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Trinitarian Catholicity: A Paradigm for Enduring Interreligious Dialogue/Encounter

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Introduction

The eruptive and destructive religious violence that constantly plagues many societies today calls for a critical look at how different religions express their creedal beliefs in relation to their counterparts. The reality of globalization and the close proximity of multiple cultures and religions interacting within territories that used to be inhabited by mono-religious cultures demands internal critique of dogmatic claims by religions, especially when such claims originate from an era of religious uniformism.

Without denying the uniqueness of Roman Catholicism and that of other religions, this paper attempts to engage in a discourse on interreligious dialogue within the framework of Trinitarian dynamics in order to advocate for a paradigm of interreligious dialogue that is faithful to the Christian heritage and relevant to the reality of religious and cultural pluralism. The Christian understanding of God as Trinity creates the foundation for engaging in transformative interreligious dialogue. God has communicated Itself to humanity as one who is eternally in dialogical encounter either with Itself as tri-persons or with Its own creation. Such dialogical identity of God calls for Christians to engage in interreligious dialogue.

The catholicity of God refers not only to God's universal presence in the created order, but also to God's essential openness to otherness that is inviting, interacting, and kenotic. It is in this context that Trinitarian catholicity is used in this paper as a model for engaging in interreligious dialogue by the Catholic Church.
Two Ways of Constructing Ecclesial Identity in the Catholic Church

To understand the dynamics involved in a dialogical encounter, one must first understand how the parties involved in the process understand who they are either as individuals or as members within a tradition. Such self-understanding is constructed both as a fixed identity that defies time and is entrapped in the immutable memory of the individual or tradition, or as an appropriation of identity that is constantly enriched by multiple events present to the consciousness of the individual or the religious tradition. In this latter context, identity is constructed within relational encounters. The former, when it pertains to religion, is seen as proceeding from God through a vertical connection between God and the particular religion. In the history of the Catholic Church, prior to the Second Vatican Council, this approach to Catholic identity prevailed. The Holy Roman Catholic Church was understood, as contained in the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*, to be Holy, Catholic, One, and Apostolic. In relation to other churches and religions, the Roman Catholic Church understood itself to be the sole path to salvation. The Council of Florence declared dogmatically that salvation was open only to those within the visible confines of the Roman Catholic Church, thereby denying salvation to the chosen people of the Abrahamic Covenant, other Christian churches that were considered heretical sects, and those belonging to other religions. This attitude and self-understanding concretized by both the dogmatic constitution, *Dei Filius* and the dogmatic constitution on the

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2 The reconciliatory Council of Florence in 1439 held to unify both the Western and Eastern Churches had decreed the supremacy of the Roman Church with the Roman Pontiff as head of all of Christendom. This declaration, though accepted by some of the representatives from the Eastern Churches was never received by the People of God in most of the Oriental Churches. See Jean Comby, *How to Read Church History: From the Beginnings to the Fifteenth Century. Vol. I* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), p. 180. See also a detailed description of the proceedings of the Council of Florence in J. M. Neale (editor), *The History of the Council of Florence* (London: Joseph Masters, 1861).
Church of Christ, *Pastor Aeternus*, have shaped to a great degree the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church of viewing itself as the curator of the totality and fullness of the deposits of salvific faith in Christ. This mentality is reflected in the resistance against any rapprochement introduced by other Christian churches who want to engage the Roman Catholic Church in a dialogical encounter as a way of achieving sororal relations.\(^3\)

On the other hand, since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has come to appreciate the role of events surrounding it as playing a role in shaping its own hermeneutics. Such awareness of the role of relational encounters in shaping the Catholic Church's self-understanding has necessitated a re-evaluation of not only the Catholic Church's relations with other churches and religions but also an evaluation of how these can become a medium for salvation. This holistic approach to identity, which recognizes both the vertical and horizontal relationships between the Catholic Church and God on one hand and between the Catholic Church and the other religious institutions on the other hand, is an affirmation of what Leonardo Boff calls recognition of "syncretic Catholicism."\(^4\) In this context, syncretism is understood as part of God's gift to the Church. The collective human experience becomes not just a didactic point for reflection but contributes to the fluid and continuous reshaping of the church's identity in each historical epoch. Hence, the catholicity of the church is not understood as the unchanging universal presence of the Catholic Church in a changing world, where the world must adjust

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\(^3\) The theological approach of the Roman Catholic Church during this period was shaped by the view that one cannot engage error. Rather than focus on dialogue, the Roman Church insisted on return to its fold by the other Christian Churches and recognition of the Petrine supremacy. See Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Mortalium Animos*. January 6, 1928 in [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos_en.html) (accessed October 8, 2010).

\(^4\) Leonardo Boff rescues the notion of syncretism from the negative pathos given to it by the Catholic Church's magisterium and argues for its legitimate role in shaping catholic identity in a globalised world where ecclesial identity is not shaped by western epistemic traditions. Syncretism becomes the basis for arguing for a legitimacy of the enduring presence of God prior to the historical advent of the incarnation within the totality of human salvation history. For a detailed treatment of this point, see Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism & Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 89 – 107.
itself to the church. Rather, the catholicity of the church comprises both the ability of the Catholic Church to remain true to its christocentric heritage while at the same time being able to adjust itself to the fluid context of each historical epoch.

Identity shaped within relational encounters is the backbone for interreligious encounters. This does not mean that Vatican II Council recognizes fully the notion of otherness as it pertains to either other Christian Churches or non-Christian religions. The theological debate surrounding the relation of the Roman Catholic Church to the Church of Christ (Mystical Body of Christ) shows a continuous resistance to otherness and an attempt to see the Roman Catholic Church as the church upon which the gifts of the Spirit rest. Reacting to the writings of Leonardo Boff, who argues that the Church of Christ is not the sole prerogative of the Roman Church, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gives a new nuance to the statement contained in *Lumen Gentium;* "This Church [of Christ]… subsists in the [Roman] Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him."\(^5\) In its interpretation of this passage, the Congregation opines that "the council, rather had chosen the word *subsist* precisely to make it clear that there exists only one subsistence of the true Church, whereas outside of its visible structure there exist only elements of church which, being elements of the church itself, tend and lead toward the Catholic Church."\(^6\) In other words, the Roman Curia interprets the conciliar document to mean that it is only in the Roman Catholic Church that the Church of Christ subsists and other apostolic churches lack the same status, as does the Roman Church due to their disagreement on the role of the Petrine office. This opinion


of the Congregation presents the catholicity of the Roman Church in an exclusive way, an approach that is not in line with a true understanding of *Lumen Gentium*. There is an attempt to understand the conciliar document, which, though not free from an attitude of perfection in light of it being the only one in whom the Church of Christ subsists, affirmed the multitude of elements of salvific truths, to mean simply "only" elements of truth. The introduction of the word "only" to refer to the elements and the removal of the adjective "many" by the Roman curia is a radical shift from the attempted recognition of the legitimacy of the other churches as means and media for salvation by the council fathers.  

Though, one cannot deny the fact that there has been significant progress made in fostering a healthy dialogical relationship with members of other religions and situating dialogue within the kerygmatic witness of the Church, there has been significant resistance within the Church against a theology of dialogue that recognizes other religions as possessing equal salvific qualities as does the Catholic Church. This is clearly expressed in some curia documents that caution against dialogical encounters, which is seen as diluting the distinct Catholic identity. Among these curia documents is the document *Dominus Iesus*, written by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This document discusses boundaries for Roman Catholic interreligious encounters.

While recognizing the need to engage other religions and the place for speculative theology on the validity and place of other religions, as well as their creedal truths in the totality of God's salvific plan, the document, *Dominus Iesus*, highlights the need to recognize those immutable doctrinal truths to which all Catholics are bound and which define the kerygmatic

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7 See a detailed treatment of this nuance being introduced by the Roman Curia in Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. *The Church We Believe in: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, pp. 29-33.
witness of the Catholic Church. Among these is the centrality of Christ's revelation of God to humanity. Christ is understood to be the finality of divine revelation as well as the plenal veracity of salvation to whom, from whom, through whom, and in whom all humanity is saved. When a theological enterprise contradicts the centrality of christocentric salvation, the document reminds Roman Catholic theologians and the Christian faithful that such an enterprise must be discarded since it threatens the primacy of revelation in Christ as understood and taught by the magisterium. Another doctrinal truth highlighted in this document is the place, role, and mission of the Catholic Church and its magisterium in God's salvific plan for humanity. Not only is all of humanity saved in Christ, all of humanity is saved through Christ present in and as understood by the Catholic Church. Thus, even members of other religions are united to the Catholic Church in Christ in a way known only to God. Hence, to deny or limit the centrality of the Catholic Church in God's plan for creation is to do an injustice to authentic interreligious dialogue.

The above doctrinal claims of the Catholic Church have not always been received positively by many within it who are invested in the mission of interreligious dialogue and by those belonging to other religions and to other Christian churches. Part of their argument ranges from a call to focus on the role of God's salvation of humanity as Trinitarian rather than the Christology advocated by the Catholic Church. Also, there has been a critique of the centrality of the Catholic Church in the salvific intention of God for humanity. The imperfections of the Catholic Church militate against a theology that presents itself as playing an irreplaceable role in

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9 Ibid, #12.
10 Ibid, ##16-22.
God's plan for the salvation of all of creation. To resolve this impasse, this paper holds that from a Christian perspective, authentic interreligious dialogue can be engaged in without fear of falling into doctrinal relativism or adhering to strict exclusivism by appropriating what this paper terms Trinitarian Catholicism.

**Trinitarian Catholicity**

Central to the Trinity is the notion of openness to the other. This openness is the basis for Trinitarian catholicity. Trinitarian catholicity refers to this essential attribute of the Trinity, which brings about dialogical communion among the divine persons and with humans who are made in God's image. In Western and Eastern deliberations on the persons of the Trinity, though Divinity is said to originate from the Father, it is open to the Son and the Spirit. This is possible because operating within the inner life of the Trinity is one of the principles of catholicity, a consciousness of openness to the other.

11 Christian theologians like John Hick, Paul Knitter, Jacques Dupuis, and S. Mark Heim have proffered other theological views to justify a radical commitment to interreligious dialogue. Hick argues for the equal legitimate claim to salvation by every religious tradition on the basis that they are all human attempts to respond to the one invitation of God to humanity to participate in divine life. See John Hick, *God has Many Names* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1980), pp. 52-53. Without denying the uniqueness of Christ as God's revelation to humanity, Knitter argues that, there is no essential negation for the argument that God can also reveal himself legitimately through other religions. This is particularly true when one holds the argument that God wills that all of his creation be saved. Also, he opines that through authentic dialogue with other religions, the validity of other religions can be appreciated. See Paul Knitter, *One Earth many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 34-35. See also *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 208-213. Dupuis argues for a refocus on Trinitarian revelation in the different religions as a justification for the valid claims to salvation by the different religions rather than the Catholic Church's claim that only through a christocentric path is salvation possible. In other words, the centrality of salvation in Jesus Christ is not to be understood absolutely, rather; as a privileged gift to humanity without in anyway negating the continuous and valid presence of God in other religions. See Jacques Dupuis, S.J. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 221. Finally, Heim calls to question the claim that there is only one ultimate end. Rather, he argues that there is no essential claim to one ultimate end in Christianity and that essentially, the Christian claim of salvation in Jesus Christ does not negate the possibility for multiple religious ends. See S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 129-157.


13 The debates in the Early Church concerning the identity of the persons of the Trinity serve as a ground for the understanding of catholicity understood as openness to the other. The relationship between the Father and the Son defined in the Council of Nicaea is rooted in the view that divinity does not rest only in the Father; rather, the divine
of unity and difference among the persons of the Trinity. By doing so, he recognizes and preserves the perfect alterity and bond of relationality present in the revealed Trinity. The Spirit is the bond of communion and society within the Trinity. The foundation of this communion/society is love that proceeds from the Father through/and the Son to the Spirit who is not only the principle of love but an actual person that makes present the Father's love for the Son and for all of creation.

Nicene-Constantinople-Chalcedon debates focus on showing the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. In these debates, emphasis is placed upon the extending love of the Father; such love is not seen as a lack on the part of the Father; rather, as a constituent aspect of the Father whose love is creative. However, though the Father begets the Son, there is an eternal difference among the persons of the Trinity. To engage the other, the notion of difference must be respected and preserved. One cannot engage the other when that other is only a reflection of the same. The Father cannot be the Father unless there is a Son and a Spirit. The love the Father has for the Son cannot be true love unless such love rests in the Spirit. The Spirit becomes the visible expression of the love between the Father and the Son as well as the preserver of difference in the Trinity. The resistance to assimilation within the Trinity by the Christian faith is concretized by the struggle against Sabellianism in the early church. This heresy conflated all three persons of the Trinity to one reality manifesting itself simply as modes to humanity.
The corresponding love of the Father by the Son and the Spirit is not a mathematically
determined reciprocity. The corresponding love is perfect. This critique of mathematical
reciprocal love is necessary if one is to seek a new paradigm for dialogical encounters within the
Roman Catholic Church. It is true that the Roman Catholic Church distinguishes between the
human agents of dialogue and the content of the dialogue. The former is stressed to be
reciprocally equal. This understanding has shaped the Roman Catholic view on religious
tolerance since all human beings have an equal right to express their religious aspirations.\(^\text{17}\)
However, the latter is viewed to be asymmetrical. The Christian content is understood to
dominate those of other religions and Christian churches.\(^\text{18}\)

The conditions of reciprocity are always determined by the one who has more power. If
dialogical encounters are to proceed from Trinitarian catholicity, then power has no place in such
encounters. The relation among the persons of the Trinity is not one rooted in power. The
originating love of the Father for the Son and the Spirit is not one of power but of kenosis. The
Father empties Himself to and for the Son and the Son does likewise – the Son's response to the
Father plays out in the salvific history revealed in the Christian faith. Such kenotic representation
is manifested in the Spirit who, repeatedly, extends Itself and reaches out to the other even when
the other, in the case of humans, is unwilling to accept such a gesture. In the Trinitarian sphere,
the Spirit who is the Spirit of love rests on Christ and joins Him to ascent to the will of the
Father.\(^\text{19}\) The Spirit, while it has been understood traditionally as the source of unity can also be

\(^\text{17}\) Declaration on Religious Freedom 'Dignitatis Humanae,' On the Right of the Person and of Communities to
Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious (December 7, 1965), #2 in
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-

\(^\text{18}\) Dominus Iesus, #22.

\(^\text{19}\) See a historical account of the doctrinal development on the theology of the Trinity in the Early Church in Lewis
Ayres, Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2004), pp. 211-218. See also Dumitru Staniloae, Theology and the Church (Crestwood, New York: St.
seen as the source of difference. The spirit preserves the union of love between the Father and
the Son. The Spirit also preserves the difference between the Father and the Son. Trinitarian life
negates any attempt of diffusing difference and reducing it to strict monism. This is primarily
played out in the hypostatic union in the person of Jesus Christ, as we shall see below.

**Christological Catholicity**

It is in the incarnate Jesus that true mediation of the subject and the other rests. However,
this mediation, as has been categorically proclaimed by Chalcedon is neither confused nor
reduced solely to the divine or to the human. The tension of mediation lies in the hypostatic
union. Christological catholicity is not just the openness of the Incarnate Word to humanity but is
the preservation of the otherness of humanity. The primal Trinitarian catholicity that plays out in
the relationships of the persons in the Trinity also plays itself out in Christological catholicity.
The Spirit, being the symbol of unity of the hypostatic union is also the preserver of the
difference between the divine and the human in Christ. This difference can never be negated
since the Spirit transcends all forms of negation.

The incarnation, understood as kenosis, an emptying of divinity and an elevation of
humanity can become a dialogical model within the framework of Christology. The insights of
Cyril of Alexandria in this matter of divine and human encounters in the person of Christ, reflect
an eternal dialogical rapprochement between divinity and humanity in Christ. What is
important in this proximity of encounters is that divinity is open to humanity just as humanity is
open to divinity. In other words, a fuller reading of this hypostatic union in Christ goes beyond

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See the account on the discussion of the two natures in Jesus Christ and the argument for their unity and
95-99.

See Cyril of Alexandria, *Third Epistle to Nestorius, including the Twelve Anathemas* in
http://www.monachos.net/content/patristics/patristictexts/135-cyril-of-alexandria-third-epistle-to-nestorius-
including-the-twelve-anathemas (accessed April 15, 2011).
any attempt to see divinity as untouched by Christ's humanity. In Christ, divinity is invited by his humanity to embrace humanity's limitations. On the other hand, Christ's humanity is invited into a deeper sense of friendship and self-less love by Christ's divinity. To put it succinctly, in the hypostatic union, both divinity and humanity are elevated to a new level of identity.²²

Christological catholicity refers to the existential openness of divinity to humanity as well as humanity to divinity. As a dialogical model, in that neither divinity is subsumed by humanity or verse versa, dialogical encounters among religions can proceed without the fear or desire to bring about the conversion of one by the other. This approach challenges the very thesis of the Roman Catholic Church that views other religions as having lesser insights into salvific truths and itself as possessing the plenitude of salvific grace and truths in relation to other religions or Christian churches. At the core of encounter with the other, one who embraces the triumphalistic mindset of the Roman Catholic position will have to struggle constantly to resist a sense of triumphalism and superiority. Dialogue punctuated by a sense of superiority will not be truly reciprocal or transformative.

The purpose of God taking human nature is not for God to be present to humans as though God were an idol, a point that Marion has helped to shed light on, rather; it is to extend divine love to humanity, who is always in need of love.²³ The incarnate Word, in His relationship with humanity, is always perfect alterity, always transcending attempts by humans to erase the difference necessary first for the expression of divine love for them, and second, to bear witness before His Father for them. The Incarnate Word as alterity is eternally open to humanity.

This essential openness to humanity is concretized in the salvific Paschal event. The Paschal event is perfect kenosis; an emptying of the incarnate Christ for humanity. In the dialogical context, dialogue is not about trying to know the other as though the other were a non-historical being, whose presence to one is solely for epistemological reasons. The other is like the icon that, while engaging, is always becoming: having the capacity of appropriating multiple, complex, and, sometimes, paradoxical identities just as the God-man identity of Christ is the most complex and paradoxical identity ever. In interreligious dialogue, the partners in the dialogue ought to engage one another with the mindset that the other is God's gift, presence, witness, and messenger. The other invites one to open up to the ongoing salvific revelation. The other religion bears witness to God's multiple works and presence in the world. The other religious partner is a messenger of God, bearing good tidings that reveal the non-exhaustive presence of God in the world.

The traditional understanding of human relationality rooted in equi-reciprocity ought to be reevaluated in the context of Christ's humanity and vocation enacted in the Paschal mystery. The kenotic love of humanity by Christ is not reciprocal; it is absolutely one-sided. No one can be Christ himself in such a way that that person can replicate back to Christ the Christ-gesture of dying for the other in the person of Christ. In other words, Christ, as the Son of God, is singular and His acts of love for the other are uniquely His that are done without any expectation of a corresponding good from the other. This is the exact meaning of the Christ mandate – "Love one another as I have loved you…" (John 13:34-35). Christ's love for the other is unique and all who love Christ are invited to love the other uniquely without an equi-reciprocal response. In the words of Levinas, "The epiphany of the Absolutely Other is a face by which the Other challenges and commands me through his nakedness, through his destitution. He challenges me from his
humility and from his height. He sees but remains invisible, thus absolving himself from the relation that he enters and remaining absolute." God's epiphany in Christ to the world, as recorded in the Christian Scripture, is a kenotic one invoking in the Christian a kenotic response that is unique and not a mere replication of that of Christ's, since Christ's epiphany is not something to be grasped in its entirety. Christ is not a mirror upon which one gazes at himself; rather, Christ is an icon that invites one constantly to new models of engagement.

Only in the Trinity can perfect mutual reciprocity be achieved. The mutual reciprocal recognition and kenotic love for one another in the Trinity is also the affirmation of difference in the persons of the Trinity. Only God can reciprocate God's love. God's love is reciprocated by God-made-human. Among humans themselves, perfect mutual reciprocal love is an eschatological reality to be realized at the eschaton. Nevertheless, humans can attempt to enact reciprocal love through justice practiced in society. But human society is never perfect, hence the enactment of laws, punishment, and constant revision of the legal system in light of growth in human experiences and knowledge.

Articulating a Dialogical Paradigm based on Catholicity

In the preceding discourse on what Trinitarian and Christological catholicities entail, certain points vital to constructing a salubrious dialogical model for interreligious encounters are worth noting. These will serve as the foundations for constructing a dialogical model for interreligious encounters. The first is that openness among the persons of the Trinity is a dialogical openness. The second is that relational recognition of one by the other is not based upon expectation. The Father affirms the Son's sonship without the need for it to be reciprocated.

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The third is that in Christ, though humanity and divinity are united hypostatically, there is the preservation and recognition of difference.

**Dialogue as Openness**

In the context of Trinitarian dialogue, the Father's openness to the Son and the Spirit is not to be understood as a superficial one where the one or the other has a preconditioned non-conscious response to the invitation. The reciprocal love of the Son and the witness of this love by the Spirit are freely given in the full sense of the word. Relating this to the discourse on interreligious dialogue, the Catholic Church's invitation to engage the other religions ought to reflect the life of the Trinity. The Catholic Church's openness to other religions and Christian Churches ought to be conditioned solely by the desire to fully live out the Trinitarian example. Formulating doctrinal barriers that reflect an existential suspicion of the other in the church's relational encounters with other religions and Christian Churches is self-defeating and contradictory. To be open to another is to allow the other to express freedom even at the risk of the other rejecting the invitation to engage.

Within the Christian tradition, the Paschal Mystery ought not to be understood simply as the definitive revelation of God's plan for humanity as though one can completely comprehend such a truth in *kronos* time; rather, the infinite possibilities contained in the Paschal Mystery are never comprehended in their totality. This infinite manifestation of the inner meaning of the Paschal Mystery makes it possible for one to argue that the visible Church of Christ cannot exhaust the meaning even through its magisterial teachings on this truth. It is this non-exhaustiveness of the Paschal Mystery that makes possible for the Christian churches to engage one another and other religions not in a superficial level but in a transformative dialogical level where one can be invited into a novel understanding of truths not yet manifested in the doctrinal
heritages of the particular ecclesial community. The implication of this is that when the Catholic Church or other Christian churches engage other religions, there ought to be a willingness to be open to the new insights revealed to them by the other. Such insights do not necessarily have to derive their validity by their concordance with Christian truths. Two categories ought to be the basis for the validity of such insights: God is the one who validates such a truth, and the other is the pragmatic relevance of such insights. This is to be determined by how such an insight or truth betters the human condition. In other words, a religious truth that categorically leads to human suffering and oppression can be rejected on the basis that all religions ought to work toward the human good.

Both the apophatic and cataphatic traditions in Christian theology affirm one fact; that one cannot grasp exhaustively the totality of God's revelation either as contained in the progressive salvific history or in the revealed Paschal Mystery. Such a humble approach to divine interactions with the created order creates an opening for approaching other religious traditions with a positive mindset, believing that faith in the divine, wherever it might be found, is always a gift from God, who constantly invites humanity to engage. The fact that the interactions between God and humanity are between infinity and finitude limits any attempt by finite humanity to lay claim to an infinite and exhaustive knowledge of who God is and what God’s dealings with humanity are. The apophatic tradition balances the cataphatic in the sense that any attempt to exhaust divine interactions with humanity are met by a sobering awareness of God's infinity.

There is an existential risk involved in engaging the other. However, such a risk is necessary for the fruitful manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit who calls Christians to engage

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26 This view has shaped both the Orthodox and Protestant understanding of catholicity as an eschatological reality that cannot be realized in its totality in kronos time. See Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 121-122.
their fellow humans in their quest for knowing and living out God's will. From the very beginnings of Christianity, Christ himself did not eradicate Judaism. He operated within the confines of Judaism. The Christian Church in its early stages saw itself as an offshoot of Judaism until its adherents were expelled from the Synagogues and Temple. Christ's recognition of Judaism as an expression of God's will for its adherents ought to be the basis for the Catholic Church in its doctrinal views of other religions. Christ never saw Judaism as being replaced by the ecclesial structures His followers will erect.27 If Divine truth is never exhaustive then no one religion can exhaust God's manifestation. No one position can exhaust God's revelation. Not even the humanity of Jesus, which is limited by temporality, can exhaust God's truth (though in Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is understood as the perfect manifestation of God. Perfection here should not be understood as exhaustive).28 By recognizing the gift of salvation as emanating from God, the Catholic Church logically should recognize that God's freedom does not limit salvation to the incarnation. One can affirm the unique place the incarnation event has in the Christian understanding of salvation history without necessarily equating such uniqueness to finality. It is necessary that one understands the conditions surrounding the early Christians' attempt to articulate a theology that emphasizes closure of revelation. The emerging theological speculations among the early Christians and sometimes-dubious writings affirming such speculations, on one hand, and the need to have a unified Christian identity as a secular tool for stabilizing the known Roman Empire, on the other hand, led the early church to embrace a theological position that grants orthodoxy to one strand of Christian theology. Nevertheless, such

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28 The discussions on the hypostatic union by the Early Church fathers reiterate the inequality between infinity and temporality and between divinity and mortality present in the Incarnate Jesus. Thus, to state that Jesus is the finality of revelation does not mean that the human nature of Jesus can exhaust the non-exhaustive reality of God. The human nature of Jesus is limited by the laws of temporality. Thus, the Scripture affirms that Jesus "Who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped." (Philippians 2:6).
pragmatic approach has been elevated to a metaphysical revelation as though such a theological position was the sole doing of God. The context from which such theological position emerged has been forgotten over time. Without the imperial policy of unifying Christian theology, many strands of Christian theology regarding revelation and other foundational Christian truths might have continued and such doctrinal teachings on the absolute necessity of salvation in Christ through the Catholic Church would not have been the creedal marker of the Catholic Church.

It is important to always recognize the role and the place of context in the shaping of theological dogmas concerning the Catholic Church as the bastion of salvation. The church, as a minority in the social order, would not be as triumphalistic as the church recognized as the sole religion in society. The realities of the Middle Ages especially in the context of the marriage between Roman Catholicism and the secular society necessitated the need to affirm uniformity in worship, creedal beliefs, and religious identification. Difference, as an affirmation of the right of the other, was not only frowned upon but was denied doctrinally and secularly. The emerging realities of contemporary times, the centuries of encounters with non-Christian religious cultures and societies, the celebration of personal freedom, and the rejection of forced Christianization of peoples have led to a partial affirmation of the workings of the Spirit in other religions and Christian Churches. There has been a noticeable shift from Trent through Vatican II.\(^{29}\) While the former advocated a condemnation of religious freedom and difference, the latter affirmed the right to religious difference. Perhaps, the emerging globalization of personal freedom will lead to full tolerance and recognition of the religious other as possessing the salvific truths needed for their salvation without the intermediary role of the Catholic Church.

Dialogue Transcends Reciprocal Expectations

When dialogue is founded on the principle of reciprocity, the outcome is not always authentic. Trinitarian reciprocal love is not conditioned by an expectation of the other to respond to the gesture and invitation to love. Emphasis is on expectation, which depicts a sense of dependence on the other. In the divine sphere, the perfect love the Persons of the Trinity have for one another transcends expectation. Reciprocity is freely given by one to the other. Reciprocity is always conditioned by a certain form of expectation. The other's freedom to accept or refuse the invitation and the nature of the other's response is conditioned by the expectation. The primary condition for interreligious dialogue ought to be openness to the other intellectually, psychologically, and existentially.

If interreligious dialogue is to be modeled in line with the Trinitarian communion, a fact must be accepted, that dialogue is an on-going process. As Origen and Tertullian rightly identified in their discourse on the Trinity, the begottenness of the Son by the Father and the inspiration of the Spirit from the Father and/through the Son is not an episodal process of one moment. Rather, it is an eternal process. The Father eternally begets the Son and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and/through the Son. Origen's and Tertullian's usage of the analogy of the Sun and light, which it reflects, is significant in showing that the self-communication of the Father to the Son and the Spirit is not to be understood as a moment but a

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30 I disagree with Leonardo Boff who argues that reciprocity is a necessary condition for divine communion. While affirming the fact that in God, reciprocity is perfect, the foundation of God's self-love is not reciprocity but love itself. Divine love is always extending; reaching out to the other. It is in this context that one is to understand the begottenness of the Son of God by the Father and the procession of the Spirit from the Father and/through the Son. Divine love is also the basis for creation's origin, sustenance, salvation, and preservation. Though he affirms the place of divine love but the role he gives to reciprocity is a misplaced one. Reciprocity cannot be unless there is perfect love. See Leonardo Boff, Trinity and Society, pp. 128-134.
process or continuum. The rays of the sun shed light only when it is a continuum, otherwise, it fades away, and darkness takes over.\(^{31}\)

Dialogue entails a constant self-awareness in relation to the continuous contact with the other. As one engages the other, one begins to see in a lucid way, one's strengths, weaknesses, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and aspirations in the context of the encounter. The Catholic Church's commitment to dialogue ought not to be solely based upon when there is a dialogical partner, rather, there ought to be an innate disposition toward dialogue. Just as the church's innate calling to mission is not based solely on when there are mission territories to explore, but on the understanding of Christ's mandate given to the church; dialogue, since it is truly a Trinitarian attribute, is part of the mandate of Christ to the Christian family. All Christians have an innate obligation to engage the other. The contact many western Christians have had with religious men and women of other religions, especially in Asia, has yielded many positive results leading to collaborations in spirituality, monastic studies, theological collaborations in matters of faith and worship, and engagement in humanitarian ventures. The Christian Churches of the West have been made to understand the human condition in a way that was not previously known to them or explored in their tradition.

**Dialogue Preserves Alterity**

Dialogue entails communication, which can be verbal or non-verbal. Communication, on the other hand, entails entering into a relational encounter with another. The relational link among the parties involved in dialogue raises the question of how to maintain the interactions without one or more parties in the encounter losing their identity. When a party to dialogue loses

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his/her identity, it is because one party has taken over the dialogical encounter, making it a monologue.

To recognize, preserve, and affirm the otherness of the other goes beyond a verbal recognition of the other. It entails an existential recognition of the other affectively, intellectually, religiously, psychologically, and culturally. This does not equate to a dehumanization of oneself for the other; rather, it entails an authentic recognition of the other as human. The other's alterity is not to be determined in relation to oneself. If this is done, the self becomes the yardstick upon which the other's existence is evaluated. Rather, the other is truly human and can speak for himself/herself. One has to allow the other to have the freedom to determine himself/herself as being mutually engaged in a dialogical encounter. By viewing the other's religion as inferior to the Catholic Church's practice of Christianity, encounters with the other will be inauthentic and have unequal power dynamics.32

To engage in productive and authentic dialogue, the other must be recognized as other. In the words of Levinas, "the other as other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I am not."33 The alterity of the other is not derived from the mere recognition by the subject, rather; alterity is a constituent part of the other. By engaging in dialogue with the other, the Catholic Church ought to begin by allowing the dialogical process to determine the content and outcome.

Conclusion

When religions begin to advocate theological views that lead to violence among their adherents, such religions at that point fail to represent the foundational responsibility of religions, which is to influence human society towards a more peaceful and equitable existence.

32 The curial document Dominus Iesus expresses the magisterial reaction against catholic theologians who articulate theological views that do not affirm either the necessity of the role of Christ and the Catholic Church in universal human salvation, or the superior claim to salvific truths by the Catholic Church.

where harmony and love for one another prevails. Adherents of all religions have a moral
obligation to seek ways in which they can foster authentic dialogue among themselves and show
how religion can truly be a tool for encouraging peaceful co-existence.

From the Christian perspective, the Trinity can serve as a valuable tool in fostering
transformative dialogue. By acknowledging the invaluable role the Trinity plays in the life of the
Christian Churches, those engaged in interreligious dialogue should acknowledge the call to
transform themselves and their beliefs even if those beliefs have been declared unorthodox by
the Christian Churches. What has the most significance is not the truths that have been
propounded by the Christians Churches, but the reality to which those truths speak.

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Muslim Youth in Search of Identity in Nigeria:  
The case of Boko Haram Violence

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Introduction

In recent times, some parts of northern Nigeria have been engulfed in a violence that erupted between a radical Islamic group, Boko Haram. The crisis allegedly began in the Nigerian state of Bauchi on Saturday, July 25, 2009, when the group attacked police stations. The crisis later spread to the states of Borno, Yobe and Kano, but Maiduguri which is the capital of the state of Borno was affected the most. This is because the leader of the sect, Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, who was killed in the aftermath, was a resident in Maiduguri and “his residence served as the national headquarters of the group from where weapons were kept [and] ... commands ... [were] issued to subordinates in different parts of the country” (Gusau and Daudu, 2010).

This crisis has killed thousands of people including Boko Haram members, policemen and soldiers as well as innocent residents of northern Nigeria. When the sect opened attacks on several police stations and killed security agents the Nigerian federal government ordered the deployment of military troops to end the engagement, which they accomplished after only days of resistance from the group. This sect has an astounding resilience fueled by its strong faith. The blind allegiance of its members is very similar to that of the members of the Taliban, a more commonly known radical group (Awofadeji, 2009). Many Nigerian youth have joined the Boko Haram movement despite its oppressive views, particularly in regards to education. The question I will explore in this article is what has influenced these young people to join this radical sect.

According to Steadman, Palmer and Ellsworth,

Individuals who study religious behavior scientifically, as opposed to theologically, do not use statements made about supernaturals as evidence that supernaturals exist. They do, however, often use statements made about religious beliefs to conclude or at least presume that those religious beliefs exist. There is an inconsistency here. People may make statements about what is inside their heads. If a person says he or she believes in ghost, he or she may believe in
ghosts. There may even be ghosts. There is no evidence that can disprove a claim as to what the person says he or she believes. However, when religious beliefs are claimed by someone to be the cause of his or her behavior, the cause of the behavior then becomes unidentifiable, and the truth value of the claim unverifiable as well (Steadman, Palmer and Ellsworth, 2009:27).

In this essay, I evaluate the power of religion in providing an identity for the Boko Haram members in such a way that makes them accept the aggression inherent in this religious sect and act violently. I ask three central questions to guide my inquiry: 1) What motivates these youth to join the Boko Haram sect, 2) What are their membership experiences, and 3) How does becoming members of the Boko Haram change the lives of these youth. Since different religious movements have arisen for different purposes in Nigerian history, this essay studies the Boko Haram sect in the light of social identity theory.

Social Identity Theory and Religion

The construction of identities has been a critical issue for social sciences and humanities since the last part of the nineteenth century. The question of identity as a critical part of modern social studies was “introduced by works of Cooley and Mead” (Carulo, 1997:385) and was further developed by Tajfel and Turner to understand the social-psychological basis of intragroup differentiation and intergroup discrimination. In other words, what initiates people as members of a specific group and what eliminates them? And, what is it that evokes their loyalty? When individuals begin to answer these questions on a collective basis, they gradually form a sense of unity of purpose. This is a social identity theory. Social identity theory is “a social psychological theory of identity formulation that privileges the role of large group identities in forming individuals’ concepts of self” (Calhoun, 2002). This defines who we are simultaneously as persons and as groups in the society. This theory “emphasizes group process and intergroup relations” (Desrochers, Andreassi and Thompson, 2002) which, to some extent, defines our self-image or the way we perceive ourselves and act. Our self-image to a great extent is the foundation of our personality. Our self-image and personality, among other factors, are shaped by our environments, cultures, events and significant people in our lives. They give us the power to believe in ourselves. This in a way helps in defining our identity. “Identity is essentially the set of beliefs or meanings that answer the question, “who am I?” ... or in the case of an
organization, “who are we?” (Foreman and Whetten, 2002:618). Identity distinguishes individuals and groups, noting their differences that demand mutual respect (Bird, 2004:207-208).

Many factors contribute toward shaping an individual in his or her society; namely, significant others (persons), cultures (institutions included), peer groups and environment (including personal experiences). In the socialization process, these factors provide interplay with and a great influence on the person. In the identification process, a group creates its own culture. Culture then can be seen as: “An ordered system of meaning and of symbols and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings and make their judgements...” (Geertz, 1975:144). Thus Browning concludes that we are shaped by background beliefs provided by tradition and the narratives that carry it. In other words, our culture influences our mind set determining the eyes with which we see things. “....we follow the logic of conventionality. We reason thusly: because everyone has done it this way, I should do it this way” (Browning, 1996:184). In this context, I tend to agree with O’Neil and Donovan that,

In the process of socialization, the individual person internalizes to a very large extent the value-judgements of his culture. He is pressured to conform, more or less adequately, to the “code morality” of the larger society. Primary emphasis on objective conformity to social norms is what can be conveniently called “code morality” - the corporate society, not the individual, is the primary subject of rights and obligations (O’Neil and Donovan, 1968:66).

A person’s response to a moral choice is influenced by the level of awareness and social factors surrounding him/her. The person wants to feel accepted and as belonging to some entity. “To some degree, loyalty is born without self-consciousness of the processes that create it ... loyalty is commitment; it involves a decision to be identified with the object of loyalty, and to accept certain disciplines consequent upon that decision” (Gustafson 1961:12). This is a communal expression of loyalty. “Communal loyalty is expressed in action” (Gustafson 1961:12). Action is required as an outward expression of loyalty to the cause of the group. This is a process of identifying with the group that gives rise to self-conscious commitment. In a religious group, self-conscious commitment is directed to the supernatural which in turn binds all the members of the group. “According to almost all scholars of religion, it is the supernatural - meaning literally 'beyond nature' and hence beyond identification by the senses that distinguishes
that which is religion” (Steadman, Palmer and Ellsworth, 2009:21). Individuals appeal to the supernatural object which is beyond them and act toward it in faith.

Paul Tillich sees faith as a fundamental element in life. It is a driving force in life that one cannot exist without. “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of [a person’s] ultimate concern. [A human being], like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his/[her] very existence, such as food and shelter” (Tillich, 1957:1). God is the fundamental symbol of our ultimate concern. In this regard, atheism “can only mean the attempt to remove any ultimate concern - to remain unconcerned about the meaning of one’s existence. Indifference toward the ultimate question is the only imaginable form of atheism” (Tillich, 1957:52). Faith grows and makes it possible for us to have an experience of God, who is a “mysterium tremendum et fascinas, that is a mystery at once awesome and attractive” (Johnson, 2007:8).

Tillich finds courage important to the faith we profess. Our faith is often clouded with ambiguity that can lead to doubt. “Courage as an element of faith is the daring self-affirmation of one’s own being in spite of the powers of “non-being” which are the heritage of everything finite” (Tillich, 1957:19). Religious faith continuously displays “the character of an enormous quest, an ongoing search for what is ultimate and whole” (Johnson, 2007:9). Taking sides with Tillich, I do not believe in atheism, but see religion as a deep relationship and belief in the existence of someone greater than us and upon whom we depend. Religion gives us the experience of the holy (Johnson, 2007:8) - something which is untouchable and awe-inspiring; an ultimate source of ultimate courage (Adasu, 1985:12). Religion is human response to the exigency of the human condition in which one is driven to seek security; status and permanence by identifying oneself with a reality greater, more worthy and more durable than oneself. I believe that everybody has a place for something superior to oneself in which the person worships/extols consciously or unconsciously. “When a person makes a supernatural claim, we do not necessarily conclude he or she is religious. But when others regularly communicate their acceptance of that claim, it would be difficult to conclude that such behavior is not religious” (Steadman, Palmer and Ellsworth, 2009:30). So, it is in the case of the Boko Haram, no matter what reservations we may have regarding the sect, we cannot say they are not religious. From our discussion of what constitutes religion and the social character of a religious movement, the Boko Haram sect too, embraces religious beliefs which provide meaning and security in life.
Their members are negotiating their existence and identity by collectively placing their loyalty into a communal pool in order to form a social identity for themselves.

**Nigerian Religious Reality and the Identity Question**

The Nigerian nation comprises a population of over a hundred and fifty million people and over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. These groups are structured along geo-political zones and have been struggling over the years to carve out for themselves a sense of identity using religion and ethnicity as parameters. This is a result of the British system of control over their former colonies. At the dawn of the twentieth century, because of their pressure on the British government for independence, the south western part of Nigeria enjoyed some quasi-independence. By 1957, “the [south] Eastern and [south] Western regions [were] self-governing” (Tijani, 2006:88) and the British prepared the Muslim dominated north for Nigerian leadership because of their subservient posture to the British control. The British government handed over power to the north in 1959 (Tijani, 2006:88). “Earlier in March, Northern self-government had been granted [independence]. Balewa's success in the December 12, 1959 general elections seems to have increased the confidence of British officials” (Tijani, 2006:88). Balewa, as a northern Muslim, became Nigeria's first prime minister. At this time, Nigeria followed the British system of government which was changed in 1979 to the presidential system of government. However, Balewa's election set the stage for the mingling of religion with politics in Nigeria.

Religion is a sacred institution that permeates the daily lives of Nigerians, both in the private and public sectors in a different way than in secular Europe and American cultures. The diversity of religious sects in Nigeria is vast. Thus what may sometimes appear to international observers as religious conflicts is usually, in reality, an ethnic conflict. The basis of such conflicts often stems from disputes over access to wealth, economic opportunities, and the political power that governs economic power. However, the perception of the North as predominantly Hausa and Islamic, and the Igbo and Yoruba South as entirely Christian, is not accurate. For instance, evidence shows that a sizeable portion of the population of the Yoruba southerners are Muslim. The so-called Muslim North also has different Christian denominations. The Tiv, who occupy most of Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa and parts of Plateau States in the Middle Belt region, geo-politically classified as the North Central region of Nigeria, are predominantly Catholic and Evangelical Christians, and there are also have rapidly growing
Pentecostal denominations. The religious diversity in Nigeria is not always ethnically based; political agendas are sometimes disguised as religious movements.

As described, Nigeria is a nation that has been splintered by five decades of ethnic rivalries and a weak central government that is unable to generate a unified and solid Nigerian identity or to eliminate the corrupting strength of so many ethnic identities. “Many people question how a 39 year old man [Mallam Mohammed Yusuf] in Nigeria spearheaded a campaign against education in 2009. Over the years he may have been deprived and watched helplessly as the elite around him lived in luxury and opulence and chosen to loathe them and all they represent”(Ekwuzie, 2009). This exemplifies the plight of Nigerian youth that are pressed on all sides by issues that make life unpleasant and painful. Many of the Nigerian children, especially those from the North are being brought up in destitution and deprivation in urban and rural squalor, or are caught up in violent crime, commercial sex and rebellion against everything. They have been told by their religious leaders to only attend the “makeranta Islamiya” (Islamic school) while those very people send their children to the most expensive schools in Europe and America. The children of the poor while attending the makeranta islamya spend most of their time begging for alms and bringing back the proceeds to their mallams (masters) at the end of the day. Once these mallams, who are influential members of the society, have social or political troubles they easily recourse to these mendicants to use them as militia to settle their scores. They either make them believe that it is a religious cause or an ethnic cause meant to advance their well-being. This corroborates the events in Thomas Hollowell’s novel, *Allah’s Garden* (Hollwell, 2009). This narrative is based on true events surrounding the author’s experience in the Peace Corps where he worked in the heart of Morocco. Using Azeddine as the protagonist of his narrative, Thomas captures the core of an Islamic society. Thomas shows the leaders preying on the ignorance of the masses and manipulating them. When one examines this story and compares it to the reality of northern Nigeria where the Boko Haram originated, one gets a better picture of the background to the events of this article.

In the midst of leadership crises and ethnic divisions in Nigeria, religion is probably the strongest institution of the civil society and one that transverses ethnic boundaries in a way most civil institutions do not. Religion promises to be a unifying force available in civil society. This is most visibly noticed in the amount of energy and resources exhibited by adherents of these faiths. Surmising that an African is “notoriously religious”(Mbiti, 1970:3), Mbiti contends that
“for the African and the community to which he belongs, to live is to be caught in a religious drama” (Mbiti, 1970:19). In this vein, Sanneh concludes that the “problem of Africa might be too much religion, not too little” (Sanneh, 2005:159). Religion, as an agent of hope and transformation, therefore, remains inseparable from the political lives of the people.

**Boko Haram: Origin, Aims and Objectives**

*Boko Haram* literally means “education is sin.” *Boko Haram* is an Islamic sect based largely in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. It first “made its [public] debut in [December 2003] when it set up a base – dubbed Afghanistan – in Kanama village in northern Yobe State, on the border with Niger, from where it attacked police outposts and killed police officers” (Awofadeji, 2009). Though the group is popularly known as *Boko Haram*, the group does not call itself by this name. Some call them *Yusufiya* sect, others *Jamaatul Takfur Wal Hyra Ahlus Sunna*, still some refer to them as *Khawaarji* and others call them *Jamaatu Alhlissunnah Lidda’awatiwal Jihad*, of which the group approves (Sani, 2011). Mallam Muhammad Yusuf was the leader of the *Boko Haram*, until he was reportedly killed by police. Yusuf was born in Girgir village of Yobe State. The [*Boko Haram*] group started as Sahaba [security organization] group in 1995. The main leader of the group then was one Abubakar Lawan who later left for the University of Medina to study, when he left, the older clerics conceded the leadership to Yusuf, who was a young and a versatile man (Sani, 2011).

When Yusuf took over, he changed the primary doctrines of the sect and renamed it *Boko Haram*. At first, the sect was based in the Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe and Kano states, but has now grown to many parts of northern Nigeria and other parts of the country.

*Boko Haram* holds beliefs similar to those of the Taliban, which literally means “student” (O'Hanlon and Sherjan, 2010:21), in Afghanistan and is, in fact, connected to it. Like the Afghanistan Taliban, the *Boko Haram* members are considered faithful Muslims whose purpose it is to enforce the authentic teachings of the prophet Mohammed. “Their goal is to impose, once again, an extremist view of Islam ..., where the country is run by religious leaders and citizens are forced, through often harsh and even brutal intimidation, to adhere to religious tenets and rules of life, where dissent is not tolerated. ... the[y] ... gain support through a combination of intimidation, indoctrination, discipline, and battlefield momentum...” (O'Hanlon and Sherjan,
Some fundamental beliefs of the group are that banking, taxation and jurisprudence in the country are not Islamic. They are against the mixing of boys and girls under the same shade for education. They reject the theory that humans evolved from primates as well as the theory that the sun is static with the earth revolving around it. They oppose these things because they believe them to be “in conflict with the direct words of Allah who said Muslims must not mix sexes under the same umbrella and that he created men from clay as well as the sun, earth and the moon each move on its own axis. … that today’s banking system is shylock and Islam forbids interest in financial transaction…” (Sani, 2011).

*Boko Haram* members believe that Western education is polluting the Nigerian system. Their aim is to clean the Nigerian state completely of Western ideologies and run the Nigerian state by the Islamic *Sharia* law. The Nigerian state has not officially adopted any one religion as a state religion. Individual Nigerians are free to profess, practice, and propagate their religions. This is a result of the pluralistic nature of the country. The fact of religious pluralism suggests that the government of the country cannot identify itself with only one religion and hope to succeed. For this reason, the makers of the 1979 and the “revised” 1989 and 1999 Constitutions gave this principle a legal backing. Section 10 of the constitution states: “The Government of the Federation or of the state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion.” Again, Section 35 comments on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change one’s religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate religion and belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. For the *Boko Haram* to declare their intention to impose Islamic religion on the nation is to opt for trouble in a country that is prone to religious violence at the slightest provocation. Already, the provision for religious freedom is contravened by the provision for *Sharia* courts. *Sharia* courts are the religious courts of Islam. As Duniya states,

At the Constituent Assembly of 1977, Sharia was the main source of bitter division among participants. Many members led by Shehu Shagari, who later became the country’s second president of the republic staged a walk-out in protest against a resolution for the non-inclusion of sharia Federal Court of Appeal in the constitution. In the end, a compromise was reached and the establishment of sharia courts of appeal was declared optional for the states in accordance with the provision recorded in section 256 no.1 of the 1979 constitution... In 1979, Sharia
Courts of Appeal found a place for the first time in the Federal Constitution of Nigeria. The development was no less than an important step towards the expectation of most Muslims; that is the establishment of Sharia Court of Appeal in every state of the federation. It was this introduction of the sharia that sowed the seed of the religious controversy which is still going on in the country (Duniya, 1993:43).

There are examples where in the implementation of Sharia law, a dhimi (a non-Muslim living in a Muslim area or state) status is passed on non-Muslims: their land is seized and they are forced to pay the tizya (poll tax) symbolizing their subjection to Islam. Dhimis under sharia also have to live in separate and inferior areas. The pattern of settlement in most northern cities such as Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, Gombe, Bauchi, Katsina etc, where non-Muslims are allocated specific areas (usually tagged, sabon-gari) to inhabit is another example.

The Nigerian state as currently constituted is the number one enemy of the Boko Haram. A secular state does not promise a strict Muslim way of life. But for the Boko Haram, the only authentic way of living is Islam and Sharia law. This is not possible for now because of the influence of the Western world, particularly the United States and Britain. One could easily see the connection of the Boko Haram with the Taliban in Afghanistan. “From the mid-1990s onward, the Taliban allied with the al Qaeda terrorists who attacked, among other targets, the U.S embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 as well as targets in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. These bonds between the Taliban and al Qaeda have only strengthened since” (O’Hanlon and Sherjan, 2010:22). Several members of the Boko Haram allegedly kept contact with the Taliban and even traveled to Afghanistan to meet with them and receive training (Awofadeji, 2009).

Boko Haram as an Islamic militant group does not accept retreat. It is against their doctrine to fight and run away. As Adeoti puts it, they “don’t fight and run away. They don’t cover their faces. You can see them. You can identify them” (Adeoti, 2009). Because it is considered an abomination to fight and retreat, they fight with all their hearts and minds. Members must see to the end of a war. For better or for worse, they must persist and persevere. Boko Haram believes that anything less than this is a sign of weakness and of a confused mind. A determined and resolute mind would not even contemplate quitting a battle. For their tactics, Boko Haram members employ mass attack and advance in large numbers. They believe in the
jihad, which is holy war. In such a war, the belief is that if you kill, you go to aljanat (heaven) and if they kill you, you still go to aljanat. So, in either circumstance, it is considered victory.

Boko Haram is anchored by strong militancy that has made even mainstream Muslim communities distance themselves from it. “Their teachings are regarded as completely out of tune with the teachings of other Islamic sects, especially regarding peaceful co-existence” (Awofadeji, 2009). Its membership is drawn in part from highly placed government officials and civil servants, but the bulk of their recruits are university dropouts. This partly explains why they do not value education and feel alienated by it. Furthermore, the involvement of prominent government officials protects the organization from criminal charges (Sani, 2011).

Activities of the Boko Haram

Boko Haram entices its members with gifts and promises of a better future. In the midst of rampant poverty, the promise of an improved quality of living easily convinces people. At times, the sect will even make some charitable offers either in cash or kind to the impoverished masses. This makes the group look even more attractive them and will increase numbers despite the fact that membership requires monetary registration and payment of application dues. As observed by Passy and Giungi, resource mobilization is a critical variable in determining the deferential level of participation by individuals in social movements/organizations (Passy and Giungi, 2001). In this case, the individual perceptions of Boko Haram members on this religious sect improves their self-image and increases loyalty and commitment towards it.

A particularly disturbing initiative of Boko Haram has been the destruction of government owned establishments with specific interest in public schools since their ideology focuses mainly on Western education and ideologies. For instance, the sect destroyed fifty-seven primary schools in Maiduguri and its surrounding areas. “It was learnt that each class room was allotted a bomb, thrown inside for maximum destruction. Two teachers were killed by stray bullets inside their homes. The Boko Haram sect believed that western schools were responsible for inculcating western values into pupils who grow up with western concepts of employment, trade, politics and general administration” (Gusau & Daudu, 2010). This makes them less useful in the Nigerian society.

Apart from schools, the offices of the government electoral body, the State Independent Electoral Commission were bombed. “It was learnt that numerous bombs were thrown into the 40 offices in the building because the sect members believed that the commission was where
leaders with allegiance to western based constitutions were being produced” (Gusau & Daudu, 2010). They also burnt down ten offices at the state National Directorate of Employment (NDE) headquarters along with three vehicles. The sect believes that NDE is helping to offer employment in accordance with western ideologies. They bombed a newly built prison believing that prisons are places that convicts are being punished with western based constitutions.

In the Nigerian state of Bauchi, hundreds of sect members marched to the Dutsen Tanshi Police Station in the early hours of the day and attacked it, chasing away the few policemen on duty and forcing themselves into the station before destroying anything they could lay their hands on. But they could not break into the armory which was under lock and key. They believe that the police are enforcing western based laws instead of the Islamic Sharia laws which are given directly by God. So, ever since this first outbreak, violence has been on the increase and security forces are battling to maintain control. They bombed a fortified military barrack in Abuja in 2010 and the Nigerian police headquarters in Abuja on July 17, 2011. They also bombed the UN building in Abuja on August 27, 2011. The fact that these attacks are carried out in Abuja, the Nigerian capital that has a strong security system speaks to the growing sophistication of the group. Lately, they have introduced suicide bombings whereby they efficiently kill and injure many people.

Appraising the Boko Haram Crisis

Boko Haram can be viewed as a case of misguided loyalty to a religious belief (in this case a sect within Islam). Conflicts arise from competing identity claims because “each of these has its own set of norms and expectations” (Foreman and Whetten, 2002: 619). Members of the Boko Haram are trying to combine the understanding of the two identities, ‘who I am’ and ‘who we are.’ Boko Haram is an Islamic sect with a misplaced identity in the context of Nigerian religious reality. Though Islam demands absolute submission to its creed and belief system, it is also a religion of peace. The term Islam is derived from the Arabic verb “aslama” meaning “to submit, to surrender” and “give oneself entirely and exclusively” (Banneth, 1971:183-185.); though this can be interpreted and employed in it also denotes peace. So, Islam is the way of peace. In summary, this is the expectation of Islamic religion from its members.

According to the Nigerian commentator and professor of sociology, Olu Obafemi, the Boko Haram crisis exposes “the insensitivity of the State and its disquieting indolent response to security and intelligence matters, the sociology of violence with regard to the Nigerian youth and
the individualization of the ideology of terrorism” (Obafemi, 2009). The Boko Haram crisis raises a serious security concern over Nigerian state’s capacity to contain the rising religious terrorism that is becoming part of its system. Information shows that both the agencies and authorities of government perhaps took for granted or ignored warnings of the imminent threat of violence from the Boko Haram. In fact, they underestimated the strength of “Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, the charismatic leader of the sect and his die-hard army of youthful, brainwashed militants...” (Obafemi, 2009). This failure on the part of Nigerian leadership raises doubt concerning its capacity to fight terrorism especially of a religiously fueled kind. Already the foremost terrorist group, the Al Qaeda, is establishing its network in the vulnerable neighboring state of Niger republic. “Any region where al-Qaeda operatives find refuge is a potential security threat...” (Cole 2009:158). The fear is that they might infiltrate the Nigerian system.

A point of serious concern is the motif of the sectarian violence and the sociology of the violence in Nigeria. Boko Haram canvasses extreme Sharia - a rejection of Western education, values and ethos. It preaches strict imposition of Islamic Sharia to replace the watered-down Sharia systems in the Sharia-compliant states of northern Nigeria where, according to Yusuf, former leader of Boko Haram, corruption persisted even after the adoption of Sharia and poverty increases. “Not minding the contradiction of his own existence that as he preaches a doctrine of abstinence and asceticism among his followers, he went about chauffeur-driven and lived a permissive and comfort-prone life, the question of rampant poverty in the North, especially among the youth, cannot be discounted” (Obafemi, 2009). As already mentioned, the poverty and illiteracy levels in northern Nigeria are very high. While government officials “wallow in obscene opulence, the youth are uneducated, unemployed and idle. They are thus the disposable, expendable and willing labor force to be recruited to such sectarian vanguard, many of which are opportunistic, politically manipulated and distractive” (Obafemi, 2009). Until the problem of youth unemployment and mass poverty is addressed, sects of the kind of Boko Haram will continue to find fertile ground in northern Nigeria. The tragedy of the duality of the lifestyle of Yusuf, the leader of the Boko Haram clearly demonstrates that people hide under religion to perpetrate all manner of crimes against the nation and its ideals instead of deploying the power they seek and get, by all means, to advance the economy, culture and democracy of the nation.

Conclusion

Although the Nigerian government killed the leader of the Boko Haram along with a
large number of their members, this is but a temporal suppression. As Obafemi states, “it should now become obvious to ideologues of terrorism that the elimination of a leader does not automatically translate to the end of terror. The case of Saddam Hussein ought to educate us” (Obafemi, 2009). And the case of the Boko Haram is quite impressive; in a relatively brief period of time, they have been able to gather significant social capital and traverse ethnic boundaries with their ideology. The evidence of social capital lies in the strength of their social network which embraces both the educated and uneducated, including top government officials. In negotiating identities, social networks form the basis on “which individuals make their choices in the short run, they also affect in the long run the cognitive parameters that lead to choices such as participating in a social movement or abstaining from doing so” (Passy and Giungi 2001:124). In this regard, the Boko Haram is still very much alive since the membership was strong and went beyond ethnic boundaries in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria. Ethnic affiliated movements “emphasize cultural and geographical elements” (Sanders, 2002:327). Their social construction is based on ‘insiders and outsiders’ and their geographical elements focus on “social origins, that are foreign to the host society” (Sanders, 2002:328). The message of the Boko Haram resonates with the experience of many Nigerian youth whom after acquiring many college degrees have been ‘useless’; they neither fit into the traditional society nor can the Nigerian establishment find them employment to be useful to themselves and the society. The story is the same all over Nigeria. For the non-Muslim youth it is still terrorism manifesting in different forms. Southern Nigerian youths have taken to kidnapping people in demand for ransom and also, are indulging in large scale internet scam as businesses.

The Nigerian government is creating new marginal groups which are “the contemporary equivalent of the proletariat” (Reader, 2008:128) and these groups need to be organized to challenge their disadvantaged position. The megalopolis cities of Nigeria are crowded by the hitherto rural dwellers known as peasants without a means of sustenance. These “are marginalized groups who slip between the structures of the system with its regular blurring of boundaries - they end up fitting nowhere. In the culture of success which predominates they are clear failures” (Reader, 2008:128). Most have the knowledge of self-exclusion but lack the power of deep intellectual self-analysis. The Boko Haram provides a place where they can fit in and negates the necessity for self-analysis as the “group” ideology is adopted instead.

Boko Haram is a case of people using religion to achieve other ends. The danger in it is
that it is tied to Islam, clouding the true nature of Islam while attracting members with its religious stance, and its aggression is directed at the Western world as manifested by the attack on Western education. As Cole captures it,

The Muslim world and the West are at a standoff. Westerners worry about terrorism, intolerance, and immigration. Muslims are anxious about neoimperialism, ridicule, and discrimination. Distrust between North Atlantic societies and the Muslim world has skyrocketed in the twenty-first century. Two-thirds of Americans admit to having at least some prejudice against Muslims. Nearly half doubt the loyalty of American Muslims to their country, and a quarter say they would not want a Muslim as a neighbor. A majority of Britons blame Muslims for not integrating more fully into British society (Cole, 2009:1).

Muslims anywhere at any time consider themselves members of *Ummal al-Islam* (the Muslim brotherhood) which does not have time or space limitations. They are linked to the traditional and present *Ummah* through the belief and creed of Islam. This might explain why “September 11 was launched not from Khost in Afghanistan but from Hamburg in Germany, not by tribal persons or seminarians, but by engineers trained in the West” (Cole, 2009:158). On this note, it is not accurate to assume that *Boko Haram* is a Nigerian problem; it could quickly become an international problem as seen in the case of the young Nigerian, Abu Mutallab who traveled far to bomb a plane in Detroit on December 25, 2009.

The alternative to forestalling the *Boko Haram* is to actively work toward the separation of state and religion in northern Nigeria and, above all, rethink new ways of making life meaningful for idle youth. This is not just the responsibility of Nigeria alone since it already has elements of a failed state. In the absence of purpose and hope for the future, the youth will flock to the *Boko Haram* which promises all of that and a sense of belonging as well. While citing Klandermans and McAdam on motivating reasons for active participation in movements, Passy and Giungi point to resource mobilization for individual benefits as key to individual motivation for collective actions. (Passy and Giungi, 2001:125 -127). *Boko Haram* remains a real and present danger in Nigeria. Corruption and greed has caused powerful members of the Nigerian government to protect this violent sect, and that must cease. The ideology of the *Boko Haram* will continue to create violence, aggression, and rebels among the poor, the vulnerable, and the young. It will bring only destruction and further fragmentation for Nigeria.
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African Culture and Christianity: The Role of Women in the Church

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Introduction

This article critically examines how African women have been living their experience of God and how culture and the Church’s teaching and practice have impacted this experience. I begin with the premise that the churches in Africa are committing themselves more and more to the struggle for justice and freedom; and human survival in the 21st century will depend on how crucial issues of justice, peace and reconciliation are addressed. The women’s agenda in terms of gender justice and an enhanced quality of life is intrinsic to these issues. Women have been hailed as the pillars of the Church in Africa playing important roles in building her up, yet they have not always felt that the Church is vocal enough about their concerns and strategic involvement in ministry.

The first African Synod in 1994 generated great expectations that the Church would enter a new phase and would empower women in church communities.34 In the estimation of some observers, the Synod deliberations however, have had little influence in shaping the African Church. The radical changes that it was hoped the Synod would generate in the context of war, poor governance, economic and ecological crises, and debilitating disease have been slow in being realized. In the words of New People “…apart from the occasional pastoral letter condemning a specific atrocity or evil, it is difficult to assert that the African Church has determined justice and peace to be unambiguously among the primary pastoral responsibilities.”35

The Lineamenta of the African Synod II though concerned with the theme “the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”, appears to disregard the issue of gender justice. Olusesan rightly observes that women’s voice has been ignored in the preparation of the

Lineamenta. He laments that women are the victims of war and violence and yet they use their victimhood “to creatively review the war mentality.” They are the compassionate care givers. He poignantly asks “can one find in the Lineamenta echoes of women’s voices on conflict transformation and peace building in and for Africa? Yet these voices abound in Africa.” This is a glaring omission that seems to render credence to the allegation that despite acclaiming the dignity of women, the Church still marginalizes them in key areas of decision making. This article therefore seeks answers to the following questions, what is the position of the Church on the role of women in the Church? In what ways are women involved in evangelization? What are the obstacles (if any) towards their participation in mission? The article will begin by defining certain key concepts namely, culture, evangelization, Christianity and Church.

**Culture and Evangelization:**

What is culture? Why is cultural analysis essential to the task of evangelization? In its widest usage, culture is the totality of a people’s way of life and the social legacy an individual acquires from one’s group. According to Mary Lobo, "culture represents a people’s design for living: social symbols, religion and rituals, language, art, literature, ideologies and meaning systems, technology, social organization and kinship structures.” A worldview and value system, norms of behavior such as law and morality are at the core of any culture. The expression African Culture presupposes all these aspects.

In Africa, culture permeates every aspect of life and constructs gender identity thereby having positive and negative effects on individuals and communities. Women in Africa are the custodians of cultural practices some of them harmful to women’s wellbeing like; early marriages, female genital mutilation, burial and funeral rituals, stigmatization of widows, barren and single women. Musimbi Kanyoro observes that “for generations, African women have guarded cultural prescriptions which are strictly governed by the fear of breaking taboos. Many aspects that diminish the standing of women continue to be practiced to various degrees, often

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37 ibid
making women objects of cultural preservation. Harmful traditions are passed on as cultural values and therefore are not to be discussed, challenged or changed.” 39

She recognizes that African women do not always agree on the detrimental effects of certain cultural practices since some women perceive them as the essence of our culture and therefore the center of our identity. What is important to note is that cultures are not static; they get modified as they interact with other cultural systems. Resilient cultures enable people to adapt to changing contexts and to cope with the demands of life. It is therefore critical that cultures be continually audited and a liberational hermeneutic be applied to them if women and men are to experience the fullness of life.

The Church which is here understood to be the whole people of God in their diverse traditions as well as an institution is part and parcel of any society and is influenced by the particular culture. Christianity, as a religion, is not a culture but the Christian faith can only be communicated through the medium of culture. In the Church, Africans experience the dilemma of how they should live as Christians and people rooted in a culture. This is a challenge that has faced Christianity since its inception. Attempts to contain it within Judaism and Jewish culture in the early church led to its breaking away and eventually becoming one of the most dynamic religions of the world. According to Lingenfelter, adapting the Church to particular cultures may lead to independence from, isolation from, and subsequent detachment from the universal church. 40 A delicate balance has to therefore be held between the Gospel and culture. This brings us to the concept of evangelization. What is it and what do women issues in the Church have to do with evangelization and culture?

Evangelization is primarily understood as an encounter of a people with the Good News of God’s love, proclaimed by Jesus Christ (Mt.22:34-40; Jn 3: 16-17; 15:9-17). It entails converting, heralding or worshipping. It is a mission, an involvement in the world. The context of evangelization requires a proper understanding of the notion of salvation, which implies liberation from all that oppresses and dehumanizes people, social, cultural, economic, political, spiritual or personal. Evangelization in this understanding means regeneration of people in a

fundamental way through the power of the Gospel as Pope Paul VI says in his Encyclical
Evangelii Nuntiandi;

affecting and as it were upsetting …mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of information and models of life which are in contrast with the word of God and the plan of salvation.41

Evangelization should bring about inner transformation in people thus making them new creatures. It takes the form of “light of the world” and “salt of the earth”; that is witnessing to God’s transforming presence and activity in society. For evangelization to be liberative, it has to be expressed in forms that are culturally meaningful to the people.

However as Evangelii Nuntiandi makes it clear, “cultures should be evangelized… in a way, in depth and right to their very roots…always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.”42 What are these deep” roots” in a culture that for example keep women subservient and blocks relationships of equality and mutuality? What does this Good News mean for that stratum of society that comprises 50% of humanity? Various forms of critical analysis including gender and feminist thought need to be applied to cultures to expose and address the values, interests, and lines of thought and models of life that have allowed women to remain oppressed.

Having delineated the meanings of the aforementioned concepts, let us examine how the Church perceives women and her policy towards their involvement in church life and ministry (evangelization). Examples will primarily be drawn from the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church though other Christian traditions will be referred to as will be deemed necessary.

The Church, Women and Evangelization:

The emergence and development of the Church is a consequence of its own missionary activities. The Vatican II Decree on the Missionary activity of the Church (Ad Gentes) 43 together 44 with occasional papal encyclicals for example Evangelii Nuntiandi45 and Redemptoris Missio46 generally represent the Catholic Church’s position on evangelization. According to the documents Christian mission is a fundamental obligation of the Church. Every Christian, as a

41 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, 1975 nos. 23.
42 Ibid,20
45 Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi Op.cit,
member of the family of God, regardless of gender, age and situation in life is called to be an apostle. This implies “working to bring all men throughout the whole world to hear and accept the divine message of salvation.” The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity asserted that “by virtue of their baptism all Christians are not merely called and made capable of belief, they are called to radiate and transmit it.” Therefore, the apostolic role according to the church fathers is equal for all, men, women, youth and children whether religious or lay.

In the document of the S.C.E.P. on The Role of Women in Evangelization, the Pastoral Commission explains that women are suited for evangelization for they “have certain human qualities which are properly feminine and which offer a precious support for evangelization.” Women are also seen as builders of life and have great capacity to love and give themselves selflessly without counting the cost “in order that human beings may have life.” They are also:

The sanctuary in which every living person grows…She has a more alert sense and a more profound respect for the individual person. Lastly, in the multiple work of evangelization, women demonstrate a special capacity for implanting deeply the seeds of Christian conviction for building up in a hundred ways the family of God.”

The Catholic Church, like other churches in Africa, acknowledges that lay people are endowed with gifts (1Cor.12) and they should be put to service of others for the purpose of building up the body of Christ in love. Therefore, the spirituality of lay people, women included should take its particular character from the situation of the person in life (married, celibate, widowed, and single) and flow from their professional and social activity. Women are seen in the Church’s view to possess countless opportunities for exercising the apostolate of evangelization. This is through their witness of a Christian life and good works (hospital work, teaching, social work) as well as other forms of charity. It is also done through proclamation of the word of God with a view to convert unbelievers or to instruct, strengthen and invite the faithful to a more fervent life.

Women evangelists are also encouraged to deepen their theological formation to the best of their ability and to understand “the image and concrete role of women in non-Christian

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50 ibid
51 ibid
religions." How far has the Church in Africa utilized the richness of traditional culture to involve women in mission and all aspects of church life? In other documents for example, *Mulieris Dignitatem*[^53], *Christifideles Laici*[^54], and in several letters and addresses of John Paul II, the Holy Father acknowledged women’s roles in the church as prophets and heroines of peace.[^55] He admits that male domination is a result of sin and is of particular disadvantage to women. It also diminishes the dignity of man.[^56]

The Church in Africa too recognizes the crucial role of women in building up the Church. The Synod Fathers in 1994 emphasized that women and men are created in God’s image and they are born equal in dignity and have complementary roles. They deplored the African customs and practices “which deprive women of their rights and the respect due to them.”[^57] They appealed to the Church in the continent to make every effort to safeguard these rights. Bishop John Njue of Kenya observed that in Africa after a century of evangelization the situation of women has not radically changed. Women’s rights and dignity are still unattained despite secular and religious efforts to improve the conditions. This is a matter of justice intrinsically linked to evangelization.[^58] Bishop Njue called for the establishment of appropriate ministries in which women can participate. Provisions should also be made for appropriate spiritual formation and women’s involvement in the liturgy and other aspects of church life.

It would be interesting to know to what extent the Church in Africa has paid heed to these calls of the Synod Fathers and promoted the theological and spiritual formation of lay women, addressed gender injustice within the Church and society; as well as worked toward the eradication of cultural practices detrimental to women’s well being and full participation in the Church. In the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation-Ecclesia in Africa, the Holy Father echoes the sentiments of the bishops.[^59] He recommended that the Episcopal Conference should establish more commissions to further study women’s problems in cooperation with interested

[^52]: ibid:327
[^57]: Editorial,” AMECEA Bishops and others Speak out at the Synod on Evangelization”, AFER, vol.36, no.. 4:224
[^58]: ibid
government agencies wherever possible. What exactly are women doing in the churches in Africa? It is to this that we shall now turn.

**Women in the Church in Africa**

To the question, are women truly participating in the Church in Africa? Justine Kahungu of the DRC unequivocally asserts that they are seen in their activities in the liturgy, they devote their talents to the choir, direct and guide the young, proclaim the word of God and at the offertory and "alongside a man, they offer to God the fruit of the earth, the work of their hands."60 Women are involved in the charismatic renewal movement as shepherdesses, leaders in the Small Christian Communities, and members and leaders in parish councils. Increasing numbers of religious women are also taking on the duties of assistant pastors in parishes. What are women doing in the Catholic Church in Kenya? In a research conducted between 1997 and 2003 and followed up by further interviews of women in Nairobi Archdiocese in preparation for this article, I identified women’s roles in the Church as they are exercised at the levels of the family, parishes and dioceses. At all these levels, women in Kenya and the AMECEA region are involved in Christ’s mission of preaching the Good News of God’s reign, teaching, healing, prayer and serving the needy; actions that are directed towards renewal and service.

Women in Africa are evangelizers of their families. As mothers, they pass on life to their children and nurture them physically and spiritually. They are their teachers, counselors and spiritual directors. The family is a miniature church and according to Pope Paul VI, “there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire church. The family ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.”61 In the miniature Church, women provide trust that enables children to relate positively with those outside the home. Like in traditional African society women socialize their children into their roles in society, teach them moral values, respect for others and social responsibility. Women help to make the presence of God felt in families. An investigation of how mothers carry out evangelization at home revealed that mothers bear the greatest share of providing spiritual formation and nourishment to the children compared to the fathers.

In today’s society which has experienced profound social, political, economic, cultural and religious changes, the family has been shaken in its foundations. War, conflicts, domestic

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60 Beya, op.cit: 187.
61 Evangeli Nuntiandi, 18
violence, globalization, poverty, debilitating disease and especially HIV and AIDS have contributed further to the instability of the African family. Women have borne the burden of care for the sick, providing for the livelihoods of their dependents in the context of poverty and they suffer greatly with children due to displacement and all types of violence during conflicts. They are also involved in healing not only through providing care but also mediating peace.

**Women as Evangelists in Parishes and Dioceses:**

At the parish level, women are involved in evangelization not only in bringing people the message and grace of Christ, but also in improving the whole range of temporal life. Contemporary church women, taking their cue from their forebears in the Gospels have been impelled by the Spirit to respond to human needs not only in the personal expression of prayer or in interpersonal spheres of immediate care and concern, but also in the public domain. “They seek to be sharers of interpersonal grace and channels of societal grace, whether the grace is shown in ecclesiastical or secular forms.”

In the parishes, women involved in the apostolate contribute in the organization of the parish and outreach to Christians and non-Christians through their gift of friendship, sensitivity and compassion, they are able to tell the goodness of God and alleviate the lot of the disadvantaged. They organize catechetical sessions, relief and provide words of counsel. In the Nairobi Archdiocese and the rest of Kenya, women’s evangelization is done in the families and the Small Christian Communities. Through these communities, faith reaches the people, transforming their lives and environments. They also share the word of God, reflect on its meaning in their lives, say the rosary, visit the sick, mourn with the bereaved, comfort them, reassure those suffering of God’s love and strengthen one another to be faithful to the Gospel. Women as teachers of peace mediate where there are difficulties in relationships, help mend broken relationships and thus contribute to maintaining peace in the Church and neighborhood.

In parishes, they participate in the liturgy by animating the mass through their Small Christian Communities or as members of the Catholic Women Association or other organizations. These tasks are very central to women’s feeling of being appreciated and being part and parcel of the family of God. In many parishes, women religious are involved in liturgical and catechetical activities. Together with lay women, they assist in the distribution of

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62 Mulieris Dignitatem.
Holy Communion. In the absence of priests on some occasions, they assume responsibility for
the Para-liturgical assembly, preside over it and direct it on Sundays and weekdays.

Besides activities in the Small Christian Communities, women also evangelize through
organized action in groups as professionals. These groups exist right from the parish to the
deanery, diocesan and national levels. These are lay spiritual and welfare/socio-economic
organizations. Examples of spiritual associations are the St. Monica, St. Anne, Lay Carmelites,
Legion of Mary, Catholic Action, Charismatic Renewal Movement, Young Christian Students
and the Grail Movement among others. Among the welfare organizations are the various socio-
economic groups that together with the spiritual ones converge in the Catholic Women
Association. The Caritas office at the Kenya Catholic Secretariat has facilitated the economic
empowerment of women in the dioceses through extending credit to them to enable them engage
in income generating activities. It has also addressed the HIV and AIDS epidemic by offering
preventive, care and support services.

Women’s involvement in the socio-economic activities alongside the spiritual ones is a
quest for liberation from all that dehumanizes them. The mandate is derived from the Gospel.

**Reflection on Women’s Roles in the Church:**

At the heart of the mission of the Church is the building of a true community of men and
women in the service of the Gospel. We have observed that the mandate for women’s role in this
mission is located in the scriptures and is further reinforced by the Social Teachings of the
Church. Women are also visible in the families, parishes and dioceses evangelizing through their
teaching and witness. The question however arises, what is the nature of this participation? How
do women perceive their participation? How far has the Church succeeded in creating values,
principles and structures that may contribute to a society that is just and fair, a society where all
members—men, women, youth and children—can participate with dignity and respect?

Aruna Gnanadson of the World Council of Churches (WCC) laments that we are nowhere near
such a community. She observes that by the end of the WCC Ecumenical Decade of the
Churches in Solidarity with Women, which concluded in 1998, participation of women in the life
of the Church in a comprehensive, just and empowering way was still an elusive dream. The
report of the Ecumenical Decade exposed many flaws in the church community. Sexism and
patriarchy still marred the relationship between men and women, and many churches remained
silent on issues related to violence against women and on the gross economic injustices experienced by women and children.  

It is also surprising that the Lineamenta of the Second African Synod does not address the issues of women in its various sections apart from a brief mention in the review of the 1st Synod under “the Social-Cultural Aspect.” The document notes the need to condemn every form of violence and discrimination against women and girls but the issue is not raised later as an agenda for the next Synod. This underscores how women’s issues are swept under the carpet despite women being praised for their steadfastness in supporting the Church and keeping it alive through their committed service and spirituality.

Feminist theologians in Africa and elsewhere attribute the failure by the Church to fully utilize women’s gifts and the denigration of women through a theology that is andocentric and based on a patriarchal ideology. The Church, mirroring the society in which it is located, still maintains a male and female anthropology that is a product of Jewish and pre-Christian cultures; a view that diminishes the humanity of women, and makes men the norm of human beings. Additionally, many advocate the utilization of engendered cultural hermeneutics in the reading of scripture and evaluating culture. African women theologians urge for the need for a dialogue between Gospel and culture. They advocate for a self critical engagement with African culture and religious heritage in the light of the message of Jesus Christ. This will result in purging the culture of negative harmful practices that denigrate women and men and retention of what is life enhancing.

The views expressed here should not be interpreted to mean that the Church is doing nothing to involve, liberate and empower women and also to create a just society for all. We acknowledge (as discussed earlier) that various programs of spiritual, social, economic and political empowerment exist through the various Caritas programs at the denary, diocese and national levels and also through faith based organizations. Some specifically address women’s empowerment at every level. These programs unfortunately remain at the welfare level and some

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64 Synod of Bishops, II Special Assembly for Africa: Lineamenta, the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. Nairobi: Paulines 2006, no. 22.
are emergency palliative measures. However, there is need to do more in ensuring that clear policies are developed that can address and redress these issues.

The Church should be able to create a living community of women and men that can serve as a liberating force that heals the brokenness of both men and women. It should seek for further ways of being church by drawing on our traditional structures that can be life affirming and empowering to women. Research on African Instituted churches (AICs) and the African Pentecostal churches has shown that the Gospel message has been accepted and interpreted within the context of African values and understanding of being. AICs are credited with providing structures within which women may acquire power and responsibility. Women function as founders and heads of churches, prophetesses, healers and prayer leaders. This is despite the fact that culture still stands against their performing sacramental functions in some churches. This notwithstanding, women in AICs are accorded more avenues of participation and decision making than in mainline churches although the later are also changing though slowly.

The challenge of the Church in Africa if inculturation has to be meaningful is to develop alternative ways of being church that takes into account traditional models and to re-evaluate them in the light of Jesus’ message. Women in Africa have integrated the stereotypes placed upon them. They accept sexist beliefs as an integral part of Christian teaching. Thus it has been an uphill task for women theologians and some male theologians to challenge the injustice of inherent sexism within the Church.

Women and men have been calling for the ordination of women in the hope that this will put an end to sexism in the church. But they have realized that even when women are ordained, they do not enjoy equal access to positions of leadership. The problem, as Russell observes, is that as long as women continue to accept and operate with male structures of ministry instead of exploring alternative patterns and styles based on egalitarian and not patriarchal and hierarchical approaches, they will continue experiencing marginalization.66

To rid the Church of sexism and to empower women in all areas of participation and leadership, both men and women need to critically evaluate the hierarchical structures of the Church, eliminate sexism in language and liturgy, analyze present structures and their roots and encourage theological exposition on the love of Jesus for all. Jesus unequivocally rejected all

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structures of domination and oppression. In his ministry, he included and involved women and they, like men were recipients of the Good News. His attitude to women was a radical departure from the Jewish culture that held them as subordinate. Thus, his message of liberation together with the traditional African culture of according women autonomy and enabling them to exercise their spiritual gifts should be evident in our churches.

What then do we perceive as the marks of a new community of men and women in the Church in Africa? Can we discern new marks in the life of the Church in the context where women are challenging the very being of the Church as they seek justice and participation? We shall attempt possible answers to these questions as a way of concluding this article.

In the Christian tradition, the church is described in many images. We speak of its marks as that of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Being church in a context of poverty, HIV and AIDS, other debilitating diseases, violence, wars, ethnic conflicts, economic and political injustice, denial and abuse of human rights, displacement and refugee crises, ecological problems and religious and cultural diversity; poses challenges to us as Christians. What does it require to demonstrate the image of church with Christ at the center of a community experiencing these problems? What new insights from women’s experiences and roles can contribute to building up such a community?

**Mark of Resistance-the commitment to survive**

I would like to affirm that one of the marks of the new community is the emerging voices of resistance. Women all over the world are finding creative and constructive ways to survive and to challenge forces of exclusion and violence. Women are moving beyond their victimization to speak a new language of survival. This is what Oduyoye calls a spirituality of resistance. Women are seeking new theological and spiritual resources in their faith journeys. They are gathering to create new forms of Christian communities which are nourishing, empowering and egalitarian. These communities provide fellowship and space for women to share their lives, struggles, and to support one another. I would also add that the signs of hope also lie in movements of men around the world who stand in solidarity with women.

**Mark of affirming relatedness- a challenge to essentialism**

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Another mark of the new community is the idea of relatedness. Women emphasize this concept as opposed to autonomy, individuality and even freedom. As persons, we live in community with one another. We need to understand the diversity of our struggles and avoid being essentialist thus trivializing other people’s struggles. Women differ in their struggles due to their social locations. They are however in the Church because they have been called by Christ to do so. They are in the Church despite it failing sometimes to be in solidarity with them because they expect it to give them joy and abundant life. They hope that God will transform the Church, thus liberating it and making all participants feel a sense of belonging in the household of God. The struggle for the liberation of women is also linked to the protection and liberation of all creation. Harmony and integrity are principles that are valued in African culture. The quest for fullness of life by African women means experiencing wholeness by living in harmony with others as well as with creation. People have fullness of life when they have good health and the power to perpetuate life.

Recognition of the depth of analysis and interconnectedness of issues

Another mark of the new community of women and men is to recognize the depth of the analysis and interconnectedness of issues. Feminist theologians like Fiorenza and Musa Dube in Africa have underscored the need for an analytical model that exposes the interconnectedness of all types of oppression. It is not helpful to separate gender justice from other types of oppression. The women’s movement has identified patriarchy as a system of graded subjugation which includes all forms of subjugation such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and age. Theology must therefore expose other forms of domination, such as poverty, religious exclusion, and colonialism which are shaped by gender and conversely, also shape gender. Fiorenza proposes the term kyriarchy as appropriate in describing the interconnectedness of oppressions.

To speak of a genuine reconciliation between women and men requires a confession of the sin of patriarchy. We find it hard to deal with patriarchy because it is rooted in our cultures and traditions and has been kept in place by all religions including Christianity. It is legitimized by all religions and theologies of the dominant groups. Women see patriarchy as the system which has kept other systems of oppression intact. Justice and reconciliation can only be achieved if patriarchy is challenged. For the Church in Africa to truly show commitment to the

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68 Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*: 83
liberation of women as is stated in pastoral letters and the Lineamentas of the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Synod of Bishops, they have to spare no efforts in preaching against all forms of exploitation against women and children. It is important for the Church to maintain impartiality in the face of political power and defend the rights of the poor and the powerless.

The Church must take seriously the theological perspective advanced by women. Theology from the perspective of women in struggle has very crucial and important insights. This is true of African women’s theologies that have been born of the struggle to seek justice for women and men in Church and society. This theology has been undermined, thereby denying the Church an avenue of rich contribution.

\textit{Mark of the maternal face of the Church}

In a very insightful article on the Church and AIDS, Orobator observes that “in the context of AIDS, the face of the Church as a multi-sectoral, ministering and healing community has a distinctively feminine profile. This profile or face embodies an important aspect of the church’s identity and mission, namely Church as mother.”\textsuperscript{70} This dimension is visible in the many ways that women provide care to the infected and affected. We noted earlier that women are the pillars of the church and are greatly involved in formation of the children, pastoral and other care/welfare ministries in the Church and society. The spiritual and social accompaniment, compassion and commitment provided by these women in responding to AIDS are integral to the identity and mission of the church. The same can be said of women as healers and peace makers in conflict situations.

We agree with Orobator that a new vision of a community of men and women should see “the emergence of a Church that actively values the contributions of women in situations of HIV and AIDS (and other dehumanizing situations), accords women greater freedom in representing the profound reality of the Church as mother to the rest of society, and dismantles the structures of gender based discrimination in Church and society.”\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{71} Orobator, 127
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**Vatican II And The Recovery Of The Local Church: Significance For The African Church**

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**Introduction**

The rediscovery of the place of the local church in Roman Catholicism by the second Vatican Council has been described by some as an ecclesiological “Copernican Revolution.”

Such a rediscovery has since spurred a great deal of renewed interest in the local churches whose communion is the whole church. At the turn of the second millennium, the high theology of the local church became truncated by an over-emphasis on a Universalist ecclesiology. Consequently, the theology of the local church was lost.

In this paper, I attempt to rediscover the theology of the local church through the lens of the Second Vatican Council. The first section deals with preliminary clarifications of how the terms “local” and “Ekklesia – church” are to be understood in this paper. The second section is a brief excursus of the historical trajectory that culminated in the loss of the theology of the local church in Roman Catholicism. Section three examines the watershed rediscovery of the local church by Vatican II. The theological implications of this rediscovery as captured in the debate regarding the relationship between the local and universal church is treated in section four. In the following segment of the paper, I explore an African relational ecclesiology which summons the African church to the challenge of striving toward an adult status as a local church. The situation of the Nigerian church is used as a case in point. Finally, I conclude by drawing attention to the foundational theology of Vatican II with respect to the simultaneity of the local and universal church, and the need to be faithful to this theology.

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Preliminary Clarifications

The term “local” connotes, *inter alia*, belonging to or existing in a particular place or places; peculiar to or only encountered in a particular place or places. It is in the above sense that Edward Schick notes:

> the concept of the … primitive term ‘ekklesia’… is the Church as a community of Christian believers of a certain city or place. In his great epistles when St. Paul uses the word ‘Church,’ he uses this word not so much for the universal Church or for the Church which consists of a nation …but rather and primarily – for the Christian community of some city: the Church of Thessalonians (1 and 2 Thess), ‘the Church of God which is at Corinth’ (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1), indeed even the community of Christians which is gathered together in some home to celebrate the Eucharist (Rom 26:5; 1 Cor 1:1). The image of the body of Christ in the classic text of 1 Corinthians 12 is applied primarily to the Christian community in the city of Corinth.\(^73\)

This Pauline perspective is core to an understanding of the meaning of the local church. In referring to the local church, Paul uses the term *Ekklesia* mostly in the singular to designate the church in a particular city. At the same time, Paul was very much aware of the universal nature of the church. Hence, on few occasions, he uses the term *Ekklesia* in the singular also to refer to the universal church of God; for instance, in 1 Cor 15:9 and Gal 1:13, Paul mentions the time he furiously persecuted the church of God; in Eph 5:23 and Col 1:18, 24, Paul refers to Christ as the head of his body, the church. In all the instances where Paul uses the term *Ekklesia* in the singular, the context determines whether he refers to a local or universal church. But Paul equally knows that the universal church is a communion of churches. Hence, in 1 Cor 1:1-2, Paul writes, for instance, “From Paul… to the church of God in Corinth… together with all those everywhere who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.” With the above expression, Paul thus reminds the Corinthians, so easily entrenched in their rivalries, that they are part of a greater reality, the universal church of God. During this early Christianity, church issues were dealt with at the local level, and only when issues clearly had consequences for the

broader community were decisions to be made by representative gatherings of regional churches,\textsuperscript{74} as was epitomized by the council of Jerusalem. In this paper, therefore, I have determined the term “local” to mean a particular church in a particular geographic place under the headship of a bishop, and “universal” to refer to the communion of local churches.

A Brief Excursus on the Eclipse of the Local Church

Early in the post biblical period, the concept of \textit{koinonia} was tied to the Eucharist which brought about the communion of those gathered at each altar. The local church was present where the faithful gathered in Eucharistic community. John Zizioulas underscores the concept of the local church as deriving “basically from the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated at a given place and comprises by virtue of its catholicity all the members of the church dwelling in that place.”\textsuperscript{75} However, there was at the same time, a common conviction that all Eucharistic communities abided together in shared ecclesial \textit{koinonia/communio}.\textsuperscript{76} Hence, the Eucharist also effectuated a certain bond of unity of all local churches called communion. Indeed, the Eucharist played a central role throughout most of the first millennium in ecclesiology. When Christians gathered at the altar “to partake of the Lord’s banquet, they believed that this action not only drew them into saving communion with God in Christ but also constituted them as Christ’s body the church.”\textsuperscript{77} Patrick Burns affirms that:

\begin{quote}
the basic unity of the Church in the third century was the local Eucharistic congregation, united under one bishop and the college of presbyters and college of deacons who assisted him in his pastoral ministry. Such local Churches were not substations of the Church Universal or branch offices of a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{74} See Richard R. Gaillardetz, \textit{Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 86.
\textsuperscript{76} For a more detailed treatment of the \textit{koinonia} and spiritual relationship that existed among the Churches in early Christianity, see Ludwig Hertling, \textit{Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity} (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1972); James D.G. Dunn, \textit{Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (London: SCM, 2006).
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 87.
world-wide organization. Rather the local Christian community, united in faith in the saving word and in Eucharistic fellowship in the body of the Lord, was the Church of God for its locality, the effective presence of the whole Christ in its concrete life and worship. Yet precisely the principle of unity of this local Church, the saving presence of Christ in word and sacrament, made it aware of its essential relationship to the other local communities throughout the world (where the same Lord and the same Spirit brought about the same ecclesial reality).  

Burns’ poignant insights merit attention. Of utmost importance is the point that the local churches were not merely subcategories of a superstructure or super-category called the universal church. Rather, every local church is imbued with the fullness of the saving presence of Christ in word and sacrament. The same ecclesial reality is effectuated by the same Holy Spirit in every local church. Hence, no church can claim to be more churchly than the others.

The significance of the Eucharistic framework was that it not only struck, but also “preserved a balance between the theological integrity of each local church and the communion of all the churches.” This balance between the autonomy of the local churches and the unity of all the churches in one spiritual communion was maintained through the communion manifested among the bishops within and between various regions.

However, this delicate balance, this relational foundation that allowed for a fruitful tension between unity and diversity in the one Body of Christ began to deteriorate in Roman Catholicism between the fourth and thirteenth centuries with overemphasis on universalism and uniformism to the detriment of locality and diversity. Some of the contributive factors to such erosion and entrenchment of universalism, include, *inter alia*, an idea of universal ecclesiology

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80 Ibid., 91.
coined by Cyprian of Carthage (Concordia) which was intended to safeguard the unity of the one church, but such ecclesiology was later to be absolutized in following centuries, the reorganization of the church under Emperor Constantine on the model of the administrative structures of the Roman empire becoming analogous to the state, only differing in its primary concerns, and thus, abandoning its communal nature, the whittling away of the autonomy of the local church in the West due to the close identification of church and state, coupled especially with the use of civil power to impose decisions of councils. Other factors were that in the ninth century under Emperor Charlemagne, the unification (uniformity) of liturgies and the unification of the empire became indistinguishable, the rich liturgies of the Spanish and Franco-Germanic countries, for instance, were made to cease to exist in order to put in place what Yves Congar calls the Carolingian ideology of unity: one God, one empire, one emperor, one pope, one law, one ritual (liturgy), such that the West became simply Latin, and the devolution of a Eucharistic ecclesiology in which Eucharistic theology was reduced to questions of the “how” of Eucharistic presence (Transubstantiation, for instance) rather than the ancient consciousness of the relationship between the Eucharist and the becoming of the church. The confusion between unity and uniformity was sealed in the eleventh century during the reforms of Pope Gregory VII (1073-85). These reforms included: standardization of canon law for the whole church, widened use of papal legates in other countries whose authority was held to be superior to that of local bishops and metropolitans; with Gregory VII, the papacy was no longer merely at the service of unity, but appeared to see itself as the very creator and origin of all churches since the Institution

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83 Gaillardetz, Ecclesiology for a Global Church, 95-6.
had supplanted the Holy Spirit. The cumulative outcome of all this and more was that the Roman Catholic Church was further distanced from the predominantly sacramental and relational foundations of the first millennium. It veered toward an increasingly juridical and universalist ecclesiology, which made it increasingly difficult to preserve a sense of church unity as a *communio*, a unity-in-diversity, favoring instead a more imperialist view.\(^8^4\) By the time of the Councils of Trent (1545-1563) and Vatican I (1869-1871), the Institutional character of the Roman Catholic Church became essential for the preservation of the Church’s unity. In this sense, unity itself became increasingly construed as uniformity. The Church of Rome henceforth exercised major influence over the praxes of local churches. Thus, for nearly five hundred years, the unity of the Church was understood in terms of uniformity in doctrine, worship, law, and theology. It was not until Vatican II that this monocultural image of the church was understood to be harmful to the life and mission of the Church. Under the direction of the Spirit, [the council Fathers were inclined to “openness to variety in the realization of the one Church confessing the same one faith.”\(^8^5\)] At this juncture, I now investigate how Vatican II rediscovered the local church.

**Vatican II and the Recovery of the Local Church**

During the second Vatican council, there was a robust and consistent effort on the part of the progressives and in the proper spirit of *aggiornamento*, to recover many of the ecclesiological motifs and emphases that had been dominant in the first millennium of the Church.\(^8^6\) The Council set about this task by a deliberate and conscious return to the source of divine revelation – Scripture and as appropriated in Tradition (*resourcement*), in an effort to enter more fully into God’s mind about the Church. Underlying many of the Council’s appropriation of biblical and

\(^{8^4}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{8^5}\) Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 51.

\(^{8^6}\) See Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*, 107.
patristic concepts was a recovery of the Church as *communio*. The Council defined *communio* as a twofold fellowship: vertically with God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and horizontally as effecting a spiritual *koinonia* among believers. In view of this twofold dimension, the Council asserts that God the Father,

> gives life to human beings dead in sin…. The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple, prays and bears witness in them that they are his adopted children. He guides the Church in the way of all truth and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits. By the power of the gospel he [the Spirit] rejuvenates the Church, constantly renewing it and leading it to perfect union with its spouse.\(^{87}\)

With respect to the horizontal dimension and as captured in the above affirmation of the Council, the Spirit “guides the Church in the way of all truth,” and unites it “in fellowship and ministry” (*in communione et ministratione unificat*). Thus *communio* lies at the heart of the reality of ecclesial experience, and it is this reality that is to be offered to the world. The Council hence presents the Church as a sacrament, a sign and instrument “of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.”\(^{88}\) Of crucial importance was the Council’s recovery relationality as the undergirding principle of the theology of communion in its teaching on the universal church as a communion of local churches. This recovery of the core principle of relationality is not unconnected with the Council’s rediscovery of the Trinitarian foundation of the Church.\(^{89}\)

The first move toward the recovery of the theology of the local Church is encapsulated in the document on the renewal of the Liturgy which recovers the centrality of a Eucharistic ecclesiology. There is no doubt that Nicholas Afanasiev’s Eucharistic ecclesiology, that,

\(^{87}\) Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* 4 (henceforth LG).
\(^{88}\) LG 1.
\(^{89}\) See LG 2-4, 15, 17; *Ad Gentes* 2-4 (henceforth AG); *Unitatis Redintegratio* 2, 6; *Gaudium et Spes* 40 (henceforth GS).
‘wherever the Eucharist is, there is the Church,’\textsuperscript{90} wielded some significant influence in this recovery as it challenged many of the Catholic theologians such as Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, and others who were to play active roles in the shaping of the theology of the Second Vatican Council. Consequently, a theology of the local church reemerges in the decisions of the council. The Council thus affirms that in each local church where the gospel was proclaimed and the Eucharist celebrated under the presidency of the bishop, the body of Christ was there made present. Furthermore, the Council teaches that it is within the context of diocesan liturgies presided over by the bishop that the local church is most profoundly manifested. One may ask, what constitutes a diocese? The Council with a theological insight defines a diocese as:

\begin{quote}
 a portion of the people of God entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the assistance of the presbyterate, so that, loyal to their pastor and gathered by him through the gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it constitutes a… [local] Church in which is truly present and active the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

The above definition of what constitutes a diocese by the council brings out the aspects of the Eucharist presided over by the bishop, assisted by the presbyterate in the assembly of all the members of the church. Precisely as local, it implies the geographical nature (particular place) of the Eucharistic community which makes it always the church of a specific place (like e.g., the church in Corinth, etc.). According to \textit{Lumen Gentium}, the celebration of the Eucharist effects a communion among those believers gathered at each Eucharistic celebration as all are united in the breaking of the bread. Echoing St. Paul (1 Cor 10:16-17), the Council notes that “in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body of Christ, is both


\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Christus Dominus} 11 (henceforth CD).
expressed and achieved.”⁹² Reaffirming this position, the Council also states that, “strengthened by the body of Christ in the Eucharistic communion, they manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which this most holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes.”⁹³ Furthermore, the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the local Church and the full substance of what makes the Church is substantiated by the Council when it compellingly avers that the faithful gathered together in the Eucharist under the ministry of the bishop are:

the new people called by God, in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. In them, the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated “so that by means of the flesh and blood of the Lord the whole brotherhood and sisterhood of the body may be welded together.” In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, a manifest symbol is to be seen of that Christianity and “unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation.” In these communities, though they may be small and poor, or dispersed, Christ is present through whose power and influence the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is constituted.⁹⁴ It is in these monumental conciliar statements that the theology of the local Church is most aptly recovered. This recovery equally had an impact on the Council’s view of the universal church. No longer does the Council treat the local church exclusively as if it were merely a subdivision of the universal church. Hence, in what is regarded as the most important ecclesiological formula of the Council, it declares that “it is only in and from these [local churches] that the one and single Catholic Church exists.”⁹⁵ The emergence of the above ecclesiological formula during the Council became an endorsement the conviction that the universal church was, in fact, a communion of churches. The formula according to Lucius Ugorji,

Guarantees… that individual Churches are not considered administrative sub-divisions of… [the one church] nor the one Church as a subsequent federation

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⁹² LG 3.  
⁹³ LG 11.  
⁹⁴ LG 26.  
⁹⁵ LG 23.
of individual Churches. The many Churches are not Churches except in the one Church; the one Church does not exist except in and out of the many Churches. Thus, “it is only in and from the local Churches that the one and single Catholic Church exists.” Analytically, the phraseology of the statement does not betray any impression of assigning any ontological and temporal priority to the universal over against the local church. Rather there is no delusion in the perception that both (universal and local) exist together and at the same time. There can be no universal church without the local and the local ceases to be church if it is not in communion with the universal. However, the relationship between the universal and the local church has continued to generate a heated debate even in the wake of the Council (Vatican II). In what follows, I examine one of such debates between Ratzinger and Kasper.

**The Universal and the Local Church Debate**

The contentious debate on the theology of the local Church was brought into sharp focus in the Ratzinger versus Kasper (then two crucial figures) debate over the claims of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in its instructions on the Church as communion, *(Communio Notio, 1992)*, which insists on the chronological and ontological priority of the universal church over the local church. Be it as it may, only an ecclesiology that acknowledges the simultaneity of the universal and local church can overcome the dangers of excessive centralization and decentralization – which in turn can deteriorate to isolationism, or even nationalism. Recognizing the simultaneity of the universal and the local church would foster both solidarity and subsidiarity—Catholic Church’s principles—which hold, *inter alia*, that pastoral

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97 Cardinal Walter Kasper feared that the CDF’s insistence on the chronological and ontological priority of the universal Church over the local Church was a subtle way of giving justification to an excessive centralization of church authority in the papacy and the Roman curia. Ratzinger responded by admitting the dangers of over-centralization of church authority but sees them only as a problem of jurisdiction and competency and that they have nothing to do with his rather dogged position that the universal church preexists the local church, which for him does not contradict the simultaneity of the universal and local church in history. For details see Walter Kasper, “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” in *America* 184, no. 14, April 23-30 (2001): 8-14; see also Joseph Ratzinger, “The Local Church and The Universal Church: A Response to Walter Kasper,” in *America* 185, no. 16, November 19 (2001): 7-11.
decisions concerning the life of the local church are best made at the local level without an unnecessary intervention by the papacy and the Roman curia except when such intervention is absolutely necessary. The ecclesiological principle of subsidiarity, therefore, promotes the autonomy and particularity of the local church without severing its unity with the universal. Any claim to any ontological priority of the universal over the local becomes problematic since there is no monolithic universal culture. The council understands this fact and that is why in order to further entrench the full ecclesial reality of the local churches, the Council adds reflections that promote their genuinely local character, namely:

i. These communities (local churches) must undertake the discernment of spirits, which acknowledges and integrates what is true and good in their particular cultures, purifies what is not, and thus brings it about that Christ and the Church are not foreign to anyone or to any place.\(^98\)

The Council thus, carefully incorporates the fact that it is necessary for the Church to be incarnated in a particular local culture by assuming whatever is true and good in such a culture while purifying what is not, so that neither Christ nor the Church would be foreign to the culture nor would the culture be stranger to Christ and the Church. Even though the Church must be local, it is not reducible to the local. The Church in the Eucharist, is at the same time an eschatological reality that transcends every culture, every fractionalization, and even death. The Eucharistic anamnesis is not simply a memorial of the past but also an anamnesis of the eschaton. The Eucharist becomes a convergence by bringing the past and reenacting it in the present as well as causing the future promise of eschatological hope to be anticipated now. Indeed, the Eucharistic anamnesis resolves the aporia of place, time, and eternity.

\(^{98}\) AG 8.
ii. The community of the faithful, endowed with the cultural riches of its own nation, are deeply in the people.\textsuperscript{99}

This means that it is the people of a particular place together with their cultural endowments that constitute a local church. For the church to be local, it must be deeply embedded in the people of a particular place or nation, it must be deeply rooted in their social, cultural consciousness, and other lineaments that form the bulk of the way of life of the people who live in that place. The church cannot exist in a vacuum. It will always have a social and cultural context.

iii. They undertake a new \textit{intellectus fidei} in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people.\textsuperscript{100}

For the church to be truly local, it must adopt a new way of understanding revelation, articulating, and teaching the faith, using the language and thought categories of a particular people, using their world views, root metaphors, and wisdom without imposing alien or foreign purported universal categories that are not respectful of the socio-cultural sensibilities of the people. Such an approach is a disservice and detrimental to unity.

iv. They live for God according to the honorable usages of their nation.\textsuperscript{101}

To be truly a local church, the people of a particular place are to live out their Christian life according to and with the resources, the customs, the gifts that God has endowed them; they use all this to worship God in their liturgy, spirituality, theology, and even in matters of discipline.

v. They participate in the local, social, and cultural life.\textsuperscript{102}

This is a way of saying that the community of the faithful in the local church should be the light of the world and the salt of the earth; they should be the leaven of the society where they live. As

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{99}] AG 15.
\item [\textsuperscript{100}] AG 22.
\item [\textsuperscript{101}] AG 15.
\item [\textsuperscript{102}] AG 11.
\end{itemize}
members of the local church, they are to be good citizens at the same time, by participating in the social, cultural, and political life of the place they live. For by so doing, they make the reign of God in their locality manifest. In rediscovering the local church, the Council realizes that it (the local church) cannot be dichotomized from the local culture. That is why the Council avers that,

> Even in the liturgy, the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not affect the faith or well-being of the entire community. Rather does it cultivate and foster the qualities and talents she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and nations. Anything in people’s way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error the Church studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. It sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.\(^{103}\)

It is noteworthy that in spite of the positive tone of this passage, it still suggests something of the culture as costume perspective. An implied assumption in the above passage is that whatever is good in a local culture can be admitted into the liturgy in the form of adaptation and/or accommodation. In this situation, the Roman liturgical rite remains intact and normative while the local cultural adornments are simply worn by it like an outer garment that can be removed at anytime. It implies a scenario where the church and the gospel are not incarnated into the fabric of the local culture, but it must be noted that there is no such thing as a universal liturgy that is not embodied in a particular cultural trappings and tapestry.

The Roman liturgical rite is indeed a local one that was imposed on all in the West after other rich liturgies like the Spanish, the Franco-Germanic, as mentioned earlier, ceased to exist.

In any case, in the later developments of the Council, understanding of the real import of culture with regard to the local church is deepened. Hence, the Council describes what constitutes culture thus,

\(^{103}\) *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37.
The word “culture” in the general sense refers to all those things which go into the refining and developing of humanity’s diverse mental and physical endowments. We strive to subdue the earth by our knowledge and labor; we humanize social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; we express through our works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of humanity through the ages; we communicate and preserve them as an inspiration for many and for the progress of many people, even of all humanity. Hence it follows that culture necessarily has historical and social overtones, and the word “culture” often carries with it sociological and ethnological connotations; in this sense, one can speak about a plurality of cultures.\textsuperscript{104}

In this passage, which comes from the last document of the Council, \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, the Council comes to a fuller understanding that cultures are not mere costumes but the very substance of a people’s life and thus, diverse human cultures enrich the life of faith and the Christian life. Hence, the plurality of human cultures also calls for diversity in the faith expression of the one Catholic Church. This shift in perspective points to the fact that as the Council progresses, issues became clearer and better appreciated. That is why the Council’s teaching is compelling: the Church is not Catholic if it is not local; but the local Church is not the Church unless it is Catholic at every level, that is redemptively integrated\textsuperscript{105} as a \textit{communio}. Put another way, the church is not universal if it is not local and the local is not church unless it is universal.

A local church which is not in communion with the whole church is not fully church; in fact, it is a contradiction in terms. At the same time, the universal church is not an abstract, disincarnated entity apart from the local church. Thus, universality entails, according to Zizioulas, “a network of communion of Churches, not a new form of Church.”\textsuperscript{106} To put it differently, “a universal Church as an entity besides the local Church would be either a culturally disincarnated Church…or alternatively it would be culturally incarnated in a demonic way...

\textsuperscript{104} GS 53.
\textsuperscript{105} Ugorji, Church: \textit{Communion and Mission}, 23-4.
\textsuperscript{106} Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion}, 258.
either… directly or indirectly… [imposing] on the world a particular culture.\textsuperscript{107}

All in all, the universal and the local church are mutually inclusive; they do not exist in isolation but as a communion of local churches in truth and in faith. In this communion, the riches, gifts, and endowments of each local church become an enrichment of the universal church. Rather than a monocultural and uniform entity, the universal church really becomes a unity in plurality. It is in this sense that the Council finally underscores its profound theological understanding of Catholicity, that the church becomes concretely Catholic by becoming local:

Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, in establishing this kingdom the church or people of God does not detract from anyone’s temporal well-being. Rather it fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, people’s abilities, resources, and customs. In so taking them to itself it purifies, strengthens, and elevates them…. The universality which adorns the people of God is a gift of the Lord himself by which the Catholic Church ceaselessly and effectively strives to restore all of humanity with all its goods under the headship of Christ and in the unity of the Holy Spirit. In virtue of this catholicity…the whole and each…are strengthened by this mutual sharing and by the common effort to achieve a fullness in unity.\textsuperscript{108}

God’s kingdom is truly not of this world. However, through the incarnation and concrete humanity of Christ, born within the particularity of a historical place and culture (Nazareth and Jewish), God’s reign is now among us albeit open to eschatological future. That Christ became human within the particularity of Jewish history and culture and that He by the power of the Holy Spirit became incarnate at all, is testament to God’s universal love that takes seriously every culture anywhere and everywhere. How seriously the Church has been taking this new awareness subsequent to the rediscovery of the local church remains another matter. Much discussion about the importance of the local church has frequently appeared to be nothing more than lip service.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 259. \\
\textsuperscript{108} LG 13.
\end{flushright}
Toward an African Relational (Communio) Ecclesiology

As noted, a certain process that began in Roman Catholicism with a combination of certain historical factors between the fourth and thirteenth centuries degenerated into an increasingly juridical, uniformist, universalist, and hence imperialistic ecclesiology. This trend led to the erosion of the relational underpinning that characterized communio in the early days of the church. A major outcome then was the loss of a sense of church communio as a unity-in-diversity. In what follows, I proffer an African perspective that holds great potential for sustaining a fruitful interface between locality and universality, and hence, a more fitting communion ecclesiology. This perspective is embedded in the framework of the rich cultural tapestry of Etche-African cosmo-religious universe along with its anthropology. Etche is one of the ethnic nationalities in the core South-South region of Nigeria which shares certain similarities with many West African societies. In their cosmo-religious world-view, the Etche believe in the dynamic ordering of beings centered around the relational sovereignty of one Creator God called Chiokike or Chukwu. Chiokike creates the deities, the spirits, and humans, as well as all other creatures in the natural world. The deities share in the sovereignty of Chiokike in the management of different segments of the created order without, however, vying for supremacy with Chiokike as the Unoriginate Origin. In this world-view, what is clear is that God, as the Unoriginate origin of all is not afraid of sharing power and dispersing authority among his viceroy for the common good of all his creatures. It is a hierarchy that is perceived as dynamic and relational as opposed to static.

Etche cosmo-religious understanding of Chiokike is as one who exercises a dynamic and relational sovereignty with openness to plurality, multiplicity, and devolution of power. Indeed, relationality and the diffusion of power in God’s dynamic sovereignty guards against autarchic
unilateralism and the idea of absolute, hegemonic, and dominating “unquestioning power-over” requiring peremptory submission and loyalty. The wide dispersal of power in God’s relational dynamic sovereignty instead allows for “power-with,” collaboration, participation, and hence, for dialogue and freedom, leading to an affirmation of a genuine diversity and pluralism.

Thus, according to this Etche cosmology, relationality is what undergirds reality; it is the magnetic field around which everything gravitates; it is the grand norm of being. Relationality is the determining criterion of interaction among the different beings that populate the cosmo-religious space. Rather than viewed in such static and dualistic terms as spirit/matter, sacred/profane, religious/secular, universal/local, reality in this Etche-African world-view is understood in terms of complex network of relationships, plurality, interconnectedness, and complementarily.

This concept of relationality is aptly captured in the aphorism, “ihe kwuru ihe esobe ya” which means literally, “wherever something stands, something else stands beside it.” This is a way of saying that relationality is constitutive of entities rather than as something extrinsic or incidental to them. Entities exist as constituted by relations to other entities in a complex of relationships. Reality is construed in a holistic sense as a complex interplay of multidimensions irreducible simply to a monistic, universalistic, or dualistic perspective. Beyond monism, universalism, uniformism, or dualism, reality is composed of a dynamic, fluid complex unity.

Inherent in the Etche cosmo-religious conception of God’s dynamic sovereignty and diffusion of power is the preservation of God’s hiddenness or transcendence. God is present to his creatures and to humans through the mediation of the deities and spirits who administer the

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110 See Ibid.
different sectors of God’s creation for the common good of all. So understood, God is not experienced as a direct presence. Rather, a presence-absence, a transcendence-immanence is understood as God’s mode of relating to humans and the world. Such construal preserves both God’s otherness as well as his caring presence as experienced by the people in the different circumstances of their lives. This way of conceiving God equally preserves the mystery that God is and creates space for openness to plurality of narratives as well as openness to new stories crafted in the community as members wrestle with the mystery of God. Such openness enables their narratives to change and develop in the encounter with other cultures in a dynamic and pluralistic context. As mystery, therefore, the question of God in this cosmology remains an open question suffused with heuristic potential, a question that cannot be exhausted by one particular narrative in an absolute sense.

Having outlined the essential contours of its cosmology, we shall now take a brief look at Etche anthropology in order to elicit its significance for an African relational ecclesiology. An important concept in Etche anthropology is known as “chi.” The word chi can mean either daylight, God, a person’s guardian-spirit, or a person’s destiny. Usually, it is the context that determines the meaning that is intended when the term is used. In our present context, the meaning that concerns us is chi understood as destiny and as guardian-spirit.

The Etche believe that at conception God endows every person with a chi in the sense of personal destiny. A person’s chi in this sense encapsulates all God’s plans, gifts, talents, fortunes, and destiny for that person. Thus, every created person has a distinct and unique chi and no two persons can have the same chi. The Etche express it thus, “chi abughi otu”: which means literally chi is not one. That is to say, each person is uniquely and differently endowed by
God. This fact is also one of the strongest witnesses to the individuality and particularity of each human person in Etche-African socio-cultural matrix. Each uniquely created and endowed human person is an irreplaceable and irreducible epicenter of life grounded in and transcendentally oriented to God who is both life and source of life.\textsuperscript{111} The irreplaceability and irreducibility of the individual finds expression in the Etche maxim, “chi anaghi aka ibe ya,” meaning, no one’s chi is greater than another’s. The Etche also take such a personal name as “Onyenachiya” meaning to each one according to his/her chi. In all these ways the Etche posit the particularity but equality and dignity of each human being as both a unique creation and the work of a unique creator.\textsuperscript{112}

However, even though a person is assigned a unique chi (as destiny) at conception, the Etche also believe that God equally sends his own spirit (that is, chi as guardian-spirit) to indwell that person in order to guard, administer, activate, and implement God’s plans and destiny for that person. The guardian-spirit as chi does not seek to conflate or morph all persons into sameness. Rather each one’s guardian-spirit activates each person in his/her specific concrete particularity, empowers each particular person to actualize his/her own distinctive possibilities, peculiar gifts, talents, and indeed, particular destiny, and mobilizes the person to use his/her particular destiny for the benefit of the community. Each person is therefore, considered to be of value. Furthermore, the indwelling of chi as guardian-spirit in each person enables openness to deity and facilitates the progress of each person toward the socio-cosmic process of wholeness and harmony. Once a person, in collaboration with his/her chi, has been able to actualize his/her destiny, that person becomes transformed, and no longer remains the same. The spirit sets him/her free for openness to deity and to others. And here lies true

freedom. What else could it be if not self-transcendence? It is about the freedom to freely choose to give to others (one’s kins, community, etc) of oneself, ones gifts, and talents, and not merely for selfish purpose. Here also lies the core of sociality, relationality, and society. Because each person is endowed with a unique destiny, then each needs the experience, endowments, services, and contributions of others for their comparative advantage\textsuperscript{113} since God did not give all gifts to one person, but some to one person and some to others, so that all have need of each other. Diversity lies at the core of relationality and sociality. Difference as seen through the lens of chi as destiny undergirds basic human interactivity.

In what follows, I shall attempt to appropriate the key elements of the Etche cosmology and anthropology as elaborated above to speak to certain issues bordering on locality in the African church. In order to avoid mistaken generalization, I will focus on the Nigerian context with which I am more at home.

**The State of the Nigerian Church as a Local Church**

There is no doubt that in the wake of the recovery of the place of the local church in Vatican II, the Nigerian church has made some progress toward becoming a truly local church. This progress is noticeable in areas such as: the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, the transliteration of most rituals and prayers for different occasions verbatim from English or Latin to the vernacular, the merging of certain elements of customary marriage with so-called church wedding, and the introduction of clapping, dancing, and drumming into the liturgy. But in many other key areas of church life, the Nigerian church appears to not be ready to boldly, radically, and originally localize.

One such core area where the Nigerian church is

\textsuperscript{113} Ridley makes reference to David Ricardo’s Law of Comparative Advantage in order to underscore the importance of the symbiotic context of human interaction in society on the basis of difference. For as long we are each better at some things than others, then we all gain from each other through the medium of exchange and make up for each other’s lack since no one person can be better at all things at the same time. See Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (London: Viking, 1996), 207-9.
rather slow to inculturate is its leadership structures. Clearly, church structures in the Nigerian church have been patterned on the Tridentine model. Indeed, it is not far from the truth to state that church structures in Nigeria today are still predominantly Western if not colonial. Because these structures are largely alien, they have continued to constitute a huge obstacle to the emergence and growth of an authentic African Christianity. There is no question, the Nigerian hierarchy is very authoritarian, legalistic, and operates the Church functions on the colonial model from the center to the periphery. Church structures would benefit from the dynamic, relational, and collaborative model as I have outlined in the Etche cosmo-religious universe. As a matter of fact, many of the Nigerian hierarchy cling to excessive conservatism and traditionalism even more than Rome itself. *Roma locuta est causa finita* appears to be their lodestar. Consequently, there seems to have been no bold and courageous effort in the Nigerian Church towards maturation. Critical thinking, initiative, and creativity are too often not encouraged by the hierarchy all in an effort to express conformity to Rome even at the expense of faith within the local church. Decolonizing church structures in the Nigerian church remains an imperative today.\(^\text{114}\) The current state of the Nigerian church appears to be a disservice to the theology of communion rediscovered in Vatican II. According to the Etche anthropology as noted previously, each individual is endowed with a unique *chi* (destiny, gifts) which is to be actualized for the benefit of the community. Since no two persons have the same *chi*, through relationality and interactivity, individuals benefit from one another via the logic of comparative advantage. By extrapolation, if we amplify the individuals as communities, societies, or churches at large, (that is as plurality of cultural contexts), then it means that each community, society, or church is uniquely and differently endowed. Each church has something unique to contribute to

\(^{114}\text{See Chukwudum B. Okolo, } Toward Decolonizing the Church: An African Liberation Theology (Onitsha, Nigeria: Tabansi Press, 1976).}
the *communio*. Any church, therefore, that fails to actualize its own gifts for the good of the *communio* does a disservice to the Body of Christ which is a unity-in-diversity as St. Paul articulates in 1 Cor 12:1-30. The Church of Rome alone does not possess the plenitude of the truth. Any claim on the part of any church to such objective and totalizing possession of the truth of God is tantamount to ecclesiastical chauvinism and imperialism since no single narrative can exhaust the reality of God. The Nigerian church must never lose sense of the nature of God as mystery. Hence, from its cultural and religious patrimony and experience as a local church, the Nigerian church, to be sure, possesses some elements of the truth of God that it has to share with the *communio*. We will always be in the process of attaining the plenitude of the truth of God until the eschaton. To be sure, the dynamic relationality gleaned from the Etche cosmology and anthropology promotes the dialogue of cultures and religions rather than their clash or the subordination of one to another. Another core area where the Nigerian church has been failing to mature as a local church is in the aspect of financial self-reliance. A popular maxim holds that “he who pays the piper dictates the tune.” The veracity of this maxim cannot be further from the Nigerian situation or the African Church as a whole. All African bishops are entirely financed by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. There is the danger, therefore, that African Bishops would not voice differences if it might threaten their financial stability. This scenario undoubtedly creates a vicious cycle of dependency which diminishes the unique voice, self-confidence, and boldness of the hierarchy of the African church, particularly in regards to standing their ground in contentious issues that call for debate and creativity. Any individual, society, or group that is bereft of economic independence, cannot be said to enjoy freedom and autonomy as such. It is only by being independent to the measure that one develops one’s own gifts and strong economic base that one can become interdependent.
For interdependence means nothing other than that two or more parties rely on one another for support in mutual reciprocity. What is interdependence if a party is completely dependent on others without anything to contribute that the others might also need? It is about the dignity of difference or diversity which is brought to bear on the unity or communion of churches. The Nigerian church should be looking for ways to become increasingly self-supporting rather than perpetually adopting a mendicant mentality, always looking outward for the scraps that fall from the master’s table. For true communion does not entail remaining at the receiving end forever. Until the Nigerian church becomes financially autonomous, the hierarchy will continue to be timid and fearful of making bold and radical attempts in carving a niche for its own contextual theological research, church life, structures, spirituality, and so forth. Indeed, until then, it will never become a properly inculturated and a matured adult local church. This crucial need makes imperative the transformation of the Nigerian, and for that matter, the African imagination. This imagination has been so insidiously battered by the net-effects of colonialism that it seems to resign to the belief that it cannot do without dependence on the West. Additionally, the schizophrenic and narcotic effects of colonial Christianity with its imperious cultural imposition on the African mind largely “stifled the creative genius and imaginative forces”\textsuperscript{115} of the African spirit. The African churches will continue to be emasculated and their dignity and self-respect remain elusive until they attain a certain level of economic self-reliance. For without such level of self-reliance Rome will continue to call the shots. Karl Marx could not be further from the truth when he opined that the one who controls the material or economic power also controls the spiritual power.

Ultimately, for the Nigerian church or African church to become an adult local church, they have to, among other things, pattern their institutional structures according to life-giving, more dynamic and relational cultural models replete in distinct African societies. It has to become financially, theologically, intellectually, and ideologically self-reliant and as much as possible, and overcome the “logic of extroversion” which is always looking outward for everything rather than developing and actualizing its own inner riches and resources. The required growth and maturity will by no means come by chance. It requires boldness, sacrifice of the princely treatment of African ecclesiastics by Rome, courage, creativity, initiative, vision, tenacity of purpose, dogged determination to experiment, and so on. The Holy Spirit cannot be confined. The Spirit still blows wherever it wills, birthing new life, recreating, renewing, challenging, liberating, and gifting. The Nigerian church and its leadership should be open to the movement of the Spirit, which is not the Spirit of timidity but of love and courage, to trustfully begin the necessary journey toward maturity and an adult status as a local church. Surely, there are other aspects of the issue at stake to be discussed. But I am constrained by the limit of this paper to rest my case here. What has been done so far is only an attempt to highlight certain core areas of the Nigerian church that need to be critiqued and addressed if it must emerge as a virile, adult local church in the *communio* of churches. It is my conviction that if these core areas are taken care of, then other things will necessarily fall in place as far as the forward match toward an adult status is concerned.

**Challenges**

Despite the remarkable achievement of the Council in the recovery of the theology of the local Church, it is unfortunate that this emerging theology is not being consistently followed through today as indicated, for instance, in the Ratzinger/Kasper debate. There remains a tension today between some who see the universal Church as a communion of local Churches and others
who maintain a preconciliar universalist approach that privileges ontological priority of the universal Church. An instance of this tension is even reflected in the election of a bishop for a local Church in which the procedures in the post-conciliar1983 Code of Canon law (a fallout of Vatican II) provides for little input from the local Church in the selection of their bishop. The consultative opinion of the people is left to the discretion of the papal legate and the Congregation for Bishops116 on whom has been placed most of the responsibility for appointing a bishop rather than by the needs of the local community and its own sense of who would be most suitable to lead and serve.117 Besides, thirty-three years after Vatican II, the Roman curia still meddles in the free experience of the life of the Church in particular contexts [where it] is not [most] qualified to do so.118 The above observation appears to be the case in most African local churches where the unhealthy intervention of Rome and local bishops with post-Tridentine mentality are frustrating and truncating the process of inculturation. One cannot agree enough with Uzukwu that the Pro-nuncio whose opinion carries more weight in the Roman scheme of things than the pastor of a diocese is not really qualified in stricto sensu to speak for the [local] Church. The pro-nuncio and the offices of congregations or secretariats in Rome do not preside over local churches. Thus pastors of local Churches should, in the spirit of pastoral reasons, be granted more autonomy to make certain vital decisions and theological reflections for their contextual witness to the kingdom especially in the area of inculturation.119 Inculturation here is not simply limited to the

118 Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 61.
119 See Ibid.
use of local musical instruments, local language, and cultural clothes. As much as these are important, what is more important is inculturation based upon theological reflection and method shaped by the contextual faith experience of the people of God in a particular place and time. Ample evidence abounds regarding restriction of certain local and contextual theologies that do not seem to sync with certain dominant and particular theologies espoused by the Universal Church. In any case, this is not to say that the offices of papal legates and the Roman congregations have no part to play in the communion of churches; such roles, while serving the unity of the church, should not replace the pastoral role of local pastors and theologians or be a method by which decisions are imposed upon the local Church, except in a case of crisis where the principle of subsidiarity has failed to work. By this, the Church will truly be a unity-in-diversity, a *communio*, local but truly Catholic.

**Conclusion**

We have examined in this paper the rediscovery of the theology of the local church by the Second Vatican Council and its significance for the Church. The Council accomplished this feat by going back to scripture and tradition to retrieve Eucharistic ecclesiology which is characterized by relationality and *communio*. In this way, the Council was able to re-establish that it is only in and from the local churches that the universal church exists. This watershed declaration of the Council is significant for the second millennium Roman Catholic Church in that it has been plagued by excessive universalism in the sense of imposing a monoculture that mandates from the top down. The rediscovery of the theology of the local church has a variety of implications for the way authority functions and should function ecclesiologically in the church,
especially with regard to inculturation. In any case, there still remains a tension today, three decades after the Council, with respect to the relationship between the universal and the local church. The achievements of that Council demand that all in the Church be faithful to its theology. Fidelity to its theology would usher in and guarantee the autonomy and growth of the local churches into adult status, especially the African churches as elaborated in the case of the Nigerian church. The celebrated Eucharistic/Communion ecclesiology accomplished by the Council is one that positions the universal church as a communion of local churches that recognizes the particularity of each local church, and the adornments, gifts, and challenges that each brings to the *communion ecclesiarum*; a church that functions fundamentally as a *diakonia*, that fortifies, and strengthens the unity-in-diversity of the one Church of God.

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Beyond Cosmetics to Meaning: Challenges and Perspectives for Inculturation

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Introduction

The word cosmetic refers to preparations externally applied to change or enhance the beauty of skin, hair, nails, lips, and eyes. The use of body paints for ornamental and religious purposes has been common among peoples from prehistoric times. Ointments, balms, powders, and hair dyes have also been used from ancient times. Greek women used charcoal pencils, rouge sticks of alkanet, and coated their faces with powder, which often contained dangerous lead compounds. Beauty aids reached a peak in imperial Rome – especially chalk for the face and a rouge called focus – and ladies required the services of slaves adept in their use. Today, we do not know how the women’s world would be without cosmetics. Back when I was still in college with some Rwandese female friends, I remember one day it rained and a close female friend of mine fell into a ditch filled with water. I rushed to rescue her and luckily she had only minor injuries. To my surprise, she said: ‘My friend, will you continue to love me even with these scars?’ I was well dressed today and had applied enough cosmetics as we were ready to go out but all that is now gone because of this accident’. I always thought she was mistaken. She hardly realized that life as a gift and its deeper meaning were more valuable to me than the external appearances she had applied to impress others. I waited for the right time to let her know that she meant more to me than the cosmetics she applied. I wanted her to move beyond cosmetics to meaning.

Why talk about cosmetics when the goal of this paper is to suggest deep roots for inculturation. The topic of inculturation is not new in recent scholarship especially, among African theologians. Yet it appears that there is still a tendency to remain at its cosmetic level

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The Roman Empire succeeded the Roman Republic during the time of Augustus. It dated from 27B.C. - beginning of Augustus’ reign, and the traditional date for its end is 476.
rather than its deep meaning. This is why this paper sets out to dig into history to systematically
capture how inculturation as a process has been at the heart of the Church; yet it is still new as its
roots have not yet fully penetrated the hearts of the clergy, religious and the laity in the African
Church. This article will suggest different possible routes which the inculturation process should
take to move beyond cosmetics to deeper meaning to touch and transform people’s lives in
Africa.

**Definition of terms**

“Culture is a set of meanings, values, and patterns which underlie the perceptible
phenomena of a concrete society.”\(^\text{122}\) These could be recognizable on the level of social practice
(acts, ways of proceeding, tools, techniques, customs and habits, forms and traditions). They
could also be carriers of signs, symbols, meanings and “representations, conceptions and feelings
that consciously or unconsciously pass from one generation to generation and are kept as they
are or transformed by people as the expression of their human reality.”\(^\text{123}\) This means culture is
the deepest vehicle to reveal a human, social group and to make it understandable.

Adaptation implies a selection of certain rites and customs, purifying them and inserting
them within Christian rituals where there is any apparent similarity. The problem we face when
using the word adaptation is that it fails to express the indissoluble marriage between Christianity
and each culture. Indigenization underlines the necessity of promoting indigenous church
ministers in every locality.\(^\text{124}\) This means that indigenisation promotes indigenous vocations.
The missionaries of Africa (commonly called White Fathers) did exactly this when they
implanted Christianity in the Great Lakes’ Region (Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and
Burundi).

**Enculturation** is the process by which the individual becomes inserted into his or her
culture. This differentiates us from other animals. From birth, we need support, help and training
by others for us to enter meaningfully into all the aspects of life. Acculturation “means the
encounter with a culture other than one’s own or the contact between cultures together with the

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\(^{122}\) Marcello de Carvalho Azevedo, *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity* (Rome: Pontifical
Gregorian University, 1982), 10.

\(^{123}\) Marcello de Carvalho, *Inculturation and its Challenges*, 10.

ensuing changes.”\textsuperscript{125} This includes the results that occur when groups of different cultures come into contact and this has impact on the original patterns of either or both groups.

Transculturation refers to “the transference of cultural traits, symbols, meanings, patterns, values or institutions of a specific culture to almost all other cultures.”\textsuperscript{126} Note that in all these terminologies, the underlying set of meanings and values give us clues to distinguish the use of different cultures. Two groups may have the same cultural practices but these carry different set of meanings and values. The underlying set of meanings therefore helps us to determine the existence of different cultures. The term closest to inculturation is incarnation. Christ himself chose to become one of us in order to save humanity. Christianity therefore has no alternative but to do the same in every culture and time to continue the salvation by Christ.

According to J.M. Waliggo in his book \textit{Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency} (1986), inculturation is “the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time, that is, the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought-patterns of each people. It is the continuous attempt to endeavour to make Christianity truly ‘feel at home’ in the cultures of each people.”\textsuperscript{127}

One thing we can be assured of is that Christianity will or will not survive in Africa depending on how Africans make the Christian faith part of their own being and thinking. When Christianity is not something they ‘wear’ on Sundays and put off the rest of the week. African Christianity depends on whether we feel and strongly believe that our Christian worldview has become part of truly African aspirations. As Laurenti Magesa puts it, “the refusal of inculturating the Gospel message slows down the ‘enrooting’ of the Church in the African continent, causing the Church and the faith to remain a ‘potted plant,’ forever living in a foreign soil. This belittles the dignity and self respect of the African people as children of God.”\textsuperscript{128}

\textbf{Inculturation in the History of the Church}

The simple rule of communication requires that a speaker adapts his or her message to his audience to be understood. The decision by the Holy Trinity to send the second person of the Trinity to come and dwell among us, speak our language, eat our food, walk on our streets, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Waliggo, \textit{Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency}, 11-12.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Azevedo, \textit{Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Laurenti Magesa, \textit{Anatomy of Inculturation} (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 10.
\end{itemize}
struggle with authorities and in the end die a humiliating death is an act of inculturation *par excellence*. The move of Christianity from the centre (Jerusalem) to the Gentile world a few years after Jesus’ death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit meant that the presentation of the Christian message and the Church’s organisation had to be inculturated to the existing milieu. For instance, we find Paul advising Christians not to eat some type of meat (sacrifices to idols) if they are with other Christians with weak consciences (1Co 8:4-13 & Rom 14:15-21). Monasticism came because of the felt-need to bear heroic witness to Christ. Celibacy of the clergy was promoted because of the demands and conceptions of the time. The church’s hierarchical and monarchical structures owed a lot to the adaptation of the Church to secular realities and mentalities of the time. Take for instance, the popes and bishops’ crosier and ring. These were symbols used by kings in the past but they were incorporated within Christianity and were given spiritual meanings. The rise of cathedral schools and universities came because of the much felt-need to raise the intellectual standard of the clergy. The Franciscan Orders were born because they felt the Church was ‘taken’ by the search for wealth and Francis of Assisi and his companions wanted to live apostolic poverty as Christ lived. These elements highlight the fact that people felt they needed a deeper meaning of who they were, what they lived and celebrated as Christians. They wanted to move beyond cosmetics.

Since its establishment in 1622, Propaganda Fide insisted on the need for evangelisers to respect the cultures of the evangelised, so that they might accept Christianity and regard it as their own. Missionaries were told again and again by their Founders to take time to study the languages and cultures of the people they were evangelising. Propaganda Fide puts it this way: “can anyone think of anything more absurd than to transport France, Italy or Spain or some other European country to China? Bring them your faith, not your country.”129 Consequently, the reality of the Church seeking constantly to adapt herself to the times, aspirations, localities and cultures of the people must be appreciated if one is to fully understand the significance of inculturation in our African contexts.130 Charles Lavigerie, the White Fathers’ founder (1878-9), insisted that his missionaries were to be assimilated into the societies they were to evangelise, eat

the same food, use the same manners, adopt a dress acceptable to the people, learn the customs of the people and make Christian doctrine void of European philosophy.\textsuperscript{131}

What we see in the above paragraphs stand out today as an impartial judge of the success and failure of inculturation in Africa. We must however not forget some negative impact of the Council of Trent on Inculturation. With all due respect, the Council of Trent slowed the process. From the Council of Trent onwards, Catholic theology and renewal stressed the necessity of uniformity. The Latin rite became the rule of all evangelised by the Latin Church. “Uniformity aimed at discouraging future dissensions and divisions within the Church.”\textsuperscript{132} Uniform seminary education ensured the continuation of the movement of uniformity. The consequence of the uniform training of the clergy was twofold. “First, it widened the gap between the repetitively trained Church leadership and the constantly evolving scientific mind of the modern. Secondly, it ignored the cultural background of the newly evangelised peoples and reorganised the mind of the native clergy according to the required western patterns.”\textsuperscript{133} This led to the loss of a possible common language and effective communication between the clergy and the laity. Furthermore, the Church was used by the colonialists as an ally to control and subjugate the peoples of the newly established colonies. The Church brought to the evangelised the replication of purely European models, habits, and institutions and sadly Vatican I hardly challenged this behaviour.

In the 17\textsuperscript{th} century the inquisition and those who advocated a narrow view of missions objected to the inculturation methods of Matteo Ricci in China and Roberto de Nobili in India. At the beginning of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century (1610), the inquisition and some Churchmen who were against inculturation got the upper hand and censured de Nobili (1577-1665, an Italian Jesuit) and ordered the discontinuation of inculturation in India and China. Stephen Neill summarizes the subsequent need for inculturation as follows:

Nobili observed the weaknesses of the Catholic mission and the need for a new method for missionary outreach. He noticed that missionaries mistook the European culture as an inseparable part of the Christian faith which made it impossible for affluent and higher Indian castes to embrace it. He realized that the Brahmins could be evangelized only by way of identification with their culture

\textsuperscript{133} Azevedo, Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity, 18.
and life style. As a result he cut himself off from the rest of the missionaries, studied the Brahmin culture, their prejudices and Tamil classics. Brahmins should not be asked, Nobili said, to abnegate the special privileges they had in the society or to give up their cultural habits unless they were obviously idolatrous. To identify with them Nobili became a Sanyasi guru, a priest and teacher who renounces the luxuries of the material world and adopts an ascetic way of life. As soon as he did so many Brahmins flocked to him to listen to his message. The resulting conversion was encouraging. He baptized several hundred Brahmins in Madurai, Trichinopoly and Salem. 

Nobili’s fellow missionaries were not happy with his method of evangelisation and his toleration of certain Hindu practices. They reported to the Roman See "that he was tolerating Hindu superstition, that he was deceiving the people, that by segregating his converts and that he was creating a schism in the Church." Whether a deceiver, a hypocrite, or the reverse of both let it be judged by theologians; from the viewpoint of contextual theology he was a perfect contextualized preacher. Yet the notable achievement of these missionaries (this applies also to Matteo Ricci) was lost. Vatican II clearly reversed the judgment of 1610.

For Vatican II, unity in diversity is what enriches Christ’s Church and makes it permanent in each locality and makes each people regard it as their own. Uniformity in all matters merely weakens the Church, makes it irrelevant to local conditions and cultures and undermines it at its very roots. It is therefore interesting to note this paradigm shift from uniformity to unity in diversity. Furthermore, when we understand where we are coming from, it helps us know where we are going. If we trace back through the development of the Church and see the different opposing camps to inculturation, then it is easy to understand the present ones and, in this way, it neither seems new nor does it discourage inculturation. These opposing camps date as far back as apostolic times: “certain members of the Pharisees party who had become believers objected, insisting that pagans should be circumcised and instructed to keep the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5f). But this group was defeated after the meeting of Jerusalem. Maybe we also need a council on African inculturation!

136 Lumen Gentium, no 13.16.17 and Gaudium et Spes, no 58.
But what do we learn from the recent Popes? Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) in his *Encyclical Evangelii Praecones* (On Promoting Catholic Missions) insisted: ‘Let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess, that is naturally good, just or beautiful. In his other Encyclical Letter *Summi Pontificatus*, Pius XII said once more: “Whatever there is in the natives customs, that is not inseparably bound up with superstition and error, will always receive kindly consideration and, when possible, will be preserved intact.” Pius XII in his *Mediator Dei* (1947) expressed favour toward the need for use of vernacular languages in the liturgy and for liturgical reform. Years later came Paul VI who strongly favoured inculturation: “an adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic, and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favoured by the Church.” Paul VI urged the African Church and said: “you may and you must have an African Christianity” embedded within your human values and characteristic forms of culture.\(^{139}\) A wise caution was also expressed by Paul VI that in their desire to have an African Christianity, they should remember the tradition; they should not go astray and touch on the deposit of the apostolic tradition: “remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life; and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7). The desire for inculturation should find its expression within the essential, constitutional patrimony of the teaching of Christ as professed by the tradition of the Church. The more we desire to make our faith truly African, the more the demand to be custodians and good stewards of the catholic faith. What this means is that faith in Jesus Christ remains the cornerstone, but the expression, that is: “the language, the mode of manifesting this one Faith, maybe manifold. It may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of the one who professes this one Faith.”\(^{140}\) The challenge is in fact twofold: (a) a clear and systematic understanding of the faith and (b) a rooted understanding of our cultures. Sometimes because we do not understand (a) we tend to be dogmatic in order to ‘avoid’ problems. A deeper understanding of Christian faith will lead to its re-appropriation.

**Why is inculturation necessary?**

Christianity survived in parts of Coptic speaking Egypt, Ethiopia and the Nubian kingdom because it had been translated into local languages, adapted to local cultures, and

\(^{139}\) Teresa Okure, Paul van Theil et al, 32 Articles evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1990), 16.

\(^{140}\) Okure, 32 Articles evaluating Inculturation, 39.
propagated by local evangelisers. Yet Christianity could not survive the invasion of Islam in North Africa because it had not yet penetrated people’s cultures. There is no reason to doubt that what has happened in the past could happen again to the flourishing and numerically strong churches established in Africa. We have good examples from the numerous fights based on religion in Nigeria. The worst happened in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide where close to a million Rwandese were killed because of who they were. If Christianity had gone beyond Sunday liturgies and liturgical dances, things could have been different in Rwanda. The lack of enrooting of the Gospel makes people swallow whatever comes their way, to say nothing of the fact that our politicians take advantage of this lack of rootedness. The Rwandese did not learn from an elderly Christian remark from West Africa on Christianity: “we eat everything they give us, but we digest it in our own way.” This digestion refers to the process of appropriation of the faith. This ‘faith’ ceases to be cosmetic by penetrating the very fabric of our being. This means that “Christian faith cannot be ‘digested by people of a given culture unless it is digested by that culture.”

The goal of inculturation is to make Christianity permanent in Africa by making it a people’s religion and a way of life which no enemy or hostility can ever succeed in supplanting or weakening. Its aim is to echo St Paul’s hymn of love: nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked (Rom 8:35).

The fears, challenges or ‘allergies’ that develop on people’s skins whenever the word inculturation is mentioned can be summed up in this way: (1) inculturation wants to dismantle the central doctrines of our faith; (2) it wants to lower the Christian standards established at a high cost by missionaries; (3) it will divert the Christian growth by introducing in it ‘superstition’ long condemned by the Church; (4) it will make Christianity easier for the African people; (5) it may bring divisions in the Church; (6) it shall create an unhealthy imbalance between the local and the universal Church and finally (7) theologians of inculturation want to create their own church to make a name for themselves. Some of these fears may be valid, but

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141 Waliggo, Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, 12
142 The point here is not that the genocide in Rwanda was caused by religion. The point made is that the latter remained at a superficial level and when people were killed, it was a clear sign that the killers had not made Christian values their own.
143 Laurenti Magesa, Anatomy of Inculturation, 6.
144 Laurenti Magesa, Anatomy of Inculturation, 7.
it is only when we face them head on that we can build a truly meaningful Christian message that touches people’s lives rather than burying our heads in the sand, satisfied with the status quo. If the likes of Galileo Galilei had not challenged the world’s thinking on the position of the sun in relation to the planet Earth, we could have continued in ignorance and gained little understanding of the implications of his findings. Inculturation fundamentally offers a project of “the making of self.” It offers a vision of the African subject, a living subject who bears the will to determine the future through choices and deeds. Inculturation wants to deepen new ways of living as Christians in Africa today, shaping Christian worldviews, creating new human relations and offering a new beginning for African values and customs to find their way within the scope of Christian faith. This is a call for a re-appropriation, a paschal mystery which involves the necessity of dying in order to rise to a new Christian life in Africa.

Inculturation challenges us to realise that nothing is given except what we give ourselves, and the world is not just a big market where civilisations barter on an equal exchange. Africans cannot refuse to work and assume responsibility for the process of inculturation if they are to make Christianity truly African. Inculturation, therefore, offers a horizon within which the question of African identity evolves at a deeper level of meaning. Primacy is given to responsibility by which persons determine who they are. This leads us to seek ways to pragmatically re-appropriate the Christian message. The late Pope John Paul II substantiates this idea: “a faith which does not become a culture [re-appropriated] is faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through and not fully lived out.” The late Fr Cecil McGarry, one of the founding fathers of Hekima Jesuit College, puts it this way, “Christianity exists when people believe; and it becomes deeply rooted when it touches people and their lives where and as they are… faith can only find its expression and life within cultures.” Pope Paul VI was keen on inculturation and said, “evangelisation loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their

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language, their signs, their symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.”

**Challenges**

From the foregoing, one can deduce the following; inculturation is not an option but a necessity. We have seen that the Church has learnt from its past mistakes and Vatican II and recent popes’ declarations are indeed testimonies to this urgent need of inculturation. What are then the current challenges of inculturation? Is it happening or not?

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that each culture has something to learn from and offer to another. No culture is superior to others. The current Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr Adolfo is of this opinion:

> But what can we learn from the East? I would say: a basic humility that acknowledges our limits. When arrived in Japan one thing that I found very striking was to discover that Japanese people are much more humble than all the Spanish or other Europeans that I had met. They have convictions, they think a lot, they are very reflective people; but they speak with humility and they know that a human person is a mystery. They realize that they don’t know much about themselves, about others and they are surprised that we speak with such assurance about God. This is something that you encounter in Buddhist monks, the humility of saying: “When it comes to mystery we know very little. We are searching, we are moving in that search, we are learning”. This attitude contrasts with the aggressive assurance with which many missionaries preached the “truth”.

This is a testimony to the fact that we ought to learn from one another. But what are the factors that inhibit inculturation in Africa? From a survey done by Laurenti Magesa, the following can be said: (1) some say that inculturation is not necessary because “some of our traditions are archaic, that they have lost their relevance and applicability. So any effort at inculturation is an exercise in futility if it is based on massive borrowing from indigenous African heritage of a bygone era.” (2) Others say that inculturation is not taking place because

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149 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no 63.
local decisions-making should be the normal way to proceed, not Vatican offices’ control over what is done in local churches. (3) Some say that liturgical ministers themselves do not understand and know what it is that they are to inculturate because inculturation requires genius and the latter are not always many within the clergy. This touches on the formation of priests today. (4) Others give up on inculturation because consultation, dialogue and sharing within the laity and clergy are often non-existent. The laity is only consulted when the parish and/or diocese administration need money for its projects. (5) Some individuals complain that though they make their views known through church councils, meetings, or through suggestion boxes, most of the time nothing is done. This is frustrating and makes some prefer silence rather than waste their time and resources, and others leave the Catholic Church for other churches where they may be heard. (6) Some church leaders do not want to hear anything about inculturation because they want to maintain “order.” (7) Others say that feelings about liturgy are personal and should not even be discussed. (8) There is a tendency on the part of the Church officials to impose their wishes upon the rest. (9) In today’s consumer age, there is the growing vice among the clergy to feel at home only with the rich, some of whom have no respect for African cultural values; all they seek is their interest and pleasure. This weighs down the image of a priest, as people begin to ask: who is a priest today? Shouldn’t he be a wounded healer? (10) The decline in moral values especially in the area of sexuality affects other areas too. A number of young people today will not hesitate to say: ‘everyone is going to die some day and so it does not matter how you die (whether of HIV/AIDS or some other diseases). (11) Many still feel that the missionary God is taken to be superior to that of traditional Africa and therefore talking about God in connection with African values and rituals puts many off. Finally, (12) many of the above reasons (note that the list is not exhaustive) are a result of an identity crisis of subjects who are slowly turning into objects of the forces of globalisation and post-modernism, where the ‘human being’ is being replaced by ‘material having.’

What should then be the approach to foster the process of inculturation? How do we move from a Church that is inclined to think that drumming, singing in local languages, dancing with African rhythm, replacing white icons with black ones, and so on is only what we mean by inculturation? What areas urgently need inculturation? How do we really move from cosmetic or

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152 Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 6, 11, 13, 18, 24, 25, 69, 72, 74.
simple appearances to deeper meaning? Or how can we turn these ‘cosmetics’ into deeper values for inculturation?

**Perspectives**

There are different proposals to foster the debate and the praxis on inculturation. First of all, an African adage says: ‘*Build a school, chase ignorance.*’ If there is one area that needs some restructuring, it is the formation of priests. Gone are the days when a priest was only trained in classical philosophy and theology. The challenges of human sciences today bring out ‘the ignorance’ of priest to the fore. A priest is no longer a ‘know-it-all.’ Courses in African culture and values, African theology and fieldwork are a necessity if we are to deepen the faith and make Christianity truly African. In this process, it is vital to also develop a Catholic catechism which is inculturated.

Second, there is a need to look at, analyse, and educate families today. There is an increase in marriage instability which leads to family breakdown, divorce, violence, infidelity or to cohabitation. It is generally observed that the divorce rate is very high. “At least 30% of marriages now end up in divorce after fewer than ten years of marriage.”154 As a result, there are many single parents in search of sexual partners regardless of whether the latter are married or unmarried, young or old. Current research shows that HIV/AIDS is spreading more in families than in any other sector of the population. The reason advanced is the regressing sense of commitment and fidelity among couples. Some of people want short-term marital relationship or seek short-term companionship for sexual gratification. Some will tell you: “let us try it out and see if it works and when we get tired of each other, each one will go his or her way.”155 Mother Teresa is the one who said that today’s problems are not fundamentally problems of hunger or famine, poverty or riches, morality versus immorality. Today’s sick-world suffers from the lack of love in families which affects all other sectors of life, Church included. People have abandoned the value and respect of family and community which traditionally held people together and fostered commitment, even when there were obstacles. In this sense, there is a lot that Christians can learn and borrow theologically from African Religion: the importance attached to sacrifices and offerings, healing, importance of community life as opposed to individualism, and rites of passage which help people to feel that they belong.

155 Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 73.
Third, one of the scourges that have taken many lives is HIV/AIDS. While we appreciate that different methods which have been sought to address the problem, maybe the starting point should have been to go back to the African value of life and sexuality. The human person in African is considered holistic. He is not just a genital organ to be used for sexual gratification. Virginity was highly valued. Though the Church has been keen in teaching this, had it borrowed from African ideal of the sacredness of individuals, promoting no sex before marriage, the situation could have been different. These African values promote respect of self, others, God and posterity. AIDS has not been able to be addressed effectively because it has ignored some elements from culture.

Fourth, customary marriage should be respected and recognised as sacred and be acceptable as a sacrament for people who join the Church when already married in the traditional customary rites. Further, there are two marriages if not three (customary, religious and civil) and the question is why not combine them? People often resort to cohabitation because these types of marriages are costly and leave the newly wedded couples financially constrained. Why not conduct the religious wedding at the home of the couple and find ways of merging customary values and religious values? If this is done, it will foster commitment. The place to begin is within the family.

Fifth, diseases were traditionally considered to reflect disharmony within the individual and ultimately affecting the community. Sickness is not an individual but a community's problem. To be healthy is to be in harmony with one’s body and the society. The sacrament of the Sick can be fostered by borrowing from the traditionally African concept of health. Since the Church holistically takes care of the sick, its healing ministry is more meaningful in Africa if it appropriates this concept of the human person. In many parishes, a number of Christians still see the sacrament of the sick to be a sacrament to be given only to those who are approaching death. While the new Revised Rite on the Sacrament of the Sick of December 7, 1972 has changed this understanding, many have not yet understood it. It will thus be easy to bring traditional understanding of sickness, healing, and health to help African Christians understand the sacrament of the sick.

Sixth, inculturation, like any development in life or thinking that involves culture, does not usually happen by plan or theory. It happens when the people involved feel free to live and express themselves in the terms that best respond to their experience and the mental, or
interactive frameworks within which they are most truly themselves. This applies to liturgy, ecclesiology, marriage, religious life, and social justice. Culture is a reality that has a life of its own and keeps growing, changing, adapting, and responding to new events and environmental changes. Inculturation is a way of living in the wider context of whatever makes human life human. Thus the encounter between culture and faith is ongoing, mutually influential, and, hopefully, a source of ongoing growth and purification.

Seventh, inculturation presupposes an intellectual as well as a spiritual grasp of the Christian faith. This is to say that the basic and profound tenets of the faith are properly understood for what they are. This again presupposes that Divine Revelation or the Revealed Truth is appreciated for what it is, a gift of God and God’s self-revelation in the concrete Person of Jesus Christ. Thus, to embark on the process of inculturation is to presuppose that one has some command over issues pertaining to culture that are useful for grounding the Christian faith to bear on the lived-experiences of a given people without compromising the core salvific truths of the Christian faith.

Eighth, since sacred liturgy is the principal means of sanctification of the People of God, and therefore an act of supreme worship of God through the sacrificial act of love of his Son Jesus Christ, it implies that liturgy is supposed to be aimed at God, not at ourselves. Jesus is the measure of worship because he laid down his life as an act of love towards his Father in atonement for our sins while simultaneously opening up for us the well-spring of mercy and forgiveness. What does that mean for inculturation? It means that proper inculturation is an effort to subject our cultural values to the scrutiny of the Light of the Gospel so that we may attune our cultural guiding values to the Revealed Truth so that in the end the Gospel becomes our culture.

Ninth, the challenge is for the theologian and the Church in various parts of Africa to identify cultural values that can be used as useful tools in the service of the Gospel. One demon that needs to be exorcised from African cultures is tribalism. This demon can easily defeat the efforts that African Christians make to be more at home with the Christian faith. Second, in line with the demon of tribalism come initiation, marriage, and death rituals that tend to take over the minds of Christians in Africa because these dimensions of life are heavily laden with cultural

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156 It important to note here that people are increasingly becoming aware that culture is not static progressives or deviants can also easily see themselves as part of a developing culture. Besides, there is also an e-culture which is increasingly developing. This is why there is need for ongoing discernment and reflection on culture.
meaning, but much of this cultural meaning is not necessarily related to Christian faith. It is for this reason that there is a tug-of-war between Christian truth and cultural values related to these dimensions of life. Dialogue is a need for the church to find solutions to these problems and particularly to scrutinise some cultural values which go against Christ’s message.

Tenth, the use of cultural musical instruments and dances for the liturgy is only a preamble to the real issue: the transformation, or if possible, the reinforcement of human cultural values to be at the service of the Gospel. This service can only be attained if the Gospel is allowed to be the guiding principle. Obviously, matters of discipline must always be distinguished from doctrine so that one is not confused with the other, although the two should belong together in our comprehensive proclamation of the faith. Belief in God necessarily evinces a specific ethic, a specific way of living according to the Gospel. Liturgical dances can easily lapse into modes of religious entertainment or simply banal performances that have no contributory meaning to the grasp and grounding of faith in the life the faithful. On the one hand, there is no need to ‘manipulate’ the liturgy by fitting into it gestures that have no real bearing on the comprehensive meaning of worship. On the other hand, dancing and drumming can be transformed into genuine and deeper ways in which our bodies become an expression of worship, just like David who wholeheartedly sparked into joy in dancing and praising God.

Inculturation should deal with the practical insertion or ‘incarnation’ of real Gospel values that give Christian meaning to human life within a specific culture. It should move beyond cosmetics to meaning. If inculturation is reducible to or stops at liturgical performances, then it is a betrayal of its proper aim, which is basically the fruitful encounter between the Gospel and Culture. The encounter is meant to become a life-giving union, not a contest, even though such a union may take a long time to achieve.

Eleventh, the role played by African theologians so far should continue to be appreciated as they continue to try to make the Christian faith truly African. Their intellectual contributions will continue to be a pillar for theology in Africa for many years to come. One thing that most people accuse Africans of is that the art of writing is not generally theirs. African theologians, the likes of Laurenti Magesa, Bénézet Bujo, J. M. Waliggo, Teresa Okure, Charles Nyamiti, and Jean-Marc Ela are indeed a proof that for us to have a well founded African Christian Faith, there is need for people who substantially give their lives to make Christianity in Africa. These theologians are indeed giants on whose shoulders we stand. Twelfth, we are aware that
syncretism is one of those elements that exist in Africa. People find themselves moving back and forth to the Church and to their traditional religions. Some Christians feel that Christianity does not take their traditional cultures seriously. Some physically belong to the Church but their hearts are spiritually absent. They still hold on to their African Traditional Religion. The question to ask is: does syncretism happen because people have not internalised the tenets of Christian Faith and made them their own? From what we have argued in the previous pages, one can argue that there is syncretism because there is no dialogue between people’s culture and the Gospel.

Concluding

In this article, we have fundamentally argued that inculturation is a two-fold process: first, it presupposes a grasp of the faith and doctrine; second it requires a shift from the traditional spiritual paradigm of belief unto a practice of the faith through the use of cultural values which are shaped by the Gospel. The bottom line or the intended result is the positive transformation of life and the salvation of people within their respective culture which must be respected and studied because every culture has something to teach us.

This essay has clearly showed that inculturation has been at the heart of the Church. In fact, it begins with Jesus Christ through his incarnation which is a symbol of inculturation par excellence. It has therefore discussed the development of inculturation in history. It has appreciated the different attempts made by the Church to encourage the ongoing process of inculturation for many centuries. Regrettably, the Council of Trent decelerated its process although there are many examples of Churchmen who have encouraged the ongoing process of Inculturation, the likes of Mateo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili, Cardinal Lavigerie, Pius XII and Paul VI. This article has also demonstrated different challenges that this process faces today while proposing a number of perspectives if the Church in Africa is truly to be African. These perspectives range from the formation of clergy in African theology, family education, review of the process of African and Christian marriage, and the recognition that inculturation requires both an intellectual and spiritual grasp of Christian faith and culture, etc. An ecclesiological perspective is necessary in order to shift the mindset of worshippers from one of going to Church to one of being Church. Inculturation is and ought to be a way of living as Church in Africa. Today’s advanced high-tech communication can be instrumental in continuing work of Christ in our multicultural societies.
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