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DISSERTATION

Titel der Dissertation

**THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN A CONTINENT TORN APART BY
WARS, CONFLICTS, VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION – Towards an African
Political Theology of Reconciliation (Based on Nigerian Experience)**

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DEDICATION

This Work is dedicated to my country Nigeria and to all the citizens of this country I love so much, hoping that one day we will come to the full awareness of who we are; one family of God!

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Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Valerian Okeke, the Archbishop of Onitsha offered me the opportunity as the then Rector of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, to come to Vienna, Austria for my further studies. I can never thank him enough for his love and belief in me, in spite of me! I thank my Bishop and local ordinary, Most Rev. Dr. Paulinus Ezeokafor. He has been very supportive. Thanks a lot!

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I. Introducing the Study

The memories of the Church's extensive celebration of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 both at the universal and local levels are still present. The climax of the celebration at the universal level was the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on Christmas Eve 1999, in order to officially usher the universal Church into the new Millennium. In his apostolic letter to the bishops, clergy and lay faithful on the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, Pope John Paul II¹ perceived the Jubilee 2000 as the "new springtime of the Christian life", whose preparation already began with the Second Vatican Council.² The Council, according to the Pope, laid the solid foundation for the Great Jubilee by bringing the Church to a sincere reflection on her identity, mission and the new challenges facing her in the new Millennium.³

So with courage, great hopes and deep sense of responsibility, the Church stepped her foot into the Third Millennium carrying along with her the millions of her sons and daughters across the globe. The Church stepped into the Third Millennium not without taking stock of her two thousand years of mission *Ad Gentes*. How has she fared with her divine Mandate to evangelize the whole ends of the earth? And what are really the new challenges to the mission of the Church? Pope John Paul II had earlier in his Encyclical Letter, "*Redemptoris Missio*" of December 7, 1990, marking the 25th anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes*, identified them as *modern equivalents of the Areopagus (RM 37c)*. They include, among others, according to him,

"... Commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those

¹ John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Vatican, November 10, 1994.

² *Ibid.*, No. 18.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 19. The Pope notes that "No Council had ever spoken so clearly about Christian unity, about dialogue with non-Christian religions, about the specific meaning of the Old Covenant and of Israel, about the dignity of each person's conscience, about the principle of religious liberty, about the different cultural traditions within which the Church carries out her missionary mandate, and about the means of social communication."

of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world.”⁴

Our time is filled with experiences of wars, conflicts, misunderstandings, and divisions among peoples of different religions, tribes, nations and Continents. It is also a time in which the Church experiences divisions within her own community and other faith communities. It is also a time in which the world is confronted with many un-answered existential questions: slavery, communism, exploitation of nature, unequal distribution of nature’s resources and wealth, under-development, poverty and hunger, debt crisis, AIDS and incurables sicknesses, etc. These, as the Pope rightly observed, are issues challenging both the universal Church and particular churches in all the Continents.

Africa as a Continent is a special case based on its historical experiences and because of the massive concentration of all these social phenomena in it. Recent years have seen many regions of Africa involved in inter-tribal wars and conflicts. Countries like Angola, Algeria, Burundi, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and **my country Nigeria** have known in the recent years wars and ethnic or tribal cleansing which left millions of people dead and made over 9.5 million people refugees.⁵ Even those who survive the wars live with deep-seated resentment, bitterness and hatred of others. This hatred is often transferred from one generation to another, waiting for the opportune moment to inflict revenge. This worrisome situation calls for urgent solution in order to prevent the possibility of what we may call *continental genocide*.

It is interesting to note that the Church in Africa is not keeping closed eyes waiting for the extermination of the whole Continent, many of whom are millions of her sons and daughters. The Church in Africa sees the need to gather the “scattered” children of Africa together so that they can begin to live as people of “the same family”.

⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican, December 7, 1990, No. 37c.

⁵ The U.S Committee for Refugees made a press release on October 2, 2001 in which they reported the regrettable increase in the number of refugees as a result of wars in Africa.

A case study of my country Nigeria and some African countries with similar experiences will show how the mission of reconciliation is urgent for the Church in the face of wars and conflicts ravaging many African societies. It is in recognition of this fact that the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria made this clarion call for reconciliation:

*The need for reconciliation and harmony is all the more urgent in view of the growing incidence of intercommunal disputes, which have degenerated into bloody clashes.*⁶

The bishops noted the urgency of reconciling individuals, communities and nations in Africa.

What does reconciliation actually entail for Africans? It entails, according to the bishops, *“having the courage to forgive one another, respecting one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father, giving each one the room to participate in the decisions that shape the common destiny of all.”*⁷ This reconciliation should be based on the solid foundation of truth and justice, freedom and fair play. This implies that such reconciliation opens the way for “all-inclusive” way of thinking especially in sharing the rich mineral, material and human resources of the Continent. It should be a reconciliation that offers no opportunity for domination or intimidation of groups or individuals. The Nigerian bishops made this reconciliation very urgent in order to avoid the imminent danger of total collapse of nations and the Continent: *“This must start now before things get totally out of hand.”*⁸

With this, the bishops were raising their prophetic voices calling on all; governments, churches, communities, families and individuals to contribute in the process of reconciliation. As if to march up their appeal for reconciliation with action, the bishops emphasized that the Church should present herself as *“a community reconciled within itself and an agent of*

⁶ , Peter, Schineller Ed., „ A Call to Holiness and Reconciliation“ by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in The Voice of the Voiceless, Pastoral letters and Communiques of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, edt. by Peter Schineller, Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigeria LTD, 2002, 367.

⁷ Ibid., 377.

⁸ Ibid.

reconciliation for all around her.”⁹ They showed their readiness to promote “an ecclesiology focused on the idea of the Church as the family of God” (Ecclesia in Africa 63). The bishops were convinced that this “image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance and trust.”¹⁰ This image eschews all ethnocentrism, tribalism, nepotism and unnecessary divisions, but rather “encourages reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups.”¹¹ The bishops also declared their readiness “to inculcate on the members of the Church that unity and bond derived from the water of baptism are stronger than blood relationship.”¹²

It is also in recognition of these specific African modern equivalents of the Areopagus (wars, conflicts, violence, oppression, poverty etc) and the urgent need of reconciliation in Africa that the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was convoked¹³ with the theme: **“The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. ‘You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world’ (Mt 5: 13, 14).”**

II. Aims and Division of the Study

My aim in this dissertation is to identify the “specific” African socio-political phenomena that challenge the Church to take the mission of reconciliation seriously. These specific African socio-political phenomena have already, at various occasions, been identified by different authors and Church bodies, such as the Conferences of African Bishops and African Synod Assemblies. By trying to rediscover the African values as they are enshrined in African Weltanschauung (world view), I will try to trace the origin and both the remote and proximate causes of these socio-political phenomena, in order to chart a new way forward for the Church in Africa in her mission of reconciliation. I am also going to analyse the African traditional means of

⁹ Ibid., 378.

¹⁰ George, Ehusani, Witness and Role of Priests and Religious in Nigeria, Abuja: Gaudium et Spes Institute, 2002, 16.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops actually took place from 9-24th October 2009.

reconciliation, taking as paradigmatic the *Igba ndu* ritual of reconciliation as practised by the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, in order to delineate what missionary options the Church can avail herself in order to effectively and fruitfully fulfil her mission. By rediscovering the deep meaning rooted in the *oriko meal of reconciliation*, which is the climax of the reconciliation process among the Igbos, I will explore its Eucharistic perspective, in order to give it its ecclesiological position. By so doing we would have established that reconciliation remains the central message and mystery of Salvation economy.

Since reconciliation is not only a theme for theology but also for politics, in the face of what we have seen above concerning African societies and nations torn apart by wars and conflicts, I will also challenge African politicians to rise up to their responsibility of reconciling peoples and working for peace among peoples. Instead of using their offices to polarise the more the already polarised societies, they should find ways of charting a new course for justice and peace to reign in African societies. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa will serve here as paradigm, in which I will try to present the Zulus' (South African) concept of "*Ubuntu*" not only as political and cultural but also as an ecclesiological option.

In the light of the above, my effort in this dissertation, **based on the Nigerian experiences** and in fidelity to Second Vatican Council's wise counsel that we should listen to the "**signs of the time**", will also be **to construct an African Political theology of Reconciliation** as a theology that attempts to understand African historical realities and socio-economic phenomena and that tries to interpret them in accordance with the Saving Mystery of Christ.

To accomplish these, I divided the work into two parts consisting of seven chapters. The first part of the work is an investigation into the distinctive African realities and the mission of the Church in the face of these realities. This is further divided into four chapters. Chapter one gives a brief history of Africa as a Continent and identifies in a panoramic view the geo-political

trajectories that set its history apart from other Continents. Having observed the fact that each African society has distinct peculiar history, culture and language different from other societies, chapter two tries to capture areas of similarities as evident in the African *Weltanschauung* – worldviews. Here I tried to document the fact that the traditional African is a *homo religiosus* and a *homo politicus* based on the fact that he sees his world as a whole, consisting of the earthly and the heavenly, the material and the spiritual, which are inseparably bound together. The influences of the new religions (Christianity and Islam) in African traditional belief and way of life will also be analysed under this section. Chapter three identifies some distinctive African socio-economic phenomena, which presents the real problems African societies are today confronted with. These problems, which I have identified using the words of Pope John Paul II, as *modern equivalents of the Areopagus* pose a great challenge to the mission of the Church in Africa. And in a logical sequence, chapter four tries to analyse the missionary activities of the Church in Africa and singles out the reconciling mission as the most actual and the most urgent mission for the third Millennium Church in Africa.

Part two, which has three chapters, focuses on the theory and practice of reconciliation. Chapter five, which is further, divided into two sections A and B makes an analytic presentation of both the Christian understanding and the African understanding of reconciliation. What are the traditional African means of reconciliation? And how can one understand these traditional means within the context of the Church as Family of God? Chapter five tries also to provide answers to the above questions. Chapter six singles out two personalities renowned for their indefatigable efforts towards reconciliation and peace in their respective communities and the world at large, in order not only to present them as exemplary figures, but also above all to challenge the African Church leaders and politicians to rise up to their responsibilities. Chapter seven, which is eventually the last chapter will now, based on the theme of reconciliation, try to construct, what for me, would be the third Millennium African political theology of reconciliation. This will lead

to the general evaluation and conclusion of the work, not implying however, that the last word has been said on the topic!

III. Method and Sources

The methodology I used in this work is both descriptive and analytic. This is because the work is based purely on researches I made on this topic by consulting the work of both African and European experts on Africa. I also consulted the works of both Catholic and Protestant theologians, which gave me a balanced theological perspective on the topic of reconciliation. Desmond Tutu for example, the South African Archbishop, who out of the peculiar South African Apartheid experience and his immense contribution to reconciliation process in South Africa has laid the foundation for the *Ubuntu* theology of reconciliation¹⁴; Elochukwu Uzukwu, one of the foremost Nigerian contextual theologians, who through his in-depth researches on Africa, has tried to proffer adequate ecclesiological response to specific African historical realities¹⁵; African researchers on African Religion, Thoughts and Culture; experts on conflicts and peace-building in Africa; Lineamenta for the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* of Benedict VI and others.

¹⁴ Desmond, Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1999; Michael, Battle, *Reconciliation, The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997.

¹⁵ Elochukwu, Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996.

PART ONE: THE AFRICAN REALITIES AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER ONE AFRICA – A BRIEF HISTORY

1.1 Statement and Clarification of Facts

Our effort here is not to venture into an excursus of the history of Africa as we have another purpose other than a historical one; namely a theological work. We will however try to give somewhat of a panoramic view of Africa as a Continent and contextual peculiarities that distinguish it from other Continents. In doing this we are going to identify the historical problems of Africa as a Continent in order to find out which Ecclesiology might be relevant for Africa and its people, for, according to Willa Boesak, “*to write a critical contextual theology requires a serious encounter with history.*”¹⁶ The purpose of such an historical encounter would be “*retrieving from the recesses of African history those models, norms or practices that were truly effective tools for contextualizing the African church’s mission and identifying and discarding those which have become antiquated and burdensome.*”¹⁷ It is at the same time to discover the new challenges, in the words of Pope John Paul II, “*the modern equivalents of the Areopagus*” (RM 37c) for the mission of the Church in Africa.

Of the five Continents across the globe, Africa is generally accepted to be the world's second-largest Continent in both area and population. It is believed to be the oldest territory on earth where the human race originated.¹⁸ It is occupying about a fifth of the Earth’s land area with over 50 independent states. Africa is rich with vast natural resources, but these have hardly benefited the majority of its people many of whom live in abject poverty.

¹⁶ Boesak, Willa, *God’s Wrathful Children: Political Oppression and Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995, x, 208.

¹⁷ A.E., Orobator, *The Church as Family, African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000, 34-35.

¹⁸ John, S., Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1975, 4.

The African Continent comprises peoples of different ethnic origins as well as several cultural, religious and linguistic groups but also with perceived similarities. John Mbiti made the observation thus:

*“Africa is rich, but it is not uniform. It has similarities, but there are also differences from time to time, from place to place, and from people to people.”*¹⁹

The advent of colonialism came with the European discoveries of the 15th Century onwards, led by the Portuguese and the Dutch, and the British and the French. In 1482, the Portuguese established the first of many trading stations along the Guinea coast, soon to be followed by other European powers. The chief commodities were slaves, gold and ivory, later expanded to include other minerals and products of Africa. On the eastern coast, Arab traders established their business, including a considerable trade in slaves.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the so-called scramble for Africa, led, with the Berlin Congress of 1884-85, to the division of Africa between the colonial powers namely; Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The territorial arrangements imposed by European Imperialists on Africa are what we have today as African nation states. Only two African countries, Ethiopia and Liberia, were able to escape the yoke of colonialism.

Colonialism was right from its beginning unacceptable by the African peoples and societies as it was met with fierce resistance in many parts of Africa. This resistance made internal administration difficult for the colonial administrators in Africa. From the mid-1900s, African nationalism grew, and social and political organizations were established in order to better the condition of the African peoples, and to achieve independence. Most African countries gained their independence towards the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s. In several of the colonies liberation wars were fought, against the French particularly in Algeria, against the British mainly in Kenya, against the Portuguese in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. In Rhodesia, the

¹⁹ John, S., Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1975, 3.

nationalists fought a white minority that had declared its independence and established an apartheid state, much the same as in South Africa, which occupied Namibia. By the mid-1990s, all of these had democratic governance and in 1993 Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia after a sustained war. Nigeria my country of Origin attained her independence on October 1, 1960. Since then Nigerian history, not different from African history in general, has been a history of wars and conflicts.

We are not trying in any way here to present the African history to be the history of the individual African states as if to give the impression that all the individual African states have the same history. But we want to delineate the fact that there are aspects of African history that are common to the African states. Our intention is to tow the path of history in order to identify the distinctly African phenomenon or social context and to be able to proffer a contextual ecclesiological and theological solution that will be true not only to an individual state but also possibly to Africa as a Continent. This is in line with the observation made by Raymond W. Copson:

*“In the case of Africa, the various “zones of conflict” share a general conflict context. This means, because African countries have cultural, historical, economic, political, and social similarities, that a general conflict context can be constructed for the continent. However, when the conflict context is applied to a particular civil conflict, there will be some nuances, which will provide the specifics of the particular civil conflict.”*²⁰

The history of Africa cannot be complete without its socio-economic, political and cultural context. In an attempt to describe its existential predicament, Africa has been called a “dark continent”, a “continent of misery” or a “face with many scars.” It is a Continent laden with multifarious crises and conflicts ranging from poverty, hunger, underdevelopment, illiteracy, colonialism, ethnicity, political instability, tragic mismanagement of available resources, corruption, wars, religious violence and scourge of deadly

²⁰Raymond, Copson, W., *Africa’s Wars and Prospects for Peace*, New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1994, 216.

diseases like Malaria and Aids. These, according to the Lineamenta for the Second Special Synod for Africa, could be viewed under three aspects: socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural.²¹ These existential malaises characterise the pitiable life-condition of every country in Africa. My country Nigeria is therefore no exception! That is why we are going to make a case study of Nigeria as a paradigm for Africa and African Nations as a whole. We are going to see all these in details in the following chapters.

²¹Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops: The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, Vatican City, 2006, 11.

CHAPTER TWO

AFRICAN WORLD VIEWS: THE AFRICAN AS HOMO REIGIOSUS AND HOMO POLITICUS

2.1 The African as Homo Religiosus

Tshishiku Tshibangu, Theologian, specialist in the oral tradition in central Africa and the history of religions in Africa; former President of the National Board of the Universities of Zaire; now Bishop of Mbujimayi rightly observed that religion "*impregnates the entire texture of individual and commercial life in Africa.*" He further noted that "*The African is profoundly, incurably a believer, a religious person. To him, religion is not just a set of beliefs but a way of life, the basis of culture, identity and moral values. Religion is an essential part of the tradition that helps to promote both social stability and creative innovation.*"²² This proven fact of the life of the African makes irrational and preposterous the overtaken misrepresentation by the western scholarship before the advent of Christianity that the African was soulless and godless. In essence, religion belongs to the very fabric of the African life.

Religion in Africa is not a discrete human activity separate from other aspects of living. The African worldview is dualistic in nature. It is permeated with the belief in the existence and interconnectedness of the two worlds: heaven and earth, the spiritual and the physical, the world of the humans and that of the spirits. They are intimately connected and therefore inseparable. For the Igbos of the South-Eastern Nigeria, it is "*ala muo*" and "*ala mmadu*". *Ala muo* is the world of the invisible beings while *ala mmadu* is the world of the visible beings, the whole of the material universe, the sun, the moon, stars, human beings, animals, plants and other inanimate objects. Just as the African believes in the existence of the two worlds, he also believes in the existence of both spiritual and physical forces, which

²²Tshishiku, Tshibangu, "Religion and Social Evolution", in: A. A., Mazrui, et al., General History of Africa: Africa since 1935, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1993, 208.

have great influences in human life. These forces are the forces of good and evil.

2.2 African Traditional Religion

What was contested was not only whether Africans had religion or not but also whether they had an idea of God or Supreme Being. African religion has been reduced to fetishism, with the idea of the Supreme Being presented as an importation²³ of the missionaries. While making a case study of the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria, Ikenga Metuh presented the most plausible scientific work to prove the fact that the idea of God is not foreign to Africans²⁴. In his well-researched work, *God and Man in African Religion*, he made an apologia of the existence of the idea of God before the advent of Christian missionaries. Contrary to the unfounded claim made by late Romanus Nwoga and his European predecessors like Alves Correia and Green, that the idea of God as is found in Igbo traditional religion today was a result of the influence of Christian missionaries²⁵, Metuh made use of the journals of the early Christian missionaries, in addition to other sources, to argue that “*the concept of God was indigenous to the Igbo religious traditions*” and that “*the Igbo beliefs about God predated the arrival of the missionaries.*”²⁶ He even quoted a document from an Igbo slave-boy Olauda Equiano, who was sold to the West Indies, predating the arrival of the first missionaries to establish the fact that the concept of God was not foreign to the natives:

*As to religion, the natives believe that there is one creator of all things and that he lives in the sun and is girded around with a belt that he may never eat or drink; but according to some, he smokes a pipe which is our favourite luxury. They believe he governs events, especially our deaths or captivity.*²⁷

²³ Geoffrey, Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1969, 39.

²⁴ C.F., Ikenga, Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

The Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria use the names *Chukwu*, The Supreme Being or The High God or the Great God; *Chineke*, God the Creator; *Olisabuluwa*, the Carrier of the world to designate God. These three names could also been seen as the Divine attributes.²⁸ The Yorubas of South-Western Nigeria call God names like *Olodumare*, Supreme or Mighty One, who is superlatively perfect; *Olorun*, the Lord and Owner of heaven. This name depicts God as the Author of all things. They also call God *Orise*, the Origin or Source of beings.²⁹ The Akan tribe of Ghana have three personal names for God, namely; *Onyame*, Sky God; *Onyankopon*, Great One or A Great Friend; and *Odomankoma*, He who alone created the world or He who satisfies the hearts of men, He who gives in abundance.³⁰

One could see from the meaning of these names the position and importance which God occupies in African traditional religion. This could also allay the doubt about the monotheistic nature of African traditional religion. There are however certain practices that may suggest polytheism. But African traditional religion remains in its essence monotheistic.

2.2.1 Monotheism versus many Deities

As we have seen, Africans believe in the existence of one universal God, who is the author of all things including the human race. This is not different from the belief in one God being practised in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other monotheistic religions. The idea of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of all men as understood in African tradition is rooted in this very belief. The reason why African Traditional Religion was ready to tolerate and co-exist with other religions could also be understood within this context.³¹ We will return to this later!

²⁸ Ibid., 45-75.

²⁹ Babs Sam, Mala, "Problems in the Study of African Religion" in: Christianity Islam and African Religion, Ibadan Nigeria: Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, 1986, 346-347.

³⁰ Ibid., 348-349.

³¹ Ibid., 338.

Apart from the existence of the Supreme Being, Africans believe in the existence of deities, spirits and ancestors³² as subordinate or intermediary beings in the hierarchy of beings. Because of the belief in the transcendence of the Supreme Being Africans can only communicate with or reach him through his intermediaries, who are also his messengers. They occupy the same position and play the same role just as the angels do in Christian belief.³³ The inability of the Africans to communicate with God directly but only through his intermediaries has made some researchers in African traditional religion to raise doubt on the monotheistic nature of African traditional religion. Benjamin Ray presented the question thus:

*Does the widespread belief in the universal Creator mean that African religions are fundamentally monotheistic? Or does the more predominant everyday concern with the lesser gods and spirits mean that African religions are essentially polytheistic?*³⁴

As if to supply the answer to the questions posited by Benjamin Ray, Idowu, one of the foremost native experts on African traditional religion made this intervention that *“Polytheism is certainly not the suitable name, however much the appearance of things may suggest it.”*³⁵ He rather employed the term *“Diffused Monotheism”* to show *“that the religion is monotheism, though it is a monotheism in which the good Deity delegates certain portions of His authority to certain divine functionaries who work as they are commissioned by Him.”*³⁶ We now delve into the ancestral cult as practised by the African peoples.

2.2.2 Belief in the Ancestral Spirits

The Africans strongly believe in the life after death. That life continues after this visible existence. Family or community members who have departed this physical world continue to have another kind of existence but they continue

³² E. B., Idowu, *African Traditional Religion, A Definition*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1973, 139.

³³ Metuh, 110.

³⁴ B. C., Ray, *African Religions*, 50.

³⁵ E. B., Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman, 1962, 220.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

to relate and interact with the living. They remain therefore an integral part of the family or the community and have great influence in the entire life of the family or the community. This is what is known as the cult of ancestors in the traditional African religion. C. A Dime described it thus:

*The cult of ancestors is a central element in African belief system. Africans believe that their departed fathers, mothers and other relations continue to live and be present, watching over the household or community, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and community property, giving abundant harvests and fertility.*³⁷

It is pertinent to note that only those who have lived good and responsible life belong to the ancestors after their death. Those who have led evil, irresponsible and shameful life do not belong to this group.³⁸ Those who are not qualified to belong to this dignified group include those who died `bad death`- those who died as children or those who died childless or death through accident, suicide or abominable diseases such as leprosy epilepsy and stomach protrusion. Such a death is considered in African traditional religion as God's punishment. This is distinguished from the natural death after a long and fulfilled life, which is seen as God's blessing.³⁹ The cult of ancestors in African traditional religion serve the same purpose the communion of saints serves in Christian religion. They play an intermediary role between the Supreme Being and the living.

Africans involve the ancestors in their daily affairs. They are not only revered but are also invoked in times of need and are invited to partake of the family meals. Sacrifices are also offered to the ancestors to appease them for the failings of the living. This is called "*inye fa nni, feeding the ancestors*"⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 365.

³⁸ E. B., Idowu, African Traditional Religion, A Definition, 187.

³⁹ Innocent, Oyibo, Aspekte afrikanischer Eschatologie aufgezeigt am Beispiel des Ahnenkults bei den Igala von Nigeria: Ein Kernelement afrikanischer Religiosität als Anfrage an den christlichen Glauben, Hamburg-Münster: LIT Verlag Berlin, 2004, 112.

⁴⁰ Metuh, 122.

among the Igbos of South- Eastern Nigeria. Ikenga Metuh presents a typical example of such offering:

*First, there must be the customary washing of hands, followed by the offering of kola-nuts. Then the suppliant holds a fowl in both hands and, standing before the Okpesi, the ancestral shrine says, 'look, my father, you see this fowl, and you see these my children, and you know all about us. Please see that no harm befalls us, and deliver us from the evil designs of evil spirits and protect us as well.'*⁴¹

The ancestors are regarded as symbols of peace, unity and prosperity in the family and therefore are implored in the ritual of reconciliation.⁴²

2.2.3 Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

Sacrifice is a form of worship during which a gift or something made sacred is offered to God. As obtainable, though in varied forms, in many African societies, Metuh distinguishes between direct and indirect worship. He defines indirect worship as “*prayers, oblations or sacrifices addressed to God through the intermediary of another spiritual being, be it deity or ancestor.*”⁴³ This is based on the African belief of his unworthiness to communicate with the Mighty God directly. But the Supreme God remains the ultimate recipient of such prayers, oblations and sacrifices. The practise of offering sacrifices to God through the intermediary of other beings has made some writers in African traditional religion to describe God in African religion as *Deus Absconditus*.⁴⁴ Metuh quoted a prayer made by a woman during a sacrifice to her Chi, as recorded by John Taylor, one of the early missionaries to Igbo land, to prove the existence of such worship among the Igbos:

⁴¹ Ibid., 124.

⁴² Ibid., 124.

⁴³ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁴ V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, London: Rinehalt and Winston, 1965, 94.

*I beseech thee my guide (Chi), make me good, thou has life, I beseech thee to intercede with God the Spirit (Chukwu Abiama) tell him my heart is clean. I beseech thee to deliver me from witchcrafts, let riches come to me, see your sacrificial goat, see your kola nuts, see your rum and palm wine.*⁴⁵

This prayer of sacrifice not only shows the transcendence of the Supreme God but also his immanence. He could be reached through his deities, who work as his messengers. It goes on to show that God permeates the life and activities of the African and therefore is not *Deus Absconditus*, who is not interested in the affairs of the people.

Apart from indirect worship as presented above, there is also the existence of direct worship of God in African traditional religion. In direct worship, just as Metuh noted, God is addressed directly without the help of the intermediaries. Such a practice is also found among the Igbos. Metuh observes that there is regular worship of the High God on daily basis while such a worship occur in other villages only on annual festivals or on occasions when the individual is faced with personal problems that requires his direct supplication to God rather than through an intermediary being.⁴⁶ He quoted from Meek to show an example of direct worship made to God by the head of a typical Igbo family.

*Thus, when the head of a family wakes up in the morning, he may, after washing his hands, lay a kola or some snuff on the ground, saying 'Obasi di nénu (Chukwu), watch over me and my children this day.'*⁴⁷

From the foregoing it is clear that sacrifice to God is an important ritual through which Africans express their belief in God and through which they sustain a healthy relationship with him. Parrinder observes that the purposes of sacrifice in Africa are giving of gifts and propitiation. Gifts such

⁴⁵ Metuh, 149.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 154.

as kola nuts, water, alcohol, fruits, vegetables and animals are offered to God either as thanksgiving for the blessings received from him, such as children, wealth and rich harvest, or with the aim of receiving such blessings. In this sense *do ut des*. Animals and occasionally human beings⁴⁸ are sacrificed in propitiation of “*sin or to avert danger or to protect the people from misfortune, sickness, barrenness, quarrels, drought, and disruption of normal life.*”⁴⁹ In this sense sacrifice is reconciliatory. The observation made by Parrinder brings this reconciliatory aspect of sacrifice to the fore:

*There is a communion sense in sacrifices, both in gift and propitiation. The latter may be a rite of consolidation, mending the breaches of order between men and the gods. It may be also a rite of incorporation, joining the family by ritual actions.*⁵⁰

2.3 The new Religions

Apart from African traditional religion, there exist in African nations other religions that are new. We say new in the sense that these religions are not originally African. But history has it that these religions were already found in Africa as early as the first century. Under these we discuss Christianity and Islam. Our effort here will not be to give the whole history of Christianity and Islam in Africa but to discuss the manner of their existence and their relationship with African Traditional Religion. The areas of similarities and

⁴⁸ Human sacrifice has been practiced in various cultures throughout history. Victims were typically ritually killed in a manner that is supposed to please or appease gods, spirits or the deceased, for example as a propitiatory offering, or as a retainer sacrifice when the King servants die in order to continue to serve their master in the next life. This practise has continued in some parts of Africa up to the 19th century. In his award-winning novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Prof. Chinua Achebe described how a neighboring clan commits an offense against Umuofia. To avoid war, a bargain is struck that involves the offending clan releasing to Umuofia a boy, whose name is Ikemefuna, to be sacrificed as a victim to the gods. Ikemefuna in the novel could be seen as a figure of Christ and also a symbol of the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Christian Bible. It is for the same reason that “living sacrifices” (Osu caste system in Igbo land) were made to the gods to appease them. These “living sacrifices” are not slaughtered but are kept alive to assist the high priest of the traditional religion to serve the deities or the gods in their shrine. It is the belief of many Igbo traditionalists that the deities, which were (and are still), perceived in some quarters as being very powerful, would wreck havoc in the society, if they are not appeased.

⁴⁹ G., Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, 73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

conflicts will be highlighted so that a genuine solution towards a harmonious co-existence could be found.

2.3.1 Christianity

John Mbiti notes that Christianity is very old in Africa that one could almost describe it as one of the native, traditional and African religious forms.⁵¹ Parrider identified Christianity as a truly traditional African religion.⁵² The presence of Christianity in Africa could be traced as early as the end of the first century in North Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia and some parts of the South. This could not be possible of course without the overriding influence of her great scholars and theologians like Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian, Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo.

The later rise of Islam in the seventh century was not only a cog in the wheel of evangelization in Africa but also threatened the very existence of Christianity at all. The size and numbers of Christian congregations was dramatically reduced, leaving only the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Horn of Africa. The situation was as Parrinder describes it:

The Christian mission in Africa, apart from Nubia and Ethiopia, was cut off by Islam from the seventh century and was hardly renewed for eight hundred years. Scattered Christian communities remained for long in North Africa, and groups of European traders and soldiers were allowed to have churches in Islamic countries but were usually forbidden to evangelize. There were a few visits by Franciscan, Dominican and Jesuit missionaries, the most notable being those of Ramon Lull to Tunis from 1292 till his martyrdom in 1314. But large scale

⁵¹ John S., Mbiti, *Afrikanische Religion und Weltanschauung*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974, 293.

⁵² G., Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, 101.

*proselytization had to await the explorations of the Portuguese.*⁵³

What could be called the pre-colonial Christianity in Africa owed its success more to the Portuguese seafaring explorers who ventured south of the Sahara mainly for trade. It is pertinent to observe here with Celestine A. Obi⁵⁴ that it is strange and humiliating that Christianity was brought to West Africa within the context of the greatest atrocities ever committed by man, namely colonization and slave trade. But the goodwill and the indefatigable efforts of some⁵⁵ heroic missionaries should not in any way be under-estimated.

Through the European explorers the missionaries could reach countries like Ghana 1470, Benin 1472 and Congo 1484, where altars and stone pillars bearing crosses were erected.⁵⁶ The efforts of the missionaries were made more effective through the conversion of kings and their chiefs, who in turn made the conversion of their subjects easier. The same success was made in South and East Africa in spite of the effort made by the Muslims to frustrate the work of these missionaries. There was however another cog in the wheel of missionization as European interest in slave trade and scramble for gold in Africa grew.

The work of Catholic mission which suffered a big set back through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was again revitalised in the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century with the founding of the Holy Ghost Fathers and the White Fathers. At this time the Protestant missionary movement thrived. The first Protestant missionaries were freed slaves from Europe, Nova Scotia and later Jamaica.⁵⁷ These made them to settle in Sierra Leone and to establish a significant Christian community, which

⁵³ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁴ Celestine A., Obi, (ed.), *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, Onitsha, Nigeria: Africana-Fep Publishers Limited, 1985, 3.

⁵⁵ I say "some" here because some missionaries were really heroic who gave all, even their lives for the evangelisation of Africa, whereas others collaborated with the colonial rulers and slave traders to manipulate and exploit the Continent.

⁵⁶ G., Parrinder, 120.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 125.

formed the nucleus of West African Christianity. The Church Missionary Society founded Fourah Bay College where Africans were trained as teachers, catechists and clergymen. It is interesting to note, just as Parrinder observed, that the first student of this college was a Nigerian freed slave of Yoruba tribe, Samuel Ajayi Crowther.⁵⁸

The introduction of European Education in both colonial and post-colonial Africa was a great catalyst to the growth and spread of Christianity. Missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant virtually monopolized the African school systems, and schools became a major conduit for new mission converts. Through the school systems many indigenous catechists, pastors and evangelists were educated. But African Christianity only started to be somewhat independent through the emergence of independent nations in the late nineteenth century. It was only then that the native clergy started to take over from the colonial missionaries. The influence of Vatican Council II on this post-colonial African Christianity cannot be underestimated. Vatican Council II endorsed the translation of liturgical texts and the celebration of liturgy in vernacular. It also encouraged the formation of native clergy and self-sufficient local churches in communion with the universal Church in Rome.

The churches of the Anglican Communion have followed the same path as the Catholic Church, developing strong local African leadership within the various national Anglican provinces, and at the same time developing a stronger and stronger voice within the world wide Anglican communion. Thanks to this development, Nigeria has the greatest number of Anglicans in the world and is an independent communion. Nigeria can boast of over 18 Million Anglicans and 20 Million Catholics.

It is pertinent to note that the South-Eastern Nigeria constitute the heart of Christianity in Nigeria.⁵⁹ Today, due to her contribution in both structural

⁵⁸ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁹ This was mainly because of the fact that Islam did not make any inroad in the South East as the attention was focused on the North. That is why its presence is well felt in the whole of Northern states but can hardly be felt in the Eastern states.

and human development, Christianity is a welcome religion in Nigeria. One of the greatest problems of Nigerian Christianity as elsewhere in Africa today is the uncontrollable proliferation of churches and different confessional groups that tend to deviate from the original message of Christianity.

Another problem that besets Christianity in Africa is an **ecumenical** one. It is still difficult for African Christians to come together and work for Christian unity. The different confessions still view each other with suspicion. This problem is rooted to the very origin of Christianity in Africa. In Nigeria for example it was Christianity at war, between the Catholics and the Protestants, fighting for the souls of the natives. People were taught to accept as one of the articles of faith, that to read a book that was written by a person of another confession or what's more to enter a church of another confession was a grave sin. It will take decades before the people's minds are purified from such indoctrinations.

Conflicts also abound among people of the same confession. We should not forget that the genocidal war in Rwanda and Burundi, which is considered to be the worst moment in the history of the Christian Church in Africa, happened within the Catholic fold, between Catholic-Christians of Tutsi tribe and Catholic-Christians of Hutu tribe.⁶⁰ How to reconcile conflicting tribes and Christian communities is a great challenge facing the Church in Africa.

It is unfortunate to note that the presence of Christianity in Africa has right from the onset posed a great threat to African traditional religion and cultures. Missionaries have regarded African religious belief and cultures as pagan and barbaric and hence condemned to absolute annihilation. This explains the prosyletization method, which they employed and which, unfortunately is still being employed today by the Christian leaders to forcefully convert the traditionalists and destroy their objects of worship. Cases abound in South-Eastern Nigeria where Catholic and Protestant

⁶⁰ Catholics of both tribes constitute nearly 90% of the population in both Rwanda and Burundi. They allowed tribal and racial sentiments to destroy the unity, which they have enjoyed for years as children of the same Father in the house of the Lord. Even Church leaders were unfortunately involved in this act of barbarism that could be seen as the African holocaust.

groups organise “crusades”⁶¹ aimed at destroying every treat of African traditional religion. This has a telling implication on the peace and unity of the people as families and communities are disorganised and set at war with each another. People who naturally saw themselves as brothers and sisters now view each other with suspicion. I wonder if the idea of the freedom of religion as enshrined in the International charter of human rights makes a sense to such crusaders. This continues to be one of the major causes of conflicts and violence across the Continent.

2.3.2 Islam

*Islam spread over North Africa from the seventh to the eleventh centuries A.D, and then it turned southwards into the western Sudan of West Africa. It expanded again from the sixteenth century and in the nineteenth it was characterised by Holy Wars. Today the progress of Islam continues into the tropics at the expense of traditional African religions.*⁶²

From the quotation above, one could have a panoramic view not only of the advent and spread of Islam in Africa but also the art and manner of its presence.

Islam has its origin in Arabia with Muhammad’s first recitations of the Qur'an in the seventh century. And its presence in Africa can be traced back to this century of its beginning, when the prophet Muhammad advised a number of his early disciples, who were facing persecution by the pre-Islamic

⁶¹ The term is used to describe series of religious campaigns by Christian forces from the 11th to the 13th century, mainly against Muslims and political enemies of the popes, mostly to capture the Holy Land from the Muslims who occupied it. The term is also used to describe contemporaneous and subsequent campaigns conducted through to the 16th century in territories outside the Levant usually against pagans, heretics, and peoples under the ban of excommunication for a mixture of religious, economic, and political reasons.

These Catholic and Protestant groups in Nigeria are really “crusaders” both in the ways they organise and execute their programmes. Knowing fully well about the origin of this term “crusade”, they intentionally use it to advertise their activities. They employ the use of force which at times leads to the destruction of lives and properties, all in the name of religion.

⁶² Parrinder, 171.

inhabitants of the region to seek refuge across the Red Sea in the Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia.⁶³ Islam in Africa is therefore as old as the religion itself.

This migration across the Red Sea is known in Islamic tradition as the first Hijra. These first Muslim migrants provided the fertile ground for the seed of Islamization across the continents. Africa became de facto the first place Islam would be practiced outside of the Arabian Peninsula.

Apart from this first attempt at implanting Islam in Africa through the Muslim migrants, the second attempt was seven years after the death of Muhammad in 639 AD, when an Arab Army invaded Egypt, and within two generations, Islam had expanded across North Africa and extending to the North Western Africa.⁶⁴

Just like the advent and spread of Christianity was made possible through the European explorers who came mainly for slave trade and Africa's natural resources, Islam later made also a successful inroad to other parts of Africa primarily through contacts with Muslim traders from North Africa and the Middle East.

Joseph Kenny listed certain reasons that fertilized the spread and growth of Islam across the sub-Saharan Africa. He noted that African kings welcomed the Muslim traders and accepted their religion due to certain obvious advantages, namely: They brought economic advantages of long-distance trade, which would be more certain if the king accepted Islam himself. This earned him respect and trust and automatic citizenship in the Muslim *umma* and made him equal with his trading partners far away.⁶⁵

Another reason given by Joseph Kenny for the easy acceptance and spread of Islam by the African rulers and their followers was a military one. By

⁶³ Abyssinia is the modern day Ethiopia.

⁶⁴ See Hassan, D., Hussein, Islam in Africa: CRS Report for Congress of May 9, 2008.

⁶⁵ Joseph, Kenny, The Spread of Islam in Nigeria: A Historical Survey, a paper presented at Conference on Sharia in Nigeria, Enugu, Nigeria: Spiritan Institute of Theology, 2001, 1-2.

accepting Islam the King and his followers were legally protected from attack by other Muslims, since Islam encouraged attack on unbelievers.⁶⁶

Other reasons include both the provision of education, which offered an equal opportunity for trade transactions with international traders and the provision of religious medicine and talismans against all forms of diseases and problems of life. The latter corresponded to the African worldview in general.⁶⁷

It was because of these very reasons that Islam made its way smoothly into what is now known as Nigeria, in the ninth century, though it found a comfortable residence among the Fulani of Northern Nigeria. The spread of Islam in Northern Nigeria gained more ground during the colonial period because of the fact that traditional religion was suppressed and Christian missions were forbidden and discouraged in Moslem areas.⁶⁸

In the course of its spread, Islam in Northern Nigeria underwent a period of revival and purification through the Jihad initiated by a Fulani Scholar Uthman dan Fodio in 1804. This Jihad was aimed at eliminating elements of syncretism and removing all innovations that are contrary to the Koran and Sharia. It was also aimed at encouraging less devout Muslims to return to orthodox and pure Islam. Through this “struggle”⁶⁹ the greater part of the Hausa tribe was won for Islam.

From the Northern Nigeria Islam spread to other parts of the nation through the Hausa slaves, gaining more adherents in the South-Western⁷⁰ part of the country, which was attracted to the religion because of the economic and political advantages it offered. There are few Muslims in Eastern Nigeria,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁸ G., Parrinder, 2006; See also Kenny Joseph, *The Spread of Islam in Nigeria*, 3.

⁶⁹ It is pertinent to make this clarification here because the term “Jihad” is often in the Western understanding taken to be synonymous with “holy war”. “Jihad” in Arabic means, “struggle”. It means continuous struggle of the faithful with the evil in the world. (Islamisches Echo in Europa, „Jihad“ - nicht „heiliger Krieg“, Hamburg: Islamisches Zentrum, 1996. It can also mean a continuous effort “to live a moral and virtuous life, spreading and defending Islam as well as fighting injustice and oppression, among other things”, Esposito (2002a), p.26.

⁷⁰ In Southwestern Nigeria, Islam found more acceptance among the Yoruba tribe. Many Christian adherents live today in this part of the country because of the presence of many tribes from the South- Eastern Nigeria, who are mainly Christians.

which is really the heart of Christianity in Nigeria, because “*the Fulani did not succeed in entering there, and Islamic influence will hardly be enhanced by modern wars.*”⁷¹

Since its presence Islam has been a threat to the very existence of not only African traditional religion but also other religions as the adherents of other religions are considered as infidels to be converted by force or wiped out. There have been uncountable experiences of wars against other religions where churches and objects of worship were set ablaze, property worth millions of dollars and thousands of souls were lost. Just as Father Joseph Kenny rightly puts it: “*Islam has been, and will be for a long time to come, one of the major challenges to Nigerians in the development of peace, justice and prosperity in the country.*”⁷² We will still come to this topic in chapter four.

2.4 The African as Homo Politicus

For an African, “to be” means “to be with”, to be in a community, to be with others. A life without a community is unimaginable for an African. “To be without” a family or a community, in other words, to be without others would imply for an African “not being at all”. The existence of an African has meaning and relevance only within the context of a community. His being and identity begins from here. The proof of the certainty of his existence can only find its valid affirmation based on the existential certitude of his community. He can therefore argue in this way, with regards to his existence: Without my community I would not be. My community exists. Therefore I exist too. It is in recognition of this fundamental value rooted in African cultures that the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of 1994 *Ecclesia in Africa* states:

“African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast

⁷¹ Parrinder, 206.

⁷² Joseph, Kenny, 1.

without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family.”⁷³

The individual understands himself and lives his life only in relation to his community. Most often his actions are directed by the awareness that he is a member, a son or a daughter of a community. That is why one often hears such expressions as: “our child”, “our wife”, “our father”, “our mother” etc. He can therefore not live in isolation. The community takes part in his entire life cycle, beginning from birth to death. The community shares also in his joys and sorrows. Should he be in need, the community comes to his assistance. The important life events like, birth, circumcision, naming ceremony, initiation rites, marriage, title taking and death are celebrated with and within the community. And just as the community takes responsibilities towards him, he also has responsibilities towards the community. What concerns the community concerns him and vice versa. The African is never alone except in the cases of ostracism, where one, due to certain anti-community actions such as stealing, killing, breaking of laws and taboos of the community, is ex-communicated from the community. Such one is considered not worthy to be a son or a daughter of the community. It is also based on the traditional African understanding that the sin of an individual can have damming consequences on the entire community. The sin of an individual can evoke the wrath of gods on the entire community. And to avoid such disastrous consequences on the community, gods are appeased through sacrifices by the community and the individual in question is either ostracised or sent on exile.⁷⁴ This belief is enshrined in the popular Igbo proverb that *“if one finger touches oil, it will spoil the others.”* The re-admission of such individual back to the community is also a communal event, climaxed with the “*oriko*” meal of reconciliation. We are going to discuss this in detail in the second part of this work.

⁷³ Ecclesia in Africa, No. 43.

⁷⁴ In his award-winning novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chinua Achebe delineates such tradition, as it existed among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria. Okonkwo, the tragic figure of the story was sent to exile by his clan Umuofia because he desecrated the whole land by inadvertently killing a clansman, in spite of the great respect and honour he enjoyed within his clan. He was exiled to cleanse the land, which he polluted with the blood of a clansman and could only return to the clan after living seven years in exile.

From the forgoing, we will see just as Healey Joseph and Sybertz Donald rightly observed, that: *“Africans emphasize harmony in the community rather than division. This often dictates the style of life. They will go to great lengths to promote peace and reconciliation. Traditionally, a divided village was the greatest calamity that could ever happen to the community”.*⁷⁵ And to maintain peace and harmony in and among communities, Africans have socio-political structures and institutions that help them to do this. These institutions see to the governance and the observance of ethical codes and taboos of the communities. These institutions are organised according to families, extended families, clans, villages and towns and are headed by the council of elders with the chief or the king as the highest authority.

2.4.1 Relationship between Religion and Politics in Africa

It was Mbiti who noted that, *“Africans are notoriously religious”*. And to show how the truism of this statement can be existentially established, he further made the following observations:

*Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing his seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament.*⁷⁶

Religion plays a central role in all the spheres of life in Africa. It is on the same note that Christopher Ejizu, another specialist in African traditional religion states that *“in the traditional African background, religion is a most important aspect of life. It pervades and permeates all aspects of life and*

⁷⁵ Joseph, Healey and Donald, Sybertz, Towards an African Narrative Theology, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 116.

⁷⁶ J. S., Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, London: Morrison and Gibb Ltd., 1975, 2.

infuses the social, economic, political dimensions African with meaning and significance."⁷⁷

In the sphere of politics it is not difficult to understand why Africans find explanation for the origin of the state and the justification of the authority of the ruler within the framework of religion. Although African political systems have been erroneously described as "stateless societies"⁷⁸ but recent researches have proved that pre-colonial African societies had organised political systems. This is evident in the observation made by Femi Otubanjo:

*The supernatural provides more than an explanation of descent in most African States. It provides, almost invariably, the legitimation of power. This is as true of the centralised political systems of Bunyoro, Baganda or Ashanti as it is of the Tallensi, Igbo or the Luo.... The right to rule is almost always located in the commonly accepted myth of descent. Rulers derive their mandate from the same divine source from which society has emerged. In the centralised political systems, this divine source is also the inspiration for the identification of ruler.*⁷⁹

Following the observations above, it is not difficult to identify the existence of *divine kingship* in African political systems, where "*earthly governments are mere agents of God's theocratic governance of the physical and the spiritual world.*"⁸⁰ Among the Yorubas of South Western Nigeria, the *Oba*⁸¹ is not only

⁷⁷ I. C., Ejizu, African Traditional Religions and the Promotion of Community-Living in Africa, 4.

⁷⁸ Robin, Horton, "Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa", in: Ajayi Crowther (eds.), History of West Africa, Vol. 1, 1971/1976. Robin Horton in his research on the history of pre-colonial Africa described African societies as "stateless societies". He understands under this term, societies, where there are no formally organised and centralised systems of government. This was based on a biased and erroneous understanding of Africans and their worldview. Where threats of such organised systems of government exist, Horton tries to ascribe it to the external influence. Cf. Ingeborg Maria, Grau, Die Igbo-sprechenden Völker Südostnigerias: Fragmentation und fundamentale Einheit in ihrer Geschichte, Wien VWGÖ, 1993, 34ff.

⁷⁹ Femi, Otubanjo, Themes in African Traditional Political Thought, in: Ali Zaccheus Sunday (eds.), African Traditional Political Thought and Institutions, Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1989, 8-9.

⁸⁰ S. O., Abogunrin, "Towards a Unifying Political Ideology and Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria: A Christian View" in: Onaiyekan J.O. ed. Religion, Peace and Unity in Nigeria, Ibadan: NACS, 1984, 1984.

a political but also a religious representative of *Olodumare*.⁸² Among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria, it is the general belief as enshrined in their myth that it was "*Chukwu*"⁸³, who gave *Eri*⁸⁴ the "*Ofo*"⁸⁵ to be the traditional high priest with the exclusive right to cleanse every kind of abomination and to confer authority on the traditional ruler of the people. Hence religion and politics are inseparable in Africa.

From the above exposition of the African as "homo religiosus" and "homo politicus", it is not therefore difficult to see why for an African; the religious dimension of reconciliation cannot be separated from its political or communal dimension. Every effort at reconciliation in African society must presuppose these two aspects. It is a religious affair as well as a communal affair. This is deeply rooted in the African worldview as we are going to see later.

⁸¹ "Oba" is the title given to the traditional king of Yoruba society of South-western Nigeria.

⁸² The name "Olodumare" refers to the Supreme Being as it exists among the Yorubas.

⁸³ "Chukwu" refers to the Supreme Being among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria.

⁸⁴ "Eri" is the archetypal ancestor of Nri community, a priestly caste in Igbo heartland. The Igbos trace their origin to this community.

⁸⁵ "Ofo" is an insignia of authority.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC PHENOMENA

3.1 The European Invasion

With the example of the experience of the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, Chinua Achebe denigrated, in his award winning novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the regrettable situation among the African tribes with the European invasion of Africa. In his novel, Achebe tried to expose the admirable communal nature of the African peoples and what culture and traditions meant for these peoples. As anti-climax, he exposed how the European forceful invasion systematically broke apart the umbilical cord of unity that characterised the lives of the African peoples. In his words, “*the white man has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.*”⁸⁶ This does not in any way suggest that Africa was a paradise nor that there was nothing good about the advent of the Europeans to Africa.

Certain evils did in fact exist in Africa prior to the advent of the Europeans. And one of the positive aspects of the coming of the Europeans to Africa is the liberation of the people from some of those obnoxious and dehumanising traditions, like the killing of twins and the marginalisation of women among others. But it was as if the Pandora’s box was let loose with the European invasion. New evils and conflicts emerged. New forms of exploitation, marginalisation, oppression and dehumanisation characterise now what may be seen as the African socio-economic phenomena.

3.1.1 Colonialism with the Evil of Exploitation and Impoverishment of Africa

Elochukwu E. Uzukwu succinctly described the evil of colonialism thus:

The colonial ideology is that of domination and exploitation of the colonized, intended to derive maximum profit from minimum

⁸⁶ Chinua, Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1958, 127.

*investment. To realize this objective, the colonizers went ahead to deny the being of the colonized, their person, their culture, their worldview. In its place was installed the person, the culture, and the universe of the colonizer for the realization of the interests of the latter. The successful implementation of this ideology alienated the colonized.*⁸⁷

In these clear and distinct words, one could understand the purpose, the method and the consequences of colonialism especially for the colonized. Colonialism is here presented as a crime against the colonized people of Africa. It was an ideology aimed not primarily at bringing civilization to Africa but towards possible annihilation of the being of Africans, in order to better the being of the colonizers. Colonialism was therefore a system of “development” as much as it was a system of “underdevelopment.”

In his book “How Europe underdeveloped Africa” Walter Rodney underscores that the two words “development” and “underdevelopment” have a dialectical relationship one to the other, in the sense that the two by way of interaction help to produce each other. He notes that through the exploitative relationship of Western Europe to Africa that enabled the unquestionable transfer of African wealth to Europe, “*Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion as Western Europe helped to underdevelop Africa.*”⁸⁸ He therefore identifies the operation of the European imperialist and capitalist system as being responsible for the underdevelopment and impoverishment of African Continent.⁸⁹ The colonial capitalist system forcefully exploited the labour of African workers and to insure for their physical survival, lowest possible wages were paid. The physical survival of the workers meant of course an un-interrupted production for and sustenance of the economy of the colonisers. Since the humanity of the colonised was denied, the only reason for their existence was to serve the

⁸⁷ Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 29.

⁸⁸ Walter, Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Rev. Edition, Washington: Howard University Press, 1982, 75.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

well being of the colonisers. While reporting such a capitalists' exploitation of the native workers in Nigeria, Walter Rodney noted:

*The Nigerian coal miner at Enugu earned one shilling per day for working underground and nine pence per day for jobs on the surface. Such a miserable wage would be beyond the comprehension of a Scottish or German coal miner, who could virtually earn in an hour what the Enugu miner was paid for a six-day week.*⁹⁰

The reason for this huge disparity is clear: Wages paid to the European workers were meant to serve for their meaningful existence. While wages to the African workers were meant to keep them physically fit to be able to keep on producing for the colonisers. The humanity of the colonised workers was of no interest to the colonisers. This could be substantiated with the event of 1934 in Gold Coast, present Ghana, where forty-one natives lost their lives in a gold mine disaster. The capitalist colonial company for whom they worked could only pay 3 pounds as compensation to the dependants of each of the victims.⁹¹ This exposes the level of exploitation Africans were subjected to under colonialism. One could of course not expect anything better as the Continent from the onset was not seen as an abode of human beings but from its material promises; ranging from phosphates, oil, lead, zinc, iron ore, timber, ivory, gold, diamonds and slaves. Thus Africa was defined in terms of economic goods: the Ivory Coast, The Gold Coast, the Slave Coast et cetera. It should therefore not be an overstatement to say, that the wealth of the west today was built on the impoverishment and exploitation of Africa. And no meaningful reconstruction of Africa today can be possible without casting a look at this dark side of not only African history but also the history of humanity. This is not only a theme for politics but also and more urgently of theology!

⁹⁰ Ibid., 150.

⁹¹ Ibid., 151.

3.1.2 Racism and Slavery

Just as Rodney rightly observed, a lot of things still remain uncertain with regards to slavery. For example, one may never ever know the total estimates of the number of slaves exported from Africa to the Western world. Varying figures continue to appear in different studies, depending, of course, on the standpoint of the researcher.⁹² One of such studies presents an estimate of between 14 million and 24 million, many of whom died in the wars and raids that netted slaves. Our effort here is not to investigate into the exact figure of slaves exported out of Africa but essentially to “recollect”, in form of remembering, the evil of slavery, which remains one of the darkest moments of human history. Such a recollection will enable us to give slavery its place in the reconstruction of both African theology and the mission of the Church in Africa. We will now engage ourselves with tracing the ideological and the historical origin of racism and slavery. The complicity of both the universal Church and the particular churches will also be exposed.

Based on certain anthropological, intellectual and theological arguments, the West had divided mankind into two: the superior and the inferior, the whites and the blacks, the masters and the slaves in order to assert their superiority. It was Joseph Washington who noted that Aristotle, following his assertion that “*the slave (those who are as different from other men as the soul from the body or man from beast) is a slave by nature*”⁹³, could be seen to have laid the foundation for the intellectual justification and the regrettable beginning of racism and slavery in the western world.⁹⁴ The Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus built further on this Aristotle’s assertion to classify humanity into four races: *Homo Europeanus*, *Homo Asiaticus*, *Homo Africanus* and *Homo Americanus*.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., 96.

⁹³ Aristotle, Politics, 1254b16-21.

⁹⁴ Cf. Washington, R. Joseph, The Politics of God, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, 8.

⁹⁵ Carl, Linnaeus, Systema Naturae, (1767), 29. See also Singleton, Harry, Black Theology and Ideology, Deideological Dimensions in the Theology of James H. Cone, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 2002, 28.

Cornel West has observed that Carl Linnaeus' racial division of humanity into four was also hierarchically classified as evident in this comparison of European and the African:

European. White, Sanguine, Brawny. Hair abundantly flowing. Eyes blue. Gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by customs.

*African. Black, Phlegmatic, Relaxed. Hair black, frizzled. Skin silky. Nose flat. Lips tumid. Women's bosom a matter of modesty. Breasts give milk abundantly. Crafty, indolent. Negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice.*⁹⁶

With the above, the stage was set for the whole intellectual degradation of the blacks as mere instruments as evident in the thoughts of some prominent western thinkers. Voltaire stated that the Negro is a species different from the Europeans as the breed of Spaniels is from that of greyhounds. The mucous membrane, which nature has spread between the muscles and the skin is white in the Europeans but black or copper-coloured in the Negro. The Negro is not capable of any great application or association of ideas and hence inferior.⁹⁷ The influence, which this direction of Voltaire's thought had on David Hume and other European thinkers in their development of pro-slavery literatures, is very conspicuous. For example Hume wrote the following to assert the intellectual inferiority of the blacks:

*I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all other species of men to be naturally inferior to the whites. There was never a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences....*⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Carl, Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae*, (1767), 29. Cf. West, Cornel, *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982, 47.

⁹⁷ Voltaire *The Works of Voltaire, Vol. XIX (Philosophical Letters)* (1733). See also Cornel, West, 62.

⁹⁸ David, Hume, Footnote to "Of National Character", (1748), in: *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, Volume III, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996, 228. See also Cornel West, 62 and Hopkin, Richard, H., "The Philosophical Basis of Eighteenth-Century Racism," *Studies in*

While maintaining the same intellectual tradition of his predecessors, Immanuel Kant asserted that Africans “*in virtue of their blackness, are precluded from the realm of reason and civilization.*”⁹⁹ According to Kant, the difference between the two races of men is so fundamental and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.¹⁰⁰ These philosophical ideologies really influenced the Europeans in their degradation, manipulation, discrimination and exploitation of blacks.

The philosophical “propaganda” against the blacks provided the intellectual ground for theological justifications of slavery. Theologically, the westerners presented arguments that slavery, as an institution, was ordained by God and of benefit to the enslaved. They made allusion to some biblical texts to justify slavery.¹⁰¹ In fact from the eighteenth century onward there arose a biblical interpretation that traced the origin of the blacks to the biblical Ham in Genesis 9: 18-27 and thus being the descendants of Ham, they carried the curse on Ham.¹⁰² The Bible presents the fact that, Noah was mocked in his nakedness by his son Ham. As a punishment for his action, Noah sentenced Ham and his descendants to be eternally slaves to brothers Shem and Japheth and their descendants. From this biblical text, many identify Africans as Ham’s descendants and Europeans as the descendants of Shem and Japheth. It is therefore not difficult to see why they also justify the enslavement of Africans by the Europeans.¹⁰³

It is awful to note that even some members of the Church shared in this view. Walbert Bühlmann, who himself was a missionary in Tanganyika,

Eighteenth-Century Culture 3, ed., Harold, E., Pagliano: Case Western Reserve University, 1973.

⁹⁹ Immanuel Kant, “Of National Characteristics so far as they depend upon the distinct feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime” in: *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John, T. Goldthwait, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 110-1. See also Tsenay, Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy, The Essential Readings*, New York: Paragon House, 1999, 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-1.

¹⁰¹ Cf. James, O., Busell, *Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964, 12.

¹⁰² C.F Benjamin, Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV (January 1997): 103-142. This view was strongly criticized by Walbert Bühlmann in his book “*God’s Chosen Peoples*”, New York: Orbis Books, 1982, 104.

¹⁰³ C.F James, H., Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 36.

observed in his critic of this ideology that many missionaries came to Africa with this bias as substantiated by the words of the pioneer bishop Augouard of Brazzaville:

*The black race is Ham's race; one feels it - the race God cursed.
The blacks are lazy, greedy, given to every vice.*¹⁰⁴

The bishop, according to Bühlmann, therefore called for prayers “*for the black race, that the curse of Ham may soon be lifted from them*”. One sees in this unfortunate view of a missionary bishop to Africa, that his whole effort as a missionary in Africa was to see that the “curse of Ham be lifted from the blacks”. We are not told whether he saw the realization of his prayer before his death in 1921. Bühlmann reports that even at Vatican Council I, seventy bishops did sign a petition to have missionaries sent to Central Africa, where “*the wretched necks of those Hamites are more and more weighed down by the oldest of all curses... In spite of all the endeavours of mother Church, the miserable race of the blacks still stands within the terrible kingdom of Satan.*”¹⁰⁵

The missionaries' connivance with the colonial masters to theologically and biblically justify the institution of slavery should not be forgotten. Reports¹⁰⁶ abound where the white missionaries, especially the English, taught the slaves that they were destined from creation to be un-free. These missionaries also allayed the moral and economic fears of the slaveholders themselves by convincing them with the following arguments: Firstly, masters are neither prohibited by the Laws of God, nor those of the Land, from keeping Christian slaves.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, giving the slaves religious instruction will make them more obedient and more efficient workers for their masters.¹⁰⁸ With these points of reference, the English missionaries devoted their whole zeal towards serving the interests of the colonial masters and slaveholders. They brainwashed the black-slaves giving them no hope of

¹⁰⁴ C.F Walbert, Bühlmann, 104.

¹⁰⁵ See Chiocchetta, P., “Il `Postulatum pro Nigris Africae cetralis` al Concilio Vaticano I e I suoi precendenti,” in *Euntes Docete*, Rome: 1960, 408ff. Bühlmann, 104.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Shelton, H. Smith, *In His Image, but... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910*, Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1972.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Harry, Singleton, *Black Theology and Ideology*, 6.

liberation from the earthly servitude. They rather admonished them to accept slavery as their fate and only hope for the other - worldly liberation. And this depends on how faithful they serve their white masters in this world. Rebellion against the master would exclude one from the kingdom of God. Shelton Smith quotes a sermon once preached by Reverend Thomas Bacon, an Episcopal missionary, to a congregation of Episcopal slaves:

*Almighty God hath been pleased to make you slaves here, and to give you nothing but Labour and Poverty in this world. If you desire Freedom, serve the Lord here, and you shall be his (Freepersons) in Heaven hereafter.*¹⁰⁹

Although much of this complicity with the colonial masters came from the protestant churches, but the Catholic Church was not free from this evil. The Vatican document “The Church and Racism” from the Pontifical Commission “*Justitia et Pax*”, which was published in 1989 with the approval of Pope John Paul II was somewhat an acknowledgement of the Church’s responsibility for the evil of racism and slavery. Among other things, the document speaks of “*places where missionaries were more closely dependent on political powers, it was more difficult for them to curb the colonists attempt to dominate. At times they even gave it encouragement on the basis of false interpretations of the Bible...*”¹¹⁰

This “admission of guilt” does not in any way mean shifting of the whole responsibility to the Church. But it does admit that the Church, through her members, took part in this crime. But it is indeed more hurting to know that, today, racism in all its forms still exists in the Church, both in the universal Church and in the particular churches. It is a common thing in Europe and America to see some Church members, at times even from the rank of the hierarchy, discouraging the appointment of foreigners as parish priests and community leaders in some communities. Such people undermine the goodwill of their bishops who, understanding fully the universal nature of the Church, and who trying to find a temporary solution

¹⁰⁹ Shelton H. Smith, *In His Image*, but..., 12.

¹¹⁰ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Church and Racism*, Vatican, 1989 No. 5.

to vocation problem as experienced in the western world, invite priests from other countries to work in their respective dioceses.¹¹¹

The situation of the Church in Europe and America today calls for a panoramic view of mission territories to include them, otherwise they keep on living with the false ideology of superiority. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace warned against such “*ideology of the superiority of persons from European (or American) stock over those of African or Indian origin or ‘colored’, which is, by some supported by an erroneous interpretation of the Bible and (Church tradition).*”¹¹²

Such was the situation in South Africa under the evil regime of apartheid. The whites’ racial attitude created a two-track system in the spheres of education, politics and religion. A great distinction was made between the white schools and the black schools, the white party and the black party, the white churches and the black churches. This was legalized and institutionalized.¹¹³ Under this two-track system, the blacks were discriminated and were never allowed, under risk of death, to enter white churches, schools and shops.

Racism exists also today in various forms in particular churches of different continents. In Africa it manifests itself in the form of ethnicism and there are thousands of such cases in the Church. For example, in Nigeria there were cases in the past, where bishops and pastors from other ethnic groups were rejected by the people because of the very reason that they were not “*sons of the soil.*”¹¹⁴ There were also reports in the past where seminarians from other

¹¹¹ Particular reference is made here to the wonderful project Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna Archdiocese, has in his Diocese, where he considers it as an Exchange programme to offer scholarship to priests from the so-called third world countries to study in Vienna, during which those priests help out in some parishes in his Diocese. Bishops in Europe and North America, who have limited personnel in their dioceses, should borrow this worthy programme from the highly revered Cardinal. The priests who benefit from this programme should also keep faith by returning to their respective countries after their studies.

¹¹² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, The Church and Racism, No. 5.

¹¹³ Michael, Battle, Reconciliation, The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997, 13.

¹¹⁴ Reference is made here to a case in 1996 in Enugu Diocese of south Eastern Nigeria, where the incumbent bishop Anthony Gbuji was transferred from Issele-Uku, naturally from another ethnic group. Some priests of Enugu diocese “rejected” this Vatican decision and criticized the moral behind “pointing an old and non indigenous bishop as if the diocese is not mature enough to have its own indigenous bishop”. Cf. Ugonna Igboaja’s book: Enugu Diocese Again. A book he wrote in critic against the appointment of Bishop Gbuji as the

ethnic groups were rejected by some local ordinaries because they were not sons of the soil.

In the political sphere, ethnicism has also characterized and influenced political developments in Africa. In my country Nigeria, the idea of the superiority of one ethnic group over the other was sown and promoted by the British colonialists. Lord Lugard, the founder of the Nigerian Nation, worked on his self-conceived principle that the lighter-skinned Fulani ethnic group in the North was superior to other ethnic groups and therefore arrogated to them the right of political leadership in Nigeria.¹¹⁵ This fundamental fallacy has till date charted the course of political development in Nigeria. The consequences of this false ideology will be later highlighted.

3.1.3 The Emergence of Nation-states: A square peg in a round hole!

The situation of African Nation-states has been that of a square peg in a round hole. Since the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 under the leadership of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, where Africa was partitioned by and shared among the European imperialist powers and thus artificial boundaries created (see figure 1), African Nation-states have not known any peace. The politico-geographical map of Africa as we see it today is the product of such greed-motivated partitioning. Hence the name: Scramble or race for Africa!

African Nation-states are therefore the imposition of European imperialism. The partitioning was done without the consent of African peoples. There was no dialogue of any kind between Europe and Africa. No African societies and groups were consulted. Diverse societies, cultures and traditions were forcefully amalgamated. Not only were disparate cultures lumped together, the newly-drawn national boundaries often cut through single culture or ethnic group. In some cases a single culture found itself located in as many as four different countries. And at the end of the Conference an

bishop of Enugu Diocese. This book was however, humbly withdrawn by the author himself though under the threat of Ex-communication.

¹¹⁵Iheanyi M., Enwerem, A Danerous Awakening: The politicization of Religion in Nigeria, Ibadan, Nigeria: French Institute for Research in Africa, 1995, 24.

"International treaty" was signed that disregarded the ethnic, social and economic composition of the people that lived in that area. The seed of discord, in the form of ethnic conflicts, wars and genocides as we know it in Africa today, was sown. This presents a vivid picture of how Europe looked down on Africa as a vulture would on its prey. In order to avoid conflict and war among the European imperialists' powers with conflicting interests in the process of scramble, conflicts and wars were exported to Africa, through partitioning. Conflicts and wars in Africa today remain the price Africans had to pay for the peace of Europe!

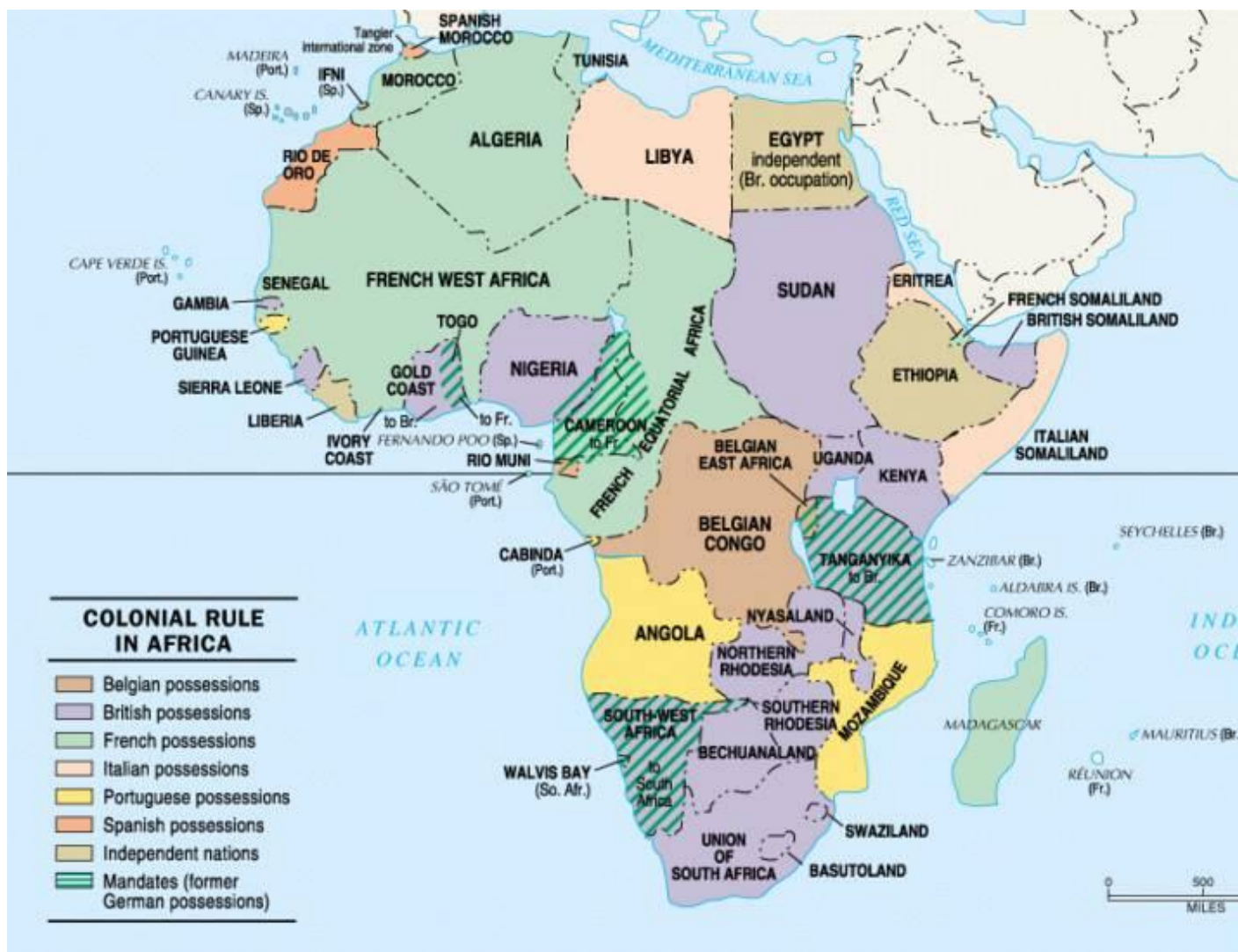


Figure 1. Politico-geographical map of Africa showing how African nations were shared among the European imperialist powers. One can also see how the boundaries were artificially created.

Nigeria, for example, had both the Southern and Northern protectorates before the 1914 amalgamation by Lord Lugard. Nigeria is a country with over 250 tribes with diversity of languages, cultures and traditions. Before the arrival of foreign powers, Nigeria had more historic cultures and empires than any other society in Africa. Different empires or kingdoms existed, some of them extending into other parts that are not part of what we have today as Nigeria.¹¹⁶ There were Hausa Kingdoms, Yoruba kingdoms, the Igbo kingdom of Nri, the Edo kingdom of Benin, the Efik kingdom, the Ibibio kingdom, the Annang kingdom and other minor kingdoms. The British imperialist power did not take note of these differences and even ignored the sensitivity of the peoples before taking the decision to create boundaries and amalgamate both the two protectorates. This is evident in the words of Captain Woodruffe, one of the Southern Boundary Commissioners, representing the opinion of the British Officer in Northern Nigeria:

*... the Political Officer, Northern Nigeria, stated that he did not see what race, Native Custom and tradition had to do with the question as he, personally, did not consider the natives had any feelings of sentiment or cling to customs and laws they and the people before them were used to, and further, in his opinion that if any natives were ordered by one Government or the other to go either North or South they would do so.*¹¹⁷

The consequences of this colonial “imposition”¹¹⁸ called Nigeria (see figure 2) still remains a cog in the wheel of her socio-political development. Even the British Governor-General of Nigeria under the colonial government was quick to observe in his report to the Royal Empire Society in London that:

¹¹⁶ Calabar kingdom stretched into parts of current-day Cameroon and Benin Kingdom extended to some of current-day Ghana.

¹¹⁷ Michael, Crowther, “Lugard and Colonial Nigeria- Towards an Identity?” in: History Today, February 1986, Vol. 36, 23 – 29.

¹¹⁸ The use of the term does not in anyway suggest a disapproval of the birth of the Nigerian Nation from the author nor in anyway negate the possibility of a peaceful co-existence of all ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. It is only meant to emphasize the artificial creation of the state called Nigeria by the colonial imperialist power thereby undermining the feelings and sensitivities of the natives.

*It is only the accident of British suzerainty, which has made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically.... Socially and politically there are deep differences between the major tribal groups.*¹¹⁹

The fact remains that after the amalgamation, the natives themselves did not understand its meaning and purpose, since the reality was totally new and they were not psychologically prepared for it. The peoples that make up the nation called Nigeria were directly confronted with the new reality without an already made solution to this political puzzle. The first reaction was suspicion and non-acceptance. The entity was perceived as part of the imposition of colonial ideologies and powers. Since the only dialogue before the amalgamation was between the colonial administrators of both southern and northern Provinces and not between the diverse ethnic groups that make up the polity, the peoples never saw anything positive about it. They were thrown into darkness that they were unable to see the possibility of a bright future for Nigeria as a united nation. This is evident in the views expressed by even the post-colonial leaders of Nigeria. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of Northern origin, later the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, for example, told the Nigerian Legislative Council that,

*Since the amalgamation of southern and northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one as country on paper, it is still far from being united.*¹²⁰

And Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Southern origin, later the first Premier of South-Western Nigeria observed:

Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English' or 'Welsh' or 'French'; the word Nigeria is merely a

¹¹⁹ Afigbo, A. E., Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs, The collected essays of Adiele Afigbo, Etd by Toyin Falola, Trenton New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2005, 240.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 240.

*distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.*¹²¹

From the above observations one could see the damning consequences that different ethnic groups within the Nigerian polity were immediately plunged into. They are today still not free from them.

But in spite of the damning mistake of the British imperialist power, the peoples, even the Nigerian elites failed to take the bull by the horn, by making the second mistake of failing to see such an amalgamation as an on-going process. They failed, in the words of Afigbo A. E., “*to conceive and perceive the Nigerian polity as a multi-faceted reality whose amalgamation called, and still calls, for action on many fronts and over a long period.*”¹²² They failed “*to realize that a multi-faceted polity like Nigeria can, and usually does undergo amalgamation in different facets of its life and being, either simultaneously or one after the other.*”¹²³ Afigbo is here trying to tell Nigerians to be patient for there is a brighter future. One can always make the best out of every situation, no matter how hopeless it might seem! We have to take note of this view in the new effort for a reconciled and united Nigeria.

¹²¹ Ibid., 240.

¹²² Ibid., 240.

¹²³ Ibid., 240-241.

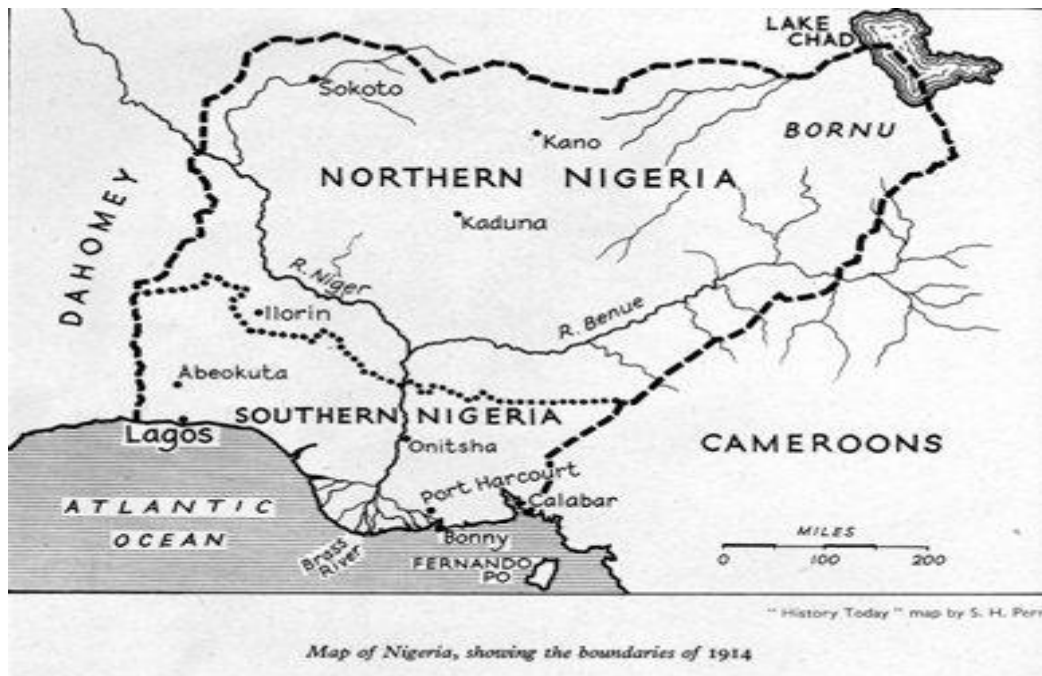


Figure 2. The map of Nigeria before amalgamation, showing the Southern and Northern Protectorates.

3.1.3.1 Wars and Ethno-religious Conflicts in Africa

Ethnicism (often known as tribalism) and religious differences¹²⁴ constitute the major sources of wars and conflicts especially in post-colonial Africa. As we have earlier observed, all the large African states are multi-ethnic and products of European imperialism. Prior to European invasion of Africa, Africans organized themselves according to ethnic groups, each tracing its origin to a common ancestor in the remote past.¹²⁵ Each ethnic group consisted of communities of extended families or clans with common ancestors in the proximate past. Each ethnic group was bonded together through common language, culture and tradition.

Apart from the original mistake made by the European imperial powers at the Berlin Conference, where different ethnic groups were forced, without their consent, to be part of particular nations, the problem was compounded through their use of these ethnic differences to sow the seed of conflicts and wars which have continued up till today to be the bane of African unity. For effective administration and to subdue the colonised to loyalty, the imperialist powers employed the *divide et impera*, divide and rule method.¹²⁶ Through this method, ethnicities were pitted against each other, thus keeping the people from rising up against imperialist powers. Distribution of economic resources was often planned to favour a particular group, thereby provoking marginalized groups to use their ethnicity to mobilise for equality. And in the ensuing conflict the favoured group was militarily supported against the marginalized. Ethnic conflicts as we have them today remain offshoots of colonialism. Rodney described the situation thus:

It was a product of the way that people were brought together under colonialism so as to be exploited. It was a product... of

¹²⁴ Religion as a source of wars and conflicts in Africa is a post-colonial experience. This is because there was absolutely no experience of religious conflicts and wars in the traditional Africa religion. The arrival of Christianity and Islam brought with them conflicts and struggles that have progressively escalated to genocides in the recent times.

¹²⁵ Walter, Rodney, 228.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 228.

*differential access by particular ethnic groups into the colonial economy and culture.*¹²⁷

We are now going to sample some conflict-laden countries of Africa, my country Nigeria inclusive, to confirm the above observations.

Sudan:

Sudan was one of the first countries in Africa to gain independence. Prior to her independence in 1956, the country was divided along two religious regions with diverse ethnic groups, namely the Arab and Muslim majority in the North and African Christian minority in the South. This was at least the view of the southern elite as stated below:

*The Sudan falls sharply into two distinct areas, both in geographical area, ethnic groups, and cultural systems... There is nothing common between the various sections of the community; no body of shared belief, and above all, the Sudan has failed to compose a single community.*¹²⁸

And the two periods of wars that Sudan has experienced since her independence from the British rule were drawn along these two regions. The Southerners carried the sentiments of being marginalised in the political and socio-economic affairs of the country by the dominant Muslim North, which had enjoyed the massive support of the British imperialist powers in all aspects of life.¹²⁹ Their complaints of marginalisation were not unfounded. Oliver Furley presented the immediate glaring picture of post-independent Sudan as follows:

... the greater educational opportunities available to northerners ensured that as the British were hurriedly ejected from Sudan by 1956, their replacements in the administration of all areas, including the south, would be overwhelmingly from the north;

¹²⁷ Ibid., 229.

¹²⁸ Wai, M.,Dustan, "Political Trends in the Sudan and the Future of the South," in Wai, M., Dunstan ed., The Southern Sudan, The Problems of National Integration, London: F. Cass, 1973, 146.

¹²⁹ Oliver, Furley, Woodward Peter, "Sudan: War without End" in: Oliver, Furley, ed., Conflict in Africa, London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995, 94.

*and that many of the new northern officials and traders who went south would be seen as new colonialists.*¹³⁰

The sentiments of the southerners gained crescendo due to the northerners increased effort to subjugate them through the post independent military regime of General Ibrahim Abbud. This led to the emergence of a guerrilla army called the Anya-nya in 1963 and naturally the eruption of the civil war in Sudan that lasted for over four decades, and consumed about a million lives and displaced several million more.¹³¹ It is true that the civil war in Sudan could more be seen as a religious war than an ethnic war because of the clear characterization of the two regions along their religious affiliations. We are still going to see the influence of religion in the many conflicts in some parts of Africa. But our effort so far is to show how some of these wars and conflicts are products of imperialist's method of divide and rule.

Uganda:

In an attempt to root the historical trajectories to the civil wars and internal conflicts in Uganda, authors have traced them back to the very coming into existence of the entity called Uganda through „ *the territorial surgery*“¹³² performed by European imperialist powers at the Berlin Conference. The territorial surgery was not aimed at a healthy growth and development of the new nation state but to serve as booty for the British imperialism. The colonial agenda as Amii Omara-Otunnu puts it “*was not to engage in a process of state formation which would foster social cohesion*” but were rather “*motivated by the geostrategic consideration of controlling the Nile Valley, together with a degree of interest in exploitation of resources.*”¹³³

And because the successive governments both colonial and post-colonial did not take into consideration the sensitivities of the diverse ethnic groups to

¹³⁰ Ibid., 95.

¹³¹ Ali, M., Taisier, and Roberts O. Matthews, “Civil War and Failed Peace Efforts in Sudan” in: Ali, M., Taisier and Roberts O. Matthews ed., *Civil Wars in Africa: Roots and Resolution*, London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999, 193-195.

¹³² Omara-Otunnu, Amii, “The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda,” in Oliver Furley ed., *Conflict in Africa*, London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995, 225.

¹³³ Ibid., 227.

formulate all-inclusive policies that will sufficiently integrate every group into the entity called Uganda, the situation escalated and became more complex. There was for example concentration of “*economic and social institutions in southern Uganda- especially in Buguda and Busoga- resulting in structural inequalities between different regions of the country.*”¹³⁴ This is another case of divide and rule method employed by the imperialist powers to disintegrate the peoples of Africa.

As a carry-over from the colonial period, this feeling of being marginalised or being excluded from the affairs of things in Uganda by diverse ethnic groups led to the emergence, even in post-colonial Uganda, of the endemic socio-political conflicts that have claimed over half a million lives and produced over 1.8 million refugees.¹³⁵ The lack of perspective by the post-colonial rulers, who instead of trying to make the best out of their deplorable situation by understanding the “territorial surgery” as a process with a promising future, who instead of formulating all- integrating policies that will promote national unity and development rather aligned themselves with their own ethnic groups to unleash mayhem on other ethnic groups. The post-colonial rulers themselves have consistently promoted ethnicism that could have led the entire nation to a possible self-destruction and annihilation. There were also cases where leaders have made use of existing government structures, like the army, to destroy peoples of other ethnic groups and religious affiliations. This became very pronounced during the regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin.¹³⁶ In spite of all the concerted efforts already made by different warring groups, by way of peace negotiations, to find a lasting solution to the crisis, Uganda is still far from knowing peace as people still carry a lot of deep-rooted resentments and bitterness.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 228.

¹³⁵ Stephen, J. Stedman and Terrence, Lyons, “Conflict in Africa” in Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, Democratic Reform: the Quality of Progress, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, 141.

¹³⁶ Omara-Otunnu, Amii, “The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda,” 229.

Rwanda:

The case of Rwanda is that not merely of ethnic conflict but ethnic genocide that threatened to wipe out the country's entire population. Timothy Longman succinctly described the situation in Rwanda so:

*The genocide and war that ravaged Rwanda in 1994 represent one of the most intense periods of violence ever to sweep across an African state. In a three-month period... more than one-tenth of Rwanda's population perished. Most of the victims of the violence were members of the Tutsi ethnic minority group, who were driven into places of presumed refuge, such as churches and schools, then systematically slaughtered by the civilian death squads, usually organized by government officials and backed up by the soldiers or police*¹³⁷.

The above long citation offers us some information about the intensity, method, and character and probably might lead us to the remote and proximate causes of the war. The questions that might be of interest would be: What roles were played by both external and internal influences? Why were most of the victims, of the Tutsi ethnic minority group? Did religion play any role whatsoever? Why were the government officials involved in the slaughter?

To the question of the remote and proximate causes of the war, general view roots it back to ethnicism that “*gained increasing political significance during the colonial period, as German and Belgian colonial administrations used ethnicity to organize indirect rule.*”¹³⁸ There were two existing ethnic groups in the pre-colonial era, namely “Tutsi” and “Hutu”. According to Bruce D. Jones, the Tutsi and the Hutu constituted two complex categories “*containing elements of ethnicity, lineage, clan, and social status, which were related in differing ways in various parts of the territory of the Rwandan*

¹³⁷ Timothy, Longman, “Obstacles to Peace-building in Rwanda” in: Ali, M., Taisier and Roberts O. Matthews ed., *Durable Peace: Challenges for Peace-building in Africa*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 61.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

kingships.”¹³⁹ This existing situation in Rwanda was manipulated by both the German and the Belgian imperialist rulers in order to establish their administration, through divide and rule method, just as the British did in Sudan, Uganda and Nigeria, as we shall see later.

The Belgians poured fuel on the already existing ethnic tension by preferring the Tutsis to the Hutus. Not only did the Tutsis gain privileged access to the state and economic opportunities, their being Tutsi also endowed them with the right of leadership and to dominate others. It was this deep seated sentiment of being marginalised in the economic and political affairs of Rwanda of the Hutus that led to the “Rwandan Revolution” between 1959 and 1962, in which thousands of Tutsis lost their lives and tens of thousands more were driven into exile in neighbouring countries like Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda.¹⁴⁰ It was this group of refugees in the neighbouring countries that organised themselves into “warrior communities” which resorted to violence to force their right of return to fatherland. It was during this struggle period that a liberation movement named “Rwandese Patriotic Front” (RPF) was born and it was this group under the leadership of Major-General Paul Kagame that invaded Rwanda in 1990.¹⁴¹ The 1990 invasion became the proximate cause of the ethnic genocide of 1994, in which millions of people mostly of Tutsi ethnic origin were hacked to death.

This makes the roles played by the political elites especially of Hutu origin, who manipulated the long-standing ethnic polarisation to legitimate violence against Tutsis in Rwanda and in exiled communities “*in an effort to wipe out once and for all what they perceived as a Tutsi threat*”¹⁴² vivid. The war came to an end in July 1994, when RPF assumed control of the Country, leaving millions of Rwandans as displaced in Rwanda or refugees in neighbouring countries. The question is: how can Rwanda and her million inhabitants both at home and in exile still living with wounds and traumas of war,

¹³⁹ Jones, D., Bruce, “Civil War, the Peace Process, and Genocide in Rwanda,” in: Ali, M., Taisier, and Robert O. Matthews ed., *Civil Wars in Africa, Roots and Resolution*, London: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1999, 57.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴² Timothy, Longman, “Obstacles to Peace-building in Rwanda”, 67.

millions who have lost their loved ones in the most dastardly act of genocide of the 21st century, ever know peace? The themes of Reconciliation and Peace building become imperative and urgent!

Nigeria

Nigeria is a peculiar case when discussing wars and conflicts that have bedevilled the country both in the pre-independent and post-independent eras. The peculiarity of Nigeria stems not only from her immense size¹⁴³ or her being the most populous country in Africa for which she is named “*the giant of Africa*”¹⁴⁴, or the multiplicity of over 250 ethnic groups but also and above all from the inability to differentiate an ethnic conflict from a religious one in the polity. This is because all the conflicts since her existence as a political entity have been viewed as having religious connotation, even when ethnic influences were at work. It is therefore always difficult to separate one’s ethnic identity from his religious affiliation. Toyin Falola, who has done a profound research on violence in Nigeria, brings this significant part of the Nigerian reality to the fore:

*In many cases, trying to differentiate between a religious identity and an ethnic one can either be difficult, impossible or misleading. Hausa Muslims, for example, cannot describe their ethnic identity without mentioning Islam.*¹⁴⁵

He further made the following observations to describe the division of the country according to regional, ethnic and religious differences:

A religious divide separates Christians and Muslims, and long-standing intra-religious conflicts further divide the people. The imperfect distribution of adherents to Islam and Christianity is complicated by ethnic differences: the north (with the exception of central Nigeria, known as the Middle Belt) is predominantly Muslim, and the southeast is predominantly Christian. It is only

¹⁴³ Nigeria covers a total area of 923,768 km² and is about twice the size of California.

¹⁴⁴ Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the eighth most populous country in the world and the most populous country in the world in which the majority of the population is black.

¹⁴⁵ Toyin, Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998, 13.

*south-western Nigeria where both religions are equally represented.*¹⁴⁶

It is this complexity of the entity called Nigeria that accounts for all the conflicts and political instability that have characterised her life as a nation and threatened and still threaten her existence as a nation today.

We have earlier observed how the British imperialist rulers had manipulated the ethnic polarisation of the Nigerian state, through their divide and rule method, to ignite the raging fire that up till today threatens to consume the life of the nation. The imperialist rulers have *“perceived the north in contrast to the south as the location of the finer races, from which the lighter-skinned Fulani race was specifically chosen, not only as superior to other ethnic groups, but also as having the right of leadership in Nigeria. Islam, the religion of the so-called finer race (the Hausa-Fulani), was a better from of paganism than the fetichism of the savage South.”*¹⁴⁷ The repetition of this historical account is very salient to understanding conflicts in Nigeria and perhaps will help immensely in the urgent project of reconstruction, reconciliation and peace building.

With this imperially imposed ideology of superiority of one race over the other and one religion over the other, the dagger was drawn for the conflicts that would latter eclipse the entire Nigerian polity. The immediate consequence of such an ideology was the genocidal Biafran war of 1967-1970 in which millions of people of Igbo ethnic origin, who were mainly Christians were massacred. The Igbos had declared a Biafran state after years of perceived marginalisation and victimization by the Hausa-Fulanis of Northern Nigeria. This was of course after the failure of all the efforts towards a united Nigeria climaxed with the failure to implement the Aburi Conference declarations.¹⁴⁸ The war as it were was not only seen as an

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹⁴⁷ Iheanyi, M., Enwerem, A Dangerous Awakening, 24.

¹⁴⁸ Aburi Conference gained its name from a town north east of Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Aburi Conference took place between 4 and 5 January 1967 and was attended by delegates of both the Federal Government of Nigeria (The Supreme Military Council) and the Eastern delegates (of Igbo extraction) led by the then military Governor of the Eastern State, who was later to become the leader of the defunct Republic of Biafra. The conference was convoked to solve the emerging socio-political problems that engulfed the post-independent Nigerian State, which later resulted to the massacre of the Easterners, mainly people of igbo ethnic group in Northern Nigeria.

ethnic war but more as a religious war because of the common view of identifying the Igbos with Christianity and the Hausa-Fulanis with Islam.

This type of perception has since then directed all the conflicts that have erupted in Nigeria till date. For the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, it is difficult to separate religion from politics. That is why even till date many of the politicians have made allusion to religion to hoodwink the unenlightened masses in order to attain their political interests. Toyin Falola gives a detailed documentation of the situation as follows:

*Proponents of Christianity or Islam seek to unseat the rival religion, to impose their own values, and to control the state. This has become a major problem, and the struggle for political power has come to entail the manipulation of the symbols and beliefs of Islam and Christianity. Indeed, religion has become so important in recent history that no analysis of modern Nigerian politics in the last quarter of the twentieth century can fail to consider it fully.*¹⁴⁹

He further states that:

*Religion is used by the power-hungry as a stepping-stone to power and political legitimacy. Since the mid-seventies, politicians have urged their followers to vote along religious lines-Muslims are told to vote for Muslims, and Christians for Christians. In 1978, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) told its followers in one of its strong Islamic northern constituencies that the two-fingered V-for-victory sign of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was a covert symbol of polytheism, an idea counter to fundamental Islamic doctrine. The NPN adopted one raised finger as their symbol, turning the universal (and universally secular) V sign into a religious issue. Later, on the eve of the 1979 presidential elections, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi advised the Nigerian Muslims, in a speech broadcast nationally, not to vote for a non-Muslim candidate.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Toyin, Falola, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

It is quite appalling as we can learn from the above citations, that the Nigerian Muslim and Christian elites have not helped the matter. Instead of labouring for the unification of the country, in spite of the ethnic and religious differences, they have rather mobilised the ignorant masses to kill and destroy themselves. This has led in the past years, especially in the 1980s and 1990s to conflicts and violence both ethnic and religious, which have occurred with simultaneous regularity, in which thousands of lives were lost and property (including churches and mosques) worth Billions of naira were destroyed.¹⁵¹

But it is interesting to observe with great admiration and respect, that in all these recorded wars and conflicts in Nigeria since her independence, the Traditional African Religion has not been involved. Christianity and Islam, the two great religions involved in all the religious conflicts in Nigeria are unfortunately imported religions that have been accommodated by the host-religion - ATR. These two imported religions have undermined the great value of tolerance and abhorrence of fanaticism rooted in African Traditional Religion. This value of tolerance rooted in African Traditional Religion as observed by Iheanyi M. Enwerem stems from the Africans view that the Supreme Being, despite of the fact of being the author of the universe and thus the highest in the hierarchy of beings, tolerates and respects the power of other deities and spiritual beings. He is not only accommodating but also in the very word of Enwerem “ecumenical.”¹⁵² It will now be pertinent to see the necessity of re-visiting the great values rooted in African traditional Religion in the project of reconstruction, reconciliation and peace building.

3.2 Poverty

Poverty in Africa is a case of ignominious scandal! It is the scandal of emptiness in the midst of plenty. It is the scandal of abjectness in the midst of surplus. How could one account for the fact that millions of Africans are dying of hunger, lack of medical attention and deprivation of life’s basic necessities, in spite of the fact that Africa supplies a good percentage of the natural resources that form the base of the world’s economy? According to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 3-5.

¹⁵² , Iheanyi, M., Enwerem, 21.

the Human Development Report of 2007, “*the poorest 40 percent of the world’s population accounts for 5 percent of global income. The richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of world income.*”¹⁵³

Apart from the fact that Africa produces 46 percent of the world's chromium, 48 percent of its diamonds, 29 percent of its gold and 48 percent of its platinum, the Continent also generates a vast array of agricultural products, tropical wood, fish, copper, iron ore, tin, phosphates, bauxite, limestone, uranium ore, oil and natural gas.¹⁵⁴ But in spite of the vast riches of her resources, the Continent’s teeming population has no benefits apart from destitution, abject poverty, hunger, malnutrition, epidemics, catastrophic number of refugees both in and outside Africa, illiteracy and deaths.

The World Bank estimates of 1998 presented the large and deplorable extent of poverty in Africa:

*The estimated total population of Africa in 1995 was 580 million. Of these 291 million people had average incomes of below a dollar per day in 1998, 124 million of those up to age 39 years were at risk of dying before 40. 43 million children were stunted as a result of malnutrition in 1995; 205 million were estimated to be without access to health services in 1990-95 and 249 million were without safe drinking water. More than two million infants die annually before reaching their first birthday and 139 youths and adults were illiterate in 1995.*¹⁵⁵

The above indicator shows that almost half of Africa’s total population are below poverty line and there are no signs that the situation has improved. In fact, new reports have it that the situation is progressively deteriorating especially in the areas of mortality and health indicators due to the wide

¹⁵³ 2007 Human Development Report (HDR), United Nations Development Program, November 27, 2007, 25.

¹⁵⁴ Martin, Pabst, “External Interests in West Africa” in: Walter Feichtinger and Gerald Hainzl, ed., *Sorting Out the Mess, Wars, Conflicts, and Conflict Management in West Africa*, Vienna: Landesverteidigungsakademie, 2007, 37.

¹⁵⁵ World Bank (1998) and other World Bank sources; United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report 1998; See also White, Howard and Killick, Tony, et al., *African Poverty at the Millennium, Causes, Complexities and Challenges*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2001, 6.

spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic.¹⁵⁶ The popular opinion in many countries in Africa is that *“life is in many respects harder now than 20 or 30 years ago.”*¹⁵⁷ My country Nigeria, in spite of being overwhelmingly endowed with natural resources, is placed, according to the World Development Indicators from 2000 – 2006, among the 20 poorest countries of the world. The indicators show Nigeria steadily decline from a per capita GDP of US\$1,200 in 1981 to about US\$300 in 2000. In 1992, 34.1 percent of the population was below the poverty line and scandalously more than 70 percent fell below that line in 2003.¹⁵⁸

The post independent Nigeria has nothing to show to millions of her citizens who long for and really deserve a better situation as what they have now. The billions of dollars accruing from her rich natural resources have been stolen, wasted and mismanaged by her leaders from independence till date. Millions of Nigerians are absolutely deprived of the basic necessities for a meaningful and worthy human living, such as housing, food, education, health care and transportation. Even the structures and other social amenities provided during the colonial period have been allowed to decay and dilapidate. The policies formulated by the political leaders are not meant to alleviate the horrible situation of the people but to worsen it.

There is no conscious effort to formulate policies that promote human development. Women are completely marginalized, impoverished and barred from every possible means of economic development. The youths are wasted and deprived of any hope of a better tomorrow. There is despair in every nook and corner of Nigeria. This has led to making Nigeria one of the countries with the highest number of asylum seekers in America, Europe, Asia and some countries in Africa. The high rate of unemployment has contributed to the breeding of all sorts of evil and criminal activities by people of Nigerian origin both within and outside her boundaries. According to current statistics, Nigeria rank among countries with the highest number of drug traffickers, prostitutes and human traffickers.¹⁵⁹ The Church cannot

¹⁵⁶ Howard, White, and Tony, Killick, et al., *African Poverty at the Millennium, Causes, Complexities and Challenges*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2001, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁸ See: World Bank, *World Development Indicators* 2006.

¹⁵⁹ C.F., Joana, Adesuna - Reiterer, 2009.

keep quiet in the face of this decay, knowing fully well that millions of these poor and dehumanized people are also her children. The challenge is even more urgent at this time!

3.3 Corruption

Corruption has been identified today as the major cog in the wheel of development in Africa. Corruption is the reason why millions of Africans are today, in the midst of plenty, still living in abject poverty. Corruption is one of the major reasons why the condition of post-colonial Africa has not improved but rather deteriorated. Through corruption billions of dollars accruing from African natural resources have been carted away by African leaders and deposited in foreign accounts in America and Europe. The Mobutu of Zaire, Charles Taylor of Liberia, Ousmane of Niger, Babangida, Abacha and Obasanjo of Nigeria belong to the modern day African cabals that stole billions of dollars that would have been used to alleviate the poverty situation of their own respective countries. It was discovered that the late General Abacha of Nigeria had accounts all over Europe, with the biggest sum in the Swiss Bank, running to over 4 billion dollars.¹⁶⁰ One could imagine how useful this money would have been to the economic development of Nigeria.

Many African leaders have also been engaged in drug trafficking, trading in arms, oil bunkering and international fraud.¹⁶¹ Political systems in Africa can now be seen as post-colonial institutionalized systems of oppression, exploitation and colossal impoverishment by the African irresponsible elites themselves.¹⁶² Corruption in Africa exists in a monumental pedigree that many see it today like a pest that tends to eat deep into the entire fabric of African life. Corruption has not only stunted the socio-political and economic

¹⁶⁰ David, Pallister, "Comment & Analysis: Pennies from heaven: Many of Nigeria's missing millions were laundered through greedy banks in London", The Guardian (London), September 7, 2000.

¹⁶¹ Howard, White, and Tony, Killick, et al., African Poverty at the Millennium, Causes, Complexities and Challenges, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2001, 57.

¹⁶² Peter, Kanyandago, "The Role of Culture in Poverty Eradication" in: The Challenge of Eradicating Poverty in the World, An African Response, Deirdre Carabine and Martin O'Reilly ed. Uganda: Uganda Martyrs University Press, 1988, 122.

growth of Africa, but also destroys the values that are deeply rooted in the African life and traditions.

The African great cultural values and religious virtues of “responsibility and accountability” have been colluded. I grew up in a tradition, where it was normal to ask a young man what he is doing for a living. But to ask such a question today would be understood as to cast doubt not only at the source of one’s wealth but also to his or her credibility as a person. The “from where” and “how” of one’s wealth today do not matter any longer. Important is that one is wealthy and donates money to his society and kinsmen. What gives one credibility today is no more “who” he or she is but “what” he or she has and can give. The culture of “being” has been substituted with the culture of “having”.

This new “culture” has been oppressive and exploitative and has today left thousands victims both nationally and internationally. Reports abound to different forms of scams with African roots with the greatest percent emanating from Nigeria.¹⁶³ Thousands of people have been duped and impoverished by “419 scam”¹⁶⁴ gangs of Nigeria origin having their networks now across the globe. Within Nigeria, millions of defenseless citizens have lost their lives and properties through these “get rich quick” gangs, who want to establish their “identity” in their respective societies through all means of oppression and exploitation.

This type of attitude is not foreign to government institutions where workers are deprived of the fruit of their labor through politicians and those in the

¹⁶³ Corruption has continued to increase in Nigeria with the country currently ranking 130th out of 180 countries surveyed in the 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI). In 2008 Nigeria scored 2.7 points and took 121st position out of 180 countries but this year the country's CPI score dropped to 2.5 ranking 130th.

¹⁶⁴ “419 scam” is a type of fraud named after an article of the Nigerian Criminal Code (part of Chapter 38: “Obtaining Property by false pretences; Cheating”) under which it is prosecuted. It is also known as “Advance Fee Fraud” because the common principle of the entire scam format is to get the victim to send cash (or other items of value) upfront by promising them a large amount of money that they would receive later if they cooperate. 419 scam originated in the early 1980s as the oil-based Nigerian economy declined. Several unemployed university students first used this scam as a means of manipulating business visitors interested in shady deals in the Nigerian oil sector before targeting businessmen in the west, and later the wider population. Scammers in the early-to-mid 1990s targeted companies, sending scam messages via letter, fax, telex and of later e-mail.

leadership positions. Cases abound in my country Nigeria where workers were not paid their salaries for two years and more because of the greedy and selfish interests of those at the position of authority. Corruption in Nigeria has led to the total collapse of all structures for a meaningful existence. Every system in Nigeria is suffering because of the irresponsible life of her leaders. The systems of education, health, agriculture, transportation, energy are all in a state of comatose. Money voted for the development of these structures has always been stolen or mismanaged by the leaders. The negative effects of this untoward life of the leaders have been telling on the citizens: indigence, destitution, underdevelopment and degeneration, mediocrity, uncontrollable rate of crime, insurgence of militants and high rate of mortality.

What would be the adequate response of the Church in the face of this “deadly disease” threatening to intone a requiem at the possible demise of this Continent? Keep quiet or to give a constructive theological and ecclesiological response that can produce an effective recovery and healing?

3.4 African Debt Crisis

African external debt running to over 220 billion dollars¹⁶⁵ constitutes one of the crises that hinder socio-political and economic growth of Africa. African external debt refers to the illegitimate debts to rich country governments and their institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). We say “illegitimate debts” because of the manner in which these debts were incurred. These debts were incurred in form of loans from IMF and World Bank by African corrupt and oppressive regimes. Instead of employing these loans to the socio-political and economic development of the region, they were used to serve their selfish interests of protecting their illegal regimes through purchase of war equipments from their foreign sponsors and masters.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ This is the estimate of Africa’s outstanding debt as of the end of 1998. This is debt owed by African countries to the imperial financial institutions like World Bank and IMF. See also African Poverty at the Millennium, 51.

¹⁶⁶ Patrick Bond presented the debt estimates of some African countries under their respective oppressive regimes as follows: “Nigeria under the Buhari and Abacha regimes (1984-1998: 30 billion dollars), South Africa under apartheid (1948-1993: 22 billion dollars),

This situation has left many African countries spending their annual earnings not in infrastructural developments but in debt service to foreign creditors. It is reported that 33 of the 41 countries published by the World Bank as “Heavily Indebted Poor Countries” (HIPC) are in Africa and that these countries spend almost \$14 billion annually on debt service. This is why African debt crisis is seen today as a new form of slavery and neo-colonialism. African debts scandal has exposed IMF and World Bank as imperialist and capitalist systems aimed to continue the colonial – era – evil of domination, exploitation and impoverishment. In spite of the claims by the IMF and the World Bank of the success of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed on African economies, the reality proves the opposite.¹⁶⁷

It is important to note that this scandal has attracted the attention of human rights activists, NGOs and the faith communities that have been fighting for decades for the cancellation of Africa’s un-payable debt. These African debt apologists see the need for the cancellation of African debt not only as a socio-economic necessity but also as morally compelling.¹⁶⁸ In their 1999 publication, two of African foremost economists noted:

the Democratic Republic of Congo under Mobutu (1965-1997: 13 billion dollars), Sudan under Numeiri (1965-1985: 9 billion dollars), Ethiopia under Mengistu (1974-1991: 8 billion dollars), Kenya under Moi 1978-2002: 5.8 billion dollars), Congo under Sasou (1979-2005: 4.5 billion dollars) Zimbabwe under Mugabe in recent years (4.5 billion dollars), etc. See: Patrick, Bond, *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation*, South Africa: Univeristy of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006, 40. See also: John, M., Mbaku, “The African Debt Crisis and the New Globalization”, in: Kieh George, K. etd., *Africa and the New Globalization*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008, 44.

¹⁶⁷ “In order for African (debtor) countries to qualify for additional credits from the international financial community, in this sense IMF and World Bank, they must agree to implement a basket of institutional reforms that address issues of macroeconomic performance and governance. These... include reduction in the size of the public sector, devaluation of the national currency, deregulation of the international trade sector, and greater reliance on markets for the allocation of resources.” Mbaku John, 32; It was expected that SAPs could help African debtor countries to manage their debts and then be empowered to fight poverty and deprivation. But the result is completely opposite as shown by the experience in Nigeria: President Shagari’s Austerity measure of 1983, and General Babangida’s Second-tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) of 1985 in Nigeria caused millions of Nigerians many untold hardships and impoverishments, from which many have till today not yet recovered. Theses programs have rather benefited only those oppressive regimes and their sycophants. See also, Mbaku John, M., “The African Debt Crisis and the New Globalization”, 29-30; World Bank Reports 1994; Lall, 1995; Magadlela, 1997.

¹⁶⁸ Mbaku, 42.

*“Debt cancellation, simple as it sounds, holds the key to Africa’s future. All efforts to find why stabilization or adjustment has not worked, why investment has not resumed, and why the state capacity has been further eroded will fail unless this single but dominant issue – debt overhand – is addressed.”*¹⁶⁹

The public outcry for the cancellation of African debt resulted in 2005 “hoax” in the name of debt relief concessions granted to 18 countries that are included in the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) by the G8. It is nothing other than a mere “hoax” because the G8 debt relief deal was attached with yet stringent conditions that, those HIPC must implement institutional reforms that have not only exploited but continue to impoverish the masses. Under this debt relief deal of 2005, the debts of countries not considered highly indebted, like Nigeria, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and other major debtors were not cancelled. This questions the sincerity of the Western imperialist powers and their financial institutions of domination, oppression and exploitation. Many negative reactions followed this dubious deal:

Jubilee South in Manila for example noted:

*“The multilateral debt cancellation... is still clearly tied to compliance with conditionalities, which exacerbate poverty, open our countries further for exploitation and plunder, and perpetuate the domination of the South.... Even if the debt cancellation were without conditionalities, the proposal falls far too short in terms of coverage and amounts to demonstrate a bold step towards justice by any standard.”*¹⁷⁰

While Jayati Ghosh, Economics Professor at Nehru University of India opined that,

“The G8 debt relief deal is actually a paltry and niggardly reduction.... And this pathetic amount is being traded for yet more major concessions made by the debtor countries, in terms of sweeping and extensive privatization of public services and

¹⁶⁹T., Mkandawire, and C. C., Soludo, *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999, 122.

¹⁷⁰ Mbaku, 45.

utilities, which is about all that is left for governments to sell in these countries, as well as large increases in indirect taxes which fall disproportionately on the poor.”¹⁷¹

And AFRODAD in Harare registered its disappointment with the following words:

“Nothing short of continuation of chains of slavery and bondage for the citizens in those countries.... The agreement does not address the real global power imbalances but rather reinforces global apartheid.”¹⁷²

Nigeria, under the civil administration of Olusegun Obasanjo was trapped in this deal and immediately entered into agreement in October 2005 with the Paris Club, which was owed 30 billion dollars. The agreement implies: *“a phased approach, in which Nigeria would clear its arrears in full, receive a debt write-off up to Naples terms, and buy back the remainder of its debt. The agreement is conditional on a favourable review of its macroeconomic and structural policies supported by the fund under nonfinancial arrangement”*.¹⁷³

One of the reactions that followed the Nigeria-Paris Club deal includes:

“Creditors generally write down bad debts as a matter of course (not of charity), the billions over principal that Nigeria has already sent out of the country, the fact that the deal imposes IMF conditionality on Nigeria (even though the IMF isn’t providing credit to the country), and the reality of the severe poverty in Nigeria.”¹⁷⁴

The point we want to make here is that Africa’s illegitimate external debt should be considered as an economic cancer that ought to be wiped out entirely devoid of conditions. This new form of domination and colonialization should be refused in its entirety. It is not an issue only for

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 45-46.

¹⁷² Ibid., 46. See also S., Ambrose, “Assessing the G8 Debt Proposal and its Implications”, Focus on Trade, 25 September 2005.

¹⁷³ Patrick, Bond, Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation, South Africa: Univeristy of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006, 46. See also: IMF (2005), Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa, September, p.10.

¹⁷⁴ R., Weissman, „Nigeria Debt Disgrace“, Multinational Monitor, Washington, 20 October 2005. See also Bond, 46.

politics but also and above all, especially in the present moment, for ethics and theology.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

4.1 Images of the Church

Our effort here is not to find a systematic definition of the Church, because it would be a will-o-the-wisp that eludes human conception. The reason would be, just as Yves Congar rightly observed, that any attempt to define the Church might be perfunctory, thereby running the risk of leaving off the “Essence” or “Being” of the Church. He notes that the highest one could do is to describe the Church.¹⁷⁵ The Church is not a subject to be reduced to the realm of “*exact measurement and analysis*”¹⁷⁶, for “*we are dealing with a mystery that during our exile on earth can never be completely unveiled, never altogether understood, nor adequately expressed in human language.*”¹⁷⁷ It therefore “*surpasses the capacities and powers of our intellect no less than any other.*”¹⁷⁸ The Mystery of the Church is closely associated with the mystery of the Trinity. The very being of the Church remains in the eternal plan of God, who “*in accordance with the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of His wisdom and goodness, created the whole universe, and chose to raise up men to share in His own divine life to which He calls all men in His Son.*”¹⁷⁹

This great divine convocation -“*convocatio*” began its unfolding at the moment when sin destroyed man’s communion with God and with his fellowman.¹⁸⁰ The call of Abraham (Cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5-6) prepared the fertile ground for the great “planting” that is the Church. And the subsequent election of Israel as the people of God¹⁸¹ was the actual “sowing” of the “seed” which would eventually be born following the advent of Christ. The Church is therefore born of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in

¹⁷⁵ Yves, Congar, *Heilige Kirche: Ekklesiologische Studien und Annäherungen*, Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag, 1966, 16.

¹⁷⁶ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999, 18.

¹⁷⁷ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, No. 79.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 79.

¹⁷⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, No. 2; See also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 759.

¹⁸⁰ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 761.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, No. 762.

the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. *“For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth”*¹⁸² the Church. After Christ’s “inauguration” of the Church, the same Church was presented to the world as its sacrament of salvation through the action of the Holy Spirit on the “convocating” assembly on the Pentecost.¹⁸³ The Holy Spirit invigorates, sanctifies and sustains the Church through the ages. The Church is therefore not a subject for definition but belongs essentially to the categories of faith or belief.

The Holy Scripture gives us no systematic definition of the Church, but tries, with various images and metaphors, to describe the inner nature of the Church. Such images are seen in both Old and New Testaments and include: “a flock” of God who himself is the shepherd (Cf. Is. 40:11; Ex. 34:11f), “a sheepfold” (Jon. 10:1-10), “cultivated field” (1Cor. 3:9) on which *“the ancient olive tree grows, whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again.”*¹⁸⁴ The Church has also been described as “the building of God” (1 Cor. 3:9), “the household of God” (Eph. 2:19, 22), “the dwelling place of God among men” (Apoc. 21:3), “heavenly Jerusalem” and “our mother” (Gal. 4:26; Cf. Apoc. 12:17)¹⁸⁵, “the mystical body” (1 Cor. 12:27), “temple of the Holy spirit” (Eph. 2:19, 22 Apoc. 21:3) “the bride of Christ” (Eph. 5:25-28).

For the Fathers of the Church and the mystics of the Middle Ages, the Church was not only a subject for theological reflection but above all for spiritual meditation. Through the help of allegoric interpretation of the Bible, they applied these biblical images to the Church and her relationship to Christ.¹⁸⁶ This also led to the personification of the Church. One of the examples is the presentation of the Church as virgin, bride, and mother.

¹⁸² Cf. LG, No.3; SC, No. 5; Jn 19: 34; See also The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 766.

¹⁸³ LG, No. 4; AG, No. 4; see also The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 767.

¹⁸⁴ LG, No. 6.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., No. 6.

¹⁸⁶ Medard, Kehl, Die Kirche: Eine Katholische Ekklesiologie, 4. Auflage, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2001, 24.

Mary is because of this considered as the concrete image of the Church as virgin, bride and mother.¹⁸⁷ Other images of the Church, which emerged during and after the time of the Fathers of the Church, are: “the people of God”¹⁸⁸, “the body of Christ”¹⁸⁹, “the society or congregation of the faithful”¹⁹⁰ and “communion.”¹⁹¹ The image of the Church which came to limelight before and at the Second Vatican Council was the Church as the People of God. Before then it was the Mystical Body of Christ image which became dominant even with its limitations.¹⁹² Even before the publication of the Encyclical „*Mystici Corporis Christi*“ by Pius XII in 1943, Yves Congar¹⁹³ and Mannes Dominikus Koster¹⁹⁴ have already done a tremendous work by laying new emphasis on the understanding of the Church as the People of God. Congar and Koster were of the opinion that with the Mystical Body of Christ image of the Church, one could not come to a clear and distinct understanding of the relationship between the visible and the invisible, law and grace, order and life. They proposed that the People of God image is a broader concept and has its foundation in the Old Testament. The Second Vatican Council picked up this concept in her ecclesiological deliberations. The Council Fathers availed themselves of the richness of this image of the Church as the People of God to acknowledge the invaluable relationship of non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, Jews, Moslems and all who seek God with a sincere heart to the Church.¹⁹⁵

In Chapter 3 of the Document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council states clearly the divine intention to gather His people together, not as individuals but as a community, beginning from the chosen People of Israel to the present chosen People of the new covenant instituted by Christ and realized in his Church:

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸⁸ Yves, Congar, Heilige Kirche, 17-21.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 22-26.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 26-33.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 34-37.

¹⁹² The Mystical Body of Christ image of the Church, although biblical, precisely of Pauline origin, was considered to be one-sided because it was more of institution and hierarchy oriented. Hence it needed a kind of argionamento.

¹⁹³ Cf. Yves, Congar, Esquisses du Mystère de l'Église, Paris, 1941, 11ff.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. M. D. Koster, Ekklesiologie im Werden, Paderborn 1940.

¹⁹⁵ Lumen Gentium, nn. 15, 16.

Christ instituted this new covenant, the new testament, that is to say, in His Blood, calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God. For those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit,(89) are finally established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people . . . who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God".¹⁹⁶

The image of Church as the People of God „*emphacises the communal aspects of participation, freedom, co-responsibility and communion*“ as against the institutionalised and authoritarian perception of the Church.¹⁹⁷

Many modern theologians developed further these images of the Church. These theologians (Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Louis Bouyer, Yves Congar, Pierre-Thomas Camelot, Romano Guardini, Hugo und Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger etc.) prepared and really inspired the Vatican Council's understanding of the Church¹⁹⁸ and thereby set the ball rolling for the post-Conciliar theologians. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops laid a great emphasis on the Church as *Communio (koinonia)*.

Medard Kehl also made his own contribution to the Conciliar *communio-Ecclesiology*. He speaks of the Church as “*Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden*”- “*Communio Fidelium*”. In fidelity to the thoughts of the Second Vatican Council, he traces back this term “Communio” to the Trinity, and notes that the Church understands herself as a sacrament of God's communion.¹⁹⁹ Kehl makes use of phenomenological method in his analysis of this Communio-Ecclesiology.²⁰⁰ The unity, which exists in the three Persons of

¹⁹⁶ Lumen Gentium, no. 9.

¹⁹⁷ Pantaleon, O. Iroegbu, *Appropriate Ecclesiology*, 1996, 50-51.

¹⁹⁸ Medard, Kehl, *Die Kirche*, 26.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

the Trinity, reflects itself in the community of the faithful. God is love (Cf. 1 Jon 4:8) and this Trinitarian unity is that of love. So, the unity of the Church flows from the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity. Or in the words of the Council Fathers: “*the Church is a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (LG 4). As the Council Fathers spoke about “Church unity”, they were at the same time thinking of Ecumenism. The unity of all Christians is also meant here. The Trinitarian unity makes the unity of all Christians urgent. This was clearly stated in the second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism: “*The highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit*” (UR 2).

Joseph Ratzinger²⁰¹ appreciated the importance of the term *Communio* and noted that it should be seen as the synthesis of the essential elements of Conciliar Ecclesiology. For him, the starting point of *Communio* begins with the meeting with the incarnated Son of God, who comes to the people in the Church’s proclamation and evangelisation. It is through this that the community of men begins. This community of men has, as its source and model, the community of the three Persons of the Trinity. Ratzinger speaks, at this point, of the Trinitarian Ecclesiology. For him, Ecclesiology seems to depend on Christology, because one cannot actually speak about Jesus Christ, the Son without at the same time speaking about the Father. And one cannot really speak about the Father without listening to the Holy Spirit. It is by so doing that the Christological understanding of the Church can extend and also be a Trinitarian Ecclesiology.²⁰² The word *Communio* has in itself theological, Christological, salvific and ecclesiological character. Ratzinger delineated above all the sacramental dimension of this word *Communio*. By tracing it back to Paul’s Eucharistic expression in his first letter to the Corinthians: (“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion* with the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the *communion* with the body of Christ? And as there is one loaf, so we, although

²⁰¹ Joseph, Ratzinger, *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens, Kirche als Communio*, Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2002, 107-131.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 121.

there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf.”-1 Cor 10:16f.), he noted that the Communio-Ecclesiology is in itself Eucharistic-Ecclesiology. For with Eucharistic-Ecclesiology, Ecclesiology will be concrete and will remain spiritual, transcendent and eschatological.²⁰³ The Church in Africa has also immensely contributed to the further development of the post-Conciliar Communio- Ecclesiology as seen in the African image of the Church as *Family of God*.

4.1.1 The African Image of the Church as “Family of God”

The synod of the Bishops for Africa took place in Rome from April 10 to May 8 1994. One of the astonishing fruits of this synod is the emergence of a “new image” of the Church as “family of God”. I would say a new image, not necessarily in terms of its origin, but in terms of its context, method and development. The image of the Church as “family of God” is a development from the Conciliar *Communio-* and *People of God-* Ecclesiology. In recognition of this fact, John Mary Waliggo states:

*“The bishops could have chosen the Vatican II concept of Church as Communion or as People of God. They purposely chose Church as Family; they wanted to use the African family as the model for being and living Church. The family model includes everyone, baptised and non-baptised, involving every member. It serves well the emphasis on Small Christian Communities.”*²⁰⁴

In line with the second Vatican Council’s insight on Communio-Ecclesiology, the Synod document “*Ecclesia in Africa*” roots the source and model of the Church as Family of God to the blessed Trinity.²⁰⁵ For “*Christ*”, the document states, “*has come to restore the world to unity, a single human family in the image of the Trinitarian family. We are the family of God: this is the good news.*”²⁰⁶ It will be better to expose the fundamental understanding of “Family” in Africa in order to see how the Church as family can be rightly applied to the African context.

²⁰³ Ibid., 114.

²⁰⁴ John Mary, Waliggo, “The Church as Family of God and Small Christian Communities”, AMECEA Documentation Service, No. 429, (December 1, 1994), 1.

²⁰⁵ *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 20.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., No. 25.

Ecclesia in Africa describes the African Family thus:

*In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God.*²⁰⁷

Fogliacco Nicholas corroborates this view when he describes the African family as: a family of human community whose members are connected to one another by blood ties; whose new members originate from within the family itself through the biological means of procreation; and whose members are “*linked to one another by a constant and invariable pattern of mutual relations.*”²⁰⁸ He notes that the Church can be called a family if all these structural elements are found in it.²⁰⁹ By tracing these three structural elements in the Church, he goes further to analyse the ways in which the Church is ‘family’ of God:

*“Just as family members are connected by blood-ties, so (1) are Christians linked vertically to God and horizontally to one another by the mystery of divine grace; just as new members originate within the family by procreation so (2) new Christians originate in the Church by baptism; just as generation establishes in the family a precise and easily discernible set of relations so (3) baptism connects a Christian vertically with each of the three divine persons and horizontally with the other members of the Church.”*²¹⁰

Deep rooted in the African family is the Spirit of communion, togetherness and human solidarity, *Ujamaa*. This means that the traditional African society abhors individualism. In African society an individual does not exist without a community. One has meaning only within the context of his family, community or society. And because of this very fact an African can

²⁰⁷ Ibid., No. 43.

²⁰⁸ Nicholas, Fogliacco, “The Family: An African Metaphor for Trinity and Church” in: *Inculturating the Church in Africa*, ed. by Cecil McGarry and Patrick Ryan, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001, 134.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

rightly say with Mbiti as if to negate the Cartesian “cogito ergo sum”: “We are, therefore, I am” or put in other words: “I am because we are; and the more we are the bigger I am.”²¹¹

The strength of the African lies in the family or community. That is why the individual, even the king of the community, cannot be bigger or greater than the community itself. The power of the ruler of the community cannot surpass that of the community itself who gave him the power. This African way of life opposes the life of individualism that has been the characteristic of the West.

Even in the moral sphere, the family or the community plays a decisive role in the moral life of the individual. The individual does not just act, but acts in relation to his or her community. The individual puts his or her community into consideration before he or she performs a certain act. When he/she performs a good act, his/her community will praise him/her because he/she promotes the name of the community. When he/she performs a bad act, the community will punish him/her because he/she destroys the name or image of the community. So the African family is always a *communio*. This introduces us to another relevant aspect of the African family: that of eating and drinking together.

The Africans eat and drink not necessarily to satisfy their hunger and quench their thirst, but above all to strengthen their togetherness, friendship and relationships. John Mutiso-Mbinda, a Kenyan priest and anthropologist describes the role eating and drinking play in an African family or community:

A meal is perhaps the most basic and most ancient symbol of friendship, love and unity. Food and drink taken in common are obvious signs that life is shared. In our (African) context, it is unusual for people to eat alone. Only a witch or wizard would do that. A meal is always a communal affair. The family

²¹¹ John, S., Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 127.

*normally eats together. Eating together is a sign of being accepted to share life and equality.*²¹²

One understands from the above, that meals in Africa are all-inclusive. It is always a family or community affair. All the members of the family or community take part in this sacred activity for the sharing and celebration of life. As implied in the above observation by John Mutiso-Mbinda, eating alone is only possible for those who are not really integrated in the family or community; those considered as evildoers in the community. Such people lose their right of communion in the family or community. They are ostracised from the community.

Such community eating and drinking in my Igbo culture is called “*Oriko*”. When the people come to eat together, it is a sign that the community is united and that every member of this community is accepted to share life and equality. Those who are in one way or the other ostracised from the community lose immediately this right of sharing life and equality.²¹³ If such people are to be integrated again in the community, it is done only through the *oriko* ritual. *Oriko* marks the consummation and the validity of the integration of these individuals in the community. It is a sign of reconciliation between the individuals and the community. *Oriko* is therefore a family meal, a community meal, a meal of friendship, a meal of reconciliation, a meal of love and peace. It is a symbol of unity. We are going to dwell more on this in Chapter five.

²¹² John, Mutiso-Mbinda, “The Eucharist and the Family – in an African Setting”, AMECEA Documentation Service, 282, (April 4, 1984), 2.

²¹³ Among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, there was a practise of *OSU* caste system. This practise originated during the slave trade or ancient wars. People who ran into shrines were automatically dedicated to the gods. That meant that they became untouchable, not to be harmed. They were no more to be sold as slaves for they became, by running into the shrines dedicated to gods, the slaves of those gods. They were exonerated from wars lest they be harmed, wounded or lost blood. By being dedicated to the gods, they lost their right of citizenship. Those were ostracised from their communities. They were therefore forbidden from having contact with the freeborn, not to trade in the same market, not to have sexual relationship with them nor to eat and drink with them. A freeborn, who had contact with any of these people became automatically *OSU* himself. It is interesting to note, thanks to Christianity and western civilisation, that this system has been officially destroyed by governments, peoples and various communities. But the actual integration and assimilation of these people into their various communities is always effected through some rituals like *Oriko*.

From the foregoing, it will not be difficult to see the central role the Eucharist occupies in the life of the Church as the Family of God. Not only are Christians linked to God and to one another by the mystery of divine grace, not only are they born and are connected to the Trinity and to one another by baptism, they are also sustained, kept alive and united with Christ and with one another by the Holy Eucharist. As the Family of God the Church eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ, and is in this way a *communio* bound together with the same body and blood of Christ. Just as blood ties all the members of a human family together, so the body and blood of Jesus Christ tie the members of God's family together so that they live together in love, peace and solidarity with one another. Within this context, the Church's tradition of excommunicating²¹⁴ people, who go contrary to the laws of God and the Church, from the Holy Communion, will be more theologically discernible for an African than a European or American. The Holy Thursday ceremony of reconciling sinners to God and to the Church and their participation in the paschal meal will be better understood by an African when applied to the *oriko* ritual. Again the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist, as practised in the Church today, will be more meaningful for an African than European or American.

One can also use the image of the Church as the Family of God to delineate the Petrine office of the Pope. In the traditional African family, the father is the head of the family. The mother collaborates with him in this role, not in a subordinate degree but actually in the sense that the father is *primus inter pares*. This gives room for order and unity in the family. Everybody plays his own role in the family and thereby promotes this order of love, peace and unity. Many theologians are of the same opinion with Waliggo that the image of the family, especially as seen in Africa, must be fully liberated before ever it could be applied to the Church. This, I believe, is based on a one sided view that the African family is patriarchal in structure and seems to be

²¹⁴ At this moment, many theologians and non-theologians are seriously debating the Church's practise of excommunicating the divorced and re-married people from the Holy Communion seriously. This practise constitutes actually a very serious crisis of faith not only for the individuals concerned but also for their families and relations. The Church is therefore called to find a more humane solution to this problem, bearing in mind those marriages that are, humanly speaking, absolutely impossible to stand again.

oppressive to women.²¹⁵ They are of the opinion that the Church should not be pyramidal in structure but one of communion.²¹⁶

Fatherhood and Motherhood are two distinct but complementary realities in an African family. The presence of one and the absence of the other make the family incomplete. They are two indispensable roles for the continuity, togetherness, harmony, balance and unity of a family. The father image and the mother image cannot be lacking in a true African family. The father image is that of Authority while the mother is the symbol of love. Authority and love are therefore necessary in the correct education of children in a family. That is why the parents represent God in a family. They are simply to be seen as defenders of moral law and example of love. Therefore to say that the structure of African family is patriarchal and oppressive is to miss this aspect. While appreciating the great religious traditions of African peoples and the important role played by the father in the African family, Pope Paul VI notes the following:

In the family one should note the respect for the part played by the father of the family and the authority he has. Recognition of this is not found everywhere and in the same degree but it is so extraordinarily widespread and deeply rooted that it is rightly to be considered as a mark of African tradition in general. Patria potestas is profoundly respected even in the African societies, which are governed by matriarchy. There, although ownership of goods and the social status of children follow from the mother's family, the father's moral authority in the household remains undiminished. By reason of the same concept the father of the family in some African cultures has typically priestly function assigned to him whereby he acts as mediator not only between the ancestors and his family, but

²¹⁵ John Mary, Waliggo, "The Church as Family of God and Small Christian Communities", 1.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

*also between God and his family, performing acts of worship established by custom.*²¹⁷

In this long quotation, the Pope underscores that the father in an African family is not only the symbol of authority but also one who acts as a priest and mediator between God and his family. He is the visible moral authority of the family. This implies that he is the arbiter of truth and goodness and so, just and righteous. It is in this sense that a father in an African family is the “head” of the family. He is not the head of the family so that he will subjugate, maltreat and oppress his wife and children. Any authentic father of an African family worth the name “father” understands his authority as that of humble service to his wife and children.

It is in this sense that we can better understand and appreciate the *Petrine office of the pope* in the Church as “the Family of God.” The pope is the symbol of moral authority, love, service and unity of the entire Christian family. He is, in the words of Henry de Lubac, “*the visible bond of unity*” for through him and all the bishops, “*all the faithful are united*”²¹⁸ as a family.

Healey Joseph and Sybertz Donald further tried to construct the various images of the Church as can be applied to both the local churches and the universal Church. They used the African metaphors of the Church as: “the extended family of God”, “the clan of Jesus Christ” and “the universal family in Christ”²¹⁹ to solve the problem of how the relationship between the local churches and the universal Church could be understood. Under this construction, God the Father is the “Chief Ancestor” while Jesus Christ is the “Eldest Brother” who is loving and caring. The Saints are the Christian ancestors. This great extended family (Ujamaa)²²⁰ of God “*incorporates all*

²¹⁷ Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, October 29, 1967, No. 11.

²¹⁸ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 150.

²¹⁹ Joseph, Healy, and Donald, Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 123-128.

²²⁰ The word Ujamaa is a Swahili word meaning “familyhood”. It has Arabic roots. “Its verbal root, jama`a, means: to gather, to unite, to combine, to bring parts into a whole. With reference to Persons, it means: to convoke, to convene, to call a meeting; in its plural, yujma`u it means: to pull people together into unity; with reference to the harmony that exists between husband and wife, it means to have sexual intercourse, etc” (Cf. Oliver A., *Onwubiko The Church as the Family of God- Ujamaa*, Nsukka, Nigeria: Fulladu Publishing Company, 1999, 10-13). Many African Theologians, like Onwubiko Oliver, have made use of

peoples, all races and all ethnic groups” who are also “*sons and daughters of God spread over a world-wide family of past and future generations including ancestors, the living and those yet to be born.*”²²¹ The churches in Africa, Asia, Australia, America and Europe are all parts of this great family of God.²²² This does not mean that the churches in these different Continents are in themselves incomplete just as it will be fallacious to claim that a family is incomplete without the extended family. This is because “*in ecclesiology `one plus one makes one`. Each local Church manifests the entire fullness of the Church because it is the Church of God and not just a piece of that Church. There can be plurality of manifestations of the Church of God, but the Church remains one and only one Church, because it is always equal to itself....*”²²³ In the local churches the universal Church experiences her Catholicity because each individual part of the church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. In this sense, the bishops of the various local or particular churches constitute a “body of bishops” which succeeds the college of the apostles, not only for their individual dioceses “*but for the salvation of the whole world.*”²²⁴

After discussing the African contribution to the post-Conciliar Ecclesiology “the Church as the Family of God”, we deem it fit to conclude this section with the view of the Post-Synodal document “*Ecclesia in Africa*” that “*the prototype and example for all Christian families*” is the Holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This Holy Family, “*which according to the Gospel (Cf. Mt. 2:14-15) lived for a time in Africa*”, remains “*the model and spiritual source for every Christian family*”²²⁵. This implies that the Church is not only the Family of God but also the HOLY FAMILY OF GOD. We shall now discuss the holiness of the Church.

this word to construct an African Ecclesiology of the family of God, otherwise seen as Ujamaa Ecclesiology. It was originally used by Julius Nyerere to construct his African socio-political philosophy popularly known as “African Socialism”. And in this sense, “Ujamaa” denotes the kind of life lived by a man and his family- father, mother, children, and near relatives.

²²¹ Joseph, Healey, and Donald, Sybertz , Towards an African Narrative Theology, 123.

²²² Ibid., 127.

²²³ F., Bruno, The Church, Icon of the Trinity: A Brief Study, Manila: St Paul Publications, 1990, 97.

²²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, No. 20.

²²⁵ Ibid., No. 81.

4.1.2 The Holy Church

Holiness is one of the marks of the Church as professed in the Apostles and Nicene creeds: “*credo sanctam Ecclesiam*”; “*I believe in one Holy Catholic Church...*” On this note, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “*the Church... is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy*” (Cf. Lumen Gentium No. 39; CCC No. 823). This holiness of the Church derives from the Holiness of God who is essentially holy. The creatures only reflect or share the inimitable holiness of God the Creator. On the holiness of the Church, P. Chirico lucidly writes:

*The Church is holy precisely because it is that unique social body called into existence by God in order to manifest the divine holiness in an increasing manner in time through the gradual incorporation of all creation within its holy unity.*²²⁶

Here, it is meant that the Church is first and foremost holy by virtue of her divine institution. The Church is the aggregate of things and persons constituted by God in Christ as the great visible sign through which the divine holiness is imparted to man. The Church is also holy by virtue of her mission of sanctifying the whole of creation. Or rather put in another way, God continues to sanctify the world through the activity of the Church especially, in the sacraments. In this sense, the Church is holy, because she is the means of holiness. Pope Pius XII thus observes that the Church “*is spotless in the sacraments, by which she gives birth to and nourishes her children; in the faith which she has always preserved inviolate; in her sacred laws imposed on all; in the evangelical counsels which she recommends; in those heavenly gifts and extra-ordinary graces through which, with inexhaustible fecundity, she generates hosts of martyrs, Virgins and confessors.*”²²⁷

From the foregoing, one can rightly observe, that, there are three-fold special relationships to the Creator through which the Church is holy. First, in and through Christ, the Church has received from God the Father, the holy

²²⁶ P. F., Chirico, “Holiness of the Church” in: McDonald, William J., (ed.), New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VII, New York: 1967, 55.

²²⁷ Pius XII, Mystici Corporis, Paragraph 65.

mission to sanctify all men (Mt. 28:16-29; Mk. 16:15-16). Second, in and through the redeeming actions of Christ, God has given the Church her essential structure, that is hierarchy of persons, doctrine, sacramental rites and the sanctifying efficacy of her essential activity. Third, the all Holy God dwells within individual members and in the Church as a whole. So, holiness exists in varying degrees in the members of the Church, from Jesus Christ, the head of the Church to all the human members in the Church.²²⁸

One can therefore conclude that holiness is not an accidental quality but an element in the very nature and structure of the Church. The Church is essentially holy both in her ontological and structural existence. But to what extent or degree is the Church holy? Is the Church already a perfect society? Henri de Lubac made an important clarification of the ecclesiological view of the early Christians; what could also clarify our understanding when we speak about the Church's holiness. He observed that when the early Christians spoke of the *Ecclesia Sanctorum*, the Church of the saints, they never presumed with that a Church that contained only the pure.²²⁹ They never "*lost sight of the conditions*" in which the Church exists in the present world when they spoke of the "*heavenly Church*."²³⁰ They were only trying to underscore that all the members of the Church have been consecrated to God and that the Christian life is a divine call to holiness. It never eluded their understanding "*that at one and the same time the Church is without sin in herself and never without sin in her members*."²³¹ The *Ecclesia sanctorum* was for them something essentially eschatological which is made manifest in the present. They however emphasised that the perfection of the Church is something to be realised in the hereafter. The *Ecclesia Sanctorum* is therefore, in this worldly existence, anticipation.

From Lubac's synopsis of the Ecclesiology of the early Christians, one can infer that this worldly holiness of the Church is far from being perfect. This is because of the imperfect life of her members. The members of the Church who are called to holiness and perfection are always in a continuous effort to

²²⁸ Cf. Lumen Gentium, No. 49.

²²⁹ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 115.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

be holy and to attain perfection. They do this amidst the shocks and jolts on the earthly road to respond to this Divine invitation. Perfect holiness will never be fully achieved until the last day, when the purification of the members of the body of Jesus Christ, the Church will be completed either by the trials endured on this earth or in the life beyond. In this respect, Andre de Bovis notes, that, *“the Church’s holiness is eschatological.”*²³² Yves Congar corroborates this view when he observed that the eschatological Church is completely pure for nothing impure can come into heaven (Apoc. 21:27).²³³ This simply means that, while the Church is still waiting for the end, she is incomplete and imperfect. She only lives in hope. When the end comes, then the world will discover the beauty of the new city *“like a bride who has adorned herself to meet her husband”* (Apoc. 21:2).

4.1.3 The Church of Saints and Sinners

The Church on earth, as it were, is a mixed community of the good and the bad. She is an *“unthreshed corn, the ark with both clean and unclean animals, a ship full of unruly passengers who always seem to be on the point of wrecking it.”*²³⁴ Right from the moment of its organization, Christ gathered a people, both the good and the bad, and intended to make out from them all an *Ecclesia Sanctorum*. Today, the Church can boast to have in her fold saints who have been purified from their sins and sinners as well who are already in the process of metamorphosis, into becoming saints. In recognition of this granite fact, George A. Tavard observes:

*The Church conceived as “congregation of the faithful” is certainly made up of sinners, although it would be more proper to speak of saints who are not saintly enough. Sinners are made saints by the Church’s holiness, which is a gift of the spirit and a participation in the very holiness of Christ.*²³⁵

In this sense, the Church therefore, is not only a community of saints. Neither is it only a community of sinners. In the Church, saints and sinners

²³² Andre, De Bovis, What is the Church, New York: Hawthorn Books Publishers, 1961, 134.

²³³ Yves, Congar, Die Heilige Kirche, 148.

²³⁴ Henri de Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 112-113.

²³⁵ G. H., Tavard, The Church Tomorrow, London: Herder and Herder Inc; 1965.

“co-exist”. By “co-existence”, we do not mean nor suggest a life of statism, where sinners are encouraged to remain in their sinfulness. Rather, we mean something more; a situation where sinners through the purifying light of the saints are made to be saints themselves so that they can enjoy fully the freedom of the children of God.

There are various scriptural passages as well as the writings of the Church Fathers that point to the existence of sinners in the Church of Christ. St. Paul’s letters, for example devote long passages to exhorting and reprimanding with considerable vehemence the sinners within the Church and to punishing them when necessary (Cf. 2 Thess 2, 3). John Chrysostom describes it as a house built of our souls. Among the stories that make it up, some are brilliant and polished while others are dark and of inferior quality.²³⁶ Henri de Lubac again notes that sinners constitute a vast majority in the Church. Though they may be “infirm”, “arid”, “putrid”, or even “dead” members, they remain truly part of her.²³⁷

It is pertinent to observe that sin reduces the degree of one’s participation in the life of Christ in the Church. In as much as sinners belong to the Church, they do not belong in the same degree as the saints. This is because, the guiltier of sin men are *“the less do they effectively and genuinely belong to the Church.”*²³⁸ That was the reason grave sinners in the early centuries of the Church were expelled from the community of the faithful until they got reconciled to the Church. But today, sinners live in the Church with their burden of sin.

Sinners are found not only among the laity but also among the Hierarchy. Thus, Francis Somerville observes: *“...we recognize that there have been and there are big sinners in the Church, and they are to be found also among the highest dignitaries of the Church.”*²³⁹ This is one of the greatest achievements of the second Vatican Council, when, with the spirit of humility and renewal, it acknowledges, in the words of Somerville, that *“the Church is well aware*

²³⁶ Cf., Andre, De Bovis, Op. Cit., 133.

²³⁷ Henri de Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 114.

²³⁸ Andre, De Bovis, 133.

²³⁹ F., Somerville, Catholic Teaching Today, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1972, 88.

that some of her members, clerical and lay, have in the course of centuries turned out unfaithful to the Spirit of God.”²⁴⁰ The Church de facto does not pretend “to be a ‘brotherhood of the pure’, a class of people, ‘who have nothing to reproach themselves with’. She cannot make any such claim. She has within her walls sinners, very great sinners even, and she considers them as her children.”²⁴¹

4.2. The Mission of the Church

In No.1 of the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity of 7th December 1965, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, the second Vatican Council Fathers noted that the Church, “*having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be ‘the universal sacrament of salvation’*”, must “*in obedience to the command of her founder (Matt 16:15) and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strive to preach the Gospel to all men.*”²⁴² And on the occasion of the twenty-five years anniversary of the publication of the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, and fifteen years anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI, John Paul II re-echoes in his Encyclical letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (1991)²⁴³, that “*the Church must be faithful to Christ, whose Body she is, and whose mission she continues.*”²⁴⁴ One understands unequivocally from the above, the origin and the specifics of the Church’s mission. The mission of the Church is of divine origin. The Church has a clear mission which was entrusted to her by Jesus Christ her head and master. Before his ascension into heaven, he bequeathed to his Church the same mission for which he came into the world. “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the*

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 88.

²⁴¹ Andre, De Bovis, 131.

²⁴² Austin, Flannery ed., “Ad Gentes Divinitus”, No. 1, in Vatican Council II., The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975, 813.

²⁴³ The usual date of publication of an encyclical is the day of its release to the public. “Redemptoris Missio” was actually published on 22 January 1991, but was dated 7 December 1990 to actually mark the anniversary of the two documents: “Ad Gentes” and “Evangelii Nuntiandi”.

²⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 39.

commands I gave. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Matt 28:18ff).

With regards to the contents, the Church has a mission, which is not distinct from the mission of Christ, to wit, the mission of proclaiming liberty to captives, sight to blind, freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). The Church has a salvific mission which is not only localized within the four walls of the Church, *missio ad intra*, but extends to the four walls of the world, to the ends of the earth, *missio ad extra*. In fidelity to Christ and his mission, the Church must continue, what was began by her head. And what immediately comes to the fore is liberation. In this regard, Jim Wallis notes, that, *“if liberation is so close to the heart and purpose of God, liberation must clearly be on the agenda of the people of God.”*²⁴⁵ For *“to imitate Christ and to be his true continuation in the world, the Church as a whole, like every Christian Community, is called to work for the dignity and rights of man, both individually and collectively; to protect and promote the dignity of the human person; and to denounce and oppose every sort of human oppression.”*²⁴⁶

The Church cannot remain faithful to the Lord of history who has sent her to evangelize the whole world (Matt 28:19-20), if she does not teach the values, which are peculiar to the liberty by which Christ has liberated us. The entire life of the Church, her celebrations and the proclamations of the good news, the pedagogy of the faith and the formation to conscience, in fact everything must be a great sign of liberty and a commitment to true liberty and for liberation. The Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* of 1971, states:

Action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world are clearly coupled as the constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel; that is to say, they are together the constitutive dimension on which is based the mission of the

²⁴⁵ J., Wallis, „Liberation and Conformity“ in: Anderson et al., (eds.), *Mission Trends*, No 4, New York: Paulist Press, 1979. 52.

²⁴⁶ R. A., McCormick, „Human rights and the Mission of the Church“, in: Anderson et al. (eds.), *Mission Trends*, No 4, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, 41.

*Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every state of oppression.*²⁴⁷

The Church, therefore, will engage herself in the liberation of all men at all times and at all levels in the measure that she is conscious of the gratuity of the liberty of salvation and also in the measure that she is aware of the greatness of this gift. The affirmation that the Church is in Christ, the great sacrament of salvation might be translated as follows into modern language: the Church is instituted by Christ so that she, being grateful for the gift of liberty, may present herself to the world as a visible and efficacious sign of the integral liberation of humanity.²⁴⁸ All men are also called to this task of liberation. And man cannot live his call to liberty in any sphere whatever without the gift of redemption, which is liberation from the power of sin.

The second aspect of the Church's mission, which is deducible from the foregoing, is that of reconciliation. The mission of the Church is fundamentally and primarily ordained towards liberation from sin and death, and towards reconciliation of men with God and with one another in Jesus Christ. This is what St Paul means when he writes, that, "God ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation... and the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18f). Pope John Paul II, while recognising fully this reconciling mission of the Church, observes that the Father has mercifully entrusted a ministry of reconciliation *"to the hands and lips of the apostles, his messengers, which they carry out in a singular way by virtue of the power to act `in persona Christi. ` And that the message of reconciliation has also been entrusted to the whole community of believers, to the whole fabric of the Church, that is to say, the task of doing everything possible to witness to reconciliation and to bring it about in the world."*²⁴⁹

Here the Pope makes allusion to the sacramental ministry of reconciliation as entrusted essentially to the apostles, which the Church exercises today through her ministers in the sacrament of penance and to the all-inclusive

²⁴⁷ The Synod of the Catholic Bishops, Justice in the World, 1971, No 6.

²⁴⁸ Bernard, Häring, Evangelization Today, England: St. Paul Publications, 1990, 111-112.

²⁴⁹ John Paul II, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, No.8.

mission of reconciliation entrusted to the whole sons and daughters of the Church.

From what we have discussed so far, two aspects of the Church's mission stand out: that of liberation and reconciliation. We now go into details to discuss how the Church accomplishes her mission as Liberator and Reconciler.

4.2.1. The Church as Liberator

Maurice Udoekpo a Nigerian catholic priest and theologian, observes in his book, *"Corruption in Nigeria Culture"* that "in many parts of the world, the Church has been identified with the established order as a liberator."²⁵⁰ Both the universal Church and the particular churches of different continents have been truly engaged in the mission of liberation either through social teachings or actions.

The Church's active role as a liberator began with the emergence of Pope Leo XIII 's great social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 1891. In this encyclical, which has been described as an "anti-socialist Manifesto"²⁵¹, the Pope opted for the liberation of the workers by speaking strongly against their exploitation and humiliation by the owners of the means of production. For "*a very few rich and exceedingly rich men have laid a yoke almost of slavery on the numbered masses of non-owning workers.*"²⁵² The Church saw it as her mission to do something to liberate the poor workers from their miserable and wretched conditions.

To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI issued in 1931 another encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, to criticise the deplorable condition of the poor caused by economic liberalism. It was also a direct condemnation of totalitarian communism of the time, which has dehumanised and depersonalised human beings.

Another encyclical that followed was *Mater et Magistra* of Pope John XXIII of 1961. In this encyclical, the Pope re-iterated the Church's concern "*with the*

²⁵⁰ Maurice, Udoekpo, *Corruption in Nigeria Culture*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 1993, 2.

²⁵¹ Osita, Eze, „Human Rights, Peace and *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII“, in: *Catholic Social Teachings en-route in Africa*, ed. by Obiora F., Ike Enugu, Nigeria: Cidjap Publication, 1991, 3.

²⁵² Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, No. 6.

exigencies of man's daily life, with his livelihood and education, and his general, temporal welfare and prosperity."²⁵³ In the following year after his encyclical, Pope John XXIII convoked the great second Vatican Council, which was a pastoral Council. It was pastoral because the Council did not concern itself with dogmatic definitions and pronouncement of anathemas, but with the pastoral life and activity of the Church in the modern world. In one of the Council's most important documents, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church states unequivocally the Church's concern for the human predicaments in our world today:

*"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."*²⁵⁴

With these words, the Council demonstrates that the Church does not shy away from the situation of the world. The Church is always in solidarity with the people in their moments of joys and in their moments of sorrows. Such solidarity is an active one. The Church praises and encourages the situations, which promote human dignity and condemns those situations, which degrade man. Bringing the Church's worries over the human predicament in our modern world to the fore, the document further articulates those problems that face the modern man to include poverty, hunger and illiteracy.²⁵⁵

Pope Paul VI, the successor of John XXIII, who saw the successful end of the second Vatican Council, carried on with the same spirit and issued the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of 1967. The Pope states clearly, that the liberation and the development of peoples attract the close attention of the Church, especially, *"of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilisation and a more active improvement of their*

²⁵³ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, No. 3.

²⁵⁴ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, No.1.

²⁵⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* No. 4.

*human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment.*²⁵⁶

Pope John Paul II did actively engage himself for the liberation of man throughout the entire period of his papacy – October 16, 1978 – April 2, 2005. The Pope, listening attentively to the “signs of the times” and responding to the human needs of our age, issued great encyclicals in the name of the Church. They include; *Redemptoris Hominis* (1979), *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), just to mention a few. At the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul issued an encyclical *Centesimus Annus* in 1991 in which he joined his voice with that of his predecessor Leo XIII in condemning the evil of the Marxist and Communist ideology and all the dictatorial regimes that practised it.

In this encyclical, the Pope committed himself to the recovery of the dignity of the human person, which has been stripped of his personhood, deprived of what is naturally and actually his own and reduced to “*an element, a molecule within the social organism*” by socialism.²⁵⁷

The Pope also condemned vehemently the neo-colonialist attitude of the developed world, where “*decisive sectors of the economy still remain de facto in the hands of large foreign companies which are unwilling to commit themselves to the long-term development of the host country; where political life itself is controlled by foreign powers, while within the national boundaries there are tribal groups not yet amalgamated into a genuine national community.*”²⁵⁸ In the face of all these problems facing the modern man, the Church recalls her “*care and responsibility for man, who has been entrusted to her by Christ himself.*”²⁵⁹ Not only has Pope John Paul II issued documents that aim at human liberation and development, he was actively engaged in dismantling systems that oppress, degrade and enslave man. We are all witnesses to the great feat accomplished by this Pope who contributed

²⁵⁶ Paul VI, *Populorum Progression*, No. 1.

²⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 13.

²⁵⁸ *Centesimus Annus*, No. 20.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 53.

immensely towards the liberation of his homeland, Poland²⁶⁰ and other nations of Eastern Europe²⁶¹ including Russia from communistic regimes without recourse to Marxist principle of social revolution. We will later dwell more on this colossal figure and great apostle of our time.

In line with the spirit of the second Vatican Council, the particular churches of different continents have also not failed to express their solidarity with the modern man. The Church in Latin America has contributed so immensely towards the uplifting of the existential condition of the poor and the marginalised class of the continent. Showing massive concern for the deplorable condition of the impoverished of this continent, the Church gathered on two occasions namely, at Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979) and decided on an action of liberating the millions of peoples of this continent. After identifying the many problems affecting the great majority of the people of the Continent; *"of hunger and misery, of illness of a massive nature and infant mortality, of illiteracy and marginality, of profound inequality of income, and tensions between the social classes, of outbreaks of violence and rare participation of the people in decisions affecting the common good"*²⁶², the gathered Church affirmed her solidarity with the responsibilities that have arisen.²⁶³ The Church declared her commitment to liberation and purification of her members and institutions in the spirit of the Gospel.²⁶⁴ This commitment was also directed to the entire society both among persons

²⁶⁰ John Paul II's 1979 trip to his homeland Poland was "the detonator" the word of General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the Communist President of the Council of the People's Republic of Poland, the fulcrum of revolution which led to the collapse of Communism. On June 2, 1979 the Pope delivered a historic homily at Victory Square in Warsaw during which, among other things, he told his native people "it is not possible to understand the history of the Polish nation without Christ."

²⁶¹ John Paul II also followed up his initiative in Poland with other nations in Eastern Europe, like Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Russia. Mikhail Gorbachev, former Soviet leader himself acknowledged publicly the role of John Paul II in the fall of Communism. He was quoted in *La Stampa*, March 3, 1992 to have said: "What has happened in Eastern Europe in recent years would not have been possible without the presence of this Pope, without the great role even political that he has played on the world scene".

²⁶² Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, "The Church in the present-day transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council", August 26-September 6, 1968, in: *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Hennelly T. Alfred, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, 90.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

in the decision-making of their own communities and the citizens themselves. At Puebla, the Church in Latin America committed herself to integral liberation and “*authentic realization of human being*.”²⁶⁵ Above all, the Church made a “*preferential option for, and solidarity with, the poor*.”²⁶⁶ The situation in Africa is not quite different from the Latin American situation. The two Continents share the same historical events and experiences²⁶⁷ such as colonialism, the slave trade, the mixing of races, ethnic conflicts, poverty, hunger, political turmoil, human rights abuse and intimidation by the dictatorial governments, etc. In the year 1994, Pope John Paul II convoked an African Synod, where the Church in Africa gathered to face the challenges posed by African realities. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: “*Ecclesia in Africa*”, the Church in Africa is challenged to “*denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person*,”²⁶⁸ and to condemn all evils and injustices; to be, for the people of Africa, “*the voice of the voiceless*.”²⁶⁹ The Church in Africa is challenged to work for the integral human liberation and development. Many countries in Africa have started reaping the fruits of the Synod through various concerted actions of the churches in these countries. For example, in Chad, the Catholic Church was at the forefront in demanding transparency in plans for a trans-national pipeline and in Kenya, ruled by a corrupt regime, the Catholic bishops are a vibrant voice demanding that moral and ethical standards be applied to the government’s actions.²⁷⁰ In my own homeland Nigeria, the Catholic Bishops Conference has taken many bold steps to opt for the liberation of the people. These steps include constant constructive criticism against the government and its policies, which tend to oppress and degrade the human person. On occasions, the leaders of the Catholic Church in Nigeria have called for the

²⁶⁵ Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops “Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future”, Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico, January 27-February 13, 1979, in: *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. by Alfred, T., Hennelly, New York, Orbis Books, 1990, 234.

²⁶⁶ *Op Cit.*, 254.

²⁶⁷ Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) and Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), *PEACE, Fruit of Reconciliation*, Kenya: Pauline Publications Africa, 2001, 10.

²⁶⁸ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 14.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 14.

²⁷⁰ Arthur, Jones, “African Catholic Church a Vibrant Force for Change” in: *The National Catholic Reporter*, July 18, 2003.

release of all political prisoners in the country.²⁷¹ The Church in Nigeria has also helped immensely towards the eradication of traditions, which degrade and dehumanise human persons.²⁷²

From what we have said so far, the role of the Church as liberator has become clearer. Because the Church is a sacrament of Christ today, her identity as liberator becomes imperative. This bears a telling implication; that, it is only in relation to Christ, her founder, and in a constant imitation of her founder, that the Church is identified as a liberator. It belongs therefore to the very nature of Christianity *“to bring the gospel to all the needy in the world, not only through words but through solidarity in action and thus, through a praxis of liberation.”*²⁷³ The kingdom project of Christ did not end with his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. It continues today *in, through and by* the Church. Today, the Church brings the gospel to all and sundry, the Jews, the Gentiles, the rich, the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed. She works tirelessly to build a just and habitable human society, – thereby establishing the kingdom on earth, as a harbinger of the heavenly kingdom to be realized in the Parousia. It is therefore by becoming a visible sign of liberation, that is, by becoming a place where justice, peace and love are not just preached but also practiced that the Church, as a liberator, can best serve humanity.²⁷⁴ Paul VI made it categorical that *“the Church... has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children - the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete.”*²⁷⁵

4.2.2 The Church as Reconciler

²⁷¹ From March 3 to 6, the Nigerian bishops had special meeting in preparation for Pope John Paul II's second visit to Nigeria (from March 21 to 23) to beatify Father Cyprien Iwene Tansi who died in 1964. The bishops made appeal to the government to make the gesture of reconciliation during Pope John Paul's visit to Nigeria. The Pope was also scheduled to meet with then military ruler, Late General Sani Abacha. The military government detained dozens of political prisoners. Most of these prisoners were later released after the Pope's visit.

²⁷² The Church in Nigeria has helped to eradicate some obnoxious traditions that degrade and ostracise human beings from their communities, such as killing of twins and *Osu* Caste system in Igboland.

²⁷³ Edward, Schillebeeckx, *Church the Human Story of God*, London: SCM Press, 1989, 185.

²⁷⁴ Cf. C.T., Suzanne, *World Hunger: The Responsibility of Christian Education*, Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis books, 1982, 89.

²⁷⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Dec. 8 1975, No. 30.

In line with the mission of Christ her founder, who reconciled mankind with God, the Church carries out the same mission today, reconciling man with his God, with one another and with the whole of creation.²⁷⁶

Throughout her entire history, the Church has tried to engage herself in this very mission. It is the recognition of the existence of sin in the world that makes the Church's mission of reconciliation imperative. Sin exists in the individual and is even more pronounced in the communities and societies, despite the fact that Christ has achieved once and for all the necessary reconciliation between humanity and God through his suffering, death and resurrection. The Church now makes this reconciliation objectively real and historically present to today's humanity. Since Christ's coming in the world did not put to end the existence of evil in the world, the Church, which is the sacrament of Christ's continued presence in the world, makes it her mission, to call the sinful man to repentance and conversion of heart. In this context that Pope John Paul II made the following observations:

*The church ...is also a reality that is by nature permanently reconciling. As such she is the presence and the action of God, who 'in Christ was reconciling the world to himself'(2Cor 5:19). This action and presence are expressed primarily in Baptism, in the forgiveness of sins and in the Eucharistic celebration, which is the renewal of the redeeming Sacrifice of Christ and the effective sign of the unity of the People of God.*²⁷⁷

The experience of divisions, hatred, struggles, injustices, conflicts, and various forms of discrimination, violence and wars compels the Church more, not only to be a sign of reconciliation to a divided humanity but above all to devote herself more effectively to the work of reconciliation. How does the Church carry out this mission today in a Continent (Africa) that is torn apart with violence, oppression, ethno-religious wars and conflicts?

²⁷⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, No. 8.

²⁷⁷ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation within the Church*, 1974, No. 1.

4.3 The Reconciling Mission of the Church in Africa

Ten years after the first ever Synod of Bishops for Africa, on June 22 2005, Pope Benedict XVI announced at his weekly general audience, that he was confirming Pope John Paul II's decision to convoke a second Synod of Bishops for Africa. In his speech, the Pope somewhat defined the focus of the Synod taking note of the new challenges facing the Church in Africa:

*I wish to announce my intention to convoke the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. I have the hope that such an Assembly will give a new impetus to evangelisation on the African Continent, to a consolidation and growth of the Church and to the promotion of reconciliation and peace.*²⁷⁸

By this convocation, the Pope already identified the deep desire of every man and woman in Africa today - Reconciliation and Peace!

Recent years have seen many regions of Africa involved in wars and internal or external conflicts. Countries like Angola, Algeria, Burundi, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Nigeria, et cetera, have known in the recent years wars and ethnic or tribal cleansing which left millions of people dead and made over 9.5 million people refugees.²⁷⁹ Even those who survive the wars live with deep-seated resentment, bitterness and hatred of others. This hatred is often transferred from one generation to another, waiting for the opportune moment to inflict revenge. This worrisome situation calls for urgent solution in order to prevent the possibility of what we may call *continental genocide*.

It is interesting to note that the Church in Africa is not keeping closed eyes waiting for the extermination of the whole continent, many of whom are her millions of sons and daughters. The Church in Africa sees the need to gather the "scattered" children of Africa together so that they can begin to live as people of "the same family". It is within this context, that the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria made this clarion call for reconciliation before

²⁷⁸On June 22, 2005, at his weekly general audience, Pope Benedict XVI announced the convocation of the Synod of Bishops for Africa in the presence of some cardinals and bishops from Africa.

²⁷⁹ The U.S Committee for Refugees made a press release on October 2, 2001 in which they reported the regrettable increase in the number of refugees as a result of wars in Africa.

ever Pope Benedict XVI confirmed the convocation of the second Synod of the Bishops for Africa:

*The need for reconciliation and harmony is all the more urgent in view of the growing incidence of intercommunal disputes, which have degenerated into bloody clashes.*²⁸⁰

The Chief Shepherds of the Church in Nigeria made this call after their first plenary meeting for the year 1998, from the 3rd to the 6th of March, on the threshold of the second pastoral visit of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria for the beatification of Cyprian Iwene Tansi, the first Nigerian ever to be beatified. The bishops saw the urgency of reconciling individuals, communities and the entire nation. After the Pope's visit and in an effort to immediately begin to put the exhortations of the Pope into practice, the Bishops had again an emergency meeting on May 5, 1998, during which they saw reconciliation as the only urgent and hopeful path for Nigerians and for Africans as a whole.

What does reconciliation actually entail for Africans? It entails, according to the bishops, *"having the courage to forgive one another, respecting one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father, giving each one the room to participate in the decisions that shape the common destiny of all."*²⁸¹ This reconciliation should be based on the solid foundation of truth and justice, freedom and fair play. This implies that such reconciliation opens the way for "all-inclusive" way of thought especially in sharing the rich mineral, material and human resources of the continent. It should be a reconciliation that offers no opportunity for domination or intimidation of groups or individuals. The Nigerian bishops made this reconciliation very urgent in order to avoid the imminent danger of total collapse of nations and the continent: *"This"* according to them, *"must start now before things get totally out of hand."*²⁸² This was really the prophetic voice of the bishops calling on all, governments, churches, communities, families and individuals to contribute to this mission of reconciliation. As if

²⁸⁰ „A Call to Holiness and Reconciliation“ by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria in: *The Voice of the Voiceless, Pastoral letters and Communiques of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria*, ed. by Peter Schineller, Ibadan, Daily Graphics Nigeria LTD, 2002, 367.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 377.

²⁸² Ibid. 377.

to march up their appeal for reconciliation with action, the bishops emphasized that the Church should present herself as *“a community reconciled within itself and an agent of reconciliation for all around her.”*²⁸³ They showed their readiness to promote *“an ecclesiology focused on the idea of the Church as the family of God”* (EA 63). The bishops were convinced that this *“image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance and trust.”*²⁸⁴ This image eschews all ethnocentrism, tribalism, nepotism and unnecessary divisions, but rather *“encourages reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups.”*²⁸⁵ The bishops also declared their readiness *“to inculcate on the members of the Church that unity and bond derived from the water of baptism are stronger than blood relationship.”*²⁸⁶

As shown by the Lineamenta of the second Special Assembly for Africa published in 2006, Reconciliation was made the essential mission of the Church in Africa:

*She (The Church) feels an urgent need to recommit herself wholeheartedly to the work of reconciliation, justice and peace throughout the continent.”*²⁸⁷

The work of reconciliation should form the core of the Church’s proclamation in Africa, in the face of the *“current historical, social, political, cultural and religious circumstances”*²⁸⁸, in which the Continent finds itself. For *“in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, a commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace appears to be where this Kingdom of Love is to be realised.”*²⁸⁹ The Kingdom of Love as contained in the good news proclaimed by the Church would be meaningless to the African people if their countries were still laden with wars, conflicts and oppression. The emergence of peaceful co-existence among peoples of different tribes and religions would be the manifest realisation of the Kingdom of Love on earth.

²⁸³ Ibid., 378.

²⁸⁴ George, Ehusani, Witness and Role of Priests and Religious in Nigeria, 16.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. 16.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. 16.

²⁸⁷ Lineamenta for the II Special Assembly for Africa: The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world” (Mt 5: 13-14), Vatican: June 27, 2006, No 1.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., No. 4.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., No. 4.

This is the message that will be meaningful to countries like Angola, Algeria, Burundi, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Nigeria. The Church should therefore commit herself without reservations to seeing that the love of Christ, which she preaches, takes root in the hearts of every man and woman in Africa. This should be seen as the definitive path to reconciliation not only of individuals but also of societies. For *"the more the love of Christ takes root in the hearts of the peoples of Africa as well as in African cultures and institutions, the more the continent and its peoples – not to mention the entire world – will enjoy the fruits of reconciliation, justice and peace."*²⁹⁰

The second Synod of Bishops for Africa has come and gone. And the Post-Synodal Exhortation²⁹¹ was released to the public on the occasion of Pope Benedict's visit to Benin on November 19, 2011. How are the respective African churches going to implement the outcome of this synod? We are going to dwell on this later in chapter six of this work. In the mean time, the bishops of African churches are called to take this mission of reconciliation very seriously, considering their own personal experiences in their own respective regions and dioceses. They are commended for their firm determination and effort in implementing the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* in their respective regions and dioceses. But more is now expected from them to help Africa and Africans chart a new course and map out an honest and a true path to peace and harmony in this continent. They have to see this as a very urgent and timely mission of the Church in Africa - The mission of reconciliation!

But it has to be noted that for the Church therefore, to authentically carry out this mission of reconciliation, she has to first and foremost look into her very structure to eliminate all the stains that present her as a "contradiction" to what she preaches. The Church loses her prophetic voice if she herself remains *"a cause of scandal in her interpersonal relations and her internal structures."*²⁹² This means also that the Church cannot courageously speak against injustice and oppression when she herself is a living structure of

²⁹⁰ Ibid., No. 4.

²⁹¹ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, November 19, 2011.

²⁹² Gustavo, Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974, 36.

injustice and oppression. The Church cannot claim to be a true reconciler, if she herself remains a system that divides, oppresses and promotes violence and conflicts. The Church must see herself only in the light of Christ the Reconciler. John Paul II made it clear that if the Church is to be reconciling, she must begin by being a reconciled Church. In order to proclaim and propose reconciliation to the world, the Church, according to the Pope, must become ever more genuinely an example of reconciliation particularly within herself.²⁹³ The Church must be ever ready to bear genuine and authentic witness with her life. In essence, the Church should put into practice what she preaches, for only through that, can she really touch and convince peoples and nations. Such authentic life witness of faith would, as Pope John Paul II observed, *“have an exemplary and prophetic value, for religions as much as for governments and nations....”*²⁹⁴

²⁹³ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, No. 9.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

PART TWO: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

CHAPTER FIVE

A: THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF RECONCILIATION

The English word “Reconciliation” describes “*the action of reconciling*.”²⁹⁵ But the real meaning is actually derived from the verb “*to reconcile*”. And according to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, “*to reconcile*,” means, “*to restore to friendship or harmony*”.²⁹⁶ It implies the existence of a broken relationship. It points to the existence of a conflict or differences that need to be resolved. Through reconciliation, such conflicts and differences are therefore removed and the initial relationship or state of harmony is restored. Reconciliation has to do with interpersonal and intergroup relationship, be it between two individuals or between communities. Through reconciliation two individuals that are enemies begin to perceive themselves as friends. It is on this note that Gerhard Sauter understands reconciliation as the restoration of communion, of life with and for one another with the intention of preparing a fertile ground for a related future.²⁹⁷ The project of reconciliation is therefore aimed at building a solid future community of peaceful co-existence among peoples of diverse religious, ethnic and political affiliations, who all share in the one humanity. It is aimed at restoring a community of men and women, where people begin to see themselves not as enemies but as friends, as brothers and sisters. Reconciliation is therefore “*nothing less than daring to be human... because... we are all part of one another*”.²⁹⁸ This view is evident in the story told by Magda Yoors-Peeters, a young Belgian woman, in 1923 at the conference of the International Fellowship in Denmark:

I am a Belgian woman. During the Great War I hated the Germans with the bitterest hatred. I wanted the French and the

²⁹⁵ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary,

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Gerhard, Sauter, “Versöhnung” als Thema der Theologie, Germany: Verlagshaus, 1997, 9.

²⁹⁸ Walter, Wink, etd, “*The Path of Reconciliation*” in: Peace is the Way, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000, 257.

Belgians to fight more and to crush Germany. So I preached hate. I not only talked it, but I wrote it. I wrote articles for the magazines and the papers to create more hatred of the Germans. And I succeeded. People listened and read what I wrote. Then they too would hate more deeply and more bitterly than before.

It was one winter in the war time that I was in Holland with my husband.... We rented a room from a Dutch family, and the man and woman felt as we did about the Germans. They also hated, as we hated....

One day my husband and I were walking along a road near the town, not many miles from the border of Germany. We saw ahead of us something lying in the mud, and when we came nearer we saw it was a man. We stooped over him and saw he was in the uniform of a German soldier. He was a German... and his feet were all muddy and bleeding.

We looked at him. We could not leave him lying there in the cold. What could we do? We could not take him to the house of the Dutch people because they hated the Germans just as we did. But he needed help; he was faint with hunger and cold.... Then suddenly we decided to take him to the house and try to get him in without the knowledge of the landlady. We helped him, between us, back to the town and into the house. The landlady fortunately was not around. We put him on the bed in our room. What could we do? His feet were bloody and dirty. I had to wash them! So I got some water and a cloth and knelt down to wash his feet. While I was washing his feet something happened inside me. Something fell down from my eyes, and I saw that he was a brother. A German was my brother. The Germans were our brothers....²⁹⁹

The story above brings to the fore what actually happens when reconciliation takes place. Scales of hatred and enmity that cover the eyes fall off so that

²⁹⁹ Magda, Yoors-Peeters, “*Daring to be Human*” in: *Peace is the Way*, edd by Walter, Wink, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 200, 258-259.

one begins to see the humanness of the other. One comes to discover that there is something that connects us all. One experiences a great awakening and makes the amazing discovery that we are all brothers! Hence reconciliation has become a very important topic not only for interpersonal human relationships but also for religion and politics especially in our world today that is full of religious and cultural pluralisms. We are now going to consider the various understanding of reconciliation in the Old Testament, New Testament and Christian theology. This will lead us to the analysis of how Africans with particular reference to the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria understand and practice reconciliation.

5.1 Reconciliation in the Old Testament

The Old Testament's biblical narrative of the fall of man presents it as the starting point of all crisis and divisions among men. Pope John Paul II presented the human condition after the fall of the first parents in this way:

In the description of the 'first sin,' the rupture with Yahweh simultaneously breaks the bond of friendship that had united the human family. Thus the subsequent pages of Genesis show us the man and woman as if were pointing an accusing finger at each other. Later we have the brother hating his brother and finally taking his life.³⁰⁰

The sin of Adam and Eve broke their love-relationship with God and this led to the collapse of their love for each other. They could no longer trust nor protect one another and thus failed to be their "brother's keeper". Crisis and division crept into their lives and since then the entire humanity continues to share in their fate. This human condition made reconciliation with God expedient. And in the darkness of their humiliation and fallen-ness, God shows a ray of light. In the agony of their defeat, God announces the victory and the salvation that is to come through His Son Jesus Christ that is to be born of a woman (Cf. Gen 3:15). God took the initiative to restore this relationship of love with man.

³⁰⁰ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, No.15.

Actually the term “reconciliation” as such never occurs in the Old Testament. But the idea of reconciliation could be read within the Old Testament’s understanding of God’s initiative in restoring the broken relationship with humanity.

According to Paul Deselaers, Reconciliation has a very deep meaning in the Old Testament especially as it concerns the relationship between God and His creation and the relationship among human beings and in relation to the whole cosmos.³⁰¹ Israel’s basic experience is God’s openness and readiness to reconciliation despite of the infidelity of His creatures. God always shows His faithfulness and never allows the sinfulness of His creatures to eternally destroy His love for them. He continuously invites them back to reconciliation and renewal of their relationship with Him and with one another.³⁰² He nevertheless demands from them repentance and atonement for the sins committed. **Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement** and the **covenant theology** will be our main focus in trying to capture the idea of reconciliation in the Old Testament.

Yom Kippur is for the Jews the holiest and the most solemn day of the year. It is the day on which every Jew makes amends of his evil behaviours and seeks forgiveness for the wrongs done against God and against one’s neighbours. On this day the whole community of Israel reconciles with God and with one another by atoning for the sins committed against God and human beings. Israel laden with the feeling of falling into the abyss of its sinfulness from which, left alone, it cannot free itself, felt the deep need of atonement through the sacrifice of a bull and a goat, in order to expiate or purify the priests, the community and the altar from this sorry state.³⁰³ And through the ritual of expiation, the entire community of Israel will again be worthy to enter to the Holy of Holies and worthy of a relationship of love and blessing with Yahweh. This is recorded in the book of Leviticus:

„And it shall be a statute for ever unto you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and shall do no manner of work,

³⁰¹ Paul, Deselaers, „Versöhnung“ – Biblisch-theologisch“ in: Walter, Kasper hrg., Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, Band 10, Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2006, 720.

³⁰² Ibid., 721.

³⁰³ Josef, Blank, und Jürgen, Werbick, Sühne und Versöhnung, Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1986, 44.

the home-born, or the stranger that sojourneth among you. For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the LORD. It is a sabbath of solemn rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls; it is a statute for ever. And the priest, who shall be anointed and who shall be consecrated to be priest in his father's stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen garments, even the holy garments. And he shall make atonement for the most holy place, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar; and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make atonement for the children of Israel because of all their sins once in the year.' And he did as the LORD commanded Moses“ (Lev 16, 29-34).

“But the tenth day of this seventh month will be the Day of Expiation. You will hold a sacred assembly. You will fast and offer food burnt for Yahweh. You will do no work that day, for it is the Day of Expiation, on which the rite of expiation will be performed for you before Yahweh your God” (Lev 23, 27-28).

The above quotations from the book of Leviticus point to the establishment of the tenth day of the seventh month to be observed as the Day of Atonement or Expiation. They also specify the content of this day. The day is to be characterised by repentance from sins, fasting, intensive prayer and abstinence from every manner of work. In this sense, **Yom Kippur** is also called the Sabbath of Sabbaths!

The book of Leviticus chapter 16 also gives the details with regards to the Liturgy of the Day of Atonement:

“Having offered the bull as a sacrifice for his own sin and performed the rite of expiation for himself and for his family, and slaughtered the bull as a sacrifice for sin, Aaron will then fill a censer with live coals from the altar before Yahweh, take two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense and bring this inside the curtain. He will then put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, so that the cloud of incense hides the mercy-seat which is on the Testimony and he does not incur death. He will then take some of the bull's blood and sprinkle it with his finger on the eastern side of the mercy-seat.... He will the

slaughter the goat for the sacrifice for the sin of the people, and take its blood inside the curtain, and with this blood do as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it on the mercy-seat and in front of it. This is how he must perform the rite of expiation for the sanctuary for the uncleanness of the Israelites, for their acts of rebellion and all their sins” (Lev 16, 11-16).

The purpose and essence of the Day of Atonement and all the rituals surrounding it is contained in the term “*At-one-ment*” itself. It was aimed at restoring the *unity* between God and the people and was never done as a *propitiation* to appease the anger of God, as contained in the view of some Reformation theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin.³⁰⁴ To understand atonement in terms of propitiation for sin would be to deny the testimony of the Old Testament, where God “*revealed himself as the initiator of forgiveness for his errant people Ex 34. 6-7), as the one who restrains from anger (Ps 85. 9-10), and who through the Prophets promises a new and eternal covenant (Jer 31. 31-34; Ezk 36. 26-33).*”³⁰⁵ Atonement was therefore aimed purely at achieving the highly needed reconciliation between God and His chosen people. And God remains the subject of such atonement and the sins of His chosen people could never be enough to disrupt His merciful love! In relation to this fact, Adrian Schenker pointed out that the Liturgy of the

³⁰⁴ Martin Luther and John Calvin developed the “substitution theory” to explain that through His death on the cross, Christ bore the eternal punishment that all men deserved for their breaking the law of God. Since man is guilty before God’s judgement, the only appropriate punishment is eternal death. Christ, the Son of God became man and has stood in man’s place to bear the immeasurable weight of wrath; the curse, and the condemnation of a righteous God. Christ was therefore “made a substitute in the place of transgressors and even submitted as a criminal, to sustain and suffer all the punishment which would have been inflicted on them.” Cf. Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 7th ed. (1994), 179, 191-195; John Calvin, *Institutes* 2:16:1. This will be clearer in our discussion on the New Testament’s understanding of reconciliation.

³⁰⁵ T.J., Ryan, “Reconciliation” , in: *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, etd by Paul Kevin Meagher et al., Philadelphia: Sisters of St. Joseph, 1979, 2985.

Day of Atonement was instituted, ordered and introduced in Israel by God.³⁰⁶ He further observed that the Atonement which Israel and her Priests receive on the great Day of Atonement is God's gift, which is free and unconditional. Israel must therefore not fulfil any condition before it receives the gift of God's mercy and pardon from all her sins. The only thing she has to do is to accept this gift of God by celebrating the Liturgy of reconciliation.³⁰⁷ Adrian Schenker concludes by noting that this Feast is a sign of God's grace.³⁰⁸ Even if Israel were to sacrifice all the bulls and goats in the whole world, that couldn't have been enough and can never be enough to purge it from the smallest of sins. The divine action in the process of reconciliation overrides all the human activities, in form of sacrifices and rituals of expiation, on his way to the mercy-seat of God. God never quits His mercy-seat!

There is yet another interesting aspect of the ritual of Atonement which cannot be ignored. It is that of fasting and abstinence from every manner of work (Lev 16, 29-31; 23 26-32). Adrian Schenker describes this aspect as gestures of repentance from one's sins and clear signs of public acknowledgement of one's failings, which burden the conscience.³⁰⁹ The point in question here is the fact of personal confession of one's sins which is accomplished through fasting and abstinence from work. This implies that the personal involvement of all is required. It is God who invites the people to reconciliation with Him, but they must open themselves for the reception of God's gift of forgiveness through these signs of repentance.³¹⁰ The reconciliation between God and human being takes place at the point of the meeting of these movements from above and from below.³¹¹

Another important observation to be made here, which is evident in the Liturgy of Atonement, is the fact that attention was not given to punishment for the sins committed by Israel. Just as Adrian Schenker rightly observed, the scapegoat was not punished in place of the guilty. Her duty was to

³⁰⁶ Adrian, Schenker, *Versöhnung und Sühne, Wege gewaltfreier Konfliktlösung im Alten Testament mit einem Ausblick auf das Neue Testament*, Freiburg, Schweiz: Verlag Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981, 113.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

single-handedly bring away the burden of the guilt. She was purely the “transporter” of the sins of the community into the wilderness.³¹² God chose through this ritual to wipe away all the sins of the people of Israel and in this sense, **Yom Kippur** signified a new beginning for Israel.³¹³ Adrian Schenker describes it as the “new creation” of the covenant between God and Israel!³¹⁴ This brings us to our second focus in trying to capture the idea of reconciliation in the Old Testament, namely the **covenant theology**.

The Old Testament’s understanding of “reconciliation” as purely a divine initiative rooted in His merciful love³¹⁵ can only be better understood within the context of the **covenant theology**.³¹⁶

The history of humanity before the advent of Christ, from the biblical point of view, is a history of covenantal relationship with God the creator. Starting with the bond-like relationship with the first parents, God always shows himself as the one taking the initiative to save humanity. This is clearly made manifest in the fall of the first parents, where God makes the promise to reconcile with humanity (Cf. 3:15). The very nature of God’s covenant with Abram (Cf. Gen 15) captures this idea of the whole initiative coming from God. God takes upon Himself obligations towards Abram; makes three-fold promises to Abram and does not spell out conditions, which Abram must fulfil before the fulfilment of the promises. In other words, God entered into a unilateral and unconditional covenant of love with Abram (Cf. Gen 12:2ff; 7). The lasting nature of this covenant is very clear from the fact, that it is God who alone takes obligations. His eternal fidelity to His promises makes it unbreakable in comparison with the covenant with the entire community of

³¹² Ibid., 115-116.

³¹³ Ibid., 116; See also Georg, Fischer, und Knut, Backhaus, Sühne und Versöhnung, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2000, 55.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 116.

³¹⁵ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, No.10.

³¹⁶ Cf., Karl, Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 4. Teil: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung. IV/1, Zollikon-Zürich, 1979, 22, 74. In his discussion on Reconciliation, Barth notes that „Reconciliation“ is the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man. It is God who takes the initiative to call man back to a new covenant, a new relationship. God accomplishes this through his Son Jesus Christ, who is the mediator between God and man. Man’s breaking of the covenant did not make God to remove the covenant but rather through act of His Grace and Sovereignty He re-established the Covenant through reconciliation in Jesus Christ. See also Dirk, Ansoerge, *Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit Gottes, die Dramatik von Vergebung und Versöhnung in bibeltheologischer, theologiegeschichtlicher und philosophiegeschichtlicher Perspektive*, Freiburg in Breisgau: Verlag Herder GmbH, 2009, 104.

Israel at Sinai. At Sinai God enters into an exclusive relationship with Israel, and through her, the entire humanity (Cf. Exodus 19ff; Deut 5ff). Unlike the covenant with Abram, the covenant at Sinai is bilateral and unilateral in that God imposes also obligations (the Decalogue, Exodus 20: 1-17; Cf. Deut 5:6-21) on Israel, which they must respect in order to be worthy of His love. The chosen people's commitment to the pact is made vivid in their univocal response: "Everything the Lord has said, we will do" (Exodus 19: 8). But Israel punctured this pact with God through their infidelity by breaking the stipulations of the Decalogue and freely broke away from the love-relationship with Yahweh. The broken relationship needed a remedy. It needed restoration through reconciliation. It was not Israel who went back to Yahweh for reconciliation. It was God who took the initiative looking for the lost humanity. God invites not only Israel back to the relationship of love with him, but this time the entire humanity through His prophet Jeremiah:

"Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a new covenant with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), but not like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, even though I was their Master, Yahweh declares. No, this is the covenant I shall make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares.... They will all know me, from the least to the greatest... since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

This classic new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah later found its concrete realization and fulfilment in Christ's event.³¹⁷

Christ became the eternal high priest, the Lamb of God and the perfect mediator of a "New Covenant" between God and His people (Heb 9:15). In the account of the institution of the Eucharist, the Synoptic Gospels show, through the use of the key terms of this prophecy, that it is ultimately

³¹⁷ Cf. H.K., LaRondelle, *The Israel of God, Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, Michigan, 1983, 9. LaRondelle argues that the modern interpretations of the prophetic word, which exclude Christ, his saving grace and his new-covenant people miss the divine mark because Christ is the first and last, the alpha and omega of the whole prophetic word.

fulfilled in Christ (Cf. Matt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Luke 22:20).³¹⁸ In this reading and with reference to Sacrifice, the „victim” is now Christ the Son of God and not an animal as was needed in the Old Testament. The old covenant has now given way for the New Covenant. Through his self-sacrifice on the cross and in accordance with the Divine initiative, Christ sealed the eternal New Covenant between God and His people, and achieved the much-needed reconciliation between God and humanity. One might be tempted to ask if this divine arrangement to reconcile with humanity suggests a passive role on the part of man. It would be a kind of going back to the naive faith Israel had in the unilateral and unconditional Abrahamic covenant that made them discard the obliging covenant at Sinai. For faith in the temple was for Israel enough to merit God’s love. The Divine invitation to reconciliation, just as we have observed above, demands man’s positive response. Man shows the dynamism of his response-ability by sincerely accepting his guilt and showing his readiness to make up for his failings. He decides to break away from his evil ways and chooses to do good.³¹⁹ He chooses to build a relationship based on Love and friendship instead of one based on hatred and aversion.³²⁰

5.2 Reconciliation in the New Testament

Apart from some places³²¹ in the gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, where some other terminologies are used to describe Christ’s message of reconciliation, it is only in the writings³²² of St. Paul that the term reconciliation is distinctly used. And the term “reconciliation”, which translates the Greek “*katallage, katallassein*”, is specifically used in New Testaments’ writings of St. Paul “*to describe the restoration of man and the world from a state of estrangement to the status of friendship with God and*

³¹⁸ Cf., Peter, Akaenyi, Covenant Theology in the context of the Divine plan of salvation for man, Lecture notes, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, 1993.

³¹⁹ Adrian, Schenker, Versöhnung und Sühne, Wege gewaltfreier Konfliktlösung im Alten Testament mit einem Ausblick auf das Neue Testament, 117.

³²⁰ Ibid., 117-118-

³²¹ Some examples in the Gospels where reconciliation is described include: Mark 1:14: Jesus preaches repentance; Luke 18:10-14: Jesus tells parables of reconciliation with God; Luke 15:11-32: the tax collector and the pharisee at prayer, reconciliation with God and reconciliation within the community (the prodigal son); Matthew 5:23-24: Jesus commands his followers to be reconciled (leave your offering at the altar and be reconciled) etc.

³²² Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the actual terminology of reconciliation, specifically in Romans 5:10-12; Romans 11:15; 1 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:16; and Colossians 1:20-23.

*his fellowman through the death of Jesus Christ.*³²³ It refers to God's initiative in repairing a broken relationship of love between Him and man. And one extraordinary point that should not be ignored in this reconciliation between God and man, which is also very conspicuous in the theology of Paul, is that this reconciliation is an exclusively Divine initiative. Two most significant Pauline Texts will serve our purpose here towards a better understanding of the New Testament's reconciliation theology, namely: **2 Corinthians 5: 17-21 and Ephesians 2:11-18.**

5.2.1 St. Paul's Teaching on Reconciliation

- a) "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2Corinthians 5:17-21).

In this text, Paul makes a systematic presentation of both the message and the ministry of reconciliation. The message is about what God definitively accomplished for humanity through His Son Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is action of God, who not reckoning man's disobedience sent His only Son to objectively restore man to the state of friendship and peace with Him. It was never dependent on man's good will nor man's desire for peace.³²⁴ This implies that God acted unconditionally, without imposing any punishment on man. He achieved this through His gracious and boundless love. The people that have been God's enemies have once again become His friends. The reconciliation brought by God is open for the entire humanity, for people of all ages and nations. No one is excluded from it. Through this single act of God the face of the earth is renewed and a new creation is born (2

³²³ T.J., Ryan "Reconciliation", 2985.

³²⁴ Gerhard, Sauter, "Versöhnung" als Thema der Theologie, 13.

Corinthians 5:17). God achieved this through the gratuitous death and resurrection of His only Son (Rom 5:10). And through this “*gratuitous action of Christ Jesus the sinner once again has access to the presence of God, is introduced once again into the royal court of God himself (Rom 5:2).*”³²⁵

Here Jesus is seen as mediator between God and man for through him and in him God chose to accomplish His work of reconciliation. He remains the perfect mediator of a “New Covenant” between God and His people (Heb 9:15). In this sense, his death on the cross should never be seen as having a propitiatory character, as if he were to have appeased the wrath of God.

After presenting the message of reconciliation, Paul also extends the invitation to people to accept this wonder of reconciliation and to allow it penetrate their lives³²⁶: “*we implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God*” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

This invitation to reconciliation does not imply that the reconciliation that God accomplished is not effective. Paul wants to emphasise that Reconciliation with God is a gift and so requires man's response. In order not to make Reconciliation an abstract theme, he applies it to his different communities as a response to situations of conflicts that exist among them. They should reconcile with God and with one another. Since there is a break in man's relationship with God, there is also a break in man's relationship with his fellowman. This break calls for reconciliation both from the vertical point of view and from the horizontal point of view. Reconciliation with God calls for reconciliation with individuals as well.

By Paul, reconciliation is not only a message. It is also a ministry, a service. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). This ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to the ambassadors of Christ, his apostles. This clearly indicated by Paul himself: “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5: 20). In other words, Paul tries to indicate that the message is of divine origin not of man. God makes use of human agents to spread His message of reconciliation. These human agents

³²⁵ Ibid., 13.

³²⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

are the representatives of Christ. And to be a representative of Christ means “to be in Christ”.

“Being in Christ” is a new mode of being. It means to be a new creation as Paul himself indicated. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5: 17)

To be an ambassador or an apostle of Christ or to be in Christ has a deep-rooted meaning. It is a vocation. Giorgio Agamben takes up the analysis of what it means to be called, to be an apostle in his commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Romans.³²⁷ He argues that the messianic call does not imply change of original identity but inner shift of every worldly status.³²⁸ He defines the messianic call as: “*die Widerrufung jeder konkreten, faktischen Berufung.*”³²⁹ It is not all about substituting one less authentic vocation with a more veritable one. It means to live a messianic life. He introduces a technical term used by Paul himself to delineate what it actually means to be in Christ or to be called by Christ. The term is “*hos me*”- Gk, “*als ob nicht*”³³⁰- German, which means “as though not”. The picture is made clear with the exposition of the text where Paul made use of this term, namely 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31: “*This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.*” To be or to live in Christ does not call for a new identity³³¹ but a change of attitude and in the way of perceiving oneself. The circumcised/uncircumcised lives as though not, the free/slave as though not and man/woman as though not.³³² This is also what it means to be a new creation. This way of life enables one not only to be reconciled with God in Christ but also with those who are

³²⁷ See the German edition of his work: Giorgio, Agamben, *Die Zeit, die bleibt*, Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006.

³²⁸ Ibid., 33.

³²⁹ Ibid., 34. This means “the revocation of every concrete and factual vocation”. It is not a kind of nullification but a definition of the only vocation that seems to be acceptable to me. It means to live a messianic life. See further explanation above.

³³⁰ Ibid., 35.

³³¹ Ibid., 37.

³³² Ibid., 37.

reconciled with Him in Christ. To be an ambassador of Christ or to be in Christ means therefore to be at the service of reconciliation. It means to take part in the ministry of reconciliation.

- b) "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:11-18).

We are not here concerned with the exegetical analysis of Paul's letter to the Ephesians but it will serve for a better understanding of the text above to say something about the context in which the letter was written. Tet-Lim N. Yee had done an extensive exegetical study of Ephesians.³³³ And here we will rely so much on the result of his research.

The situation with which the Jewish author³³⁴ of Ephesians was confronted was that of ethnic and religious hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles.

³³³ Tet-Lim N., Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul's Jewish Identity and Ephesians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

³³⁴ Tet-Lim Yee made a solid diagnosis of Ephesians 2, 11-22 and identified the author as having a Jewish background but making a kind of apologia for the Gentiles, naturally from the perspective of a Jew. His mission as a Christian Jew is reconciliatory. According to Yee Tet-Lim: "The bulk of evidence in Ephesians is quite enough to show that the author's language, terminology, thought and ideas can be best explained by the hypothesis that his conceptual background is sufficiently and characteristically Jewish. It has also become evident from the internal evidence of the letter itself that the author thinks and expresses himself in Jewish categories and images and suggests thus his strong Jewish background". "Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation": *Paul's Jewish Identity and Ephesians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 69.

The Jews have constructed a strong boundary between the Jews and the ethnic “others”, namely the non-Jews or the Gentiles. This boundary of estrangement and dichotomy was created out of their exclusivistic perception of their identity.³³⁵ Their perception of themselves as the chosen people of God and their perception of others as not belonging to the “body politic of Israel”³³⁶ were based on two facts: election through the covenant with God and circumcision.

The Jews perceived themselves as the chosen people of God, the children of the covenants of the Promise. This Divine privilege gives them a special ethnic identity that distinguishes them from the rest of the world, “foreigners” or the “ethnic others”. They now perceive the rest of the world as existing outside the body politic of Israel (Ephesians 2: 12ff). So, just as Tet-Lim Yee observes, *“instead of being seen as inclusive, able to embrace non-Jews, the ‘covenants of the promise’ have become a boundary marker, distinguishing the Jews who lay within their orbit from the Gentiles”*.³³⁷

With regards to circumcision, Tet-Lim Yee adumbrates:

*“Circumcision as the sign of the election was (and still is) for the Jews the first act of full covenant membership and obligation. In the self-understanding of Jews, circumcision entails the first commitment to live as a Jew, to ‘judaize’ and to adopt the Jewish way of conduct as a whole... Circumcision is a sure sign of Jewish identity and not least, a bond which holds the Jews as the elect of God.”*³³⁸

Circumcision is the external sign that defines the Jewishness of the Jews. It is the external seal of their covenant with God and thus *“an essential part of Jewish ethnic and religious identities.”*³³⁹ Hence the Jews made a physical dichotomy between circumcised/Jews and uncircumcised/non-Jews as evident in Ephesians 2: 11.

³³⁵ Ibid., 72.

³³⁶ Tet-Lim Yee observes that “ ‘the body politic of Israel’ ... was ethnocentric and exclusivistic”, in that “the Gentiles who lacked the ‘mark’ of the elect in their ‘flesh’ were by their origin of ethnicity excluded from it by the Jews....” Ibid., 102.

³³⁷ Ibid., 105.

³³⁸ Ibid., 81.

³³⁹ Ibid., 81.

Their Divine election and circumcision made the Jews to be ethnocentric and see themselves as occupying a pre-eminent position over the rest of humanity.³⁴⁰ The result of this domineering position is the exclusion and marginalisation of the ethnic others from the Divine privilege. And this ethnocentric attitude created a hostile and divisive atmosphere in the church made up of the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. There were alienation, estrangement and ethnic sentiments in the Christian community that made reconciliation urgent. The author took it upon himself to intervene by inviting the entire Christian community of Ephesus to reconciliation.

In order to accomplish this, it was necessary for him to assume a neutral position by distancing himself (Ephesians 2: 11) from the perspective of his native Jews who polarised the one human family.³⁴¹ He made a deconstruction of the Jewish and Gentile identities and presented a messianic alternative. The author perceives the death of Christ as “*the solution to the problem of ethnic estrangement*”.³⁴² From henceforth the death of Christ has made the two separate ethnic groups into one. Those who were ‘far off’ and those who were ‘near’ have been brought together by the blood of Christ: “but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (Ephesians 2: 13-15). The author draws the attention of his recipients to the great work accomplished by Christ who broke all the barriers that divided humanity (Ephesians 2: 13-19) and call for a future of harmony and peaceful co-existence. This is the overriding import of two metaphors employed by the author, namely: “one new man” and “one body”. According to Tet-Lim Yee, These two metaphors “*are both society-creating and community-redefining metaphors; they are meant to reframe the notion of the people of God and to undercut the old ethnic forms of self-identification and allegiance as they replace them with a new community-identity in Christ. They lay bare the way in which Jew and Gentile could be correlated within*

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 87

³⁴¹ Ibid., 82-85.

³⁴² Ibid., 119.

one community-body, namely the body of Christ, and prepare for the Gentiles a place on which to stand within a redefined, inclusive community".³⁴³ Undercutting the old ethnic forms of self-identification and allegiance and replacing them with a new community-identity in Christ does not in any way imply conformism or loss of a previous identity, but more a change of attitude or way of perceiving the other. It means transcending all ethnic biases and one's self-identity "*by developing an all-embracing attitude toward the ethnic 'other'*".³⁴⁴

5.3 Reconciliation: A Theological Perspective

As we have seen above, "reconciliation" as a theme has assumed a deep theological importance. This theme has been variedly developed in Christian theology. The theory of "*satisfaction*", as developed by Anselm of Canterbury in his work "*Cur Deus Homo*" "Why did God become man", has up till date deeply influenced the development of the Christian doctrine of reconciliation as represented in both Protestant and Catholic theologies.³⁴⁵

According to Anselm, the order of the universe as established by God was destroyed through the sin of mankind. God himself was also wounded through this disorder. The divine Justice therefore demands that this destruction of the original order of the universe be remedied. And this remedy can only be accomplished through satisfaction. It would be contrary to justice if God were to effect this remedy out of sheer mercy without compensation.³⁴⁶ God must therefore demand compensation, that is, satisfaction from man. Since sin is directed against the infinite God, therefore the satisfaction itself must be infinite. The idea behind this thought is the Germanic and early medieval feudal system, where the sin against a feudal Lord is greater in weight than the sin against the vassal. It merits also a greater satisfaction. Since God is infinite, the finite man is not therefore capable of rendering this infinite satisfaction to appease God for sin against

³⁴³ Ibid., 126.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 127. See also my earlier presentation of Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of what it means to "be in Christ" through the use of the technical term "*hos me*".

³⁴⁵ José, Comblin, „The Theme of Reconciliation and Theology in Latin America“, in: Reconciliation, Nation and Churches in Latin America, ed. by Iain S. Maclean, England: Aschgate Publishing Limited, 2006, 154.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, Lat.-deutsch (ed. F.S. Schmitt), Darmstadt, 1956, 41, (I 24).

Him. Only man is obliged to infinite restitution, but only God can make it. So it is necessary to have someone who is both God and man, the God-man. Only through him is this satisfaction possible.

This theory answers the question concerning the necessity of Incarnation, which Anselm made the title of his book: *Cur Deus Homo*? But it does not yet answer the questions: why must Christ die for our own sins? Could God not forgive our sins and achieve the all needed reconciliation without the death of His only Son? Anselm replies by noting that, in order to render the all needed infinite satisfaction, it becomes again necessary that the God-man must give his infinitely valuable life. He must die: and willingly too. For it is only through his death that God can forgive humanity.³⁴⁷ Therefore through his voluntary death, Jesus has made satisfaction for the sins of humanity. Through the death of God-man reconciliation was made possible between God and man.

The explanation given by Anselm is still not satisfactory because it raised again some fundamental theological questions. Apart from the question concerning the necessity of Christ's sacrifice for God's work of reconciliation, other questions might be: Must blood be shed for the sake of reconciliation and what's more the blood of an innocent man? Does such a view not contradict God's justice and mercy, which He made manifest through Jesus Christ?³⁴⁸ Does the teaching about the "vicarious" suffering and death of Christ not reduce human freedom and responsibility?³⁴⁹

Peter Abelard rejected Anselm's view on the necessity of satisfaction for reconciliation and insisted that God could have achieved His work of reconciliation without satisfaction. He maintained that the Incarnation and Christ's suffering passion death was motivated by the pure love of God. We are therefore justified through the love of God.³⁵⁰ However, the views of Anselm and Abelard have prevailed in both Protestant and Catholic

³⁴⁷ Hans, Kessler, Erlösung als Befreiung, 14-17 See also Thomas, Präpper, Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte, 35-45.

³⁴⁸ Gerhard, Sauter, Versöhnung als Thema der Theologie, 37. Sauter indicates that this is the critique of the Socinians, who are the disciples of Fausto Socinini (1539-1604) against the satisfaction theory of Anselm. They hold the view that the theory of vicarious suffering and satisfaction is inconsistent with the Divine justice and mercy.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 62-69.

theologies. The Protestant theology however connects the doctrine of reconciliation with the doctrine of Justification to emphasize that reconciliation is purely the work of God.³⁵¹ This view has become dominant in Protestant theology of reconciliation and it is important to note that more attention has been given to the theme of reconciliation by Protestant authors than the Catholics in the contemporary epoch.³⁵²

Jose´ Comblin tried to explore the somewhat restricted history of the development of the theme of reconciliation in the Catholic tradition.³⁵³ He noted that in dealing with the theme of ´reconciliation´ the Catholic Church restricted it to the sacrament of penance, whereby the sinner is reconciled with God and with the Church through public confession of sins and later through private confession. He also noted that the term ´reconciliation´ “*was not developed theologically*”, but was rather used “*as a canonical juridical term.*”³⁵⁴ It was not until the Second Vatican Council that the term gained an unprecedented attention. And According to Comblin:

*Though the Second Vatican Council did not create a theology of reconciliation, the term... was used in the context of the dialogue between the Church and the world and all those sectors more or less separated from the church. In this manner then it set the bases for possible future development.*³⁵⁵

As a post Vatican II development, the theme of reconciliation was again taken up by the Synod of Bishops of 1983 and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation³⁵⁶ that followed became a motivating force for the churches in all the Continents to consciously devote their attention towards developing a theology of reconciliation. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation made the following observations concerning a great longing for reconciliation in the face of divisions among peoples and the need to reflect on the theme of reconciliation:

³⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

³⁵² Jose´, Comblin, „The Theme of Reconciliation and Theology in Latin America“, in: Reconciliation, Nation and Churches in Latin America, 136.

³⁵³ See his article above.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 137.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 137.

³⁵⁶ See John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Reconciliatio et Penitentia of 2 December 1984.

Nevertheless, that same inquiring gaze, if it is discerning enough, detects in the very midst of division an unmistakable desire among people of good will and true Christians to mend the divisions, to heal the wounds and to re-establish at all levels an essential unity. This desire arouses in many people a real longing for reconciliation even in cases where there is no actual use of this word. Some consider reconciliation as an impossible dream which ideally might become the lever for a true transformation of society. For others it is to be gained by arduous efforts and therefore a goal to be reached through serious reflection and action. Whatever the case, the longing for sincere and consistent reconciliation is without a shadow of doubt a fundamental driving force in our society, reflecting an irrepressible desire for peace. And it is as strongly so as the factors of division, even though this is a paradox... Therefore every institution or organization concerned with serving people and saving them in their fundamental dimensions must closely study reconciliation in order to grasp more fully its meaning and significance and in order to draw the necessary practical conclusions.³⁵⁷

It was within this context, according to Comblin, that the President of CELAM³⁵⁸ proposed in 1985 to Latin American theologians “*to study the theme of reconciliation and develop a ‘theology of reconciliation’*” that will respond to political realities of Latin America.³⁵⁹ The present article by José Comblin³⁶⁰ was not only a timely response to this proposal by the CELAM President but has contributed immensely to the articulation of the theology

³⁵⁷ Ibid., no 3 and 4.

³⁵⁸ CELAM is short form of **Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano**, meaning: *Latin American Episcopal Conference*. It is a conference of the Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America, created in 1955 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

³⁵⁹ José Comblin, 137.

³⁶⁰ José Comblin, „The Theme of Reconciliation and Theology in Latin America“, in: *Reconciliation, Nation and Churches in Latin America*, ed by Iain S. Maclean, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006. Comblin José is a Belgian Catholic theologian and social critic, and member of the faculty at the Catholic university of Louvain and resident in Brazil. Comblin is author of over forty books and has made immense contribution to the Latin American theology of liberation.

of reconciliation by opening the paths and the perspectives such a theology of reconciliation should not ignore.³⁶¹ In this article, by meticulously exploring the biblical, historical, philosophical and theological perspectives on the theme of reconciliation, he tried to articulate answers to the following questions posed by political realities of Latin America: What is the significance of reconciliation for Latin America? What are the demands for an authentic reconciliation in Latin America? What are the inevitable paths to reconciliation in Latin America and how can the Church contribute to authentic reconciliation?³⁶² His vision of reconciliation is not restricted to Latin America but extends to all the Continents and especially to societies that have undergone the humiliating experiences of exploitation, enslavement and defeat.³⁶³

5.3.1 The Christology of Reconciliation

Christology as we know deals with reflection on the Person and work of Christ. And by the Person of Christ we mean his being, life, death and resurrection. The question that is to be answered here would be: of what Christological relevance can the Person of Christ be within the context of reconciliation? Kasper Walter made an important observation with regards to this:

*“The doctrine of the Incarnation has to do with the reconciliation of God and the world”.*³⁶⁴

This implies that it is for the very reason of achieving the all needed reconciliation between Him and the world that God took flesh to become man. And God’s work of reconciliation did not stop with Incarnation but found its fullness with the passion, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore any Christological discussion that ignores the reconciling

³⁶¹ Jose´, Comblin, , „The Theme of Reconciliation and Theology in Latin America“, in: Reconciliation, Nation and Churches in Latin America, etd by Iain S. Maclean, England: Aschgate Publishing Limited, 2006, 135.

³⁶² Ibid., 136.

³⁶³ Ibid., 170.

³⁶⁴ Walter, Kasper, Jesus The Christ, Wellwood, England: Burns and Oates Limited, 1976, 16.

mission of Christ would therefore be incomplete. This view is validated by John Paul II, who noted that “...*reconciliation is a gift of God, an initiative on his part. But our faith teaches us that this initiative takes concrete form in the mystery of Christ the redeemer, the reconciler and the liberator of man from sin in all its forms.*”³⁶⁵ This is why, according to John Paul II, “*St. Paul likewise does not hesitate to sum up in this task and function the incomparable mission of Jesus of Nazareth, the word and the Son of God made man.*”³⁶⁶

Jesus Christ as the reconciler forms the core of Paul’s Christology as we have seen above.³⁶⁷ He is even more specific on this in his letter to the Romans: “for if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more can we be sure that, being now reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. What is more, we are filled with exultant trust in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have already gained our reconciliation” (Rom 5:10f). Jesus Christ has reconciled humanity with God through his death on the cross. He made mankind lovable again before God. We are therefore once again worthy of Divine favour and are at peace with God our Father. “His purpose in this was, by restoring peace, to create a single New Man out of the two of them, and through the cross, to reconcile them both to God in one Body; in his own person he killed the hostility” (Eph 4:15-16). Even St John expressed the same Christocentricity of the message of reconciliation in the eleventh chapter of his Gospel when he noted “that Jesus was to die for the nation- and not for the nation only, but also to gather together into one the scattered children of God” (John 11: 51-52). This implies that the death of Jesus Christ not only achieved reconciliation between God and man but also reconciliation between man and his fellow. John Paul II distinctly sums up the whole Christology of reconciliation as follows:

...We can therefore legitimately relate all our reflections on the whole mission of Christ to his mission as the one who reconciles.

³⁶⁵ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, No. 7.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 7.

³⁶⁷ See our analysis on this in 5.2.1. above.

*Thus there must be proclaimed once more the Church's belief in Christ's redeeming act, in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, as the cause of man's reconciliation in its twofold aspect of liberation from sin and communion of grace with God.*³⁶⁸

5.3.2 The Soteriological Dimension of Reconciliation

Soteriology deals with the economy of salvation and reconciliation remains its central mystery.³⁶⁹ Hans Kessler³⁷⁰ observed that the hope and the experience of salvation in Christianity are so closely connected with Jesus of Nazareth. This is true of the Christianity of the west as it is also true of the Christianity of the East and the Reformation.

Salvation is always spoken of in connection with the reality of Christ's death that one often hears or reads: "We are saved through the death of Jesus Christ". And we also pray during the Stations of the Cross: "We adore you O Christ and we praise you; because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world". How then can we understand such expressions today? What is then the meaning of salvation?

The word salvation derives from the Greek word "*soteria*", which is the common word, used in the history of religious doctrine of salvation. In Latin usage, it is a comprehensive term for being delivered from personal or collective suffering and evil.³⁷¹ In the Hellenistic culture, gods received the title "*Soter*" especially when they delivered mankind from all forms of temporal evils such as sicknesses or natural disasters.³⁷² The term was later used for God (Ps 24, 5; 26, 9; Lk 1, 47; 1 Ti 1, 1 etc) and for Jesus Christ (Lk 2, 11; Phil 3, 20 etc).³⁷³ In both usages, "*Soter*" simply means the Saviour. In Judaism and Christianity the concept "Salvation" assumes a significant meaning especially in the study of Soteriology.

³⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, No. 7.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 7.

³⁷⁰ Hans, Kessler, *Erlösung als Befreiung*, 11.

³⁷¹ G., O'Collins, and E., Farrugia, "Salvation", in: *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, New York: 2000, 233.

³⁷² Cf. K. H., Schelkle, „*Soter, Soteria*“, in: *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 2. Auflage, Band 111, ed. Hörst Balz und Gerhard Schneider, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1983, 781-788.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 781-788.

The creation account in the Book of Genesis presents the account of the special creation and elevation of man, which is followed by the fall of man, and consequently God's loving plan of salvation, which is fulfilled in His Son Jesus Christ through his passion, death and resurrection. The Exodus event recalls for the chosen people the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, a sort of temporal salvation, that points to the ultimate salvation, which God would accomplish for the entire humanity (Ex.12: 1-28).

In the New Testament and in the Christian tradition, the concept of Salvation is totally centred on Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He is the only Son of God, the saviour of mankind (Cf. Lk 2, 11; Acts, 13, 24; 1 John 4,13; 2Pet 2:21, 2Tim 1, 11). And the type of salvation, which Jesus Christ brings, is a unique one. It takes care of the material and the spiritual aspects of man. It is holistic and integral and aims at the total redemption of the individual human person and the entire humanity. It is however not restricted to humanity alone, it extend to the order of nature or cosmos.

An American Archbishop once asked his student one of the most important theological questions of our time: "why, if all creation became disordered as a result of original sin, why was there not pantheism instead of the Incarnation?"³⁷⁴ He was immediately thrown out of theological board for asking such a question. Apart from testing the rationality of this particular student, whom he expected to answer "*that since lower nature had fallen through man, it was fitting that all lower nature should be reconciled to God through man*"³⁷⁵, the Archbishop was also trying to make an echo of his observation that something has happened to our cosmos. The question would seem, if humanity needs reconciliation, what is with the cosmos? Does it need it too? It is purely an ecological question that does not however remove the necessity of a theological attention.

We cannot today deny the obvious fact that our nature, our cosmos, has been treated with great vehemence in all the continents. Man has committed the most ignoble act against nature. Globally, there is a rapid increase of

³⁷⁴ , Fulton, J., Sheen, In the Fullness of Time, with compilation and edition by Patricia Cossmann, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2000, 115-116.

³⁷⁵ Fulton, J., Sheen, Treasure in Clay, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993, 54.

deforestation of tropical rain forests and fast spread of desertification. These together with the uninhibited exploitation of natural resources, lead to the daily death of several dozens of plant and animal species. We have exploited, misused and polluted our environment. We have not protected our species and we have not preserved our natural landscapes. The situation is even worse with the fast development in science and technology. H. Gruhl, one of the voices crying in the wilderness summarizes it thus:

*We are waging a reckless war of supremacy with nature, and nature has been rendered defenceless. In a matter of decades we plunder what nature has taken millions of years to amass. The forests are going up in smoke, the desert is spreading in all directions, the air is poisoned, and the waters have become a sewer. The human technological total victory is ending in total self-annihilation.*³⁷⁶

The condition of the cosmos today needs urgent attention. Nature cries for help. It moans for salvation and reconciliation. St. Paul presents the picture in this way: “For created universe waits with eager expectation for God’s sons to be revealed. It was made the victim of frustration, not by its own choice. Nature did not become rebellious because it willed it, but because of him who made it so: because of us. Yet always there was hope, because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God. Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all of its parts, as if in the pangs of childbirth” (Cf. Rom 8: 20-22). This nature’s longing for reconciliation is also accomplished through the redemptive work of Christ “because” St. Paul notes, “God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross” (Col 1: 19-20). The whole of creation is therefore involved in reconciliation “till the universal restoration comes” (Acts 3:21), when all creatures will again meet Christ, “the first to be

³⁷⁶ H., Gruhl, Ein Planet wird geplündert; Schöpfungsglaube und Verantwortung für unsere Erde, Regensburg: 1978, 22.

born from the dead” (Col 1:18), who will then subject everything to God, “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). One cannot therefore complete any treatise on Soteriology without addressing its ecological dimension. And soteriological discourse is therefore a discourse on atonement, redemption and God’s work of reconciliation accomplished through His son Jesus Christ.

5.3.3. The Ecclesiology of Reconciliation

The Ecclesiology of reconciliation should be understood within its Christological perspective. For there can be no meaningful discussion on the Church as such without deriving its starting point from Christology. By this we mean that the Church, as the mystical body of Christ, continues the very mission of Christ her founder. We have dwelt much on the Ecclesiology of reconciliation in chapter 4 above (see above, my discussion in 4.2.2 - The Church as Reconciler and in 4.3 - The Reconciling Mission of the Church in Africa). But I re-iterate what I have already said on this topic by summing up again with the words of Pope John Paul II:

To the hands and lips of the apostles, his messengers, the Father has mercifully entrusted a ministry of reconciliation, which they carry but in out in a singular way by virtue of the power to act "in persona Christi. " But the message of reconciliation has also been entrusted to the whole community of believers, to the whole fabric of the church, that is to say, the task of doing everything possible to witness to reconciliation and to bring it about in the world.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 8.

B: THE AFRICAN UNDERSTANDING OF RECONCILIATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE IGBOS OF SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

5.4 Reconciliation as “Ubuntu” in the Light of Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa

In order to construct a Christian response to the evil of apartheid in South Africa that has divided humanity according to skin-colour or race, Archbishop Desmond Tutu looked deep into the African basic philosophy for a peaceful co-existence and adapted the term “Ubuntu” as not only philosophically but also both politically and theologically relevant.³⁷⁸ Tutu was particularly concerned, not only with bringing to an end the evil of apartheid, but above all with the reconciliation of all races in South Africa, so that people may begin to live as one family of God devoid of resentments and spirit of revenge. He therefore chose to theologically point to the entire South Africans, irrespective of racial origin, to re-discover the great value rooted in the African worldview, where a person’s being is “caught up” and “inextricably bound up” in the common humanity of all.³⁷⁹ He posited the question: *“what is it that constrained so many to choose to forgive rather than to demand retribution, to be so magnanimous and ready to forgive rather than wreak revenge?”*³⁸⁰ His answer: **Ubuntu!**

“Ubuntu” according to Michael Battle means:

*“‘humanity’ and is related both to umuntu, which is the category of intelligent human force that includes spirits, the human dead, and the living, and to ntu, which is God’s being as metadynamic (active rather than metaphysical)”.*³⁸¹

From the above one understands that “ubuntu” refers to the community of human persons as opposed to “umuntu” which refers to an individual person. Hence the Zulus of South Africa have the proverb: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, “a person is a person through other persons.” The Xhosa people of South Africa from where Archbishop Desmond Tutu originates have a similar

³⁷⁸ Michael, Battle, *Reconciliation, the Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997, 1.

³⁷⁹ Desmond, Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, New York: Image Doubleday, 1999, 31.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 31.

³⁸¹ Michael, Battle, *Reconciliation, the Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 39.

proverb: “*ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu,*’ which, translated roughly, means ‘each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others’ or ‘a person depends on other people to be a person.’”³⁸²

Ubuntu is deeply rooted in the African sense of community as opposed to the Western individualistic way of life. Tutu notes that *ubuntu* opposes the Cartesian principle of “*Cogito ergo sum*” and affirms the essence of human being as a being with others:

“*I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.*”³⁸³

He goes on to describe the characteristics of a person with *ubuntu*:

“*A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.*”³⁸⁴

A person with *ubuntu* works therefore not only for his own good but also and above all for the common good of all. He abhors anything that goes contrary to or diminishes the common good. He contributes immensely to a harmonious and peaceful co-existence of all. Such vices as uncontrolled “*anger, resentment, lust for revenge and even success through aggressive competitiveness*”³⁸⁵ that bring dichotomy and distortion in human relationships are not found in a person with *ubuntu*. A person with *ubuntu* seeks reconciliation instead of revenge! He seeks peace instead of war!

Tutu observed that wherever people forgive one another and decide to live as brothers and sisters, there is *ubuntu* at work. And wherever people take machetes and guns to kill themselves, there is *ubuntu* abroad. While taking examples in some African countries he noted:

Ubuntu was abroad in the post-uhuru Kenya. One could point to the opposite that had occurred in the Belgian Congo in the early

³⁸² Ibid., 39.

³⁸³ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 31.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 31.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 31.

*1960s, and more recently in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Where was ubuntu then? But in Zimbabwe, after one of the most bruising bush wars, Robert Mugabe on the night of his election victory in 1980 amazed all by talking about reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. That was ubuntu at work. In Namibia after SWAPO won the first democratic elections in 1989, President Sam Nujoma wowed everyone with his engaging smile. There were no reprisals against whites. That was ubuntu in evidence.*³⁸⁶

South Africa after the collapse of the obnoxious apartheid-regime, which left uncountable number of victims and with the emergence of Nelson Mandela as the immediate post-apartheid President of South Africa is a veritable evidence of a place where *ubuntu* was and is still at work. It was really *kairos* for South Africa! Tutu observed that Nelson Mandela became a somewhat personification of *ubuntu*. He became a “*heroic embodiment of reconciliation and forgiveness*”³⁸⁷, in spite of all the humiliations (climaxed with his imprisonment for 27years), which he suffered from the apartheid regime. Instead of being obsessed with bitter resentments and desire for revenge, he immediately extended his bruised hands and opened his wounded heart to both friends and foes and invited all to national reconciliation through the constitution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). By constituting the TRC he delivered the all-important and the most urgent message for the entire people of South Africa: the message of *ubuntu*! The message is summed up as follows:

This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of color, race, class, belief or sex. The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 32.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 39.

reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society.

*The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu not for victimization.*³⁸⁸

It is a message of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is a message of self-transcendence. All these are included in the hermeneutics of *ubuntu*.

The ingenuity of Tutu lies not only in re-discovering the great value of African worldview as expressed through *ubuntu* but above all by giving it a theological perspective.³⁸⁹ For Tutu, according to Battle Michael, the theological perspective of *ubuntu* lies in the great discovery of that, which every human person possesses, namely, *imago Dei*.³⁹⁰ We are all *imago Dei* because God created us all to be so. This is our common identity. This is our common humanity. This is our *ubuntu*! This implies that *ubuntu* transcends all races, colours and religions. *Ubuntu* is therefore not only “an alternative way of being in a hostile world”³⁹¹ but an existential response to the world in the midst of cultural, ethnic and religious pluralisms. *Ubuntu* makes globalisation and the existence of mega cities (e.g. Los Angeles and Lagos in Nigeria) as we have them today possible. This is because *ubuntu* enables us to discover that we have God as our Father and that we are all diverse members of one family of God. That we all share in the one humanity!

5.5 Reconciliation in some African Traditions

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 45.

³⁸⁹ Ubuntu theology is very popular in South African context. Many authors have devoted their attention researching on the Ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu. Michael Battle’s book: *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* assumes a prominent position.

³⁹⁰ Michael, Battle, 5.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

In order to restore broken relationships within the community and among communities and in order to ensure for peaceful co-existence and to allay fears and mutual suspicion, African traditions have certain rituals that are influenced from their *Weltanschauung*. These rituals are in form of covenants.³⁹² These covenant rituals are seen in many spheres of human relationships be it by contracting a marriage, by entering into business partnership, settlement of disputes between couples, in the families and between two warring tribes or ethnic groups, et cetera. Kasomo Daniel describes such covenants thus:

*The most profound dimension of African beliefs and practices was embedded in covenants of peace after warfare. These covenants restored the relationships of warring communities. They affected the entire communities at loggerheads and were witnessed by the members of these communities, the living dead, the ancestors and by God as well. To break such a covenant was an anathema.*³⁹³

He goes further to describe the details of such a covenant taking the example of the covenant between Luo and Maasai tribes after their battle:

The Luo – Maasai covenant, exhibits a strong feature of religious dimension in peace and reconciliation process. It started with convening of inter-communal meeting on the boarder where the battle ensued. This was as a result prolonged war or conflict. The participants comprised men, women, youth and children. Branches of poison trees and weapons of warfare were placed along the border so as to form a fence between the antagonists. A dead black dog was placed across the fence, cut into two and blood allowed to spill on the fence and to the ground on both sides of the fence. Meanwhile, the lactating mothers of conflicting groups exchanged their babies across the fence so that each could suckle the babies of the other group. Prayers led by respective elders and religious leaders followed

³⁹² Cf. Daniel, Kasomo, „The Position of African Traditional Religion in Conflict Prevention”, in: International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Vol. 2(2), February 2010, 025.

³⁹³ Ibid., 026.

*this. They beseeched God to bless the covenant of peace. The chopped off branches of poison trees, whose sap was used to poison arrows and the slain black dog symbolised that evil had been severed, thus vicariously bringing peace. The exchange of the babies across the fence by the mothers and the suckling of one another's babies implied that warring parties had become kith and kin.*³⁹⁴

Quite ordinary the peace covenant described above might appear, but there is more to it than meets the eye. Such a covenant of peace as witnessed in many African traditions has gone a long way to bring reconciliation among peoples. The presence of rituals like the killing of an animal, the spilling of blood, the suckling of one another's babies by the lactating mothers of both parties was enough to convince the reconciling communities of the good intention involved. It allayed fear and mutual suspicion. God and the ancestors served as witnesses of such a peace covenant and should anyone go contrary to the terms of the covenant, he or she has to face the wrath of God and the ancestors. Such a peace covenant was taken seriously and was by no means superficial.

Kasomo also reports of another reconciliation ritual among the Abagusii in Kenya. The details of such a covenant, according to him include: the pouring of libations by the elders of both reconciling parties, the sacrifice of a white goat, a bull and a black cock, the spilling of the blood of these sacrificial animals, the eating of the flesh of the animals and the drinking by both parties from the same calabash.³⁹⁵ Such detailed process was also seen in many African traditions with somewhat little local or regional adaptations as we are now going to see when we make a case study of the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria.

5.6. "Igba ndu" as the Ritual of Reconciliation among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria

The Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria have a common ritual of renewing relationships, establishing trust in new relationships and restoring broken

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 026.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 026.

relationships. This ritual has both cultural and religious undertones and captures again the African *Weltanschauung*, where there is an inseparable relation between the physical world and the spiritual world. The Igbos are very conscious not only of maintaining the harmony between the two worlds but also of assuring the existence of such a harmony among humans as a break in the human harmony implies automatically a break in harmony with the spiritual world, which may spell doom for the living. So when human relationships are endangered in any form through misunderstanding, distrust or conflict, such relationships are again restored or renewed through the ritual known among the Igbos as "*Igba ndu*."³⁹⁶

What is actually "*Igba ndu*"? The term "*Igba ndu*" itself is a combination of two words "*igba*", meaning to bind or to tie (bond, in terms of binding together) and "*ndu*" meaning life. "*Igba ndu*" therefore literally means to bind life together. Two or more individuals agree to commit themselves to this one and only life that belongs to them, not as individuals, but as a group or community. *Igba ndu* means in this sense to commit oneself to life and its values. This understanding is rooted in the people's belief in the sacredness and oneness of life. The Igbos believe that life is sacred and belongs to the community. That is why the entire community comes together to rejoice at birth of a new life. This new life is protected and guided by the community all through the various stages of life till death. Even at death the individual continues to live in the community as an ancestor, otherwise known as the "living dead". The Igbos strongly believe in the continuity of life. The individual life is intimately linked with the life of the community and continues in the life of the offspring. This is evident in the personal names the Igbos give to their children: *Ndu ka aku* (life is greater than wealth), *Ndu bu isi* (life is the head of all things), *Ndu bu eze* (life is the king), *Chi bu ndu* (God is life) *Chi nwe ndu* (God is the owner of life) etc.

It is therefore within this context that two or more individuals come together and decide to commit themselves, through *Igba ndu*, to life. Committing oneself to life means taking the commitment to promote life and to work for the common interest. It implies the decision to pursue those values that

³⁹⁶ E., Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 86-87.

promote common good – the *summum bonum*. With *Igba ndu* ritual two individuals or communities choose to transcend themselves and their persons as individuals and work for a harmonious and peaceful co-existence of all. They abhor anything that works against this purpose. *Igba ndu* can therefore be understood as the ritual of institutionalisation of a community of love and peace. This is evident in the *Igba ndu* ritual made between six villages of Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo described by Chinua Achebe in his *Arrow of God*:

*“In the very distant past..., the six villages – Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo – lived as different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine men to install a common deity for them. This deity, which the fathers of the six villages made, was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place that became Nkwo Market and the other half was thrown into the stream that became Mili Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief Priest. From that day, they were never again beaten by an enemy.”*³⁹⁷

The above description of *Igba ndu* between six communities by Chinua Achebe is a vivid presentation of both the structure and the motif of *Igba ndu* in Igbo tradition. This we are going to see later when we present Uzukwu’s description of the structure of *Igba ndu* ritual among the Igbos. But what is to be observed in the present description is that the motif of every *Igba ndu* among the Igbos is the (re)-establishment of a new community of love and peace devoid of fear and mistrust. The establishment of a new community of love and peace implies transcending the walls of the old communities. In the case of these six communities, it meant above all transcending one’s original identity in order to accept a new identity. As we have seen above, those six

³⁹⁷ Chinua, Achebe, *Arrow of God*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Hienemann, 1974, 14-15.

communities dropped their original names and were transformed into one new community: *Umuaro*. The dropping of their original names does not imply loss of identity but signifies a change in attitude and in way of perceiving each other. Although they had lived as different peoples, and each worshipping its own deity, although they had perceived each other as enemies, they now decided to live as one and to commit themselves to one life of the new community. They decided to perceive themselves as brothers and sisters, children of a common deity, *Ulu*. This commitment to life is perpetual although from the human dimension of its existence, subject (at least not wilfully) to disruption and renewal. This is similar to the nature of the covenant between God and the chosen people of Israel.

In the real sense of it, *Igba ndu* is better understood as making of a covenant³⁹⁸ between two or more individuals, groups or communities. *Igba ndu* covenant can be prophylactic (for prevention of mistrust and conflict) or healing (for reconciliation after a conflict). Uzuokuwu was describing the later when he wrote:

*“Marriage in crisis and relationships between families, business associates, clans, village-groups are ritually renewed when endangered by betrayal or failure.”*³⁹⁹

Our present concern is with *Igba ndu* as the ritual of reconciliation.

Certain symbols are needed for *igba ndu* ritual and these I may call the material objects of *Igba ndu*. They include kola nut, palm wine, hot drink, *ofo*⁴⁰⁰ (consecrated stick cut from the *detarium senegalense* tree), blood of the covenanting partners, *nzu* (white chalk), *ogirisi* leaf (from the life tree)⁴⁰¹ etc. The formal object of *Igba ndu* ritual is incantation (in form of prayer) of the *dibia* or the priest as well as the declaration of the intention of the covenanting partners.

³⁹⁸ See also Uzuokuwu, Op. Cit., 87.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁰⁰ Ojike Mbonu defined “*ofo*” as “a sacred symbol of truth, justice, law and authority among the Igbo. It is used principally in sacrificial rituals...” See Ejizu C., *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1986, 23.

⁴⁰¹ See , E., Uzuokuwu, *Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997, 280.

During the *Igba ndu* covenant, “God, ancestors and divinities (especially the powerful Earth Spirit)”⁴⁰² are invited as witnesses. Should anyone or any group of the covenanting partners go contrary to the terms of the covenant, such a person or group will face the consequences as justice from God or the divinities.⁴⁰³ Uzukwu describes the details of *Igba ndu* ritual as follows:

*The tradition ritual (Igba ndu) opens with (1) an invocation of God, spirits, and ancestors, (2) a declaration of the points at issue necessitating the ritual, as already agreed upon by the parties, (3) and the commitment of the parties in form of an oath or promise to abide by the terms declared. This is called inu iyi (literally, swallowing or drinking iyi). Iyi is a mystical object imbued with force through contact with God or spirits. Iyi is also a generic term for stream. Each stream is guarded by a spirit. Drinking iyi leaves one open to the power of the spirit to save or to kill.*⁴⁰⁴

Analysing the points exposed above by Uzukwu, one notices the presence of God, spirits and ancestors as witnesses to the covenant. The declaration of the points at issue necessitating the *Igba ndu* means in this sense the agreement to stop the conflict or in the case of warring parties, to stop the war and to avoid anything that will lead to another war in the future and to commit oneself to peaceful co-existence. The taking of an oath in the form of inu iyi is a ritual form of commitment that makes the *Igba ndu* covenant binding on both parties, and of course makes one prone to the consequences (in this case the wrath of God, divinities and ancestors) should one go contrary to the terms of *Igba ndu*. In some cases⁴⁰⁵, *inu iyi* might imply the drinking of blood taken from both parties or from the sacrificial animals. From the above exposition one could see that the structure of *Igba ndu*

⁴⁰² E., Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 87.

⁴⁰³ Justice comes in form of mysterious death(s) of the individual(s) concerned or in the community or mysterious sickness such as madness, barrenness, lack of progress in life. These are seen as punishment being meted to the individual(s) by God or divinities.

⁴⁰⁴ E., Uzukwu, Worship as Body Language, 280.

⁴⁰⁵ This is obtainable in the case where two lovers want to commit themselves to a life of perpetual love through marriage covenant. The two lovers seal this covenant by drinking their own blood and making the promise of fidelity and should anyone go contrary to the terms of the covenant, he or she should face the wrath of God, divinities and ancestors. This implies that such a person shall never have a peaceful life.

covenant in Igbo tradition is similar to that of covenant tradition in ANE and the Old Testament.

It is interesting to note that the Igbo ritual of *Igba ndu* has been adopted by Christian churches and given a Christian perspective. And within the context of African Christianity, the blood aspect of *Igba ndu* has been overtaken by the significance of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic covenant. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you” (Luke 22, 20). In African Christian communities today, Christ remains the principle that binds people together. He is the ultimate instance of *Igba ndu*, for he is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14, 6). Christians should be encouraged to see Christ as the foundation upon which their life is built. He is the truth upon which every human relationship is built. Healey Joseph and Sybertz Donald stressed the importance of this understanding when they made the following observations:

*“Human beings’ relationships with Christ and with other Christians in the gathered faith community is deepened when believers eat his body and drink his blood in the Eucharist. In a profound spiritual sense, the Christian’s deepest blood relationship is with Jesus Christ. In the Eucharistic community the Christian can extend the meaning of the Akan proverb and say, I belong by blood relationship; therefore I am. This unique blood relationship with Christ has a deep meaning in African culture when Christians remember the pact of blood-brotherhood/sisterhood”.*⁴⁰⁶

And on this note Christ could also be seen within the context of African Christology as “*Ogbugba ndu anyi*”, meaning “Christ, our covenant”. It can now be better appreciated why the *Igba ndu* ritual of reconciliation among the Igbos is only consummated through a common meal of the reconciling parties. This common meal of the reconciling parties is known as *Igba oriko*.

5.7 *Igba Oriko* as the Highest Point in the Reconciliation Process among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria

⁴⁰⁶ Joseph, Healey, and Donald, Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 267.

We want to begin here with the fundamental observation made by Francis Arinze concerning the essence of eating together in Igbo tradition:

...in normal life, two confirmed enemies, for example, those who wish each other's death or grave injury, would not eat in the same sacrifice.⁴⁰⁷

This is because of the danger of poisoning or doing harm to one another. The atmosphere before reconciliation is that of mutual mistrust and suspicion. One is always afraid not to fall prey to the evil machinations of the enemy. There is therefore a conscious avoidance of eating together or eating from the same bowl by two enemies. Enmity implies living with prejudices and deep-rooted sentiments, that one is consumed with the "I", with protecting one's personal interests and idiosyncrasies rather than the common interest. One is hindered from self-transcendence. During the enmity the common life is disintegrated, dichotomised and individualised. One is estranged or left to be on his own. One is looked at as a "stranger" by his or her enemy. Barriers are erected. Life is viewed as being many instead of one. What remains is the "we" and "they" or "I" and "you" dichotomy.

Eating and drinking together is therefore among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria as well as in other parts of Africa, the fundamental symbol of love and unity. It is the most basic symbol of sharing life as a community. It is a significant means of showing total trust and confidence in one another. It is purely an expression of friendship and oneness. Eating alone is a rare phenomenon except in the case of ostracism as I observed in Chapter four above. That is why reconciliation of individuals, groups, communities, clans or tribes is consummated through the *oriko* meal of reconciliation. Arinze made this important observation with regards to this:

When husband and wife have fallen out with each other, the practice is to offer a sacrifice of reconciliation to the ancestors and some family spirits. This rite is called aja nligha or igba oriko. The couple eat the offerings from the same plate. Henceforth they can resume their normal life together.... In the old days, sacrifices of reconciliation after inter-town wars, were

⁴⁰⁷ Francis, Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1970, 103.

*offered by the erstwhile belligerent towns. Some Ibos (Igbos) used to offer a slave for this and then there was no question of a meal. But some, for example Maku people, sacrificed two sheep at the boundary of the two towns. Representatives of both towns partook of the sheep and reconciliation was effected.*⁴⁰⁸

Oliver Onwubiko emphasised the importance of *oriko* meal for reconciliation and for integration into the community through his analysis of Pita Nwana's Igbo novel, *Omenuko*.⁴⁰⁹ *Omenuko*, the main figure of the story, was accepted back into his community only after they have done *oriko* sacrificial meal. The words of the elders of his community were clear on this as quoted and translated by Onwubiko:

*“Mgbe ndi ahu o choro batasiri ha enyeghi Omenuko oji n’ihi na ha aka-agbaghi oriko ahu ha biara igba. Ha wee si Omenuko ya mee ihe o choro ime. O wee kputa ehi ahu ha akuwa okuko asato na otu oke okuko ocha na ji ukwu asato na ji nta asato, si Igwe na ya ewere ihe ndia nye ndi ala ya ka ya na ha wee gbaa oriko, ka obi ha dikwa ocha n’ebe ya no site n’ubochi ahu we gaba. (When those invited came, they did not give Omenuko Kola because they had not undergone the rite of Oriko for which they came. They told him to do what he wants to do. He brought that cow and eight eggs and one white cock and eight big yams and eight small ones and told Igwe that he has given these things to his people for them to perform the rite of oriko with him, so that their hearts may be clear about him from that day on).”*⁴¹⁰

Kola presentation is a fundamental symbol of hospitality and acceptance in any Igbo family or community. That his community refused to present

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁰⁹ *Omenuko* was a fiction (although based on true life story) written in Igbo language by one of the foremost Igbo authors, Pita Nwana, delineating the Igbo traditional values. The book took its title from the name of the central figure of the story, *Omenuko*, who was exiled from his community for committing an abomination by selling his clansmen. At the end of his exile, he could return to his community only after the ritual of reconciliation has been performed. The celebration of this ritual implies total acceptance and re-integration of the individual into the community.

⁴¹⁰ Oliver, Onwubiko, *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod: A Personal Response*, Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press Ltd., 1993, 53.

Omenuko with Kola was a distinctly clear sign that he was not yet welcome back to his community. He could be presented with Kola only after the purification rite has been performed and then followed with *oriko*. The food items brought by Omenuko, as listed above could be used for both sacrifice and preparation for *oriko* meal. The purpose of performing the *oriko* rite is also clear in the words of Omenuko: “*ka obi ha dikwa ocha n’ebe ya no site n’ubochi ahu we gaba*” (so that their hearts may be clear about him from that day on). To make “their hearts clear about him” means total forgiveness of all the offences he committed in the past and starting a-new with him. It means to purify their hearts of all prejudices and biases his old life has impressed in their minds. It implies the beginning of a new relationship between him and his community, a relationship of peace and harmony. He will be integrated once again into the life of his community. He will be restored to the life of the community, from which he severed himself through the pursuit of his selfish interest by selling clansmen. He will begin again to have one life with his community. For his life is also the life of his community. This is evident in the words of the elder of the community who performed the rite:

“Onye isi ala wee puta, were akwa okuko ahu hie ya n’onu ugboro ano na-asi, “Ma m kwuru mma, ma m kwuru njo megide Omenuko na umu nne ya, o bu njo ahu ka anyi na-ehichapu taa. Anyi na ha aburukwala nna na nwa. Nna nna anyi ha nurunu, olu madu bu olu mmuo, anyi na ha aburukwara otu. Ihe anyi na-aso nso ka ha na-asokwa nso ugbu a. Ihe anyi na-eri ka ha na eri ugbua. Ihe na-azo anyi ndu ga na-azokwa ha ndu ugbu a. Ihe na-egbu anyi ga na-egbukwa ha ugbu a”. (The senior elder came out and took that egg and rubbed it four times on his mouth and said: “If I said good or evil against Omenuko and his brothers, it is that evil that we are cleansing today. We have become father and son with them once more. Our ancestors listen, the voice of the people is the voice of god, we have become one with them. What we abhor is what they abhor now.

What saves our life is what saves their life now. What we eat is what they eat now. What kills us is what kills them now)".⁴¹¹

One could observe, from the words of the elder, the social or communal implication of sin and reconciliation in Igbo tradition. The purification was not only meant for Omenuko and his brothers but also for the entire community, which as individuals, by commission or omission has shared in the abomination committed by them. Sharing in the abomination could also be by saying anything evil against Omenuko and his brothers. After rubbing the egg four times on his mouth he said: "*If I said good or evil against Omenuko and his brothers, it is that evil that we are cleansing today.*"

This brings us back again to the Eucharistic tradition of the Church.

Oriko meal of reconciliation has for the Igbos the same significance which the Eucharist has for Christians. Just as we have seen above with the oriko meal, the Eucharist is "*an assembly, a meal, a memorial, a reconciliation, a sacrifice and a thanksgiving*".⁴¹² The Eucharist, just like oriko meal, "*is an all inclusive banquet*".⁴¹³ Gathered together around the table of the Lord we share our equality as children of God. We relate as one family of God, Jews and Gentiles, man and woman, free and slave. Around the table of the Lord at the Eucharist, we make the fundamental experience of who we actually are: one *umunna*!⁴¹⁴, (brethren or community), having God as our common Father.

From what we have said so far, one sees the inseparable connection between *Igba ndu* and *oriko* meal of reconciliation. Both are the two phases in the

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 53-54.

⁴¹² Joseph, Healey, and Donald, Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 274.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 268.

⁴¹⁴ "*Umunna*" would be the Igbo translation of *Ujamaa* or *Ubuntu*. Pantaleon Iroegbu tried to construct an Igbo *Umunna* Ecclesiology as the appropriate Ecclesiology within the socio-cultural and religious context of the Igbos. "*Umunna*" according to him "literally means, children of father." On this basis then, *Umunna* Ecclesiology would mean: "an understanding of the Church as constituted of members who can trace their origin from one father. Just as a people with one political set-up and destiny are a political *Umunna*, so also a people with one religious affiliation and performance constitute a religious *Umunna*. The Church is an *Umunna*. The ecclesial community is an *Umunna* community. The people of God are children of God as Father. In that wise they are an *Umunna*". See Pantaleon, Iroegbu, *Appropriate Ecclesiology, Through Narrative Theology to an African Church*, Owerri, Nigeria: International Universities Press Ltd., 1996, 89. He further remarked: "In *Umunna*, all are *Umu* (children). Therefore all are in fraternal co-existence with the others and filially with the *Nna* (father), God Himself". Ibid., 93.

process of reconciliation. It is also evident from the above exposition that reconciliation is not easy to come by. The individual offender must first of all be ready to accept his guilt and confess his sins to the community before reconciliation with the community is accomplished. Damian Eze made the same observation when he noted that *“the sinner who has been on a necessary self-ostracism and exile freely chooses to return to his umunna (community), to confess his sins, atone for those sins and seek forgiveness and be re-united with the community.”*⁴¹⁵ He made use of an example given by Pita Nwana in the same book we have analyzed above – Omenuko, in order to substantiate the importance of confessing for ones sins.

*On the arrival of Igwe, Omenuko began the process (of reconciliation) at a private level.... Then he confesses his guilt to Igwe and states his resolve to atone for those sins, an act which looks like a private confession: ‘Gee nti ugbua. Emere m ihe ojoo n’ala anyi megide madu na ndi mmuo na mgbe di anya’ (Listen now, in the past, I did what is evil in the sight of humans and in the sight of the spirits).”*⁴¹⁶

He therefore outlined the constitutive elements in the whole process of reconciliation among the Igbos to include: repentance, whereby the sinner experiences compunction of conscience and admits his guilt; readiness and willingness to make amends, whereby the sinner makes atonement for the sins he committed by accepting to provide all the materials for the sacrifice; confession of guilt, whereby the sinner makes a public confession of his sins to the community; and the kola nut communion, which is *oriko* meal of reconciliation.⁴¹⁷ From the above one can see the great similarity between the process of reconciliation among the Igbos and the **Yom kippur** among the Jews as we have seen in section 5.1 above. The similarity becomes clearer when one observes that the priest who does the sacrifice of atonement *“takes all the items over which all the sins have been confessed and casts them all in the forest, presumably the Ajo ohia, the Evil forest”*.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Damian, O., Eze, The Eucharist as Orikonso, A study in Eucharistic Ecclesiology from an Igbo perspective, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008, 128.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 133-134.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 132-133.

Here the items used for sacrifice and purification of sins could be compared with the scape-goat used on the Day of Atonement. And the casting of the items into *Ajo ohia*, Evil forest could be compared with the casting of the scape-goat into the wilderness. *Ajo ohia* in this sense has the same signification as the wilderness – the abode of evil. It is then at this point pertinent to say something on the relevance of *oriko* meal of reconciliation to the inculturation of Christianity in Igbo society.

5.8 Oriko Meal of Reconciliation and Inculturation

Since its emergence and development⁴¹⁹, the term “Inculturation” has variously been defined and explained to denote the relationship between the Gospel message and the culture of the people in which both undergo a kind of symbiosis. It depicts the way in which the Word of God takes flesh (Incarnation) in a particular Culture. Based on this understanding, Aylward Shorter rightly defined Inculturation as *“the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures”*.⁴²⁰ By employing the term “dialogue”, Shorter points out to the symbiotic nature of the relationship. It is a relationship based on mutual respect for each other. It is not a relationship where one views the other as being inferior or tries to impose itself on the other. This implies the recognition and appreciation of the good values found in every culture. This view was even made clearer by Roest Crolius in the following observations:

⁴¹⁹ Although the term “inculturation” officially became a common theological vocabulary after the Second Vatican Council, but its content, object and subject have not been foreign to the Church. The Second Vatican Council made use of the term “Adaptation” instead of “Inculturation” to communicate the same message. Authors have traced the earliest use of the term to J. Mason who in 1962 published an article with the title: “L’Eglise Ouverte Sur Le Monde” – The Church opened to the World. In this article, he made use of the expression “un Catholicisme inculturé” to call for a cultivated Catholicism. Since then, the term has been given a good attention in theological books and lexicons. The Jesuits popularised this term after the Second Vatican Council by changing the official focus from “Adaptation” recommended by the Council to that of “Inculturation”. See E., “Lapointe, Inculturation and the Mission of the Church”, in: *Grace and Truth*, 4, 1985, 194-204; Aylward, Shorter, *Towards an African Theology of Inculturation*, New York: Orbis, 1980, 11; Oliver. A., *Onwubiko, Theory and Practice of Inculturation – an African Perspective*, Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1992, 1-4.

⁴²⁰ Aylward, Shorter, *Towards an African Theology of Inculturation*, New York: Orbis, 1980, 11.

*... the inculturation of the church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the church universal.*⁴²¹

The relationship between the Christian message and the culture of the people is that of openness, where each is ready to be enriched by the other for the purpose of unity and communion as Roest Crollius rightly observed above. Oliver Onwubiko collaborated with this view and even made it more concrete by tracing it back to Jesus Christ himself.

*“The Incarnation is the theological basis of Inculturation. Jesus was born into a culture. He lived that culture and used it to announce His message of salvation. He knew that the transmission of the Gospel depends, to a large extent, on cultural dynamism which links successive generations with their past through their present to their future. He knew that the authentic development and expression of the Christian life cannot be achieved through a ‘static’ culture or through a totally new culture imposed from the outside. His mission to culture and through culture is summed up by the fact that He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to perfect them (Mt 5: 17).”*⁴²²

This view brings us to our very intention in this section, namely to analyze how *oriko* meal of reconciliation can be reconciled with the Christian message of reconciliation with special regards to the Eucharist as a covenant and a meal of reconciliation.

From what we have observed so far, we have seen that the Igbo understanding of *oriko* as a covenant and reconciliation meal can form the

⁴²¹ Roest, A., Crollius, „What is So New About Inculturation?“, in: Gregorianum, vol. 59, 1978, 735.

⁴²² Oliver. A., Onwubiko, Theory and Practice of Inculturation – an African Perspective, Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1992, 72.

basis for the peoples' understanding and reception of the Eucharist as a covenant and a meal of reconciliation. And in this sense, the *oriko* meal of reconciliation offers a fertile ground for the inculturation of the understanding of the Eucharist in African Igbo Christianity.⁴²³ The *oriko* meal of reconciliation can therefore be understood as *preparatio evangelica* for the Eucharist.⁴²⁴ The Eucharist within this perspective, just as Damian Eze rightly observed, will now be the fulfillment and perfection of the *oriko* meal of reconciliation.⁴²⁵ Hence he called the Eucharist "*Oriko Ndi otu Kristi* – the *Oriko* of Christians or *Oriko n'ime Kristi*" – *Oriko* in Christ".⁴²⁶ This understanding of the Eucharist as *Oriko* permeates the hearts of the Igbos, both Christians and non- Christians alike. This is evident in the result of the interviews conducted on this subject by Damian Eze among some Igbos of different social and religious groups:

"In answer to a question on how he understands the Eucharist as an Igbo man, Chijioke Iroabuchi Azubike, a lay Anglican, says this: 'When I spoke to you about the culture of my people I emphasized the importance of the reconciliatory and sacrificial meal called Oriko. For this reason, I can say that the Holy Communion is Oriko'.

Asked whether in his understanding the Eucharist has some resemblance with Nrigba (Oriko), Ginikanwa Nicholas Okechukwu, the chief priest of the Omenala Ndigbo at Nri, answered, 'Yes it does. This is because those who have done evil in the Church are required to make peace before they can take part in the Holy Communion. In the same way, no one can take part in the Nrigba if the person is guilty'.

On how best to interpret the Church's faith and dogma on the Eucharist for Ndigbo, Jerome Okonkwo, a Catholic priest and professor of humanities in Imo State University, Owerri,

⁴²³ Damian, O., Eze, The Eucharist as Orikonso, A study in Eucharistic Ecclesiology from an Igbo perspective, 217.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 220.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 220.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 220.

answered: 'I see Igba-oriko ndu as the only option we have towards inculturation of the Eucharistic Sacrifice'.

Jonas Ezekwem, a lay Catholic, has this to say: 'In the Old Testament we read about the covenants that God made with the Jews. By his death and resurrection, Jesus made a new covenant, which we celebrate in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Oriko of Christians'.

... In answer to how best the Church should treat public sinners who are desirous to reconcile with God and the Church, H O S Uwakwe, another Catholic layman said: '...there is a great need for public penance for public sinners. If for example there is a case of murder, the sinner must do public penance ... Then after that we can share Holy Communion with him or her. And that Holy Communion serves as the Oriko between the sinner and the rest of the community'".⁴²⁷

From the above interview-reports from Damian Eze, one sees the great similarities in Igbo understanding of Oriko meal of reconciliation and the Christian understanding of the Holy Eucharist.

One of the similarities is that both are community-based meals. Oriko takes place within the context of Umunna. So we can say with Damian Eze that *"it is in the Umunna that Oriko has its meaning and function.... The Umunna makes the Oriko"*⁴²⁸ and vice versa. The Eucharist is also a meal that takes place within the context of the Qahal – Assembly of the faithful, and in this sense, the Church makes the Eucharist and vice versa.⁴²⁹ What could be for the Igbo Christians the authentic ecclesiological conclusion one can arrive at following from what we have said above with regards to the communal basis of both Oriko and the Eucharist? The conclusion made by Damian Eze is also very relevant here:

"The understanding of the reception of Oriko as a mark of authentic membership of the community will undoubtedly awaken, not only the desire, but also it will bring to life the need,

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 221-222.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 217.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 216.

for taking part in Holy Communion, when they (Igbo Christians) understand that the Eucharistic Communion is not just better than Oriko, by comparison, but that it is the reality and the goal which the Oriko, as the shadow, aims to attain.”⁴³⁰

The attempt to understand the Eucharist as Oriko Umunna Kristi – Oriko of Christ’s Community was well captured in one of the most popular Igbo communion hymns which many theologians including Damian Eze have analyzed. The hymn which was composed by Jim Madu is thus:

<i>N’oriri di aso, eluigwe n’uwa na-emekorita</i>	<i>In the Holy Communion, heaven and earth</i>
<i>Chukwu na madu aburu otu</i>	<i>commune, God and humanity become one</i>
<i>Ndi no n’enigwe na ndi no n’uwa</i>	<i>The saints in heaven and the people on earth</i>
<i>emekoria bie oma buru out n’ime muo.. embrace one another and become one in spirit...⁴³¹</i>	

Just as we have already said, the hymn captures the African understanding of community as *Ujamaa*, *Ubuntu* or *Umunna*. We have earlier stated that *Umunna* means community of persons, living and dead (ancestors). It is a community of beings, physical and spiritual. *Chukwu* (God) is always at the center of this community imparting His blessings and assuring for peace and harmony in the community. This community transcends every blood relation, color, race and gender. The African Family of God Ecclesiology is also understood within this category.

Another similarity between the Igbo understanding of Oriko meal of reconciliation and the Christian understanding of the Holy Eucharist evident in the above-quoted interview by Damian Eze is in the fact of confession and atonement for sins. The Catholic Christian practice of inviting sinners to confess their sins before the reception of the Holy Communion is also in the same perspective with the Igbo practice of *Igba-oriko* only after sinners have acknowledged their sins and atoned for them. In this understanding, the Igbos have no difficulty in understanding the necessity of going to Confession before the reception of the Holy Communion as many European Catholics have today.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 219.

⁴³¹ The hymn was composed by Jim Ambrose Madu, but I took this rendering with its English translation from Damian, Eze, *The Eucharist as Orikonso, A study in Eucharistic Ecclesiology from an Igbo Perspective*, 224.

The only area, where more attention should be paid in such an inculturation is on the significance of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here emphasis should be constantly made that the blood of the animals used for the sacrificial meal is of no soteriological or salvific significance. The people should be rightly thought that *“the foundation of the Church, the new Umunna is the Blood of Christ, which replaces the blood of animals of sacrifice.... The blood of the foundational covenant that defines the Umunna is no longer the blood of animals. There is no longer any need for any other sacrifices except the Sacrifice of the Eucharist, which in itself is not separable from the One unrepeatable Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, which seals the New Covenant”*.⁴³² Just as the Jewish Christians transformed the traditional Passover meal of Jewish Religion into the Christian Eucharist, the Igbo Christians can also rightly transform their *Oriko* meal of reconciliation into the Christian Eucharistic communal meal of reconciliation.⁴³³

⁴³² Damian, Eze, *The Eucharist as Orikonso, A study in Eucharistic Ecclesiology from an Igbo Perspective*, 215.

⁴³³ Joseph, Healey, and Donald, Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 269.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PASTORAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RECONCILIATION

6.1 Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Desmond Tutu as Great Apostles of Reconciliation of our Time

I singled out two men of God, the late Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Desmond Tutu as paradigmatic messengers of reconciliation of the twenty-first century-world laden with conflicts, wars and oppression of diverse forms. These paradigmatic figures come from two continents, namely Europe and Africa that have known wars and ethnic cleansing in the last 100 years. Not only are they recognised in the Christian world as true prophets of reconciliation, they have also been globally acclaimed as great apostles of peace in the world for both have been respectively recognised by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.⁴³⁴

6.1.1 Pope John Paul II (1920 – 2005)

We have to make it clear that we do not intend here to beatify nor canonize the great Pontiff and Shepherd of the mother Church, who with his death on the 2nd of April 2005, and according to the will of God, left the papal throne and thereby ended his 27 years of missionary activities. But it could also serve as our own little contribution towards bearing witness to the life and tremendous missionary achievements of this Pope. And the aspect of his life that interests us in this work is his efforts towards building up the whole world as one family of God irrespective of tribe, colour, religion, culture and tradition. He was really a bridge builder who really touched the hearts and lives of all and sundry.

George Weigel, an American Catholic theologian, made this important observation in his biography of Pope John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*:

*“The pontificate of the Pope John Paul II has been one of the most important in centuries, for the Church and the world.”*⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ Desmond Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 while Pope John Paul II was nominated for the same award in 2004 to honour his effort at dismantling the communist regimes in his native Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe.

⁴³⁵ , George, Weigel, *Witness to Hope*; the biography of Pope John Paul II, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001, 4.

He further notes that, *“the Second Vatican Council and the pontificate of John Paul II have laid down a set of markers that will likely determine the course of world Catholicism well beyond modernity and into the third millennium of Christian history.”*⁴³⁶ Weigel had the opportunity of having a personal access to the Pope, and thereby had the great privilege of being confided by the Pope himself with the secrets of his life, his political action, doctrine and his faith. Weigel’s bestseller could therefore be a good “binoculars” to really understand the figure of John Paul II objectively from “inside” and from “outside”, in that he presents both contradictory judgements people make about this great world figure of our time. It is interesting to note that these contradictory judgements come from people both “from within” and from without the Church. For some people, according to Weigel, *“he is... the defender and principal embodiment of a moral force that has led humanity safely through this bloodiest of centuries...the champion, of the cause of human freedom.”*⁴³⁷ To others, he *“is unyielding authoritarian, out of touch with the aspirations of those he claims to lead and dares to teach...”*⁴³⁸ Yet there are many who *“admire his defence of human rights, his outreach to Judaism, and his dedication to peace while deploring his theology and his moral judgements.”*⁴³⁹

Pope John Paul II was named by *Time Magazine* the “Man of the Year” in 1994.⁴⁴⁰ In this section we want to focus on the figure of Pope John Paul II as a great apostle and missionary of reconciliation of our time.

After his election on October 16, 1978, the Pope mapped out clearly the path he was to follow throughout the period of his pontificate. It was the path that leads to the world, the path that reaches out to the “other”. It was the path of solidarity and dialogue with peoples, religions, cultures and traditions - the path towards the unity of humanity. The Pope thus addressed the world during his papacy’s inauguration homily:

“...Be not afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political

⁴³⁶ Ibid. 4.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. 4.

⁴³⁸ Ibid. 4.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 4.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. 4.

*systems, vast fields of culture, civilization, and development....*⁴⁴¹

With these words he declared his readiness to work with Christ to break all the barriers and systems of divisions across the globe. It was somehow an open invitation to all the continents and nations of the world, he would latter visit, to open their hearts and mind to receive him and his Good news.

One of his first international visits or rather pilgrimages was the one to his homeland Poland. The visit lasted for eight days, from June 2-10, 1979. This visit is regarded today as the “lighter” that sparked off a non-violent and peaceful revolution that led to the dismantling of Communism in Poland and later in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. He remains a Catalyst in the collapse of Communism. Even Mikhail Gorbachev had to declare that, *“John Paul II was indispensable to the peaceful conclusion of the Cold war.”*⁴⁴² Like a true Apostle, John Paul recognised fully the weight of the adage, which says that, *“charity begins at home.”* He knew that, in order to make effective his mission towards a peaceful reconciliation of the world, he must of necessity begin from his native land Poland.

The Pope later solidified his missionary efforts towards reconciliation with the personal witness of his life. On December 27, 1983, he celebrated Mass at Rebibbia prison and visited Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish assassin who shot him at St Peter’s square Rome in 1981.⁴⁴³ By this visit, the Pope extended his forgiveness to his would-be assassin and offered him a hand of reconciliation.

Throughout the period of his pontificate, the Pope had striking encounters with world religions, peoples, cultures and traditions making reconciliation imperative in our world today. For example, in his address to Diplomatic Corps in Vatican in the year 2001, while acknowledging the astonishing advances in science and technology, he emphasized on the need to employ this to promoting global peace and communion:

“The century just ended has seen remarkable advances in science, which have considerably improved people’s life and

⁴⁴¹ Cf. George, Weigel, Witness of Hope, 262.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 4.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 474.

health. These advances have also contributed to our dominion over nature and made easier people's access to culture. Information technology has made the world smaller and brought us closer to one another. Never before were we so quickly informed about the daily events, which affect the lives of our brothers and sisters in the human family. But one question can be asked: was this century also the century of "brotherhood"? Certainly an unqualified answer cannot be given. As the balance is made, the memory of bloody wars which have decimated millions of people and provoked massive exoduses, shameful genocides which haunt our memories, as well as the arms race which fostered mistrust and fear, terrorism and ethnic conflicts which annihilated peoples who had lived together in the same territory, all force us to be modest and in many cases to have a penitent spirit".⁴⁴⁴

Here the Pope is not only suing for peace, he is also appealing towards a global human family; a culture of "brotherhood". He is calling for an *ujamaa/ubuntu* attitude to the world. This is what it means to have a "penitent spirit". Metanoia!

While making allusion to the genocidal war that claimed thousands of lives in former Yugoslavia, the Pope re-iterated the same message of reconciliation to the people of Croatia:

"To forgive and be reconciled means to purify one's memory of hatred, rancour, the desire for revenge; it means acknowledging as a brother even those who have wronged us; it means not being overcome by evil but overcoming evil with good".⁴⁴⁵

He followed it up with his message to the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2002, where he stressed that reconciliation through forgiveness is both urgent and necessary in order to avoid any future occurrence:

⁴⁴⁴ John Paul II, Address to Diplomatic Corps, Vatican: January 10, 2001, no.3; L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, January 12, 2001, p.1.

⁴⁴⁵ John Paul II, Homily during the Mass in Croatia, October 24, 1998, no.5; L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, November 7, 1998, p.2.

*"It is not easy to forgive, but it is urgent and necessary for the good of all. It is true that one cannot erase from memory what happened in the past, but hearts can and must be freed from bearing grudges and planning revenge. The memory of the errors and injustices should be a strong lesson not to let either happen again, so as to avoid new and perhaps ever greater tragedies".*⁴⁴⁶

The Pope did also in many of his messages to Africa warn that the Continent should never forget its great cultural heritage of family, community and solidarity. This according to him would be prophylaxis to the evil of dichotomy, individualism and ethnic conflicts that bedevil the Continent:

*"African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best tradition".*⁴⁴⁷

In all the countries of Africa he visited, the Pope did not fail to proclaim the urgent message of reconciliation for the Continent. This was the case in the homily he delivered at Onitsha, Nigeria, at the occasion of his second pastoral visit to Nigeria in 1998:

*Today I wish to proclaim the importance of reconciliation: reconciliation with God and reconciliation of people among themselves. This is the task, which lies before the Church in this land of Nigeria, on this continent of Africa, and in the midst of every people and nation throughout the world. "We are ambassadors for Christ . . . and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).*⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ John Paul II, Address to Mr. Ivan Misit, Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Holy See, November 30, 2002, no. 3; L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, December 11, 2002, p.3.

⁴⁴⁷ John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no.43.

⁴⁴⁸ John Paul II, Sermon at Onitsha, Nigeria, on the occasion of his second visit to Nigeria, February, 1998.

While calling on all Nigerians to recognise the fact that they are all children of God in spite of ethnic and religious differences, he urged them to work for the common good of all:

All Nigerians must work to rid society of everything that offends the dignity of the human person or violates human rights. This means reconciling differences, overcoming ethnic rivalries, and injecting honesty, efficiency and competence into the art of governing. As your nation pursues a peaceful transition to a democratic civilian government, there is a need for politicians — both men and women — who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served (cf. Ecclesia in Africa, 111). There can be no place for intimidation and domination of the poor and the weak, for arbitrary exclusion of individuals and groups from political life, for the misuse of authority or the abuse of power. In fact, the key to resolving economic, political, cultural and ideological conflicts is justice; and justice is not complete without love of neighbour, without an attitude of humble, generous service.

When we see others as brothers and sisters, it is then possible to begin the process of healing the divisions within society and between ethnic groups. This is the reconciliation, which is the path to true peace and authentic progress for Nigeria and for Africa. This reconciliation is not weakness or cowardice. On the contrary, it demands courage and sometimes even heroism: it is victory over self rather than over others. It should never be seen as dishonour. For in reality it is the patient, wise art of peace.

Here the Pope is maintaining that reconciliation and a future community of peace is only possible through a change in the way we perceive each other. In other words, he is calling for self-transcendence. And this self-transcendence implies the readiness to transcend one's standpoint, one's ethnic identity, culture and religion. For only then can we begin to see our common identity as *Imago Dei*, as people sharing in the one humanity!

The Pope did not only preach the message of reconciliation, he above all bore witness to reconciliation through his personal life and in his capacity as the head of the Church. This witness of life was evident on many occasions where he made irrevocable steps towards reconciling the Church with the world by asking forgiveness in the name of the Church for all the past faults of the Church. It was the same Pope who in November 1979 re-visited the case of Galileo and acknowledged the mistake of the Church in his trial and condemnation.⁴⁴⁹ All these mark him out as one of the greatest apostles of reconciliation of our time.

This view is shared by many in Africa and other developing countries. For example, the central message of Pope John Paul II on two occasions he visited Nigeria was: Reconciliation and Peace. This apostolic message of the Pope was recognised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria:

*The Pope is known worldwide to be an apostle of peace.... As he goes around the world preaching peace, he denounces all forms of injustice, oppression and discrimination as inconsistent with the fundamental dignity of human person. He denounces all forms of dictatorship, military and civil. He condemns unfettered capitalism in the same way as he does atheistic communism, both of which do not respect the dignity of the human person.*⁴⁵⁰

The Catholic bishops were appreciative of the Pope's visit and his message to Nigerians. They therefore called on the whole nation to hearken to this *kairoitic* message of the Pope and make reconciliation imperative. This is because reconciliation is the path to true peace and authentic progress⁴⁵¹ in Africa, Europe, America and the world at large.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Luigi, Accattoli, When a Pope asks Forgiveness, The Mea Culpa's of John Paul II, transl. by Jordan, Aumann, New York: Daughters of St. Paul, 1998. For the case of Galileo see the same book, 125-137.

⁴⁵⁰ „A Call to Holiness and Reconciliation“ by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria in The Voice of the Voiceless, Pastoral letters and Communiques of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, edt. by Peter Schineller, Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigeria LTD, 2002, 374-375.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 377.

6.1.2 Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1931-)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu began his earthly journey from a humble and lowly background, being the son of a schoolteacher and a domestic worker. He rode to limelight through the difficult and the life-suffocating evil system of Apartheid that promised no bright future for a kid, who through no fault of his was born with a colour he never chose and in a family whose members have a colour that is different from those that believed that by being white, they possess not only right to exist as human beings but above all the right to the best of everything that life has to offer, ranging from education, housing, religion, employment, health, economy etc.

Having possessed the basic training in his Western Native Township, he chose, after serving as a teacher and marrying his wife Leah, to pursue his theological studies in order to answer his divine call to be a church minister. Since his ordination to the priesthood in 1961 and his subsequent elevation as the Bishop of Lesotho in 1975⁴⁵², he has served in many capacities where he never failed to deliver his prophetic messages as responses to the existential realities of South African people. He was later appointed as the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC 1978-1985). It was this post that brought him to both national and international limelight.⁴⁵³

His office as the General Secretary of the SACC offered him the authoritative and credible platform to fight the evil system of Apartheid and to fearlessly hammer his message of liberation, justice, reconciliation and peace to the South African people.⁴⁵⁴ This is because of the immeasurable influence of the Church in dismantling Apartheid in South Africa as Tutu himself rightly observed:

Clearly the Church had made a contribution to what was happening in our land.... Presumably without that influence

⁴⁵² Hendrik, J.C., Pieterse, Desmond Tutu's Message, A qualitative Analysis, Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995, 10.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 11.

*things might have turned out a little differently. It could also be that at a very difficult time our struggle, when most of our leaders were in jail or exile or proscribed in some way or other, some of the leaders in the churches were thrust into the forefront of the struggle and had thereby given the churches a particular kind of credibility – people like Allan Boesak, formerly leader of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, Frank Chikane, former general secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), Peter Storey, former head of the Methodist Church, Beyers Naude, the most prominent Afrikaner church dissident and also a general secretary of the SACC, Denis Hurley, formerly Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban, and leaders of other faith communities who were there where the people were hurting. Thus when they spoke about forgiveness and reconciliation they had won their spurs and would be listened to with respect.*⁴⁵⁵

It was in recognition of his priceless efforts towards peace that he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 and was later appointed the Archbishop of Cape Town in 1986. Based on his unquestionable credibility and strong conviction that reconciliation of races is the only way forward for the entire people of South Africa, he was appointed by the post-apartheid democratic government of Nelson Mandela in December 1995, to head the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁴⁵⁶ We are going to see later (in 6.2. below) his own personal account of his experiences as a member and leader of this commission.

The life of Archbishop Desmond Tutu can only be understood within the context of his mission as a liberator and reconciler. This is evident in many of his messages on different occasions while addressing the peculiar socio-political realities of South Africa. He was as indefatigable as he refused to be silenced in his effort to achieve liberation for blacks from their white

⁴⁵⁵ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 43-44.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 69.

oppressors. And having achieved this he has since devoted his unfailing energy to achieving reconciliation between blacks, whites, colored and Indians in South Africa and beyond. In his monograph *Versöhnung ist unteilbar*, published in German by Peter Hammer, he noted that reconciliation is only possible between people who accept their own personhood but at the same time respect the personhood of others.⁴⁵⁷ We have earlier exposed his fundamental convictions on this when we presented his *ubuntu* theology based on the African understanding of person. But for more insight into his person as an apostle of reconciliation, it is benign to document once again some of his firm and dogged contributions to the dismantling of Apartheid. Being a product of two traditions (Africa and Church), he allowed this come to bear in all his political and theological thoughts and activities.

In one of his critics against apartheid, Tutu made the following observations:

*“Apartheid... says human beings are made for separation, alienation, division and disunity. The Bible and Christianity say human beings are made for fellowship, communion and Koinonia.”*⁴⁵⁸

He further observed that no individual person is self-sufficient. We all need and depend on one another in order to be fully human:

*A self-sufficient human being is subhuman. I have gifts that you do not have, so, consequently, I am unique – you have gifts that I do not have, so you are unique. God has made us so that we will need each other. We are made for a delicate network of interdependence. We see it on a macro level. Not even the most powerful nations in the world can be self-sufficient.*⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷ Desmond, Tutu, *Versöhnung ist unteilbar*, Wuppertal, Deutschland: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1984, 102.

⁴⁵⁸ Desmond, Tutu, “Christianity and Apartheid” (Speech), Rand Afrikaans University, March, 1984, 7.

⁴⁵⁹ Desmond, Tutu, “God’s Dream,” in: *Waging Peace II: Vision and Hope for the 21st Century*, ed. David Krieger and Frank Kelly, Chicago: Noble Press, 1992, 37.

It is within this context that he expresses his dream⁴⁶⁰ from a world whose ugliness, misery, poverty, wars and hatred, whose greed, alienation and disharmony will be transformed to their opposites, where there would be more joy, peace, justice, love, care and harmonious existence for all. A world where the lion and the lamb would lie together and the weapons of human destruction turned to serve humanity. A human family where everybody belongs, white and black, rich and poor, homosexual or heterosexual, Jew and Arab, Palestinian and Israeli, Catholic and Protestant, Serbian and Albanian, Hutu and Tutsi, Moslem and Christian.⁴⁶¹ The one family of God! Tutu continues to pray for one human family where everybody feels belonged irrespective of ethnic, racial or religious origin. This one human family should be a place, where people come to share their different gifts and charismas for the promotion of equality, brotherhood, community of life. This will enable us to discover our true identity: not black or white, Moslem or Christian, but brothers and sisters.⁴⁶²

6.2. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa

After the awful years of tortures, killings, repressions, gross human rights violations, racism and dehumanisation that were perpetrated by the evil system of Apartheid that was summarily dismantled with the election of Nelson Mandela in 1994 as the post Apartheid democratic President, South Africans decided to begin anew. They chose to reconstruct their society and

⁴⁶⁰ As an apostle of peace and reconciliation, God's messenger, Tutu reiterates God's intention for a glorious world, where love, justice and peace reigns, where human beings will accept each other as brothers and sisters. He tries to interpret God's desire for one human family in spite of the differences of race, colour, sex, culture and religion. We all belong to the one family of God. He therefore makes the realisation of God's message his essential mission. And to this vain, he undertakes the role of a prophet to communicate God's message to the divided children of God. It is therefore not difficult to understand why he presents his dream as God's dream: "Ich habe einen Traum" sagt Gott. "...Es ist der Traum von einer Welt, deren Hässlichkeit und Elend und Armut, deren Kriege und Feindseligkeiten, deren Gier und gnadenloser Wettbewerb, deren Entfremdung und Disharmonie in ihr glorreiches Gegenteil verkehrt werden, in der es mehr Lachen, Freude und Frieden geben wird, Gerechtigkeit und Güte und Mitgefühl, Liebe, Fürsorge und Gemeinsamkeit. Ich habe einen Traum, dass der Löwe wieder neben dem Lamm liegt, dass Schwerter zu Pflugscharen und Speere zu Baumscheren geschmiedet werden, dass Meine Kinder wissen, dass sie zu einer einzigen großen Familie gehören, der Familie der Menschen, der Familie Gottes, Meiner Familie." Desmond, Tutu, Gott hat einen Traum, neue Hoffnung für unsere Zeit, München: Heinrich Hugendubel Verlag, 2004, 33.

⁴⁶¹ Desmond, Tutu, Gott hat einen Traum, neue Hoffnung für unsere Zeit, 33.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 34-38.

build a solid future South African Nation, where human beings are treated as equals irrespective of race, colour or religion. One glaring reality, which could also constitute an irreconcilable problem that could go on for generations, if not properly handled, was: how can the millions of Apartheid victims and survivors live peacefully with Apartheid perpetrators within the same South African Nation? Many of the victims and survivors were still traumatised by the inhuman experiences they suffered. Many were still emotionally filled with deep resentments. What about justice? What about reparation?

There were varied opinions on how best to move forward. There was one camp, which suggested for historical amnesia; that the past should be ignored and forgotten. This camp therefore “*clamoured for a blanket or general amnesty.*”⁴⁶³ The reasons for taking this somewhat superficial and perfunctory solution were identified by Alex Boraine⁴⁶⁴:

.... *There are some who simply wish to ignore the past because of their own involvement in it. But there is a defensible position, which calls for moving on into the new future and not allowing the past to destroy or inhibit the new democracy.*⁴⁶⁵

The consequences of such historical amnesia might be catastrophic if the problem is not nipped from the bud. Such fears, if not honestly treated might end up being neurotic, that it disrupts and really inhibits the entire normal life of the nation. One cannot honestly and authentically move into the future by ignoring the past. Such a move would only be a backward move into the same past as George Santayana rightly pointed out that “those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.”

⁴⁶³ Desmond, Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 27.

⁴⁶⁴ Alex Boraine was the deputy Chairperson of Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Before his appointment, he was an ordained Methodist Minister and one time youngest president of the Methodist Conference. He later resigned his position as minister and went into politics in order to fight “right from inside” the Apartheid system. “He later headed nongovernmental organisations which had played a significant role in promoting democracy and in shaping the legislations that eventually spawned the TRC.” See Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 80. Alex Boraine has given an objective and honest account of his experiences as member and deputy Chairperson of TRC in his book: *A Country Unmasked*, on which we are going to depend much in this section.

⁴⁶⁵ Alex, Boraine, *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000, 4.

The granting of a general amnesty without dealing with the suffering history of the people would only be window dressing! This was the case in Chile under the oppressive regime of General Augusto Pinochet, where he and his co-perpetrators offered themselves a general amnesty through subversive means by not allowing the searchlight of accountability to flash into the numerous atrocities perpetrated by his government and security forces. They swept everything under the carpet in order to escape justice. Such a general amnesty in South Africa would have deepened the wounds of the victims and thus perpetuated the clamour for justice. Such a general amnesty “*would have been a disaster, for it would have encouraged impunity and may even have led to acts of personal revenge.*”⁴⁶⁶

The second camp that enjoyed majority acceptance called for a coming to terms or dealing with the past because, “*dealing with the past is inescapable if we are working towards a peaceful future.*”⁴⁶⁷ And, according to Boraine, “*to ignore the past is to perpetuate victimhood.*”⁴⁶⁸

What does dealing with the past entail? There were those who were afraid that dealing with the past might lead to revenge, punishment of the perpetrators or applying retributive justice. In the case of South Africa dealing with the past entailed justice and accountability. It entailed *memoria passionis*, remembering of the suffering experiences of the people through truth telling by both the victims and the perpetrators. Dealing with the past entailed avoidance of a blanket general amnesty. It entailed distancing oneself from amnesia and cowardly way of facing the past as in the case of Chile under Pinochet. Using the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, dealing with the past meant for South Africans to “*look the beast in the eye*” to avoid its “*uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage.*”⁴⁶⁹ This according to him entailed the following:

“*We contend that there is another kind of justice, restorative justice, which was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Here the central concern is not retribution or*

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 28.

punishment. In the spirit of ubuntu, the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence.

This is a far more personal approach, regarding the offence as something that has happened to persons and whose consequence is a rupture in relationships. Thus we would claim that justice, restorative justice, is being served when efforts are being made to work for healing, for forgiving, and for reconciliation.”⁴⁷⁰

Boraine, the deputy chairperson of TRC corroborated the above view of his chairman:

“We really had no choice but to look for another way of coming to terms with the past. We decided on a truth and reconciliation commission which would hold in tension truth-telling, limited amnesty (against blanket general amnesty), and reparation. It was on this basis that the Commission was established, and the fact that its hearings were held in public was challenge to denial and the beginning of an acceptance of accountability and a commitment that what we had experienced must never happen again.”⁴⁷¹

With the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africans made an irrevocable step towards looking into their past and braced up for a new future of a reconciled South African Society that was presently divided. With the TRC, South Africa made the bold step to break the silence no matter how heartrending it might seem to be at the moment, but the hope of a healed future was sustaining. Such a reconciliation process opened a soothing room for the traumatised victims to come out and publicly tell their

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 54-55.

⁴⁷¹ Alex, Boraine, *A Country Unmasked*, 7-8.

stories. It offered a trustworthy atmosphere for the perpetrators to acknowledge and to be accountable for their deeds.⁴⁷² Tutu was more explicit on this:

*“WE ended up obtaining over 20,000 statements. People quite extraordinarily did want to tell their stories. They had been silenced for so long, sidelined for decades, made invisible and anonymous by a vicious system of injustice and oppression. Many had been bottled up for too long, and when the chance came for them to tell their stories the floodgates were opened.”*⁴⁷³

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was really a solemn ritual of reconciliation as we will now see in the testimonies of the leading leaders of the Commission, namely Desmond Tutu and Alex Boraine.

Desmond Tutu gave a detailed testimony of how overwhelmingly touching the stories of the victims and perpetrators were, but more remarkable and amazingly gracious was the readiness by both sides to forgive and reconcile. In one of the testimonies he notes:

“I never ceased to marvel, after these wonderful people had told their stories, that they looked so ordinary, so normal, They laughed, they conversed, they sent about their daily lives looking to all the world to be normal, whole persons with not a single concern in the world. And then you heard their stories and wondered how they had survived for so long when they had been carrying such a heavy burden of grief and anguish, so quietly, unobtrusively, with dignity and simplicity. How much we owe to them can never be computed. Their resilience in the face of daunting challenges and harassment that would have

⁴⁷² Ibid., 41.

⁴⁷³ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 108-109.

knocked the stuffing out of lesser mortals was in the end quite breathtaking.”⁴⁷⁴

He further notes:

“We have been deeply touched and moved by the resilience of human spirit. People who by rights should have had the stuffing knocked out of them, refusing to buckle under intense suffering and brutality and intimidation; people refusing to give up on the hope of freedom, knowing they were made for something better than the dehumanizing awfulness of injustice and oppression; refusing to be intimidated to lower their sights. It is quite incredible the capacity people have shown to be magnanimous – refusing to be consumed by bitterness and hatred, willing to meet with those who have violated their persons and their rights, willing to meet in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, eager only to know the truth, to know the perpetrator so that they could forgive them.”⁴⁷⁵

All these testimonies go to a very large extent to prove the great wonder that takes place when truth is told, when fault is acknowledged, when a true meeting of persons takes place. Scales fall off the eyes that one begins to see the humanity of others. Enemies begin to see themselves as brothers and sisters because ‘my humanity is caught in your humanity’. This was possible at TRC because it was built on the principle of *ubuntu*.

Tutu also told the story of a white woman victim, Ms Beth Savage, who was badly injured together with others by the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), during one of its raids against the whites at King William’s Town golf club in November 1992. Four people lost their lives during this raid. It was quite interesting that Ms Savage grew up in a family that strongly opposed Apartheid and whites’ domination. In spite of her horrible experience as a victim, she had this to say before the TRC:

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 120.

“All in all, what I must say is, through the trauma of it all, I honestly feel richer. I think it’s been a really enriching experience for me and a growing curve, and I think it’s given me the ability to relate to other people who may be going through trauma.... It’s important to me, but, and I’ve said this to many people, what I would really, really like is, I would like to meet that man that threw that grenade in an attitude of forgiveness and hope that he could forgive me too for whatever reason. But I would very much like to meet him.”⁴⁷⁶

The confessions made before TRC and the victims by the perpetrators of the 1992 Bisho massacre, where 30 unarmed ANC demonstrators were mauled to death by the Ciskeian⁴⁷⁷ Defence Force (CDF) soldiers, are moving and go further to show how dynamic the process of reconciliation can be. Tutu testifies further:

“The next witnesses were former CDF officers, one white and the others black. The white officer, Colonel Horst Schobesberger, was their spokesperson. He said that it was true that they had given the orders for the soldiers to open fire. The tension became so thick you could, as they say, cut it with a knife. The audience could not have been more hostile. Then he turned toward the audience and made an extraordinary appeal: ‘I say we are sorry. I say the burden of the Bisho massacre will be on our shoulders for the rest of our lives. We cannot wish it away. It happened. But please, I ask specifically the victims not to forget, I cannot ask this, but to forgive us, to get the soldiers back into the community, to accept them fully, to try to understand also

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 146-147.

⁴⁷⁷ Ciskei was one of the homelands including Bophuthatswana, KwaZulu and others, where ANC was forbidden to operate. Tutu reported that, “these and other homelands were established under apartheid’s “divide and rule” master plan, which sought to strip all black South Africans of their citizenship and make them citizens of a patchwork quilt of ethnically based Bantustans scattered around South Africa. KwaZulu resisted government efforts to make it take independence but the leaders of all three felt threatened by the ANC.” Bisho was the capital of Ciskei, where the massacre of unarmed ANC demonstrators took place in 1992. It was ruled by Brigadier Oupa Gqozo.

*the pressure they were under then. This is all I can do. I'm sorry, this I can say, I'm sorry'. That crowd, which had been close to lynching them, did something quite unexpected. It broke out into thunderous applause! Unbelievable! The mood change was startling.... No one could have predicted that day's turn of events at the hearing. It was as if someone had waved a special magic wand, which transformed anger and tension into this display of communal forgiveness and acceptance of erstwhile perpetrators. We could only be humbled by it all and be deeply thankful that so-called ordinary people could be so generous and gracious."*⁴⁷⁸

The communal nature of TRC marks it out to be specifically African⁴⁷⁹ model of reconciliation. It was not just about telling the story of suffering and acknowledging past faults, it was more and above all about integrating the perpetrators into the community, from which they have separated themselves. It was about restoring the lost harmony. TRC was therefore community oriented. Its aim was to re-establish a community of love and peaceful co-existence of both victims and perpetrators. It was aimed at re-discovering the humanness of the "other" that was lost through Apartheid. The victim and the perpetrator were brought to the great awakening that they are in reality brothers and sisters. The witness of Mr. Neville Clarence as reported by Tutu is worth mentioning here to prove that there is no boundary that reconciliation process cannot transcend. Mr. Neville Clarence was one of the 219 injured victims of a car bombing targeted against the South African security force personnel on May 20, 1983 by ANC. He lost his

⁴⁷⁸ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 150-151.

⁴⁷⁹ I say here "specifically African model" because it was born out of African Weltanschauung of "togetherness", "communio", "ujamaa", "family", "umunna". This does not in anyway imply that other traditions, countries and continents cannot adopt or apply this model to their conflicts experiences. In fact, TRC should be paradigm for all nations and traditions that have experiences of conflicts, divisions and wars. Israel and Palestine would have to borrow a lot from South Africa if there could ever be any sincere and genuine effort at reconciling their age long conflicts. Africa and the Western world still have scores to settle especially in relation to slavery, colonialism and economic exploitation suffered by Africa. Africa needs to tell the story of her suffering and the Western world ought to acknowledge its faults of the past for the much needed and long overdue reconciliation of both parties.

eyes in this attack, where twenty-one people also lost their lives.⁴⁸⁰ Tutu made the following documentation of his witness before the TRC:

*“He attended the amnesty hearing when those who had masterminded this attack were applying for amnesty. The main applicant was Mr. Aboobaker Ismail. Neville Clarence did not oppose the application. Instead he went over to Mr. Ismail, who had apologized for causing the civilian casualties, shook hands with him, and said he forgave him even if his action had cost him his sight and he wanted them to join forces to work for the common good of all. He later said that it was as if they did not want to let go of each other as they shook hands. The picture of the two shaking hands was blazoned on our TV screens and splashed on the front pages of our newspapers. It said more eloquently than words what the whole process of healing and reconciliation was about. It stood out as a superb icon for the Truth and Reconciliation process.”*⁴⁸¹

The experience of South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers us enough practical examples of what takes place in the whole process of reconciliation. It exposes how sublime, gracious and healing admission of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation could be. It above allayed the fears of many who were of the opinion that mere exposition of the truth could only lead to more carnage, bloodbath and revenge from the victims. The Post TRC South Africa as it exists today proves the contrary.

We are not however claiming that TRC of South Africa enjoyed the approval of all. There were critiques who argued that *“the final report of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission... appeared to have done something for truth but very little for reconciliation”*⁴⁸². They are of the opinion that truth was overemphasised to the detriment of reconciliation. But Alex Boraine, the vice President of the commission, while responding to such critiques noted that *“... while truth may not always lead to reconciliation, there can be no*

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 153-154.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁸² Alex, Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 340.

*genuine, lasting reconciliation without truth*⁴⁸³. He further observed that reconciliation is only a difficult process that has already started and that calls for the support and contribution of every man and woman. The state of things in South Africa today gives credence to this fact. He argues:

“If one compares South Africa before and after 1994, one has to concede that we are not the same country, that major conflict, which hopelessly and devastatingly divided our society, has been resolved”.⁴⁸⁴

He further notes:

*“Reconciliation, in other words, is not a sure-fire escalator, which takes one consistently and steadily to new heights. It is a process of fits and starts, of going forward and going back, of reaching heights and plumbing depths. But already, one looks back on the years since 1994, one can see a growing maturity. This was particularly evident in the 1999 election. South Africa has witnessed a shift from traditional voting patterns, and the white right wing, which had seemed so threatening, has almost disappeared. White Afrikaners have made new choices in terms of their political allegiance. So called coloured South Africans, many of whom had supported the National Party in the previous election, voted for other opposition parties and indeed for the ANC itself. This is part of reconciliation, but it is a process and an extraordinary, exquisitely painful journey.”*⁴⁸⁵

That South Africa successfully hosted the 2010 FIFA world cup bears an overwhelming testimony to the ongoing reconciliation in South Africa. Before this event, the Western world doubted the possibility of South Africa uniting as a nation to host the world. FIFA was steadily inundated with dissenting opinion to have plan B as an alternative should South Africa prove their fear. FIFA did not consent to this because it believed in South Africa. South Africa really proved to the world that it is a new and reconciled South Africa. It showed to the world that it is a rainbow nation irrespective of its difficult

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 341.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 345-346.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 346.

past. It proved its capacity to transcend the walls of division that tore it apart. The world was treated with amazing spirit of hospitality, friendship and brotherhood. It was a global celebration of *ubuntu*!

It is pertinent at this point to warn that South Africa, with its tremendous and imitable progresses, is not yet a paradise on earth! Being able to forgive and reconcile has telling implications for today and for tomorrow. It implies the readiness of both victims and perpetrators to learn from the past and being able to declare: Never again! It implies Metanoia or change of heart. It implies a change in the way people have perceived the others. It urges a conscious effort towards promoting the common good of all. It calls for both individual and common engagement towards helping the others; especially the victims transcend their existential situations. The process of reconciliation implies the enthronement of social justice both at individual and national level.

Commitment to social justice, in the case of South Africa, implies the concerted efforts by the whites who have immensely benefited from the apartheid system, to work towards improving the existential condition of millions of blacks who are still deprived of opportunities for a meaningful existence.

“For unless houses replace the hovels and shacks in which most blacks live, unless blacks gain access to clean water, electricity, affordable health care, decent education, good jobs, and a safe environment – things which the vast majority of whites have taken for granted for so long – we can just as well kiss reconciliation goodbye.”⁴⁸⁶

It also includes *“learning the language and culture of others; being willing to make amends; refusing to deal in stereo-types by making racial or other jokes that ridicule a particular group; contributing to a culture of respect for human rights, and seeking to enhance tolerance – with zero tolerance for intolerance; by working for a more inclusive society where most, if not all, can feel they*

⁴⁸⁶ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 274.

belong – that they are insiders and not aliens and strangers on the outside, relegated to the edges of society.”⁴⁸⁷

I would like to conclude this section with a poem by J. Cabazares, quoted by Boraine to emphasize that reconciliation calls more for praxis than theory:

*Talk to us about reconciliation
Only if you first experience
The anger of our dying.*

*Talk to us of reconciliation
If your living is not the cause
Of our dying.
Talk to us about reconciliation
Only if your words are not products of your devious scheme
To silence our struggle for freedom.*

*Talk to us about reconciliation
Only if your intention is not to entrench yourself
More on your throne.*

*Talk to us about reconciliation
Only if you cease to appropriate all the symbols
And meanings of our struggle.⁴⁸⁸*

The experience of TRC of South Africa remains till now an unavoidable paradigm for groups, communities, societies and nations in dire need of coming to terms with their past. It is a specifically African model based on African tradition of *ubuntu*. It has also an ecclesiological perspective within the context of post-Conciliar *communio-Ecclesiology*. It can also be a model for countries in other continents with painful experiences of wars, violence, human rights violations, and oppressions, ethnic and religious conflicts.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 274.

⁴⁸⁸ J., Cabazares, in: Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked*, 361.

6.3 Robert J. Schreiter on Reconciliation

Robert Schreiter is a Catholic theologian who, based on his missionary activities in Asia and other developing countries, has vested a lot of interest and effort in developing the theme of reconciliation. He is an internationally acclaimed expert in the areas of inculturation, mission and reconciliation, in which he has also published many books and articles. Some of his most popular works include: *Constructing Local Theologies*; *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*; *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* and *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*. Apart from his academic publications, Robert Schreiter is also engaged in the praxis of reconciliation, for apart from having served as consultant theologian to Caritas Internationalis for its programs on reconciliation and peacebuilding, he is also actively engaged in the work of reconciliation and peacebuilding with many organisations. We are going to rely on his two works on reconciliation to present his understanding of reconciliation.

In his earlier work on reconciliation, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* published in 1992, he tried to clear any misunderstanding and confusion that can be associated with the concept of reconciliation because of its use in the secular sphere. He observed that we are dealing with the reconciliation of the social order after a period of conflict and violence.⁴⁸⁹ He pointed to the risk of abusing this concept in any hasty and mischievous effort to reconstruct a new social order in order to avoid armed conflicts and cover the oppressors at all cost.⁴⁹⁰ This type of reconciliation can only be superficial and is a kind of window dressing. He identifies three understandings of reconciliation that can distort and falsify its true meaning:

“There are at least three understandings of reconciliation that come close to the genuine meaning of reconciliation but distort and even falsify its true sense. These three are reconciliation as

⁴⁸⁹ Robert, J., Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, 18.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

hasty peace, reconciliation instead of liberation and reconciliation as a managed process."⁴⁹¹

In the first form of the falsification of reconciliation as a hasty peace, people try to suppress the memory of the history of violence and victimization. This, according to him, is the type of reconciliation which the oppressors wish themselves so that they can easily escape the consequences of their actions. True reconciliation neither expects the victims to forget their sufferings nor suppress their memory of a history of violence. Such type of reconciliation that will expect the victims to forget their suffering experiences does not aim at preventing oppression but will only lead to the continuation and institutionalisation of oppressive situations.⁴⁹² Schreiter strongly believes that to trivialize and ignore the memory of victims is to trivialize and ignore human identity and to trivialize and ignore human identity is to trivialize and ignore human dignity.⁴⁹³ He concludes that any type of reconciliation in the form of hasty peace that ignores the suffering experiences of the victims is in fact the opposite of reconciliation. Because to forget the suffering of the victim implies to forget the victim and hence the causes of the suffering will never be exposed and really encountered.⁴⁹⁴ True reconciliation is a long process that needs time and thus should not be hasty. Any true and sincere reconciliation is always aimed at restoring a new relationship, a new human life⁴⁹⁵ and should be based on the moral authority of the victims themselves.

The second form of the distortion of the term, which Schreiter identifies, is seen where people try to understand reconciliation as an alternative to liberation. This was the case in Latin America⁴⁹⁶ and in South Africa.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁹⁶ Robert Schreiter makes reference here to the Latin American experience where, in 1985, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Latin America (CELAM) suggested that reconciliation and not liberation is the most suitable topic for Latin American theology and praxis. See Robert, Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, 21.

⁴⁹⁷ Here reference is also made to the Kairos-Document of 1985 published by South African theologians, where it was suggested that Christians should speak about reconciliation instead of liberation. See Robert, Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, 21.

Schreiter clearly states that reconciliation can never be an alternative to liberation but its implication. This is because, according to him, there can be no reconciliation without liberation. If the sources of conflict are not identified, examined and removed, reconciliation cannot be realized. We would only have a truce and not peace.⁴⁹⁸ Liberation remains therefore a necessary prerequisite for reconciliation.⁴⁹⁹

Lastly Schreiter points out that reconciliation is not a managed process. What does he mean by that? He simply wants to draw attention to the fact that reconciliation is more of a spirituality than a strategy. This is to denigrate the effort of people who in our highly scientific and technologized world, believe that one can hastily settle a conflict through the application of strategies or acquired skills.⁵⁰⁰ Here people are trained to accept and learn to cope with their situation. Schreiter makes it still clear that reconciliation is not a technique that should be mastered but something humans should discover which is open to every culture, both technology rich and technology poor cultures. He concludes by stating that reconciliation is more of spirituality as strategy.⁵⁰¹ By reconciliation as spirituality he means that reconciliation is a gift of God. It is God who reconciles. Schreiter's effort with all these nuances is to restore the term reconciliation to its Christian and religious origins.

From the Christian perspective he re-echoes the fact that reconciliation is a gift of God realized through the suffering and death of His Son Jesus Christ:

*"Reconciliation is the work of God, who initiates and completes in us reconciliation through Christ."*⁵⁰²

By this he wanted to underscore that reconciliation is not based on human effort. Any human effort at reconciliation is divinely inspired and motivated. This divine initiative finds its starting point in the lives of the victims. This, according to him, is because, *"experience shows that wrongdoers are rarely*

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁰² Robert, J., Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation, Spirituality and Strategies*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998, 14.

willing to acknowledge what they have done or to come forward of their own accord. If reconciliation depended entirely upon the wrongdoers' initiative, there would be next to no reconciliation at all".⁵⁰³ God begins the process of reconciliation with the victim by restoring to him his humanity – the divine image he possesses, which the oppressor tried to rob him of.⁵⁰⁴ The divine initiative to begin the process of reconciliation with victim is in line with His activity in the economy of Salvation where He began with His Son Jesus Christ. He is always the God who identifies with the victim and not with the oppressor.

Schreiter warns against the danger of believing that since reconciliation is the work of God, the human effort is of no value. The fact of God initiating reconciliation does not nullify the necessity of man's cooperation with the grace of God. Reconciliation is in this sense theandric! It involves the cooperation between the human and the divine!

*"The problem with this line of thinking is that it creates a too simple dichotomy between divine and human action. God's action is not some thunderbolt over and apart from human action. The communion between the human and the divine involves divine initiative coming through human action. It is frequently reported that the moment of reconciliation comes upon the victim as a surprise, or the consequences of reconciliation take people where they had not expected to go. There one can discern God's action: moving the victim and the community along in a moment of grace."*⁵⁰⁵

It is within this category of the encounter between the divine and the human in the process of reconciliation that Schreiter bases the spirituality of reconciliation. He opines that *"it is in God working through us that reconciliation is to be found."*⁵⁰⁶ We are therefore, God's instruments, "ambassadors" of reconciliation.⁵⁰⁷ This divine-human cooperation in the

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 16.

work of reconciliation finds concrete expression in “spiritual practices” that make true reconciliation possible.⁵⁰⁸ Schreiter states it succinctly:

*That relationship expresses itself in spiritual practices that create space for truth, for justice, for healing, and for new possibilities. Such practices lead to creating communities of memory, safe places to explore and untangle a painful past, and the cultivation of truth-telling to overcome the lies of injustice and wrongdoing. They lead also to creating communities of hope, where a new future might be imagined and celebrated. Often reconciled victims – and sometimes other members of reconciling communities – receive a call or vocation to become healers of others: healers of other victims, healers of wrongdoers. That healing takes place through the practice of truth-telling, the pursuit of justice, and peace-making.*⁵⁰⁹

The above outlined praxis of reconciliation is what Schreiter calls the strategies of reconciliation that must of necessity be rooted in the spirituality of reconciliation. There must be a mutual interaction between the two for, according to him, “*a spirituality that does not lead to strategies does not fulfil its goal... and a strategy that is not based in a spirituality will fall short of the mark*”.⁵¹⁰

Exposing further the Christian perspective on reconciliation, Schreiter reiterates St. Paul’s understanding (2 Cor 5:17) of reconciliation as transformation of both the victims and the oppressors into a “new creation”. This could be seen as the immediate spiritual fruit of reconciliation. In this sense, both the victims and their oppressors respond to the grace of God and to the divine call to be ambassadors of reconciliation. They are endowed with the amazing experience of being a new creation in Christ – a new humanity made possible through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵¹¹ The process of reconciliation, according to Schreiter and in line with the theology of St. Paul, finds its consummation in the reconciliation of

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 17-19. See also Robert, J., Schreiter, *Wider die schweigende Anpassung*, 91-92.

“all things in Christ, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:20).⁵¹² This is reconciliation from the perspective of the whole cosmos.⁵¹³

Another area to which Schreiter devoted much attention in his works on reconciliation is the role of the Church in the ministry of reconciliation.⁵¹⁴ Can the Church be an effective instrument of reconciliation? His answer is yes based on the following conditions. He noted that the Church can be effective and genuine in the ministry of reconciliation only when it presents herself as a reconciled Church. The Church must be a sign and an example of reconciliation by first and foremost achieving reconciliation within her community. For only as a reconciled community can the Church be an example of reconciliation for other societies. The Church must also be ready to accept her mistakes in history and ask for forgiveness.⁵¹⁵ The Church must always stand on the side of the victims against every oppressive system and regime. The Church should not corroborate with systems that oppress and dehumanise the people. She should engage herself in dismantling all the structures of oppression, violence and injustice.⁵¹⁶

Having outlined the pre-requisites for the authenticity and credibility of the Church in her reconciliation ministry, he pointed out the various concrete means in the Church's possession, which can help her carry out this ministry effectively. One of such concrete means, according to him, is the power of rituals. Rituals help us to come into contact with all the parts of our life. They help us to express our suppressed emotions. Rituals can therefore play an important part in the process of reconciliation.⁵¹⁷ Examples of such rituals include: the opportunity of public celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the ritual of purification of places where abominations in form of spilling of human blood and deaths occurred, the dignified burial of the dead victims of oppression and violence, the Sacrament of reconciliation, et cetera.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹² Ibid., 19.

⁵¹³ See Robert, J., Schreiter, *Wider die schweigende Anpassung*, 92-96.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 104-112.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 117-118.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 117-125.

The Church can also make use of the image-language of the New Testament in her ministry of reconciliation. Images, according to Schreiter, are means of retelling stories and reconstructing new histories from the experiences of tragedies.⁵¹⁹ Examples of such images in the New Testament include: The parable of the lost son and his brother (LK 15, 11-32), the Emmaus story (LK 24, 13-35), the story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria by Jacob's well (Joh 4, 7-26) and the appearance of the risen Lord to Thomas (Joh 20, 19.29).⁵²⁰

The last means, which the Church can avail herself of in the work of reconciliation is the cross. The cross which is an instrument of torture, according to Schreiter, should be made to be seen as the symbol of glory and triumph. The cross, a sign of paradox, stays at the centre of our world filled with violence and oppression, so that we do not only forget the agonies of the tortured bodies and souls but also never lose our hope. Thus God chose to reconcile with the world through the cross.⁵²¹ By hanging and dying on the cross, God chose to identify with the victims of violence and oppression and so through the victory of His resurrection to restore their hope of salvation.⁵²²

6.4 Reconciliation: A Challenge to the Church in Africa – Lessons from the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops took place in Rome from 4th to 25th October 2009. The theme of the Synod was: *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world" (Mt 5: 13, 14)*. Here we are going to focus on the issues addressed in the Pre-Synodal Instrumentum Laboris and Post-Synodal Propositions submitted to the Pope by the Synod Fathers and eventually on the just released Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI *Africae Munus* in order to expose the urgent lessons, which the Church in Africa can learn from the Synod.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 121.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 121-124.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 124-125.

⁵²² Ibid., 125.

The importance of this Second Synod of Bishops for the Church in Africa can never be underestimated. Its importance and urgency was made extensively clear in the Pre-Synodal Instrumentum Laboris:

“The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops is an important moment for the Church-Family of God in Africa. It is kairos (cf. Mk 1:15). St. Paul the Apostle writes in his Letter to the Corinthians: “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). This is the acceptable time for reconciling each person to God and one another. This reconciliation will bring about justice and peace. Just as Jesus accomplished his mission through bearing his cross, all Christ’s disciples in Africa, who have received “the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6), must likewise in their flesh break down “the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14).”⁵²³

The urgency of the Synod and the topic of reconciliation⁵²⁴ as we have earlier observed were borne out of the socio-politico-existential realities of the African Continent. There is an urgent need to break down the walls and barriers, which divide and tear people apart. There is an urgent need to re-establish the African human family. This great need calls for the response-**ability** of all as it is further outlined in the Instrumentum Laboris:

“Convinced that ‘in the midst of conflict and division, we know it is God who turns our minds to thoughts of peace,’ people make an offering of their suffering and activity so that ‘those who were estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek the way of peace together’(cf. 2Cor 5:18). Building the civilization of love is everyone’s responsibility.”⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Instrumentum Laboris of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City, 2009, No. 146.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., No. 147.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., No. 147.

The situation of conflicts and divisions in Africa poses a great challenge to Africans themselves at various positions and levels. It is therefore a common project both at individual and community levels. The Church, as the Family of God in Africa, is more challenged, based on her divine vocation to bring the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth.⁵²⁶ The Church as Family of God in Africa continues the mission of Jesus Christ, who is not only “*the source of God’s reconciliation to humanity as a whole and to each person individually*”⁵²⁷, but “*also the means leading to reconciliation among peoples.*”⁵²⁸ The Church accomplishes this mission of reconciliation by building communion among African societies.⁵²⁹ And this can only be more effective through the witness of life not only of the Church as a Family of God but also of the individual members of the Church.⁵³⁰ For only in this manner can the Church be a true sacrament, an efficacious sign of reconciliation in Africa.⁵³¹

While recognising the efforts already made by some African Societies towards reconciliation of peoples by employing traditional African models of reconciliation (such as sovereign national conferences, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa), attention was also drawn to various socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural factors militating against any genuine effort towards reconciliation. Such militating factors, as noted in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, include:

- a) The socio-political factors: “*Some African societies have been ruined by their political leaders. Others have witnessed tragic scenes of xenophobia, where foreigners were looked upon as symbolizing the misfortunes of society and became scape-goats. As a result, persons were burnt alive and hacked; families scattered and villages destroyed. In still other countries, some Particular Churches mention that political parties have used ethnic, tribal or regional sentiments to rally*

⁵²⁶ Ibid., No. 148.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., No. 42.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., No. 42.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., No. 42.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., No. 42.

⁵³¹ Ibid., No. 43.

*populations to their cause in a conquest for power, instead of fostering living together in peace.”*⁵³²

- b) The socio-economic factors: *“...Bad management and its consequent misery has caused trafficking in human beings, the prostitution trade and minors’ being forced to work. This has largely contributed to the destruction of family ties, the destabilization of entire communities and the displacement of thousands of refugees. On the national level, areas rich in oil and mining are very quickly becoming the kindling points of conflict, indeed of wars between neighbouring peoples and nations.”*⁵³³
- c) The socio-cultural factors: *“Some parts of the media (radio, press, television) have disseminated information and images which have incited populations to violence and hate and brought serious harm to the values which hold the family and society together: respect for elders and the dignity of women as mothers and protectors of life, etc. People are concerned about a growing loss in a cultural identity, primarily among the young and a consequent disregard for African Traditional Religion, which further shows the lack of appreciation for values viewed to be properly African. In certain parts of the continent, some mention that relations between one religion and another are degenerating into a true Christian and Muslim rivalry.”*⁵³⁴

The Church in Africa should therefore not ignore these societal experiences of reconciliation in Africa in her effort to find sincere ways of achieving reconciliation among the peoples of Africa. The mistakes of the past efforts should not be repeated. Above all, the Church should never ignore the traditional models or means of reconciliation, as they exist in different African traditions. Those traditional practices of reconciliation should be incorporated into the Christian practice of reconciliation. This is another area where Inculturation is urgently needed! The proposition of the Synod Fathers that *“the grace of the Sacrament of Penance celebrated in faith suffices to reconcile us to God and neighbour, and does not require any*

⁵³² Ibid., No. 50.

⁵³³ Ibid., No. 51.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., No. 52.

traditional rituals of reconciliation”⁵³⁵ though theologically correct, does not suggest any openness to Inculturation which it urges in Propositio 7. The Synod Fathers exposed their mistrust of African traditional rituals of reconciliation when they stated that “*a great number of Christians in Africa adopt an ambiguous attitude towards the administration of reconciliation. While they are very scrupulous in carrying out the traditional rites of reconciliation, they give little value to the Sacrament of Penance*”.⁵³⁶ This being the case, it is at the same time not enough to conclude that those rites are irrelevant to the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in Africa. Some of these rites as we have them in African traditions do also exist in Christian tradition. Example of such is *igba ndu* and *oriko* meal of reconciliation among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, which I have earlier presented in details. Here I want to observe again that the traditional rituals of reconciliation, when they are sieved of their pagan contents, do not in any way negate the Sacrament of Penance but complement it and make it take root in the African tradition. So the proposition of the Synod Fathers on Inculturation that “*positive elements of African traditional cultures be incorporated into the Church’s rites*”⁵³⁷ should also apply to the rite of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

What more, the Synod Fathers’ proposition with regards to the pastoral initiatives to be undertaken by the local churches for the enhancement of the culture of reconciliation is worthy of praise. Such pastoral practices include:

- “1. A Reconciliation Day or Week every year, especially in Advent and Lent, or a Year of Reconciliation on the continental level, to ask God for special pardon for all hurts and wounds inflicted upon each other and to reconcile offended persons and groups within the Church and the wider community. Communal acts of reconciliation and forgiveness could be arranged; and
2. an extraordinary Jubilee Year in which the Church in Africa and its Islands give thanks together with the universal Church

⁵³⁵ Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: II Ordinary Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops 4-25 October 2009, English Edition, Propositio 7.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., Propositio 7.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., Propositio 32.

and pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This period of reconciliation should be marked by the following:

- a. personal conversion and individual sacramental confession and absolution;*
- b. a continental Eucharistic Congress;*
- c. the celebration of rites of reconciliation in which people forgive each other;*
- d. renewal of Baptismal promises, in which being disciples of Jesus supersedes all other forms of allegiance to clan or political party; and*
- e. a renewed Eucharistic life.”⁵³⁸*

In the area of religious conflicts, especially between Christians and Muslims and African Traditional Religion, the Church should make more effort and explore new ways to promote peace and inter-religious dialogue.⁵³⁹ The meeting of these religions should be founded on truth, openness and sincerity of heart. The effort should not stop at the upper level, but more practical ways should be developed to enable it reach the grassroots.⁵⁴⁰

The Church’s effort at carrying out her mission of reconciliation could also meet serious obstacles through the existence of conflicts and divisions in her very life and among her members:

“Her message will not be effective, unless she fosters unity among her own members and resolves any conflicting signs in her life of witness. In this regard, divisions based on ethnic, tribal, regional or national lines and a xenophobic mentality have been observed in some ecclesial communities and in the words and attitudes of some Pastors.”⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁸ Ibid., Propositio 8.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., Propositio 11.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., Propositio 11.

⁵⁴¹ Instrumentum Laboris of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, No. 53.

This aspect poses a greater challenge to the Church in Africa. If the Church in Africa cannot present herself as the Family of God, then her mission of reconciliation would only be a will-o-the-wisp that eludes any actualization. The Church in Africa is challenged “*to devise ways and means to rebuild communion, unity and episcopal or priestly fellowship; to regain courage in her prophetic mission; and to commit herself to forming lay leaders who are committed to their faith, so that they can work in politics to bring the many different people in society to live together in peace. Such is the case also in the formation of priests and women and men religious who are eager to be signs of and witnesses to the Kingdom.*”⁵⁴² The Bishops, Priests, Deacons the Religious and the Laity are in a special way challenged to promote ecclesial communion and “*cooperation at the diocesan, national, continental and inter-continental levels.*”⁵⁴³

Just as the topic of the Synod suggests, the reconciliation, which Africa needs, implies the establishment of both justice and peace. For there can be no true reconciliation without justice and peace.⁵⁴⁴ And what does justice and peace mean for the Church in Africa?

Justice and peace entail the establishment of universal brotherhood. It is the acceptance and promotion of the common humanity of every man and woman. It is an all-inclusive attitude to life and the material things of life based on the principle of equality and equity. It implies the recognition and respect of the fundamental rights of every human being. Justice and peace mean giving everybody his or her due. No part of the society should be excluded from the socio- political and economic affairs of the community. Experiences of injustice in Africa include; marginalisation of some groups of the society, inhuman treatment of prisoners, expulsion of refugees often done in a dehumanising way,⁵⁴⁵ preferential implementation of penal

⁵⁴² Ibid., No. 54.

⁵⁴³ Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: II Ordinary Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops 4-25 October 2009, English Edition, Propositio 3 and 4.

⁵⁴⁴ Instrumentum Laboris of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, No. 147.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., No. 56.

systems especially with regards to war against corruption,⁵⁴⁶ exploitation and unjust payment of farmers,⁵⁴⁷ nepotism and tribalistic practices in public institutions and all forms of oppression of the poor and the weak especially women.⁵⁴⁸

Injustices are also identified within ecclesial communities, for example, in cases where women are only subjugated to play only inferior roles, where ecclesiastical workers are not given just salaries and where pastors arbitrarily mismanage church properties.⁵⁴⁹ The Church in Africa is more urgently challenged to dismantle all the structures of injustice within her community and to exert more energy in her prophetic mission of being the voice of the poor, the weak, the marginalised, the oppressed and the voiceless.⁵⁵⁰ For it is only by presenting herself as a just Family of God in Africa that the Church authentically be at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace to African societies and peoples.⁵⁵¹

6.4.1 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation – Africae Munus

Benedict VI began his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by calling Africans to “*live reconciliation between individuals and communities and to promote peace and justice in truth for all*”.⁵⁵² What makes reconciliation urgent for Africa is because of her bruised and scarred memory “*as a result of fratricidal conflicts between ethnic groups, the slave trade and colonization... with rivalries and with new forms of enslavement and colonization*.”⁵⁵³ In the face of present African realities, African peoples are called to “*foster dialogue among her among the members of its constituent religious, social, political, economic, cultural and scientific communities*.”⁵⁵⁴ The Pope made this

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., No. 57.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., No. 58.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., No. 59.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., No. 61.

⁵⁵⁰ Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: II Ordinary Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops 4-25, Propositio 17.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., No. 69, 92.

⁵⁵² Benedict VI, Africae Munus, Ouidah, Benin, November 11, 2011, no. 1.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 11.

vocation to dialogue, peace and reconciliation an imperative for particular Churches in Africa:

*“Hence the Synod Fathers could see that the difficulties encountered by the countries and particular Churches in Africa are not so much insurmountable obstacles, but challenges, prompting us to draw upon the best of ourselves: our imagination, our intelligence, our vocation to follow without compromise in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, to seek God, “Eternal Love and Absolute Truth”. Together with all sectors of African society, the Church therefore feels called to respond to these challenges. It is, in some sense, an imperative born of the Gospel.”*⁵⁵⁵

The Church must therefore be in the forefront in this vocation and mission! The effectiveness of this mission depends on the preparedness of the Church to witness with her personal life. This was clearly observed by the Synod Fathers and was later emphasized by the Pope in his Exhortation:

*“Thus, in union with the Synod Fathers, I invite “the Church ... in Africa to be a witness in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace, as ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘light of the world’,” so that her life may be a response to this summons: “Arise, Church in Africa, Family of God, because you are being called by the heavenly Father!”*⁵⁵⁶

The Church should teach by example. The life of Christ should manifest in all her words and actions. By presenting herself, through witness with her life, as present visible incarnation of God’s Word, she can be authentic and effective in the service of reconciliation to the peoples of the Continent.⁵⁵⁷

Benedict VI made allusion to the principal elements of the Synod’s topic, namely reconciliation, justice and peace to underscore that the three go hand in hand. Reconciliation and justice are the conditions for a lasting

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 12

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 16.

peace. None of the three elements should be ignored in any sincere effort at reconciliation. For according to him, *“human peace obtained without justice is illusory and ephemeral. Human justice which is not the fruit of reconciliation in the ‘truth of love’ (Eph 4:15) remains incomplete; it is not authentic justice.”*⁵⁵⁸

The Pope did not fail to reiterate that reconciliation is not a ministry for the Church alone, but should be of greatest importance for politics and public life.⁵⁵⁹ The path of reconciliation should be the way for African societies and communities, leaders and the entire African peoples in the face of the tragic experiences of the genocidal wars, conflicts and violence that constantly threaten the peaceful co-existence of African nations and thus blurs the future of African Continent. The Pope states it succinctly:

“Indeed, only authentic reconciliation can achieve lasting peace in society. This is a task incumbent on government authorities and traditional chiefs, but also on ordinary citizens. In the wake of a conflict, reconciliation – often pursued and achieved quietly and without fanfare – restores a union of hearts and serene coexistence. As a result, after long periods of war nations are able to rediscover peace, and societies deeply rent by civil war or genocide are able to rebuild their unity. It is by granting and receiving forgiveness that the traumatized memories of individuals and communities have found healing and families formerly divided have rediscovered harmony. “Reconciliation overcomes crises, restores the dignity of individuals and opens up the path to development and lasting peace between peoples at every level”, as the Synod Fathers were anxious to emphasize. If it is to be effective, this reconciliation has to be accompanied by a courageous and honest act: the pursuit of those responsible for these conflicts, those who commissioned crimes and who were involved in trafficking of all kinds, and the determination of their responsibility. Victims have a right to truth and justice. It is important for the present and for the future to

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 19.

*purify memories, so as to build a better society where such tragedies are no longer repeated.”*⁵⁶⁰

The most important aspect of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation is that the Pope did not occupy himself only with the nuances of reconciliation, but rather, based on the propositions of the Synod Fathers, recommended concrete pastoral ways for the Church in Africa to promote and to achieve reconciliation:

*“In order to encourage reconciliation in communities, I heartily recommend, as did the Synod Fathers, that each country celebrate yearly “a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent”. SECAM will be able to help bring this about and, in accord with the Holy See, promote a continent-wide Year of Reconciliation to beg of God special forgiveness for all the evils and injuries mutually inflicted in Africa, and for the reconciliation of persons and groups who have been hurt in the Church and in the whole of society. This would be an extraordinary Jubilee Year “during which the Church in Africa and in the neighbouring islands gives thanks with the universal Church and implores the gifts of the Holy Spirit”, especially the gift of reconciliation, justice and peace.”*⁵⁶¹

African Church leaders and Conferences of Bishops should make effort towards ensuring that these recommendations are meticulously implemented in their respective dioceses and regions. This is a *kairos* for Africa. This chance must not be ignored! The Church in Africa should dare to lead again! The Church should utilize the opportunity of the trust she still enjoys from the great majority of African peoples to lead the people along the path of reconciliation and peace! The Church in Africa should never forget to lead by example, by being a reconciled Church and a Church that begs for the forgiveness of all her failings in the history of Africa.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 157.

6.4.2 The Church-Family of God in Africa as Church that also Confesses her Sins

In the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, published November 29, 1998, Pope John Paul II stated categorically of the urgency of the Church's acknowledgement of the sins of her members in history. He delineated the burden of errors and faults, which weighs down the Church because of a counter-witness to Christianity by the sons and daughters of the Church both past and present. He observed that because "*our sin has impeded the Spirit's working in the hearts of many people*" there is therefore a great need for *Mea Culpa*. And the Jubilee Year is the *kairotic* moment for such *Mea Culpa*. In a very distinct and unequivocal language the Pope stated the Church's readiness for purification of memory through confession of sins:

"As the Successor of Peter, I ask that in this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness, which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters".⁵⁶²

By this the Holy Father pointed out that this confession of sin should be addressed to God. This is because sin is an offence against the Will of God. Because the Church has gone contrary to God's Will, she should kneel down humbly before Him to implore for mercy. While recognising also the social dimension of sin, the pope adds that, "*Christians are invited to acknowledge, before God and before those offended by their actions, the faults which they have committed.*"⁵⁶³

This request for confession of sin was met with great opposition from many cardinals. What was their argument for opposing this momentous proposal coming from the supreme Pontiff of the Church? For many of them, "*to admit a defect or stain in the Church could lead to the suggestion of a reform; and since this would be very dangerous, it was felt necessary at all costs to avoid*

⁵⁶² *Incarnationis mysterium*, No. 11.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, No. 11.

admitting any fault."⁵⁶⁴ These are those who are always afraid of any reform of the Church. The die-hard traditionalists who, like Ottaviani, are strong advocates of *semper idem*.

Luigi Accattoli, a Vatican correspondent for the Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, made a detailed account of the development of the Pope John Paul II's proposal for *Mea Culpa* in his exceptional and well-researched book, *When a Pope asks Forgiveness*. In this book, Accattoli notes that the Pope had initially made this proposal at the Extraordinary Consistory in 1994.⁵⁶⁵ He describes the other arguments of the cardinals who opposed this proposal. The leading arguments were the ones from cardinal Biffi of Bologna. Cardinal Biffi's arguments centred on the impeccability of the Church. For him, the Church cannot be guilty of sins because she is the "total Christ." Christ is the head of the Church to whom nothing morally objectionable can be imputed. One can only talk of the sins of the members of the Church but not of the Church as a community, for "*the wounds of sinful conduct are not inflicted on the Spouse of Christ, but on those who are the subjective agents.*"⁵⁶⁶ Biffi argues further, that, "*we are conjoined and belong to the 'total Christ' insofar as we are holy, not insofar as we are not. Our sinful actions are therefore acts that in their essence are outside the Church.*"⁵⁶⁷ What Biffi in essence is representing is that the examination of conscience should apply to individual persons but not to the Church as a community.⁵⁶⁸ There were however, cardinals⁵⁶⁹ who supported the Pope's proposal but advised extreme caution and prudence on how it should be done at all. Joseph cardinal Ratzinger, the then Prefect for Propagation of Faith, suggested that Christological aspect of this examination of conscience should rather replace ecclesiological orientation.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁴ Luigi, Accattoli, *When a Pope asks Forgiveness*, 8.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁶⁹ Luigi Accattoli made mention of cardinals like, Moreira Neves of Brazil, Angelo Sodano, Vatican's Secretary of State, Cassidy of Australia, Joseph Ratzinger and Etchegaray. Cf. Accattoli, *When A Pope asks Forgiveness*, 55-66.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

Accattolli notes that, interestingly enough, Pope John Paul seemed bent on the execution of this proposal that he answered his critics back with the publication of his Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.⁵⁷¹ The Pope makes it therefore clear that “*the consideration of mitigating factors does not exonerate the Church from the obligation to express profound regret for the weaknesses of so many of her sons and daughters who sullied her face, preventing her from fully mirroring the image of her crucified Lord, the supreme witness of patient love and of humble meekness*” (TMA 33). The Pope adds that “*although she is holy because of her incorporation into Christ, the Church does not tire of doing penance: before God and man she always acknowledges as her own her sinful sons and daughters.*” As *Lumen Gentium* affirms: “*The Church, embracing sinners to her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal*” (TMA 33). He concludes that the Church cannot therefore “*cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act. For acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them*” (TMA 33).

With this papal response expressing his determination to carry out this project of examination of conscience and purification of memory, the stage was set. What remained was the preparation for this great event. Part of the preparation was the need for “*a theological reflection on the conditions which make acts of purification of memory possible.*”⁵⁷² It was the then cardinal Ratzinger, who, then, as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, proposed to the International Theological Commission⁵⁷³ the study

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 67-68.

⁵⁷² International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000, 8.

⁵⁷³ International Theological Commission is composed of 30 theologians, from different schools and cultures, chosen for their professional competence and their fidelity to the magisterium. The Pope himself names the members, upon the recommendations of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and after consultation with bishops' conferences. All of the world's continents are represented on the body. At the time of this proposal for *Mea culpa*, Joseph cardinal Ratzinger was its President.

of the topic *“The Church and the Faults of the Past.”* The questions to be addressed included: *“Why should it be done? Who should do it? What is the goal and how should this be determined, by correctly combining historical and theological judgement? Who will be addressed? What are the moral implications? And what are the possible effects on the life of the Church and on society?”*⁵⁷⁴

After the careful study from this Commission, it came out with a document: *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past.* After historical, biblical and theological consideration of the theme, with its moral, pastoral and missionary implications, this highly revered and trusted Commission, as if to reply cardinal Biffi and members of his camp, reiterated the Second Vatican Council’s position about the Church. It states among other things that *“this Church which embraces her sons and daughters of the past and of the present, in a real and profound communion, is the sole Mother of Grace who takes upon herself also the weight of past faults in order to purify memory and to live the renewal of heart and life according to the will of the Lord.”*⁵⁷⁵ The Church does this in imitation of Christ her head who once took upon himself on the cross the sins of the whole world. The Church identifies with her numerous sons and daughters in all history. For the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of her children are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the Mother Church (GS 1). What is so impressive about this document is its directness in establishing the ways in which the Church, though holy, remains in this-worldly existence a sinful Church. For example, in Chapter three, it states that the Church *“is holy in being made so by the Father through the sacrifice of the Son and the gift of the Spirit. She is also in certain sense sinner, in really taking upon herself the sins of those whom she has generated in Baptism.”*⁵⁷⁶ It further states, as if to appoint accusing fingers, that *“all members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners.”*⁵⁷⁷ With this foundation

⁵⁷⁴ *Memory and Reconciliation*, 8.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

so solidly established, it was therefore not difficult for the commission to see clearly the necessity of a confession of sins and purification of memory.⁵⁷⁸

To the question: who is in the position to make this *Mea culpa* in the name of the Church, the Commission replies thus:

*“This expression of regret can be done in a particular way by those who by charism and ministry express the communion of the People of God in its weightiest form: on behalf of the local Churches, Bishops may be able to make confessions for wrongs and requests for forgiveness. For the entire Church, one in time and space, the person capable of speaking is he who exercises the universal ministry of unity, the Bishop of the Church ‘which presides in love,’ the Pope”.*⁵⁷⁹

This could be seen as a valid ecclesiological response, taking cognizance of *Communio* and *Mystici Corporis Christi Ecclessiology*. The bishops will make requests on behalf of the particular churches while the Pope, as Vicar of Christ on earth, makes *Mea Culpa* in the name of the universal Church. One clear short sight of the document is to forget the importance of taking the requests for forgiveness to the grass-root. There was no mention of parishes. Would that not have been appropriate that the parish priests make this request in the name of their communities? A lot of scandals, wounds and disappointments come from many parish priests. It is in the parishes that minors are abused. It is in the parishes that Church workers are mostly exploited. It is in the parishes – the grass-root that priests have abused their powers and have treated the lay as second-class citizens in the Church. The Church-Family of God in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace should take note of this unavoidable step towards any authentic mission in Africa!

With regards to the sexual abuses that have in the recent past shaken the foundation of the Church, especially in the Western world, the Church

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.

should deal with such allegations with the deep concern and love of a mother, and with a high sense of responsibility expected from the world's greatest moral authority. There are also thousands of such allegations in Africa⁵⁸⁰, which are unfortunately denied and covered under the "conspiracy of silence". The Church-Family of God in Africa must open her eyes and ears to learn from the historical experiences of the Churches in America and Europe! Apart from the pastoral care for the victims and their families, the Church should also develop humane policies to protect the children and families from potential exploitation. Since prevention is better than cure! One of the best solutions of a problem is nipping it from the bud. In this sense, we recommend a strict psychological screening of candidates to the priesthood and for religious life apart from removal from the pastoral ministry of the priest-abusers. For only through such sincere and humane efforts can the Church in Africa regain her moral authority!

Another issue, which needed to be clarified, was the question of the *appropriate addressee* of the confession. To whom must the request be made? The Commission made it clear in the document that "*the confessio peccati, sustained and illuminated by faith in the Truth which frees and saves (confessio fidei), becomes a 'confessio laudis' addressed to God, before whom alone it becomes possible to recognise the faults both of the past and of the*

⁵⁸⁰ In November 20 1998, Sr. Marie McDonald of the Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa, while representing her religious Congregation who is engaged in Missionary work in Africa, presented a four-page paper titled "*The Problem of the Sexual Abuse of African Religious in Africa and Rome*" to the Council of 16, a group that meets three times a year consisting of delegates from the Union of Superiors General, an association representing men's religious communities based in Rome; the international Union of Superiors General, an organization representing women religious; and the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. In this paper, Sr. McDonald exposed, among other things, the problem of "*sexual harassment and even rape of sisters by priests and bishops*" in Africa. She noted that the financial predicament of the sisters makes them vulnerable and exposes them to priests who help them on the condition of gaining sexual favors from them. Sometimes such sisters are impregnated and forced to commit abortion by their "abusers". The sister expressed her disappointment with the standing committee of SECAM before whom she brought this report coming from diocesan congregations and Conferences of Major Superiors in Africa. Instead of taking the report seriously, the committee "felt that it was disloyal of the sisters to have sent such reports outside their own dioceses.... that the sisters in question should go to their diocesan bishop with these problems." Sr. McDonald interpreted the reaction of the committee and some local ordinaries that have been properly informed about this worrisome incident that could shake the foundation of the Church in Africa as another "conspiracy of silence". There are also thousands of cases where minors (boys and girls) and women were abused and exploited by priests and Church employees.

*present....*⁵⁸¹ The Commission also turns its attention to the human recipients of *confessio peccati*. They include persons and/or “*groups of persons either inside or outside the community of the Church.*”⁵⁸² The individual cases or instances were not specifically considered but, just as Luigi Accattoli observed, there have been well known instances, which Pope John Paul II himself mentioned on different occasions. Examples include, the treatment of Galileo, the Jews and Muslims, Hus and Luther, the Indians; the injustices of the Inquisition, the Mafia, racism; religious integralism, schism and the papacy, wars and injustice, and treatment of the Blacks.⁵⁸³

Just as the Church is ever ready to make confessions of her sins, she recognises also that she has on many occasions in the course of her history, fallen victim of sins from others. She has always been the wounded one! She therefore expects the same readiness from her offenders to make requests of forgiveness to her. Reciprocity is an indispensable condition for any true reconciliation. The Church expects the same initiative from the other party.⁵⁸⁴ But the Church is ever ready to make the very first step because of her deep conviction that such a step would “*have an exemplary and prophetic value, for religions as much as for governments and nations....*”⁵⁸⁵ The Church also does this because it will remain a sign of Church’s vitality and authenticity and it will go a long way to revitalise and strengthen her credibility.⁵⁸⁶ Above all is the strong conviction of the Church that such recognition of faults and confession “*can foster renewal and reconciliation in the present.*”⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 50.

⁵⁸³ Luigi, Accattoli, When a Pope asks Forgiveness, 56.

⁵⁸⁴ Memory and Reconciliation, 51.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 15.

6.5 Reconciliation: A Challenge to African Political Leaders

In his diagnosis of African post-conflict situations, Segun Odunuga⁵⁸⁸ identified the real problems facing most of African independent states and charted a new course of action for African leaders.⁵⁸⁹ One of the problems is the existence of weak political institutions, where the political leaders manipulate themselves into political power and suppress every other opposition in order to cling on to power for a very long time. These leaders often whip up ethnic sentiments to polarise the people more. Fraudulent electoral practices have also been employed thereby instituting corruption, ineptitude and illegitimate governments.⁵⁹⁰ African politicians have been unfortunately source of divisions rather than being symbols of unity. He summed the African post-conflict situation thus: *“The progress of Africa has been undermined through bad governance, lack of transparency, accountability and social justice. The trend has to be reversed if long-term stability, prosperity and peace are to be ensured.”*⁵⁹¹

From the above observation it is evident that Segun Odunuga has a vision of a reconciled Africa. He is oblivious that such reconciliation does not come easy. One has to go beyond words or theory into active engagement. It involves sincere commitment of African leaders to this project. His vision of a stable, prosperous and peaceful Africa implies the following:

“Democratic institutions will have to be put in place to ensure good governance and strengthen the notion of effective power sharing between the various segments of society. This can only be done under the belief that a peaceful change of leadership is possible and that there can be no progress without fair play and

⁵⁸⁸ Segun, Odunuga, “Achieving Good Governance in Post-Conflict Situations: The Dialectic between Conflict and Good Governance”, in: Adedeji, Adebayo, etd., *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts*, South Africa: IPSR Books, 1999, 41.

⁵⁸⁹ According to him the only way towards overcoming conflicts in Africa independent states is good governance by African leaders. Africa needs leaders who are ready to transcend the colonial heritage and work towards the unification of the polarised people of diverse ethnic groups. This can be done through the institution of solid all-inclusive political structures.

⁵⁹⁰ Apart from gaining the power through illegitimate means, these leaders are so parochial that they see their ascension to power as an opportunity to enrich themselves, their families and tribes. Cf. Segun, Odunuga, *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁹¹ Segun, Odunuga, *Ibid.*, 51.

*social justice. In such an environment of social justice, the cohesive efforts of the society will enable Africa to face the challenges posed by the new millennium. That is the only way forward.”*⁵⁹²

Africa needs urgently *“leaders who are unifiers, chiefs in the true sense, who bind wounds, hold everything and everyone together, mobilise and motivate their people, pursue a policy of inclusion rather than exclusion and are seen by one and all to be of the highest integrity and beyond suspicion.”*⁵⁹³ This must be uppermost in the mind of political leaders. African independent states, weighed down by the horrible experience of wars and conflicts need leaders, who will sooth their wounded, who will console the bereaved, give back the homeless their homes, restore justice to the deprived and recover the human dignity of those who have been deprived of it. What are the most fundamental practical ways of achieving this?

Adedeji Adebayo suggests:

*“Overarching objective must be to seek a system of governance that unites rather than marginalizes; builds bridges of confidence and reconciliation rather than the pitfalls of alienation; shares power rather than monopolizes it; and decentralizes rather than centralizes, thus yielding space to civil society....”*⁵⁹⁴

The implication of the above observation is that any effort at reconciliation and peace building in Africa that ignores her past and present specific socio-political circumstances will be superfluous. It would be building on sand or laying a shallow foundation. Any effort at reconciliation by African political leaders that does not find plausible response to her past and present experiences with regards to the questions of governance and leadership, social justice and equity, distribution of natural resources and economic

⁵⁹² Ibid., 51.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁹⁴ Adedeji, Adebayo, “Comprehending African Conflicts” in: Adedeji, Adebayo, etd., *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts*, South Africa: IPSR Books, 1999, 17.

progress is bound to fail. It is on this basis that any effort at reconstruction will be possible at all.

Africa needs visionary leaders, who like Moses and Joshua are ready to lead African people out of socio-political and economic bondage into the modern world of freedom, progress and peace. The strident effort of African political leaders would be, just as Boraine Alex rightly observed, to build a solid bridge between *“the past ... characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful coexistence.”*⁵⁹⁵ This demands great courage from the leaders to part with the past and be able to say: Never again! The courage to part with the past implies the readiness to accept the responsibility for the present and the future. This is because dealing with the past does not mean dwelling in the past but a necessary part of the promise of a new future.⁵⁹⁶ It implies: *“a promise that the past will not be repeated, that the future will bring democracy, stability, and a culture of human rights based on a commitment to the rule of law.”*⁵⁹⁷

The third Millennium African leaders should therefore commit themselves zealously to instituting *“a governance system that will draw its inspiration from Africa’s ancient values of solidarity, cooperative spirit, self-help development and humanism.”*⁵⁹⁸ The results of many researchers⁵⁹⁹ on African conflicts have shown that the solution to Africa’s socio-economic and political woes should not only have ameliorative effects but should above all serve as prophylaxis against their future occurrences. The researchers are overwhelmingly united in their articulation of the solutions towards the

⁵⁹⁵ Alex, Boraine, *A Country Unmasked*, 424.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁵⁹⁸ Adedeji, Adebayo, *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁹⁹ Of immense importance are the contributions made by the research teams in some conflict countries to the international workshop held in Bamako in November 1980 under the aegis of the African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ACDESS). The researchers, while accessing the historiography of those conflict countries, tried also to proffer solutions towards mastering and managing African conflicts. They recognised the efforts already made both by the local and international interest groups and at the same time focused on the still needed effort to be made for a sustainable, reconciled and peaceful future. See the already quoted book by Adedeji Adebayo.

prevention of conflicts in African societies. They include, as already indicated above,

a) The establishment of good governance based on democracy and the respect of the fundamental human rights.⁶⁰⁰ African societies must enthrone human rights culture and eschew the military culture of suppression, oppression and denial of the rights of the citizens.

b) The avoidance of any form of exclusivity in form of geographical, economic, social, cultural or ethnic marginalisation.⁶⁰¹ There must be all-inclusive system of governance, in which each ethnic or social group takes part.

c) All the local, national and sub-regional crises are to be handled with diligence, equity and patriotism⁶⁰² without bias or favouring one group against the other. For favouring one group against the other, as experience has shown will polarise the society making the people to live with hatred and resentments.

d) The entronement of the rule of law⁶⁰³ for all without any preferential treatment to anyone no matter how fat or highly placed. For the experience of the western world shows how effective this is in the establishment of order and accountability in the society.

e) The demilitarisation⁶⁰⁴ of African societies especially those that have been involved in long lasting wars. The Western world, which sponsors and supplies arms to rebel groups in exchange of Africa's pearls, diamond, gold and oil should reconsider their action.

f) Education of the vast majority of Africans who still in the third Millennium remain uneducated and unenlightened. I consider illiteracy as Africa's

⁶⁰⁰ Bintou Sanan, Kouca, and Sicave, Ecawell, "The Experience of Northern Mali: A History of Armed Conflict, in: Adedeji, Adebayo, etd., Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts, South Africa: IPSR Books, 1999, 214.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 214.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 214.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 214.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 214.

original sin of the 21st century. Such mass education will go a long way towards liberating the people from poverty and intellectual short sightedness, which makes them assume wrong identity. Education removes the scales that blind the eyes and empowers the people to look outside the cave to see the horizon and stars beyond.

f) Promotion of encounters⁶⁰⁵ and dialogue with other cultures and religions at all levels. African universities and schools should offer courses on reconciliation, peace and national unity.

g) Deconstruction of people's perception of others and the promotion of the African spirit of togetherness, *Ujamaa*, *Ubuntu* or *Umunna*. This will go a long way towards rooting out mistrusts among different ethnic and religious groups.

African political leaders must be in the forefront towards the realisation of the above. For, they are the real captains that will sail African people to lasting and sustainable development and peace.

⁶⁰⁵ The initiative taken by General Yakubu Gowon's administration in Nigeria after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-1970) was monumental and worth documenting here. Immediately after the war, General Gowon declared "no victor, no vanquished" and initiated a policy of national integration and reconciliation based on 3Rs: reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Under the policy, his government established unifying schemes: "unity schools, two in each state of the federation (one for boys and the other for girls) with a view to bringing together young people of various ethnic groups so as to develop a bond of oneness and unity; and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)... NYSC started with a view of making graduates of tertiary institutions have a one-year service in states other than their own, so as to foster national unity and integration." See Odunuga, Segun, "Nigeria: A Victim of its Own Success" in: Adedeji, Adebayo, etd., *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts*, South Africa: IPSR Books, 1999, 227.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION

7.1 Traditional Theology and Emergent Theologies

The Enlightenment and its resultant French Revolution was in effect a necessary time bomb that shook the foundation of the Church and her theology, but at the same time awakened theology from its dogmatic slumber and aloofness that incapacitated it from looking the existing world socio-political situations in the face. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution left the Church no other option, despite her anti-revolutionary efforts,⁶⁰⁶ than to break the theological cave filled only with dogmas and Hellenistic terminologies in which she was trapped and a new horizon for Catholic theology was opened.⁶⁰⁷ This found its concrete expression at the Second Vatican Council as we are going to see briefly.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, The Church's theology was dominated by and judged according to the standard of the Scholastic theology of Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁰⁸ There was no genuine readiness on the part of the Church to relate the traditional contents of faith to the existential realities of the world.⁶⁰⁹ The Church was really consumed with the fear of making mistakes that really stunted her development and made her bereft of vitality

⁶⁰⁶ The Church understood the French Revolution in terms of the Apocalypses that was destined to consume the world with its evil of atheism. The Church saw in it an Antichrist aimed at destroying the Christendom and with it the Kingdom of God. The Church immediately took an anti-revolutionary position through her theologian, who worked as apologetics trying to denigrate the evil of the French Revolution and to defend the *depositum fidei*, deposits of faith. See also, Jürgen, Moltmann, "Revolution, Religion, and the Future", in: Johann Baptist, Metz, and Jürgen, Moltmann, Faith and the Future, Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, Maryknoll, New York: 1995, 162-163.

⁶⁰⁷ ⁶⁰⁷ Metz noted that the attempt to grapple with the fundamental crisis of Christian theology brought about by the processes of Enlightenment led to the dissolution of "*the classical unity of theology and led to a variety of forms for theology's attempt to give an account of the hope that is in us.*" Johann Baptist, Metz, "Theology in the Modern Age, and before its End", in: Johann Baptist, Metz, and Jürgen, Moltmann, Faith and the Future, Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, Maryknoll, New York: 1995, 31.

⁶⁰⁸ In an effort to revive Thomism, which was however a papal reaction against many theological schools that rose to the challenges of modernism, Pope Leo XIII promulgated, through his encyclical "Aeterni Patris" of August 4, 1879, Thomism as the official philosophy of Roman Catholic theology. CF. Francis Schüssler, Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods, in: Francis Schüssler, Fiorenza, and John, P., Galvin, Systematic Theology, Roman Catholic Perspectives, Vol. 1, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 35-36.

⁶⁰⁹ Richard, Lennan, The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 125.

by unduly clinging to tradition.⁶¹⁰ This “conservatism and pessimism”⁶¹¹ of the Church was given a fatal blow through the emergence of the modern age with all its processes of both scientific and political Enlightenment.⁶¹² The Church and her theology reacted defensively and apologetically to the challenges of the modern age:

*“Rather than playing a genuinely creative role in the modern age’s history of freedom, and particularly in the processes of bourgeois and post bourgeois Enlightenment, (she sic) has for the most part opposed this. What have been termed the Catholic ages within the modern age, and particularly since the Enlightenment, have essentially always been “anti” ages: the age of the counter – reformation, the age of the counter – Enlightenment, the age of the counter – revolution, the age of political restoration, and the romantic movement.”*⁶¹³

Johann Baptist Metz made the observation above to indicate the fact that the Church and her theology was always lagging behind the world development. He particularly pointed out that the Church and her theology, which should have stayed in the forefront in the development of human freedom, was unfortunately left out in the effort and more scandalously worked against such development:

*“Can Catholics and Catholic theology appeal to a history of freedom that was fought and suffered for, not only without them, but to a considerable extent, against them?”*⁶¹⁴

But a ray of light rose in the Church among some of her theologians who were of the opinion that the Church should not remain deaf and blind to these challenges. For, Modernism was an opportunity for growth and therefore the Church could not afford to miss it. She had to grow with the

⁶¹⁰ This is to make use of Karl Rahner’s observation that the possibility of false developments by the Church before the Vatican II Council was less to be feared than was her “unliving traditionalism”. For “a genuine will to respect tradition implied the readiness to seek new ways and means to relate this tradition to the future.” See also, Richard, Lennan, *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶¹² Johann Baptist Metz, “Theology in the Modern Age, and before its End”, in: Johann Baptist Metz, and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future, Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*, Maryknoll, New York: 1995, 33.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

age. The contributions of theologians⁶¹⁵ like Bernard Lonergan, Edward Schillebeeckx, Henry Bouillard, Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Karl Rahner who, in the spirit of openness, authentically listened to the spirit and message of modernism, were influential to the change in the attitude of the Church that eventually led Pope John XXIII to convoke the Second Vatican Council. One could therefore say that the Second Vatican Council was the fruit of the Catholic Church's openness and readiness to give a sincere response to the processes of Enlightenment and French Revolution. John XXIII rightly conceived the Council as *aggiornamento*. And so with the Second Vatican Council, a new course was charted for the Catholic Church and her theology just as Lennan Richard rightly pointed out:

*“Thus, Vatican II was not simply another event in the history of the Church, but was the single most important influence on the shape of contemporary Catholicism.”*⁶¹⁶

With the Second Vatican Council, Catholic theology became flexible and less dogmatic. It became clear *“that theology could say something important without needing to elevate everything to dogma.”*⁶¹⁷ This new way of being open on the part of the Church and her theology in a world that is becoming more and more pluralistic led to the emergence of ecumenical theology, feminist theology, Liberation theology, ecological theology, political theology and others.⁶¹⁸ Moltmann describes these theologies as *“new working drafts in our generation designed to overcome the fateful and fundamental antirevolutionary, conservative, and apocalyptic option in Christianity; and their purpose is no longer merely to react to the development of the modern mind and spirit, but to run ahead of it, carrying the light of hope.”*⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁵ Francis Schüssler, Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology: Task and Methods, in: Francis Schüssler, Fiorenza, and John, P., Galvin, Systematic Theology, Roman Catholic Perspectives, Vol. 1, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 37.

⁶¹⁶ Richard, Lennan, *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶¹⁸ Kasper, Walter, *Jesus the Christ*, Wellwood, Great Britain: Burns and Oates Limited, 1976, 15. See also Jürgen, Moltmann, “Religion, Revolution, and the Covenant of Life”, in: Johann Baptist, Metz, and Jürgen, Moltmann, *Faith and Future*, 164-165.

⁶¹⁹ Jürgen, Moltmann, “Religion, Revolution, and the Covenant of Life”, in: Johann Baptist, Metz, and Jürgen, Moltmann, *Faith and Future*, 164-165.

7.2 Why Political Theology?

Under this section, our idea is going to be very much influenced by the works of Johann Baptist Metz⁶²⁰ who is considered today as a great master of political theology as we are also going to see later. The term “political theology” has been historically and controvertibly used differently by some authors and hence has also undergone some historical transformation. It was originally used by the Stoics, who distinguished the three classes of theology (tripartita theologia), namely: mythical theology, natural theology and political theology.⁶²¹ Political theology was then used to express those religious practices, which served the needs of the state. It was employed in ancient Rome to serve the religious legitimacy of the absolute and infallible state.⁶²² Augustine however criticized this political theology of Rome in his City of God (*DE Civitate Dei* VI, 12). According to him, there are ends beyond the state, which political theology cannot serve because it is the *Civitas Dei* and not *Civitas Terrena* (earthly city) that constitute the true end of man. The reflection on this political theology of Rome was also found in the early Christian theologies.

The question of the need of religion in the society came again to the fore since the time of Renaissance, especially in the political philosophy of Macchiavelli and later Hobbes.⁶²³ The secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment and French Revolution led to the separation of State and Religion, which was strongly fought against by the leaders of Catholic Restoration. It was then within the above historical context that Carl Schmitt revived the discussion of political theology in the twentieth century (1922). The term appeared first in his 1922 essay under the title: *Politische*

⁶²⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, born in 1928, has devoted much of his works to this topic starting from his earlier works and treatises in the 60s and 70s. He was not only a faithful student but also a friend and a great collaborator of Karl Rahner, whose transcendental theology laid a solid theological foundation for Metz. He later went on to develop his own new political theology as a corrective to the transcendental theology of Rahner, whom he accused of being silent to the catastrophe of Auschwitz. Auschwitz became for him the starting point of his new political theology, because, according to him, only “after Auschwitz can one truly raise the question of God. Today he has immense bibliographies on the theme of political theology.

⁶²¹ Metz, Johann Baptist, *Memoria Passionis, Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2006, 252.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 252.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 252.

*Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität.*⁶²⁴ According to him, the political organisation of an epoch must correspond with its metaphysical understanding of the world. He therefore prophesied the immediate end of modern liberalism and democracy, which will be replaced through a dictatorial form of government, since such socio-political forms of government like the former, lack theological foundation.⁶²⁵ For him, monarchy corresponds to theistic ideas and hence justifiable.

*“The monarch is identified with God and has in the state a position exactly analogous to that attributed to God in the Cartesian system of the world.”*⁶²⁶

Schmitt's understanding of political theology was viewed with considerable reservation, being seen in some quarters⁶²⁷ to be an endorsement of Hitler and German nationalism.⁶²⁸ One could therefore see that the controversy generated by the term “political theology” has been enormous.

7.2.1 The New Political Theology According to Johann Baptist Metz

It was Johann Baptist Metz, who later picked up the term “political theology” to free it from all the misunderstandings surrounding it and thus to give it a “new”⁶²⁹ interpretation. In his diagnosis of the modern age and the

⁶²⁴ Carl, Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre der Souveränität*, Munich und Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1922.

⁶²⁵ Dorothee, Sölle, *Politische Theologie*, Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1971, 72.

⁶²⁶ Carl, Schmitt, *Political Theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*, translated by G. Schwab, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985, 46.

⁶²⁷ Carl Schmidt himself responded to the debate generated by his work and particularly to Erik Peterson, a Catholic theologian, whose publications of 1931 and 1935 argued against the possibility of a political theology as propagated by Schmitt. Carl, Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II: die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1970, 16. See also, Erik, Peterson, ‘Göttliche Monarchie’, *Theologischen Quartalschrift*, Heft LV (1931), pp. 537-64; , Erik, Peterson *Der, Mon- otheismus als politisches Problem; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum*, Leipzig: Jakob Hegner, 1935.

⁶²⁸ See, for example, Alfred, Schindler, ed., *Monotheismus als politisches Problem? Erik Peterson und die Kritik der politischen Theologie* , Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Ger Mohn. 1978.

⁶²⁹ Metz coined the term “new political theology” to distinguish it from the earlier understanding of political theology among theologians before him as we have seen above: “Zwar habe ich in meinem bisherigen Versuch, eine neue “politische Theologie” zu bestimmen, immer deren Unterschied, ja Gegensatz zu jeder Form einer direkt politisierenden Theologie hervorgehoben und ausdrücklich jenes Missverständnis einer Neopolitisierung des Glaubens oder gar einer Neopklerikalisierung der Politik abgewiesen, das der Begriff der „politischen Theologie“, nicht zuletzt wegen seiner historischen Hypothek, zu assoziieren scheint.... Wenn ich hier nun erneut den Gebrauch dieses

consequences it had on Christian theology, Metz observed that, through the processes of the Enlightenment, theology fell victim of twofold reduction that led to the eventual crisis for theology.⁶³⁰ The first is “*the privatistic reduction of theology in which the logos of theology is entirely concentrated on religion as a private affair and, thus, is in danger of losing continuity with the messianic cause of Christianity.*”⁶³¹ The second is the “*rationalistic reduction of theology... of withering of the imagination, a radical renunciation of symbolism and mythology under the excessive cognitive pressure of the abstract modern world of the sciences.*”⁶³²

With the relegation of theology to the private sphere, Christian theology lost its essential mission to the society. It concerned itself only with the salvation of the individual but ignored the socio-political situations in which the individual exists, which often make him victim of exploitation, oppression and dehumanisation. Theology became a stranger to the realities of the modern humanity and could no longer take account of the modern man's dreams and aspirations nor give practical responses to the existential questions he was confronted with. For example, the questions of freedom, human rights, exploitation, alienation, social justice, peace and reconciliation which form part of the eschatological promises of the gospel⁶³³ were relegated to the background or removed outside the domain of Christian theology. Theology became world-less and face-less. This was

Begriffes zu rechtfertigen und zu erläutern suche, so tue ich das zwar teilweise immer noch aus dem Mangel an einer geeigneten Alternative zur Bezeichnung des mit ihm verbundenen kritisch-hermeneutischen Anliegens der Theologie. Gleichwohl soll die Klärung der theologischen Deutung dieses Begriffes auch die Frage nach seiner historischen Legitimation zur Sprache bringen“, Johann Baptist Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie*, Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1997, 34.

⁶³⁰ Metz noted that the crisis of the Enlightenment led to the emergence of transcendental, existential and personalistic tendencies of modern theology that made it to ignore the social or public dimension of Christian message. This constituted a crisis for Christian theology. Ibid. Johann Baptist Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie*, Mainz, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1997, 10. See also Johann Baptist Metz, „Theology in the Modern Age, and before its End“, in: Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 32.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 32.

⁶³² Ibid., 32.

⁶³³ Johann Baptist Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie*, Mainz, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1997, 14.

clearly the shortcoming of both the Neo-Scholastic and transcendental-idealist theologies.⁶³⁴

Metz systematically articulated three modern crises and challenges on which Christian theology must take a stand:

- a) Theology can no longer claim to be historically and socially innocent. This implies that it is no longer necessary for theology to engage itself in an apologetic defence of its foundations in relation to ideological and social criticism. This leads inevitably amounts *“to an attempt by theology to establish a new relationship to history and society that has not been clarified by the theological theories of world secularization and modernization.”*⁶³⁵
- b) Theology can longer defend *“a system that took no account of the individual situation or person, that is, theology concerned itself with the “irruption” of the poor, which does not permit the poor to vanish into an impersonal theory of poverty.”* In the particular European experience, it is the Auschwitz catastrophe.⁶³⁶
- c) Theology must free itself from parochialism of cultural monocentrism in order to encounter the reality of an ethnically and culturally polycentric world. For *“traditional Christian theology needs to overcome not only a great deal of social but also ethnic blindness. It must adopt the option for others in their otherness, for ethnic and cultural characteristics are not just an ideological superstructure based on economic problems, as Marxist theory and Western praxis would like to suggest.”*⁶³⁷

His personal response to these challenges, as a European theologian, is his “post idealist” theology – **political theology**. And what does he really mean with the term “political theology”?

⁶³⁴ Here Metz directed his critique particularly to Kahl Rahner whose transcendental theology he considered to be too idealized and privatized that it does not take care of the reality of sin, guilt, suffering and evil that threaten the human subjects everywhere.

⁶³⁵ Johann Baptist, Metz, “Theology in the Struggle for History and Society”, in: Johann Baptist, Metz, and Jürgen, Moltmann, Faith and the Future, 50.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 50-51. See also, Johann Baptist, Metz, Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie, 106.

He understands political theology primarily as a critical corrective against an extreme privatisation tendency of modern theology.⁶³⁸ It is a theological effort at deprivatising (Deprivatizierung) of theology, since “*historical as well as social questions penetrate to the core of theology and demand an extremely differentiated treatment that can no longer be provided by the individual theological practitioner.*”⁶³⁹ He noted however, that deprivatising theology does not in any way ignore the personal responsibility of the individual before his God as documented in the message of the New Testament.⁶⁴⁰ It is exactly this privatising tendency that exposes theology to the risk of ignoring the existential circumstances in which the individual exists. With such a tendency of reducing faith to the private sphere, it is uncritically and uncontrollably exposed to the danger of supporting and protecting those dangerous institutional and political ideologies that oppress and dehumanise⁶⁴¹ and in this sense present religion really as the opium of the people.

For him, political theology attempts to formulate the eschatological message under the circumstances in which our modern society finds itself.⁶⁴² It is a reflection “*on Christian traditions in the context of world problems*”.⁶⁴³

Jürgen Moltmann, who was a strong corroborator of Metz, is also of this view that political theology:

*“Is the theological reflection of Christians who for the sake of their consciences suffer in the midst of the public misery of society and struggle against this misery.”*⁶⁴⁴

⁶³⁸ Metz understands political theology as a critical corrective against the extreme privatisation tendency of modern theology. According to him, modern theology erred in its effort to respond to the aspirations of the Enlightenment and French Revolution that sought to relegate religion to the private sphere through the separation of State and Religion. Cf. Johann Baptist, Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie*, 9.

⁶³⁹ Johann Baptist, Metz, „Theology in the Modern Age, and before its End”, in: Johann Baptist, Metz and Jürgen, Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 31.

⁶⁴⁰ Johann Baptist, Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie*, 11.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴³ Johann Baptist, Metz, “Future in the Memory of Suffering”, in: Johann Baptist, Metz and Jürgen, Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 5.

⁶⁴⁴ Jürgen, Moltmann, “Political Theology”, in: *Theology Today* – vol. 28, no. 1 – April 1971, 7.

The new political theology will therefore take into account the situation of our modern times and take the modern humanity seriously and tries to give answers to its modern experiences of suffering and defeat.

With his new political theology, Metz *“tries to create the awareness that theology and Church are never simply politically innocent, and therefore, one of theology’s fundamental tasks is to consider political implications.”*⁶⁴⁵ And this is where he identifies the positive function of political theology:

„Sie sucht das Verhältnis zwischen Religion und Gesellschaft, zwischen Kirche und gesellschaftlicher Öffentlichkeit, zwischen eschatologischem Glauben und gesellschaftlicher Praxis neu zu bestimmen....“

*(To point out the relationship between religion and political society, between the Church and the public life, between the eschatological faith and its practical expression (praxis) in the society.)*⁶⁴⁶

By this he means that theology should not remain deaf and dumb in the present existential situation of the world. Not only the Church, but also theology has a mission in the public life.

In relation to the Church, she has been in her socio-historical forms of manifestation of great political influence. The Church has always taken position on different social and political issues. The question of politics in the Church is not the question of whether the Church should interfere or not interfere in politics. The glaring fact that should not be contested at all is the fact that the Church has a specific option within the context of the political history of humanity. She has also a special mission within the modern history of politics especially in relation to the political freedom of humanity.⁶⁴⁷ In the light of the above, Metz emphasises that the Church is not neutral and in all aspects not politically innocent.⁶⁴⁸ The Church must be interested in politics and what happens in the political sphere. A Church

⁶⁴⁵ Johann Baptist, Metz, “Theology in the Struggle for History and Society”, in: Johann Baptist, Metz and Jürgen, Moltmann, Faith and the Future, 51.

⁶⁴⁶ Johann Baptist, Metz, Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie, 13.

⁶⁴⁷ Metz, Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie, 64.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, 64.

that turns its back on politics, may be in the name of being politically neutral, would be a weak Church and quite unfortunate, as we have seen in history, an “accomplice” to the evils that occur in political arena.

What is true of the Church is also true of her theology! And just as Jürgen Moltmann further observed: *“political theology is not simply political ethics but reaches further by asking about the political consciousness of theology itself. It does not want to make political questions the central theme of theology or to give political systems and movements religious support. Rather, political theology designates the field, the milieu, the environment, and the medium in which Christian theology should be articulated today.”*⁶⁴⁹ Therefore the themes of freedom, justice, peace and reconciliation and the ways they find expression in societies should be of particular interest to the Church and theology. The Church and theology should not close their eyes on the situations of injustice, racism, oppression, exploitations, wars and conflicts that often characterise the modern time politics. These remain the modern “*Heterotopias*”⁶⁵⁰ for Christian theology.

7.2.1.1 Political Theology as Fundamental Theology of the World

The new political theology according to Johann Baptist Metz is a theology of the world in relation to the world of our time with its processes of enlightenment, secularisation and emancipation.⁶⁵¹ It is a theology with the

⁶⁴⁹ Jürgen, Moltmann “Political Theology”, in: Theology Today – vol. 28, no. 1 – April 1971, 9.

⁶⁵⁰ In his diagnosis of the modern situation of globalization and plurality of cultures and religions, Hans-Joachim Sander tried to identify the new places of God’s presence based on the particular European experiences. He borrowed Michael Foucault’s term “Heterotopie”, which was used to describe the spaces of otherness, which are neither here nor there; places, where secret and covered things happen, such as burial grounds, brothels, Gardens, Colonies, libraries etc. Sanders employed this term to indicate that the place of God’s encounter or talk about God (Christian theology) can no longer be identified with the old utopias where only the individual or the institution mattered, but now in the modern time of globalisation, with those people who are fighting for their human dignity, whose dignity has been, either in the past or in the present, trampled upon because of their sex, race, colour, position in the society, language or religion. These are the places (topos) of God’s encounter (theophany)! These are concrete places for Christian theology, *loci theologici*, because their dignity finds its origin in God. Hans-Joachim, Sander, „Europas Heterotopien, Die Zumutung von Gottes Orten in den Zeichen der Zeit“, in: Bulletin ET. 18 (2007/1-2), 41-67. Foucault, Michael, Die Heterotopien. Der utopische Körper. Zwei Radiovorträge, zweisprachige Ausgabe, Frankfurt, 2005.

⁶⁵¹ Metz, Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie, 75.

face “to the world”, to the world in this our time.⁶⁵² And what implication can this have for theology?

In his book *Theologie der Welt* first published in 1968, Metz tried to give a new understanding of the world different from the Greek worldview. The Greeks had a cosmocentric understanding of the world.⁶⁵³ The world was not seen beyond its natural horizon. God and man exist within this horizon and are part of the cosmos. Metz made an anthropocentric turn, where he sees the world not as existing in itself, over and above human beings. The world does not exist independent of human beings. It exists and derives its meaning only in relation to human beings!⁶⁵⁴ Thus, human history remains the context in which the world can be understood.⁶⁵⁵ And the human history in question is not the individual history but the history as it affects a community of persons, where the individual exists. This makes it social and political.

“Welterfahrung und Weltverhalten vollziehen sich vielmehr im Horizont zwischenmenschlichen Mitseins, und dies nicht bloß im “privaten Sinn der Ich-Du-Beziehung, sondern im “politischen” Sinn des gesellschaftlichen Miteinanders”

(“Every experience of the world takes place within the horizon of shared human existence, not merely in the “private” sense of the I-thou, but in the “political” sense of social existence in community. Thus every experience of the world and the interpretation of the world based on it are inter-subjectively or inter-communicatively grounded.”⁶⁵⁶

With this understanding, the world will no longer appear as a finished product but a world capable of change through the solidarity of human actions, through which man consummates his free existence before God, his creator. The world has, through the multiplicity of its history, been influenced through the action of the first human beings and through salvific

⁶⁵² Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 253, 257.

⁶⁵³ Johann Baptist, Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt*, Mainz: Matthias – Grünewald – Verlag, 1968, 48.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 49. Translation: Johann Baptist, Metz, „Welt“, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, cols. 1024-5, trans. by Johns in *Man in the World*, p. 90.

action of the Son of man. The future world which is promised as the eschatological city of God is therefore made present in the *hinc et nunc* action of the individual believer⁶⁵⁷ Metz concludes that the believer acts not only “in” the world, but above all changes and transforms within the horizon of this divine promise, which is given to him as an individual only in solidarity with others.⁶⁵⁸ In this way he tries to emphasize the primacy of praxis as the distinguishing character of political theology from both neo-scholastic and transcendental theologies. This is the fundamental understanding upon which he rooted his political theology as fundamental theology of the world.

*“The theology of the world is neither a purely objectivistic theology of the cosmos nor a purely transcendental theology of the person and existence. It is a political theology. The creative – militant hope behind it is related essentially to the world as society and to the forces within it that change the world.”*⁶⁵⁹

This does not imply that political theology assumes the role of fundamental theology from the point of view of apologetics as it used to serve, or creating a new branch of theology, but primarily from the perspective of being critical of ideology and institution, including theology itself and the Church.⁶⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann maintained the same view:

*“Responsible theology must therefore engage in institutional criticism as it reflects on the ‘place’ of the churches in the life’ of modern society and in ideological criticism as it reflects on itself. It can no longer self-forgetfully screen out its own social and political reality as the old metaphysical and personalistic theologies did.... Political theology designates the field, the milieu, the environment, and the medium in which Christian theology should be articulated today”*⁶⁶¹

Dorothee Sölle was even more radical and concrete in her expression with regards to what should be the function of political theology:

⁶⁵⁷ Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt*, 49-50.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁵⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, “Responsibility of Hope”, in: *Philosophy Today*, 10, 1966, 287.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁶¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 102-103.

*“A criticism of society which... does not detect and give expression to the capitalist or to the concentration camp guard that is in each of us, but instead creates enemies in hostile projections; I consider political propaganda, plain and simple, and not a political interpretation of the gospel.”*⁶⁶²

It is pertinent to observe that political theology is not without some criticisms. The major critic against political theology is directed to its project of deprivatization of theology as if salvation of the individual is ignored in its overemphasis on political salvation. Even Metz himself pointed to this misunderstanding by noting that interest in the social or political life of the individual does not subsume the subjective existence of the individual as a member of the society.⁶⁶³ For political theology takes care of the human persons in their concrete existential and historical situations. And it does this by exposing the individual histories of human sufferings and catastrophes, hidden and suppressed.⁶⁶⁴

7.2.1.2 Political Theology as Theodicy-sensitive Theology

Metz noted that Christianity as “Religion with the face to the world” cannot ignore the fundamental question of its hope threatened by the darkness of the human history of suffering, which continues to glare it in the face; namely the question of theodicy.⁶⁶⁵ He means that the history of catastrophes and human suffering past and present makes the naive justification of God as the classical theodicy has done impossible. It rather raises the question a-new and demands from Christian theology to give a greater sensitiveness to theodicy.⁶⁶⁶ This falls within the ambit of political theology. Political theology therefore takes up anew the theodicy question.

The resuscitation in theology of the old theme of theodicy does not imply the justification of God in the face of pain, suffering and evil in the world as

⁶⁶² Dorothee, Sölle, *Political Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 92.

⁶⁶³ We have noted this in 7.2 above. See also Metz, *Zum Begriff der neuen politischen Theologie*, 11.

⁶⁶⁴ Johann Baptist Metz, *Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz*, in: Metz and Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 39-40. Metz, *Theology in the Struggle for History and Society*, in: Metz and Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 53.

⁶⁶⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 3.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

theology and philosophy did in the past.⁶⁶⁷ It implies most importantly to radically raise the question: How can one “talk about God” at all in the face of the debilitating history of the world’s suffering?⁶⁶⁸ He added that this remains the central question for theology. And this question should not for any reason disappear from theology and since it is an eschatological question, about the future of humanity, no superficial answer to it can be satisfactory.

“In taking up once again the theme of theodicy in theology I am not suggesting (as the word and its history might suggest) a belated and somewhat obstinate attempt to justify God in the face of evil, in the face of suffering and wickedness in the world. What is really at stake is the question of how one is to speak about God at all in the face of the abysmal histories of suffering in the world, in “his” world. In my view this is “the” question for theodicy; theology must not eliminate it or over-respond to it. It is “the” eschatological question, the question before which theology does not develop its answers reconciling everything, but rather directs its questioning incessantly back toward God.”⁶⁶⁹

Metz critiqued the theology’s response to the problem of evil in the world, which was influenced by St. Augustine. St Augustine gave a hamartiological explanation to the origin of evil and naturally paired it with its soteriological parallel.⁶⁷⁰ Within this category, St Augustine understood evil as *privatio boni* and traced its origin back to the original fall of man. And in this case, suffering was seen as a necessary consequence of sin. Humanity takes therefore the full responsibility and not God. Christian theology has always projected this view.⁶⁷¹ This Augustine’s response to the problem of evil is not

⁶⁶⁷ Johann Baptist, Metz, *Theology in the Struggle for History and Society*, in: Metz and Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 54.

⁶⁶⁸ Johann Baptist, Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 4.

⁶⁶⁹ Johann Baptist, Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. and intr. J. Matthew Ashley, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998, 55f.

⁶⁷⁰ St Augustine rooted the origin of evil and suffering in the world to the human freedom, through which he sinned and fell out of God’s grace. God did not leave him condemned to this fate but through His infinite love and mercy made Salvation possible for him through His Son Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. Augustine’s response was only an apologetic one, in order to defend God as All-powerful, All knowing and All loving. God, according to him, should therefore not be involved into this.

⁶⁷¹ Johann Baptist, Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 11.

satisfactory and can never be satisfactory to the modern man in the face of all the innocent sufferings crying out to heaven. His response has rather left the human person in the face of suffering lonely, hopeless, dejected and above all god-less. His effort to trace back the origin of evil and suffering to the human freedom is in itself contradictory and self-destructive. Metz argues that since human freedom is not autonomous but theonomous, that is, made possible by God, it is impossible to make it carry the whole weight of the responsibility for the history of the world's suffering. God can never be left out of it. The question must of necessity be directed back to Him.⁶⁷²

In contradistinction to Augustine's hamartiological solution, Metz pointed to certain biblical traditions, where suffering is not as a result of sin, as in the case of Job and Jesus Christ. One sees here the just and the innocent burdened with despicable suffering. The new theodicy-sensitive theology must therefore break the causal relationship between suffering and sin⁶⁷³ and then find a new language for the formulation of the old theodicy question, in order to make it unforgettable!⁶⁷⁴ Discourse about God should in this sense mean lamentation, weeping or simply as Metz puts it "*the cry for the salvation of others, of those who suffer unjustly, of the victims and the vanquished in our history*".⁶⁷⁵

Metz further developed the theme of "*crying out to God*"⁶⁷⁶ and presents it as the deepest form of prayer: "*Prayer of missing; of missing God*".⁶⁷⁷ It is the same cry, which was heard in Auschwitz: "Where is God?" It is the same cry of Job: "For how long?" "Will no one give me hearing? I have said my last word; now let God reply!" It is also the same cry of the Son of God on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is the most solemn cry, which humans make when trapped in the deepest valley of human suffering. It is the cry for salvation made by humans fettered in the shadow

⁶⁷² Directing the question of evil and suffering in the world back to God does not imply making God responsible for it or identifying Him as its ultimate cause. It is, just as Metz developed in his theodicy, crying to God and seeking for His near-ness in the face of world's suffering. See also Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 100.

⁶⁷³ Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 29-30.

⁶⁷⁴ Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 4.

⁶⁷⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God*, 55.

⁶⁷⁶ Metz's German rendering of this expression is: "Der Schrei nach Gott". I have spontaneously translated it to mean: "crying out to God" or "crying after God".

⁶⁷⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 94.

of darkness and hopelessness. It is the cry of one left alone in the agony of human suffering and the most depressive experience of God's forsakenness. It is the moaning of the creature before his Creator, the voiceless cry after light before the dark shadow of God's face.⁶⁷⁸ The cry and the moaning seen as prayer, with its biblical paradigmatic in Luke 11:13 means: "*Gott um Gott zu bitten*" "*praying to God for God*"⁶⁷⁹ This, according to Metz has the following implications:

Firstly, he sees in the prayer-language in human history as the most impressive but also most shocking documentation of the language of human suffering and crisis. This is evident not only in the religious history of humanity but above all in the prayer-language of the biblical tradition.⁶⁸⁰ Hence, the language of prayers is not only more universal, but also more exciting and more dramatic, more rebellious and more radical than the language of the theology of the future.⁶⁸¹ It is the language that does not cover the human histories of suffering, catastrophes and crises as Christian theology has done in the past but uncovers and exposes it. It is practice oriented rather than being idealistic. It is a passion for God, a cry unto Him and as such should be the language of Christian theology.⁶⁸² Such crying out to God does not lead into emptiness and meaninglessness. It is a cry that is at the same time its own hearing. Metz puts it succinctly:

„Weil dieser Schrei selbst der Ausdruck dafür ist, dass er angekommen ist (vgl. Mk 11,34). Der Schrei nach Gott drückt eine besondere Weise des Naheseins aus. Er ist der Ausdruck dafür, dass Gott mir gerade in seiner Göttlichkeit, d.h. in seiner Unfasslichkeit und Unausprechlichkeit, so nahe gekommen, so nahe gegangen ist, dass ich dies nur im Schrei ausdrücken kann, dass ich nur nach ihm schreien kann. In diesem Sinn wäre der Schrei selbst das erste Ereignis seiner Erhörung. In diesem Schrei, und gerade in ihm, ist Gott „da“, ereignet sich Da-sein Gottes. Dieser Schrei ist die Art, wie Gott in seiner

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 99.

*Göttlichkeit bei mir ist, wie er mir in seiner Abwesenheit und Ferne, in seiner Transzendenz nahe ist.*⁶⁸³

In the above quotation, Metz tries to describe what happens at the moment of crying out to God. He means that such a cry holds in itself the sublime experience of God's nearness. By such a cry, God who is transcendent, absent and far away becomes, in his Divinity, near and present. God manifests Himself in the bottom-less-ness and emptiness of human existence. It is at this point that one is confronted with God, that one raises the question of God at all. It is at this point that one has the mystical experience of God. Such was the experience of the chosen people of Israel in the wilderness. When they cried to Him, He manifested Himself to them as God who is near and present.⁶⁸⁴ This is theodicy! It is a kind of negative theology. Metz calls it apocalyptic eschatology. This leads us to the second implication of "praying to God for God".

Metz notes that when we "pray to God for God", we should also in this very act of praying, allow God to be God and should not try to subjugate Him to our whims and caprices. Crying out to God means also as Metz describes it, "suffering unto God".⁶⁸⁵ At the same time, in view of his apocalyptic eschatology, Metz points that God still interrupts in human history, just as He did through the Incarnation. This sustains our apocalyptic hope and motivates us to action. This apocalyptic hope empowers us to live according to the mysticism of Incarnation; working in solidarity with God to interrupt in the human history of sufferings. This leads us to the third implication of "crying out to God":

Just as we have seen above, the mysticism of Incarnation or Jesus-mysticism calls for discipleship. It is an apocalyptic hope that challenges us to do what Jesus had done:

"Die Mystik, die Jesus lebte und lehrte ist nicht eigentlich eine Mystik der geschlossenen Augen, sondern eine Mystik der

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 104. Metz's German expression of this is: "Leiden an Gott".

*offenen Augen, die auf die gesteigerte Wahrnehmung fremden Leids verpflichtet.*⁶⁸⁶

Metz tries here to emphasize the point that the mystical life of Jesus was not that of closed eyes but one of eyes opened to see not my own needs and suffering but that of the “strange-other”. It is a “*God-mysticism with an increased readiness to perceive, a mysticism of open eyes that sees more and not less. It is a mysticism that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not – pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it, for the sake of a God who is a friend to human beings.*”⁶⁸⁷ It is according to Metz a mysticism of compassion. This implies mystical forgetfulness of the “I”, in order to grow in the mystical bond between God and man, and that of human community. This does not in any way imply the disappearance of the individual subject into the anonymous and faceless mass. It is a form of self-transcendence, for the sake of taking responsibility for the “other”.⁶⁸⁸ Here the authority of God made manifest in the authority of those who suffer remains the motivating force.⁶⁸⁹

7.2.1.3 Memoria Passionis as the Starting Point of Political Theology

Metz is of the conviction that any effort to reconstruct the history of humanity and to give man a future worthy of existence, without substantially taking account of man’s history of suffering will only be a will-o-the-wisp that eludes human conception. History will have meaning only in relation to the suffering of the past victims.⁶⁹⁰ He vehemently criticized the modern idealists and post-idealists for neglecting “*the value of past suffering and for overlooking the enduring significance of the suffering of individual victims*”⁶⁹¹ in their conceptions of history. He therefore held it as of

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁸⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. and intr. J. Matthew Ashley, 163.

⁶⁸⁸ Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis*, 106.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁹⁰ Francis Schüssler, Fiorenza, “Eschatology, Hope, and Political Theology” an Introduction to: Johann Baptist Metz, and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, xvi.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., xvii.

overriding importance “to retrieve the memories of these victims, ‘the other’ with regard to the history of the victors.”⁶⁹² He states emphatically:

*Such memory challenges positivist, Marxist, and liberal conceptions of history and political life. Such memory displays the task of history as a practical task. Such a memory poses the challenge and task to the Christian churches that they spell out the meaning of the memoria passionis Jesu Christi in the midst of our modern society.*⁶⁹³

Memoria Passionis is therefore a challenge to both politics and theology and over and above all, a challenge to Christian theology. Christianity tries to make present and tangible the *memora passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*, as a “dangerous memory of freedom in the social systems of our technological civilization.”⁶⁹⁴

The unfortunate fact of modern history of humanity is the suppression of the memory of suffering, which is, de facto, an integral part of man’s history. The modern humanity is suffering from “cultural amnesia!”⁶⁹⁵ People have made a very costly mistake of defining history only from the point of view of the successful and the established. Human history has been presented as the history of the conquerors and the victors! The most important aspect of human history has now been relegated to the unconscious. Conscious effort has been made to erase the story of the vanquished and the conquered from the human memory. And not until this story is rediscovered, humanity will never ever be free, never ever have future, never ever grow, never ever be happy and never ever learn to say: never again! It is in recognition of this granite fact of human existence that Johann Baptist Metz called for the reconstruction of human history to include the history of the conquered and the vanquished:

⁶⁹² Ibid., xvii.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., xvii.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁹⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, Christianity in a Globalized World: Faith, Politics and the Memoria Passionis, translated by J. Matthew Ashley, Paper Presentation, USA, October 20, 2006, 4.

*It is of decisive importance that a kind of antihistory should develop out of the memory of suffering – and understanding of history in which the vanquished and the destroyed alternatives would also be taken into account: an understanding of history ex memoria passionis as a history of the vanquished.*⁶⁹⁶

Another regrettable fact is that not only has history neglected the history of the conquered and the vanquished, theology has also erred either by not remembering the past suffering of the “other” or, as we have already noted, by failing to give adequate answer to the problem of suffering; an answer that will be plausible and that can fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the modern man in the face of the problems caused by the plurality of cultures and globalization. Theodicy has left the numerous questions of humanity in the face of evil, pain and suffering in the world unanswered. The traditional answer proffered by Theodicy is no more plausible. It remains for the modern man insufficient and unsatisfactory!⁶⁹⁷

Metz warns that despite the fact that “*Christian faith declares itself as the memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi ... on which is grounded the promise of future freedom for all*”⁶⁹⁸, this remains implausible. This kind of eschatological promise could only degenerate to be opium for the victims!

The eschatological truth of the memoria passionis is not merely to be expressed in empty tautologies and paradoxes, ... it must be reflected upon within, and determined by temporal circumstances, the memory of the suffering of Jesus must be deciphered as a subversively liberating memory with the apparent plausibilities of our society, and the Christological

⁶⁹⁶ Johann Baptist, Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering”, in: Faith and the Future, 9.

⁶⁹⁷ Johann Baptist, Metz, Memoria Passionis, 21-22.

⁶⁹⁸ Johann Baptist, Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering”, in: Faith and the Future, 10.

*dogmas must hold good as subversive formulas of that memory.*⁶⁹⁹

In effect, Metz is saying that the proclamation of the gospel of resurrection of Christ is only to be understood within the context of the account of his passion. Hence, according to him, “*a memoria resurrectionis that would not be comprehensible as memoria passionis would be mythology pure and simple!*”⁷⁰⁰ Christian theology should therefore not be bereft of the memory of suffering but rather make it its central theme.

In the political order, there has been an upsurge of wars, racial segregations, ethnic and tribal conflicts that have led quite appalling degrees of homicide and genocide. The fact that these situations are repeated with simultaneous regularity points to the truism of “amnesia” even in the political sphere. The world’s politics as it stands today tends to forget too soon the agonising experiences and consequences of wars and ethnic and racial conflicts. The sufferings of the victims, of the “other”, have been neglected and forgotten. The most unfortunate thing about it is the deliberate and conscious effort by politicians to wipe out or suppress the memory of such sufferings. The pertinent question to be asked is: Is there any possibility of a political future free of wars and conflicts irrespective of racial, cultural, ethnic, religious and political differences? The spontaneous answer would be: There can be no future without the past! And the present is what connects the past and future. There can never be any peaceful future without the *hinc et nunc* memory of the past suffering. It is therefore important to remember in the present, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. That entails according to Desmond Tutu, “*taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence.*”⁷⁰¹

While observing that, “*the problem of the future was primarily political and fundamentally social*”, Metz tries to underscore the connection between the

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁰¹ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 271.

Christian memoria passionis and the political life and why this connection is necessary:

*It is not a question here of a subsequent introduction of the Christian memory of suffering into the existing forms of political life, but of making this memoria passionis effective in the transformation of our political life and its structures – a transformation already shown to be the decisive requirement for tackling the question of the future.*⁷⁰²

The association of the Christian memoria passionis and the political life will free politics from all forms totalitarianism and universalism that is inherent in political theories that institutionalise the fittest, the rich, the oppressor and the victor at the expense of the weak, the poor and the suffering victims. Metz maintains that, “the Christian memoria passionis recalls the God of Jesus’ passion as the subject of the universal history of suffering ... and refuses to give political shape to this subject and enthrone it politically.”⁷⁰³ It would tantamount to a political idolatry and will only lead to oppression and thereby emergence of more sufferings and victims if any party, group, race, nation, or class tries to define itself as this subject. The essence of connecting the Christian memoria passionis with the political life is to liberate and protect political life from totalitarianism.⁷⁰⁴

*The memory of suffering brings a new moral imagination into political life, a new vision of others’ suffering that should mature into a generous, uncalculating partisanship on behalf of the weak and unrepresented. Hence, the Christian memory of suffering can become, alongside many other often subversive innovative factors in our society, the ferment for that new political life we are seeking on behalf of our future.*⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰² Johann Baptist, Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering”, in: Faith and the Future, 13-14.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

The Auschwitz catastrophe became for Metz a definitive concrete suffering experience that should constitute the category of *memoria passionis* and as such, the starting point of his European model of political theology.⁷⁰⁶ For him, a theology aware of such catastrophes can no longer be a theology locked into a concept of a system but must become one locked into a concept of the active agent, and one with a practical foundation. In the face of such catastrophes, theology is directed from history in the singular to histories of suffering in the plural. In this sense, theology must become its own critique of ideology: It must learn to see through the high content of apathy of theological idealism and to unmask its lack of sensitivity for the discontinuous character of historical and political catastrophes. In clearly accentuated words, he notes:

*For me, there is no truth that I could defend with my back turned to Auschwitz. There is no sense of me that I could save with my back turned to Auschwitz. For me, there is no God to whom I could pray with my back turned to Auschwitz. When that became clear to me, I tried to no longer to engage in theology with my back turned to the invisible, or forcefully made-invisible, sufferings in the world; neither with my back to the Holocaust nor with my back turned to the speechless sufferings of the poor and oppressed in the world. This probably was the starting point toward the construction of a so-called political theology.*⁷⁰⁷

Memoria passionis as the starting point of the new political theology tries to keep such a specific memory in place. It understands such a memory as possessing dangerous, subversive, practical, critical and emancipatory force.⁷⁰⁸ It is not a kind of memory that tends to wipe out or ignore the historical situation of the victims, the oppressed, the conquered and the

⁷⁰⁶ Metz called his European model of political theology: "The theology after Auschwitz". For him, it is impossible to do theology, or to talk about God, or to pray to God, or to cry out to God with one's back turned to Auschwitz. To start from Auschwitz is to make theology immune from being merely a subject-less, faceless mythical and abstract theory. It empowers theology to start from a concrete history of suffering to the histories of suffering.

⁷⁰⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, "Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz", in: *Faith and the Future*, 41.

⁷⁰⁸ Johann Baptist Metz, "The Future in the Memory of Suffering", in: *Faith and the Future*, 7.

destroyed. It abhors any memoria that only celebrates the success of the victors or the conquerors. Such a false memory according to Metz is deprived of all future. Memoria passionis as the only valid memory necessary for the political theology makes demands on the present humanity. It is a kind of memory in which the experiences of the past break through to be the centre point of our lives and reveal new and dangerous insights for the present. It is memory with future content.⁷⁰⁹ In order to underscore the subversive and the liberating effect of this memory, Metz clearly states:

*“Every rebellion against suffering is fed by the subversive power of remembered suffering. In this sense, suffering is in no way a purely passive, inactive “virtue.” It is, or can be, the source of socially emancipatory action. Thus, in this sense, the memory of accumulated suffering continues to resist the cynics of modern political power.”*⁷¹⁰

Such a memoria passionis will become not only a source of reconciled life but also a solid prophylaxis in our modern time of globalization amidst cultural, ethnic, racial and religious plurality in our world. Remembering the suffering of the “strange-other” will be a politico-theological panacea to the world burdened with hatred, resentments, conflicts, terrorism, differences, divisions, oppression, exploitation and dehumanization.⁷¹¹

7.2.2 The Place of Memoria Passionis and the Relevance of Political Theology in the Suffering experiences of Africa

Africa is indeed a Continent laden with problems. It is as we have earlier observed a “face with many scars.”⁷¹² Apart from being one of the world’s poorest regions, it is a Continent where “countless number of human beings, men and women, children and young people, are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalised and abandoned.”⁷¹³ The history of Africa cannot therefore be complete without the history of her catastrophes namely; the history of slavery, colonialism, exploitation,

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁷¹¹ Johann Baptist, Metz, Memoria Passionis, 163, 168-170, 256.

⁷¹² Elochukwu, Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 1.

⁷¹³ Ecclesia in Africa No. 41.

oppression, hunger, wars, racial and tribal tensions, divisions, political instability, violation of human rights, international debt, bribery and corruption, arms trade, problems of refugees and displaced persons, the spread of AIDS etc. Africa's history has been the history of the enslaved and the persecuted, the conquered and the vanquished. It has been a history of the oppressed and the exploited, the poor and the victims both dead and alive!

These are really the concrete suffering experiences of African people and constitute greater part of African histories of suffering. They constitute for me *the topos* for the Church and Christian theology. They belong to the category of African *memoria passionis*. They are the heterotopias where the question of God could be raised for African people, and where God can be encountered by them. They remain concrete situations where the faces of African people could be seen. It is the point where theodicy question can be raised for African people. It is in the face of these existential realities that Africans can raise their voice and ask: where is God? Is the God of the western world the God of the African people? Did God create Europeans and the Africans to be equal? Are Africans also the children of the same God?

It is important to note that Africa's peculiar socio-political realities do not only pose question for Theodicy, they also and, it seems to me, pose more question for Anthropodicy.⁷¹⁴ Most of African problems are man-made! There we see the height of human perversion! African peculiar history of suffering should therefore be the starting point for *memoria passionis* and political theology. Let us take another look on South Africa.

One of the successes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of the post-Apartheid-South-Africa was that the Apartheid-victims came out to remember their sufferings by confronting their oppressors. They were given the room to tell their stories of victimhood thereby accusing their oppressors

⁷¹⁴ This is to borrow the term used by Johann Baptist Metz to describe the sufferings at Auschwitz as a question not only of theodicy but also "of the justification of humankind". He observed it thus: "In this sense the question asked by Elie Wiesel could also be formulated with a view towards Anthropodicy as follows: 'Where was humankind in Auschwitz?' Many survivors went to pieces exactly because this question could not be answered because they could no longer believe in humankind. How can you continue to live among men if in Auschwitz you had to find out what they are able to do?". Metz, "Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz", in: Metz and Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 45.

of inflicting them with unimaginable sufferings. The oppressors including the vicious Apartheid regimes were challenged not to deny nor suppress the long years of oppression and suppression through political and cultural amnesia! Such a political amnesia as was the case then in South African was aptly portrayed by Desmond Tutu:

*(The victims) had been silenced for so long, sidelined for decades, made invisible and anonymous by a vicious system of injustice and oppression. Many had been bottled up for too long, and when the chance came for them to tell their stories the floodgates were opened.*⁷¹⁵

The success of the Commission could be seen from the fact that it laid its foundation on Memoria Passionis. People were invited not to forget their suffering but to remember their suffering. Any attempt to suppress the account of their suffering experiences would have made the result of that Commission perfunctory. Memoria Passionis became the first step towards healing and reconciliation within the context of South African suffering experiences. How?

Through Memoria Passionis in South Africa the oppressors and the conquerors were given the opportunity to face their victims and to take responsibility for their actions and to plead for forgiveness. They were of course in the spirit of *Ubuntu* forgiven by their victims after acknowledging their guilt and pleading for forgiveness. The effect of such a reconciling encounter between the victims and the oppressors through memoria passionis as reported by Desmond Tutu was amazing:

*“After the people have told their stories, they looked so ordinary, so normal. They laughed, they conversed, they went about their daily lives looking to all the world to be normal, whole persons with not a single concern in the world.”*⁷¹⁶

Memoria Passionis offered political, religious and psychological healing to both the victims and their oppressors.

The healing effect of Memoria Passionis on the part of the victims is unimaginable. This is also true of the oppressors. It heals the oppressors

⁷¹⁵ Desmond, Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 108-109.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 109.

also from the burden of guilt that weighs them down and hinders a normal free existence. Memoria Passionis offered both the victims and their oppressors the opportunity to come together in order to chart a new course for a *better and reconciled future*. Such Memoria was dangerous, subversive and liberating. It gave them the courage to say at once: No more Apartheid! The activities of Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa could be a paradigm for all other nations in Africa that are torn apart by wars, conflicts, injustices and oppression. Memoria Passionis as it has worked in South Africa would be an option for the Church and theology in other nations of Africa. Such an option would only lead to acknowledgement of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation. Such an option would only challenge us to look back into our past history, reconcile our present and give our future a hopeful content. Desmond Tutu shares the same view with Johann Baptist Metz, when he observes that *“it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again.”*⁷¹⁷ Such a Memoria Passionis will not only challenge the present African people to **“Compassion”**⁷¹⁸ using the word of Metz, but also, within the context of African peculiar experiences, to **“Reconciliation.”** The suffering experiences of Hunger, wars, racial and tribal tensions, divisions, political instability, violation of human rights, international debt, bribery and corruption, arms trade, problems of refugees and displaced persons, the spread of AIDS should then be the overriding contents of African political theology.

7.3 African Model of Political Theology

We have tried to identify above what should be the *topos* for African political theology. It includes the socio-political situation of Africa. They constitute, in

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 271.

⁷¹⁸ Within the context of political theology as a fundamental theology of the world, Metz noted that remembering the suffering of the “strange-other” challenges to what he calls “Mitleidenschaft”. He translated this word to mean in English: “compassion”, which implies a call to discipleship, to engagement by Christians not only to help the suffering “other” but also to prevent the future occurrence of such suffering. He interpreted this term “compassion” within the category of his mysticism of “Gottleidenschaft als Mitleidenschaft”, the mysticism of open eyes. See Memoria Passionis, 105. He identified the biblical paradigmatic of “compassion” with Jesus’ parable concerning the last judgement in Mt 25: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me....” See his Memoria Passionis, 106.

my own view, the *loci theologici* for African theology. African Christian theology should not emanate independently of the distinctly social context, which characterises her being Africa. It should be a theology that has its springboard from African worldview. In this section we are going to recapture again what we have already noted about the African world-view, and perhaps when necessary elaborate more on it. And the basis for constructing such an African model of Christian theology should be the African Anthropology.

African philosophy of life is anthropocentric. Human being is at the centre of the universe and is directly connected to nature (cosmos) and to God, who is seen as the author of all things.⁷¹⁹ For African peoples, “*relatedness*” is the central category in which the notion of human being or human person is to be understood.

Boethius had laid the philosophical and theological foundation for the Western world, upon which it built her conception of “person”. Being naturally influenced by Tertullian⁷²⁰, who originally introduced the term into theology, and applying it then to human person, Boethius defined “person” as “*the subsistent individual of a rational nature*”.⁷²¹ This notion of person has for the most part influenced the Western thought and culture of individualism.⁷²² Descartes’ insistence on the existence of the thinking thought, “*cogito ergo sum*” was therefore no innovation to the Western mind,

⁷¹⁹Juvenal Ilunga, Muya, “Benezet Bujo: The Awakening of Systematic and Authentically African Thought”, in *African Theology, the Contribution of the Pioneers* etd by Benezet, Bujo, and Juvenal Ilunga, Muya, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003, 125.

⁷²⁰ Peter, F., Schmid, Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer GmbH, 1998, 32, 43.

⁷²¹ “*Persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*” Boethius, III, 84, 4-5.

⁷²² Though some thinkers have criticised the Boethius’ notion of “person” and have tried to bring to the fore the relational aspect that is lacking in his definition. Richard from St. Victor (1110-1173) was of the view that independent existence does not exclude being in relationship. See Schmid, Peter, Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer GmbH, 1998, 32. In the modern age, Descartes and Kant have strongly insisted that rationality is the definitive mark of the individual subject. However, some Western thinkers, especially those who were confronted with the theological question of the Trinity, have transcended this Boethian definition that ignores the bodily-ness of the rational subject to emphasize the fact that relationship is the distinctive mark of “person”, which should not be ignored. The result of this theological effort is the consciousness of the fact that the term “person” includes both the two dimensions of individuality and being in relationship. See Schmid, 43ff. Bujo also made this important observation with regards to this: “Diese Definition wird freilich von der heutigen Moraltheologie im Westen auch nicht mehr so buchstäblich übernommen. So meint Klaus Demmer, dass sie Zeichen einer gegenstandsgerichteten Denkform trägt.” Benezet, Bujo, *Wider den Universalanspruch westlicher Moral: Grundlagen afrikanischer Ethik*, Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2000, 122.

although there have been streams of thoughts that have parted with it as we are going to see later.⁷²³ But it is a view that is inconceivable for an African. Contrary to Boethius' definition, Africans have traditionally, in my own opinion, a more holistic⁷²⁴ notion of person, which I would like to define here as "*the subsistent individual of a related nature*". What does this imply?

The immediate implication is that the individual is an individual person only in relation to other persons. It is the same idea that is depicted in the Zulu proverb as we have earlier noted in chapter 5 of this work: "*ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu*" ("*a person depends on other people to be a person*").⁷²⁵ The existence of the individual person is affirmed not merely by thinking or by being rational but above all by *being related*. It is only by *being related* to the community of persons that the human person can develop its rationality. Instead of the Cartesian "*cogito ergo sum*", the Africans, according to Be'ne'zet Bujo, say: "*cognatus sum, ergo sum*".⁷²⁶ This according to him is the fundamental thing in the African vision of human person.

Another implication is the recognition of the individuality and the uniqueness of every human person, just as Boethius⁷²⁷ made explicit in his own definition. Being related to the community of persons does not subsume the individuality or the uniqueness of the individual person.⁷²⁸ Rather it is only in relation to the community of persons that the individual person can assert and unfold himself or herself. His or her rights and freedom as an individual person are protected within the community. What is true of the individual person within the community is also true of his or her community. For the community grows only through the common effort of the individual persons.⁷²⁹ It is only by being related that both the individual and

⁷²³ There has been a radical development in the Western understanding of "person" as well in theology as also in human sciences. Theologians have done more, especially in their effort to develop the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁷²⁴ By "holistic" here, we want to indicate the fact that the African understanding of the human person takes note of both the rational and the bodily aspects of the human person. It is by no means one sided.

⁷²⁵ Michael, Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 39.

⁷²⁶ Benezet, Bujo, *Wider den Universalanspruch westlicher Moral*, 18.

⁷²⁷ By this we mean that Boethius' definition of person is not all wrong but needs to be augmented. He has emphasized only one aspect.

⁷²⁸ Benezet, Bujo, *Wider den Universalanspruch westlicher Moral*, 20.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

the community can live on. Not being related leads to the annihilation of both.⁷³⁰

It is pertinent to point to the fact, just as Bujo rightly observed, that being related transcends all familial and ethnic boundaries.⁷³¹ For community, according to him, means for the African: “world-community”, in which he can encounter every human being irrespective of origin, tribe, language or religion.⁷³² This observation is aimed at allaying the fear of those who believe that African understanding of community can promote parochialism and tribalism.

*“To affirm the centrality of the notion of community in the African view of the world and of the human being is not equivalent to encouraging tribalism, on the contrary it is laying foundations on which one may think in universal terms. In fact the community, in the African sense, is open to the universal. Backed by traditional examples, Bujo highlights well the absolute respect demanded by African tradition towards the ‘otherness’ of others.”*⁷³³

Another important observation to make in this context is the fact that “*being related to*” is not limited to the community of human persons but includes both visible and invisible realities. The human person is not only related to other human persons but also to the entire cosmos, the living-dead (ancestors), and the yet-to-be-born and above all to God who is the origin and source of every relationship. Bujo pointed out that this is why the whole humanity is understood among the black Africans as a big family having its origin from God. All are therefore brothers and sisters in this one big family and the “we” takes the upper hand and not the “I”.⁷³⁴ This is the point where we would like to connect the Trinitarian foundation of the notions of “person” and “community”.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 19

⁷³¹ Ibid., 122.

⁷³² Ibid., 20, 122.

⁷³³ Juvenal Ilunga, Muya, “Benezet Bujo: The Awakening of Systematic and Authentically African Thought”, in *African Theology, the Contribution of the Pioneers* ed by Benezet, Bujo, and Juvenal Ilunga, Muya, 126.

⁷³⁴ Benezet, Bujo, *Wider den Universalanspruch westlicher Moral*, 90.

The African understanding of person as the “*subsistent individual of a related nature*” against that of Boethius, can also apply to God in His Trinitarian existence. This is because the definition brings out the whole theology of the Trinity, of three persons in one God. The three persons in one God are each self-subsistent but are united in the one community of persons.

The traditional doctrine of the Trinity has its foundation both in the New and Old Testaments, though not explicitly.⁷³⁵ The New Testament⁷³⁶ is more pronounced in its expression to this reality, especially in the baptismal formula according to the gospel of St Matthew⁷³⁷ Other New Testament texts where allusion to the Trinity are made include 2 Corinthians 13:13 and Acts of the Apostles 7: 55.⁷³⁸

The theological efforts to develop the doctrine of the Trinity and to demystify, if possible, the mystery of one God in three Persons, beginning from Tertullian, who first introduced the term, through the early Councils of the Church and up to the present time, led to a sound development of the notion of “person”. Through the different Councils beginning from Nicaea (A.D 325) to Constantinople (A.D 381), the Church and her theologians employed many Greek and Hellenistic terms – “*homoousios*”, “*Hypostasis*” and “*prosopon*”, – to explain the dogma of three Persons in one God.⁷³⁹

The dogmatic conclusions of the second Ecumenical Council of the Church (Constantinople A.D 381) marked the ultimate and conclusive response of the Church to the problems posed by Arianism, with which she was confronted at the time, but opened up more directions for the further development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Council added the following formulation to the one already formulated at the Council of Nicaea: “*And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the*

⁷³⁵ Peter, F., Schmid, Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft, 29.

⁷³⁶ The Old Testament texts where allusion to the Trinity is made implicitly include: Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8.

⁷³⁷ “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). See Peter, F., Schmid, Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft, 29.

⁷³⁸ “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2Cor 13:13); But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand” (Acts 7:55).

⁷³⁹ Peter, F., Schmid, 30.

*Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.”*⁷⁴⁰

This forms the point of departure for the modern explication of the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Peter Schmid, effort is made to capture the unity of the three Persons in one God in interpersonal categories, in which unity is understood as actualised community.⁷⁴¹ The unity of the three Divine Persons is made more plausible through their relationship with, to and in one another. He therefore noted that community is the essence and the intention of the Three in one God.⁷⁴² He identifies three important implications of such image of God:

In the first place, God is himself Relationship. Secondly, God is Relationship to us human beings. And thirdly, He is the source and foundation of our relationship to one another.⁷⁴³

By this observation, Schmid tries to corroborate the views of early thinkers⁷⁴⁴ who in their teachings on the Trinity tried to bring the relationship aspect to limelight. He makes a special reference to Matthias Scheeben who emphasized that the Three Divine Persons make up one unique and sublime community, whose members are perfectly the same, related and bound together. Such Divine community remains therefore the impenetrable, eternal and essential ideal of every human community.⁷⁴⁵ On this note Schmid made the following conclusion:

„Christliche Anthropologie könne dann angewandte Trinitätstheologie sein und verdeutlichen, dass das In-sich-, Bei-sich- und Aus-sich-Sein der menschlichen Person konstituiert ist

⁷⁴⁰ Thomas, P.C., General Councils of the Church, 22. See also DS 150.

⁷⁴¹ Peter, Schmid, Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft, 31.

⁷⁴² Ibid., 31-32.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁴⁴ Richard of St Victor for example, understood the Trinity analogously as the bond of friendship between the lover, the beloved and the one loved by both in their love. By this he meant that being independent and being in relationship can be conceived together. Peter Schmid however, rightly places such a Trinitarian analogy in marriage, family and the Church instead of in the bond of friendship. See Schmid, 34. Hegel, Pannenberg, Scheeben, Schmaus, Moltmann, Kasper and others toed the same line of thought by emphasising the community aspect of the Trinity. See Schmid, 32.

⁷⁴⁵ Peter, Schmid, Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft, 32, 41. I tried here to make a spontaneous translation of Scheeben's idea quoted by Peter Schmid.

*durch das Vom-anderen-her-Sein, Im-anderen-Sein und
letztendlich durch das Von-Gott-her-Sein.*⁷⁴⁶

The central point of the forgoing expose⁷ is that the essence of God is Communio, which is made real and tangible in the Trinitarian communio of the three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The Divine communio is also extended to the human community right from the moment of creation: “*Let us create man in our own image and likeness... In the image and likeness of God He created him, male and female he created them*” (Gen 1:26-27). In order to create man in His own image and likeness, He created them two, male and female, a community of persons. Right from the onset, the human person is called to live only in relationship with and to other persons. The implication is that the whole human family was created in the image and likeness of God and should therefore live in essence of this image. This is also the being and the essence of African family! African family remains a community of persons created in the image and likeness of God. It is a symbol of the Trinitarian family.

With the foregoing, we would have laid the solid foundation for our model of African Christian theology. The basis for African Christian theology should be the African Anthropology which is not different from Christian Anthropology as we have seen above. It is also a Trinitarian theology built on African understanding of human person as being in relationship *with, to* and *for* the community of other human persons irrespective of color, language, tribe or religion. It is a theology that recognizes not only the fundamental unity of the human family but also takes into special account the plurality of human persons. The unity in diversity or singularity in plurality that has been the given in our present world should not be taken for granted by such a model of African Christian theology. It is a theology of community based on the African principle of *ujamaa*, *ubuntu* and *umunna*. And in a Continent with many wars, conflicts, exploitations and oppression, it will be a political theology that tries to expose these African socio-political realities and

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 34. My translation: *Christian Anthropology can therefore be seen as applied theology of the Trinity, which indicates clearly that **being in itself, with itself and from itself** of the human person is constituted through **being from others** and **being in others** and finally through **being from God**.*

challenges African societies, institutions including the churches and the entire peoples of Africa both at the individual and communal level to rise up to restore the broken relationships.

7.3.1 Towards an African Political Theology of Reconciliation

Benezet Bujo, one of the leading African theologians has identified the three phases in the development of African theology:

*“We can distinguish three phases in the movement towards an African theology. Firstly, we speak of the investigations of Placide Tempels. Secondly ... is the African consciousness Thirdly ... criticisms offered by the modern generation.”*⁷⁴⁷

The first phase is the period of its conception through, quite interestingly, a non-African theologian and missionary⁷⁴⁸ in Africa, Placide Tempels. Bujo noted that Placide Tempels had laid the fertile ground for the emergence of African Christian⁷⁴⁹ theology. Part of his individual effort was his ability to penetrate the African culture, in order to really understand the African ontology and worldview, so as to sincerely encounter the African people with the Christian gospel message.⁷⁵⁰ The result of Tempels’ research was the discovery of the fact that “*life*”, “*force*” or “*vital force*” is the supreme value of African Weltanschauung as evident in the life of the Bantu people of whom he made his classical study.⁷⁵¹ This idea motivates the behaviour of the Bantu people and every effort is made to strengthen one’s vital force. God, according to him, remains the “Strong one” who possesses the fullness of force and is the source of the Force of every creature.⁷⁵² This thought pattern, according to him, would be a leeway for African Christianity. It is on

⁷⁴⁷ Benezet, Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992, 52.

⁷⁴⁸ Placide Tempels (1906-1977), born in Berlaar Belgium, was a European Franciscan missionary in the Belgian Congo. He became famous not only in Africa but also in the Western world through the publication in 1945 of his book *La philosophie bantoue*, which was translated in English as *Bantu Philosophy* in 1959.

⁷⁴⁹ We emphasize here “Christian” theology to distinguish it from African traditional theology based on African traditional religion. However, this does not mean that we are not going to make use of both traditional and religious values that are found in African traditions and belief systems. This explanation frees the present work from any ambiguity, which has often surrounded the expression “African theology”.

⁷⁵⁰ Benezet, Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 53.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁵² Placide, Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959, 22.

this basis that Bujo rightly called Placide Tempels “*the father of African theology*”⁷⁵³ because “*he laid the foundations on which Africans were able later to build.*”⁷⁵⁴

The second phase in the development of African theology, according to Bujo, is the emergence of native African theologians who sowed on the fertile soil already prepared by Tempels. This stage he refers to as the true birth of African theology.⁷⁵⁵ It is no wonder then that the first native African theologian, Vincent Mulago comes from the Belgian Congo, having naturally drunk directly from the intellectual milk of Placide Tempels. Just like Placide Tempels before him, he did his research on the possibility of Bantu philosophy among the Bantu groups taking Bashi, Banyarwanda and Barundi as examples.⁷⁵⁶ This was the focus of his doctoral thesis at the Urban University Rome with the title: “*Life Unity among the Bashi, Banyarwanda and Barundi.*”⁷⁵⁷ By making use of the term *ntu*, which according to him means “being”, he clearly distanced himself from Placide Tempels for identifying the “vital force” with “being”. He rather sees *ntu* as the participation principle, by which human beings at the basis of family or clan participate in the one being *ntu*, of the common founding ancestor, who derived his *ntu* from the “*participial Unparticipated Vital Source*” *Ntu* otherwise, God.⁷⁵⁸ The present development of the African family of God Ecclesiology could be indirectly seen as foreshadowed by Mulago’s thoughts.⁷⁵⁹ There were also his contemporaries who helped to the emergence and promotion of African Christian theology. Some of them as mentioned by Bujo include Alexis Kagame, Tharcisse Tschibangu and others whose main effort then was to awaken the consciousness of the necessity of “adapting”, “Africanising” and “indigenizing” Christian message.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵³ Benezet, Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context, 55.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁵⁶ Benezet, Bujo, “Vincent Mulago, An Enthusiast of African Theology”, in: African Theology, the Contribution of the Pioneers etd by Benezet, Bujo and Ilunga, Muya Juvenal, 16.

⁷⁵⁷ Benezet, Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context, 55.

⁷⁵⁸ Benezet, Bujo, “Vincent Mulago, An Enthusiast of African Theology”, in: African Theology, the Contribution of the Pioneers, 17-19.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁶⁰ Benezet, Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context, 55.

In the third phase of the development of African theology, another group of African theologians emerged who transcended the “*initial question of the possibility of an African theology*” that was the focus of the first group of African theologians mentioned above and changed the original theological tone from that of “adaptation”, “Africanization” and “indigenization” to that of “incarnation” or “inculturation”.⁷⁶¹ This group of African theologians concerned themselves with a renewed African theology that has African tradition as its context. They criticised the theologians before them for not proceeding contextually and for ignoring “*the actual, post-colonial situation, and, instead of trying to construct a new liberation theology for Africa today, remain stuck in the position of outdated negritude movement.*”⁷⁶² Bujo mentioned some of these theologians to include: Charles Nyamiti, John Mbiti, J.S. Pobee, E.J. Penoukou and M. Ntetem. Bujo⁷⁶³ himself belongs to this group. The effort of these theologians was more to make Christianity take flesh in the African context.

Bujo allied with the effort of these contextual theologians to chart the path for a renewed African theology. He criticised the unfortunate situation of the post-colonial Africa, where many Africans have lost their cultural identity and the old African traditional values upon which African faith was built.⁷⁶⁴ Some African theologians are unfortunately also victims of this colonial influence. On this note Bujo clearly notes that,

*“Anyone who wants to construct an African theology must take the basic elements of the African tradition and interpret them in the light of the Bible and the Fathers.”*⁷⁶⁵

This change in tone was an immediate development from the Second Vatican Council which in its Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* noted:

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 55, 62.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 62.

⁷⁶³ Bujo worked out, from his own perspective, what should be the contextual basis of African Christian theology. He identified the ancestor tradition rooted in African religion and culture as the starting point of such an African theology that will also lead to the construction of a new Christology and Ecclesiology for Africa.

⁷⁶⁴ Benezet, Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 63.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 63.

*“In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.”*⁷⁶⁶

By this statement, the Second Vatican Council recognised the fact that every culture is a fertile ground for the incarnation of the Gospel, which is the continuation of the Divine Incarnation. And by recognising this fact, it therefore encouraged particular churches to articulate the Universal Christian message to be meaningful and understandable to their respective communities drawing from the riches of their cultures and traditions. This should in fact form the basis of their theological reflections and by so doing, they will *“take their own place in the ecclesiastical communion”* (Ad Gentes 22).

This position of the Vatican II Church led to the emergence of inculturation and contextual theologies. They found their concrete articulation in inculturation theology, African liberation theology, African feminist theology and Black theology of South Africa.⁷⁶⁷ *“These theologies”* according to Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz *“address issues of culture, class, racial exploitation, oppression and poverty”*.⁷⁶⁸ These theologies have been no doubts, very innovative and resourceful and have exposed new ways of being Church in Africa. They have, however, their limitations. One of the critiques is lack of a synthesis and a dialectical encounter between them.⁷⁶⁹ African theologians should focus more attention on a more inclusive theology rather than producing a multiplicity of local theologies that deal with different cultural issues. Another relevant critique is that such theologies have

⁷⁶⁶ Ad Gentes, 22.

⁷⁶⁷ Elochukwu, E., Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 3. See also Joseph, Healey, and Donald, Sybertz, Towards an African Narrative Theology, 21.

⁷⁶⁸ Joseph, Healey, and Donald, Sybertz, Towards an African Narrative Theology, 21.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 21.

remained confined within the four walls of theology lectures, congresses and synods. Much has not been seen in its practical implementation and application. The practical effects of such theologies should be more seen in societies, communities and institutions. Bujo presents the fact thus:

“African theology, it is plain, must be contextual, that is, it must take into full account the actual African situation. From what has already been said, it seems that this discipline has remained far too academic, and is for the most part irrelevant to what is going on in African society today. What are we to say of an African theology, which never gets beyond the lecture halls of universities and congresses, mostly outside Africa? No one could take seriously a theology which preached the necessity of inculturation, but simply ignored the surrounding social misery.”⁷⁷⁰

African Christian theology should therefore be more praxis oriented and should apply to the real problems which individuals face in their respective societies and communities. That makes African theology really contextual theology. It must aim, as we have often observed above, at the socio-political realities confronting African nations, societies and institutions. That is why we believe that such a contextual theology remains a political theology.

Following the historical event of the second world war, the Second Vatican Council Fathers made an important observation that is valid for all times; that the Church should always listen to the “*signs of the times*” (Gaudium et Spes No. 4). This portrays the ever-increasingly and historically recognisable dynamism of the Church. For the Church would ever remain a widow if she is married to a particular age! As an African response to this Vatican II Exhortation, the first African Synod of the Bishops at the instance of Pope John Paul II took place in 1994 and deliberated on the new challenges facing the Ecclesia in Africa. The Pope was very specific in his Papal Exhortation to African Church and theologians based on the new image of the Church as the Family of God, which became the core theme of the Synod:

⁷⁷⁰ Benezet, Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context, 65.

“Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God's Family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. The new evangelization will thus aim at building up the Church as Family, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations. It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church”.⁷⁷¹

And it is in a continuous effort to listen to “the signs of the times”, especially of our time and for the people of Africa that the Church of Africa gathered again in Rome for the second Synod of the Bishops for Africa from 4th to 25th October 2009 to deliberate on the African socio-cultural realities and to articulate what should be the new mission of Ecclesia in Africa. The topic chosen by the Synod Fathers was *“The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace”*. In an effort to synthesise the central points of both Synods: “family”, “brotherhood”, “reconciliation”, “justice” and “peace”, and, in an effort to find an all inclusive theology that will take care of all the issues addressed by the Synods, we have in this project reduced them to a single theme, namely, **reconciliation**.

Reconciliation is the primary message of Jesus Christ: *“The kingdom of God is close at hand, Repent and believe in the good news”* (Mk 1, 14.15). It could be said therefore to be at the heart of Christian faith, and affects the problems of all peoples, cultures and traditions, from spiritual to existential

⁷⁷¹ John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, No. 63.

and from socio-political to ecological and economic issues.⁷⁷² God interrupted in human history through the Incarnation of His Son and brought about reconciliation with humanity. We are therefore called to interrupt in human histories of sufferings, of divisions and broken relationships! In an effort to listen to the “signs of the times,” and in the face of the world’s present realities of wars, conflicts, divisions, misunderstanding, resentment, bitterness and hatred, **reconciliation** becomes urgent and imperative.

Africa in particular and the world at large need a theology that will address the present situation of things in the world, especially in this *Third Millennium*. Peoples need to be reconciled in Africa. Peoples need to be reconciled in Europe and America. Peoples need to be reconciled in Asia and Australia. Religions need reconciliation with one another. Continents need to be reconciled with one another. Africa needs reconciliation with Europe and America. The cases of slavery, under-development, exploitation, international debts and its scandals keep on rearing their head now and again. Even the depraved Mother Nature needs and pangs for such a reconciliation with humanity. It is therefore a *kairos* for a theology that addresses these problems. This theology remains in our own perception a **theology of reconciliation**. This theology will address the challenges that reconciliation raises for theology and the distinctive contribution that theology can make to discussions of reconciliation. It involves a theological reflection on the themes of “memory,” “forgiveness,” “metanoia,” or “renewal,” “purification of memory,” “*Wiedergutmachung*”⁷⁷³, “redemption,” “reconciliation,” “justice” and “peace.” But the question one may ask is: what makes a theology of reconciliation a distinctively African Christian theology?

The answer is inherent in our prior expositions of African socio-political realities of wars, conflicts, exploitations and oppressions. Any African theology worth the name must take into account the Africa’s *memoria*

⁷⁷² Rüdinger, Noll, and Stefan, Vesper, Ed., *Reconciliation: Gift of God and Source of new Life*, Document from the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Graz: Verlag Styria, 1998, 10.

⁷⁷³ „Wiedergutmachung“ is a German word meaning to make good again, to remedy, to restore once again the broken relationship. In my Igbo language, it is a synonym for “mmari” which means to remedy the wrong done to the other.

passionis, the suffering experiences of Africa. We have already identified such a theology as a fundamental theology of the world, a theology with the face to the African world. Such a theology raises theodicy questions in the face of the history of sufferings and experiences of catastrophes in Africa. In African peculiar experiences as we have observed above, more questions should be raised concerning the human responsibility. In other words, African theology raises more or less *Anthropodicy* questions.

The answer to what makes a theology of reconciliation a distinctively African Christian theology can also be found in our earlier exposition of African rituals of reconciliation as rooted in African traditions. The question finds its answer in the African worldview and Anthropology. The African concepts of “*ubuntu*”, “*ujamma*”, “*family*”, “*umunna*” or “community” as we have exposed above make such a theology of reconciliation plausible for African peoples.

African theology of reconciliation receives its remote Ecclesial authority from the Second Vatican Council, while its proximate Ecclesial authority derives from the two African Synods. While the Second Vatican Council encouraged, as we have observed above, that the churches and theologians articulate the Christian message to appeal to the contextual situations of the hearers of the message, and while both Synods of the bishops for the Church in Africa focused attention to the African socio-cultural and political realities, theology of reconciliation becomes therefore urgent and inevitable in Africa!

Another question that naturally raises its head, which needs our attention here, is: Why Reconciliation theology instead of Liberation theology, which in the recent past till now has been the focus of many African theologians?

The clarifications made by Robert J. Schreiter in his book, *Wider die Schweigende Anpassung, Versöhnungsarbeit als Auftrag und Dienst der Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*⁷⁷⁴, which we have already presented in section 6.3 above, will be of immense help here. In his clarification of the term „reconciliation“, Schreiter tried to rescue the term from its false conceptions as it is understood today. Apart from observing that

⁷⁷⁴ Robert, J., Schreiter, *Wider die Schweigende Anpassung, Versöhnungsarbeit als Auftrag und Dienst der Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, Luzern: Genossenschaft Edition Exodus, 1993. The title of the original English edition is: *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992.

reconciliation does not mean “*a hasty peace*”⁷⁷⁵ nor “*directed process*”⁷⁷⁶, he warned that it should not in any way be confused with the term “liberation”.⁷⁷⁷ Haven identified reconciliation as the core of the Christian message⁷⁷⁸, he insisted that liberation should not be seen as an alternative to reconciliation nor should one talk of reconciliation instead of liberation. He distinctly made it clear that liberation is a condition for reconciliation for there can never be reconciliation without liberation.⁷⁷⁹ By this he underscores that reconciliation implies prior dismantling of all the structures of exploitation and oppression, such as the racist structures in America that oppress and deny the human dignity of the blacks.⁷⁸⁰ True reconciliation, according to him, means exposing all the remote and proximate causes of conflicts and divisions and healing them from the root.⁷⁸¹ Following Robert Schreiter’s line of thought, we would conclude that liberation is part of reconciliation and hence Reconciliation theology, in our view, is more holistic than Liberation theology. This is because the liberation message that is the content of Liberation theology is also included in our African theology of reconciliation.

7.4 General Evaluation and Conclusion

The traumatic experience of the genocidal Nigeria-Biafra war 1967-1970, right at the cradle of my existence⁷⁸², in which almost a million lives of

⁷⁷⁵ He noted that if reconciliation were to be understood as a hasty peace, it would imply covering up the victims’ experiences of suffering and the causes of such suffering, and ignoring the remembrance of such experiences, which will definitely lead to forgetting the victims themselves and their identity as human beings. In this way, reconciliation will only be superficial. Ibid., 37-38.

⁷⁷⁶ Here Robert Schreiter points to the fact that reconciliation be more understood in terms of spirituality and not in terms of strategy. It is not like a technique or a tool, which one can use to repair the broken world but is more of an attitude to the world that in need of peace. The most important thing in the process of reconciliation is the readiness by the human agents to dramatically and actively change the social order of things. From the side of God, reconciliation remains the Divine initiative. For it is God who constantly renews the world through the power of His Grace. Ibid., 46-49.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 41-46.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 44-45.

⁷⁸² Being born in the heat of this war in 1968, I count myself blessed to be living today after the ravages of this war, in which thousands of children born before, during and after this war died of Kwashiorkor- malnutrition sickness. The pictures of such children, known in the

people of Igbo extraction were lost, formed the foundation for the context of this research work. The socio-political effects of that war not only on the Igbos but also on the entire polity called Nigeria still persist till the present day. Nigeria has been a society known for its ethnic and religious pluralism. This has constituted and still constitutes millions of problems that continue to threaten its corporate existence as a nation. Just as we have observed in chapter three of this work, the incessant conflicts and ethno-religious wars that have characterized its history have not waned. Instead of working towards the socio-political unification of peoples of different ethnic and religious origins, our leaders have continued to manipulate and polarize the people more. Politicians have played and continue to play politics based on ethnic and religious divides. Wounds and deep seated sentiments have not been healed but continue to be reopened. The situation has become more complicated because religious groups and their leaders, who naturally should have worked more for reconciliation and peace, have unfortunately been guilty of the same evil. From whom and from where should our help come?

We have also, through the analysis of other African countries with similar experiences as obtained in Nigeria, like Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda and South Africa, brought to the fore the great and urgent need of reconciliation of people of diverse ethnic and religious origins. Some of these countries have made sincere attempts to come to terms with their past in order to build a solid future for a peaceful co-existence. But more is still to be done. The onus falls on both civil and religious institutions to rise up to the present challenges facing the Continent. Many ecclesial bodies and institutions have also tried in many ways to respond to these challenges.

Within the Catholic communities there have been groups which have raised their voices against oppressive governments and systems, which not only suppress and exploit the people, but also tear people apart through the imperialists' principle of *divide et impera*. The sublime voices of different Conferences of Bishops across the Sahara Africa have refused to be silenced. The echo of those voices should not die out but be sustained and continue to

German world as "Biafra-kind", shocked the world and attracted great sympathy and solidarity from the western world.

reverberate! Such prophetic voices of ecclesiastical leaders need only to be augmented with practical and pastoral initiatives.

The proposals of both African Synods of Bishops for Africa should not be allowed to rot away in the dustbin of history but given serious consideration and urgent pastoral implementation. The lessons from the last African Synod on the Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace challenge the Church in Africa in a most significant manner to take up the mission of reconciliation seriously and urgently. The Synod Bishops are all back from Rome to their respective dioceses not to continue the intellectual deliberation on the Synod topic but to work out its practical implementation. This is not only a mission but a duty which they owe to African peoples!

From our discussion thus far, we have identified the third Millennium mission of Ecclesia in Africa as that of reconciliation. We have also tried to prove that this mission of the Church in Africa is not distinct and can never be separated from the original mission of Christ.

Jesus Christ remains, through the Incarnation, in an immanent way, the visible reality of God's interruption in depraved human history of sufferings brought about by the broken-relationship with God. God took the initiative to reconcile man with Himself through the Incarnation, birth, suffering, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is therefore our reconciliation and our peace. He is both the messenger and the message of reconciliation. St Paul has clearly indicated that reconciliation is not only a message but above all a ministry. *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Cor 5:18). The overwhelming significance of Christ's ministry of reconciliation is that it *"truly opens up the real potential of a universal inclusion of the nations, no matter how far apart they are socially, as the people of God in the 'one body'".*⁷⁸³

Now, this ministry is entrusted to the Church. The Church exists today as the visible presence of Christ. She is the mystical body of Christ; therefore, his hands and feet. She continues to interrupt today, in the name of Christ, in the present depraved human history of sufferings. The mission is specific

⁷⁸³ Tet-Lim, N., Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 183.

for the Church in Africa in the face of the Continent's history of slavery, colonialism and exploitation by the Western world. It is her specific mission in the face of poverty, wars and ethno-religious conflicts ravaging the Continent. The Church in Africa should therefore never abandon this all-embracing approach of Christ in her ministry of reconciliation.⁷⁸⁴ She should toe the footsteps of Christ, taking however into consideration the contextual exigencies of the contemporary time, in order to be true ambassador and messenger of reconciliation among the African peoples.

In this mission of reconciliation, the Church should find practical methods of making this mission bear lasting fruits. Such methods might imply rediscovering those traditional rituals of restoring relationships among peoples and communities. In my Igbo culture of South-Eastern Nigeria, the *igba ndu* ritual of reconciliation culminated in the *oriko* meal of reconciliation remains a plausible option. This ritual, as we have earlier observed, should be given a Christian perspective. It retains its significance within the category of Christian understanding of Communion. The same meaning and significance is articulated by South African people with the term "*ubuntu*". The Church can only make this mission more effective and authentic by being truly, through her life, the Family of God in Africa.

And since religion and politics play vital roles in the lives of Africans, it will not be difficult then to make reconciliation a project not only for the Church and theology but also for political institutions and societies. This should form the greater part of the political manifestoes of all the political parties in every African nation. Reconciliation and peace, I believe, should be the foundation of any authentic nation building in Africa. African political leaders should find practical ways of dismantling all the ethnic and religious boundaries both real and imaginary, which divide people. The deconstruction of ethnocentric perspective implies as a necessity, the reconstruction of the people's perception of the ethnic "other". This includes the institution of all-inclusive systems of governance. This implies also the building of all-inclusive community devoid of any form of estrangement, exclusion and marginalization of any group whatsoever. Efforts should also

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 183.

be made towards alleviation of poverty and existential conditions of the poor African masses. The God-endowed natural resources of the Continent should be properly explored and directed to the provision of basic infrastructures in all the societies and communities. Sincere effort should be made for the institution of democratic structures and systems of accountability by African leaders. The African understanding of leadership as service rooted in the African tradition should be re-discovered.

And having said all these, we therefore conclude by calling for an African political theology of reconciliation as a fundamental theology with the face to the African world! It is a society-critical theology. It is a theology critical of Church and theology itself. It is a theology that does not ignore the African history of suffering. It tries to expose all the hidden experiences of suffering of the African peoples and societies.

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Abstrakt [deutsche Übersetzung]

Die Erfahrung der vergangenen Jahre zeigt, wie sehr die Afrikanischen Gesellschaften durch Bürgerkriege, soziale Gewalt, wirtschaftliche Ungerechtigkeit und Ausbeutung gespalten und polarisiert sind. Solche - über viel Jahrzehnte andauernde - Konflikte gefährden das Bestehen von afrikanischen Staaten wie zum Beispiel Angola, Algerien, Burundi, Kongo, Elfenbein Küste, Eritrea, Äthiopien, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan und auch meiner Heimat Nigeria. Die zahlreichen Kriege und Konflikte kosteten bislang über eine Million Leben und haben über 9.5 Millionen Menschen zu Flüchtlingen gemacht. Die vielen Opfer dieser Kriege und ihre Traumatisierungen dürfen nicht vergessen werden.

Leider Gottes haben die ethnischen und religiösen Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den verschiedenen Völkern Afrikas ein Klima der Angst, der Verbitterung und des Hasses geschaffen, das ein friedliches Zusammenleben der Menschen, die nebeneinander leben müssen, sehr erschwert. Dabei handelt es sich um ein Pulverfass, das bei jeder Gelegenheit explodieren kann, sollte es nicht gelingen, eine endgültige Lösung der kriegerischen Konflikte zu finden.

Aber welche Lösung wäre angesichts der Milliarden von Problemen Afrikas angebracht?

Viele engagierte und aufrichtige Bewegungen und Organisationen innerhalb als auch außerhalb Afrikas bemühen sich eine Lösung zu finden. Auch die Kirche bleibt diesbezüglich nicht untätig, da die afrikanische Problemlage auch das Leben von Millionen ihrer Söhne und Töchter betrifft. Die Kirche Afrikas sieht die Dringlichkeit, die Menschen dieses Kontinents zusammen zu bringen, und versteht ihre Mission als einen Beitrag, die Völker Afrika zu einer Familie Gottes zu einen. Dieses Verständnis wurzelt in der afrikanischen Weltanschauung selbst. Denn die Afrikaner verstehen sich als Gemeinschaft, als Communio! Sie sagen: „Ich bin, weil wir sind. Und je mehr wir sind, desto mehr ich bin.“ Bei den Zulus in Südafrika wird dieser Gedanke so ausgedrückt: „Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu“ – Die Person ist Person durch die anderen Personen“. Bei den Igbos in Südosten Nigerias

wird dasselbe Verständnis durch den Begriff „Umunna“ zum Ausdruck gebracht.

Angeichts der miserablen Situation der Völker Afrikas, die von Bürgerkriegen und sozialer Gewalt, von wirtschaftlicher Ungerechtigkeit und Ausbeutung gekennzeichnet ist, ist die Mission der Versöhnung für die Kirche in Afrika nicht nur eine Option, sondern eine drängende Notwendigkeit. Dessen bewusst hat die zweite Afrikanische Synode für Afrika (Rom vom 4.-25. Oktober 2009) die Aufmerksamkeit der Kirche auf die Mission der Versöhnung gelenkt. Das Thema der Synode lautete: "Die Kirche in Afrika im Dienst von Versöhnung, Gerechtigkeit und Frieden."

Aber was kann Versöhnung für die Menschen in Afrika bedeuten? Am Beispiel meiner Heimat Nigeria kann die Frage konkreter lauten: Was kann wirkliche Versöhnung für die Völker Nigerias bringen? Die Konferenz der katholischen Bischöfe Nigerias hat eine wichtige Antwort gegeben: "having the courage to forgive one another, respecting one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father, giving each one the room to participate in the decisions that shape the common destiny of all."

Ich habe in dieser Dissertation versucht, Versöhnung nicht nur als Thema der Mission der Kirche in Afrika zu betonen, sondern als Thema der afrikanischen Theologie überhaupt. Am Beispiel meiner Heimat habe ich das Igbandu Ritual der Versöhnung bei den Igbos herangezogen, um der Kirche ein Beispiel zu geben, wie sie in konkreter gesellschaftlicher Situierung ihrer Mission der Versöhnung gerecht werden kann. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit habe ich dabei auf das Oriko Mahl der Versöhnung als Spitze des Versöhnungsprozesses gelegt und versucht, es aus christlicher Perspektive zu deuten.

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