of their father.

3.4.1.2.2 \textit{Initiation}

Naming is followed by initiation. In some East African cultures, e.g. Maasai, Kikuyu, Chagga, Gisu, and Sabiny, it involves circumcision. Others, e.g. Luo, Baganda, Banyoro, Basonga Banyankole, and Bahaya, however, do not have circumcision. Circumcision involves pain and shedding of blood whose aim is the celebration of both physical and moral courage.\footnote{Magesa, \textit{African Religion}, 100.} Mbiti describing the rites of initiation among the Akamba, Nandi and Masaai says that these rites

\footnote{Magesa, \textit{African Religion}, 100.}
are essential for one to get married.\textsuperscript{338} The shedding of blood which is poured into the ground as a kind of libation symbolically means that the dead ancestors are reached since they are thought to be living in the ground. Endurance of physical pain is a great virtue because it teaches the individual to be prepared to face difficulties in life. The initiates are supposed to do many physical exercises, eat unsavory food and are often beaten but are to be stoic and are not to show any signs of flinching.\textsuperscript{339} Employing Shorter’s expression “sublimation of pain”,\textsuperscript{340} Magesa says it is intended to teach a lesson in self-giving. Magesa continues:\textsuperscript{341}

\begin{quote}
It is to impress upon the initiate, the one intense, unforgettable moment, the reality of life and its requirement for living. An initiation operation gives a clear message that to be self-giving and to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the community is an essential aspect of life, even if it means pain or may demand extensive suffering. Furthermore, the operation is intended to tell the initiate that to know oneself and to appreciate the worth of others demands self-denial and a certain amount of suffering. Even to enjoy pleasure … some suffering is inevitable. This is why then, that in many cases the surgery is performed on sexual organs or parts of the body that are generally very sensitive, on the one hand and, on the other, are associated in one way or other with fertility.

Similar to army recruits, initiates are prepared to protect and defend the ethnic group from foreign aggression. They are the guardians of an ethnic group and this role unites them with ancestors. Initiation rites are done in a group to reinforce the communitarian aspect of initiation and also to foster unity and solidarity within the group.

That being said, it is not the purpose of this study to romanticize all that was done by East African cultural traditions. Initiation rites and rituals were supposed to enhance full humanity and foster social relationships but female circumcision or clitoridectomy or what the critics prefer to call female genital mutilation (FGM) which is still practiced widely in East Africa has
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\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{338} Mbiti, \textit{African Religions}, 158-173.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid. 160.
\textsuperscript{340} Shorter, \textit{African Culture and the Christian Church}, 190.
\textsuperscript{341} Magesa, \textit{African Religion}, 101.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
attracted considerable criticisms from many sectors of society. East African theologians including Mbiti and Magesa claim that female clitoridectomy is an African traditional value but fail to point out that it is also a danger to women’s lives and a violation of their rights. Some girls have lost their life due to breeding caused by female clitoridectomy wounds. Mary Nyangweso Wangila describes a range of practices involved in female circumcision commonly done on girls between the ages of four and sixteen. These practices, according to Wangila, are common in East Africa particularly in Kenya where at least half of the women are exposed to female circumcision. Wangila has strongly attacked the rite of female circumcision which she says is a disease that needs a cure because it is a grave health hazard which has caused death, a violation of the human rights of women and children, a violation of freedom of choice, a violation of sexual fulfillment and a violation of bodily integrity and self-determination. It is against article 5 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

These traditional practices, according to Wangila, meant for full human wholeness are also aimed at controlling sexual desires of women and discouraging infidelity in marriage. Feminists

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343 Mary Nyangweso Wangila, *Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture, and Gender in Kenya* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 2007), 8. Some of the FGM practices bear Arabic names. Wangila, mentions *sunna* (means tradition in Arabic), which is the pricking, slitting, or removal of the prepuce of the clitoris and *adla* (means tightening in Arabic) which is basically recircumcision or refibilation; this is mainly done on women who have given birth, widowed or divorced to emulate a virginal vagina. The Arabic names point to the fact that female circumcision is rooted in Arabic traditions and later found its way into some East African cultures.

344 Ibid. 5-6. A 1992 Maendeleo Ya Wanawake survey in four regions of Kenya found that 50% of Kenyan women were circumcised (7,050,000). In Tanzania, the prevalence is 10%, while in Uganda it is 10%. Clitoridectomy is the most common form of female circumcision in all the three countries. Infibulation is done in Kenya and Tanzania particularly in Muslim communities.

345 Ibid. 59.
say that female circumcision is rooted in patriarchy which defines and confines the role of women to marriage and motherhood.

Wangila outlines and discusses strategies which have been used to curb female circumcision but critiques most of them for not involving the circumcising communities and neglecting education as the most important tool in curbing this practice.\textsuperscript{346} Wangila suggests that the most effective strategy to deal with the problem of female circumcision is conscientization through proper education. She says:\textsuperscript{347}

Conscientization through education is a strategy of educating and sensitizing circumcising communities about the possible consequences of female circumcision. Because it addresses issues of cultural dynamism and the need to abandon outdated values and practices, this strategy seems to be the most effective in changing attitudes towards the practice and eventually leading to its abandonment. It has been shown that individuals who are aware of the consequences associated with female circumcision or are more educated are less likely to have their daughters circumcised.

Education is a good strategy but care should be taken that proper education is taught. Some forms of education may be detrimental to the circumcising communities. The kind of education that is needed is one that sensitzes and empowers the circumcising communities to be aware that female circumcision is against human dignity, a violation of free choice and a health hazard.

\textsuperscript{346} Ibid. 70-76. Wangila discusses a variety of strategies but finds most of them unacceptable: First, strategies that ignore the social context in which female circumcision is practiced and what the eradication of the practice would mean to the individuals in those communities cannot yield a favorable outcome. Second, strategies that criminalize the practice and propagate imperialistic assumptions and at the same time negating the identity of female circumcising communities and overlooking the efforts to end the practice are doomed to fail. Third, some strategies have been critiqued for their coercive nature, an approach that is unworkable with culturally rooted practices. Fourth, circumcision through words encourages observance of rituals associated with female circumcision without physical circumcision. Wangila says that this practice does not promote the ideals of social justice that are essentially in question. Fifth, clinicalization of female circumcision involves a harmless form of surgery and accommodates the cultural needs of the circumcising community. Wangila critiques it for dwelling on the health risks and ignoring a wide range of values including women’s rights. Moreover, such surgery would not be readily available in rural communities.

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid. 74.
However, education does not take away the government’s responsibility to enact and enforce laws that criminalize female circumcision. Besides female circumcision, there are many other African traditional practices in East Africa that are often criticized for debasing women which include among others, polygamy, widow inheritance, prohibition of women to inherit land, and prohibition of women to eat certain foods like chicken and eggs.

3.4.1.2.3 Marriage and Kinship

The entire process of initiation is directed toward marriage and procreation. *Marriage is so important that for Magesa, it defines what a person is*. He says: “Whatever else a person has or is, without marriage and children, one is nothing. Indeed such a person is seen as damned, a lost soul. Without marriage and children, a person is most likely already ‘rotten’ in religious terms, that is, completely dead.”\(^{348}\) Jacquet Maquet too notes in Africa marriage was a necessity: “To be an adult is above all to be married, to be a father. If bachelors exist in African societies, their situation is not a normal, expected social role.”\(^{349}\) For Mbiti marriage “is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born.”\(^{350}\) Marriage does not only involve interpersonal relations but also inter-community relations. Marriage unites families, clans, communities and cements alliances. Magesa correctly says that marriage is not merely a contract but a step-by-step progressive development undertaken by the community with many rituals that begin with courtship, “bride price”, marriage ceremony, until


the union is sealed at the birth of a child.\textsuperscript{351} He adds: “But what truly completes the humanization of a person in this world is the mystical union with the ancestors, which is achieved only through the generation of children.”\textsuperscript{352}

Marriage in East African traditions is the foundation of kingship because what establishes clan relationships is consanguinity which is considered to be the most important relationship in the social structure. “Consanguineal relationships…are not possible without affinal relationships, that is, relationships affected through marriage … Marriage always establishes very strong bonds between the individuals belonging to different families and clans, particularly when children are born.”\textsuperscript{353} Relatives of both sides of marriage partnership establish a kinship relationship.

As we have noted, naming among the Bantu societies of East Africa is not restricted to the nuclear family (father’s name) as it is in Western societies but rather a child is given a clan name to emphasize the importance of clan relationship. The upbringing of children is not a sole responsibility of the nuclear family but a collective responsibility of the extended family. Among the Baganda, in family relationship, the paternal aunt (\textit{ssenga}) plays an important role in major decisions particularly those concerning marriage of children. She is also responsible for sex education and preparation for marriage of her brother’s daughters. Even among the Bakwaya in Tanzania who are matrilineal people, “the paternal aunt claims the most exceptional respect of

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid. 125. The ceremonies may differ from one ethnic group to another. The payment of “bride price” has been wrongly interpreted as “buying a bride.” Wherever this tradition exists, it has a deeper meaning of appreciation rather than buying.

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid. 128.

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid. 116. Even with children born out of the wedlock, a relationship is established between the father’s family and the mother’s family.
anyone in the family or a clan system of relationships.”

On the other hand, the responsibility of bringing up boys is entrusted to the maternal uncles among the Baganda who are patrilineal, the same is true among the matrilineal Bakwaya. According to Kisembo, due to the relationships established by marriage, the family created by marriage is the fundamental element and the basic sphere of action in African relationships. Consequently, marriage plays an important role in human wholeness.

3.4.1.2.4 In Communion with Ancestors

For East Africans, one is truly human in communion with others and in relationship with the departed ancestors. Shorter succinctly points out: “The traditional African community was not a community of living only. It was a community of both the living and dead. Death was somehow swallowed up in the affirmation of a vital relationship between ancestors and descendants.”

East Africans celebrate the past, present and future by a ritual. When a person dies in East Africa, people are supposed to observe a period of mourning until an heir is installed. In Tanzania, many ethnic groups have adapted an Arabic ritual, in Swahili called arobaini, literally meaning “forty” because it is supposed to be celebrated forty days after the death of a person. Among the Baganda, it is known as okwabya olumbe literally translated as “exorcising evil or

354 Ibid. 118. See also H. Huber, Marriage and the Family in Rural Bukwaya (Tanzania) (Fribourg, Switzerland: The University Press, 1973).


357 Arobaini is also practiced by Arabs.
When someone dies, the Baganda believe that evil has befallen on the household of the deceased which needs to be exorcised at the conclusion of the period of mourning even though there is no fixed period of time when okwabya olumbe ritual should be celebrated. The ritual has basically four important activities: first, exorcizing walumbe (evil) which is believed to have brought death. Second, the dead person is remembered by visiting his or her grave and cleaning it. Third, there is sharing an important meal to express communion between the living and between the living and the dead. Fourth, there is the installation of the heir.

Okwabya olumbe or arobaini is an act of communion in remembrance and also actualization. It constitutes making present among us here and now those who are remembered, our ancestors, and is a reminder that they are still alive.

The departed ones are part and parcel of the family, lineage or clan from which they come.

The Bantu of East Africa bury their relatives near their home to stress the relationship that still continues to exist between the living and the dead. The ancestors, otherwise known as bakulu

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358 Olumbe means evil that brings death. It also means sickness. According to Ganda tradition, walumbe is the cause of sickness and death. As we will see, walumbe appears in Ganda creation story and is supposed to be living in big underground holes at Ttanda near Mityana. Okwabya Olumbe is also known as “last funeral rites.”

359 At dawn, the children of the deceased move out of the house of the deceased which symbolizes the exit of walumbe (evil) from the house.

360 Communion is expressed by the way the meal is prepared and shared. Close relatives, particularly in-laws are supposed to bring food which is shared. The meal is considered to be so important that refusal to partake in this meal may be interpreted as animosity between the person and the deceased.

361 For the installation of the Kabaka (King), there is a series of rites that begin with a mock combat between the Kabaka with his party against priests, which the Kabaka wins. It is an expression of conquest ideology and Kabaka’s right to obtain spiritual resources for the kingship from the priests. The combat also re-enacts the original fight between the legendary first Kabaka, Kintu against Bemba, the mythical “snake-chief” in which Kabaka Kintu was victorious. At installation, the chief priest gives the Kabaka a royal spear saying “Go and conquer your enemies.” The Kabaka then vows, “I am the Kabaka to live longer than my ancestors, to rule the nations, and to put down rebellion.” Cf. Benjamin, African Religions, 95f.
Baganda) or *badugu* (Sukuma), though dead are ever present and continue to influence life in their communities, invoked when the life of the community is threatened with disaster.\textsuperscript{362} People constantly remember their departed ones or ancestors by libation.\textsuperscript{363} The ancestors and their descendants exchange gifts and favors.

Our ancestors complete the cycle of human wholeness which is so important in the East African cultural and religious traditions. Celebration of ritual of ancestors shows how the dead are related to the living. Relationality which is an important element of the way human beings live in East Africa, and undergirds the philosophy and religious practices of East Africans and their cultural traditions, finds its fruition in communion with ancestors who have passed on.

At the conclusion of this sub-section of rites of passage, we can notice that for East Africans, a person is not fully a person until he or she is fully socialized after going through the necessary and prescribed rites of passage from birth to funeral rites. These rites involve some kind of sacrifice and self-giving for the sake of the community and also teach the initiate to be aware that human wholeness involves challenges, trials and suffering which have to be faced courageously rather than being evaded.

**3.4.1.3 Status of Women in East African Traditional Societies**

This dialogic study has a special focus on the poor and marginalized. Discussing the theological anthropology of Libermann we pointed out that despite his intention of liberation of


\textsuperscript{363} David Kyeyune, “Dialogue Between Christianity and African Religion in Uganda: The Relation between the Spirits and Living Relatives,” in *Dialogue with the African Traditional Religions* (Kampala: Gaba Publications, No. 37, 1975), 41. Kyeyune says that the dead resent being forgotten, otherwise they can bring misfortune to people that is why people remember them by libation. The Baganda, for example, for libation pour out the “first” beer (best beer) for the deceased members of the family.
Africans he had also racial attitudes against them which are discernible in his condescending language. We have also mentioned that despite the fact that East African rites of passage are aimed at human wholeness, female circumcision is a violation of human rights. This brings us to the question about the status of women in East African traditions because like Africans who were enslaved during the time of Libermann, women too have been marginalized. Femininity has been trifled not only by African cultural traditions but in the West as well.\textsuperscript{364} Feminists have consistently pointed to patriarchy and androcentricism as the root cause of discrimination of women. Radical feminists claim that the Christian Bible is inherently patriarchal and should be rejected.\textsuperscript{365} East African women theologians have deviated from radical feminism and have advocated for a middle position with regard to the liberation of women. For instance, Teresia Hinga insists that although the Bible should be read with a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion because it has a patriarchal slant, nonetheless, it should not be discarded altogether.\textsuperscript{366} She recognizes that the Bible is a story of human beings with all their weaknesses. The main task, she says, is to “salvage ‘her story’ from his ‘story.’”\textsuperscript{367}

John Middleton claims that women in Lugbara society in northern Uganda are not persons but individuals. Middleton’s view deserves our attention because it radically deviates from our cherished position of the concept of human being in East African cultures. Despite widespread discrimination of women, they are indeed human beings with human wholeness. In his


\textsuperscript{365}Mary Daly is one of the radical feminists who argues for a total rejection of the Bible as irredeemably patriarchal and conducive to oppression of women. Cf. Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973).

\textsuperscript{366}Teresia M. Hinga, “Women Liberation in and through the Bible: The Debate and the Quest for A New Feminine Hermeneutics”, AFER (Vol. 6, No.4, December 1990) 34-45.

\textsuperscript{367}Ibid. 38.
description of person among the Lugbara, Middleton points out two factors, first, “persons have lineage and family authority and moral responsibility” and second, “… a person is actually or potentially, at the center of a constellation of lineage relationships and positions of both living and dead; an individual is not.”

According to this concept of person, Middleton says that women (oku) in Lugbara society are essentially individuals, not "persons". He continues to insist that women are subsumed with men as 'ba in the context of people but women are said to lack souls, to lack social responsibility and are not fully socialized like men. They are said to be of bushland and "evil" (onzi). After death, women join the lineage of ancestors but not ghosts. There is one exception, according to Middleton, the first born girls whom the Lugbara say would have been born men but for unknown reasons they were born women.

The problem with Middleton’s idea is perhaps his definition of person among the Lugbara. He says that person has lineage and family authority and moral responsibility. According to this understanding of person, then because a woman has no lineage and authority and has no moral responsibility, then she is just an individual but not a person. One important element of person that Middleton overlooks is the status accorded to women because of motherhood.

First, in East African societies including the Lugbara, the sexes could not compete for the same occupations. This was largely because their roles were differentiated according to their physical constitution. A woman (and a man for that matter) could not refuse to marry. Childrearing and motherhood were the occupation of every woman and the length of lactation, coupled with the desire for large families, meant that the woman had very little space for social or political activities outside the family circle. Before the advent of colonialism, there were few

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occupations in which women could compete with men. The occupations of both men and women were linked with their familial roles, differentiated by sex and there was a very clear-cut sex division of labor.

Practically, the only areas in which men and women competed with some equality were those which could be termed "religious or occult", as we have pointed out above. One could find both women and men as specialists in spirit possession, as custodians of holy places, priests/priestesses, and medicine-doctors or diviners. Sexes were on an equal footing there because these situations were exceptional, religious or ritual situations. Health and well-being were extremely important for the maintenance of society. Roles of medicine men or women, healers, herbalists were allocated to both men and women and gave those who practiced them an esteemed place in society. 369

Second, women were accorded high status in traditional East Africa societies from the point of view of motherhood and potential motherhood. The honor accorded to the mother everywhere in traditional East Africa was remarkable and fatherhood was not really honored in comparable fashion. The bride, as the precious gift through which a family group perpetuated its existence, was equally honored in the marriage ceremonial. Among the Gikuyu of Kenya, the term mother “is considered an honorable form of address and one which is desired by every woman in Gikuyu society. When a woman reaches the stage of motherhood she is highly respected, not only by her children but also by all members of the community.” 370 The concept of motherhood was very

important indeed and one of the most important relationships was that of mother and son. The mother was the effective symbol of life and motherhood was bound up with the existence of the human individual. The primary aim of getting married was procreation of children. As a woman was praised for her fruitfulness in bearing children, at the same time she was the primary victim of a childless marriage. “Unhappy is the woman who fails to get children for, whatever other qualities she might possess, her failure to bear children is worse than committing suicide. She has become the dead end of human life, not only to her genealogical line but also to herself.”

For the reasons above, it is hard to believe Middleton’s assertion that among the Lugbara, women were considered to be individuals but not persons.

Obviously, in the modern situation, when there is increasing equality of education and opportunity between the sexes, and when science and child-care have reduced the need for lengthy periods of breast-feeding, and have begun to limit families, there is enormous tension between old and new outlooks on the relationship of the sexes to each other. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike has made a point by proposing women Christologies with an African context insisting that women are not just child bearers, there are other important qualities that need to be tapped. She says: “African traditional woman stands at the center of the life of the clan. She is a multiple personality: a religious leader, for example, diviner, seer, medium, priestess, medicine person, rainmaker and counselor.” It means that the role of women must not be confined to

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371 It is very common in many East African societies for a woman to be called her son’s or daughter’s name i.e. Mama Sophia (Mother of Sophia) to highlight the fact that her son or daughter gives her a special status in society.


374 Ibid. 78.
motherhood and childbearing. *It is more than ever essential that women be esteemed not simply as women, but as human persons who are endowed with human wholeness.* There is also a need to redefine the image of motherhood which for some theologians, particularly feminist theologians, has been used by male dominated society to oppress women and in a sense deny them human wholeness.

### 3.4.1.4 Holistic Healing

In any society, when there is brokenness (human, communal or cosmic), there is always a need for healing. Brokenness is caused by evil which is detrimental to human and cosmic wholeness. In as much as Africans believe in holistic human life, they also believe in holistic healing. Consequently, the difference between an herbalist or medicine-doctor and a diviner is hard to demarcate.\(^{375}\) As we have already noted, in African world view, the difference between physical and metaphysical, between animate and inanimate, is not meaningful because spiritual powers are active in the natural order.\(^{376}\)

According to Nyamiti, in African world view, “life is a central category. Reality is judged or evaluated in its relationship to life: life is seen as the highest form of reality. The nearer a being comes to possess life, the more real it becomes.”\(^{377}\) Nyamiti goes on to explain that for Africans

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376 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 49.

life is not abstractly conceived, but concretely lived in human community in the world of nature and spirits, and at the same time life is dynamic in a sense that the more life one has, the more powerful that person is. Dynamic human wholeness then “is understood as maturity comprising fecundity, practical wisdom, sacrality, rights and responsibility as well as liberty from any type of subjugation.”\(^{378}\) On the other hand, evil is the diminution and effacement of the above values. As a result, evil in a corporate and organic African world view, “disturbs the communal and organic harmony in the cosmo-theandric world”, in a moral sense, is “an infliction against the sacred”, and in the last analysis, since African world view is anthropocentric, is “detrimental to human life.”\(^{379}\) According to Nyamiti, The human person is the prime cause of evil and any misfortune or disease or accident is caused by human neighbors.\(^{380}\)

A human person is also instrumental to healing. Tempels alludes to “kilumbu” or “nganga” as a powerful person among the Baluba who “possesses a clearer than usual vision of natural forces and their interaction, the man who has power in selecting these forces and directing them toward determinist usage in particular cases, becomes what he is only because he has been ‘seized’ by the living influence of a deceased ancestor or a spirit.”\(^{381}\) In East Africa, this powerful person in Swahili is called mganga “medicine-doctor” or “diviner”. The mganga possesses medicinal powers for life. According to Magesa, “diagnosing the causes of affliction is the central

\(^{378}\) Ibid.

\(^{379}\) Ibid. 41.

\(^{380}\) Ibid. Even in cases of accidents like a car accident, there is always a “neighbor” who is the cause of the accident.

preoccupation of African Religion.” The profession of *mganga* consists in finding the cause of illness, advising the procedures necessary and prescribing the remedy. Medicines have power to benefit humanity but also powers detrimental to immoral individuals. There are medicines for catching thieves and adulterers, as well as for fortune, love, success, security and giving birth. Among the Baganda, for instance, there are medicine-doctors (*musawo muyunzi*) who are believed to have mysterious powers to heal a broken leg or arm without touching it. This power is believed to be inherited.

The fundamental and important religious point about *mganga* or medicine-doctor as Magesa points out is that “the medicine underlines the interconnectedness of, and interdependence between, humanity and the rest of creation.” The natural elements are applied to the human body to establish a link between nature and humanity and to underline nature’s healing power. The underlying idea is holistic healing to which the *mganga* plays a prominent and decisive role. *Mganga* is also as powerful symbol of human wholeness because his or her role is both for spiritual and physical wellbeing that is, he/she heals people holistically.

### 3.4.1.5 Covenant

We noted in the last chapter that biblical covenant shows how we are related with one another, God and the cosmos. In many East African cultural traditions, covenant was restricted to

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382 Magesa, *African Religion*, 213. Magesa describes an interview with a diviner in Zanaki (Tanzania) by Michael Kirwen. The diviner says: “People come to me to find out what is causing their problems. It is my work to divine the cause of the evil, to figure out the source of the immorality that is provoking the problem. Once the immorality is identified, then the person can take steps to neutralize them.”

383 These people belong to a special clan called “*engabi emyunzi*”. It is their specialty to heal people’s broken bones.

human relationships, resorted to in cases of disputes and confined settlement amongst the immediate parties and their families, and encouraged unity and cohesion in society. The covenant ritual or blood pact (omukago in Luganda) was also done to cement brotherhood or sisterhood. It was done among equals and carried the same obligations for each. Among the Baganda it was “the most sacred bond, and the breach of it was expected to be followed by sickness and death.”385 The two individuals who were to make the blood pact sat on a bark cloth.386 The blood pact ritual involved the sharing and eating of a coffee bean smeared with the blood of another and this in effect meant that the two became brothers or sisters.387 Similar blood pact ritual is noticed among the Zaramo in Tanzania with the eating of each other’s blood as an essential part of the ritual.388

The main reason for blood pacts was the promotion of life. Blood, in East African cultures, symbolizes and expresses life. The exchange and sharing of blood makes those who make the blood pact brothers or sisters or even twins ready to offer one’s life for the other. When the blood pact is done between groups, it assures cessation of hostilities, guarantees safe passage to the other’s territory. Between individuals, it guarantees complete parity, solidarity, and reciprocity. The two become effectively one. Blood pact ritual is no longer performed; nevertheless the

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386 Bark cloth is a traditional cloth commonly used by the Baganda before the advent of Western cloth. Bark cloth is made from ficus natalensis (mutuba) tree. In 2005, the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization recognized bark cloth as the world’s collective heritage with strong ritual importance among the Baganda.

387 Roscoe, The Baganda, 18. A coffee berry was divided into two, each person took half of the berry, made slight cuts in the flesh of his stomach, rubbed the half berry in his blood, and put it in the palm of his hand, the other person took it from the palm with his lips and swallowed the berry. The two then promised to be faithful to each other, to help one another in every possible way and care for each other’s children. A sacred meal followed in which all were allowed to partake.

388 Lloyd Swantz, The Zaramo of Tanzania: An Ethnographic Study (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1956), 23f.
enduring value of brotherhood and sisterhood is still evident in many East African societies exemplified in hospitality towards the other.

At the conclusion of the discussion of interpersonal relationships, we notice that we have discussed some fundamental aspects of relationality which are of a great value in the understanding of who a person is in East African traditional and cultural heritage. Rites of passage enabled a person to be a full member of community and socialize fully with others. When there was brokenness in the cosmos, in community or illness of an individual there was a mganga to restore health. A covenant cemented relations among individuals and communities, forged alliances and resolved conflicts. All of this was aimed at human wholeness. We are now going to see how relationality and human wholeness are also core values of divine-human dialogue.

### 3.4.2 Divine-Human Relationship

We have noted that East Africans see relatedness as an important and constitutive characteristic of being human. The divine-human relationship is the foundation of all relatedness because first, East Africans understand God as a relational God, the source and animator of all relationships and second, they also believe like many societies that human beings are at the center of all creation. The divine-human relationship is an important aspect of East African theological anthropology because human wholeness and fullness of life is in God the source of all life and whose life is shared by all creation including ancestors. In addition, East Africans understand religion as chiefly functional and anthropocentric (but not just utilitarian), aimed at human wholeness. We are to discuss the East African concept of God and other divine beings by first examining attributes of God in African Religions. The existence of a relational God for
African peoples is presumed rather than proved and as we will notice, African peoples use attributes to describe God and to show that God is not removed from their lives. Second, we are to discuss the concept of multiplicity and dynamism in the understanding of a relational God in the East African religious traditions.

3.4.2.1 Attributes of God

Our human knowledge is limited and cannot fully comprehend the essence and nature of God. To circumvent this problem, Africans use numerous attributes to describe the nature of God. The study of praise names and attributes of God reveal that God is not only held very high in African traditions but also relates with human beings.\textsuperscript{389} Jan Voshaar who did a doctoral dissertation entitled “Tracing God’s Walking Stick in Maa” among the Maasai of Tanzania and Kenya says that for the Maasai “God is not spoken of in conceptual terms, but rather in relational terms.”\textsuperscript{390} He continues: \textsuperscript{391}

The latter [relational terms] have no conceptual clarity, as one would want in dogma, for example. They are expressive of living reality. God is omnipotent, all wise, merciful etc. These are attributes of God that Olmaasani would affirm, but Olmaasani never talks about Her like that. These are categories foreign to him. God did bring forth whatever there is; yet the categories of ‘creatio ex nihilo’ make no sense. It is not a category for Maasai. God is nothing definite that can be named or known; but Her names are sweet to the mouth, dear to the heart and expressive of reality, rather than clear-cut intellectual concepts. God is not an object to be known; She is at one with everything.


\textsuperscript{390} Jan Voshaar, ‘Tracing God’s Walking Stick in Ma” (Doctoral Dissertation Presented and Defended at the Katholieke Universiteit, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, June 1979), 112. He says that the Maasai use the expression “Naai Pasina ai” which means “O God, in relationship with me –sharing in trouble” to show the solidarity between an individual and God.

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid. 112ff. Voshaar says God’s name refers to feminine realities. That is the reason why he uses feminine pronouns to refer to God. However, this is not to mean that \textit{Enkai “God”} is a woman or a goddess. Those designations are too definite. The “being-of-the-same-order” with all that is, cannot be expressed in that way. Voshaar then concludes that according to the Maasai “the feminine provides the overall “quality” of life and reality, the quality in which everything is one. God is eminently of this quality.”
Mbiti, an apologetic theologian, in his famous work *Concepts of God in Africa*, uses scholastic categories to describe “God both alone and in relation to the Universe”, in a variety of African traditions.\(^{392}\) Mbiti’s main purpose is to prove that traditional Africans believed in a Supreme Being. By drawing examples from 270 different African peoples, Mbiti shows that intrinsic, active, eternal and moral attributes are relevant taxonomies to the understanding of the Supreme Being by African peoples.\(^{393}\) Attributes are relational and for that reason what stands out as one gleans from the numerous examples Mbiti gives in his transposition of scholastic categories to the understanding of God in African traditions, is the relational God who relates with human beings to bring about fullness and wholeness of human life.\(^{394}\) As Voshaar points out above, attributes are expressive of living reality and in this case God the source of reality.

However, one cautionary remark before using Mbiti’s scholastic categories, particularly intrinsic categories which is also supported by Voshaar’s understanding of Maasai’s concept of attributes of God is that although traditional East Africans affirm scholastic attributes of God - omnipotent, omnivolent and omniscient - at the same time, these are indeed foreign to them because they never talk to God and other divine beings like that.


\(^{393}\) Ibid. 3-42. The intrinsic attributes include the omniscience, omnipresent, omnipotence, transcendence and immanence of God. These attributes show that God has unlimited knowledge and power. God’s power and knowledge means that God is aware of all cosmic events. Under the rubric of eternal attributes of God, Mbiti provides numerous examples from African traditions to show that God is Spirit, eternal and infinite. Mbiti’s moral attributes give a clearer understanding of God as a relational God in African traditions. These are also human qualities but with one major difference, that God alone has the true moral attributes. Thus God alone is kind and compassionate, human kindness or compassion is just a reflection and shadow of God’s. Active attributes include creation and under the same rubric Mbiti gives anthropomorphic attributes which include God the father.

\(^{394}\) Ibid. See also, Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 15f. God for Africans is omniscient because God is all knowing, thus knows human problems and needs. Among the Baganda, God is referred to as *Liisoddene* meaning “big eyed” or “all-seeing”. God is all-hearing because God listens to all people, aware of all that is in the world whereas human beings are limited and imperfect. God is omnipotent for exercising power over nature. Among the Bakiga of Uganda, God is referred to as “the one who makes the sun set.” Similarly among the Kikuyu in Kenya God is referred to as one who makes mountains quake and rivers overflow. God is omnipresent so among the Langi in Uganda, God is like wind or air.
The concept of a relational God in African traditions is clearer from Mbiti’s exposition of active attributes of God. The commonest active attribute of all actions of God by practically all African peoples is creation. God is source and creator of the cosmos and human beings have a special place in God’s creation. Creation stories abound in many East African ethnic groups carrying the basic theme that after creation, God and first human beings or ancestors lived in a very close relationship and in some ethnic groups it was almost like a family relationship. Although this close relationship was severely disrupted by human disobedience, there is still a glimmer of hope that our relationship with God was not severed. Despite sickness and death which according to many creation accounts are a result of human disobedience, life will continue. God’s creative work continues through the birth and sustenance of human life. Many prayers by African peoples ask for fertility, good health, and plenty i.e., good harvest and good rain.

Anthropomorphic attributes of God are also very common active attributes of God. These are widely used by African peoples to help them to conceptualize a relational God whom they have

395 Ibid, 45ff. Mbiti lists many East African ethnic groups which describe the activity of God as creator. Among his own ethnic group, the Akamba, God is called Mumbi which means creator. Among the Baganda, the most common name for God is Katonda which means creator. The Bakiga call God Sebahanga which means “the fashioner” from the verb kuhanga meaning “to fashion” or “to set in order”. The Banyankole call God Nyamuhanga which means “one who sets things in order” or “creates everything” or “gives new life.”

396 Mbiti, Concepts of God, 171f. Among the Chagga in Tanzania, God used to visit the first human beings and provided them with food. Among the peoples of West Nile in Uganda, the relationship is narrated by stories that heaven and earth were united by a rope as a symbol of communication. This rope was later cut by a hyena. The story of the rope also appears in Maasai creation account. Cf. Jan Voshaar, ‘Tracing God’s Walking Stick in Ma”, 106f.

397 Ibid. 52f. The Langi of Uganda believe that God causes a woman to conceive and bear. Their neighbors the Lugbara believe that God is the only creator of living beings and the dispenser of death.

398 Magesa, African Religion, 198. A common prayer among the Kikuyu of Kenya says: “Mwene-Nyaga [God], you who have brought us rain and given us a good harvest, let people eat grain of this harvest calmly and peacefully. Do not bring us any surprise or depression. Guard us against illness of people, or our herds and flocks; so that we may enjoy this season’s harvest in tranquility. Peace, praise ye, peace be with us.” Magesa cites Aylward Shorter, The Word that Lives: An Anthology of African Prayers (mimeo, n.d.), 32.
not seen.\textsuperscript{399} These attributes show that Africans have as their major focus the self-revealing divine reality set within the horizon of interpersonal relationships operative in that disclosure and moving the human reality to a level beyond that of the physical cosmos. God is described in terms like a porter, craftsman, builder, maker who uses his hands. A very common anthropomorphic attribute of God is father. Unlike Western mentality which emphasizes nuclear family, the notion of father for African peoples is to be understood as a kinship-relationship.

Any religious tradition has attributes of God but what is peculiar about Mbiti’s numerous examples from African peoples which he gives to justify these attributes is that they are drawn from ordinary and real situations of existential life which people experience in their day-to-day lives. God reveals himself/herself in each and every culture, to each and every person in ways that touch the lives of people. God is active in peoples’ lives even though some of the attributes may seem to indicate that God is removed from them. For instance, the study of East African names given to God demonstrate that God is associated with the sun though not identified with it to reinforce the concept that God is not removed from people because the sun which is a representation of God is powerful and diffuses sunshine to serve human needs.\textsuperscript{400}

In East Africa, natural attributes of God show that the world is animated by the spirit of God. East Africans associate God with extraordinary natural objects like big trees or mountains or lakes or anything that inspires awe. These natural objects are considered to be special dwelling places of spirits.\textsuperscript{401} The Kikuyu, Meru and Embu make their prayers facing Mount Kenya for it is the earthly abode of God, yet not identified with God, but demonstrates God’s will and power to

\textsuperscript{399} Ibid. 91.

\textsuperscript{400} Shorter, \textit{African Christian Religion}, 62.

\textsuperscript{401} Nakayima/Nyakaima is a tree found in Mubende, Uganda which is at least 400 years old. It’s believed that it has a spirit of an ancient king. People still go there to venerate this tree and seek an answer to their daily needs.
The Chagga in Tanzania associate God with Mount Kilimanjaro. Peoples dwelling around Mount Elgon as well as those dwelling around Lake Victoria consider these places to be dwelling places of God. Wangari Maathai, a Noble Peace Prize winner, renowned for her work on the environment, engages the challenges facing Africa today and one of these is the environment. She says that her grandparents “lived within a community full of rituals, ceremonies, and expressions of their connection to the land and their culture; they did not feel alienated or adrift in a meaningless, highly materialistic world that assigns value only to dollars and cents, because their world was animated by the spirit of God.” She asserts that indigenous people who lived on the slopes of Mt. Kenya believed that it was sacred because God (“Ngai”) dwelt there which imbued in them a deep respect for nature. We will dwell more on the ecological question in the next chapter.

3.4.2.2 Multiplicity and Dynamism of Divine Beings

Discussing God of African Religions, the question of God and multiplicity of divine beings and their relationship with each other is a very crucial one in understanding human wholeness. According to Uzukwu, African apologetic theologians argued for “a stout affirmation of continuity between the God of ancestral religion and the monotheistic Western Christian God revealed in Jesus Christ.” The term “Supreme Being” was first used by deist philosophers and then evolutionist anthropologists before it was taken up by apologists. As noted before,

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402 Ibid. 171. The ethnic communities living around Mt. Kenya - Kikuyu, Meru, and Embu - say that it is the dwelling place of God. The Kikuyu call it Kirinyaga meaning “God’s resting place.”

403 Among the Baganda, Lake Victoria is called Nalubaale which means a “dwelling place of divine being.”

404 Maathai, The Challenge for Africa, 162.


406 Ibid. 57.
Dickson rightly cautions us to be careful in the use of monotheism and polytheism to describe God and divine beings of African Religions. The use of the terms monotheism and polytheism by apologetic theologians is also a good example of how they oversimplify and easily transpose Western categories to African understanding of God. The basic difficulty with the use of “Supreme Being” is that superlative language does not do full justice to the complexity and multiplicity of traditional African understanding of God. Nor does referring to other deities as intermediaries solve the problem. East Africans do not use superlative language in describing the relationship between God and other divine beings nor do they see one deity subject to the other. Each deity has a special role to play. Yet this is not to be identified with polytheism.

However, what seems to be clear according to East African traditions is that sacrifices and rituals to what the apologetic theologians call “Supreme Being” were infrequent whereas those offered to other deities were numerous. The Baganda, for instance, had about 70 divine beings called balubaale each of which was approached for a special need. Their roles however, would overlap. One of them, Kibuuka was a war god. This divinity had a temple and the Kabaka consulted his medium before going to war. Another deity was Sserwanga. John Roscoe gives a graphic account of a Baganda python deity, Sserwanga regarded as the giver of children, had a temple, a medium and a priest to interpret the message of the medium. Sserwanga was in fact a big python which was fed with milk daily by a medium and with fowls and goats near a river over which the python had power. Offerings were made before a fishing expedition and a feast after returning. Appearance of the new moon was celebrated for seven days. Baganda’s Katonda

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407 Aloysius Lugira, *African Religion: World Religions* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2004), 58. Kibuuka was a renowned divinity in Buganda. There is a legend that he was a fierce fighter. He was killed in action during the reign of Kabaka Nakibinge. His remains were enshrined in a temple built for him at Mbale (now known as Mpigi). He is the guardian of war. His temple was desecrated by the British and the contents including his jaw bone were put on display in Cambridge Museum in the United Kingdom.

who is often identified with “Supreme Being” had three shrines which had priests enlisted from one of the Baganda clans. These shrines for Katonda were not as popular as those of other divine beings like Kibuuka or Sserwanga because people in their daily lives turned to other divine beings rather than Katonda the “Supreme Being” to answer their day-to-day needs and concerns.

Besides ritual worship, some deities received popularity because they were considered to be founders of a clan or ethnic group, heroes or revered dead members of a family. According to Magesa, the ancestors have a privileged place in African society, they are the protectors and “watchdogs of moral behavior of the individual, of the family and the clan.”[409] Such ancestors are symbols of ultra-human power, and as founders of dynasties or cults become divinities themselves like Kintu of Buganda.

On the other hand, Katonda plays a more generic role, is immanent in people’s lives, and part and parcel of their culture, and for that reason, there is no need to have elaborate rituals to praise and give honor to Katonda. Katonda has many attributes describing the multifaceted functions, e.g., Mukama – “Lord”, Liisoddene – “Big eyed”, and Nnamugerek – “One who brings order.” Yet other deities are not referred to with many attributes as Katonda. Furthermore, Katonda-related names are given to people and the most common of these names are those which indicate that the person belongs to God.[410] Since Katonda is diffused in people’s lives and activity, the Baganda and their neighbors did not feel the need to offer many sacrifices to Katonda.

Among the Acholi of Uganda, Rubanga is the creator God whom the apologists identified as the “Supreme Being”. Yet the more common divine being among the Acholi, according to


[410] Byakatonda among the Baganda or Byaruhanga among the Banyoro means “one who belongs to God”. Same meaning is conveyed by Nyamunga among the Baluhyia. Other names include Byamukama among the Bahaya, Banyoro, and Banyankole which means “one who belongs to the Lord”. These names are very common among the peoples of western Uganda, northern Tanzania and eastern Kenya.
Shorter, is Jok, a generic term for Spirit which stands for both one and many: “There are Joks corresponding to different levels of human and social experience, but without doubt, the most important is that of the territorial or chiefdom Jok, to whom offerings and prayers are regularly made at specific shrines.”

Multiplicity, relationality and dynamism which undergird East African divine economy deserve further analysis in order to arrive at a better understanding of the divine-human dialogue. First, East African creation stories show evidence of multiplicity and complexity of relationships among the divine beings. Among the Baganda, “Supreme God” Katonda is the God associated with creation. However, the centerpiece of Baganda creation story is not Katonda but rather Ggulu, the sky God (Ggulu literary means “sky”) who lived in the heavenly court and who gave permission to his daughter Nambi and his son-in-law Kintu to go and inhabit the earth. In an intricacy of relationships at the heavenly court, Walumbe who is the source of sickness and death is indeed Ggulu’s son, which reinforces the argument that Walumbe is not an absolute evil spirit. Another figure at the heavenly court is Kayikuuzi, Walumbe’s brother. Kayikuuzi was sent by Ggulu to dislodge Walumbe from the earth but he was frustrated by Kintu’s children and had to go back to heaven, yet in spite of this failure there is optimism, epitomized in a Luganda saying, "Abaana ba Kintu tebalifa kuggwaawo" which means, “Kintu's children (i.e., the


412 Mbiti, Concepts of God, 175. The Baganda creation story speaks of Kintu the first Kabaka of Buganda and his wife Nambi who lived in the sky with the sky God, Ggulu. Nambi, Walumbe and Kayikuuzi were Ggulu’s children. Ggulu told Kintu and his wife Nambi to go and inhabit the earth but advised them not to go with Nambi’s brother Walumbe (the evil one, cause of sickness and death) but on their way Nambi remembered that they had forgotten millet for the chicken. When she went back, Walumbe saw her, followed her and went together to the earth. On earth, Walumbe brought sickness which killed Kintu’s children. Cf. Aloysius Lugira, African Religion: World Religions (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 56.

413 In Luganda, a foreign word sitaani (shetani in Swahili) derived from Arabic shaitan is used to express absolute evil or the devil.
Baganda), will never be wiped off the face of the earth.” Exchange of roles (Ggulu for Katonda), complementarity, multiplicity of divine beings, complexity of relationships and good and bad sharing the same origin (Kayikuuzu and Walumbe are both sons of Ggulu) all combine in the Baganda creation story to underline multiplicity and dynamism of the divine-human relationship that cannot be encapsulated by a strictly monotheistic hierarchical God.

Second, East African understanding of God shows multifaceted dynamism. According to Magesa, for African Religion, “God is seen as the Great Ancestor, the first Founder and Progenitor, the Giver of Life, the power behind everything that is.” This dynamism of God has often been interpreted in terms of vital force. God diffuses his power through ancestors who often intervene in human affairs with specific purpose. However, vital force is also subject to fluctuations, it could be manipulated by witches and sorcerers with evil intent or by medicine men/women to arrest or cure sickness and illness. Due to the vital force that is diffused in the cosmos, non-human creation is generally seen as a manifestation of the divine. As noted above, the earth is sacred and guarantees sacredness for human beings and is animated by the Spirit of God. God diffuses power through the spirits who are active and reside in natural phenomena like

414 According to the Kiganda creation story, after Walumbe had settled on earth and was killing Kintu’s children, Kintu appealed to the sky God, Ggulu who in turn sent Walumbe’s brother Kayikuuzu to persuade the former to go back to heaven where he had come from. But Walumbe refused to go back to heaven, which prompted Kayikuuzu to try to remove him by force but his efforts were thwarted by Kintu’s children who shouted at the sight of Walumbe even though they had been strictly warned not to do so. Frustrated by the disobedience of Kintu’s children, Kayikuuzu decided to go back to heaven. On leaving, Kayikuuzu told Kintu that he was leaving him and his family at the mercy of Walumbe who would kill all of them at will. In reply Kintu said: “You, return to heaven. If Walumbe wants to kill my children, let him do so, I will keep having more. The more he kills, the more I will get he will never be able to kill off all my children”. This gave rise to the saying: “Kintu’s children (Baganda) will never be wiped from the face of the earth.”

415 Magesa, African Religion, 35.
416 Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, 30ff.
417 Magesa, African Religion, 35.
418 Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, 31.
trees, rocks, rivers, or lakes. We have mentioned that in East Africa, natural objects that inspire awe are often seen as dwelling places of God and they have names associated with God.

However, we have to add a cautionary remark to the use of *vital force* in theological and philosophical discourse in African divine economy. African philosophers and theologians who have used the notion *vital force* as a basis of their theological and philosophical underpinning in the discussion about the divine-human relationship in the African context, but have confined it to a Christian monarchical and hierarchical God, have not done full justice to the dynamism of African divine economy. There has been a tendency to use Thomistic causation to explain how *vital force* functions.\(^{419}\) The problem with this line of argumentation is that whereas Thomistic causation points to a single source that can be easily identified with a hierarchical monarchical Christian God, it runs the danger of suffocating the multifaceted dynamism so central in the understanding of African traditional God and other divine beings. It must be stressed that the starting point of dynamism in African divine economy is multiplicity.

Third, divine-human relationship is cemented through dialogue by the invocation of God and deities at various times of the day in prayer and sacrifices and for that reason sacrifices played an important role in communicating with the East African God and deities. In the Old Testament tradition, sacrifices were sacred actions, performed by sacred people (mainly priests), in a sacred place (Temple) and at a sacred time. According to this tradition, the underlying principle was that holiness was achieved through separation.\(^{420}\) In East African traditions too, sacrifices

\(^{419}\) Magesa, *African Religion*, 47. Magesa’s argument of causation resonates with St. Thomas Aquinas’ Five Ways (proofs) for the existence of God and particularly the second argument known as efficient cause by which he argues that all creation depends on God, the primary efficient cause.

\(^{420}\) Holiness in the Old Testament was achieved by separation. Sacrifice as a sacred action was separated from all other human activities. A sacred person, a priest was separate from all other human beings. The sacrifice on *Yom Kippur*, “Day of Atonement” was performed by only the high priest in the Holy of Holies in the Temple at Jerusalem.
involved a separation but their overall purpose was human wholeness. An animal or chicken for sacrifice had to be special, i.e., a white chicken or a blemished (spotted but of a certain color) goat. The item for sacrifice is separated from human use and transferred to divine powers and then killed or destroyed by fire. God gets the savor of the sacrifice and in some cases the people eat the material part of what remains.

Magesa makes a difference between sacrifice and offering; whereas in case of a sacrifice there is separation by destruction, for an offering the emphasis is on dedication by separation. Among the Turkana, the ultimate purpose of sacrifice and offering is to reconstruct a new relationship between God, human beings and creation. These three entities which used to be separate are transformed by ritual activity into “substantial reality.” “When the animal is immolated, dissected, roasted, thrown to Ajuk (God) and the ancestors; and eaten by the men, as smoke and smell ascend to Ajuk; then there is being constructed a new entity or super-entity of relationships.” And for that reason, “the fundamental meaning of sacrifices and offerings lies in their efficacy to restore wholeness. If wrongdoing causes a dangerous separation of the various elements of the universe, sacrifices and offerings aim to reestablish unity and restore the balance.”

These varied ways East Africans understand their God and other divine beings and give honor and praise to them point to a fundamental fact that a strictly monotheistic and hierarchical Christian God cannot do full justice to the complexity and multiplicity involved in the

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421 Magesa, *African Religion*, 201. Items for sacrifice are usually bloody whereas for offering they are bloodless.


understanding of God in the East African traditional cultural and religious context. It calls for a close look at the Holy Spirit as the source of dynamism and pluralism.

First and foremost, Uzukwu proposes that multiplicity and dynamism of divine beings of African religious heritage should not only invite us to be cautious of using superlative language in the description of God who is Spirit, but at the same time, be the basis of reinterpretation of the Holy Spirit for the “spirits” are dimensions of the one Holy Spirit. Even though Uzukwu bases his arguments on West African milieu, they are also relevant to East Africa. The dynamism of the East African traditional God and multiple divine beings cannot be encapsulated by a strictly monotheistic Christian God, and calls for a reinterpretation of God which strongly points to the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.

Second, the understanding of God and divine beings in African Religions reveals a lot about plurality in East African religious practices today. When foreign missionaries introduced the Christian religion to East Africans, they thought that by baptism, East Africans had abandoned the past traditions and had been converted to Christianity wholeheartedly. Traditional African religious practice was forced to go underground by Christian missionary evangelism but East African Christians still revert in “secret” to the diviner or traditional medical-doctor or medium for healing and to learn their fate. John Mary Waliggo discussing the persistence of African Religions demonstrates how it persists in Christian churches. He says that Christian missionaries had convinced themselves that the Baganda had been won over to Christianity but when Kabaka Muteesa II was exiled in 1953, many Baganda Christians identified with traditionalists rejecting Christian prayers as ineffective in bringing him back.

424 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 60.

It is also very common today to see many Christians who go to church on Sunday but on Monday turn to traditional healers who were outlawed by the missionaries. With the proliferation of Pentecostal and African Independent churches, it is also becoming increasingly common to see people moving from one church to another. This points to plurality derived from the principle of relationality which is widely diffused in Africa. The majority of East African Christians appropriate the teaching of the official church according to their own circumstances and needs but using the dominant symbol system of African Religions.

At the conclusion of the discussion of divine-human relationship, we have noted that for East Africans God and other divine beings are the source and origin of relationality and human wholeness. Yet, how the divine-human relationship is understood and lived by East Africans poses a number of challenges because nothing definite can be known about God. Clear-cut scholastic intellectual concepts run the risk of trying to encapsulate East African concept of God and divine beings. As Magesa rightly points out the most viable way to describe the Numinous is by symbols and images of peoples’ existence. That is the reason why East Africans use attributes drawn from day-to-day experience (e.g., mountains or lakes they see) to describe God. Lastly the dynamism and multiplicity of God and divine beings for East African means that the reality of the divine is spirit who gives life to human beings, a point which will be examined in the next chapter.

3.4.3  East African Concept of Time and Human Wholeness

The richness of the East African cultures owes a lot to the different waves of migrations into the area, each leaving an imprint on the local culture. Receptivity, flexibility and hospitality

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426 Magesa African Religion, 55.
which are core values of the East African ethnic religions may be seen by some to be vulnerable or fragile; on the contrary, they are a source of strength that has enabled African Religions to survive to date. These core values contribute to the wholeness of the individual and community. The study of East African Religions then has to deal with the concept of time and history of African Religions. Ranger and Kimambo present coherent arguments not only to show that African Religions have a history which can be known and studied but also the historical study of these religions reveals how religion was at the heart of African society.427

The geographical location of East Africa on the equator which means that there are almost regular times of sunrise and sunset throughout the year has had a significant impact on East African anthropology. The concept of time for East Africans is one of the enduring indications of the inviolability of traditional mentality and a reminder that despite attempts by Western colonialism and Christian missionary evangelism to obliterate traditional symbols and rituals, traditional mentality and philosophy still thrives basically in two ways. First, East African concept of time portrays a dilemma of identity between East African traditional concept of time defined by human events and Western notion of time characterized by linear concept of time. Second, the way East Africans are generous with their time for others shows that time is an enduring value of human wholeness.

Mbiti argues that the concept of time is a key to understanding African ontology. “The concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation.”428 According to Mbiti, African concept of time prevents Africans from knowing what their history is, since


they do not have a historical world view. Traditional Africans, Mbiti tells us, time has “a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking.”

Mbiti analyzes the Kikamba and the Kikuyu verb tenses to prove his point. This pattern, he claims, is found in many other East African languages, a claim which can be challenged. Mbiti encapsulates African concept of time in a two dimensional view of actual time by two Swahili words: sasa which means “now” or “newness” or “immediacy” and zamani which, as we have noted, means “in the past”. He says that sasa which is the micro-time (little time) is the most meaningful period for the individual because one has a personal recollection of the events or phenomena. Sasa swallows up what in Western linear concept of time would be considered future. Sasa also feeds and disappears into zamani which is the macro-time (big time) and center of gravity. “Zamani” for Mbiti “is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, the dimension in which everything finds its halting point. It is the final storehouse for all phenomena and events, the ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before.”

Mbiti insists that for traditional Africans, time is nothing but a composition of events but these events have to be experienced to be actual and for that reason time has to be experienced to be actual. Distant future events cannot be experienced therefore they are not actual and do not

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429 Ibid. 21.

430 Ibid. 20.

431 In Luganda (language) for instance, the simple future is formed by using the verb “to come” followed by the infinitive e.g. tujja kusoma meaning “We are going to read”, similar to the English simple future used with the verb “to go” followed by infinitive. This future is normally used for events that are about to happen. Luganda has also a future to express events that will happen many months or years in the future, e.g. tulisoma meaning “we will read.”

constitute actual time. According to this reasoning, actual time for Africans is exhausted by the two tense-dimensions that involve experienced events: the zamani and sasa.

Mbiti is convinced that because of this notion of time, Africans do not expect the future to usher in a golden age or to be different from sasa or zamani. “The notion of messianic hope, or final destruction of the world has no place in the traditional concept of history.” Mbiti maintains this conviction because he sees the African culture as praeparatio evangelica to the biblical revelation with its high point in Jesus Christ. So what Mbiti is basically saying is that African concept of time is incomplete until it finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, Mbiti believes that it was due to Christian missionary teaching, Western education and modern technology that Africans are discovering the future dimension of time. It has led to national planning and economic growth. However, Mbiti also believes that futuristic expectations can lead people to “escape from facing the challenges of this life into the state of merely hoping and waiting for the life of paradise.”

According to Mbiti, the concept of time has also influenced geography because what is near is what is important and for that reason, Africans are tied to land because it is an expression of zamani and sasa. To remove them from their land is an act of great injustice. Land becomes even more precious, priceless and “sacred” when the dead relatives are buried there simply

433 Ibid. 29.
434 Ibid. 35.
435 Ibid. 35. Indeed this is not a criticism of African religious practices only, but also of any misguided religious futuristic expectations that tend to overlook the present situation in life and put emphasis on the glorious future.
436 Ibid. 35.
because for Africans, integral fullness of personhood is to be in communion between the living and the dead.437

Mbiti’s two-dimensional concept of time has attracted a barrage of criticisms. Augustine Musopole outlines the views of critics who insist that Mbiti’s assertion that Africans have no future, demeans them portraying them as people who are not forward looking and therefore non-developmental, stagnant, buried in the past, prisoners of history, and virtually without any creative imagination.438 One of the fundamental contradictions in Mbiti’s analysis of time is his concept of “potential time” which he reserves to future events that “are certain to occur”.439 The problem with Mbiti’s philosophical reasoning is that he thinks that things falling within natural rhythm, the seasons for example, “are certain to occur” and therefore are in a category of “potential time.” This means that traditional Africans believe that “potential time” extends indefinitely into the future, so it is a contradiction to say that Africans cannot conceive of a distant future. This flaw undermines Mbiti’s linguistic claim that African verb tenses cannot

437 The Bantu in East Africa do not bury their relatives on communal land but rather on their private property which is often referred to as “ancestral home.” It is an abominable crime to sell this property. People who migrate to cities do not consider cities to be their “real” home. When they die, they are taken back to their “ancestral home.”


439 Mbiti, African Religions, 17. Mbiti says: “The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time. If, however, future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they best constitute only potential time, not actual time.” Musopole points out that Mbiti contradicts himself when he says that for Africans future time can only be reckoned as potential time because it contains no events to transform it into actual time. Musopole wonders why Mbiti who denies future dimension of time can speak of potential time in the future. For Musopole, potential time may not indeed be actual time but it is conceived as time all the same. To call it potential time does not stop it from actualization. The only difference is that actual time has a historical imprint while potential time is a mental anticipation. Cf. Musopole, Being Human in Africa, 142.
express the distant future. If traditional Africans can conceive the distant future, then it is hard to believe that they do not have ways to express it linguistically.

Contrary to Mbiti’s assertion that traditional African religious systems had no eschatology, Ranger and Kimambo rightly argue that East African traditional religions had within them “dynamic potentialities of millenarianism” exemplified in Maji Maji movement ideology.⁴⁴⁰ Maji Maji rebellion fed on protest ideologies emphasizing the immanence of God and on hope of God’s rule over both the living and dead.

Mbiti says that many visitors to Africa complain about Africans being idle, lazy and always late.⁴⁴¹ Mbiti dismisses these judgments saying that they are judgments based on ignorance of African peoples adding that those sitting down, “are actually not wasting time, but either waiting for time or in the process of ‘producing’ time.”⁴⁴² There are underlying important factors which deserve further scrutiny for the understanding of the concept of time for East Africans and how this understanding influences their philosophy, behavior and actions.

In East African traditional societies, time is not only determined by human events but also by natural events.⁴⁴³ The ancient Greeks had two words for time which are still used today: chronos which means sequential time or what Mbiti refers to as linear time and kairos which means

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⁴⁴⁰ Ranger and Kimambo, *The Historical Study of African Religion*, 19, 202-216. Maji Maji was a movement waged by Africans against German colonial rule in German East Africa (present day Tanzania) between 1905 and 1907. It involved over twenty ethnic groups. Maji means “water”. Maji Maji was based on the ideology pronounced by the leader Kinjikitile Ngwale that those who partook of the water would be immune from German bullets. The basic theme of Maji Maji ideology was “unity to regain independence.”


⁴⁴² Ibid. 25. Italics are author’s.

⁴⁴³ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 24. Mbiti’s example of milking of a cow at sunrise, shows that milking is the human event, and sunrise the natural event. It does not matter at what time the sun rises so long as it rises.
opportune moment. Concerning *chronos*, before the advent of a more precise Western system of measurement of time by clocks and watches, natural rhythms of the sun and the moon played an important role in the calculation of time and still influence the concept of time for East Africans.\footnote{In traditional East African society, months were marked by the appearance of the moon which also served to inform people when they might expect the rains. Among the Baganda, a season of rain followed by a drought made up a year which consisted of six months.} A day for East Africans does not begin at midnight as it does in the Western system, but rather at sunrise. In Swahili (like in most of East African languages), Western 7.00 a.m. is rendered *saa moja* (*saa* meaning “hour” and *moja* meaning “one”) because the sun normally rises at around that time.\footnote{East Africans do not have a twenty four hour cycle for the day but rather two cycles of twelve hours each, daytime (*mchana*) and nighttime (*usiku*). Due to the fact that most of the activity is done during the day, in Swahili, like in many other East African languages, a day is further divided into *alfajiri* (early morning), *asubuhi* (morning), *mchana* (afternoon), *alasiri* (late afternoon) and *jioni* (evening). These divisions still influence people’s concept of time. So, for many East Africans, if an event is scheduled to take place at 6.30 a.m. which in Swahili is *saa kumi na mbili na nusu alfajiri* literary meaning “half past twelve in the early morning”, the keeping of time will be more influenced by *alfajiri*, “early morning”, rather than the numerical and more precise 6.30 a.m.} This means that for East Africans natural rhythms of time still play an important role in their understanding and keeping of time. It also shows that East African mind-set has embraced the new system but, at the same time, has retained the old tradition as well. East Africans often try to reconcile the two systems instead of embracing one and discarding the other. What is paramount though is that they will always try to find time to accommodate the human event.\footnote{Let us give two examples to elaborate this point: First, many priests have heard this observation before starting Mass at the scheduled time: “Let’s wait for the people before we start.” Second, many buses in East Africa do not have a fixed timetable for departure or arrival but wait until the bus is full.} The underlying motive is hospitality which will be discussed.

*Kairos* is an indeterminate time when an opportunity avails itself. The definition of opportunity, its importance and urgency is determined by the one who sees it and this can be an individual or community. This means that human events have the special effect of bestowing
meaning to time. 447 The people concerned must decide on their needs and opportunities rather than being imposed on them. For instance, when colonialists and Christian missionaries came to East Africa, without involving the people concerned and without a spirit of mutual dialogue, defined the needs, priorities and moments of opportunity for East Africans.

Of utmost importance about time, East African kairos is determined by values, actions and events that promote holistic development of human being and communal well-being. One of the most fundamental East African values is hospitality. A visitor knocking at one’s door is kairos, a moment of opportunity in East African cultural and religious traditions. It is a precious moment to show kindness and love. That is when the relational approach to the understanding of human being undergirding the East African concept of person is concretized.

Hospitality in East Africa is epitomized in the Swahili word karibu “welcome” which has infiltrated most of the East African languages. Hospitality means that one has to be charitable and generous with his or her time. Mbiti says that time in Western society is a commodity that is utilized, sold and bought but in traditional African life, time is created or produced. 448 In addition, for East Africans, time is not only created or produced but also is a value or gift that is given, shared and received in a spirit of hospitality. An individualistic person will not have time for the other. A person who offers time to listen or to assist the other who is in need does it out of genuine concern and love for the other.

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447 In Luganda, the month of July is called Mufuwulampawu meaning time when mpawu (edible ants) are available in plenty. These edible ants are harvested from anthills at night. Edible grasshoppers, nsenene are another delicacy. These are available in November which in Luganda is called Musenene. For the Baganda, these delicacies have become so important that they bestow meaning to time.

448 Mbiti, African Religions, 24.
The word hospitality is derived from *hospes* meaning “host” and “guest” at the same time. Hospitality then means welcoming strangers in a mutual relationship of reciprocity. According to Gregory Olikenyi, in many traditional East African societies, when a person visits a family, hospitality is ritualized following a pattern. First, the guest is welcomed by the host with the word *karibu*. Second, there is exchange of greetings after being seated. There might be kneeling, hugging or handshake. During the exchange of the greetings there is identification. Third, there is a presentation of tangible gift. Among the Baganda and Bahaya, it is coffee. The Chagga normally present the local beer called *mbege*. The Maasai present milk or milk mixed with fresh blood of a cow. *Milk symbolizes life, and for the Maasai it is the most precious gift one can receive.* Fourth, there is sharing of a delicious meal specifically prepared for the guest. Normally, in East Africa, a chicken or a goat is slaughtered for the guest even by hosts who do not eat meat regularly, to highlight the value of healing brought to the hosts by the guest. Fifth, there is integration of the guest into the life of the hosting community. This involves sharing at a deeper level. The guest reveals the reason and intention of his/her coming which is followed by sharing and dialogue. At the level of a wider community, when the guest is to stay permanently, the Baganda normally give a name and a clan to a guest from another ethnic group to show that he/she is initiated in the community and a member of the community. Sixth, there is farewell.

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450 Ibid. 110.

451 Swahili saying: *Mgeni aje mwenyeji apone* (Let the guest come so the hosts may be healed). Similarly the Chagga say: *Mweni nashe naso duhai* (Let the guest come so that the host may be healed).
with hope that the guest will return. A guest is accompanied for some distance before bidding final farewell. Among the Baganda, a similar pattern is followed when a bride officially reveals her spouse to her family at an introduction ceremony (kwanjula). The important value of East African hospitality is to establish and maintain personal relationships in a spirit of mutual dialogue. The value of welcoming guests resonates with Jesus’ teaching: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Mtt 25:35). In the next chapter, we will discuss how East African hospitality parallels the evangelization of the Word of God.

At the conclusion of this discussion about time in East African context, it is important to note that first, contrary to Mbiti’s two-dimensional concept of time, there is much evidence for a three dimensional concept of time as expressed in the meaning and celebration of ritual which we saw when we dealt with rites of passage. Whereas for Mbiti, when one dies one enters the state of personal immortality which lies not in the future but in zamani, the truth of the matter is that rituals of the dead are celebrated in the present by East Africans not just to remember the past but also to look forward to the future. Even though for East Africans the emphasis is on sasa, the future has no meaning without sasa and sasa has no meaning without the future. When East Africans venerate ancestors, they want them to live on, sasa, now.

Second, there is a strong connection between human events and natural events which undergirds the meaning of time and has anthropological and ontological implications to East

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452 The in-laws are the most revered visitors one can receive in the family. The introduction ceremony (kwanjula) is an elaborate ceremony in which traditional customs of courtesy are observed. A paternal aunt of the bride plays an important mediatory role in identifying the bridegroom and introducing him to the members of her family. She also speaks on behalf of the bride. After this ceremony the couple is deemed to be married even though Christians are required to exchange the vows in church.

453 Mbiti, African Religions, 21. When a dead person is remembered, he is in state of immortality that is why procreation of children is important.
Africans. The movements of the sun and the moon were important for cultic and religious celebrations in East African religious traditions. Cultic celebrations were often done at the appearance of the new moon.\textsuperscript{454} In East Africa, the sun which for centuries was and perhaps for some is still the “standard” measure of time rises and sets at almost the same time throughout the year which gives rise to monotony, constancy, and predictability. \textit{Unlike Mbiti who believes that traditional Africans had no future, I believe that traditional East Africans had a future but this future was predictable because the sun which rises and sets at almost the same time throughout the year is also predictable.}

Third, for East Africans, the value of time as a gift is expressed concretely by hospitality which is an essential value that undergirds human wholeness. It fosters friendship, good neighborliness, solidarity and respect for each other. Hospitality is a core value of African Religions and has been instrumental in the welcoming and acceptance of Christian missionaries to East Africa. This point will be explored further in the next chapter.

\textbf{3.4.4 Relevance of East African History to Human Wholeness}

Human wholeness is lived in history. The study of East African history is intended to demonstrate that first, East Africans despite the lack of written documents in pre-colonial era have a history that can be studied, second, East African history is closely related to and intertwined the history of African Religions, and third, history is not impersonal but rather a lived experience between a narrator and what he or she narrates. Unlike Mbiti who believes that \textit{zamani} is a “graveyard of time”, Bothwell Ogot and John Kieran entitled their work \textit{Zamani} to show that first, East African history can be studied and second, written documents are not the only criteria of history but rather history can be discerned “in material objects to be found in the

\textsuperscript{454} Roscoe, \textit{The Baganda}, 321f.
earth, in the way in which society is organized, in stories and sayings, in the grammar and vocabularies of languages… in songs and dances, in works of art, in poems, legends and fables, just as in more formalized written histories.” This means that geography, archeology, oral tradition, language and genetics can provide important historical information of any given society. Hence, the inability to write down traditions and histories by some societies does not necessarily mean that those societies are devoid of culture and history.

In East Africa, traditions were handed on from one generation to the next through symbolic action and oral symbolism and the study of oral history has indeed revealed a high degree of interaction between different ethnic groups. “This interaction was seldom the result of great conquests or migrations, rather it was a filtering movement of small groups of people, a highly complex process of ebb and flow from every possible direction.” This interaction is also responsible for the development of religious ideas. Shorter analyzes the word for the sun in the sky and its linkage to the notion of Supreme Being in many East African societies which might have developed through movement of peoples.

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456 The study of the Bible, for example, has revealed that the Word of God was first transmitted by oral tradition for many centuries before it was committed to writing.


458 Shorter, *African Christian Religion*, 63f. Shorter lists the Sun Name of God in some East African ethnic groups: for Kisii is *Erioba*, for Mbugwe is *Djuba*, for Sonjo is *Rhioba*, for Pare is *Izuva*, for Issanju is *Dyiova*, for Iramba is *Nzua*, for Gogo is *Inzua*, for Meru is *Irava*, for Chagga is *Irava* (*Rua*), for Turu is *Yava*, for Pimbwe is *Ilyuba*, for Kimbu is *Ilava*, for Nyamwezi is *Lyoba*, for Nyamwezi is *Kazyoba*, for Haya is *Kazooba*, for Baganda and Banyoro is *Kazooba*. According to Shorter, the linguistic similarity was a result of ethnic interaction. More importantly, Shorter shows the development of the meaning of sun-name that eventually sheds more light to the understanding of the notion of Supreme Being among these East African societies. See also Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 52. Cf. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, 130.
The history of neighboring rival kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro in Uganda, reveals there was a great deal of interaction between the two kingdoms in language, culture and religion. This interaction was facilitated by flexibility and openness of the two ethnic groups. It led to improvement in political organization and sharing of religious beliefs and practices. The Baganda and Banyoro, for instance, share the preeminence of Kintu both as a legendary figure and as a founding father of their dynasties as well as a religious figure and symbol of ultra-human power. Some revered deities in Buganda are believed to have come from neighboring ethnic groups. There was free movement of people to places of religious worship. It has been argued that the development of the concept of Supreme Being in the understanding of God was more developed in African societies which had centralized political organization, though it may be contended which influenced the other – the notion of Supreme Being or the centralized political organization. In Buganda and Bunyoro, it was through interaction with other ethnic groups that the two societies moved from clan system to a more centralized political organization system and eventually monarchies. This transition influenced the religious understanding of the peoples. For instance, ‘divine kingship’ which was fairly widespread in East and Central Africa and more evident in monarchical societies had a major impact on the political structures and religious beliefs of the Baganda and Banyoro dynasties. Furthermore, the advent of Christianity found a fertile ground for growth in these societies. For

459 Ibid.

460 http://www.buganda.com/eddiini.htm (accessed on November 12, 2012). Ddungu the god of hunting was a Bunyoro god who was also venerated in Buganda.

461 Nakayima or Nyakaima variously called by the Baganda and Banyoro respectively is still revered and visited by many people of different ethnic groups.


instance, the rapid acceptance of Christianity in Buganda and its spread to neighboring areas by Baganda evangelizers is due to a wide range of existing social-political, economic and religious factors which made Buganda a springboard of Christianity in the area.⁴⁶⁴

Relationality is an indispensable factor in understanding Buganda and Bunyoro history because of the important role played by the narrator or guardian of history. Each king who had passed on had a guardian whose responsibility was not only of being a custodian of the king’s tomb but also had the responsibility of keeping and narrating the history of that king. There was therefore an unbroken tradition from one guardian to another. History in that sense was not impersonal, but became a lived experience based on an unbroken chain of relationships. Unbroken chain of relationships is still important today in defining one’s identity. Consequently, surveying the history of the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro before the advent of colonialism, will show first, that these ethnic groups have a history and second, their history still has great impact on the religious and cultural traditions of those kingdoms

3.4.4.1 History of Buganda

The name Uganda is derived from Buganda.⁴⁶⁵ The people of Buganda are referred to as

*Baganda* (the singular form is *Muganda*), their language, *Luganda*, and their customs, *Kiganda*.

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⁴⁶⁴ Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo, *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Oxford: James and Curry Ltd., 1999), 10. According to Spear and Kimambo, Christianity entered Western Kenya due to “Ganda missionary evangelism which was later displaced by European missionary paternalistic ‘policy of leading strings.’”

⁴⁶⁵ ‘Uganda’ (*Swahili for ‘Land of the Ganda’) was the name used by the Arab and Swahili traders on the East African coast to refer to the kingdom of Buganda. These traders first arrived in Buganda in the mid-nineteenth century in search of slaves, ivory, as well as other merchandise. When the European colonialists eventually extended their hegemony over Buganda and the surrounding territories at the end of the nineteenth century, they used the Swahili term Uganda to refer to the new colony. According to the 2002 national census, Baganda are the largest ethnic group in Uganda accounting for at least 17% of the total population of Uganda.
Sometimes the generic term *Ganda* is used for all the above (especially by foreign scholars).\(^{466}\) Buganda is home to the nation's political and commercial capital, Kampala. It is right in the heart of Africa, astride the equator, around the northwest shore of Lake Victoria (*Nalubaale*), and at the source of the White Nile is one of the most watered areas in Africa. Roscoe, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, says, “the Baganda belong to the great Bantu family, and are perhaps the most advanced and cultured tribe of that family: in their dress and habits they are superior to any of their neighbors, while their extreme politeness is proverbial.”\(^{467}\)

Buganda attracted substantial attention of anthropologists and historians particularly due to its preeminence among its neighbors.\(^{468}\) Roscoe points out that the Baganda had an elaborate system to record history.\(^{469}\) According to this system an heir impersonates his predecessor. Thus a

\(^{466}\) According to *Kiganda* folklore, *Buganda* was the name of the house in which Bemba, who was the leader of the Baganda before the advent of Kabaka Kato Kintu, used to live. This house was located at Naggalabi, Buddo. When Bemba was defeated in battle by Kabaka Kintu, Kintu slept in Bemba's house as a sign of his victory. Thus Kabaka Kintu became the 'ruler' of Bemba's house. This name eventually came to mean all the territory that Kabaka Kintu ruled. To this day the ceremonies of crowning a new king take place at Naggalabi, Buddo, to recall Kabaka Kintu's victory over Bemba and the newly crowned king must sleep in the house called *Buganda*. As we will see later, other sources say that Buganda was actually a king of Buganda before the coming of Kabaka Kato Kintu.

\(^{467}\) Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 5.

\(^{468}\) The classic and indispensable ethnographies of pre-colonial Buganda are Rev. John Roscoe’s *The Baganda* and Katikkiro (Prime Minister) Apolo Kaggwa's *Mpisa za Baganda* (1905; rendered in an abridged translation, *The Customs of the Baganda*, 1934). These were written separately, but both are based on the extensive collaborative interviews which the two men conducted with clan elders and others knowledgeable in the history and customs of the kingdom at the turn of the 20th century. The only later historical ethnography of Buganda which is comparable to those of Roscoe and Kaggwa in scope and depth is Michael Nsimbi's *Amannya Amaganda N'ennono Zaago “Kiganda Names and their Customs.”* Ssemakula Kiwanuka’s *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900* (London: Longman, 1971), is also of great historical value. The earliest published descriptions of the kingdom of Buganda, however, were written by two British explorers who spent several months each at the royal capital. John Hanning Speke searching for the source of the Nile was stranded there for six months in 1862, and described his impressions soon thereafter in his *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (1863). Henry Morton Stanley resided at the king’s court for some months in 1875, assisting Kabaka Muteesa I in a local war against Buvuma islands, an experience he recounts in the first volume of *Through the Dark Continent* (1878).

\(^{469}\) Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 3.
woman belonging to a particular clan will claim to be the mother of a king who died many years
ago because her grandmother or great grandmother was a mother of a king. Roscoe continues:470

Bearing this system in mind, and also taking into consideration the remarkable accurate
memories of the people, their graphic power to recount the details of the events long past,
and their conservatism in religious ceremonies and social customs … it is possible to
obtain from them a fairly accurate account of the past years.

Sir Apolo Kaggwa’s *The Customs of Baganda*471 traces the history of the kings of Buganda,
their wives, their prime ministers, important chiefs, important events and particularly the wars
they fought. This information derived from oral tradition goes about four centuries back and
shows how the Baganda preserved their history even before the advent of the script.

A Ugandan historian, Ssemakula Kiwanuka, discusses how the Baganda preserved their
history.472 He says that one of the most important sources of information in Buganda are the
royal jawbones of kings and shrines of royal tombs.473 Each shrine has a guardian who has
information of the king buried there. These stories have been passed on for centuries from one
guardian to another. According to Kiwanuka, the custom of removing and preserving the lower
jawbone goes back between 1200 and 1400, when the Baganda were migratory.474 It was
therefore convenient to carry easily portable material which gave rise to the importance of
jawbones. However, as the Baganda society became sedentary, body tombs became important
and guardians were appointed to take charge. Shrines were also built for the jawbones and

470 Ibid.


472 Ssemakula Kiwanuka, *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900* (London: Longman,
1971), 2.

473 Ibid.

474 Ibid. 3
guardians were appointed. This office was a prestigious one. Even though it was not hereditary, normally the son of a guardian inherited the office from his father. The incumbents and their immediate family had a great deal of information concerning the person whose tomb or jawbone they took care of. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the jawbones were buried by Kabaka Kamanya. Kiwanuka laments that it was the cultural intrusion of Christianity and Islam and the changing socio-economic and political structure that reduced the job of a guardian.475

Another method of preserving history was through clans.476 At the royal palace, there were many different jobs that were entrusted to different clans. These clans jealously guarded their function and became a valuable source of information. Clan histories tell us a lot about migrations into Buganda, about the monarchy itself and system of government and the evolution of chieftainship.477

Four centuries ago, Buganda was a small kingdom but grew in size and cohesion at the expense of its neighbors, particularly Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom which declined in power and dominion.478 The establishment and centralization of Buganda kingdom is attributed to Kabaka Kato Kintu who is believed to have come from the northeast of Buganda. Prior to the establishment of Kintu's dynasty, the people who lived in Buganda had not been united into a

475 Ibid. 3.
476 Ibid. 4.
477 Ibid.
478 Ibid. 30. At its founding, the Kingdom of Buganda had only a small territory consisting of the counties of Busiro, Busujju, Kyaddondo and Mawokota; as well as small portions of Ssingo and Bulemeezi counties. Most of the surrounding territory was the dominion of the kings of Bunyoro. There was immense rivalry between Bunyoro and Buganda, and constant fighting over territory. Gradually, Buganda was able to expand its territory at the expense of Bunyoro until it grew to the twenty counties that constituted Buganda at its pinnacle. The islands of Ssese in Lake Victoria (Nnalubaale) were autonomous within Buganda right from its founding, being reserved as the islands of the gods. They were not directly governed by the kings of Buganda until after the 1900 agreement.
single political entity. They were organized into groups that had a common ancestry and constituted the most important unit in Buganda's culture - the clan. Despite a common language and culture, the clans were loosely autonomous with leaders (Abataka) who ruled over their respective clans. There was no caste system in Buganda and all clans were equal. Sometimes the clans had a common leader but there were also times when there was no common leader at all if none of the clan leaders could overwhelm the others. However, before Kato Kintu came to Buganda, Buganda had been invaded and conquered by Bemba, who is thought to have come from Kiziba (part of modern Tanzania) to the southwest of Buganda.

Kato Kintu came into Buganda as a conquering hero who defeated the unpopular, harsh, cruel and ruthless Bemba. There were five clans in Buganda at that time, now called the original clans (bannansangwawo). When Kabaka Kintu invaded Buganda, he is reputed to have brought thirteen clans with him and this numerical strength might have played a key role in Kintu being able to establish himself as king. Another factor was that Bemba’s subjects were already primed to rebel against him and indeed some prominent clan leaders joined Kintu's invading forces.

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479 Ibid. 31. Each clan has a totem which may be an animal, bird, fish or plant. The members of pangolin (lugave) clan, for instance, claim to have a common ancestry, consider themselves to be brothers and sisters and for that reason marriage within the same clan is strictly forbidden.

480 Ibid. 32. Some powerful leaders who are said to have established themselves for periods of time prior to Kintu's arrival include: Sseguku, Buwumpya, Bukokoma, Bukulu, Bandi, Beene, Ggulu, Kyebagaba, Muyizzi, Bukuku, Bukadde-Magezi, Nakirembeka, Tonda, Maganda, Mukama, and Bemba. According to the most widely accepted version of history, Bemba was the acknowledged leader at the time of Kintu's arrival.

481 These were the Ffumbe (Civet Cat), Lugave (Manis), Ngeye (Colubus Monkey), Nnyonyi Nnyange (Bird) and Mmamba (Lungfish) clans.

482 Thirteen clans in Buganda claim to have come with Kintu. However, it is highly improbable that all actually came with him. What might have happened was that around the time of Kato Kintu, there were a number of migrations into Buganda from different directions and since Kintu is a legendary and important figure in Buganda, in order to ascertain their legitimacy in Buganda, many of the migrating clans had to associate themselves with Kintu. This custom has been carried on up to today when new arrivals particularly from Rwanda assume Kiganda names and are assimilated into one of the existing clans.
Key among these was Mukiibi, head of the Lugave clan, who was assigned command of the invading force. As soon as he was in full control, Kabaka Kato Kintu organized a meeting at Nnono where he met all the clan leaders. This meeting was of great historic significance for it stipulated a constitution detailing Buganda's form of governance, and the relationship between the clans and the king which was formally agreed upon during the meeting. In addition to military conquests, Kabaka Kintu cleverly allied himself with the leaders of the original clans. He was the first king of Buganda to share his authority with the other clan leaders. This may also have played a key role in getting him accepted as the king of Buganda. In organizing the kingdom, Kintu conceded to clan leaders’ authority over their respective clans in matters of culture. Kintu then became arbiter between the clans in case of disputes, thus cementing his role as Ssabataka, head of all clans. Kintu is also venerated by the Baganda and appears in

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483 Key among these was Mukiibi, head of the Lugave clan, who was assigned command of the invading force.

484 Kintu established his palace at Nnono. It is here that he appointed his first government and awarded chieftaincies to his prominent followers. For this reason, Nnono is one of the most important cultural and historical sites in Buganda. It is also for this reason that when the people of Buganda talk about issues of deep cultural significance, they refer to them as being of or from Nnono (eby’ennono).

485 Kato Kintu’s principal wife, Nnambi Nantuttululu was the daughter of Bakazirwendo, the leader of the Ngeye clan. His Prime Minister (Katikkiro) Kakulukuku, was the son of Mukiibi, head of the Lugave clan and erstwhile military commander.

486 A different version of Kato Kintu’s ascendency to power in Buganda claims that he was not a foreigner but an indigenous Muganda raised up in eastern Uganda. In his book "Ssekabaka Kintu ne Bassekabaka ba Buganda Abuamusoooka" (in Luganda, published by Crane Publishers Ltd.), Chelirenso E. S. Keebuŋero presents a cogent case for the argument that Kato Kintu was indigenous to Buganda rather than an invading all conquering hero. The book reports extensive research among clan elders asserting that Kintu was in fact born in Buganda. Kintu is said to have been the son of King Buganda (after whom the kingdom took its name). That King Buganda did indeed exist is fairly well established and his shrine is known to be at Lunnyo, near Entebbe in Busiro. According to this version, King Buganda was deposed by his brother Bemba. As stated elsewhere Bemba was a ruthless and unpopular ruler. So the clan elders concocted a secret plot to take the late king’s young sons out of the country. They were sent to the Masaaba mountains to the east (now Mt. Elgon) and there looked after by royal attendants until they had matured enough to lead an army into battle. When the time was judged to be right, the elders sent messengers to Masaaba who returned with Kintu the prince. They then joined Kintu in the successful battle to oust Bemba. As we will see, this story bears resemblance to the story of how Kabaka Kimera came to Buganda.
Kiganda creation story as the first person on earth. This story is also shared by ethnic groups in this region including Bunyoro.\textsuperscript{487}

Kato Kintu was succeeded by his son Ccwa. Although, the Bachwezi are rarely associated with the history of Buganda, the name Ccwa suggests that they might have ruled Buganda for some time. As we will see, the Bachwezi had a greater influence on the Banyoro whom they ruled for at least a century and a half.

Ccwa was succeeded by Kimera. Banyoro accounts suggest that Kimera had Luo origins and together with his brother, Rukidi, they are the founders of the Buganda and Bunyoro dynasties respectively.\textsuperscript{488} The Baganda version of Kimera’s origin disputes the Banyoro claim, affirming that Kimera was a Muganda born in Bunyoro from where he came to Buganda with at least ten clans.\textsuperscript{489} Reading through both versions of Kimera’s origins, it seems likely that Kabaka Kato Kintu whom the Baganda refer to as the founder of their dynasty, was actually Kimera whose

\textsuperscript{487} According to Baganda creation story, which we have discussed, Kintu was the first person on earth. This legend has led to discussion about the difference between Kintu the first king of Buganda, and Kintu the alleged first human being on earth. This discussion has led some to conclude that there was never a king called Kintu, and that Kintu is merely a legend. What Baganda scholars assert, however, is that Kintu was indeed a legend relating to the creation of human beings. Baganda regarded Kintu in this legend as the father of all people. It appears that when Kato established himself as Kabaka, he gave himself the name Kintu, a name that he knew the Baganda associated with the father of all people. Thus Kato Kintu was in effect trying to establish his legitimacy as ruler of the Baganda by associating himself with the legendary first person in Buganda. It is for this reason that he also named his principal wife Nambi who also appears in the legend as Kintu’s wife.

\textsuperscript{488} Ogot and Kieran, \textit{Zamani}, 182.

\textsuperscript{489} The Baganda version of the origin of Kimera claims that Kimera was a grandson of Kabaka Ccwa I, grew up secretly in Bunyoro after Ccwa’s only son Kalemeera had been banished from the king’s court, sought refuge in Bunyoro where he bore his only son Kimera and Kalemeera later died. Kimera eventually came back to Buganda as a king of Buganda after the death of Kabaka Ccwa I. This story may have been developed to justify the patriarchal and unbroken hereditary tradition of the Buganda dynasty, on the one hand, and to recognize and at the same time play down the influence of Bunyoro on the Buganda dynasty, on the other. The Banyoro version of Kimera’s story which claims that he was not a Muganda, however, seems to be more credible. It would have been great humiliation for the Baganda to accept that one of their kings and indeed the founder of the dynasty was a Munyoro.
other name was Kato.⁴⁹⁰ This argument is supported by an alternative version of Kato Kintu’s ascension to power detailed above. According to this version, Kato Kintu was a Muganda who grew up in a foreign territory and later came to Buganda as a conquering hero.

From the time of Kabaka Kimera, Buganda more than doubled its size, absorbed many immigrants, created a strong royal body guard and strengthened royal power through centralization. By the nineteenth century Buganda had reached indeed the position of *primus inter pares* among its neighbors. Buganda tradition claims that there has been an unbroken tradition of kings in Buganda from Kabaka Kintu to Kabaka Mutebi II, the present king, the 36⁰ king of Buganda. However, this tradition was broken when President Milton Obote abolished kingdoms and chieftaincies in Uganda in 1966 but they were restored in 1994 and Kabaka Mutebi II was crowned king. Kabaka Mutebi is now a cultural leader rather than a political one.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, when the interior of East Africa was frequented by Arabs for trade and European explorers in search of the source of the Nile, this was also Buganda’s heroic age. John Hanning Speke (1827-1864) who claimed to have found the source of River Nile came to Buganda in July 1862. He praised the Baganda for their organizational skills. Another British explorer and journalist, Henry Stanley, visited Buganda in 1875. He said that in Buganda he found, apart from the formidable King Muteesa I, a highly developed and civil society with its own government centering on the king.⁴⁹¹ Stanley met King

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⁴⁹⁰ John Bettie, *The Nyoro State*, (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1971), 54. The original name of Kimera was Kato but when he assumed his authority and severed ties with Bunyoro, he got a second name Kimera which in Luganda and Runyoro means “to grow roots” (from the verb *kumera*). The Banyoro regard the Buganda dynasty as inferior, originally subordinate to Bunyoro. A famous Banyoro saying goes: “The Baganda are children of the Banyoro.”

⁴⁹¹ http://www.buganda.com/eddiini.htm (accessed on August 20, 2011). The government included royal tax collectors as well as armies that traveled swiftly to all parts of the kingdom and newly conquered lands along specially constructed roads which crossed streams and swamps by bridges and viaducts. Henry M. Stanley counted 125,000 troops marching off on a single campaign to the east (Busoga) where a fleet of 230 war canoes waited to act
Muteesa I in April 1875 and carried a letter from Muteesa I addressed to Queen Victoria asking for missionaries to come to Buganda. The letter reads in part: 492

Oh! That some pious, practical missionary would come here! What a field and harvest ripe for the sickle of civilisation….It is the practical Christian tutor who can teach people how to become Christians, cure their diseases, construct dwellings…and turn his hand to anything – like a sailor – this is the man who is wanted….You need not fear to spend money on such…a mission…

The irony of this much publicized letter is that although Kabaka Muteesa I received missionaries who arrived two years later in 1877, he also opened the doors of his kingdom to foreign influence that eventually led to its desecration. Kabaka Muteesa’s letter gives some glimpse of what a Christian missionary was expected to be and do. A missionary had to be “pious” and “practical”. He had to be at the service of others and for the realization of full humanity. Kabaka Muteesa did not envision Christianity to be in conflict with traditional culture and religion, otherwise he would not have allowed Christian missionaries to come to Buganda.

3.4.4.2 History of Bunyoro Kitara

Whereas the Baganda recount their glorious recent past, the Banyoro 493 are nostalgic of their remote past glory. Banyoro like Baganda are Bantu now confined around the shores of Lake

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493 The kingdom is known as Bunyoro Kitara. The original name was Kitara which is associated with the reign of the Bachwezi. It was also the name of the northern province of the kingdom. Later, the kingdom acquired the name
Albert in western Uganda but have legends of being the political masters of a very large empire that spread to Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo and northern Tanzania. The influence of Bunyoro Kitara kingdom on their neighbors can be discerned from their language Runyoro which is associated and very similar to Rutooro, Runyankole, Rukiga, Ruhaya, Ruzinza and Rukerewe. These languages, often referred to as Runyakitara, cover a wide geographical area which includes western Uganda and northern Tanzania, a reminder of the glory of Bunyoro Kitara. Strangely enough, Luganda is not part of this language group which suggests that although Bunyoro Kitara controlled Buganda for some time, the Baganda did not assimilate Runyoro in the same measure as other neighboring ethnic groups had done.

Bunyoro area was once occupied by agriculturists until immigrations, particularly pastoralists came in from the north about 700 years ago. Bunyoro still exhibits an uneasy synthesis between the centralized rule associated with newcomers referred to as Bahima or Bahuma and the originally segmentary lineage of the indigenous people referred to as Bairu, a small minority lording it over the majority. Bunyoro have 135 clans, the ruling class are from the Babito clan from whom comes the Mukama, the king. Bunyoro have myths and rituals to support this social division.

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Bunyoro which is associated with the system of land tenure in this area. Bunyoro is the territory and Banyoro are the people.

494 Bettie, *The Nyoro*, 23. The societal division between Bahima (Bahuma) and Bairu is not so pronounced among the Banyoro as it is among their neighbors the Banyankole and the Banyarwanda (Batutsi vs Bahutu) where there is more presence of cows. Bahima are regarded to be superior to Bairu. In Rwanda the social division between Batutsi and Bahutu spilled over into genocide in 1994.

495 Class differentiation between rulers and subjects celebrated with rituals and myths was aimed at a political organization. Myth provides an intellectual background why the Babito should rule. Rituals expressed in coronation ceremonies confirm the Mukama to be king.
The origin of this social division can be traced from various oral traditions of ethnic groups in the area and archeological findings which speak of people referred to as Bachwezi who controlled much of western Uganda between 1350 and 1500.\textsuperscript{496} The Bachwezi were great pastoralists who kept long-horned cattle as distinct from the indigenous short-horned humpless ones. The descendants of the Bachwezi can still be identified in Bunyoro, Ankole, Rwanda, Burundi and Karagwe in Tanzania where they, with the exception of Bunyoro, formed the ruling aristocracy. When the Banyoro speak of their glorious large empire in the past, it is most probable that this empire refers to the reign of the Bachwezi. Under the Bachwezi, the Banyoro made a transition from clan system to organized and centralized monarchy with larger administrative units.\textsuperscript{497} The Bachwezi are also credited for having left behind a spirit cult; no wonder then, many traditional gods in Bunyoro, Buganda and Toro have names associated with Bachwezi.

Bunyoro Kitara empire broke up when the Luo invaded it from the north and established the Babiito dynasty (as distinct from the Bahuma or Bahima), led by Omukama Rukidi, at the beginning of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{498} The Nilotic Luo adopted the local language and culture of the Bantu, Banyoro. The Babiito had inherited a large empire from the Bachwezi which disintegrated into smaller kingdoms of Bunyoro, Buganda, Ankole and Karagwe in the present

\textsuperscript{496} B.A. Ogot, \textit{Zamani}, 178. Pre-Bachwezi period is often associated with the time of creation and the reign of Batembuzi and since these were gods, the Batembuzi did not die but disappeared or ascended into heaven. Batembuzi were followed by Bachwezi who like the Batembuzi, disappeared mysteriously. Also Cf. Bettie, \textit{The Nyoro}, 25.

\textsuperscript{497} Ibid. 180. Archeological evidence in Buganda and western Uganda at Bigo bya Mugenyi which was the capital, Mubende, Kibengo, and Ntusi reveal features of the Bachwezi culture: their regalia, pottery forms consisting of bowls, jars, basins and dishes. The Bachwezi are also associated with the introduction of backcloth, manufacturing many items, coffee cultivation, iron working, earthwork fortifications and reed palaces.

\textsuperscript{498} Bettie, \textit{The Nyoro}, 25. The Babiito from the north are Nilotic, relatives of the present day Acholi and Alur.
day northern Tanzania. The Luo settled in large numbers in western Kenya where they maintained their language and culture and are associated with the founding of dynasties.

Bunyoro Kitara started to decline from the beginning of the 18th century at the expense of Buganda. Around 1830 a separate Babiito dynasty was established in Toro. When Chwa II Kabalega (1853-1923) became Omukama in 1870, he embarked on a revival of Bunyoro Kitara but his efforts were thwarted by the British who fought him for five years before subduing him and exiling him to Seychelles in 1899. According to Banyoro tradition, the present Omukama Solomon Gafabusa Iguru is the 27th of the Babiito dynasty.

The history of Buganda and Bunyoro shows that first and foremost, contrary to ethnographies that depicted Africa and particularly the interior as a dark continent of “uncivilized” people, without recorded history, there is strong evidence to show that people in these areas were highly organized and preserved their history.

Second, what can be discerned from the way Baganda preserved their history is that history for them rather than being impersonal is a lived experience and a lived tradition that engages the “historian”, in this case the guardian, to be part of the story. The guardian is not just a guardian of history but like an heir is the link between the living and the dead.

Third, it is often argued that Baganda and Banyoro dynasties were centralized autocratic monarchies. Although the Kabaka is thought of being an embodiment of the Baganda (i.e., the Baganda refer to themselves as Baana ba Kintu “children of Kintu,” the first king), there is

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499Kabalega had defeated the imperialists led by Sir Samuel Baker in 1872. The British under Captain Lugard then turned their attention to Buganda, divided them along religious lines and aided a Protestant party to defeat the Catholics in 1892. After securing Buganda, the British shifted their attention to Bunyoro, this time using Baganda and Nubian mercenaries. Kabalega was defeated after putting up a spirited resistance for almost five years. The defeat of Kabalega at the hands of the British was seen as a great humiliation. According to Bettie, Missionaries and Europeans who went to Bunyoro after this war regarded the Banyoro as idle, unenterprising and decadent compared to the rest of other Ugandans. Cf. Bettie, The Nyoro, 31.
ample evidence that right from the time of Kabaka Kintu, the administration of the kingdom was oligarchic involving many persons who included chiefs from village level to ssaza (district) level, clan chiefs, queen-mother, priests and mediums. At the local court, the Kabaka had a Lukiiko (equivalent to parliament) headed by Katikkiro “prime minister”. In that way, the Kabaka through a system of subsidiarity diffused the exercise of power among his subjects and at the same time ensured he was closer to his people.

Fourth, traditional cultures were dynamic and flexible, and assimilated new ideas. Migrants were assimilated into the culture of the local people and learned the local language even though some, in cases like the Babiito who invaded Bunyoro, were stronger, founded a dynasty and took control of the political organization and establishment of the local people. Muslim and Christian traditions which carry universalist and absolutist claims have been intolerant to other religions and cultures. For instance, we will see in the next chapter that when Spiritan missionaries arrived at Zanzibar in 1863 and at Bagamoyo, Tanzania in 1868, they could not convert the local people because they had embraced Muslim faith. They focused their attention to ex-slaves who had been forcibly uprooted and isolated from their social and cultural milieu and dehumanized. When Europeans and Arabs penetrated the interior of East Africa they found peoples and cultures which were hospitable to them and welcomed them. Missionaries converted many people to Christianity in these areas because the local cultures were flexible and tolerated Christianity as they had interacted time immemorial with foreign cultures and religions. Missionaries and colonialists on the other hand, with an aura of superiority sowed intolerance, desecrated local cultures and imposed their own which they believed was superior to the local one. They even convinced the local people to hate certain aspects of their own culture and to look at them as “heathen”. All places of worship were desecrated and many traditional rituals were prohibited.
What has saved the local cultures from complete disintegration is their flexibility and malleability that enables them to be open to newness without necessarily losing the old. We have noted that when Kabaka Muteesa I wrote a letter to Queen Victoria requesting missionaries to come to Buganda, he thought of them as important agents for the realization of the wholeness of individual and community.

Fifth, rather than being nostalgic of the past and insulating in the ancestral past, East African religious traditions have found ways to survive, evolve and perpetuate their values and eventually integrate them in the Christian tradition. One of the pivotal and core values is hospitality which as we have seen is discernible in the East African concept and understanding of time and history and at the same time a core value of human wholeness.

3.5 Conclusion

Exploring East African understanding of human being through the lens of African Religions, we have discussed the fundamental importance of relationality in the realization of human wholeness. Relationality is also necessary for dialogue and for that reason will play an important role in the next chapter as we compare and contrast Libermann’s theological anthropology and the East African theological anthropologies and its implication to the contemporary East African Catholic Church. Such an undertaking, ambitious as it might appear to be, allows neither romanticizing Libermann nor idealizing East African ancestral past. It is true that some traditional religious values are irreversibly in the process of erosion; it is also important to note that these values have to be informed by the present context. They keep evolving because culture is not static but dynamic.
The present context is important because there has been a tendency among African theologians, philosophers and historians to pile massive blame and criticism on colonialists and Christian missionaries and now neocolonialists for the disintegration of African traditional values, culture and heritage. It is important to recognize the role played by colonialists and missionaries in the plight of African heritage. However, I believe that more energy now should be directed to the enemy within, as Robert Schreiter points out: “Concentration on the distant enemy - real as that enemy might be - may make one blind of the nearer one. Denouncing those who are far away is safer, and it also avoids the unpleasant fact that some measure of oppression comes from within.”

In East Africa, immense oppression is imposed on the people by East Africans themselves which needs to be addressed. Evil has no color or race. An oppressed today might become an oppressor tomorrow. Moreover, as we have pointed out, even before the advent of colonialism, there were oppressive systems within the East African religious traditions.

We have discussed East African values not only to highlight their importance in the understanding of human wholeness but also to show that they are relevant values for dialogue with other traditions. East African core values include: relationality; holistic understanding of human being; hospitality, plurality, dynamism and flexibility in the East African understanding of God and other divine beings. These values will play an important role in the dialogue with Libermann’s theological anthropology. These values will provide a solid foundation for interpenetration, mutuality and dynamism that comes from the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Theological Anthropologies in Dialogue: Libermann and the East African Context

4.1 Introduction

Dialogue is a meeting of meanings, values, attitudes and understandings. We have argued that despite living in a Church whose dominant approach to mission was monologue, Libermann’s attitude to mission was dialogue with Africans whom he sought to evangelize through his missionaries. Libermann was transformed and informed by African experience to which he listened by instructing his missionaries to respect Africans and adapt to their cultures. Libermann’s attitude to Africans was partly influenced by his personal experience as a Jew. Jews at the time were despised and looked down upon by the wider society. His experience enabled him to feel compassionate with Africans who were dehumanized by the slave trade. In addition, he was epileptic. Epilepsy impeded him from becoming a priest for almost twelve years. We noted that suffering for Libermann was educative. It enabled him to be empathetic and in solidarity with those who were suffering, particularly Africans, and at the same time imitate the suffering of Jesus Christ.

In discussing East African theological anthropologies we have underlined the importance of relatedness through the lens of African Religions as an essential element of being human for East Africans. The underlying motive of emphasizing relatedness or relationality is to show that it is conducive to dialogue. Relationality is also the underlying theme of this chapter.

We will begin our discussion with looking at the meaning of dialogue. We will then look at the importance of history and narrative followed by a case study of an analysis of the first mission of the missionaries of the Holy Spirit at Bagamoyo, Tanzania. The purpose of this analysis is to establish the faithfulness of the first missionaries to East Africa to Libermann’s
teaching. We will then discuss human wholeness using the leitmotif of *ubuntu* and how it is expressed in East African hospitality and reconciliation. We will conclude the first part of our study by examining the relational Triune God as the source and origin of human wholeness and its implication to interreligious dialogue and ministry based on the charisms of the Holy Spirit.

The second part of our study will deal with the relevant implications arising from the dialogue to the contemporary East African Catholic Church. We begin here with the East African reality characterized by *anthropological poverty*, means and ways to address it, and the necessity of moving from dependency to interdependency. One of the means to address the challenge of anthropological poverty is by redefining the theology of inculturation which must shift its emphasis from retrieval to *interstitial spaces* or *in-between spaces* where cultures are located. We will show how Small Christian Communities (SCC) can be an effective way of evangelization and empowerment of Christians. The crucial challenge of HIV/AIDS and the Church’s response to it will be highlighted and discussed. This will be followed by looking at the East African multifaceted faces of Jesus which call for a ministry of *diaconal service*. We will wind up our discussion by delineating the importance of the life-giving Spirit in creation.

4.2 Dialogue

Dialogue is from the Greek *dia* which means “with” and *logos* meaning “word” or “conversation.” In this sense, dialogue means “conversation with.” It is presumed that the conversation is with another person or persons; consequently, dialogue is a two-way conversation or communication between persons.\(^{501}\) Dialogue demands duality for as Shorter puts it: “No dialogue is possible unless there are two sides or two persons ready to engage in it.

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\(^{501}\) Brigid Haines, *Dialogue and Narrative Design in the Works of Adabert Stifter* (London: University of London Press, 1991), 18. She says that the number of participants is not contained in the word dialogue but the general connotation is that dialogue is an interchange based on binary opposition of two speakers. It was popularized by Plato and the drama of Aeschylus.
When it begins, it takes the form of an exchange between two sides, a mutual address and response … a confrontation of beings, a meeting of meanings, values, attitudes and understandings.” 502 For dialogue to take place, the two persons must hold differing views on a subject with the purpose of learning more truth about the subject from the other. Simply put, in dialogue my perception of the truth makes a dialogue with your perception of truth in order to learn more truth. Dialogue then means relating with the other and relating with the other is dialogic. 503

Dialogue involves listening to each other. There are barriers to dialogue and listening which include prejudice, differences of language and imagery, contrary purposes, anxiety and defensiveness which have to be overcome. 504 “[T]here is need for courage and humility – courage to take risks and humility to accept the possibility of undergoing a change oneself. This mutual awareness that constitutes dialogue is the essential ingredient of fellowship and love. It is also a precondition for true conversion of heart.” 505

Vatican II officially embraced ecumenism and interreligious dialogue after many years of vigorous official rejection. For Pope John Paul II, dialogue is essential for theological anthropology. He says: “dialogue is an indispensable step along the path toward human self-

502 Shorter, African Christian Theology, 5.

503 Our understanding of truth statements has become “deabsolutized”. It has become “relational”, that is, all statements about reality are now seen to be related to the historical context, praxis intentionality, perspective of the speaker, and in that sense no longer “absolute”. Therefore, if my perception and description of the world is true only in a limited sense, that is, only as seen from my place in the world, then if I wish to expand my grasp of reality I need to learn from others what they know of reality that they can perceive from their place in the world that I cannot see from mine. That, however, can happen only through dialogue.


505 Ibid.
realization … of each individual and every human community.” During the time of Libermann, in nineteenth century Europe, truth, that is, a statement about reality, was conceived in an absolute, static, and exclusivistic either-or manner. It was believed that if a statement was true at one time, it was always true, and not only in the sense of statements about empirical facts but also in the sense of statements about the meaning of things. The ecclesiology of the Catholic Church, for instance, as we have pointed out, confined salvation in the Catholic Church, outside of which there was no salvation. Laurenti Magesa says:

Dialogue between Christianity and African Religion has never been a real conversation … On the contrary, contact between Christianity and African Religion has historically been predominantly a monologue, bedeviled by assumptions prejudicial against the latter, with Christianity culturally more vocal and ideologically more aggressive. Therefore, what we have heard until now is largely Christianity speaking about African Religion, not African Religion speaking for itself.

Our study is an ideological dialogue. First, we have the theological anthropology of Libermann’s understanding of l’œuvre des noirs which was influenced by 19th century Christian theological anthropology characterized by Eurocentricism. Conversation with other non-European cultures and religions was “predominantly a monologue”. Libermann struggled to overcome the prejudices against Africans prevalent during his period and was open to genuine dialogue. His missionary approach was conducive to dialogue. The qualities of good dialogue, namely openness, listening and humility were evident in Libermann’s approach and attitude to mission. Libermann understood missionary activity to be a mutual exchange of equal partners with different views about reality. He taught his missionaries that they must be informed by Africans whom they sought to evangelize. This was a radical shift from European mentality of the time which looked down on Africans.

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506 Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, 28.

Libermann showed extraordinary qualities of dialogue in the merger between the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary which he had founded and the Spiritans. There were many among his members who criticized him for allowing the merger to go ahead and the first major challenge he had to deal with was from within.\(^{508}\) Libermann stood firm on his decision and also showed that dialogue is not just pleasing everyone but it also involves difficult decisions which have to be taken courageously and decisively.

Second, we explored the theological anthropologies of the East African context through the lens of African Religions in the last chapter. We have highlighted underpinnings of these theological anthropologies that include relationality, holistic understanding of person, hospitality, openness to dialogue, tolerance to other religions, and multiplicity and dynamism of God and divine beings. It is because of these values that African Religions are dialogic and possess enormous potential and fertile ground to dialogue with Libermann’s theological anthropology.

Third, the task that remains is to show that the two sides of the dialogue can enrich each other and this enrichment is important for the contemporary East African Catholic Church which is faced with many challenges, most of which are rooted in history.

Bevans and Schroeder conclude their book *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, which according to many scholars in missiology is a masterpiece and classic, with “Mission as Prophetic Dialogue” as the title of the last chapter.\(^{509}\) *Prophetic dialogue*, they say, is a synthesis “of three strains that have grounded mission theology: mission as participation in

\(^{508}\) Koren, *Spiritans*, 106.

\(^{509}\) Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 348ff. The idea of prophetic dialogue is even developed more in their recent book: *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011). The term was first used by the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) at their General Chapter in 2000. Basically the term means that dialogue flows from the relational reality of who we are as human persons. It follows that to live, speak and act authentically we must engage others in an attitude of respect and friendship in a “spirit of dialogue”. Prophecy basically means proclamation. As Christians we proclaim the self-communicating God who calls us into a living relationship with Godself and God’s creation. Prophecy presupposes that one proclaims what he lives.
the life of the Trinity; mission as continuation of the mission of Jesus to preach, to serve and witness to the justice of God’s ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ reign; and mission as the proclamation of Christ as the world’s savior.”510 Bevans and Schroeder continue to elaborate on how prophetic dialogue must be carried out in a threefold manner: “with the poor, with culture and with other religions.”511 Our dialogue too of the two theological anthropologies between Libermann and the East African context is a prophetic dialogue that focuses on the poor, culture and religion. Our main focus though, is on the poor because these are the people to whom Libermann dedicated his l’œuvre des noirs. Since the marginalization of the poor and their cultures is part of our history as human beings, our conversation between the two theological anthropologies is going to dwell on history and the lessons we can learn from it.

4.3 History

History is a lived experience, a story of our humanness. Human history is important for anthropology because it is a story of ways human values are lived in experiential day-to-day life. Fullness of life is sought for in concrete historical conditions. It is because of the importance of human history that our analysis of Libermann’s theological anthropology started with his life story. Our main and avowed purpose of his life story was to show its influence and impact on his understanding of theological anthropology of l’œuvre des noirs. Our analysis of the East African theological anthropologies through the lens of African Religions dealt with the history of Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms, first, to highlight its importance to the understanding of human wholeness, and second, to show that despite the lack of written documents before colonialism and missionary evangelism, East Africans had a history, a living tradition narrated by a dynamic oral tradition.

510 Ibid. 348. My italics.

511 Ibid. 349.
Libermann’s life experience influenced him to make a first step to dialogue with Africans who were dehumanized by the Whites. Let us look at a historical dialogue between first, Libermann’s life story and the East African context, and what lessons it offers us, and second, between Libermann’s missionaries and the East African ransomed slaves at Zanzibar and Bagamoyo during the last half of the 19th century.

4.3.1 Libermann, Narrative and the Oppressed

History deserves narrative and more so the story of the oppressed. One common feature between Libermann’s life story and East African history is suffering and oppression. We have noted physical suffering (epilepsy) and social exclusion (because he was a Jew) as major challenges to Libermann’s personhood. At the same time, these experiences formed him to be in solidarity with those who suffer discrimination, particularly Africans, the major focus of his l’œuvre des noirs. Libermann’s main response was narrative. Libermann wrote memoirs and thousands of letters, many of which focused on the degrading and dehumanizing experience of Africans and how to ameliorate it by appropriate missionary action. East African history has been a story of suffering and violation of human rights and human dignity. Slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism which have dehumanized East Africans and caused untold suffering to them have been part and parcel of East African history. The story of the slave trade in East Africa, which we will discuss later, is a sad story of discrimination and dehumanization.

Libermann lived as a Jew for almost half of his life. Jews secluded themselves to preserve their Jewish identity and religion, and at the same time, they were discriminated against by the wider society. Even though the dreadful dehumanization of East African slaves cannot be equated to the humiliation which the Jews suffered during the time of Libermann, for Libermann
the humiliation he went through enabled him to be compassionate, empathetic and sympathetic with those who were suffering from discrimination.

The second half of Libermann’s life was a life of physical suffering from epilepsy which posed immense challenges to his human wholeness. At the same time, it instilled in him a sense of solidarity with those who suffered and motivated him to dedicate his *l’œuvre des noirs* to them. As we pointed out, suffering for Libermann was educative (chapter one).

East Africans have been resilient in face of suffering but resilience is not enough; they have to look ahead and that is why we must turn to Libermann for a good lesson. First and foremost, it is not our aim to be prisoners of history, but to learn from it as Libermann did. Libermann’s best contribution to Africans who were suffering was to narrate their story and to come to their aid through his missionaries. The story of exploitation and desecration of African cultures as well as values of African cultural heritage has to be narrated because the voices of these cultures have been suppressed for centuries.

We noted that according to Mbiti, for Africans, it is human activity that sets time in motion and time is humanized by it (chapter three). Narrative is a human activity. Paul Ricoeur fuses time and narrative by arguing for its centrality to our understanding of human identity.\(^\text{512}\) Ricoeur insists that the acting and suffering human subject is the final standard by which all

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\(^{512}\) Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University Press, 1984). Randy Boyagoda commenting on Ricoeur’s vision says that the fusion of time and narrative is necessary, indeed is written into the human condition itself, since Ricoeur is convinced that at the heart of human identity is the need to narrate, which in turn underwrites every literary and historical work. Boyagoda adds that that need becomes more urgent for individuals whose very acts of telling narrate something restorative about their lives as they seek resolution of the past and its legacies. In addition, readers of such works have an ethical responsibility to recognize the inherent dignity and significance of individuals struggling under forms of oppression. To read, for Ricoeur, is to validate one’s own humanity, that of the writer, and that of the peoples written. It is a humanist, virtue-ordered interest in the human being acting in time with and for others. Cf. Randy Boyagoda, [http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/265](http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/265) (accessed on November 15, 2012).
artistic and philosophical scholarship should be directed.\textsuperscript{513} Ricoeur observes that it is not enough to say that the oppressed are surviving despite the oppression, it is not enough to say that winning or losing is taking place in ways we cannot easily understand. “We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering … calls for narrative.”\textsuperscript{514} Even though Libermann did not physically go to the missions, he narrated the story of the suffering Africans. His story was so attractive that many young people joined the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary. At the time of the merger with the Spiritans in 1848, Libermann’s Society which had received provisional approval by Rome seven years before had 62 members whereas the Spiritan Congregation which had existed for 146 years had only 13 members.\textsuperscript{515} It was Libermann’s story that he narrated to Propaganda Fide in Rome in form of memoirs that enabled the Roman officials to grant him provisional approval to his Society of the Holy Heart of Mary. The overall implication for the East African Catholic Church and theologians in the region is that they face a daunting task and challenge of narrating the story of the marginalized and oppressed.

Second, despite the suffering Libermann went through, he had a positive attitude to life. He even discouraged people from consoling him. He often referred to epilepsy as \textit{ma chère maladie}, “my precious sickness”, to show that it was dear to him, loved by him, and treasured by him. He assures his brother Samson and his wife: “So I can assure you, my dear friends, that my beloved illness is for me a great treasure, preferable to all the goods that this world offers to its

\textsuperscript{513} Ibid. 75.

\textsuperscript{514} Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, Volume I, 75.

\textsuperscript{515} Koren, \textit{Spiritans}, 103.
He saw himself graced in an extraordinary way by the Spirit because of his illness. East Africa is bedeviled by many problems which include poverty, dependency syndrome and diseases like HIV/AIDS. In face of these problems and challenges to human wholeness, there is always the necessity to be positive about life and develop strategies that enhance to live life in its fullness.

Third, Libermann looked forward to the future with hope. Libermann had all the reasons to look back to his life experience and narrate the many hardships he went through in his past life. On the contrary, we do not see that spirit in Libermann’s writing. For instance, he never looked at his Jewishness as a way to attract or to appeal for pity from others. As Cahill notes, “Libermann shed almost entirely his Jewish clothes.” Libermann was never a prisoner of his history. Libermann’s hope is also important for East Africans whose history is characterized by suffering and exploitation. There is always a danger of dwelling in the past misery to attract pity and attention, instead of looking ahead with hope. As we will see, the theology of inculturation has put too much emphasis on retrieval; that is why it needs a new face.

Dialogue like history is a lived experience and for that reason let us assess the dialogue between Libermann’s theological anthropology of l’œuvre des noirs and East African theological anthropologies through the lens of existential circumstances of day-to-day experience by analyzing the early Spiritan missionaries’ mission at Zanzibar and Bagamoyo, Tanzania.

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517 Cahil, Francis Libermann’s Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, 293.
4.3.2 Evangelization of Ransomed Slaves in East Africa

South African historian and theologian, John de Gruchy emphasizes the need of a mutual and critical dialogue between theologians and historians. He rightly says: 518

Historians and theologians need each other. Historians seek to establish the way things were and why; theologians are concerned to go beyond the “what” to how things should be. In their different ways both should therefore address the fundamental question, “So what?”…I am convinced that theologians must endeavor to be good historians in order to do theology … For us with the contemporary concern for the mission of the church, and therefore who regard missiology as a focal point in doing theology, the need for historians and theologians to be engaged in a critical dialogue becomes essential. We need to be rooted in the concreteness of history, both past and contemporary, yet exploring the horizons of what should be and what must be.

“We need to be rooted in the concreteness of history” if we are to do a meaningful dialogue between Libermann’s theological anthropology and the theological anthropologies of the East African context. For that reason, from a theological anthropological point of view, we are to study the evangelization method of the ransomed slaves by the first Spiritan missionaries to East Africa at Zanzibar 519 and at Bagamoyo, 520 by exploring why Spiritan missionaries and ransomed slaves acted in such and such a manner and at the same time look at what should have been done.


519 Zanzibar, which is infamous in history as one of the greatest slave markets in the world, sold between 50,000 and 60,000 slaves per annum in its markets during the second half of the 19th century. This city whose center is known as Stone Town exchanged hands between Portuguese and Arabs and when the Portuguese left in the late 17th century, it fell into Persian hands. By mid-nineteenth century a BuSaidi dynasty originally from Oman at the Persian Gulf was in full control. One of the powerful rulers Said Said (1804-1856) moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840. From Zanzibar the Sultan controlled entrance into the interior of Eastern Africa as far as the Great Lakes region. By the time the Spiritans arrived at Zanzibar, large quantities of slaves, ivory and spices were traded there. Cf. Paul Kollman, The Evangelization of Slaves, 37f.

520 Bagamoyo on the Tanzania mainland was not strictly speaking a slave trade market but since it was a main destination point of slaves en route to Zanzibar, some slaves exchanged hands for local needs, between dealers and local slave masters. Bagamoyo, it is said, is derived from two Swahili words, bwaga and moyo. Bwaga means “to throw down” or “put down”. Moyo as we have hinted in the last chapter means “heart” or “soul”. Bagamoyo then was a place where captured slaves after a long journey from the interior, would put down their hearts, lay down the burden of their hearts and give up hope because it was the last contact with the mainland before a trip to Zanzibar where misery and desperation awaited them. An alternative meaning of Bagamoyo is derived from the Swahili word ku-agha meaning “bid farewell” which means that Bagamoyo was a place where slaves after going through hardships
This historical study is intended to examine the influence and impact of Libermann’s teaching both on his missionaries and on the ransomed slaves whom the missionaries sought to evangelize in East Africa. When a word or teaching is passed on, there is always room for adaptation, misinterpretation, assimilation, or even outright rejection, each of which is traceable in the Spiritan attempt to implement Libermann’s teaching by evangelizing ransomed slaves at Zanzibar and Bagamoyo. The ransomed slaves were the first East Africans in modern era to be evangelized by Christian missionaries. It is important to examine this dialogue and interaction through the lens of Spiritan missionaries because Libermann never did any missionary activity in East Africa (let alone outside France). His missionary ideals were passed on, preached and practiced by his missionaries who were sent to Africa, the prime focus of his mission.

Before we embark on this important analysis, it is crucial to be reminded of Paul Kollman’s cautionary remarks we alluded to in chapter one. First, missionaries must be cautious of assisting others on terms set by themselves. There is always a danger of paternalism. Second, we should also be cautious of anachronism that is, passing judgment on the past on terms set by us and worse still based on present reality.

It is proper to examine Libermann’s teaching through his missionaries because, first, the East African Spiritan mission started in 1863 at Zanzibar, eleven years after the death of Venerable Francis Libermann when his ideals were still strong and fresh in those who lived with him and were associated with him. Libermann’s successor as the Congregation’s Superior General, Fr. Ignatius Schwindenhammer (1852-81), who sent Spiritan missionaries to East Africa, was a close associate of Libermann. Second, there is no doubt that Spiritan missionaries tried to


emulate and put into practice Libermann’s life and teaching. Kollman points out: “Holy Ghost missionaries revered Libermann’s voluminous writings, especially his 1846 Memorandum to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide as guidelines for missionary action.”

Third, the East African mission is also a litmus test on Libermann’s teaching and the influence it had on his missionaries and the people who were evangelized. Besides Libermann’s teaching, Spiritan missionaries were also influenced by other factors, particularly the teaching of the Catholic Church on what Bevans and Schroeder call the six constants: Christ, ecclesiology, salvation, eschatology, anthropology and culture. Bevans and Schroeder say that Christology was high, ecclesiology was institutional, eschatology was futuristic and individualistic, salvation was spiritual only through the church (extra ecclesiam nulla salus), anthropology and culture were both negative due to the fact that many missionaries looked down on non-European culture which they conceived to be primitive but at the same time pitied --what they referred to as pagan. These models had an important impact on Libermann’s teaching on mission and also a substantial impact on the Spiritans who evangelized East Africa during the second half of the 19th Century.

Even though early Spiritan missionary activity in East Africa was basically a monologue because of their tabula rasa attitude to the culture of East Africans, nevertheless, there was some kind of dialogue between the evangelizers and the evangelized. First and foremost, any interaction or meeting together of peoples whether between equals, or between superior and

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523 In Rome, Spiritans were answerable to Propaganda Fide, besides which the Congregation of the Holy Spirit gave them financial support, and missionaries had to heed their instructions.

524 Bevan and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 229.

525 Ibid. 229f.
inferior, involves some kind of dialogue. The fact that the responses of the evangelized are rarely heard and noted does not mean that they did not have any response whatsoever to what they were taught by missionaries. Second, in Kollman’s assessment of Spiritan methodology, there are noticeable voices of the evangelized ransomed slaves that give us a clue of how they responded to Spiritan evangelization.

Kollman from a historical, social-anthropological and moral point of view has written so far the best assessment of Spiritan missionary activity at Zanzibar and Bagamoyo between 1863 and 1900. He points out that previous historical studies on evangelization of Africans have put emphasis on the exploits of self-sacrificing European missionaries but failed to address the experience of Africans evangelized. Kollman embarks on an important and almost impossible task of reconstructing the experience of those evangelized. I say “almost impossible task” because there is an old saying that history is written by victors which may be true for this early Spiritan mission.

The Missionaries of the Holy Spirit were the first Catholic missionaries to evangelize East Africa in the modern era. Spiritan strategy and methodology of evangelization set a tone of

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526 Albert de Jong, *The Challenge of Vatican II in East Africa: The Contribution of Dutch Missionaries to the Implementation of Vatican II in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Malawi 1965-1975* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 18-25. de Jong describes four different forms of interactions by the early missionaries: translation, substitution, assimilation, and Christianization. For instance, by introducing education, early missionaries promoted the local culture. They transformed local languages from oral to written languages. They wrote dictionaries and grammars of the local languages. The first French-Swahili dictionary was written by Spiritans.

527 Kollman, *The Evangelization of Slaves*. Kollman’s work is a revision of a dissertation submitted and successfully defended at the University of Chicago, Divinity School. He did much research trying to reconstruct the forgotten story of the evangelized. He also heavily relied on the findings of John Kieran who from a historical point of view analyzed Spiritan missionary activity between 1863 and 1914. Cf. Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers.”

528 Ibid. 10.

529 Earlier efforts by the Portuguese Augustinians to evangelize the eastern coast of Africa and particularly Mombasa which was a Portuguese garrison at the beginning of the 17th Century, ended in failure and bloodshed. At Mombasa the local king, Chingulia Jerome, who was a Christian, reverted to Islam, and killed the Christians. In August 1631, his men martyred more than 300 Christians known as the Mombasa martyrs because they refused to renounce their
evangelization further in the interior of East Africa. The first people to be evangelized were the ex-slaves who formed a nucleus of the first Christians in East Africa. Missionaries of the Holy Spirit arrived at Zanzibar, a slave trade market, in the Indian Ocean, off the coast of Tanzania mainland, in 1863. They moved to Bagamoyo on the eastern coast of mainland Tanzania in 1868. Britain had outlawed the slave trade in 1807. As we pointed out in chapter two, Pope Gregory XVI’s encyclical *In Supremo Apostolatus* of December 8, 1839 condemned the slave trade as an inhuman act and forbade the faithful to trade in Blacks or any other kind of persons. However, when the Spiritans arrived in East Africa, the slave trade was at its peak. Spiritans decided to concentrate their mission on slaves or ex-slaves and as we will see, there was justification for this choice. They bought slaves, taught them useful trades in life and christened them. Among the slaves the main target was children who were put in orphanages, then school dormitories, before they were inserted in Christian villages or “freedom villages.”

For Spiritans, the two main purposes of evangelization of East Africans were anthropological, *salus animarum* (salvation of souls) and ecclesiological, establishment of the Catholic Church. The methodology they used to achieve both aims was the creation of Christian villages or “sacred space” which had been spearheaded by Jesuits in Latin America in the 17th and 18th centuries. Influenced by 19th century theological anthropology, dominated by Catholic ecclesiocentricism which stipulated that proper human personhood was to be found in the faith. There is no recognizable trace of this earlier evangelization effort except some few buildings like Fort Jesus in Mombasa.

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530 Ibid. 63, 91. Kollman points out that the Spiritans believed that Africans had a soul and were so zealous for the salvation of souls that they employed someone to watch cemeteries for people thrown there still alive whom they could baptize. Kollman also mentions a special group of women who visited the sick and baptized them. In a Muslim society, these women “baptisuses” often went to homes where priests could not be allowed to go, assisted the sick but their real intention was to baptize them. Also cf. John A. Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers,” 146.

confines of the Catholic Church outside of which there is no salvation, the Spiritans created Christian villages where they enclosed ransomed slaves in order to form them into Christians. Spiritans were convinced that Christian villages or what they often referred to as “freedom villages” would help the ransomed slaves to deepen their faith. The Spiritans had a patronizing and *tabula rasa* attitude to the ransomed slaves they evangelized.

Spiritans never attempted to evangelize the surrounding Muslim community even though they enjoyed good relations with their leaders. First, they did not want to imperil the permission given to them by the Sultan of Zanzibar to establish their mission and also to avoid awakening Muslim fanaticism when European presence and control in this region was thin on the ground. Second, Spiritan missionaries were aware of the fact that it was difficult to convert Muslims. Attempts to proselytize Muslims in North Africa had not achieved much success. Third, Spiritan missionaries looked at the surrounding Muslim environment with mistrust and disdain. It was unsafe for “liberated” slaves because they could be recaptured easily and either be reinserted in the slave trade circuit or could be taken in by slave owners at the coast. Some of those who tried to escape from the Spiritan enclave turned back after realizing that it was safer and better to be in the hands of patronizing Spiritans than to be exposed to marauding Arab slave traders.

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532 Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 120. The first Christian village at Bagamoyo received the name St. Joseph in 1873; forty families were living there in 1876, seventy in 1878 and sixty in 1880. The village was organized like a religious community based on *ora et labora*, “work and prayer”. They had to be indoors at 10 pm. A bell called the villagers to morning and evening prayers. All villagers worked for the mission for five days a week and in return were given weekly food and clothing they needed. Each household had a piece of land to cultivate but if one neglected his field, it was given away to another.

533 Ibid. 95. Sultan Sayyid Majid allowed the Spiritans to establish their mission in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo and gave them material support after realizing that in Zanzibar they were not a threat to the Muslim community and taught practical and useful skills to ex-slaves.

Spiritan ministry won admiration and praise of many people who visited Bagamoyo and Zanzibar missions, like Henry Stanley. The British, who had ships in the Indian Ocean to monitor illegal shipment of slaves, gave the slaves they intercepted on high seas to the Spiritans rather than to the Anglican mission. Another unlikely source of support of Spiritan missionary activity came from Sultan Majid who gave Spiritans large estates of land (which they still own) on which they established Christian villages at Bagamoyo. He did this in recognition of the good work the Spiritans were doing.

Spiritans made a major contribution to the human development of Africans. Fr. Charles Sacleux is regarded as one of the greatest Swahili lexicographers; produced his first dictionary (French – Swahili) in 1891 but it was published in Paris in 1941. Fr. Alexandre Le Roy, a sociologist, proposed new reforms in Christian villages that included more liberty to villagers, remuneration for their work, and even an option to leave if they wished. Le Roy’s reforms were discussed at the Spiritan Chapter in 1884. However, Kollman reports that many of these reforms were not implemented.

Kollman labors to avoid passing judgment on Spiritan evangelization method, but his overall assessment is that from our vantage today, Spiritan actions are “morally dubious.” First, my reading of the title of his book, The Evangelization of Slaves suggests that the evangelized were slaves before and after being ‘ransomed’ and taken in by the Spiritans, educated in orphanages and boarding schools, and then confined in Christian villages. Kollman’s justification of the title


536 Kollman, Evangelization of the Slaves, 219ff.

537 Ibid.

of the book is that Spiritans did not call them free, nor did they see them as slaves, but called them their children which may resonate with slavery today for “to evangelize slaves whom they did not unequivocally declare to be free is something we would reflexively condemn today.”

Although Spiritans called the enclosures, or enclaves, Christian “freedom villages”, others looked at them as another form of slave institution, a step away from prison, where freedom of movement and expression were curtailed. Young children had to become Christians. Ransomed slaves were subject to hard labor which eventually led to labor and remuneration disputes. Adults had to work hard to support and maintain the young children.

Second, Kollman claims that although slavery was a tragedy, and Spiritans took a pragmatic approach to it, at the same time for some Spiritans it was seen as a providential opportunity to establish the Church and win converts to the Catholic Church and for that reason slaves had an instrumental value for the evangelization of the interior. He adds that the majority of the slaves bought by Spiritans were children, for whom they used to appeal to donors to finance their mission. Vincent Donovan, a fellow Spiritan, questions the rationale of fighting a system by

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539 Kollman, *The Evangelization of Slaves*, XX. Kollman describes a slave as “someone who exists in a property relation to another and thus whose life and labor belongs to the other”. By exchanging hands, slaves then had moved from one form of slavery to another replacing merchant – commodity relationship prior to being bought by Spiritans to patron – client relationship. We noted in chapter two that John Noonan describes slavery as “the right of the owner to determine the identity, education and vocation of the slave and to possess the fruit of the slave’s body.” Noonan poignantly points out that slavery was practiced for centuries by all societies with scarcely any condemnation. Cf. John T. Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 6. Kollman contends that Spiritans changed the religious identity of the slaves which aptly applies to Noonan’s description of slavery.

540 In a society where there was little government control, Spiritans had effective control of Christian villages. They had policing and judicial structures as well as prisons where they incarcerated the culprits and those who tried to escape from the Christian villages. Kieran points out that surprisingly, villagers in the Christian villages were allowed to keep slaves themselves. Cf. Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 129.

541 Even today, normally children are required to follow the religion of their parents. Spiritans had assumed the role of “fathers” in a patron-client relationship. The children had no other choice but to become Catholics.

542 Ibid. 18, 64.
buying the products of the same system.\textsuperscript{543} Lawrence Njoroge claims that traders in human misery intensified their efforts to get slaves from the interior due to the demand created by the Spiritans’ ransoming of slaves.\textsuperscript{544} Njoroge’s claim may be true for Mombasa where there was a great number of runaway slaves to Spiritan missions which resulted in acute labor shortage, incited Arab hostility against the Spiritans, and created more demand for slaves.\textsuperscript{545} However, there is little evidence to suggest that Spiritans’ ransoming of slaves created labor shortage at Bagamoyo and Zanzibar.

Third, Kollman insists that Spiritans were not abolitionists but rather emphasized gradual abolition that would come with Christian European civilization or colonization.\textsuperscript{546} He also claims that Libermann was “a committed abolitionist,” a claim we said is untenable (chapter two).

Fourth, of paramount importance to the theological anthropological discussion, Kollman engages in an insightful discussion about the meaning of conversion. He considers Paul’s conversion on his way to Damascus as a model of conversion. It is his conviction that Spiritans never attempted to convert the slaves they evangelized even though they changed their religious identity.\textsuperscript{547} Indeed this is where the whole irony lies. Spiritan mission did succeed in \textit{forming} Christian identity in ways that even Spiritans least expected. Slaves who had been uprooted from their homes and culture, dehumanized, ill-treated and isolated became aware of their own importance and were able to express that identity in collective acts which showed their solidarity


\textsuperscript{545} Baur, \textit{2000 Years of Christianity in Africa}, 231.

\textsuperscript{546} Kollman, \textit{The Evangelization of Slaves}, 62ff.

\textsuperscript{547} Ibid. 17. In his discussion of the meaning of conversion which is derived from the Greek, \textit{metanoia}, Kollman says that a complete once for all conversion similar to Paul’s conversion envisioned by the Spiritans never happened.
and did indeed become the genesis of many Catholic communities in the interior of East Africa. Kollman employs Edward P. Thompson’s\textsuperscript{548} influential notion of \textit{moral economy} to describe this identity which was experienced in ways that even Spiritans did not expect and was not always manifested in loyalty to the patronizing Spiritans. Drawing from Albert Hirschman’s\textsuperscript{549} three responses to unsatisfactory situations, Kollman describes how Africans reacted to the Spiritan enclosures by exit (escape strategy), voice (voicing concerns) and loyalty (adhering to the system) in ways which reveal that they had absorbed and internalized the \textit{moral economy} of the Spiritan mission.\textsuperscript{550} Kollman asserts that the three relate to one another dialectically, so much so that certain voices can be for loyalty to improve the system instead of exiting.\textsuperscript{551} For instance, voices of agitation by villagers were expressed which for some Spiritans may have been indicative of the education policy at Bagamoyo.\textsuperscript{552} Kollman insists that those who exit may also express their loyalty to the internal values of the system which they seem to have abhorred in the

\textsuperscript{548} Edward P. Thompson, \textit{The Making of the English Working Class} (London: Alfred A. Knoff, 1963). The concept of a "moral economy" has proved useful in attempting to describe and explain the contentious behavior of peasants in response to onerous social relations in England in the nineteenth century. Essentially, it is the idea that peasant communities share a set of normative attitudes concerning the social relations and social behaviors that surround the local economy: the availability of food, the prices of subsistence commodities, the proper administration of taxation, and the operation of charity, for example. This is sometimes referred to a "subsistence ethic": the idea that local social arrangements should be structured in such a way as to respect the subsistence needs of the rural poor. Peasant communities are aroused to protest and rebellion when the terms of the local subsistence ethic are breached by local elites, state authorities, or market forces and this explains the food riots in England at the time.


\textsuperscript{550} Kollman, \textit{Evangelization of Slaves}, 21. Kollman gives an example of Léon who escaped from the Spiritan mission and expressed his dissatisfaction and grievance to the French consul in Zanzibar. For Kollman, Léon’s exit and his exercise of his voice show how he had internalized the moral economy of the mission.

\textsuperscript{551} Ibid. 21, 22.

\textsuperscript{552} Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 122. Kieran says that some of the responses included the refusal to work, absenting from Church services or running away from the village. More important though, a delegation was sent to the Superior in 1880 to ask for land and liberty. The request for land was granted when Le Roy, a social anthropologist who became Superior General of the Spiritans later, allowed the villagers to own their own land which was demarcated from the land of the mission.
first place. For instance, some escapees from the Spiritan mission started their own Christian villages in the interior of East Africa. *This kind of attitude shows that the Spirit works and moves people in mysterious ways even to the Spiritans.*

Assessing the Spiritan strategy and methodology and how the Spiritans understood, appropriated, internalized and passed on Libermann’s teaching to East Africans, we notice that despite the racial attitudes which the Spiritans had toward East Africans, there were also some positive contributions to the humanity of the ransomed slaves. First and foremost, prioritizing slaves for evangelization as the Spiritans did was a theological anthropological question because slavery dehumanized people. Spiritans had not departed from the intention of their master Libermann. The choice of slaves was in conformity with Libermann’s cherished objective of *l’œuvre des noirs*. *L’œuvre des noirs* was a missionary endeavor for the liberation of the abandoned, especially Blacks. It was also in conformity with the 1849 Rule, sometimes referred to as *The Règlements of Francis Libermann*, which states that the specific purpose of the Congregation is “the care of those who are most in need and most abandoned” (article 1). As we noted in chapter one, the “most abandoned” may also refer to the slave masters who were dehumanizing others and needed conversion. But, by and large, the misery of the slaves attracted untold pity and need for urgent liberation. In addition, European missionaries presented Africa as an object of pity. “The Spiritans described eastern Africa as the most abandoned place in the world with regard to truth and proper religion.” Consequently, by prioritizing slaves as the

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554 Kollman, *The Evangelization of Slaves*, 49. Antione Horner, one of the first missionaries, asked himself whether there was any place in the world as abandoned as East Africa.
object of evangelization, the Spiritans had not parted from the intention of their master
Libermann.

In addition, Donal Dorr\textsuperscript{555} says that the Church should be an effective defender of the poor
and powerless in society and an encouragement to them in the struggle for justice. With this
understanding, we can say that the poor in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century East Africa were indeed the
slaves who were uprooted from their homes, dehumanized and sold. It is very hard to see any
other group of people who were more desperate and abandoned than the slaves in East Africa at
the time. The Spiritans’ commitment to the struggle against this structural injustice therefore can
be termed as a “\textit{preferential option for the poor}.” However, as we will see, although Spiritans
made a “\textit{preferential option for the poor}” by evangelizing slaves, their weakness was the
negative attitude they had about them.

Second, Libermann’s theological anthropology was informed by Christian anthropology of
the 19\textsuperscript{th} century which insisted that human salvation was to be attained through sacrifice, and
doing good works. The ultimate theological anthropological end of \textit{l’œuvre des noirs} was the
salvation of the both the missionaries and the evangelized. According to Libermann, to achieve
this noble goal, abandonment was necessary.

Jean Gay synthesizes Libermann’s teaching on missionary apostolate and perfection in
abandonment or surrender to God.\textsuperscript{556} It means to put oneself at the disposition of God and allow
the Holy Spirit to work in you. It is not a single act of virtue but habitual disposition of the soul
united with the will of God necessary for holiness of life. Charles Ebelebe concurs with Gay’s

\textsuperscript{555} Dorr, \textit{Option for the Poor}, 11.

\textsuperscript{556} Jean Gay, \textit{La Doctrine Missionnaire du Vénérable Père Libermann} (Paris: Maison-Mère), 1943. He points out
six important elements of Libermann missionary teaching: 1) Abandonment to God. 2) Holiness of life. 3) Rule of
Life. 4) Harmonious relations with civil authorities. 5) Inculturation. 6) Respect people who are evangelized. Of
these six elements Gay says that the most important one is abandonment or surrender to God.
understanding of Libermann’s teaching on abandonment as an absolute necessity for holiness and a *sine qua non* for his missionaries; however, Ebelebe also poignantly adds that Libermann’s insistence on holiness of missionaries had racial overtones.\(^\text{557}\) According to Ebelebe, Libermann taught that missionaries had to be holy in order to atone the sins of Africans.\(^\text{558}\) In other words, Libermann’s instruction on perfection and holiness of his missionaries was not just because missionaries had to be holy but also prompted by the dreadful and evil situation of the Africans.

Nevertheless, by leaving their country, particularly France, and arriving at Bagamoyo, like slaves who laid down their burden and heart, Spiritan missionaries too laid down their heart at Bagamoyo. Many of the first missionaries buried at Bagamoyo died before their thirtieth birthday. Despite their shortcomings, Spiritan missionaries gave up their life for the mission. “*There is no greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends*” (Jn 15:13) aptly applies to the early Spiritan missionaries to East Africa as well.

Third, we noted in chapter two that Libermann’s theological anthropology emphasized the importance of work and the need to carefully interiorize the ethos of work in Africans who might have developed a negative attitude to work after years of slavery. Koren says that according to Libermann, human beings can realize their full potential through work.\(^\text{559}\) He continues: “It is only when the necessity of work is understood and accepted that an ‘advanced civilization’ can arise to bring about ‘an honest and natural well-being’ as well as ‘social and civil order.’”\(^\text{560}\) Spiritan Missionaries emphasized *ora et labora* as part and parcel of their missionary strategy at


\(^{558}\) Ibid.


\(^{560}\) Ibid. ND VIII, 248, VI, 66.
Zanzibar and Bagamoyo. They said: “The value of work and the love for work was an essential factor in the moral education of the people.”\textsuperscript{561} Baur says that the best achievement of Christian villages was that they became centers of ‘civilization’.\textsuperscript{562} He adds that Spiritans’ commitment to work was recognized by Sultan Barghash who commended agricultural development at Bagamoyo. According to Baur, it is this type of civilization that attracted chiefs in the interior to invite Spiritans to bring it to them.\textsuperscript{563} Later on, Spiritans introduced coffee in Kenya and Tanzania which transformed the economy of those countries.\textsuperscript{564}

There is no doubt that early Spiritan missionaries made a positive contribution to the human wholeness of ransomed slaves. However, although Spiritan missionaries made a \textit{preferential option for the poor} by choosing to focus their missionary activity on slaves, although they sacrificed their lives for the mission, their missionary endeavor is overshadowed by their dehumanizing attitude to the people they were supposed to liberate. First and foremost, patron-client relationship in an enclosed environment curtailed the flourishing of the humanness of the ransomed slaves. This was clearly seen in the failure on the part of Spiritans to work out remuneration procedures aimed at a just wage for the work which the ransomed slaves did. Spiritans did not conscientize the ransomed slaves to understand that what they received after their work (food and clothing) was their right, not a favor. The right to a just wage became a favor. This created an attitude of dependency. Subsequent missions in the interior of East Africa even by other Religious Congregations perpetuated the attitude of patron-client relationship and


\textsuperscript{562} Baur, \textit{2000 Years of Christianity in Africa}, 232. “Civilization” here means social and economic development, not “European civilization” as it was understood in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{563} Ibid.

dependency. Mission stations became centers of “handouts” from benevolent European missionaries. Instead of encouraging East African Christians to earn what they get by hard work, they encouraged them to be beggars. As we will observe, the East African church is still a begging church.

Second, an important theological anthropological question is the attitude of the Spiritans toward those they evangelized and changed their religious identity. This is where the Spiritan missionaries fell short of the teaching of Libermann in a crucial way. We have noted that Spiritans did change the religious identity of the slaves they evangelized but did not attempt to convert them on their own terms. Even though Spiritans had sacrificed their lives to go to East Africa which they described as the most abandoned place in the world, and gave up their lives for the sake of that mission, Spiritans did not abandon the general racial attitudes which Europeans had against Africans but rather allowed these attitudes to influence the exercise of their ministry in East Africa. Spiritan missionaries carried the baggage of the general prejudices of Europe against Africans as descendants of Ham, lazy and intellectually inferior. As we pointed out, Libermann too had European racial attitudes against Africans and for that reason needed a phenomenological epoché, the suspension of the natural attitude that prevented him to see Africans as they really are. However, what brought outstanding transformation in Libermann’s life was that he was informed by African experience and listened to it. This insight enabled him to instruct his missionaries to respect African cultures. “Get rid of Europe, its

565 Njoroge, Century of Catholic Endeavour, 192f. Njoroge believes that 50 years later, Spiritans might have recognized the danger of giving handouts. He mentions a Kikuyu custom of bride-wealth which is offered to the parents of the girl by the family of the groom. There were divergent policies between Spiritans and Consolata missionaries when this custom was analogously applied to girls joining Religious Life. The Consolata missionaries eagerly paid the bride-wealth for each girl joining Religious Life whilst the Spiritans refused to do so. As a result, the Consolata received many more girls to Religious Life in their missionary territory than Spiritans. In some cases, parents forced their daughters to move away from the Spiritans to the benevolent Consolata. It should also be mentioned that the rejection of bride-wealth by Spiritans might not have been due to change of heart with regard to missionary gifts but rather due to their misinterpretation of bride-wealth which in their dairies was likened to selling girls like goats. Cf. St. Austin’s Journal, September 11, 1931 and October 1, 1931.
customs and its spirit. Become black with the Blacks”, he said. He also realized that conversion is a life-long journey for everybody including himself. Missionaries must not only convert those whom they seek to evangelize but missionaries too must be converted by the evangelized.

Libermann stressed personal sanctification of the missionaries. Spiritan missionaries did not “become black with the Blacks”, neither did they “get rid of Europe, its customs and its spirit”, but instead enforced the European customs and spirit on East Africans they evangelized with a view to convert them to Catholicism. However, as Bosch points out, true conversion is not joining a community to secure “eternal salvation” but rather true Christian conversion is:

a change in allegiance in which Christ is accepted as the Lord and center of one’s life. A Christian is not simply somebody who stands better chance of being “saved”, but a person who accepts the responsibility to serve God in this life and promotes God’s reign in all its forms. Conversion involves personal cleansing, forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal in order to become a participant in the mighty works of God.

We have alluded to the Greek word *metanoia* which means “conversion” or “change of heart” or “change of way of life”. The conversion that is required is not just a change of one’s religious identity as the missionaries had thought; it is a change of one’s way of life, a complete turn-around. It is a gift of God and for the whole of one’s life. Since conversion is through the grace of God which moves one to conversion and an inner personal experience, it is also difficult to know who is truly converted and who is not. We have to look at people’s actions and the way they look at reality.

Third, during his seminary and novitiate enclosures for almost thirteen years, Libermann’s outlook on reality and spirituality was closed-in spirituality until the vista of mission appeared on the horizon. Ransomed slaves too were confined in Christian villages which curtailed human

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566 ND IX, 330.

development and human flourishing. Enclosures do not provide an environment conducive for full human wholeness and development. We highlighted the deleterious effects of the Jewish ghetto life, and seminary and novitiate cloisters on Libermann’s human development. Employing Cozzens term, *puer aeternus*, “a boy eternally” there was a danger that Libermann would remain *puer aeternus* because of these enclosures. The same would apply to the ransomed slaves; there was a danger that they too would remain *pueri aeterni* in Christian villages. Furthermore, we noted in the last chapter that relationality is an important concept of being human in East African traditional and cultural milieu. Relationality is suffocated in enclosures and needs open space to flourish. For the ex-slaves, evangelization was a double tragedy: on the one hand, they had been dehumanized by traders in human misery; on the other hand, Spiritans confined them in enclosures that curtailed human flourishing. Worst of all, even though there was nothing wrong in liberating or ransoming slaves, putting them in enclosures left an *indelible mark* on the East African church, succinctly put by Baur: “… to the outside world a liberated slave remained a slave and therefore Christianity was seen as the *religion of the slaves.*”568 However, it must be pointed out that this attitude was mainly prevalent around Bagamoyo but not widespread in East Africa.

Furthermore, Christian mission is done in the Spirit. The Spirit of God is not limited to space and time. This is what Libermann realized when he was moving out of the novitiate enclosure to the ‘outside world.’ He realized too that there were many souls to be saved out there. Like Jesus who was led by the Spirit at the beginning of his mission (Lk 4:1, 14), Libermann too was led by the Spirit to start his mission and to go where the Spirit led him. *He realized as well that the Spirit can neither be localized nor encapsulated by space and time.*

568 Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 231. Italics are author’s.
Fourth, the greatest setback of the Spiritans was their failure to form the local clergy mainly due to racial bias against East Africans. Libermann had insisted that the training of the local clergy was a “sine qua non.”\textsuperscript{569} This is what Propaganda Fide in Rome had recommended. In the beginning Spiritans were enthusiastic to train the local clergy and a seminary was built at Zanzibar in 1869. Father Charles Durparquet who was rector of this seminary between 1870 and 1872 can be singled out for his efforts to strengthen the academic quality of the education program at the seminary and establishment of the confraternity of the Holy Spirit to enhance the sanctification of the seminarians and conversion of Africans.\textsuperscript{570} However, his efforts fizzled out as Kieran reports:\textsuperscript{571}

There were eight students in the seminary in 1869 at the start of the project. By mid-1870 there were twelve, but Horner said he would be happy if four persevered. At the end of 1870, there were twenty and this remained the figure throughout 1871 and 1872. On returning from France in 1876, Horner put out all the poor students, so then only ten were left, who were reduced to four by June. That was the end of the attempt. Although in 1880 and 1881 Baur referred to thirty and forty in Zanzibar Seminary, these were really being trained as catechists.

The second attempt was to train Spiritan Brothers and on November 1, 1875, Brother Philip Mzuako became the first native born East African to be professed in the Congregation.\textsuperscript{572}

\textsuperscript{569} Koren, The Spiritans, 167.

\textsuperscript{570} Kollman, The Evangelization of Slaves, 147f.

\textsuperscript{571} Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 135. Kieran enumerates some of the major reasons for the failure of the first seminary in East Africa. First, the teaching method and curriculum was too strenuous: medium of instruction French, subjects taught included: Greek, Latin, Arithmetic, Vocal and Instrumental Music. There was no effort to incorporate local languages like Swahili in the curriculum. Second, there were disagreements among the Spiritans about the training of clerical students; Charles Durparquet wanted them to be allowed more latitude whilst others like Horner were for confinement. Third and worst of all, Spiritans felt that Africans lacked the ability and had no true vocation, celibacy being the major obstacle.

\textsuperscript{572} Gerard M. Nnamunga and Don Bosco Onyalla, eds., 25 Years of the East African Province (Dar-es-Salaam: Amref, 1998), 24. Brother Philip Mzauko was born in Malawi, brought to Zanzibar as a slave and ransomed by Horner for 50 francs. He was christened before he was sent to France where he did his novitiate and then was professed in the Congregation in 1875. He came back to East Africa and worked at Mhonda before he left the Congregation in 1880 after a quarrel with the Spiritans.
However, one major setback was that East African professed members were not treated as members but rather had an intermediate status between professed Brothers and laity. Baur, the Superior, suggested to the Spiritan Generalate in France that Africans who were professed should be given an intermediate status because he had problems in putting them at the same footing with the Europeans. In response, the Congregation said that those admitted should do the novitiate and be allowed to take vows renewable every year, and should be given the title *agregés*.\(^{573}\) *Agregés* means “associates”, not full Brothers; at the same time they were supposed to keep the vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. Those who were professed in this arrangement were frustrated and left the Congregation.

The initial failure to train priests and brothers to join the Congregation frustrated so much the Spiritans that it took them many decades to recover from it but instead they concentrated on the training of catechists.\(^{574}\) The first priest to be ordained in Spiritan mission territory was Alfonse Mtana from Moshi diocese, Tanzania in 1939.\(^{575}\) By contrast, other groups of missionaries which came to East Africa later were more successful in training the local clergy. For instance, the Missionaries of Africa who arrived in Uganda in 1879 ordained the first two indigenous priests, Basil Lumu and Victor Mukasa in 1913 and by 1935, there were 122 African members of the Congregation.

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\(^{573}\) Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 140. Kieran says that when Phillippe and Dieudonné were admitted into the Congregation, the problem of their status was discussed until they settled for the title *agregés*. Other missionaries like Le Roy however, wanted the establishment of a local Congregation of lay Brothers rather than have Africans admitted in the Congregation.

\(^{574}\) Ibid. 143. The failure to train local clergy must be seen against the background of failure, not only by the Spiritans but by the Catholic Church as a whole. Between 1844 and 1924, all the Congregation’s African missions trained only 34 priests.

Missionaries of Africa.\textsuperscript{576} Consolata missionaries who arrived in Kenya in 1902 ordained two local priests, Giacomino Camisassa and Tommaso Kimangu in 1927.

Fifth, after the failure to train indigenous clergy, Spiritans turned their attention to education, another cherished objective of Libermann missionary strategy. This is what Vincent Donovan has to say:\textsuperscript{577}

It is no exaggeration to say that the school became the missionary method of East Africa. This was a policy eagerly backed by Rome. In 1928, Monsignor Hinsley, Apostolic Visitor to East Africa, told the gathering of bishops in Dar es Salaam: ‘Where it is impossible for you to carry on both the immediate task of evangelization and your education work, neglect your churches in order to perfect your schools.’

Schools had been there from the beginning of the evangelization of ex-slaves. After the closure of Christian villages, the school strategy became even more important to win converts, instill Christian morals, and to compete with other religions like Muslim and Protestant faiths. Again, like the evangelization of the slaves, children were the main target for education. Since the purpose of schools was to convert people to Christianity, teaching of catechism was part and parcel of the school curriculum. Education is a cherished value of any society. It is derived from the Latin, “educare” which means “to pull out” what is already there. Education’s main purpose is holistic human development. However, Christian missionary education system in East Africa was indoctrination and Western orientated. It neglected and despised East African cultural heritage and managed to convince East Africans that what is truly East African was to be shunned and despised. The origin of \emph{anthropological poverty} which is still a problem in East Africa can be traced from the education system.

\textsuperscript{576} Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 144.

\textsuperscript{577} Donovan, \emph{Christianity Rediscovered}, 7.
At the conclusion of this historical overview of Libermann’s theological anthropological teaching through the lens of his first missionaries to East Africans, it is important to constantly remind ourselves that true Christian mission is a participation in the dialogical life of the Trinity; this dialogue is prophetic and focuses on the poor.\(^{578}\) Libermann was deeply aware of that fact. We can notice that lack of proper dialogue characterized by patron-client relationship between the evangelizers and evangelized undermined one of the avowed objectives of Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs*, to be “Black with the blacks.” Libermann had taught that missionary activity was aimed at holistic development of human beings. He insisted that missionary activity is also a dialogue between the evangelizer and the evangelized, for both mutually share and enrich each other. Libermann was aware of the danger of paternalism and for that reason he taught that missionaries were “to avoid as detestable shortcoming any manner of superiority … or anything similar that is often very common when dealing with people of lower classes.”\(^{579}\)

However, for early Spiritan missionaries, East African religious consciousness and particularly of ex-slaves was not acknowledged as having any value. The humanity of the ex-slaves was defined in terms of the Spiritan missionaries. These missionaries portray the impression that they believed East Africans to be employing the same thought categories as themselves.\(^{580}\) Spiritan missionaries also presumed that ex-slaves had neither culture nor religion, and if at all they did have a culture or religion, it had to be suppressed and replaced by a superior European culture and a superior religion, Christianity. Hillman asserts that religious activity aimed at displacing African traditional religious symbol systems and replacing them with foreign imports was the

\(^{578}\) Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 349.

\(^{579}\) ND II, 256f. *Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary*, Chapter IX, Art. VIII.

greatest threat to the survival of African cultures. The education system was instrumental in providing practical skills for human development; at the same time, it is responsible for the desecration of East African traditional religious symbol because after displacing it, it replaced it with European import, impoverished and disoriented East Africans and condemned them to dependency. Born in slavery, nurtured in slavery, perpetuated and propagated in slavery, disoriented by the education system, the East African church has struggled and is still struggling to be true to itself. The prevailing social and economic situation has forced and confined many East African Christians to a position of dependency and anthropological poverty. East African reality as we are to explore, later on, is characterized by dependency syndrome. We are now going to examine first and foremost the concept of ubuntu as an underlying East African idea at the heart of human wholeness.

4.4 Ubuntu, the Essence of East African Human Wholeness

East African anthropologies and Libermann’s theological anthropology of l’œuvre des noirs are aimed at human wholeness encapsulated in a Bantu term ubuntu. Southern African theologians have used the concept of ubuntu meaning “humanness”, “humaneness” or “humanity” as an important concept of theological anthropology because it relates to the concepts of ontological being and identity, and can add a new perspective to the debate on true identity and what it means to be a human person in relation to other human persons. In short,
to be truly human you need *ubuntu* which means being in relationship with other persons who give form and substance to one’s true humanity.

According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *ubuntu* “speaks of the very essence of being human”, it is also very difficult to render in Western language.\(^{584}\) *Ubuntu* is derived from the word *muntu* or *mtu* which, as we noted, means a “person” as a plurality of relations (chapter three). We also noted that according to East Africans, the essential relations of *mtu* are *mwili* (body) and *moyo* (spirit or soul). *Moyo* is relational; it connects us with other human beings, God and all creation. *Ubuntu* then derives its relationality from *moyo* because *moyo* is the underlying concept of bondedness and relatedness. I would like to use the term, *ubuntu* to stimulate thought, conversation and dialogue between Libermann’s theological anthropology and the theological anthropologies of the East African context in order to open new avenues to an integrative, relational-ontological identity.

Although the word *ubuntu* is loaded with philosophical and theological meaning, it has not generated much theological anthropological thought among East African theologians. For Bantu of East Africa, *ubuntu* is rendered *utu* (Swahili), *buntu* or *obuntu* (in many Bantu languages, e.g. Baganda, Baluhya, Basoga, and Bahaya) which carry the same meaning like *ubuntu*. In East African Bantu thought, *obuntu* is the essence of humanness and humaneness. Human actions of kindness, love, and hospitality are termed in Luganda as *obuntu* actions (*ebikolwa eby’obuntu*) or *obuntu* heart (*omutima gw’obuntu*). Likewise to show that a person has no humanity or no humaneness, the Baganda use the expression “*taliimu k’abuntu*” meaning “there is nothing

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human in the person.” South African philosophy of *ubuntu*, more accurately expressed as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* “a person is a person through other persons”, affirms the critical understanding that identity arises out of intersubjective interactions between persons. Tutu says: “When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘Yu, u nobuntu’; ‘Hey, so-and-so has *ubuntu*.’ Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate.” The expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, rendered in Luganda as *omuntu aba muntu n’abantu*, carries the same meaning and philosophy underlying the South African expression. For the sake of clarity, in our analysis, the term *ubuntu* is to be used.

Exploring East African rites of passage from birth to last funeral rites, we noted that they are communitarian and bring the community together. The main purpose of these rites of passage is *ubuntu* that is, human wholeness. Undergoing these rites is meaningless if one lacks *ubuntu* that is, humaneness, kindness, compassion that are important and essential values for community living. *Ubuntu* adds moral and ethical demands and value to a person. In our discussion of the rites of passage, we alluded to Magesa who says, “without marriage and children, one is nothing. Indeed such a person is seen as damned, a lost soul.” Analogically, the same is true of a person without *ubuntu*, that person is damned, nothing and lost.

We noted the phenomenologists’ call to ethical responsibility toward the other (chapter two). Edith Stein adds that the ethical responsibility is clearly expressed by being empathetic to others. Employing phenomenological language, *ubuntu* is both an ethical responsibility and

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empathetic. *Ubuntu* enables a person to see the other as he/she must be seen and does not totalize others which is so tempting to the human mind.

Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs* was a missionary endeavor meant for the liberation of Africans who were under the yoke of slavery. From East African perspective, Libermann’s understanding of person is not to be essentially derived from his understanding of essence of person but rather from his interaction with others in the relationship he was engaged in with them. This is important because if we are to look at Libermann’s concept of person from the point of view of essence using scholastic categories, we realize that his concept of person portrays dualistic tendencies prevalent at the time. This is what we explained when we looked at Libermann’s Commentary on the Gospel of St John (chapter two). The best way then is to deal with Libermann’s concept of person through personal relationship which came to the fore in his interaction with Africans whom he sought to liberate from the yoke of slavery through his missionaries. Analogically, Libermann’s missionary endeavor of *l’œuvre des noirs* can justifiably be called *ubuntu* mission aimed at the restoration of human wholeness and human dignity. Libermann was empathetic, deeply sensitive to the pain and frustration of the miserable and abandoned. “My heart belongs to the Africans,” he said.\(^{588}\) Libermann was also convinced that Africans are made in the image and likeness of God but this image is being effaced and needs to be reclaimed.

In chapter three, we alluded to Jean-Godefroy Bidima’s description of relationships as a break away from solitude, and integrating oneself with others.\(^{589}\) *Ubuntu* too enables us to be aware of not only our limitations and frailty but also that we are not self-sufficient, we need others for

\(^{588}\) LS 3, 591.

survival. *Ubuntu* involves humility, recognizing that one cannot be independent but interdependent with others and with God. Humility is also a great virtue in Christian tradition. Left to ourselves, we can do nothing good without the grace and mercy of God.

Libermann too was constantly aware that he needed God’s grace. It was the grace of God that helped him throughout the experiences of his life: his conversion, suffering, and starting and accepting to implement *l’œuvre des noirs*. First, Libermann saw the grace of God working in him in his conversion experiences. In chapter one, we alluded to how Libermann’s conversion was influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* and particularly the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*. He says, “Who could believe that this book was an opening, that shook my faith as a believer, was one of the ways in which God was using to draw me to the true religion.”

It was definitely the grace of God which was working in him even in ways that he never expected.

Second, Libermann saw the grace of God in the foundation and implementation of *l’œuvre des noirs*. In the seminaries at Paris and Issy, he set up “*Bandes de Piété*” (“groups of piety”). Reflecting on them later on, Eugène Tisserant says, “He [Libermann] managed to persuade the superiors at Issy and Paris to let him try to restore the spirit of Our Lord to these men who would be the channels for the grace of God to reach the people.” Libermann restored the “spirit of Our Lord” in seminaries by setting up “*Bandes de Piété*”. Frédéric Le Vavasseur and Eugène Tisserant the original founders of *l’œuvre des noirs*, were members of these groups. We can trace the beginning of *l’œuvre des noirs* in these groups thanks to the grace of God. Furthermore, Libermann says that he was ready to undergo hardships and suffering for the sake of his project.

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590 N.D. I, 63.

591 ND I, 590.
“By the grace of God, I will be very happy, even in the midst of great hardships, as long as we retain our unity in the love of Jesus and Mary.”\textsuperscript{592}

When Libermann’s missionaries travelled from France to Africa they were moved by God’s grace to bring the good news of salvation to Africans. At the same time, they expected the receiving community to welcome them with hospitality. This mutual exchange of hospitality between evangelizer and evangelized has parallels with the meaning of the concept of \textit{ubuntu} because hospitality, which is our next point of discussion, is one of the core values of \textit{ubuntu}. Later on, we will look at reconciliation as a fruition of \textit{ubuntu}.

4.4.1 Hospitality

We have observed that at the core of East African hospitality, as our presentation of the previous chapter demonstrates, is the establishment and maintenance of personal, communal and mutual relationships. The meaning of hospitality is about communicating interpersonally and socially in order to consolidate relationships. Hospitality is one of the clear and contextual manifestations of \textit{ubuntu} among East Africans. Hospitality is also a great biblical virtue.\textsuperscript{593} Abraham and Lot are praised for welcoming to their homes visitors who turned out to be angels (Gen 18; Heb 13:2). Jesus received hospitality from the house of Peter at Capernaum (Mk 1:29-31) and from the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus at Bethany whom he loved (Lk 10:38-42). Jesus expected his disciples to be received with hospitality; otherwise the disciples would shake off the dust that clung to their feet to show their displeasure (Lk 10:1-12).

Hospitality was a driving force in the establishment and implementation of Libermann’s \textit{l’œuvre des noirs}. East African hospitality is characterized by welcoming, acceptance,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{592} ND I, 597. Letter to Eugène Tisserant, February 4, 1842.

\item \textsuperscript{593} New Testament Greek uses the word \textit{philoxenia} for hospitality which literary means “love of strangers.”
\end{itemize}
friendship, sharing, mutual love, integration and solidarity, values which were also at the heart of Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs*. Libermann was touched by the humanity of Africans who were suffering and allowed them to inform him and influence his life. He was penetrated by the humanum of Africans which led him to have a profound value of human wholeness.\(^\text{594}\)

The basic characteristic of East African hospitality parallels the structure of the Gospel message: human relationship with God and with one another.\(^\text{595}\) As G. van der Merwe points out, the relationship portrayed in the gospel message “is primarily concerned with a person’s relationship with God, and only from this relationship do implications of the message of salvation flow to other relationships. Turn this order upside down, and the heart of the gospel is torn out.”\(^\text{596}\) The message of the gospel presents to us Jesus Christ who revealed God’s love to people to which people are called upon to respond by a change of heart and mind (*metanoia*). Jesus wanted his disciples to have a perfect relationship with God and with their fellow human beings. At the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus told his disciples that after receiving the Holy Spirit they were to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Disciples were to “go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

East African pattern of hospitality outlined in the last chapter (welcoming, interaction, identification, sharing, integration, and mutual dialogue) has been followed in receiving

\(^{594}\) Uzukwu, “Inculturation”, 54.


missionaries in East Africa. When Fr. Simeon Lourdel (Mapeera)\(^\text{597}\) and Br. Amans Delmas, Missionaries of Africa (“White Fathers”), arrived in Uganda on February 17, 1879, they were received with hospitality.\(^\text{598}\) Kabaka (King) Muteesa I gave them land at Nabulagala near the capital Kampala where they set up their mission. Eventually, as a great act of hospitality, Kabaka Muteesa gave them Lubaga hill which used to be his residence.\(^\text{599}\) There was mutual sharing of gifts and talents. For instance, Fr. Loudel became Kabaka Muteesa’s medicine man.\(^\text{600}\) When the missionaries were integrated in the community, they learnt the local language. Fr. Lourdel is credited for having written the first book in Luganda in 1881.\(^\text{601}\) It is beyond the scope of this study to detail the story of the first missionaries in Uganda that involved religious wars, Christian martyrs, and rivalries between French missionaries (Catholic) and English missionaries (Anglican). However, it is important to note that after living in the country for three years, Catholic missionaries were forced to retreat to northern Tanzania between 1882 and 1884 because of political and religious problems that the missionaries deemed to be a threat to their lives. When they came back after the death of Kabaka Muteesa, they were amazed to see that the number of catechumens had increased and the work of evangelization had continued under the

\(^{597}\) Fr. Simeon Lourdel is popularly known in Uganda as ‘Mapeera’ because his companion, Brother Amans Delmas used to call him “mon père” which gave rise to ‘Mapeera’.

\(^{598}\) Yves Tourigny, Ancestors in the Faith: The Story of the First Catholic Missionaries in Uganda (Kampala: Angel Agencies, 2009), 34. Cf. Armand Duval, Father Simeon Lourdel: Apostle of Uganda (1853-1890), trans. Maurice Gruffat (Kampala: Angel Agencies, 2012), 74ff. When Simeon Lourdel and Amans Delmans arrived by Lake Victoria to Uganda, they were at first incarcerated for 15 days before they had audience with Kabaka Muteesa I.

\(^{599}\) Ibid. 64ff. Cf. Duval, Father Simeon Lourdel, 74ff. The present Lubaga cathedral in Kampala is located at a place which used to be Kabaka Muteesa I’s palace.

\(^{600}\) Duval, Father Simeon Lourdel, 167.

\(^{601}\) Ibid. 138. It was a small booklet with 19 pages which had been adapted from the Swahili version which had been written by the Spiritan Missionaries in Zanzibar.
guidance of Joseph M. Balikuddembe (first Catholic martyr in Uganda). In a short time the early Ugandan Christians and catechumens had internalized the Gospel message and without priests became evangelizers to themselves in both word and deed. Fr. Simeon Lourdel had this to say:

Our catechumens and newly baptized Christians are full of courage. In illness they take care of one another with great charity. During our absence they opened a house in which they gave shelter to all the sick people of their group and looked after them and took care of them.

Definitely, when the gospel message was communicated to the early Ugandan Christians, they internalized it based on the foundation of their African religious values of which hospitality was of great importance. By caring for the sick, they showed how they had become missionaries to themselves. We are now going to look at another important aspect of ubuntu contextualized in reconciliation.

4.4.2 Reconciliation

Reconciliation is important for our study because it is dialogic. There is always need for reconciliation because we live in a broken world. In every society there are offenders and ways and means of how to deal with them. African traditions had structures to deal with suspected offenders: they were tried, convicted or acquitted, and then appropriate punishment was given to those who were convicted. Normally this is what is also demanded of Western retributive justice. The whole process of justice should lead to reconciliation. Africans had also another way of achieving reconciliation without recourse to retributive justice. Sometimes, as pointed out in the


602 Ibid. 177.
last chapter, a covenant ritual was done to settle disputes and bring about reconciliation. Basically reconciliation of an offender without recourse to retributive justice involved the offender accepting his or her offence, asking for forgiveness and then reconciliation which involved a meal. This was the path South Africa chose to deal with offenders during the period of apartheid.

Libermann, as we noted in chapter two, sought for a reconciliatory approach to offenders. We noted that he was not an abolitionist and his approach to slave masters was prudence. He was aware that a reconciliatory approach was necessary because slave masters wielded so much power which they could use to ruin his mission. He advised the bishops of Guadaloupe, Martinique and Reunion to be neutral in dealing with Blacks, Whites and Colored. He wrote: “Remain independent on this question of rights as well as on the fact of abolition.”

Even within his own Congregation, Libermann was an animator and reconciler. He reconciled many confreres who wrote to him seeking advice and guidance. As a seminarian, many students went to him for spiritual direction. It was because of his qualities of spiritual direction that he was chosen to be a novice master of the Eudists. Libermann was chosen by his companions to be the leader of l’œuvre des noirs because they saw in him qualities of a leader who can reconcile confreres. As noted above, Libermann showed good qualities of dialogue when he came to terms with members of his Society who disagreed with the merger with the Spiritans in 1848.

The system of apartheid in South Africa inflicted wounds that needed healing soon after independence in 1994. A ‘Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ was set up by President Nelson Mandela, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu with an avowed aim of exposing the atrocities

605 ND XII, 285f.
committed in the past and achieving reconciliation with its former oppressors. In his book, *No Future Without Reconciliation*, Tutu argues that true reconciliation cannot be achieved by denying the past nor can it be achieved by looking for revenge. The path that South Africans chose for amnesty was consistent with *ubuntu*. This is what he says:  

> Let us conclude this chapter by pointing out that ultimately this third way of amnesty was consistent with a central feature of the African *Weltsanschauung* – what we know in our languages as *ubuntu*, in the Nguni group of languages, or *botho*, in Sotho languages. What is it that constrained so many to choose to forgive rather than demand retribution, to be so magnanimous and ready to forgive rather than wreak revenge?

For Tutu, the driving force to forgive without recourse to retributive justice and revenge was *ubuntu*.

The people of northern Uganda are also seeking reconciliation after many years of conflict. There have been conflicts in Uganda but none has been so brutal and as prolonged like the one which started as a civil war in northern Uganda in 1987 and is spreading to the neighboring countries. Uganda is divided between two ethnic groups, the Nilotic-speaking north and Bantu-speaking south. During the British colonial rule, soldiers and policemen were mainly recruited from the north. After independence, when political power depended on military clout, the northerners, especially the Acholi, controlled much political space. They also played a pivotal role in the removal of Idi Amin from power in 1979. When President Museveni who is from the south removed them from power in 1986, they regrouped in the north under the leadership of Alice Lakwena and then afterwards under Joseph Kony and formed the Lord’s Resistance

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607 This war was started by Alice Lakwena who claimed to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, attacked the Uganda army in order to liberate the Acholi. Lakwena preached forgiveness rather than vengeance. She recognized the need for expiation for the many sins the Acholi soldiers committed during and after the war against Museveni’s National Resistance Army (NRA). Her army was defeated near Jjinja, 50 miles east of the capital, Kampala and she fled to neighboring Kenya in 1987 where she died. Her cause was taken up by Joseph Kony, her uncle.
Army (LRA). Charles Muwungu says that the motive of the rebellion is to remove what Kony calls “the Ugandan ungodly regime and to lead Uganda according to the Ten Commandments.” However, Kony and his soldiers do not keep any of the Ten Commandments. LRA has terrorized people, abducting children, indoctrinating them and recruiting them as child soldiers, the girls are forced to be commanders’ wives. They have killed many innocent civilians and mutilated many. LRA has enjoyed the support of the Sudanese government in retaliation to Uganda’s support to the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) which until 2006 was fighting for the liberation of now South Sudan.

According to Kevin Ward, from 1991 Kony’s army was directed not against the government army, “but against the Acholi themselves, with savage mutilations of ears, lips, nose, and hands. This was partly in response to the creation (by the central government) at the time of a local militia to defend local communities from ‘enemy’ incursions.” They abducted children whom they recruited in their ranks and trained them to kill. This violence was meant to exert pressure on the civilians to join their cause. The government of Uganda then decided to put people in protected camps but did not provide them with enough security. In some cases the soldiers dug-out in the center of the village, into which they retired if attacked by the LRA, using the rest of the village as a human shield. In addition, the government mobilized civilians to defend

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608 Charles Mwebe, Muwungu, “The Genesis and Nature of the LRA in Northern Uganda,” AFER, Vol. 45, No. 4, (December 2003), 329f. Muwungu looks at the different accounts of Kony and what he finds credible is that his father was a Catholic catechist in one of the missions in Gulu and might have served as an altar boy as many of the children of catechists do. This background may explain some of the religious dimension of his movement. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), over the course of history changed its names: Lord’s Salvation Army (LSA), Christian Democratic Army (CDA) and Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA) all of which have religious overtones.


610 Ibid. 253.
themselves with bow and arrow defense units which attracted more brutality from the LRA which was well equipped with modern weaponry.

This leaves the Church an important role to play in this conflict. The Uganda Catholic bishops have taught that this conflict cannot be solved by military means but rather through negotiations. One of the initiatives also supported by the Catholic Church is amnesty for the rebels. The Catholic bishop of Gulu, John Odama, referred to the rebels “as prodigal sons who can be forgiven and received back into society. This is not the kind of language the government relates to. But it is a constant theme of the churches, and seen as consistent with fundamental Christian values.”611 This initiative is also supported by the Acholi cultural norms in dealing with conflict. The international community has insisted that the perpetrators of the war crimes in northern Uganda, namely Kony and his top commanders, must be taken to The Hague to face war crimes committed against humanity. However, it is amazing to note that the victims of the rebels’ brutality have expressed their willingness to forgive and forget which is in conformity with the Acholi culture, as Jeffrey Gettleman reports:612

In Acholi culture killers are accepted into the community after they have paid the compensation, admitted to their misdeeds and shared a meal, usually of roasted sheep, with the relatives of their victim. This is the metaput ceremony, and it comes from the days when clans were tightly intertwined by marriage and trade and could not afford to alienate one another.

The Uganda Catholic bishops’ teaching on reconciliation between the government and the rebels resonates with this traditional Acholi ideal of reconciliation and offers a better initiative for the Catholic Church to widen her scope for reconciliation based on Ubuntu, exemplified in Acholi metaput ceremony. Though the Uganda government has claimed victory over Kony’s

611 Ibid. 207.
LRA and people who were in camps have gradually returned home, Kony’s marauding soldiers are still a great threat to the people in the region. Kony’s soldiers are still active in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic where they have continued their trademark of destroying villages, killing people, abducting and recruiting child soldiers, and raping women. There is still need for reconciliation to bring to an end this gross violation of human rights which started as a Ugandan problem but now has become a regional one. The impetus for reconciliation is provided by the cultural heritage symbolized by metaput ceremony which must be used as a springboard to bring about reconciliation that goes beyond that provided by retributive justice. As Bevans and Schroeder succinctly point out: “Reconciliation does not ‘forgive and forget’, it does not ‘just move on’ or ‘get on with life’; It remembers and still rages, laments and grieves. But it does so with the grace of wholeness, salus. Obviously there is a profound anthropology at work here, as well as eschatology.”613 Indeed, metaput ceremony without recourse to retributive justice remembers, laments, grieves, and forgives so as to bring about hope where there is despair, aimed at human wholeness.

Kenya offers us yet another example of reconciliation by electing Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto to be president and vice president respectively in the March 4, 2013 election. The two are indicted for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court, The Hague, stemming from their involvement in the 2007 post-election violence that left 1,300 dead.614 Paradoxically, each is accused of aiding his ethnic group to fight against the other during post-election violence. The history of this conflict goes back to colonial times when the Kikuyus

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613 Bevans and Schroeder, Constants in Context, 394.

614 The 2007 post-election violence, which received much media coverage, created a political, economic, and humanitarian crisis that erupted in Kenya after incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared winner of the presidential election that was held on December 27, 2007. His main challenger, Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) alleged electoral manipulation and called upon his supporters to go to the streets. In the conflict that ensued more than 1,300 people lost their lives and about 300,000 people were displaced.
(Kenyatta’s ethnic group) were removed from their fertile highlands of Mount Kenya by colonial settlers and then were settled among the Masai and the Kalenjin (Ruto’s ethnic group), which created an ethnic conflict. Politicians have often exploited this conflict to further their malicious political ends. The election of these two men who were nemeses shows how Kenyans have chosen the path to reconciliation rather than retributive justice which The Hague is pursuing.

4.5 Relational Trinity

The purpose of discussing the relational Trinity is to indicate that Christian doctrine which posits the Trinity to be the origin of human wholeness and all relationships resonates not only with Libermann’s understanding of the Triune God but also with traditional East African understanding of God and divine beings. Drawing from relationality, we are to discuss first, the importance of understanding the relational nature of the Trinity and the impact of this understanding on traditional East African concept of God and divine beings and Libermann’s understanding of the Triune God. Second, relevant implications of the above discussion situate us in a better position of realization that the relational Trinity is the source of inter-religious dialogue and a foundation of ministry based on the charisms of the Holy Spirit.

Christian doctrine teaches the Trinity to be the origin of all relationships. It means that relational element to the identity of the three persons of the Godhead, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is essential to understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. McGrath sums up the traditional Western view of the Trinity in saying that the Trinity is “a community of being, in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them.”615 McGrath’s description of the Trinity as a “community of being,” that is, a collective of

distinct persons, correctly rests on community as the primary ontological reality that gives rise to the nature of the beings. This conception distinguishes it from another view which sees persons as “beings in community”, that is, individuals who happen to relate. The consequence of “beings in community” is to see the persons of the Trinity as three completely separate individuals who happen to be in community. The emphasis in McGrath’s “community of being” is that the very nature of the beings is found through their being in community.

East African understanding of personhood is very similar to McGrath’s view of the Trinity. The relationships that exist between persons shape their true identity because relationships are active lived realities that shape our true identity and being. This element of our ontological identity is related to the ontological identity of the persons-in-relationship in the Trinity. We noted that for East Africans, one’s truest identity comes not just from a moment of encountering another person (called ‘relating’): it comes from a continuum of shared being (called ‘having a relationship’). Who I am is shaped by who I am in relationship with. Within the Trinity this form of ongoing engagement is referred to as perichoresis, thus the indwelling within the Trinity expressed by Jesus, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” (Jn 14:10; cf. Jn 17:21).

It is a shared life that gives rise to both common identity and individual expression: one ousia (substance) with three distinct hypostaseis (persons), a common substance in three subsistences, existing in an eternal self-emptying relationship.

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616 Ibid. 325. The Western view of the Trinity which McGrath alludes to is based on the Western emphasis on independence and individuation.

617 Brian Gaybba, ‘Trinitarian Experience and Doctrine,’ in Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives, eds. J. de Gruchy and C. Villa-Vicencio (Johannesburg: David Philip Publishers, 1994), 83. Perichoresis means “indwelling”. It is from the Greek, peri meaning “with” and choreo (intransitive) meaning “be room” or “go into.” The early Greek Fathers used the term perichoresis to indicate mutual indwelling of the three persons as they are contained within each other. At the same time, they have ‘space’ (expressed by the meaning of the root perichoros, meaning “space” or “territory”) to be themselves or express their distinct otherness.

618 Ibid.
Christian anthropology asserts that human wholeness has as its foundation the relational Trinity because it is bestowed by God, in the Holy Spirit through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Trinitarian economy which is the basis of human wholeness and Christian mission offers us an important perspective of looking at the dialogue between Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs* and East African theological anthropologies. Trinitarian economy deals with two major relationships, first, between the three persons of the Blessed Trinity and second, between the Triune God and creation. Our main focus is on the latter and particularly the Triune God-human relationship because, first, this study is a theological anthropological study, and second and more important, recent studies of the Trinity are emphasizing the divine-human dialogue as the starting point of understanding the Triune God. In chapter two, we saw that for Rahner, the starting point of theology is not God or Jesus Christ but anthropology. Rahner revitalized the Trinity as a doctrine about economy – that is, a doctrine that proclaimed the way in which God comes to be known and felt in human experience. The starting point of the economy of salvation, according to Rahner, is the individual human person who is constituted as the recipient of the mystery of God’s self-communication, rather than the unity of the

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619 The Trinity is the Christian teaching which states that God consists of three simultaneous, eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons are equal in their attributes and nature, but differ in how they relate to the world and to each other. When we say they are equal in nature and attributes, we are speaking of what is called the Ontological Trinity (ontology - study of being and essence). Each of the three persons in the Godhead are divine, have equal attributes i.e. omniscience, omnipresence, holiness. When we speak of how they relate to each other and the world, we are speaking of the Economic Trinity (economic - from the Greek *oikonomikos*, means arrangement of activities of the house). Trinitarian economy then deals with how the three persons of the Triune God relate to each other and the world. Christian tradition assigns different roles to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. God, the father is creator, God the son, savior and God the Holy Spirit, sanctifier. Over the years, Christian West in discussing the Trinity has laid too much emphasis on the ontological Trinity – the nature and essence of the Triune God. In modern times however, many theologians are discovering the importance of the Trinitarian economy.

620 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999). In this book, Rahner attempts to explain how the Triune God is manifested in a special threefold manner to the human person through grace.
Godhead.\textsuperscript{621} This is succinctly expressed in Rahner’s axiom: “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.”\textsuperscript{622}

Libermann never engages in a discussion about the nature and essence of the Triune God but rather was more interested in the Trinitarian economy. He was at pains to see that Africans, created in the image and likeness of God, were able to receive God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Drawing from 19\textsuperscript{th} century Christian anthropological tradition, Libermann’s \textit{l’œuvre des noirs} was founded on the economy of the Triune God and was aimed at bestowing human wholeness to Africans who were under the yoke of slavery so that they could participate in the Trinitarian love of God. In chapter two, we alluded to Edward Hahnenberg who affirms that the Triune God’s ultimate reality lies not in nature or substance but in personhood, relationship and love.\textsuperscript{623} \textit{For Libermann too, God’s reality was not in nature or substance but in relationship with those who were oppressed.}

Even though traditional East Africans did not believe in the Trinity as taught by the Christian tradition, nonetheless, from the point of view of divine economy, there are similarities between the East African understanding of God and divine beings and the understanding of the relational Trinity. First and foremost, we have highlighted the importance of the Trinitarian economy in understanding the Trinity. Traditional East Africans, like Libermann, did not engage themselves in discussing the essence and nature of God but rather were interested in divine economy by making use of attributes to describe God (chapter three). Second, Christian tradition posits the Trinity to be the source and animator of human wholeness and relationships which is also

\textsuperscript{621} Ibid. 91.

\textsuperscript{622} Ibid. 22. Later Rahner says: “The mystery of God’s self-communication consists precisely in the fact that God really arrives as man, really enters into man’s situation, assumes it himself, and \textit{thus} is what he is.” (Trinity, 88f).

\textsuperscript{623} Hahnenberg, Ministries, 77.
affirmed by traditional East African understanding of God and divine beings who are believed to be the origin of human wholeness and all relationships. Third and most important, traditional East Africans believed in God and divine beings which means plurality (not to be understood as polytheism) and dynamism in the understanding of the divine essence. As indicated above, plurality and dynamism are also recognized in the understanding of the relational Trinity. Furthermore, plurality and dynamism point to an understanding in both traditions that God is dynamic and Spirit cannot be encapsulated by a strictly monarchical God. Like the Trinity, God and divine beings in the East African tradition relate with each other in a community of communion, are dynamic giving life to all creation. The dynamism of the Trinity opens two important considerations necessary for human wholeness; first, tolerance that leads to inter-religious dialogue and second, the importance of charisms of the Holy Spirit in ministry.

Christians believe that human wholeness is achieved through Christian mission which “is participation in the dialogical life and mission of the Trinity.” We noted in chapter two that Christian mission is relational and Trinitarian because it is a participation in the life of God who sent Jesus and is continued under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This means that Trinitarian economy operates in Christian mission. Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs* was a missionary endeavor. The foundation of Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs* can be traced back to the time just before his conversion to Catholicism when he realized that God is universal and could not be monopolized by any culture or religion, had no favorites but was for all peoples. He later realized that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob who liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt is the same God who was to liberate Africans from the yoke of slavery. In

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624 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 394.
other words, God is a missionary God, because of self-communication of divine love to all human beings by delivering them from all forms of slavery.

On the other hand, East Africans did not proselytize their religion and for that reason, it was a religion without a missionary outreach but at the same time, welcomed other religions in a spirit of hospitality and tolerance. Missionary activity involves receiving and communicating the Word of God to others. Traditional East Africans participated in missionary activity by being recipients of the Word of God. They welcomed Christian messengers with great hospitality as we have noted. They participated in the mission of their God whom they understood to be kind, merciful and charitable to all people, could be approached by all people without distinction and without going through any rite of initiation. God of the African Religions is a free and tolerant God.

The spirit of openness to other religions which we see in Libermann and the spirit of welcoming Christian messengers with hospitality we see in East African religious heritage mean that mission must respect the freedom and dignity of human beings as Bevans and Schroeder insist.625

And just as the triune God’s missionary presence in creation is never about imposition but always about persuasion and freedom-respecting love, mission can no longer proceed in ways that neglect the freedom and dignity of human beings. Nor can a church that is rooted in a God that saves through self-emptying think of itself as culturally superior to the peoples among whom it works. Mission, as participation in the mission of the triune God, can only proceed in dialogue and can only be carried out in humility.

East African hospitality and tolerance and Libermann’s tolerance and openness to other religions call for interreligious dialogue. In East African understanding of person, community living and being in relationship with others are important elements of being person. We find that we relate with, and live with people of different religious affiliations which calls for

625 Ibid. 348.
interreligious dialogue. Indeed, human wholeness cannot be achieved unless the question of the people we deal with including people of other faiths is factored in.

Bosch outlines some important qualities of interreligious dialogue in a context of interrelationship between dialogue and mission.626 These characteristics are also important for the East African Catholic Church. First, interreligious dialogue is “characterized by creative tension, which reaches beyond the sterile alternative between a comfortable claim to absoluteness and arbitrary pluralism.”627 Interreligious dialogue involves commitment to one’s own religion while at the same time open to the other. It is a meeting of hearts rather than minds, a mystery.

Second, interreligious dialogue presupposes commitment. It does not imply sacrificing one’s own position but at the same time we are not expecting to move into void but rather move to meet God who has preceded us and has been preparing people. “We are all recipients of the same mercy, sharing in the same mystery. We thus approach every other faith and its adherents reverently, taking off our shoes, as the place we are approaching is holy.”628

Third and very important, dialogue has to be carried out with an attitude of humility because it is a religion of grace finding its center in the cross. “The word that perhaps best characterizes the Christian church in its encounter with other faiths is vulnerability…We cannot approach people

626 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 483.
627 Ibid.
628 Ibid. 484.
when we are confident and at ease but only when we are contradicted.”629 As Moritzen puts it succinctly:630

Nobody denies that Jesus did much good, but that in no way saved him from being crucified. It belongs to the essence (of Christian faith) that it needs the weak witness, the powerless representative of the message. The people who are to be won and saved should, as it were, always have the possibility of crucifying the witness of the gospel.

Lastly, Bosch argues that dialogue and mission should recognize that religions are worlds in themselves, with their own axes and structures and ask fundamentally different questions.631 Bosch is weary of the Catholic outlook to interreligious dialogue that put the Church at the center of the dialogue exhibited in Pope Paul VI encyclical Ecclesiam Suam. He is also equally critical of Rahner’s notion of anonymous Christians that “tends to sweep the whole good-willed humanity into the back door of the ‘holy Roman Church’ thereby preserving the idea of ‘no salvation outside the church.’”632 Christian faith should carry the conviction that Jesus Christ has taken a definitive eschatological course extending human beings to forgiveness and justification through conversion. Yet this conversion as we have already pointed out is not just to be Christian but rather carries a responsibility of promoting God’s reign in forgiveness, hospitality, charity, and reconciliation, in other words, promoting ubuntu among the people we live and relate with in community.

Another area that calls for discussion is ministry. The relational Trinity is a foundation of relational approach to ministry and calls for a pneumatic approach to ministry characterized by

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629 Ibid. 485.
630 Cited by Bosch, Transforming Mission, 485.
631 Ibid.
632 Ibid. 486.
charisms. Plurality and dynamism are core values in the understanding of God and divine beings in the East African religious heritage. Dynamism of God and divine beings means that God is spirit who empowers each and every individual to full human wholeness. Libermann wanted Africans to be empowered with ministry in the Church. As we pointed out in chapter two, he called upon his missionaries to train Africans to become priests. He even suggested that catechists should receive minor orders in the Church. Libermann also advocated for the creation of episcopates in Africa.

Hahneneberg suggests that traditional linear model for ministry - clergy and laity - should be replaced by concentric circles of ministries model because the latter situates a minister within an ecclesial community to serve the Church and its mission to the world.633 The linear model also referred to as the clerical or Christocentric model has dominated the Catholic Church since the late middle ages. A priest, according to this model, is in persona Christi and for Thomas Aquinas he is an instrumental cause whilst Christ is the principal cause.634 In the late middle ages, there was another shift, this time from the actions of a priest to the priest’s person and ultimately the priest did not only act in persona Christi but became alter Christus, “another Christ.”635

Hahneneberg insists that although Vatican II raised the participation of the laity in liturgy from passive to active participation, the laity are insufficiently empowered.636 Drawing from the relational Trinity, Hahneneberg then calls for a new understanding of the priestly ministry that

633 Hahneneberg, Ministries, 45.

634 Ibid. 44.

635 Ibid. 45. In persona Christi had another modification in Pope Pius XII Encyclical Mediator Dei of 1947. He says that the priest is in persona Christi Capitatis – “in the person of Christ the head.” A priest, according to Pope Pius XII, represents Christ and therefore should be male.

636 Ibid. 9.
recognizes the Church as a living organ with people of different gifts and more important an awareness that the charismatic and hierarchical gifts are both from the Holy Spirit. A priest then acts in *persona ecclesiae*, “in the person of the church.” What Hahneneberg is calling for is that *each and every baptized member must be empowered to be an active and effective instrument of evangelization*.

The East African Catholic Church often finds herself entrenched in a *hierarchical model of the Church that suffocates the proper working and functioning of the Holy Spirit. This model does not sufficiently empower each and every Christian to be an active and effective instrument of evangelization and at the same time does not offer them support to confront the challenges they face in living their faith.* One of these challenges is posed by the mushrooming Independent and Pentecostal Churches. Many Catholic theologians insist that the Pentecostal Movement is winning members from the Catholic Church because it has taken inculturation seriously. A question may be posed: Which kind of inculturation have they taken seriously? The truth of the matter is that the culture that they have taken seriously is not the ancestral culture but the living culture. Pentecostalism in the way it is practiced in East Africa disdains retrieval of cultural traditions and one good example in Uganda is that they do not perform the last funeral rites ritual (*okwabya olumbe*) which they say is satanic. The most important lesson to learn from the Pentecostal Movement is to rediscover the importance of the Spirit and empower each and every member to be an apostle. Whereas in East African Catholic Church this role is enshrined in the ministry of Religious and priests, for the Pentecostal Movement, each and every member has a role to play in evangelization.

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637 Ibid. 68ff.
Confronted with the challenge of the Pentecostal Movement, the Catholic Church has inadvertently or advertently adapted the wearing of the rosary to scare off the surge of the Pentecostals who move to each and every home to each and every person. Pentecostals in Uganda do not give honor to Our Lady and abhor wearing medals and rosaries which they say is worshipping of false idols condemned by the First Commandment of the Decalogue. Whatever the effectiveness of the Catholic strategy, the truth of the matter is that East African Catholics should be empowered to be bold enough to confront the challenges of Pentecostalism albeit the inspiration they may draw from wearing a rosary.

At the conclusion of the first part of our dialogue, our discussion had an underlying motif of speaking for the poor, critique ways and means used to address their poverty and marginalization, and the need to empower them to full flowering of ubuntu in them. Relational ubuntu enshrined in African cultures resonates with relational Trinity and the need to rediscover the importance of the Spirit in diaconal ministry. Our next discussion moves us to the contemporary East African reality and the need to address the challenges the reality presents.

4.6 Contemporary East African Catholic Church: Redefinition and Challenges

East African Catholic Church is an important voice because Catholics make up at least 30% of the total population of East Africa. Catholics in this region are faced with an important task of restructuring and redefining their faith in Jesus Christ and developing a holistic understanding of their lives in Jesus Christ that leads to human wholeness. They are to redefine being church in

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638 According to 2002 Uganda Census, out of the total population of 24,442,084 people, 10,242,592 thus 42% were Catholics. This information is available on Uganda Bureau of Statics website. www.ubos.org (accessed on March 11, 2013). Also cf. Charles Wendo and A. Baguma, The New Vision, (March 24, 2005), 1. In Kenya, according to the 2009 Census, there were 9,010,684 Catholics of the total population of 38,610,097 which is 23.3%. This information is available on Kenya Bureau of Statistics website. www.knbs.or.ke (accessed on March 10, 2013). Also cf. Musai Basse, Daily Nation, (August 31, 2010), 1. Tanzania has no official figures of religious affiliation but the number of Catholics is normally put at about 25% of the total population of 44,929,002 people according to the 2009 census.
the contemporary East African context. Through the lens of the dialogue we have carried out so far, we are going to examine how East Africans have to redefine their faith and the challenges they face in this task. First, we will explore the East African reality characterized by anthropological poverty and dependency on the one hand, and resilience and interdependence on the other. HIV/AIDS which poses an enormous challenge to the Church will be discussed. At the same time, inculturation theology as one of the ways of addressing anthropological poverty will be proposed and discussed. Second, we will address the question: Who is Jesus Christ for East Africans today? This question is important in the redefinition of faith in Jesus Christ and being church in East Africa. Third, the role of the life-giving Spirit in creation will be discussed to widen our scope of human wholeness.

4.6.1 East African Reality

Theology deals with praxis or the real. African reality, past and present is characterized by pluralism, poverty and exploitation.639 People are expected to respond to the grace of God in a free and human manner, thus allowing the possibility of rejection and this happens in the person’s historical moment and cultural context. Early Spiritan missionary activity in East Africa focused on isolated individuals abstracted from their actual situations of time and space in Christian villages. When Christian villages were abandoned and missionaries moved to open space in the interior, to East Africans within their own cultural milieu, East African cultures were supposed to be evangelized and assumed by the Church. For this to happen, a person had to be reached “through his or her ephemeral cultural world not by substituting for it the cultural world of some other people, ancient or modern.”640 Libermann was very clear on this point,


missionaries were not supposed to impose their own culture but to adapt to the culture of the people they evangelized, a good ideal which unfortunately was insufficiently implemented by early Spiritan missionaries. The reality is that many East Africans are still impoverished, exploited and dehumanized. However, there is also a spirit of resilience of the East African soul thanks to pluralism and relationality which are important characteristics of East African person and culture.

### 4.6.1.1 Pauperization of the East African Person

The Assembly of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) that met in Dar es Salaam in 1976 succinctly said that the common denominator to all African reality has been the “pauperization of the African person: political, social and economic known as anthropological poverty.”

Engelbert Mveng uses the term anthropological poverty to describe the loss of African cultural and religious perspective on life, “the general impoverishment of the people. Colonialism brought about loss of their identity and diminishment of their creativity. It indiscriminately disrupted their communal tribal life and organization and destroyed their indigenous values, religious beliefs, and traditional culture.”

Despite the devastating effect of anthropological poverty on African personality, African anthropology still exists, characterized by deep interest in human relationships which is the hallmark of African anthropology.

One of the cherished objectives of Libermann’s intention (dessein) of l’œuvre des noirs was the liberation of Africans from anthropological poverty. By the time of Libermann, anthropological poverty of African personality was slavery. Libermann’s dessein of l’œuvre des

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noirs was to liberate Africans from all forms of slavery. Libermann like his missionaries who came to East Africa were influenced by European racial prejudices prevalent at the time which looked at Africa as a land that was to be pitied and needed aid for according to them it was “the most miserable on earth.”

Despite this negative approach to Africans, at the same time Libermann’s strategy to alleviate this miserable condition put more emphasis on empowerment of Africans by training of the clergy rather than poverty reduction.

Since the time of Libermann the means to exploit, impoverish and dehumanize Africans have changed and evolved; from slavery to colonialism to present day neocolonialism, but the reality has always been the same. We have sketched out the deleterious effects of slavery on the humanity of East Africans, and the efforts by early Spiritan missionaries to address this problem and their shortcomings. When slavery was no longer economically viable, it was replaced by colonialism. East African nations felt a sigh of relief when they received independence, Tanzania in 1961, Uganda in 1962, and Kenya in 1963 but now they are under the yoke of neocolonialism. According to Martey, slavery and colonialism are overt and crude, neocolonialism covert and subtle but “worse than colonialism because it means power without responsibility and exploitation without redress.” Libermann’s Jewish experience had taught him that it is not enough to be emancipated in law, but in fact as well. Independence in law did not lead to independence in fact. Though politically independent, neocolonialism has created an atmosphere of dependency in East Africa.

Neocolonialism is so dehumanizing that many East Africans deny and hate what is truly theirs but wholeheartedly and willingly embrace and promote European way of life. A glaring example

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643 N.D. III, 76.

is the powerful European soccer mania which has swept over the Continent, exhibited in supporting European soccer clubs at the expense of local soccer.\textsuperscript{645} Although East Africans give wholehearted allegiance to their national teams, when they are called to action their indifference or lack of support to their local clubs is killing the fabric of the national team. The coverture, subtlety and attractiveness of neocolonialism in this case impoverishes East Africans so much that they fail to realize the deleterious consequences it poses to what is truly theirs.

Economically, Tanzania and Uganda are in the category of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of the world and although Kenya is outside that bracket, more than half of its population live below the poverty line.\textsuperscript{646} Uganda and Tanzania have been classified by neo-colonialist International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank as Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) which means they can apply for some debt relief to ease the burden of debt and public spending. IMF and World Bank may be helping poor countries to alleviate poverty on a short-term basis but in the long run these institutions have “designed their programs (conditions, in fact) to aggravate dependency, poverty, inequity, subservience and vulnerability.”\textsuperscript{647} By creating an

\textsuperscript{645} The majority of East Africans support European clubs like Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester United at the expense of their own indigenous clubs. They often cite corruption as the underlying reason why they do not support their local clubs. However, European clubs may be the worst culprits of unethical behavior. They buy players at an incredibly enormous price. Cristiano Ronaldo, for instance, was bought by Real Madrid for approximately US $ 134 million from Manchester United (Daniel Taylor and Jamie Jackson, “Manchester United Accept £80m Cristiano Ronaldo Bid from Real Madrid,” \textit{The Guardian}, June 11, 2009). Even in Spain people asked the rationale of buying a player at such an exorbitant fee when the country was experiencing economic turmoil. Big European clubs have commercialized their soccer worldwide and what Africans may not know is that they contribute to the wealth of the European clubs by paying for Digital Satellite Television to watch European soccer games and by buying T-shirts of players of European clubs.

\textsuperscript{646} A person who lives on less than one US dollar a day is considered to be living below the poverty line. In East Africa, poverty is largely concentrated in rural areas depending on subsistence agriculture. Rural-urban population flow has put a lot of pressure on social services such as housing and jobs, aggravating urban poverty. Most vulnerable groups are women, youth and aged. These problems have been aggravated by HIV/AIDS infection which has compromised life expectancy. Cf. http://www.imf.org (accessed on December 12, 2012).

\textsuperscript{647} Martey, \textit{African Theology}, 50.
environment of dependency, these institutions can analogically be called slave masters.\textsuperscript{648} One of IMF and World Bank programs is to give financial aid to poor countries because for centuries Africa has been displayed as a continent of despair, hunger and famine which appeals to pity and charity and therefore needs aid. As we have pointed out, Christian missionaries used the same strategy to receive funding for their mission. Dambisa Moyo has written an insightful book, \textit{Dead Aid}, in which she argues that despite the widespread belief that the rich should help the poor, and the form of that help should be aid, the reality is that aid has helped make the poor poorer, stifled and retarded Africa’s development, created “all pervasive culture of aid-dependency that there is little or no real debate on the exit strategy from the aid quagmire.”\textsuperscript{649} She argues that despite four decades of aid to Africa, aid dependency model has kept Africa in a perpetually childlike state, created a vicious cycle of aid dependency which “chokes off desperately needed investment, instills a culture of dependency, and facilitates rampant and systematic corruption … The cycle, that in fact, perpetuates underdevelopment and guarantees economic failure in the poorest aid-dependent countries.”\textsuperscript{650}

Dambisa Moyo proposes trade as one of the viable exit strategies from the aid quagmire.\textsuperscript{651} During the colonial period, East African nations produced raw materials for industries of colonialists. Coffee for instance, was widely grown in East Africa but processed in the West and then imported to East Africa. In this process, its price had multiplied more than five times.

\textsuperscript{648} Here we are alluding to Marx’s idea that institutions which create an environment of economic dependency are slave masters because slave masters are not only those who deprive others of their freedom, but also those who acquire monopoly of wealth and economic power which they use to create an environment of dependency (chapter one).


\textsuperscript{650} Ibid. 49.

\textsuperscript{651} Ibid. 64.
Despite the unfairness and exploitation of the trade model, trade is far better than foreign aid simply because whereas aid is given to governments which often misuse it and do not channel it to where it is needed or intended to go, trade benefits the growers who sell their produce to the government, creates an incentive for them to grow more and creates employment. Trade gives the producers a voice to challenge their government leaders, motivates creation of wealth while aid is aimed at poverty reduction. Trade is from below and filters to all sectors of the economy of the country whereas aid is from above, invests wealth in the hands of the government and often does not filter below because of corruption and misappropriation of funds.\textsuperscript{652} When aid money filters below, it is often given to people and institutions which support the government. At the time of independence, East African states could balance their budgets by trading raw materials with other nations. This is not possible today. East African countries are now balancing their budgets with foreign aid. By early 2000s, at least half of Uganda’s US $ 2 billion budget was financed by foreign aid.\textsuperscript{653}

Foreign aid, as Bolton Giles argues, is not enough, unreliable, with strings attached and often not given to nations that need it most.\textsuperscript{654} He adds that the system is not only unjust to Africans who are depending on unreliable aid but also unjust to taxpayers in the West who are taxed

\textsuperscript{652} Ibid. 64. African dictators find aid very attractive because what they have to do is to listen to their donors from whom they receive their wealth. The indigenous people are left at the mercy of these dictators who use the aid from donors to rig elections and create an infrastructure to keep them in power perpetually. By 2013, a small country like Uganda, for instance, had 70 ministers, 385 Members of Parliament, 131 districts and 82 presidential advisors; the number will keep on increasing as long as aid money keeps flowing. Such infrastructure however costly it might be serves the interests of the incumbent President Yoweri Museveni who by 2013 has been in power for 27 years.

\textsuperscript{653} Giles Bolton, Africa Does Not Matter: How the West Has Failed the Poorest Continent and What We Can Do about It (New York, NY: Arcade Publishing Inc., 2007), 102f.

\textsuperscript{654} Ibid.116. Bolton enumerates ten top recipients of US aid in 2006. Israel tops the list with US $ 2,495 million followed by Egypt, US $ 1,779 million. These are not the poorest countries of the world. On the other hand, poorest countries like Burundi received US $ 26 million and Eritrea, US $ 2.8 million. Sometimes ideological considerations are a major factor for aid. Thus Mobutu, dictator as he was, received much aid from the West because of his anti-socialist tendencies during the cold war. He siphoned a substantial amount of aid money into his private accounts in Switzerland.
twice, first, for aid, and second, for protecting their farmers from competition in agricultural products. Giles like Moyo insists that protectionism on agricultural produce whereby farmers in the West are paid for what they grow and produce, and limitations or tariffs on foreign agricultural imports to those countries is not only a false pretense that agriculture in the West is economically viable but also gives a wrong impression that trade is not a viable economic option. Simply put, the price at which consumers buy agricultural products in the West is far higher than the production of those products because of the subsidies which the Western farmers receive. Worse still, these products, particularly clothes, are sometimes dumped on the African market thereby killing the local clothes industries. Capitalist economics is all about minimizing cost of production and maximizing profits. But this economic system impoverishes Africans and is also costly to the West which raises the question whether there is any rationale of keeping and maintaining an economic system of ‘protectionism’, subsidies to Western farmers and aid to Africans other than keeping Africans perpetually dependent on the West.

The trade model is also important for the East African Catholic Church because Christians have to be encouraged to work and earn by the fruit of their labor. Unfortunately, the aid model has been used by missionaries to create dependency. Many Christians look at the Church as an institution composed of begging members who turn to their leaders for gifts. Politicians have exploited the begging syndrome to further their ends. President Museveni is known for giving cars to newly ordained bishops and in so doing compromises their moral ability to criticize him.655 Although, it is always good to support churches which are experiencing financial challenges, this support must be in form of helping them to be self-reliant. In East Africa, very often, aid is attached to certain expatriate missionaries and when they leave it disappears. Many

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655 Eddie Ssejjoba, “Born Again Leaders Blast Counterparts,” New Vision (June 02, 2012). Alex Mitala, a leader of the Pentecostal Churches in Uganda criticizes bishops who are asking President Museveni to step down in 2016 when in the first place these bishops had received cars from the President.
indigenous priests have faced the challenge of taking over from expatriate priests who had killed the spirit of self-reliance by giving hand-outs. Worse still, seminary training does not adequately prepare and empower the indigenous clergy to be creative in their ministry. It is still entrenched in the Scholastic model of philosophy and theology instead of opening up the curriculum to incorporate humanities which in turn reinforces African holistic approach to human wholeness. We are now going to look at some of the ways to address anthropological poverty.

4.6.1.2 Transformation From Dependency to Interdependency

Anthropological poverty which is an East African reality needs to be addressed both from within and from without. In addressing the problem of anthropological poverty emphasis has often been put on the role played by external forces in impoverishing East Africans. The first major problem with such pessimistic approach is that it often neglects the enemy within. African current economic problems have not been entirely caused by external forces like IMF and World Bank but also by Africans themselves, particularly dictators who have manipulated and used foreign aid to perpetuate their legacy. Second, a pessimistic approach to a problem often neglects the fundamental fact that we have to learn how to depend on our resources in order to solve our problems. Third, an important and relevant question in trying to address the problem of anthropological poverty which prompts soul searching is due to the fact that when a certain group of people is continuously marginalized by a variety of forces, it is always healthy for such a group to ask itself why we not others. Are there some weaknesses within the group which may be the cause of a circle of marginalization and impoverishment? It means that it is always important to search from within if we are to broaden our understanding of the true causes.

We noted that individuation is an important category of understanding person in Western thought that is traced from Aristotle’s notion of person as subsistent being reflected in Boethius’
definition of person as *naturae rationalis individua substancia* (individual substance of rational nature), an understanding that was prevalent during the time of Libermann. The emphasis of this understanding of person is self-sufficiency. Such understanding of person has its own advantages particularly reflected in a strong drive for personal freedom. In theological anthropology, it leads to emphasis on individual condemnation and individual salvation. Libermann went further than Western thought by insisting that interdependence is also an important notion of humanness. He was aware of the dangers of individuation which may create misguided assumptions about independence or emancipation leading to individualism and egoism. Libermann taught that as people we are interdependent because we depend on each other and need each other for mutual support. Interdependence leads to mutual respect of each other’s values and heritage. Interdependence resonates with the African value of communion which is a cherished value of East African personhood. We live in communion and each one depends on each other. Communion is rooted in the mystery of the Trinity which is a communion of relations.

The Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania offer us a good example of the importance of human value and the necessity of promoting interdependence on the one hand, and the sacredness of individual freedom on the other. During the period of the slave trade, many leaders of ethnic groups in East Africa cooperated with traders in human misery to sell off their brothers and sisters into slavery in exchange for clothes or guns or other merchandise. However, this was not so among the Maasai. Some scholars have attributed this success against slave traders to the so called “war-like nature” of the Maasai and a strong army of *murran* who defended their ethnic

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656 N.D. X, 231.
group from Arab slave traders.\textsuperscript{657} I do not subscribe to such an argument because if military might alone was the key determining factor in defeating the marauding slave traders, then other ethnic groups would have done the same. Each ethnic group or chiefdom in East Africa had a strong enough army that could easily have repelled small bands of Arab slave traders. But they could not because leaders of these people did not resist the allurements of the material benefits which the slave traders offered. It can be argued that some chiefs thought that by exchanging their subjects with guns, they were strengthening their army and protecting the whole ethnic group from foreign invaders and in so doing individuals had to be sacrificed for the sake of the entire ethnic group. This argument is rather weak because these African chiefs or kings who participated in slave trade were aware of the sanctity and value of human life and that the goods they received in the exchange were far less important than the life and dignity of their subjects. The Maasai, on the other hand, who would have had a stronger reason to get guns to strengthen their army, rejected the enticement for basically two reasons. First, the Maasai had and still have great respect for personal freedom. Each individual in Maasai society is endowed with human dignity which cannot be sacrificed for material goods. According to a study done by Jan Voshaar, personal freedom is a treasured and cherished value among the Maasai:\textsuperscript{658}

\begin{quote}
Political activity is fluid, free and occasional. The Maasai male population is composed of free and independent individuals. This is treasured…To the Maasai this freedom is complete, but it comes of course within a uniform world-view and social organization. This fluid kind of leadership, individual freedom, individual cattle wealth, individual mobility, family and group isolation, together too with the clan and age-group unity, are all simultaneous elements of Maasai society. The personal independence exhibited by Maasai man and within her own sphere (sic), the Maasai woman, - their individual ‘self-sufficiency’ is an attribute of the Maasai tribe as a whole.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{657} Among the Maasai, the Murran refers to “warriors” who have graduated into “warrriorhood” after circumcision ceremony. They are normally between the ages of 15 and 30. Cf. Voshaar, “Tracing God’s Walking Stick in Maa”, 59.

\textsuperscript{658} Voshaar, “Tracing God’s Walking Stick in Maa”, 50.
It is because of this respect of personal individual freedom that the Maasai could not allow members of their society to be enslaved from within or from without.

Second, the Maasai defended their members from Arab slave traders because there was a strong bond of unity within the Maasai society not built on hierarchy or military strength alone but rather on values. Voshaar continues.659

It is a turned-in society turned-in to itself, not because of societal and organizational strings that permeate the whole coming from an organizational centre that pulls everything unto itself, but rather as a reality that is turned-in on itself on account of the values that are treasured in this society and on account of the world-view that is shared by its members. ‘Closed society’ or ‘self-sufficiency’ in this context, does not mean that the outside world is not needed or that it is shunned. The outside world is appreciated and built into the Maasai world, but on Maasai terms.

The Maasai society is a decentralized society and what brings them together to create a strong bond of solidarity are the treasured values they share together as a group, and one of these cherished values as we have observed is personal freedom and human dignity. Therefore, the Maasai were spared the onslaught of slave trade because of the value of human freedom and human sanctity. It was horrendous and detestable for them to see their brothers and sisters being sold off into human misery and they did everything in their power to see that they protect each and every member of their society. The Maasai then offer us a good example of how people can fend off forces of dehumanization by first, respecting individual freedom and human dignity, second, by being united with each other and third, by being concerned with the well-being of each other. They could achieve all of this without being a hierarchical structured society.

That being said however, the Maasai need interdependency and to interrelate with other inculturated Christian communities. Interdependence and respect of human dignity seems to be working very well within Maasai society but as Shorter points out, “ecclesial maturity does not

659 Ibid.
consist in self-encapsulation, but in the capacity to give, receive and mutually invigorate within a koinonia.”

We are living in a globalized world and we cannot afford to live in a closed-in society. We have looked at the deleterious effects of enclosures on interpersonal human development, i.e., Jewish ghettos, seminaries and novitiate cloisters, and Christian villages. This may analogously apply to an ethnic group which chooses to close her doors on others. Inner cohesion is not enough for them to survive. Recent studies in post colonialism have stressed the importance of borderline conditions of cultures and disciplines. Borderline or “in-between” space provides a framework of describing cultures where identity is formed in an on-going process and this is the space which the Maasai cannot afford to neglect.

An important lesson from the above discussion is that the East African Catholic Church is to pursue an economic model that combines self-reliance and interdependence. This model calls for a recognition that inasmuch as we aim to be self-reliant we also realize that it is an ideal that cannot be achieved because we are always interdependent.

4.6.1.3 Inculturation

The importance of inculturation for our present study is first and foremost underlined by the fact that the present study is a dialogue between anthropologies, and inculturation is a dialogue between faith and culture. Inculturation deals with anthropology because human beings are born and nurtured in a culture, the locus of humanization. Anthropology focuses on the value and goodness of human person and his/her cultural context as the locus where God reveals himself/herself, for as Bevans says: “It is within every person, and every society and culture, that God manifests the divine presence.” Inculturation then is like a marriage, a covenant between

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661 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 16.
partners to form a mutual relationship. Second, prominent East African theologians like Mbiti and Nyamiti have consistently insisted that inculturation is the best viable option to address the problems of anthropological poverty. As we will see, this choice for inculturation theology by Mbiti and Nyamiti has been done in preference to liberation theology which we are to analyze later on. Third, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar during the 1974 Synod lamented that “Christian life in Africa was very often lived merely at the surface, without any dialogue between the gospel and the genuine values of traditional religion.” They called for a genuine research that would enrich the process of evangelization, rejected adaptation and insisted on proclaiming the gospel in ways that touched the lives of the people and adapted the theology of incarnation. Fourth, the durability of the African Church will depend on inculturation. According to Waliggo, “this terminology [inculturation] has never been superseded.” The history of Christianity in Africa supports this view. In the early centuries of Christianity, North Africa had flourishing Christian churches with Carthage as the center but this church was almost wiped out by the Muslim invasion. It only survived in Coptic speaking Egypt and further south in Ethiopia where it had been translated into local languages, adapted to local cultures, and propagated by local evangelizers. Fifth, Libermann’s l’œuvre des noirs is a missionary

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663 Ibid. 213. See also AMECEA Documentation Service, No. 11/2 (Nairobi, 1974), 2f. The term adaptation which was suggested by Vatican II did not go far enough to express the reality of indissoluble marriage between Christianity and each local culture. It meant selection of certain rites and customs, purifying them and inserting them within Christian rituals where there was any apparent similarity. This was followed by indigenization which referred to the same process but underlined the necessity of promoting indigenous church ministers. Vatican II stressed reformulation of the Christian doctrine in the thought and language that are understandable to contemporary people (Gaudium et Spes 44, 62). The term incarnation of the Christian message came into general use after the Council.


665 Ibid. 12. The same can be said of the Kingdom of Congo in West Africa where Portuguese missionaries evangelized and “converted” many people in the 15th and 16th centuries, had a local bishop consecrated in 1518 but this church disappeared due to lack of inculturation.
evangelization endeavor and missionary evangelization necessarily involves a meeting of cultures. It is due to the realization by the Church that evangelization is addressed to a culture that has contributed to the development of the idea and theology of inculturation. Furthermore, the hallmark of Libermann’s teaching was inculturation. He insisted that his missionaries should assimilate the culture of the people they evangelize.

We noted that inculturation is modeled on the incarnation of Jesus, the Word of God, and paradigm of all inculturation. According to Jesse Mugambi the term “incarnation” is the “semantic inspiration of inculturation … the manifestation of the divine in human corporeality. God becomes manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, inculturation is the manifestation of the Church in the various cultures where it has been introduced and established.” Since the incarnation of the Word of God in the Jewish cultural milieu in Palestine, the Word of God has been becoming flesh in many cultures birthing into Christianity. The first major inculturation process was when Christianity absorbed the Hellenistic culture. According to Catherine Keller, the crucial turning point in what she calls the process of hybridization was when the

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666 Pope Paul VI, Evangeli Nuntiandi, 20.

667 Mugambi, From Liberation to Reconstruction, 8. Though the term inculturation may be of recent origin within Christian theology and language, the reality it signifies has been present in various degrees in the Church since her foundation.

668 It must also be pointed out that inasmuch as there were people who advocated for inculturation in Christian evangelization, others have opposed it. Examples from Church history abound: The early Church experienced problems when some members of the Jewish party wanted all Christians to be circumcised. This dispute was settled by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Missionary efforts using inculturation methods by Matteo Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili in India were censured by Rome due to some sections in the Roman Curia who were opposed to inculturation. The Council of Trent stressed uniformity and adopted Thomistic scholastic philosophy and theology as the unifying system. This uniformity still thrives in seminary training. During Vatican II, Cardinal Ottaviani and Archbishop Lefebvre with a motto “semper idem” (always the same) resisted any changes in the Church. See Louis J. Gallagher, trans., China in the 16th Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583-1610 (New York: Random House, 1953). George H. Dunne, Generations of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the last Decades of the Ming Dynasty (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1962), 23-108.

669 Catherine Keller, Mayra Rivera and Michael Nauser, eds. Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004).
Church became a state religion. Christianity absorbed the Hellenistic culture at a very high cost for in reality it absorbed an idolatry of identity: a metaphysical Babel of unity, an identity that harmonizes the multiplicities it absorbs … God was infused with power … God of power and might." The inevitable implications of such concept of God are the omni-attributes of God, e.g. omnivolent, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient which have found their way in the understanding of God in African Religions thanks to the Christian scholastic apologists. Cultural dominance and Christian triumphalism have been major factors in the way Christianity has been propagated from Europe to the rest of the world. One major difference is that in Africa slavery and colonialism took a racial turn.

Inculcation “aims at making Christianity permanent in Africa by making it a people’s religion and a way of life which no enemy or hostility can ever succeed in supplanting or weakening.” Despite the desecration of African cultures by Western colonialism and Christian evangelism, African cultures have been resilient. Levinas’ idea of the inviolability of the face of the other offers us a useful analogy to African cultures which have managed to survive despite centuries of desecration. It is of paramount importance that the East African cultural matrix is retrieved and modernized in a globalized world so that it can become vibrant and lead to fullness of human living. Inculcation theology is equal to the task of bringing about a true marriage between Christianity and African cultures birthing into Christian communities. Much ink has been poured into inculcation but the effort to translate it into reality beyond the theoretical level

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670 The turning point was Constantine’s victory over Maxentius at the Milvan Bridge (312 AD); since then the church in the West has always been compromised to power and privilege in one form or another. See, Kealy, Sean P., “Jesus’ Approach to Mission,” SEDOS BULLETIN 32/2 (Fall 2000), 47.

671 Catherine Keller, Postcolonial Theologies, 223.

remains an enormous challenge. One fundamental problem is that inculturation theology is almost exclusively dwelling on retrieval. There are grounds to go beyond retrieval.

First and foremost, there is now a growing awareness that any theological endeavor must make a preferential option for the poor and marginalized. This is also true for missionary activity. Anthony Gittins\textsuperscript{673} points out that authentic mission is a movement from the center to the margins, a centrifugal movement of lives to the other especially to the poor and marginalized as Gustavo puts it: “mission is to convince the poor that God loves them.”\textsuperscript{674} Libermann’s \textit{l’œuvre des noirs} was primarily focused on the poor and marginalized Africans. It was a preferential option for the poor. We have noted that despite their weaknesses, by their choice to evangelize slaves, early Spiritan missionaries to East Africa made a preferential option for the poor. Inculturation theology too particularly in the African context has to make a preferential option for the poor. Preferential option for the poor is the raison d’être of inculturation theology because African cultures have been marginalized and trivialized for centuries.

Second, inculturation theology makes a preferential option for the poor by narrating the story of exploitation and desecration of the African cultures as well as the values of African cultural heritage because the voices of these cultures have been suppressed for centuries. Hence, inculturation is not only retrieval of African cultural heritage but also narrating the story of the voiceless. This is not only extremely important but also a challenging task because the history of the oppressed is often suppressed. We saw how it is extremely difficult to reconstruct the response of the ransomed slaves to Spiritan evangelism in Christian villages because missionary stories are stories of the evangelizers rather than the evangelized. In the history of East Africa,

\textsuperscript{673} Anthony Gittins, \textit{Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Missions} (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2002), IX.

\textsuperscript{674} Cited by Gittins, \textit{Ministry at Margins}, 12.
we saw how Africans had a vibrant and dynamic oral tradition which enabled them to recount their stories from one generation to another. In reference to history, we have underlined Ricoeur’s time and narrative and his assertion that the story of the marginalized demands a narrative. Therefore, one of the ways by which inculturation theology can be relevant is to narrate the story of suffering human subject, and narrating the story of an oppressed culture.

Jesus was weak, had no army, had no political base or power but his influence is still felt today because there was somebody to narrate his story. The story of the Uganda martyrs is known in many parts of Africa because their story is narrated and their names given to people. In many East African traditional societies, children were gathered at an evening fire and narrated a story by an elder. The same story had to be repeated the following day by one of the children to make sure the story continues. The memory of the past is not aimed at vengeance but rather reconciliation even with powers which colonized and enslaved Africans. Inculturation theology, therefore, makes a preferential option for the poor and marginalized by focusing on narrating their story.

Third, inculturation in its primary aim of making Christianity relevant to the African situation must fully incorporate liberation theology. Martey points out that the locus of African reality is African history which needs to be rediscovered, rehabilitated and viewed as a unity, for true liberation “must be historical liberation; if not there is no liberation...Rediscovery of their history deepens the sympathies, fortifies the will and liberates the mind.” Inculturated Christianity attempts to offer hope to anxieties and anguishes of people of Africa who are faced

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675 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 75.


with many challenges. Martey notes that one of the initial problems of inculturation theology in Africa was a rift between inculturation theologians and liberation theologians.\(^678\) Those who subscribe to inculturation theology, for instance Mbiti and Nyamiti, see in African culture not only the weapon of fighting neocolonialism but also the rooting of Africans on a firm basis of culture. Inculturation theologians were often criticized by South African liberation theologians, namely Desmond Tutu, Bonjagalo Goba, Mokgethi Mothlabi and Simon Maimela, who think that liberation and particularly political liberation should be the main focus of African theology. They also felt that in their struggle for political independence, they had been abandoned by their African counterparts north of the Zambezi but south of the Sahara. On the other hand, South African liberation theologians were accused of limiting their understanding of liberation to political liberation. Mbiti rightly poses a question: “When the immediate concerns of liberation are realized, it is not clear where Black theology is supposed to go.”\(^679\) In synthesizing and harmonizing the tension between the two theologies, Martey insists that African theology has to deal with both culture and liberation adding that the two are mutually inclusive rather than exclusive and should interpenetrate each other. Even though the polarization and tension between the two theologies has subsided thanks to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, there is an inherent weakness in the way inculturation theologians have presented their case which can be read from the above confrontation. Martey\(^680\) rightly maintains that inculturation cannot occur in an oppressive and exploitive environment but in an atmosphere of freedom.

\(^{678}\) Ibid. 107. At a Conference of Black Churchmen at Dar es Salaam in 1971, the two groups could not agree on the main theme of the meeting. North American theologians insisted on “liberation” while Africans on “Africanization” with emphasis on culture. When Black theology emerged in South Africa it drew many theological insights from North American Black theology.


\(^{680}\) Ibid. 126.
which calls for the understanding of culture not only made up of traditional symbols but also praxis. For that reason, inculturation has to deal with liberation. It has to deal with oppressive structures and *anthropological poverty* which dehumanizes people, for as Waliggo points out, “inculturation which ignores such realities and divorces itself from liberation theology has already made itself irrelevant.” In addition, *culture is not limited to “traditionalism” but is dynamic, changing, holistic and above all not a precept of the past but of the present*. This is an important aspect of culture because as we noted in the last chapter, African culture is intertwined with all spheres of life, it is a way of life. Liberation too is not just political but for the whole way of African living.

Fourth and most important, in a globalized world of highly charged and dynamic communal interrelationships, many scholars are insisting that the place for grabs and locus of culture is not just in retrieval of cultural heritage but at *the interstitial space where human identity and identity of culture is formed*. We saw how East African concept of time combines the traditional concept of time defined by natural and human events and the Western linear concept of time defined by chronology. East African existence negotiates its existence and identity between the two spaces. *Interstitial space* becomes even more important in East African context due to the fact that culture is interwoven in all spheres of human life.

Homi Bhabha who has made a major contribution to the theories of cultural identity in a globalized world says that *interstitial space* or in-between space is a boundary “where something begins presencing” adding that “cultural globality is figured in the in-between spaces of double frames; its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred ‘subject’ signified

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681 Waliggo, “Making the Church That Is Truly African”, in *Inculturation*, 24
in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the present.”

According to Michael Nausner, boundaries are “complex fields of negotiations rather than lines of divisions … complex places of exchange both in their geographical and cultural significance … highly relevant places of producing meaning.”

He suggests that Christianity should not be institutionalized to become “sedentary culture” because “being Christian is being a boundary dweller, being shaped in-between”.

Nausner gives an example of Jesus whose career “is conceived in Mark as a journey” not only from Galilee to Jerusalem (the center of Judaism) but also to foreign territories of Tyre and Sidon where he cured a Syrophoenician woman who even reminded him that God’s hospitality goes beyond national and racial boundaries (Mk 7:24-30).

Gerald Boodoo underlines the importance interstitial space as a space of our identity, and identity “is in relational difference and not about consolidating essence”.

He continues: “Identity is forged in the interplay of relationships in locations of space which could never be completely possessed and thereby allows for not only the inversion of roles, … but also possibilities of creating differing identities.” Since identity is not about being but rather about the production of ways of existing in the interstitial space, it is necessary to have “continuous negotiation and rephrasing/reinterpreting relationships.”

Interstitial space cannot be

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682 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 2004), 309.
684 Ibid. 126.
685 Ibid. 130.
686 Ibid. 130.
687 Ibid. 6-7.
688 Ibid. 9.
completely possessed otherwise East African cultures would have been dead by now. *Interstitial space* calls for tolerance.

*Interstitial space* means reading the “signs of the times” and interpreting them correctly, it means creativity and finding new ways of evangelization. It is at *interstitial spaces* where East African cultural identity is formed that inculturation theology should turn its primary focus because for a long time it has been conceived as a theology of retrieval of the past rather than a theology of the present. *It is at interstitial space that inculturation discovers that the act of faith is not merely a notional assent to a number of fixed dogmas and doctrines but it is a living, dynamic and transforming encounter with the risen Christ, a union with him which is distinguished by all the characteristics of a relationship of mutual love and trust.* It is at *interstitial space* that marriage between African societies and the Christian gospel takes place, birthing into Christian communities; hence the need and urgency of Small Christian Communities (SCC) which is our next topic of discussion. These Christian communities define themselves, their personality and identity, become subjects rather than objects of evangelization, and organize their worship, and as a result they are evangelized.

**4.6.1.4 Small Christian Communities (SCC)**

Small Christian Communities (SCC) are envisioned to be the flowering of *ubuntu* values of humanness, humaneness, kindness, hospitality and reconciliation. They also locate the Church where it must be, among the people. Their primary objective is to empower each and every Christian to be an effective member of evangelization. Libermann encouraged inculturation which would empower Africans to be effective tools of evangelization.
AMECEA (Members of Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) endorsed the creation of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as one of the ways to enhance evangelization in Eastern Africa. In 1973, the bishops issued a declaration that SCC must be the new way of being the church in this part of Africa. They commissioned the setting up of SCC after realizing that the participation of the laity in evangelization was weak. The AMECEA bishops resolved:

We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa it is time for the Church to become really “local” that is: self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting…We believe that in order to achieve this we have to insist on building Church life and work on basic Christian Communities, in both rural and urban areas. Church life must be based on the communities in which everyday life and work takes place; those basic and manageable social groupings whose members can have real inter-personal relationship and feel a sense of communal belonging, both in living and working. We believe that Christian communities at this level will be the best suited to develop really intense vitality and become effective witnesses in their natural environment.

These communities were to encourage members to strengthen “inter-personal relationship” by prayer. A pastoral plan and ecclesiology was adapted to implement SCCs in AMECEA countries. SCCs draw their foundation and strength not only from the Church as a “domestic family of God” but also from communitarian living of African way of life. The core value of SCC is ujamaa (familyhood) expressed in fraternal care and love. SCCs are consistent with the idea of relatedness which is a characteristic way people live in East Africa.

The African Synod took the model of church-as-family-of-God as a guiding way of evangelization of Africa. “For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.” Small Christian Communities (SCC) are

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689 AMECEA Bishops, “Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s” in AFER (16/1 and 2, 1974).
690 Cited by Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 115. Cf. AMECEA Bishops, “Planning for the Church”.
691 John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, No. 63.
modeled on the family as an important and primary element of evangelization. First, it envisions all families as having an important evangelical role to make the social justice mission central to its identity, and to ground that mission in family spirituality. Second, this metaphor resonates with East African understanding of marriage and family. Marriage is not just a contract between two partners but depends on kinship support of the extended family.

According to Joseph Healey who has done extensive contextual research on SCCs and has conducted training sessions on SCCs at diocesan levels, SCCs have transformed churches which have embraced and implemented their ideals. The late Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge diocese, Tanzania went even a step further by launching a new pastoral initiative of integrated community composed of priests, families and religious men and women of which the bishop himself was a member. This community integrated the ideals of Nyerere’s Ujamaa and at the same time it was a reenactment of Spiritan Christian villages at Bagamoyo. Joseph Healey praises this community living which he says is a concrete way of living the fullness of the Christian vocation.

Healey’s overall finding was that SCCs were not implemented by many dioceses and where they existed they were not functioning well. He says, “the SCCs are taken as simply an addition to the old way of being church….The institutional model of Church has suffocated the community aspect and dimension…SCCs have not been in the forefront in the struggle for

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693 The concept of ujamaa (“familyhood”) was popularized by former Tanzanian President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (1962-1985) as a model of African socialism and communitarianism. This model promoted the ideals of collective agricultural labor, proportional land use, shared proceeds and adequate distribution of and access to social services and amenities. People were regrouped in villages. At first it was voluntary but later it became compulsory and at its peak in 1975, two thirds of Tanzanians were living in ujamaa villages. Ujamaa was abandoned because of its unviability as a model of social economic development.

694 Ibid. 65.
justice and peace, human rights and democratization.”695 Healey presents theologies that can redeem SCC: First, a theology of liberation from all that enslaves Africa; second, a theology of inculcation which can empower African Christians to feel fully at home in the Church; third, a theology of communion, not only of Catholics but of the entire people of God; fourth, A contextual theology which pays attention to the differences in the needs and aspirations of the rural and urban, educated and illiterate, old and young; fifth, a narrative theology which interprets the wide range of narrative and oral forms of communication in SCCs for example, proverbs, sayings and riddles.696

Assessing SCCs reveals that first and foremost, lack of commitment is a great obstacle to the functioning and survival of SCCs. These communities offer East Africans the best chance of being church because they are based on the real traditional African communitarian values of being person. We have already noted that in the early years of Christianity in Uganda, SCCs functioned well even in the absence of a hierarchical Church (when all missionaries had retreated to Tanzania). The diocese of Kiyinda Mityana in Uganda has drawn enormous inspiration from these early Ugandan ancestors in faith in being church in SCCs.697

695 Joseph Healey, “Our Five Year Journey of SCCs from December 1991 to October 1996: The Evolving Sociology and Ecclesiology of Church as Family of God.” AFER, Vol. 39, No. 5-6 (October 1997), 287-311. This is a paper that was presented at a “Theological Consultation on Small Christian Communities” at Notre Dame University by a commission led by Fr. Joseph Healey. The purpose of the paper is to share some of the recent experiences and reflections on the development of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a “New Way of Being Church.” (287). The research was done in two urban areas: Cathedral Church, Nakuru, Kenya and Mukuru Catholic Parish, Nairobi, Kenya. The latter is a slum area. The choice of these places was mainly due to the fact that urban areas have presented a great challenge to the African family.

696 Ibid. 298.

SCCs have played a pivotal role in programs aimed at caring for the sick. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator enumerates a number of examples where parish SCCs have been instrumental in caring for the sick in refugee camps and in urban slums areas affected by HIV/AIDS.\(^{698}\) In Korogocho slums in Nairobi, Sr. Gill’s Korogocho Home Based AIDS Care Program got much boost from the parish because it had a well-developed network of SCCs.\(^{699}\) Sr. Duggan’s Kamwokya Christian Caring Community at Kamwokya, Kampala got its initial impetus from SCCs known in Luganda as *bubondo* (*kabondo* in singular). She reports that this was the first organized effort to cope with AIDS in the area.\(^{700}\) “The involvement of SCCs in the care of PWA [People With AIDS] had the immediate effect of reducing the stigma attaching (sic) to those infected by HIV.”\(^{701}\) In refugee camps in Lukole, Tanzania, Juvenal Niboye reports that SCCs “are responsible for the growth and development of the church in the camps.”\(^{702}\) These examples vividly show that SCCs have the potential of transforming communities into caring communities and empowering people to be vehicles of love to others.

Let us now look at the challenges to the proper functioning of SCCs. First and foremost, SCCs have not functioned well in many dioceses because they are just appended to an institutional hierarchical structure.\(^{703}\) For instance, in Kampala archdiocese, SCCs appear in the pastoral plan

\(^{698}\) Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 2005.

\(^{699}\) Ibid. 95.

\(^{700}\) Ibid. 99.

\(^{701}\) Ibid.

\(^{702}\) Ibid. 149.

\(^{703}\) Brian Hearne, “Priestly Ministry and Christian Community” *AFER*, 24, 4 (August 1982), 228. This is a report of a commission set up by AMECEA to review the role of a priest in SCCs. Hearne proposes 12 recommendations which include among others “Africanization” of church ministry, biblical spirituality, ecumenical dialogue and removal of tension between the view of priesthood as “sacred power” with unquestionable powers and priesthood as the function of leadership in the Christian community.
of the archdiocese placed at the lowest level of the pyramidal hierarchical church. The basic structure runs as follows: archdiocese, parish, sub-parish and SCC. In this hierarchical structure, SCCs are subordinate to the sub-parish which means that their functioning is regulated at a higher level of sub-parish. No wonder that Healey says “the institutional model of the church has suffocated the community aspect and dimension” of SCCs. Their role is often reduced to being represented by their leaders at meetings, animating the Sunday liturgy and prayer meetings. There is therefore a need to look at SCCs as families or even extended families which exist in their own right rather than looking at them as subdivisions of or subordinate to sub-parishes. A family normally functions as a basic community by its own right and as a community needs other families to function properly which necessitates dialogue between families. SCCs too need space to negotiate inter-SCC dialogue aimed at strengthening their solidarity and their being church. Fully operational SCCs will foster the ability of each member to express and share his/her faith devotedly and at the same time become an active member of the community.

Second, SCCs need to be integrated in the existing local community. Open space in a lived existing community environment is a pre-requisite for SCCs to function properly. Even though SCCs are basically for Christians, they have to be created from existing communities because such communities reflect the multifaceted diversity of community living where Muslims, Christians, Buddhists as well as Agnostics coexist. For that reason, efforts by Bishop Christopher Mwoleka to create an integrated community of families, single people, priests, and Religious should always be looked at with much suspicion. These institutional communities like institutional hierarchical models suffocate the proper functioning of SCCs. If the example of Christian villages at Bagamoyo is to go by, institutional communities do not stand the test of

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704 Obutume Bw’omukatoliki mu Ssaza Ly’e Kampala (Kisubi: Marianum Press, 1999). This is a report of the Synod of Kampala Archdiocese that took place in 1999.
time. SCCs must be drawn from people and from the existing environment rather than being created for the people. Members are consulted in the process of their creation and implementation of their objectives so as to generate full participation of each and every member. By empowering members, SCCs offer a formidable response or equal to the challenge posed by Pentecostal Movements.

Third, SCCs must be more than just prayer groups. Drawing from African concept of person which is holistic, SCCs are to have a multifaceted approach to life. SCCs are then faced with a challenge of integrating a social agenda in their aims and objectives. Besides prayer and visiting the sick, members of SCCs can get involved in a number of social issues which include justice and peace, being catalysts of reconciliation, facilitating means of bridging the gap between rich and poor, improving sanitation in the locality, and stimulating social development projects. Currently, SCCs disproportionately attract more women than men, more girls than boys and more poor people than middle or high income earners. The social agenda not only attracts but also stimulates active participation of people of all classes, ages and genders.

4.6.1.5 Responding to the Challenges of HIV/AIDS

Jesus says: “I came so that they may have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Our human nature is fragile and our human life is challenged by infirmities. Malaria and HIV/AIDS are the leading causes of deaths in East Africa. We have selected HIV/AIDS for further analysis because it is not only a physical disease but also a social and psychological disease which has affected numerous lives. The healing ministry was an important and indispensable part of Jesus’ ministry. The Gospel abounds with examples of Jesus’ healing ministries and outreach to people

705 Healey and Hinton, eds. Small Christian Communities Today, 97.
of different mental, spiritual, emotional, material and physical conditions (Mt 9:35, 14:34-36, 15:29-31; Mk 1:32-34; Lk 7:18-23). It is then logical that the ministerial identity of the Church should be modeled on the praxis of Jesus. As Earl Shelp and Ronald Sunderland point out, “when Jesus welcomed the sick and disabled with open arms, he presented a potent model to his followers. The manner in which the churches and their members respond to people with AIDS is an indication of the degree of seriousness with which they follow the example of Jesus.”

The East African church too is to make the healing ministry an important and indispensable part of her ministry. As Waliggo points out, “the Catholic Church should become the healing Church par excellence through the celebration of the Sacraments.” Pastoral letters of the bishops of Kenya and Uganda affirm this principle, but the gap still exists between such affirmation and its translation into ecclesiastical praxis. Pastoral and sacramental ministries are highly important in the time of AIDS.

The challenges of HIV/AIDS resonate with the challenges which Libermann had to confront, living with epilepsy for almost all the last half of his life. Epilepsy like HIV/AIDS has deleterious social implications. Despite the suffering, Libermann lived positively with epilepsy and offers us a good example of how to address the challenges of HIV/AIDS.

There is an African way of addressing the challenges of HIV/AIDS. We noted that human wholeness is an important aspect of African Religions (chapter three). Healing is also important and mganga plays an important role. Healing ministry becomes even more important with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In our analysis of the challenges of HIV/AIDS, emphasis should also be

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707 John Mary Waliggo, “Inculturation and Its Positive Impact on the Prevention, Cure and Healing of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in the AMECEA Region.” A Paper presented and discussed during the 15th AMECEA Plenary Assembly, June 7th 2005, Kampala, Uganda. This assembly was specifically focused on HIV/AIDS.
put on African traditional values which I believe can offer us a starting point of how to deal with the pandemic.

The challenge posed by HIV/AIDS is a very real one that deserves considerable attention because about 8% of East Africans live with HIV/AIDS. The first cases of HIV/AIDS in Africa were reported in southern Uganda near the border with Tanzania in 1982. The disease spread so fast that at the end of 1991 People With AIDS (PWA) were almost 20% of the total population of Uganda. In 2001, Uganda reported 900,000 PWAs which meant that the percentage had dropped to its current level of about 6%. In the same year, Tanzania reported the number of PWA to be 2,220,000 while in the same year Kenya reported 3,900,000 PWAs. The high figure in Kenya of the number of PWA is often attributed to the Kenya government’s

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708 Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 86-121. Orobator from a social and theological point of view has so far done the best contextualized study on HIV/AIDS in East Africa. He examines the church in East Africa in relation to her response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

709 Ibid. 88. Stories coupled with myths abound on either side of the border between Uganda and Tanzania, concerning the first cases of HIV/AIDS and the origin of the disease. The first cases of HIV/AIDS were reported near the border of the two countries just after the 1979 war that removed dictator Idi Amin from power by a combination of Tanzanian forces and Ugandans living in exile. The border regions of Kagera/Rakai became the epicenter of the disease and it spread rapidly thanks to prostitution and trucking along the trans-highway from Uganda to the port of Mombasa through Kampala, Jjinja (Uganda), Kisumu, Eldoret, Nakuru, and Nairobi (Kenya).

710 Ibid. 88. Cf. UNAIDS/WHO, “Epidemiological Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections Uganda 2002 Update” puts the figure at 900,000. The Uganda Ministry of Health, however, puts the number of PWA at 1,438,000. See, Ministry of Health STD/AIDS Control Program, “HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report June 2001”, 14. In addition, these figures should be seen in the light of population increase of the country. Decrease in percentage does not necessarily mean decrease in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS. Uganda with an annual growth rate of 3.5% has one of the highest population growth rates in the world. The population of Uganda more than doubles every 20 years: in 1959, it was 5.6 million; 1969, 9.2 million, 1980, 12.6 million; 1991, 16.4 million; and 2002, 24.4 million which means that the number of people living with HIV/AIDS is on the increase. What the figures show however, is that the rate of increase of the population of Uganda is higher than the rate of increase of the number of PWA. There is also a very strong suspicion that figures of PWA in Uganda are doctored by the Uganda government to convince the donor community for more HIV/AIDS grants, reflected also in the discrepancy of the figures between the Uganda Ministry of Health and those of UNAIDS/WHO above. Worst of all, these grants are often misappropriated. For example, Uganda is reeling in the scandal that top officials, their relatives and colleagues siphoned tens of millions of dollars meant for HIV, malaria and tuberculosis from Geneva-based Global Fund. Money went to charities that did not exist, into the personal bank accounts of government employees and even to fund a nationwide campaign to scrap term limits so that President Yoweri Museveni could run for a third term in office. Cf. “Uganda Shaken by Fund Scandal,” *The Washington Times* (June 15, 2006).

711 Ibid. 90.
lack of openness to the prevalence of the disease. This is due to the fact that Kenya relies heavily on the tourist industry. Accepting the prevalence of HIV/AIDS would scare off potential tourists. According to Orobator, Uganda has been seen as a success story of declining seroprevalence rates due to the “multilayered response from the government involving civic society, NGOs and churches.”\(^{712}\) This multilayered response involved first, the government’s openness about the disease, second, the political will to mobilize local and international resources (including the Church) to combat the threat of HIV/AIDS, and third, the government’s ability to galvanize a wide spectrum of civic society.

Orobator analyzes the Catholic Church’s approach to HIV/AIDS in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.\(^{713}\) The Tanzanian bishops were the first to address the HIV/AIDS crisis in an official pastoral letter in 1987 (“Declaration of the Tanzania Catholic Bishops on AIDS”). The letter declares that God employs historical events to communicate divine will. “We believe that behind this deadly disease there is the voice of God addressing us human beings today … to recognize and to respond to this invitation of God in our days.”\(^{714}\) Orobator highlights two interesting peculiarities of the Tanzanian bishops “Declaration” whose general tone he says, “is didactic and moralizing.”\(^{715}\) First, the most unsettling suggestion of the bishops is that the epidemic is a medium used by God to communicate divine will and command which creates the “real possibility of interpreting HIV/AIDS as a fateful manifestation of God’s discontent that can only be appeased through personal moral reform.”\(^{716}\) Second, another most astonishing aspect of the

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712 Ibid. 89.
713 Ibid. 112-121.
715 Orobator, From Crisis to Kairos, 113.
716 Ibid. 114.
“Declaration” is the total absence of any reference to or awareness of the Church’s responsibility which creates the impression that the Church is insulated from it.

The earliest extant letter issued by the Uganda bishops addressing HIV/AIDS appeared seven years after the first reported cases of HIV/AIDS in 1989.\(^{717}\) The Church’s teaching by the Uganda Episcopal Conference attributed the rapid spread of the disease to poverty and ignorance on the one hand, and loosening sexual behavior on the other. The bishops refer to the time of HIV/AIDS as a moment of grace to seek for conversion and action. The pastoral letter reads in part: “The people of God should be the family that embraces and sustains those who are sick, caring for them as brothers and sisters without barriers, exclusions, hostility and rejection.”\(^{718}\) The bishops were aware of the crippling stigma that led to the ostracization of people living with HIV/AIDS. They add that care, compassion and companionship amount to participation in the healing ministry of Jesus: “We too are called to do the same to those who in our day suffer from this new and deadly disease AIDS. The Lord Jesus is vividly present to us in the weak and the ill, and these can in some sense share in the mission of Jesus.”\(^{719}\) According to Orobator, although the Ugandan bishops opposed the use of condoms, they fully supported the government programs that included the use of condoms to combat the disease.\(^ {720}\)


\(^{718}\) Ibid.

\(^{719}\) Ibid.

\(^{720}\) The president of Uganda AIDS Commission which is a governmental body responsible for the country’s policy on HIV/AIDS was a retired Catholic bishop of Kabale, Barnabas Halem’Imana. The Commission encourages abstinence and marital fidelity but at the same time promotes condom use as means of preventing HIV/AIDS. This method is popularly known as “ABC” which stands for “Abstinence. Be faithful. Condoms.”
The Kenya Episcopal Conference on the other hand, was confrontational especially in her rejection of use of condoms.\textsuperscript{721} The Catholic Church leaders in Kenya allied themselves with Muslim leaders instead of Protestant Churches in their objection to condom use.\textsuperscript{722} The first major letter addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS by the Kenya Episcopal Conference appeared in 1999, ten years after the Ugandan bishops’ letter and seventeen years after the first cases of the HIV/AIDS pandemic were diagnosed ("The AIDS Pandemic and Its Impact on Our People: Seeking Solutions and Solidarity in these Difficult Times").\textsuperscript{723} Kenya bishops observe that HIV/AIDS is a crisis of immeasurable magnitude producing worst effects on African families, but it is also in the context of family that solutions are to be found. The bishops also link gender with HIV/AIDS highlighting and condemning cultures and traditions that make women primary victims of HIV/AIDS. The real backbone to the solution to HIV/AIDS control, the Kenya bishops contend, is “abstinence and fidelity.”\textsuperscript{724}

Orobator is of the view that despite the well written pastoral letter, Kenyan bishops have adopted a confrontational attitude towards the government on the issue of prevention which overshadows the good efforts taken to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic.\textsuperscript{725} He adds that the Catholic Church in Kenya manages between 40 and 50% of the country’s health care institutions and has integrated HIV/AIDS into Community-Based Health Care especially in the most remote

\begin{footnotes}
\item[721] Orobator, \textit{From Crisis to Kairos}, 119.
\item[722] Ibid. Orobator speaks of a public and dramatic expression of the opposition of condoms which occurred on August 19, 1995 when the late Archbishop of Nairobi, Cardinal Maurice Otunga together with the Imam of Nairobi’s Jamnia Mosque and chairman of Kenya’s Muslim Council, Sheikh Ali Shee burnt latex condoms and sex education material which they deemed to be inappropriate.
\item[724] Ibid.
\item[725] Orobator, \textit{From Crisis to Kairos}, 120.
\end{footnotes}
parts of the country but “all of this evaporates in the heat of the controversy. Simply put, the church in Kenya appears to be more criticized for its relentless opposition to condoms than complimented for its contributions to HIV prevention and care of PWA.”

Condom use has generated loads of controversy in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The donor community has put it as a pre-requisite for donor money. The Catholic Church has lost out on donor money because of the Church’s rejection of condom use. Another controversy that has arisen is that many donor countries require recipient countries to recognize gay/lesbian marriage as a valid form of marriage. It is beyond the scope of our discussion to unravel the merits and demerits of condom use or gay/lesbian marriage but what is important is that Africans must find ways to address their problems without relying on outside assistance that stifles their ability to address the problems caused by HIV/AIDS thereby propagating the dependency syndrome.

Efforts have been taken by governments and churches to address the problem of HIV/AIDS, but the disease is still spreading at a rapid rate. The spread of HIV/AIDS in East Africa has always been attributed to, first and foremost, poverty. We have dealt with anthropological poverty which is a major challenge to East Africans. The second reason for the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS is marginalization of women. Kevin Kelly did research on HIV/AIDS in Uganda, Thailand and Philippines; his overall conclusion is that HIV/AIDS thrives in cultures, particularly African cultures and the Catholic Church, where there is marginalization of women. He mentions patriarchy in the African traditions and the Catholic Church’s failure to acknowledge “full and equal dignity of women” as the major causes for the spread of

726 Ibid.

HIV/AIDS. Orobator enumerates some factors which have made women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS which include: their physiological configuration, inability to negotiate safe sex, and imbalance of gender power. These factors, he adds, are “compounded by perennial cultural practices, such as polygamy, wife inheritance, post-mortuary rites and female genital mutilation (FGM), which discriminate against women and reinforce their subjection to male domination and sexual exploitation.” Orobator’s ideas are also shared by another Nigerian theologian, Teresa Okure, who says that “in many countries of the developing world the condition which carries the highest risk of HIV infection is that of being a married woman.” “To put it starkly,” Orobator concludes, “HIV/AIDS has made a preferential option for women.”

Reflecting on the theological challenges of HIV/AIDS in East Africa, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Church has AIDS, put succinctly by Orobator: “The body of Christ has AIDS.” One of the implications of this affirmation is that the Church must live positively with HIV/AIDS. Kelly’s assertion that the Church should live positively with HIV/AIDS involves the

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728 Ibid. XX. Kelly is of the belief that the idea of inferior status of women has thrived in the Church for many centuries as reinforced by Augustine’s negative attitude towards women. He observes that the pro-women teaching of John Paul II acknowledges all human beings to be made in the image and likeness of God and also men and women are complimentary and different. However, Kelly argues that this argument of complementarity has been used to deny women equality with men for it is the same argument used by the Pope to deny women’s ordination to the priesthood Cf. New Directions in Sexual Ethics, 44- 65.

729 Orobator, From Crisis to Kairos, 133.

730 Ibid.


732 Orobator, From Crisis to Kairos, 134.

733 Ibid. 121.
recognition that the Church has AIDS and this is exemplified by some ministers of the Church living with HIV/AIDS.\textsuperscript{734}

Libermann offers us an excellent example of how to live positively with ailment. As pointed out, Libermann lived so positively with epilepsy that he even discouraged his friends from consoling him. This does not take away the fact that physical suffering was an immeasurable cross to carry and at one point he says he was ready to die.\textsuperscript{735} Libermann’s attitude toward suffering resonates with Jesus’ suffering we alluded to in analyzing Luke 22:44 and Heb 5:7-10 (chapter one). Libermann, following the example of Jesus, entrusted his suffering to the will of God. In one of the letters he wrote to his brother Samson referred to in chapter one, he says: “True Christians are satisfied with everything their heavenly Father gives them, because they know that whatever He sends is good and useful to them.”\textsuperscript{736} Therefore, the Church in East Africa has a task of acknowledging that she has AIDS and engage the crisis provoked by HIV/AIDS by \textit{living positively with AIDS}.

Second, traditional African values have so far played a pivotal role in addressing the challenges of HIV/AIDS. Waliggo lists some of the cherished African values which include:\textsuperscript{737}

- central concern for life: transmitting, protecting, curing, healing life …
- family values of educating children in the appropriate and proper use of their sexuality; the common values of caring for one another; the medical and healing values …
- spiritual-religious values based on strong beliefs that only God is the ultimate source of all cure and healing.

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\textsuperscript{734} Kelly, \textit{New Directions in Sexual Ethics}, 192ff. Kelly is critical about mandatory HIV testing of candidates to priesthood and Religious life, which he says infringes on the personal freedom and privacy of an individual.

\textsuperscript{735} LS II, 294. Letter to Monsieur Féret, November 13, 1839.

\textsuperscript{736} LS I, 8. Letter to Dr. and Mrs. Samson Libermann, July 8, 1830.

In mitigating the enormous challenges posed by many children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, the extended family has played a crucial role by absorbing these children. The Western approach has often been to create institutions like orphanages thereby institutionalizing the problem. The East African Church then is called upon to harness traditional African values in addressing the HIV/AIDS challenge. We pointed out that one of these values is hospitality expressed in love and compassion demanded of God’s people (Mtt 25:31ff).

Third, the Church is commissioned to move out to people rather than waiting for them to come to the Church. “AIDS challenges the Church to...be in the midst of the world’s pain, not just diagnosing its problems from afar but close to people, accepting them as they are and helping them to see and know God’s acceptance of them.”738 Movement to the locale where the PWA live actualizes the missionary identity of the Church and assumes “the shape of ‘companionship’, that is, journeying toward and with PWA.”739 Consequently, during times of AIDS “the church is challenged to adopt a new missionary praxis: a church that is not too far; not too busy; a church that does not wait for people, but goes out to the people, to meet them where they are, to offer compassionate care and solidarity.”740

Fourth, Orobator explores the multi-sectoral approach in addressing the challenges of HIV/AIDS. He observes that the Church is not a sector among many but itself a “mosaic of sectors” or a “community of sectors”. He says:741

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738 Heather Snidle and David Yeoman, *Christ in AIDS* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1997), 73. Cf. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 128. Orobator mentions “Kitovu Mobile” which is managed by the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM) Sisters near Masaka, Uganda. Their essential quality involves reaching out, going to, or bringing the church to PWA. The MMM Sisters bemoan that many times priests are not available to visit the sick.

739 Orobator, *Crisis to Kairos*, 128.

740 Ibid. 105.

741 Ibid. 125.
In this multi-sectoral understanding, the local community is the body of believers attentive and engaged, through various means and strategies, in the social context of life, faith, worship and ministry. Within this community, one finds a variety of ‘sectors’ – all interrelated and integrated, in view of achieving a common ecclesial mission. It is at this level that the identity and mission of the church assume a direct relevance to the people facing AIDS.

Multi-sectoral approach calls for an integration of Church activities. It implies that the challenge of HIV/AIDS crisis has to be dealt with holistically. It resonates with African way of living and African approach to the understanding of person and healing which is inclusive and holistic as underlined by Nicolson:742

African traditional religion is utterly holistic. Religious well-being, physical and general prosperity are all one. Bodily health cannot be separated from spiritual health nor individual health from community health. If one person in the family or community is ill, the illness makes the whole community less whole. If one individual is alienated from the community, the community and the individual are ill.

St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are one body of Christ but with many parts and many gifts (Cor 12:12-31). The communitarian way of living is crucially essential in addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Lastly, the Church is called upon to pay attention to women who are disproportionately targeted by HIV/AIDS. Kelly points out that the Church’s approach should be pro-women:743

The experience based theological reflection of women is fashioning a clearer lens enabling the Church to see what needs to be done. In other words, if we were not living in an age in which God’s Spirit is speaking in new ways through the voices of women interpreting their own experience, the Church might not be able to interpret accurately what God’s Spirit is saying in “the Time of AIDS.”... Today it is the critical analysis of women rather than the solutions of men which must be listened to.

It is not just listening to women but also empowerment of women in pastoral and sacramental care.744 This would inevitably involve first, dismantling structures in the church and society that

743 Kelly, New Directions in Social Ethics, 50. My italics.
make women disproportionately vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection and victims of the disease. Second, it would call for the Church to learn from women how truly to be a Church in the presence of human suffering even when the resources are limited. In East African hospitals and even in homes, it is often the women who are taking care of the sick. “If “being with” counts as one of the qualities of the church in the time of HIV/AIDS, the evidence from the field indicates that women have mostly been the ones who embody this quality of presence.”

4.6.2 Faith in Jesus Christ

Christian anthropology teaches that God’s self-communication to the human race is mediated through Jesus Christ our savior to which we are called to respond with faith. Faith is both an intellectual assent and an act of the will. Jesus asks his disciples: “Who do people say that I am”? (Mk 8:27). This is a relevant and important question which must be posed to East Africans. In chapter two, we noted that Libermann’s understanding of Jesus Christ was informed by 19th century dualistic anthropology whose Christology was high reflected in his “Commentary on the Gospel of St. John”. However, despite the deleterious effects of dualistic anthropology which led to mortification, asceticism and extreme fasting, Libermann was aware that the ultimate purpose of l’œuvre des noirs was holistic salvation of Africans mediated through Jesus Christ. For that reason, he taught his missionaries to take care of their spiritual and bodily needs.

Beginning our discussion with the Gospel tradition, we realize that the identity of Jesus is a central question to the understanding, purpose and structure of the Synoptic Gospels and

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744 Pastoral care includes the ordination of women to diaconate or priesthood debate which is beyond the scope of our discussion.

745 Orobator, From Crisis to Kairos, 138.

746 Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 143.
particularly the Gospel of St. Mark. Many commentators on this Gospel believe that the identity of Jesus is shrouded in a *messianic secret* whereby people do not recognize Jesus’ identity, and even when demons reveal that he is the Son of God, Jesus silences them (Mk 1:34; 3:12). The disciples of Jesus discover the identity of Jesus but gradually.\(^{747}\) At the high point of the Gospel of Mark at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples: “Who do people say that I am”? (Mk 8:27). Peter answers the question and reveals the true identity of Jesus as “Messiah”, but Jesus warns them not to tell anyone about his identity (Mk 8:29-30). However, Peter also reveals that he has not understood fully the true identity of Jesus when he rebukes Jesus for foretelling his passion, death and resurrection but Jesus in turn rebukes him and calls him Satan (Mk 8:31-33). During the passion of Jesus, his identity is a fundamental motive for his death sentence. At Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin (Mk 15:52-64), the High Priest asked Jesus: “Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?” When Jesus answered in the affirmative, the High Priest tore his garments, convicted Jesus of blasphemy and sentenced him to death. It is at the end of the Gospel of Mark that a centurion at last recognizes the true identity of Jesus, the Son of God (Mk 15:39). He recognizes this by the manner of Jesus’ suffering and death. Going by the above ancient Synoptic tradition, we can notice that first, the identity of Jesus is to be found in relationality rather than essence and as human beings we cannot fully comprehend his true identity. Peter identifies him as “Messiah” which is an attribute of Jesus rather than his essence. It highlights the relational understanding of Jesus. Second, Jesus tones down triumphalist messianic expectations because he was not a political messiah. Third, Jesus’ identity is not only to be found in his life-giving ministry but also in his suffering and death.

\(^{747}\) The ignorance of Jesus’ disciples about his identity is reflected in the healing of a blind man (Mk 8:22-26), a passage that comes before Peter’s confession of Jesus. After Jesus had put spittle on his eyes the blind man said: “I see people looking like trees walking,” but when Jesus laid his hands on him a second time he saw, understood, more clearly. Disciples of Jesus too had followed him but only gradually understood fully his identity.
Let us look at some responses to the question: Who is Jesus Christ for Africans today? First, inculturation theologians have settled for “Jesus as our ancestor.” Second, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) meeting of 1987 asserted: “He is our elder brother, liberator and healer.” Third, South African theologians settled for ‘liberator’. African women theologians too insist that Jesus is a ‘liberator’ who liberates women from all forms of servitude. Fourth, some African theologians like Martey try to reconcile the theologies of inculturation and liberation by settling for “ancestor liberator”.

East Africans’ understanding of Jesus Christ is influenced by Christian teaching and the contemporary reality rather than the ancestral past. Ancestors, as we have pointed out, are believed to transmit and safeguard life in African traditional societies and so that is the reason why many theologians in East Africa argue for “Jesus our ancestor” as an appropriate motif today. The problem with this motif is that it is out of touch with present day-to-day reality of East Africans. First, if we are to go by the names given to Pentecostal and Independent churches in East Africa, we can hardly see any one called “Jesus our ancestor”. Christ for these Churches as well as the Catholic charismatic renewal movement carry the liberation and healing motif.

Second, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike conducted an interview concerning the experiences of East African women in relation to Jesus. These are some of the responses she sampled: “Jesus is my strength”, “Jesus is my savior”, “Jesus Christ is my hope”, “Jesus is my closest friend”, and

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748 Martey, *African Theology*, 78ff. According to Martey, Nyamiti is a staunch supporter of “Jesus our ancestor”.

749 Ibid. 79.

“Jesus is the core of my life; He is my helper, my comforter…” These responses are an expression of women’s faith in Jesus and are also indicative of the experience including suffering and hardships which they overly bear in their daily lives. They never refer to Jesus as “our ancestor”.

Third, early missionary evangelism that discouraged what is truly African may also be partly to blame for lack of interest and lack of enthusiasm in “Jesus our ancestor.” For instance, in chapter three, we made reference to the Luganda version of the Roman Ritual of the Rite of Baptism of Children which requires people to renounce traditional rituals, ancestral worship and ancestral cult. After years of Christian evangelism many East Africans are developing a negative attitude to the ancestral past and if they are to have recourse to it, do it secretly. Therefore, the overwhelming consensus for East Africans is that Jesus is a healer, liberator, and savior close to people in the many challenges they confront in life and particularly to women who are often disproportionately entrenched in the thick of desperation.

“Jesus our ancestor” as an answer to the identity of Jesus by inculturation theologians suggests the following: first, it reinforces the belief that these theologians are still entrenched in retrieval rather than the present reality, thereby vindicating Mbiti’s claim that African concept of time has virtually no future; second, the gap between theologians and ordinary people is wide and perhaps theologians are out of touch with contextual realities.

751 Ibid. 72-73.

752 William Mpuuga, Ekitabo Ky’omukristu, (Kisubi: Marianum Press, 1975), 702. I have translated the Luganda version as follows: “Do you renounce traditional rituals which are against the teaching of the Catholic Church in which you were baptized, namely of twins, of ancestors (elders), of traditional shrines …?” The response is: “We renounce them completely.”
The healing, liberation and savoir motifs which have special significance for East Africans’ understanding of Jesus are also relevant to the understanding of Jesus’ priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews which is the only New Testament book that explicitly calls Jesus a priest. Jesus is referred to as a “merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb 2:17). After revealing the two qualities of Jesus’ priesthood (merciful and faithful), the author explains first, why Jesus was faithful (Heb 3:1-4:12). He was trustworthy as a son to God who had appointed him to be in charge of His house (Heb 3:1-6). Second, Jesus is also a merciful high priest (Heb 4:14-5:10). As we pointed out, Gospels abound in examples of Jesus’ healing ministries. In addition, Jesus was drawn from human community, was in solidarity with the people and through his obedient suffering and death, God crowned him high priest. The two qualities (merciful and faithful) of Jesus’ priesthood then offer us two important implications to the ministry of priesthood. First and foremost, priesthood is a ministry of commitment to diaconal service. A priest is to identify himself as a servant of others and particularly the poor and marginalized. Second, priesthood is a ministry of being in solidarity with the weak, marginalized and sinners. Like Jesus, a priest journeys with the people in their joy and suffering. Libermann too called upon his missionaries to be in solidarity with the people they serve. “Be their servants” he said.

East African ministry of priesthood is often associated with power and prestige rather than service. Part of this power is derived from the hierarchical clerical model of the Catholic Church that stresses power rather than diaconal service. Another source of power is derived from traditional African power vacuum. With the absence of traditional and cultural leaders who were revered in traditional African societies, a great deal of this power vacuum has shifted to religious leaders. Even in areas where traditional leaders still function their role has been reduced to a
ceremonial and cultural one.\textsuperscript{753} Priests have filled this vacuum evidenced by their titles. In Luganda a parish priest is called, \textit{Bwana Mukulu} which can be rendered “Most High Elder” or “Eminently High Elder”. This term symbolizes that the position of parish priest is an eminently powerful position rather than a position of service.

4.6.3 Life Giving Spirit and Ecology

Ecology is important for this study because human wholeness is achieved only through reconciling also with the environment. Ecology reminds us that our life is dependent on the cosmos. It is a critique of traditions, even African religious traditions, whose outlook on life is anthropocentric.\textsuperscript{754} Ecology opens our horizon to know that we are one among many in the cosmos. The word ecology comes from the Greek \textit{oikos} meaning “house” and \textit{logos} meaning “study.” The whole cosmos is a house or habitat so ecology is a study of the way different species are related to each other and their interaction with each other in the “house.” It reminds us that we depend on each other for survival.

Relationality is an important leitmotif of this study. So far we have discussed its importance within human society. Ecological consciousness calls us to widen our scope of relationality to all members of creation belonging to the same “house.” Leonardo Boff develops what he calls a new paradigm based on interrelatedness whose foundation is ecology, “the science and art of relations and of related beings.”\textsuperscript{755}

\textsuperscript{753} In Uganda, traditional leaders were restored in 1994. There are now the Kabaka of Buganda, Omukama of Toro, Omukama of Bunyoro and Kyabazinga of Busoga as the main leaders. Despite the deep respect and large following these leaders have in their respective areas and on their subjects, many feel that they are spineless, without political power.

\textsuperscript{754} We have mentioned traditional African outlook on life that was anthropocentric. According to this view, the earth is good as far as it is useful to human beings.

In recent years there has been a cautious and positive outlook on creation and an attempt to
revitalize the creative work of the Holy Spirit against a backdrop of neglect for most of the last
four centuries. Jesus says: “It is the spirit that gives life.” (Jn 6:63). These words are also echoed
in the Nicene Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.” Despite the fact
that the life giving-Spirit does not give life just to human beings but to all creation, widespread
philosophical and theological views have placed human beings at the center of creation at the
exclusion of non-human creation. Consequently, theological and philosophical reflection became
androcentric and anthropocentric. Thanks to ecological consciousness our understanding of life
has been stretched to include all creation. Salvation for instance, is not just for human beings but
for all creation.756 The same applies to “justice and peace” in recent Catholic teaching, which has
been appended with, “and integrity of creation.”

When we look at Libermann as the source of inspiration for ecological consciousness we find
that he has no special teaching on ecology. Our inspiration however, is his teaching on the Holy
Spirit whom he sees in every aspect of creation. For instance, Libermann uses the metaphor of a
ship to describe the different roles of the Holy Spirit who is wind in moving the ship.757

More inspiration however, is drawn from African Religions. In the last chapter, we alluded to
Wangari Maathai’s conviction that traditional East Africans believed that the “world was
animated by the spirit of God” which enabled them to be deeply connected with and bonded with

756 Bevans and Schroeder, Constants in Context, 377. Biblical passages of creation have also become important in
developing the theology of creation. God has reconciled all creation through Christ (Col 2:15-20).

has sails and a rudder. The wind blows into the sails and pushes the boat forward in the general direction in which it
should be going. But this is not accurate enough and eventually the boat could end up way off course. Your soul is
the boat, your heart the sail. The Holy Spirit is the wind and he blows on your will and your soul in the direction that
God wants you to go. Your spirit is the rudder and its role is to make sure that you do not deviate from the direct
path determined by the goodness of God. Your spirit must gently and calmly watch over what you say and do,
totally submissive to the will of God.”
non-human creation. This belief motivated them to respect, preserve and conserve nature because they saw it as a manifestation of God and depended on it for survival. The earth for instance, is not only important for producing food for human consumption it is also a locus where our ancestors are buried which gives rise to a religious ritual of libation. Consequently, within the traditional African system, there was a very genuine concern for ecology and its relevance to human wholeness.

Another source of inspiration for ecological consciousness is African holism. Marthinus Daneel, a missiologist, narrates a moving story of how the Shona people of Zimbabwe through their traditional leaders planted over a million trees to mitigate the effects of deforestation and drought which affected him as well and led him to conversion to environmental stewardship. What sparked off conversion was African holism, as Daneel says: “African holism became the hermeneutic for theological reorientation. Saving souls was important, I thought. But never at the expense of the salvation of all creation. In my situation conversion had little significance if it did not translate into full environment stewardship.”

The threat of ecocide is a very real one and a global one too. It is depicted in Leonardo Boff’s work, *Cry of Earth, Cry of the Poor* which decries the damage done to the earth, its cause traced to human greed and original sin. Lynn White Jr. traces the origin of ecocide to the priestly biblical account of creation: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it,” (Gen 1:28) which he says is an anthropological bias in favor of human beings which has led to the destruction of nature by human beings; as a result “Christianity”, he concludes, “is the most


760 Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).
anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen.” Many theologians have contested White’s views. Anne Clifford thinks that the biblical text should be understood as “service” rather than “dominion.” Theodore Hiebert thinks that the problem is basically with the priestly tradition which is hierarchical and anthropocentric. The Yahwistic tradition, he opines, puts an emphasis on farming as we saw in chapter one; *adam*, “human being” is made out of *adama*, “soil” and is given breath to become a *nepes hayya* “living soul” (Gen 2:7,19). He is entrusted with cultivating the soil. The Hebrew word to cultivate, *abad* also means “to serve.” Hiebert then concludes that whereas for the priestly tradition, human beings are masters of the earth, for Yahwistic tradition, they are servants. Hiebert’s view shows that human beings have a very strong bond of relationship with non-human creation which is often referred to as kinship. It is also shared by the modern scientific world view which holds that all creation shares a common origin.

Scientifically, our common origin is explained by a widely accepted Big Bang theory which was first presented by Edwin Hubble who developed a powerful telescope and found out that the universe was expanding which means that it was smaller in the past. Extrapolating backward in

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762 Anne Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God,” in “And God Saw That It Was Good” *Catholic Theology and the Environment*, eds. Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1996). Clifford’s reading of the biblical creation accounts shows that they are not anthropocentric as White would like us to believe, but rather theocentric. She says that “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28), which critics say has been used to propagate humankind’s domination over nature, should be seen in a wider context of the priestly tradition which was written during the exile in Babylon (ca. 550 BC). Unlike the Mesopotamian creation account *Enuma Elish*, the created human beings are not to serve gods but to serve living creatures with whom they share an earthly kinship.

time, there had to have been a period when it was at its smallest size, the primeval atom which exploded almost fifteen billion years ago.\textsuperscript{764} Hence, all creation shares a common origin from that primeval atom. Hubble’s discoveries were confirmed by Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity. Evolutionary theories too have reinforced our interconnectedness with other creatures.

From this common origin and interconnectedness McFague develops the ecological theology of the \textit{Body of God}. She proposes the model, \textit{Body of God} for it combines “the agential and organic models in order to express the asymmetrical and yet profoundly interrelational character of the panentheistic model of God and the world.”\textsuperscript{765} The rediscovery of our interconnectedness with non-human beings has also given rise to the rediscovery of the important role of the Holy Spirit in creation.

The most important source of inspiration for ecological consciousness and sustainability is the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. Theologians are finding a strong link between pneumatology and ecology, between the Holy Spirit and creation. Neglect of one has often led to neglect of the other. Drawing from the Nicene Creed, Elizabeth Johnson says that the Holy Spirit “Lord and giver of Life” to all creatures had a rich tradition until the Protestant Reformation when focus drifted to salvation of human beings – faith alone (Protestants) or faith and good works (Catholics).\textsuperscript{766} She continues that thanks to the Big Bang and evolution theories, God has been


\textsuperscript{765} Sallie McFague, \textit{The Body of God: An Ecological Theology} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 149. She says that the agential model is supported by Christian and Hebrew traditions, assumes God to be the agent whose purposes are realized in history is combined with the organic model which means that the “world or universe is God’s body …It is a model not primarily intellectual but aesthetic and ethical: wonder and awe at the immensity, richness, and diversity of creation as well as gratitude and care for all its forms of life.” (140). McFague adds that Body of God is Trinitarian based on the Nicene Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of Life.”

brought back to a living, struggling and dying circle of life. Mark Wallace strongly believes that the divorce between creation and God’s spirit is rooted in dualism entrenched in Christian doctrines which stress that God is in heaven not on earth, and dualism of matter and spirit.  

Inspiration is to be found in the Nicene Creed: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.”

Jürgen Moltmann develops a theology based on the pneumatological doctrine of creation of God the lover of life and his Spirit in all created beings. He approaches this theme from an ecological perspective and by this he moves beyond the contemporary environmental crisis to a deeper understanding of creation as the house (oikos) provided for God’s creatures to dwell in and for God’s own indwelling with them. This, he says, demands a new way of thinking which he calls participative rather than analytical, “guided by the will to find a way into the community of creation, to reawaken the awareness of the community and restore it.”

The indwelling of the Spirit in creation has been a powerful expression to explain the activity and influence of the Holy Spirit on creation. Johnson says “the divine Spirit encircles and indwells the universe” which leads her to propose pan-en-theism meaning “a relationship where

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768 Ibid. 313.


770 Ibid. 4.
everything abides in the Creator Spirit who in turn encompasses everything.”

Elizabeth Johnson’s ideas are also shared by Wallace who proposes “an earth-centered model of the Spirit as the “green face” of God who sustains the natural order and unifies all God’s creation into one common biotic family.” He reinforces this argument by showing that the Spirit not only brings communion within the Godhead “…but also performs the role of the vinculum caritatis within nature in order to promote the well-being and fecundity of creation.” The indwelling of the creative Spirit also means that God is compassionate and in solidarity with every living being that suffers. Wallace compares the wounded Spirit in nature to Jesus’ suffering and death.

East African theologians and Catholic bishops have been very reluctant to address the environment degradation taking place in East Africa. To date, East African Catholic bishops have not issued any pastoral letter on the environment. Equally alarming, they have failed to see a connection between human poverty and ecocide. East Africa is blessed with nature: Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa and second highest in the world; Mounts Kenya and Ruwenzori are second and third highest in Africa respectively; Lake Victoria, the largest lake in Africa and second in the world; Lake Tanganyika, the deepest lake in Africa and second in the world; and a very high concentration of animals. All of these natural resources and beauties are being destroyed. Lake Victoria, for instance, is polluted at an alarming rate by discharge of raw sewage, dumping industrial waste including fertilizers and chemicals from farms which has led

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773 Ibid. 317.
to contamination of fish and oxygen depletion at the bottom of a lake supporting the densest and
poorest rural population in the world.\textsuperscript{774} Lake Victoria is a major reservoir of River Nile which
supports about 80\% of Egypt’s population. Mount Kilimanjaro is losing its ice cap and in a few
years there will be no snow on the mountain. Al Gore is attributing it to global warming.\textsuperscript{775}
James Taylor puts the blame on deforestation.\textsuperscript{776}

Maathai\textsuperscript{777} outlines the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for the poorest
countries, most of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. These goals should be achieved before 2015:
eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender
equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, ensure
environment sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development. According to
Maathai, the most important and fundamental goal is protection of the environment. We
mentioned in the last chapter Maathai’s view that the cause of deforestation around Mt. Kenya is
rooted in missionary evangelism that displaced God from Mount Kenya to heaven, thereby
giving people a free hand to plunder the forests around this mountain.\textsuperscript{778} Thanks to her Green
Belt Movement, millions of trees have been planted.

\textsuperscript{774} Eric Odada, Daniel Olago “Mitigation of Environmental Problems in Lake Victoria, East Africa: Causal Chain
and Policy Option Analyses”, \textit{Ambio}, Vol 33, No 1-2, 2004, 14. This well-detailed and researched article, says that
anthropogenic causes are responsible for the degradation of Lake Victoria. Besides pollution, there are other causes
including over-fishing, and introduction of the Nile perch which is eating up smaller species to depletion.

\textsuperscript{775} Al Gore \textit{The Assault on Reason} (New York: New Penguin, 2007).

\textsuperscript{776} James Taylor, \textit{Chicago Sun Times} (June 30, 2007).

\textsuperscript{777} Maathai, \textit{The Challenge for Africa}, 239 ff.

\textsuperscript{778} Ibid, 173.
In March 2007 the government of Uganda approved the give-away of 7,100 hectares of Mabira forest land to Mehta group of companies for sugar cane growing.\textsuperscript{779} President Museveni said that the growing of sugar cane would reduce money spent on imported sugar and create employment.\textsuperscript{780} A cross section of Ugandans, environmentalists, politicians, traditionalists and church leaders opposed the give-away. The decision caused so much uproar in the country that the government had to abandon it.\textsuperscript{781}

Unfortunately, the Catholic hierarchy in Uganda, perhaps for fear of political ramifications, did not seize on the Mabira question to streamline her position on the environment, and denounce violence. It would have been an occasion for bishops to call upon people to be civil in addressing contentious issues and also encourage them to protect and conserve the environment. Indeed it is each and everyone’s responsibility to plant trees so that “Mabira” is in each and everyone’s compound.

The indwelling of the Spirit has important implications to the East African Catholic Church. It resonates with the East African traditional view that the earth is animated by the spirit of God, which must be used as the foundation of ecological theologies of the Holy Spirit particularly in the East African context.

\textsuperscript{779} Solomon Alweny, “From Trees to Sugarcane: The Implications of Mabira Giveaway” \textit{The Daily Monitor}, (March 24, 2007). Mabira is the largest tropical forest in Uganda. The location of the forest is a blessing to the country because it is within the metropolitan areas of Kampala and Jjinja, the largest cities in Uganda. These cities have high carbon emissions. Mabira forest has the capacity of capturing 550 tons of carbon dioxide per hectare. Mabira forest is a buffer zone and catchment area of Lake Victoria. It has species not found anywhere in the world. Traditionalists claim that it is the dwelling place of divine beings and any encroachment and desecration of the forest would provoke divine retribution.


\textsuperscript{781} In the riots that ensued two Indians were killed by the mobs, an apparent reaction against the Indian community because Mehta group of companies is owned by an Indian family.
4.7 Conclusion

We have highlighted the importance of dialogue and relationality to human wholeness. Our first task has been to prove that dialogue between Libermann’s theological anthropology and East African theological anthropologies is possible. We have noted that despite living in an age when the Catholic Church’s approach to mission was monologue, Libermann taught his missionaries to have a genuine dialogue with Africans they sought to evangelize. We have also argued that East African religious heritage was conducive to dialogue and for that reason East Africans have been hospitable and tolerant to other religious traditions including Christianity which has threatened its existence.

We have underlined the strong relationship between dialogue and narrative because dialogue feeds on narrative. For that reason, we have emphasized the importance of narrating the voice of the voiceless, of people who have been denied human wholeness. Any theological endeavor must make a preferential option for the poor by narrating the story of the voice of the voiceless. Libermann never went to any mission outside his native France but participated in missionary activity by narrating the story of the oppressed, the story of Africans under the yoke of slavery. It is from the story he narrated, albeit his condescending language, that we see that he was informed by Africans.

I have epitomized East African anthropology in the term ubuntu, the essence of human wholeness, to show that despite the desecration of East African religious and cultural heritage, there is resilience exemplified in ubuntu values of hospitality and reconciliation. East African hospitality, for instance, looks at time not just as a commodity that is bought and sold but more important as a gift that is shared. Furthermore, hospitality was instrumental in the acceptance of
messengers of the Gospel in East African milieu. Thus, East Africans participated in missionary activity not by proselytizing African Religions but by welcoming and receiving Christian missionaries with hospitality. Above all, ubuntu is relational and communitarian which means that according to Christian tradition, ubuntu draws its source from the relational Trinity who is the origin and animator of all relationships.

The second part of our dialogue has focused on contemporary East African Church which is facing many challenges derived from anthropological poverty. Drawing from dialogue, we have seen that the East African Church cannot build the future with hope by clinging to the past. Libermann cut himself off from the Jewish heritage and looked at the future with vigor and hope. We have noted that there has been a strong tendency among inculturation theologians to cling to the past rather than focusing on the present reality which indeed vindicates Mbiti’s claim that African concept of time virtually has no future. The emphasis on the present reality calls for the understanding of interstitial space as the prime locus of culture.

The present reality presents many challenges (HIV/AIDS, ecocide, neocolonialism and aid syndrome) to the East African Catholic Church, which call for new ways of evangelization that empowers Christians, particularly those who are disproportionately targeted by these challenges.
CONCLUSION

Concluding Theological Reflections

5.1 Authentic Human Wholeness: An Urgent Need for *Metanoia*

The central premise of this study is an ideological and theological anthropological dialogue aimed at first, enriching our understanding of both Libermann’s *l’œuvre des noirs* and the traditional East African religious and cultural heritage; second, deepening our understanding of human wholeness especially in the context of the East African Catholic Church. In the spirit of dialogue, the study calls for a true *metanoia* “repentance” or “conversion” or “change of heart/mind” as a necessary condition for human wholeness. *Metanoia* was also Jesus’ foundational message: “Repent (*metanoeite*) and believe in the Gospel.” (Mk 1:15). Jesus’ message was aimed at human wholeness.

The call to *metanoia* evokes the act of faith epitomized in the Christian traditional philosophical and theological debates as both an act of the intellect and act of the will. As an act of the will, we have emphasized the importance of *metanoia* for each and every person. Evangelizers and those evangelized, slave masters and slaves, all need *metanoia*. *Metanoia* as an act of the intellect refers to intellectual conversion. Dealing with the conversion of Libermann (chapter one), we alluded to the Greek literal meaning of *metanoia* “beyond perception” or “beyond understanding” (*metá* meaning "beyond" or "after" and *noeō* meaning "perception" or "understanding" or "mind") which indicates that *metanoia* deals with the intellect as well. Then, what is needed is a true *metanoia* of both intellect and will, of mind and heart. Furthermore, *metanoia* whether of the intellect or of the will is a journey, not a single act but a continuous process of renegotiation, renovation, reconditioning, evolution and transformation throughout one’s whole life.
5.2 Being Converted while Converting Others

We have formulated an innovative understanding of human wholeness through the lens of relationality because true and authentic dialogue is relational, mutual and receptive. The call for metanoia can be read from our arguments for a philosophical and theological turn to relationality. The importance of relationality for this study was enunciated because theological anthropologies of Libermann and the East African religious and cultural traditions are best understood in terms of relationships. Relationality calls for a way of thinking which is more participative than analytical. In dealing with Libermann’s understanding of l’œuvre des noirs we have applied a phenomenological approach to knowledge and criticized exclusive claims of analytical knowledge by which the knowing subject masters the object in order to dominate it.\footnote{Richard Bauckham, \textit{Theology of Jürgen Moltmann} (London: T and T Clark, 1995), 7, 225. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, \textit{Experiences of God}, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 62, 64; Jürgen Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God}, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Herder and Row Publishers, 1985).} Instead, we have advocated for a phenomenological and participatory approach to knowledge whereby the knower opens oneself to the other in receptivity, wonder, love, and mutual relationship with the other so that he/she (subject) can be converted or changed.\footnote{Ibid. 225. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, \textit{Experiences of God}, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 62.} Constantly aware that Libermann’s l’œuvre des noirs was a missionary endeavor, we have applied the phenomenological and participatory approach to knowledge to missionary evangelization. The context of dialogue highlights the reality that evangelization is not or must not be a one-way communication but rather a mutual sharing and encounter.

One of the primary objectives of missionary evangelization is conversion. We have stressed that missionary evangelization is not just about converting others but also the evangelizer being...
converted as well. A missionary like a teacher who is taught by his/her students is also converted by those he/she evangelizes. This line of argument has been very critical in putting forward a case that Libermann too was indeed informed by Africans he sought to liberate from the yoke of slavery by his project *l’œuvre des noirs*. Furthermore, *the Spirit of God is also recognized being present among those who know little or nothing of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus, a missionary *par excellence*, is a good shepherd; he knows his sheep and his sheep know him and follow him (Jn 10:14). Mutual relationship between the knower and the other, evangelizer and evangelized leads to acceptance, solidarity and faith similar to what Paul felt for Jesus Christ: “Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2:20). In order to be in solidarity with others, we have to meet people where they are.

It must be emphasized that in the whole process of conversion there is always the work of the Holy Spirit who moves people to conversion and who is the principal agent of evangelization. Libermann was moved by the Spirit of God to conversion. The same Spirit was at work in early Spiritan missionary activity at Bagamoyo. As we have pointed out in reference to Spiritan mission, *missionary activity may be a necessary factor in the process of creating Christians, but such practices, however comprehensive they may be, may not be sufficient for conversion. East Africans appropriated the Christian message in ways that went beyond simply being obedient to patronizing Spiritan missionaries which is an indication that the Holy Spirit was working in them.*

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784 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75.
5.3 Church of the Poor and Prophetic Dialogue with the Poor

We have underlined Ricoeur’s call that the poor are the final standard by which all artistic, philosophical and theological scholarship must be directed.785 Theologically, Ricoeur’s call implies a prophetic dialogue with the poor. We pointed out that prophetic dialogue is important for evangelization because it is an encounter which involves witness and service. A Christian prophetic dialogue with the poor means that when Christians encounter the poor, they mediate the Word of God to them through their lives, words and actions in a spirit of mutual dialogue, a two-way process. A prophetic dialogue with the poor provokes us to revisit how we look at the poor and how we try to assist them.

In the course of our discussions we frequently referred to the poor as an integral part of the Church, the need for their voice to be heard, and their need for salvation and liberation. We have noted that the contemporary East African Catholic Church’s main challenges are rooted in anthropological poverty. We have also identified different categories of people who have been the cause of the plight of the poor. The underlying idea is metanoia; first, whether poor or rich, to realize that we all need conversion, and second, for the oppressors to see the poor as people created in the image and likeness of God. The emphasis on metanoia for all people means that we must be sensitive and cautious of the meaning of “who is poor”. I mention this because there was a tendency among early Spiritan missionaries to East Africa and indeed even in Libermann’s writings to link those who were materially and economically poor to lack of salvation. Africans were often described as poor and therefore furthest from salvation. This reference to the poor as being furthest from salvation often overlooked the fact that it was those who oppressed the poor, like slave masters, who were indeed the furthest from salvation.

785 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 75.
In our analysis, those who are economically, materially, physically, socially and culturally poor have been identified as slaves, women, those living with HIV/AIDS, Libermann who suffered from epilepsy, the culture of the East Africans which has been desecrated by colonialism and missionary evangelism, and non-human creation which is experiencing ecocide. The majority of East Africans are poor because more than half of them live below the poverty line. We have underlined the fact that despite their numerical majority, in the Church as in society, the voice of the poor is oftentimes suffocated. We have noted that Libermann was a voice of the voiceless. East African Catholic Church too must be a voice of the voiceless. The Church must also empower the poor to be effective tools of evangelization.

The Church and especially the East African Catholic Church must be continuously reminded that it is a Church of the poor. We can recall our argument enunciated in the last chapter that the poor have remained largely clients of patronizing sympathizers (e.g. missionaries, IMF and World Bank). However, the poor cannot be simply regarded as beneficiaries of the Church’s charitable assistance. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator points out that “despite the rhetoric and ideology of participatory development and solidarity, the poor have remained largely objects and clients, dependent on and subject to external measurements of their needs and priorities.”\textsuperscript{786} The poor not only lack a platform to articulate what they are, what their needs are and what they stand for, but also do not have people to listen to their plight. Even the definition of “who the poor are” is by external reference, not by “internal definition”.\textsuperscript{787} It is important to stress that the poor have rights and privileges and are integral members of the Church, body of Christ, which is

\textsuperscript{786} Orobator, \textit{From Crisis to Kairos}, 210.

\textsuperscript{787} Vigdis Broch-Due and David A. Anderson, “Poverty and the Pastoralist: Deconstructing Myths, Reconstructing Realities,” in \textit{The Poor are not Us: Poverty and Pastoralism in Eastern Africa}, eds. David E. Anderson and Vigdis Broch-Due (Oxford: James Carrey, 1999), 19.
a direct antithesis of developmental paternalism. Orobator observes: “The poor are a sacrament of God, not by virtue of being poor, and therefore able to prick human conscience and disturb our complacency, but by virtue of their inalienable dignity, albeit obscured by poverty, oppression and destitution.”

In trying to assist the poor out of their poverty, there has been a tendency to idealize the poor. Colonialism according to Joerg Rieger proclaimed God to be on the side of the colonizer, on the side of the powerful, adding that a “theological reversal” that would put God on the side of the poor would not solve anything. He embraces Gustavo Gutierrez’s idea of the preferential option for the poor which is not based on the goodness of the people on the margins but on the goodness of God. This means that there is no need to idealize the marginalized in order to appreciate them. This is what Gustavo himself has to say:

The ultimate reason for commitment to the poor and the oppressed is not to be found in social analysis we use, or in human compassion, or in direct experience we ourselves may have of poverty. These are doubtless valid motives that play an important part in our commitment. As Christians, however, our commitment is grounded, in the final analysis, in the God of our faith. It is theocentric, prophetic option that has its roots in the unmerited love of God and is demanded by this love.

The underlying idea that the East African Catholic Church is a Church of the poor recognizes that there are no insiders or outsiders because the Church is the body of Christ. “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share the joy.” (1 Cor 12:26). Church of the poor draws its model from Jesus who was poor. “By making himself poor, Jesus opted to enrich those who were sunk in poverty. The riches he brought to them in this way

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788 Orobator, From Crisis to Kairos, 210.


would not be of the sort of riches that distinguish the rich from the poor, but simply equality to all.”

Jesus’ integral solidarity with the poor means that there is no segment in the Church which calls itself the “voice of the voiceless” as it often happens with the hierarchy of the Church but rather the voice of the poor is the voice of the Church.

5.4 A Communicating Church

Relationality urges us to look at the East African Catholic Church as a Church that communicates, listens, tolerates and journeys in a mutual relationship. A relational Church must communicate to people in a language and culture people understand. We have noted Libermann’s communication strategy and its effectiveness in being a voice of the voiceless. We have noted also that the Catholic Church in East Africa has a strong voice arising from numerical strength (approximately 30% of the East Africans are Catholic). Unfortunately, this voice is neither sufficiently heard nor proportionate to the numerical strength which the Catholic Church possesses in East Africa. The East African Catholic Church owes numerical strength partly to history because it has been in East Africa for over 150 years. Since 1863 when the first Catholic missionaries started a mission on Zanzibar archipelago, the Church has continuously grown numerically. Even though demographic figures are not the standard measure of true conversion, they are at the same time an important sign of the times that should be read intently. Despite the increase in the population of Catholics, there are at the same time some worrying signs of falling percentages. For example, if we look at the demographic figures of Uganda, we notice

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791 Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor: Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Aspects of the Option for the Poor*, trans. Paul Burns (Kent: Burns and Oats, 1989), 69. The authors insist that the Church does not make allies with the poor as some liberation theologians would seem to suggest but rather the poor are an integral part of the Church.

792 Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 212.

793 83% of the Rwanda’s population is Christian (Catholics 56.9% and Protestants 26%), yet the country experienced one of the worse genocides in the world in 1994.
that the population of the Catholics has been growing steadily but the percentage has been
dropping, from 44.5% in 1991 to 42% in 2002, and possibly there will be a further drop in
percentage when the next national census will be conducted. Anglicans too, who like
Catholics arrived in East Africa almost at the same time, are registering falling percentages in
Uganda, from 39% in 1991 to 35% in 2002. Pentecostals in Uganda have gained ground at the
expense of Catholics and Anglicans. In the 1991 census they had no category, probably because
they were either considered to be insignificant or counted as Anglicans, but in the 2002 census,
they make up 4.6% of the total population of Uganda.

We mentioned that one of the keys to the Pentecostals’ fast growth in numbers is that they
have empowered each and every one of their flock to be an evangelizer. The second important
reason is communication. They have been aggressive and even sometimes annoying in
communicating their message. Catholics and Anglicans on the other hand, have become
“sedentary” and complacent, depending on old structures which seem to be crumbling as the
location of the Church moves from the traditional Church compound to where people are and
live. Fifty years ago, priests, Religious, and catechists could afford to sit around the parish
compound and wait for people to come. Today, the Church has to move where the people are and
live to meet them and be in solidarity with them in joy and sorrow. The imagery of an itinerant
and pilgrim Church has often been used in a sense of showing that we are journeying toward
heaven. Jesus’ ministry was an itinerant ministry not only to his Father but also around Palestine
and beyond. Jesus’ Church is an itinerant Church. The Church now needs an itinerant strategy
that involves constant negotiations, interpretation and new ways of evangelization by utilizing

794 www.ubos.org (accessed on March 11, 2013). According to this website, out of the total population of Uganda of
16,671,705 people there were 7,426,511 Catholics in Uganda which amounted to 44.5%. 

the available means of communication. We have insisted on interstitial space as the location of culture and where there is continuous negotiation of relationships. Interstitial space is not only the location of culture but of the Church as well; that is where Christian identity is formed. This is the space that the East African Catholic Church must be attentive to.

5.5 Tolerance as a Way of Being Church

Unlike Christianity which holds absolute claims, one of the hallmarks of African Religions as this study reveals is tolerance to other religious traditions which is one of the most important reasons why Christianity was accepted easily by Africans. In East African religious and cultural traditions, tolerance flows from ubuntu which we have detailed in the last chapter. Tolerance is also connected to the East African values of hospitality and reconciliation. We have noted that due to tolerance, early Christian missionaries were received by Africans with a lot of hospitality. In cases of conflict, the underlying motif was more on reconciliation rather than reprimanding the culprit and that is the reason why Africans had alternative means of reconciling the aggrieved and culprit without recourse to retributive justice. Today, more than ever before, living in a world of many divergent views, beliefs, means of communication and interaction, there is need for tolerance in the East African Catholic Church.

One of the fruits of tolerance is interreligious dialogue. Of late, the Catholic Church has accepted interreligious dialogue which points to religious tolerance. Although Libermann looked at the Catholic religion as the only true religion and did not entertain interreligious dialogue, the process of his conversion to the Catholic faith was ignited by an intuition that God is universal and cannot be monopolized by one ethnic group which means that he believed in a tolerant God.

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795 Early missionaries had taken communication seriously and for that reason they taught people how to read and write. The first Christians in Uganda are called abasomi meaning “readers” because they were taught to read and write by missionaries at mission stations. Munno, the first daily newspaper in Uganda was started by the early missionaries. Unfortunately, this paper is no longer in circulation.
It is important here to reiterate that theology is the study of God, thus a limited human person studying about an unlimited primordial God. As Kenan Osborn points out: “In our relationship to God, God is always the primordial agent, the primordial source. Human response, by nature, is always derived, secondary, and responding, and this response is finite, limited, time-conditioned, and individuated.” Osborne is very critical of absolute claims to objective knowledge. He insists: “Atemporal human thinking is meaningless thought, and atemporal human existence is meaningless existence.” He concurs with Ricoeur’s analysis of Gedamer’s fusion of horizon:

This [fusion of horizon] is a dialectical concept which results from the rejection of two alternatives: objectivism, whereby the objectification of the other is premised on forgetting of oneself; and absolute knowledge, according to which universal history can be articulated within a single horizon. We exist neither in closed horizon, nor within horizon that is unique. No horizon is closed, since it is possible to place oneself in another point of view and in another culture.

It is useful here to recall Ricoeur’s arguments against what he reads as Levinas’ passivity of the self and objectification of the other (chapter two). Arguments of admirers and critics of both Levinas and Ricoeur were outlined which I would not like to revisit here. However, the main point which Ricoeur is stressing here is that any kind of absolute claims whether by the self or by the other are to be rejected. The underlying idea then is that we are limited which must lead us to be tolerant to each other’s views, and to each other’s beliefs. At the same time we recognize, as Libermann came to know and believe, that God is limitless, infinite and universal. We have been very critical of systems that try to encapsulate the Numinous God who is Spirit. We have been


797 Ibid. 97.

equally critical of systems that limit human wholeness by enclosures and cloisters especially when the individual concerned is not given a chance to choose to embrace them.

Lastly, tolerance is the way of being Church in East Africa where Christians find themselves living in a cosmopolitan world of divergent ideas, beliefs and realities. The rationale for tolerance is founded on the fact that human knowledge is limited, which then calls us to open up and accommodate other people’s views and beliefs in a spirit of mutual dialogue which enables us in turn to be true disciples of Christ, bringing faith, hope, love, light, peace, joy and reconciliation to others and also receiving these values from them as expressed by the Prayers of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
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