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## Media Mindfulness as an Essential Tool for Faith Formation of African Youth in the Digital Era

Elizabeth Titilayo Aduloju, Ph.D

### Abstract

In today's media-saturated world, young people are exposed to a variety of media content and gadgets, including television, films, the internet, social media, video games, and music. It is notable that contemporary young people, irrespective of their race or social class, are now connected through computers and smartphones, which afford them significant power and opportunities for socialisation, education, entertainment, evangelism, and catechesis. However, their activities, coupled with the culture of secularism, have led to a decline in church attendance and catechetical studies among youth in Africa. Furthermore, while these media can enrich experiences, they do not always promote what is genuine, sound, and beautiful, and they all reassess the faith formation and education of young people in Africa considering secularism and advancements in digital technology. Media mindfulness is essential for integrating faith formation activities with digital media interactions. Consequently, this article employs conceptual analysis to investigate the effectiveness of media mindfulness as a tool for faith development and formation among young people in Africa. The article concludes that incorporating media mindfulness in youth will empower them to engage critically with the content they consume, make informed decisions, and produce original content.

**Keywords:** Faith formation, Digital media, Media, Media mindfulness, Strategy, Youth

### Introduction

In today's media-saturated world, television, movies, the Internet, social media, video games, and music are popular forms of media that occupy much of young people's time and daily routines. Also, with secularism culture, with an increase in societal ills and a waning in the number of those who attend Church and catechetical studies among the youth, the task of faith formation and education of young people is critical and immense (Usselmann, 2020a), in an age of overwhelming digital media. Today, young people of every race and social class are connected to the world beyond through computers and phones in ways their parents and grandparents could scarcely imagine. These technologies - laptops, phones, the Internet, social media, etc. - offer users enormous power and many gifts, particularly in young people's socialisation, education, entertainment, evangelisation, and catechesis. Usselmann (2020a) further states that, although these media are gifts, as Pope Francis pointed out, they do not

always promote what is true, good, and beautiful and, therefore, do not often support the dignity of the human person. They are undoubtedly great tools for evangelisation, but if misused, they can lead to evil. For instance, the irresponsible use of the media can undermine the good of the person by being controlled by the power of the gadgets, alienated from actual human contact and addicted, in some cases, to drugs, gambling, games, sexting, pornography and so on (Aduloju, 2020).

The world we are in today has changed the way people pursue and express their involvement and participation in the Church and other public spheres. What constitutes active participation of the young people in the Church is changing over time. The years of innocence, when young people were formed and educated formally and informally through families, peers, churches, schools, and society, were far gone. Their lives are now being changed alongside a large-scale transformation in education, work, leisure, faith/moral formation, and relationship formation (Aduloju and Ojo, 2019), not only in Africa but in many countries of the world. It is not far-fetched, therefore, to see that people today live in a highly technological-driven society where everything takes the prefix 'e', for example, e-World, e-Generation, e-Church, e-Priests, e-Parish, e-Youth, e-Seminarians, e-Banking, e-Business, e-Research, e-Fundraising, e-Tithing, even e-Confession and many others (Chibuko, 2019). This is to say that young people's lives are now undergoing a new formation in the virtual environment. Unfortunately, they prefer to listen to the dictates of this e-Everything than harkening to the voice of parents, teachers, pastors, etc (Aduloju, 2020).

Based on the various challenges and effects of the newer technological world on Catholic youth, in particular, they must know and understand how their faith, values, and the Gospel values they learn in catechesis, sermons, and schools help them live happy and fulfilled lives within the all-encompassing digital environment. Hence, through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the Church understands the challenges of today's Catholic youth and has been advocating for media literacy education and mindfulness within faith formation to teach the youth how to engage the media they use daily critically. Thus, integrating an innovative approach through media mindfulness into their faith formation can help young Catholics and adults question the media they consume, evaluate it, make independent decisions, and create

their own content (Usselman, 2020a). Media mindfulness allows youth to see the relationship between faith and the media they use. With media mindfulness as the basis for their formation and education, the youth would allow faith to guide their presence on blogs, chat rooms, and social networking sites, shaping their text messaging and internet surfing habits. Consequently, the Christian message will be authentic, liveable, and accessible to a generation that knows only the wired world and is 24/7 e-connected (Usselman, 2020a).

### **The Notion of Faith Formation**

According to the Oxford Living Dictionaries, 'faith' is derived from Latin *fides* and Old French *feid*. Faith is complete confidence or trust in a person, thing, or concept. Within religion, one can define faith as "belief in God or the doctrines or teachings of religion" (Dictionary.com) Meanwhile, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) says that

Faith is, first, a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, the Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself to God and to believe absolutely what he says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature (no. 50).

This CCC definition of faith is more acceptable in the context of this paper. Equally, the term "formation" is derived from the Latin word *formare*, which means "to mould", "to fashion", and "to direct". It means the holistic development of an individual's faculties and abilities, which involves the individual's change, growth, and transformation. In short, this affects all the dimensions of human learning – cultural, physical, intellectual, psychological, social, moral, and spiritual (Aduloju and Ojo, pp. 202-203). Another way to conceive formation is to see it as a process that empowers a person to integral development in the light of Christian ideals. The formation is, therefore, an organic, lifelong, and holistic process involving the correct thinking (orthodoxy), right behaviours (orthopraxy), and right feelings (orthopathy) of individuals and communities (Portland Seminary, 2022).

The word "faith formation" is sometimes used as a synonym for Christian education classes, which in many places, including Nigeria, is still popularly referred to as "Sunday School". Faith formation can be understood as the process of adapting to the image of Jesus Christ for

the glory of God and the good of others. This is the very mission of God's Church: to equip and prepare the followers of Jesus Christ so that they may be sent out into the world to build God's kingdom. Thus, faith formation is seen as every moment, encounter, or relationship that deepens our trust in God and reshapes how we perceive and engage with His creation. At its core, faith formation is the Church's divine mandate to prepare and empower disciples of Jesus Christ to carry His message and extend His kingdom throughout the world. It is the ongoing journey through which our faith matures, and our lives are continually transformed by the love of God (Spirit and Truth Publishing, n.d.).

Hence, faith formation focuses on deepening initial conversion to the faith. In other words, conversion is the goal of faith formation and is a lifelong process. In the Catholic Church, faith formation is geared towards nurturing the conversion directed not only towards the service of the believing community but also to society at large. It thus nurtures the mind and the heart so that words and deeds may evidence the gospel message (Sadlier.com, n.d). Faith formation, therefore, is an invitation to a way of life. This is why the Church should always strive to CONNECT the good news of Jesus with the daily experiences of the youth (Clements, 2015), particularly in the era of digital/social media proliferation.

### **Conceptualising Media Mindfulness**

To fully understand the concept of media mindfulness, it is pertinent to look at the two words separately before defining them within the context of this paper. The word 'media' is the plural form of 'medium, which (broadly speaking) describes any communication channel. According to Stoltzfus (2020), media can include anything from printed paper to digital data and encompasses art, news, educational content, and numerous other forms of information. Media is also seen as anything that can reach or influence people, including phones, television, and even the Internet. In the context of informatics, 'media' means both the devices used to store data (hard drives, CD-ROMs, diskettes, etc.) and the ones used to transmit it (cables, wires) or even propagate it in its many forms (videos, sounds, podcasts, etc.). In modern times, media are gravitating increasingly toward the digital side of this field. Some of these contemporary forms of media, such as the Internet or social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), have completely revolutionised our world.

Mindfulness is the essential human ability to be fully present, aware of where and what one is doing, and not excessively reactive or overwhelmed by what is happening around one. It is a quality that every human being already possesses. It is not something one has to conjure up; one must learn how to access it (Mindful Staff, 2020). It is believed that no matter how far we drift away, mindfulness is right there to snap us back to where we are and what we are doing and feeling.

Therefore, media mindfulness is a reflective disposition for engaging with media to recognise media consumption/production's impact on one's mood/emotions, life, and those around one. The more appropriate way of looking at media mindfulness is to look at it from the perspective of Hailer and Pacatte (2010), who say that "media mindfulness is media literacy education in the context of faith communities and faith formation" (p. 2). According to them, media mindfulness adds Gospel values to the media literacy approach, discovering what this reflection process means for us as disciples. Equally, Usselmann (2020b), points out that media mindfulness takes the media literacy concept and adds a theological reflection framework that integrates values articulation into the media literacy pedagogy. For her, media mindfulness is media literacy within faith formation. Thus, media mindfulness can focus on any medium, such as television, newspapers, social media, etc., and its production and popular culture. Since the 21st-century youths consume media like water, it is vital to guide them on how to be mindful of what they listen to, see and watch on the digital media. Media mindfulness will equip them with the capability to appropriately and wisely use media technologies. It will also be timely to build and form the faith of African Catholic youths through media mindfulness. Already, media mindfulness is viewed as a positive response to the cries of people who feel that media bombardment is destroying the values and characters of youth today; incorporating it into their formation and education is urgently needed.

### **Viewing Media through Media Mindfulness Lenses**

Two lenses help people to view the media messages critically and wisely utilise the media gadgets. According to Hailer & Pacatte (2007), these are the lenses of faith and mindfulness. The lens of faith stresses that all of creation can reveal God to us and encourages all Christians to see the world as a place full of wonder and awe and the media as a potential

location for discovering the presence of God in all manner of unlikely places. Through this eye of faith, one can be rooted in the values of the Gospel daily to live the spiritual values of Jesus in everyday life and, therefore, find meaning. In a like manner, the second lens offers a reflective strategy that questions and discerns. This lens allows media users to study each medium within the context of its own structure and language. One can agree with Hailer and Pacatte that utilising these two lenses can lead young media users to be critical and discriminate when engaging the media, thereby deepening their faith life in faithful and relevant ways for twenty-first century living amidst the highly mediated world.

### **Understanding Media Literacy**

It would only be complete to look at the concept of media mindfulness by understanding what media literacy is. No doubt, the two terms work *pari passu*. Hence, according to the Centre for Media Literacy, media literacy

is a twenty-first-century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages in various forms – from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. For education to succeed, it must incorporate media literacy education into it (Centre for Media Literacy, n.d.).

Similarly, according to Aduloju, the awareness, mindset, and capacity to use digital tools and resources to recognise, access, manage, integrate, assess, analyse, and synthesise digital resources is known as media literacy. It is the capacity to generate latest information, produce media, and interact with people in particular contexts to facilitate positive social action.

Based on the definitions above, media literacy has the potential to promote the understanding of how media work, how they can affect people's lives, and how to use them creatively and productively. With so many advertisements, commercialisation, and viewpoints, it is not so easy to separate fact from fiction, good messages from bad and ugly ones, and to guide the exploration of the media surrounding our young people today. According to the CML, media literacy is the ability to "access, analyse, evaluate, create and participate" in the media we encounter (Centre for Media Literacy, n.d.).

### Media Usage of Young People in Africa

Contemporary African youths engage and explore the e-world, especially the social media platforms – Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok – like never before in their daily activities. Unsurprisingly, millions of people in Africa have adopted and used these platforms and many others for communication, receiving and spreading information and entertainment. In fact, as of January 2022, Nigeria alone had more than 109 million internet users. Of course, this is the highest number reported in Africa, with Egypt taking the second position with over seventy-five million users (Kamer, 2022). The 2011 UNICEF South African Report on Children Social Media shows that of the 44 million users of MXit, 73% of the users comprise people between the ages of 13 and 25, pointing to the fact that the majority of the users of South Africa's most popular social network are teenagers and young adults (Ephraim, 2013). He further states that statistics from Social Network Statistics show that in all the 49 African countries listed, 35–40 per cent of users of social networks comprise people not older than twenty-five. In Nigeria, about thirty-three million (15.8 per cent of the Nigerians) are active social media users as of January 2021, of which young people are the majority (Ephraim, 2013).

Table 1: Internet users and population statistics for Africa 2021

African Region	Population (2021 EST)	Pop % of World (31-Dec-2000)	Internet Users 31-Dec-2020	Penetration % of Population	Internet Growth % 2020 – 2021	Facebook Subscribers 31-Dec-2020
Total for Africa	1,373,486,514	4,514,400	590,296,163	43.0 %	12,975 %	255,412,900
Rest of the World	6,502,279,070	356,471,092	4,463,594,959	68.6%	88.3%	2,475,026,941
World Total	7,875,765,584	360,985,492	5,053,891,122	64.2 %	100.0%	2,730,439,841

Source: [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com) (2021)

Like their contemporaries in the developed world, Essoungou (2010) believes that African youths have fully embraced the catchy and trendy new digital technology and social media. The truth remains that these platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube and many others, offer free access to young people and allow them to spend more time playing games, watching cartoons and videos and chatting endlessly with friends both far and near than engaging in a worthwhile event or attending catechetical classes. Corroborating this, Essoungou writes that studies suggest that when Africans go online (with their mobile phones), they spend much of their time on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and so on). Sending and reading e-mails, reading news, and posting research queries have become less critical for Africans. It is a truism that those recent technologies, as individuals have them today, have been valuable and helpful to them in all human endeavours. Based on the experience of contemporary young people, one can say that they cannot live without digital and social media. This is why Aduloju (2019) stresses that these "technologies have bit by bit taken a vital part in the people's day-to-day lives, and being without them would be unimaginable for some people, particularly the young ones" (p. 159).

Aduloju (2019) further argues that new media technology is critical because it is used for everything and is like everything else. For instance, digital media aids people in living well and comfortably functioning as reasonable persons in the community. This means that it has the power to promote human happiness and fulfilment of purpose (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2000). Moreover, Aduloju (2019) avers that both young and old can benefit from technology by learning to value their own dignity, appreciating the opinions and feelings of others, developing a sense of shared responsibility, and becoming more independent, respectful, and able to communicate. Unsurprisingly, digital media have become central to young people's understanding of the world and their role in it. Many of them now walk around with wireless technology in the palm of their hands. Thus, they can easily tweet, text, post, and talk all day, yet sometimes, they feel disconnected from the people and realities around them (Ladner, 2018).

New media technology is essential in today's e-connectivity world because it is used for everything. Like everything else, it has challenges, dangers, harms, and risks. These risks are aptly captured by Pope Francis (2019) when he writes,

The digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, and violence, even in the extreme case of the 'dark web'. Digital media can expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation, and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships. New forms of violence are spreading through social media, for example, cyberbullying; the Internet is also a channel for spreading pornography and the exploitation of persons for sexual purposes or through gambling (no. 88).

No doubt, these close circuits also facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, inciting prejudice and hate. Of course, how young people use digital media can make them inhuman in the sense of being blind to the vulnerability of others and prevent them from self-reflection. To many youths, media usage has brought a kind of digital migration in which they withdraw from their families and cultural and religious values to the extent that they enter a realm of loneliness and self-invention. Indeed, if technology is used in these ways, it will result in a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity (Pope Francis, 2019). Thus, the Church must not leave the youth in the clutches of this trending digital media but should strive harder to rescue them from sinking into the ocean of digital media. It is, therefore, imperative for the Church to think of new ways of educating and forming the faith of young people in the era of digital media proliferation.

### **The Need for Youth Faith Formation in Africa in the Digital Era**

The number of youths in Africa is increasing. A few years ago (in 2015), 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa. By 2030, the number is forecasted to increase by 42 per cent. By 2055, it is expected to have more than doubled from the current levels (United Nations, 2013). Many of this teeming population are digitally connected and can access various digital and social media. Of course, these have opened them to many opportunities and significantly changed their lives. According to Ephraim, "The introduction of computer technology, and in the past 15 years, the adoption of the Internet, have tremendously changed the methods of operation in all facets of life on the African continent. Daily operations in industry, finance,

arts, and education have become faster, more accessible, and global. With the emergence of social networks in the past 5 years, interpersonal, socio-economic, and socio-cultural exchanges have been taken to a whole new level" (2013, p. 4).

Despite the many benefits of digital media technology to the youth, it also has many disadvantages. As observed, youth today spend much time using digital technology and social media. This digital environment they inhabit has an enormous impact on their entire lives. For instance, it profoundly impacts their use of time and space, their self-understanding, understanding of others and the world in general, and their ability to communicate, learn, be informed and enter a relationship with God and others (Pope Francis, 2019, no. 83). No doubt, the technological realities that young people are exposed to create an obstacle to their sincere growth in faith and societal values. According to Pope Francis,

Young people also experience setbacks, disappointments, and profoundly painful memories. Often, they feel "the hurt of past failures, frustrated desires, and experiences of discrimination and injustice, of feeling unloved and unaccepted." Then, too, "there are moral wounds, the burden of past errors, and a sense of guilt for having made mistakes" (no. 83).

Today's young people are challenged early, beginning with their first exposure to television, movies, and the Internet. Much of the media is aligned against Christian values, and African youths spend about one-third of their free time on social media and the Internet. The messages they communicate are often in direct opposition to the teaching of Catholicism, and young people are deeply impacted by what they absorb from the media (Wallace, 2017). Regrettably, the powerful impact of digital media on young people's lives will continue to grow and evolve even faster.

Based on these facts, youth's faith formation is needed and vital now more than ever. Youth faith formation focuses on providing children and youth with the tools and experiences to encourage and support them as they travel on their faith journey amidst the proliferation of digital media. The formation of faith in youth is more important for the Church today than ever, and the Church should not shy away or slack on this all-important aspect of the growth of future leaders. According to Aduloju & Ojo (2019), youth faith formation reinforces and reflects the objective of having the youth in an ever-deepening relationship with God through

active participation and youth media ministry. This will give the youth a broader knowledge and understanding of the history and traditions of the Church. Thus, "the goal of youth formation is to provide a strong foundation in the basic beliefs and traditions of the Catholic faith. It is hoped that youth formation will help communicate God's word to the young people to let them grow in faith as 'followers of Jesus'" (p. 204).

Looking critically at the faith formation of the youth in the era of social media, the Church and society should focus on the youth formation to systematically re-orient them to get on well with their youthful exuberance, pro-life phenomenon and prospects to prepare them as future leaders of both the Church and the society. He believes that today's youth in dire need of active training in the modern world is a great challenge to the Church and other formation agents, particularly in Africa. Thus, the agents must prepare and take some giant steps to take particular care of the youth's well-being (Aduloju and Ojo, 2019). If the Church's youth programme is more of the same ineffectual discipleship efforts that produce young people with a nominal faith, the Church will work harder yet deliver the same results (Clement, 2015). Hence, practising media literacy that integrates faith and media mindfulness is necessary for digital youths' faith formation and education.

### **The Core Concepts of Media Literacy**

As media users, we must stop and reflect on all we see, hear, and feel when we engage with media messages. This means that it is essential to know how media are created so we know the techniques involved in grabbing our attention. However, that is only one part of being media literate or mindful. The crucial part is asking questions such as, Who created this message? What techniques are used to attract my attention? Why is this message being sent? What values, ideologies or points of view are being communicated or omitted from this message? How might people understand this message differently? Thus, understanding the concepts of media literacy has become necessary. Thus, as cited by Young African Leaders Initiatives (2015), the Centre for Media Literacy (CML) developed the following five core concepts:

i. All media messages are constructed: this means that media messages are not accidental or naturally occurring; they are carefully constructed, much like buildings or highways. Every media text is the result of deliberate choices made by its creators, who select specific materials, formats, and techniques to achieve effects. Understanding who built the message, what tools they used, and why they did so is essential to decoding its meaning. ii. Media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules. This states that each form of communication has its creative language. That is, messages are crafted using a creative language unique to each medium. Just as literature relies on metaphor and rhythm, media employs its own grammar and syntax. For instance, ominous music in a film can heighten fear, a close-up shot can evoke intimacy, and bold headlines can signal urgency or importance. Recognising these conventions helps audiences become more critical and less vulnerable to manipulation.

The other concepts are: iii. Different people experience the same media message differently: here, and more importantly, is the notion that media messages are not experienced uniformly. Each viewer brings a distinct set of life experiences, shaped by age, gender, education, and cultural background, that influence how they interpret what they see, and moreover, media is never neutral. Embedded within every message are values and perspectives that reflect the priorities of its creators. Choices about which characters to feature, what settings to use, and how narratives unfold all convey implicit judgements about what matters and who deserves attention. These embedded viewpoints shape public perception, often subtly. v. Most media messages are organised to gain profit and/or power: most media messages are designed with profit or power in mind. The media landscape is largely driven by commercial interests. Newspapers and magazines prioritise advertising space before allocating room for news. Television programming is interwoven with commercials, and the internet has become a global arena for persuasion—whether by corporations, influencers, or political groups. Understanding this underlying motive is crucial to navigating the media we consume.

Suppose the youth understand the core concepts behind every media message they encounter and ask these questions regularly about the messages they see, read, and hear. In

that case, they can become more conscious and mindful of whether to accept or reject media messages as legitimate.

### **Incorporating Media Mindfulness Strategy into Faith Formation of African Youth**

For Catholics, the faith perspective means bringing the Gospel values and Jesus' example into conversation with the media messages. This is media mindfulness! It includes differentiating among the values, messages, and meaning of life espoused by faith groups and interpreted by the media. This is to say that media literacy education is teaching and learning about media, values, and the critical skills necessary for living in the twenty-first century (Hailer & Pacatte, 2007). They further aver that a media-literate person will be aware of the boundaries between reality and the constructive reality of the media and know how to navigate them in meaningful and mindful ways. Incorporating a media mindfulness strategy into the formation of young people in Africa involves, first, developing their critical thinking skills through media literacy education. That is, equipping them with the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and participate in media messages.

Therefore, integrating a media mindfulness strategy into the faith formation of young people is about helping them to ask questions about the media they create and consume. This is necessary because, as already pointed out, although these media are gifts, they only sometimes promote what is accurate, sound, and beautiful. Therefore, they often do not support the dignity of the human person. It is even more crucial than ever for Catholic youths to know and understand how their values, specifically the Gospel values they teach and learn in catechesis, help them live happily and fulfilled within the all-encompassing e-connectivity environment (Usselmann, 2020b). If the Church in Africa does not give this teeming population the skills to integrate these values into their everyday choices, they will not have faith as a foundation and grounding force in their future lives. Thus, teaching the faith is not for the moment but for a lifetime.

The media mindfulness wheel can help us understand how to teach Catholic faith and values to a media-centric generation and guide them in their faith formation experience. The wheel follows a four-step methodology of theological reflection (listen, reflect, dialogue, act). The

methodology is circular since the questions help us become more profound as we move along in the discernment process of our media experience.

### Media Mindfulness Wheel Strategy



The diagram is scanned from *Our Media World: Teaching Kids K-8 About Faith and Media* by Gretchen Hailer and Rose Pacatte, page 130. Copyright © 2010, Daughters of 2020 Sr. Nancy Usselman, FSP. All rights reserved.

As specified in the wheel strategy, there are four steps or actions to take while engaging with the media:

First step: In this step, we ask: What is going on? What am I seeing, hearing, and feeling? Second step: Here we ask: What is really going on? Who pains? Who gains?

Third step: This step connects with our Christian values, so we ask: What difference does it make? What Christian values does this media experience support or ignore? This step will help the youth to question the values the media artefact communicates and will also enable them to examine if that is in accord with what they believe and what the Church teaches. This concerns morality, the good and bad of actions, spiritual values, and our existential longings.

Fourth step: This step aids the individual to ask, 'What difference can I make?' What response seems appropriate in the light of my Christian beliefs? This is the hardest step to concretise. It

means asking oneself: What do I take away from this media experience? Does it challenge me? Does it reveal some social issue that begs my concern? Does it open me up to different points of view? If so, what action will I take as a result? (Hailer & Pacatte, 2007).

This wheel method of theological reflection can be used with any popular media artefact: movie, song, TV show, social media feed, YouTube video, or video game. Strategising ways to insert media mindfulness in a faith formation education puts critical thinking and discernment skills at the core of a lived faith. This is an excellent way of discussing, for instance, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, and our belief in God by evaluating how or if the artefact of the culture alludes to the human yearning for something more, that deep human desire for God (Usselman, 2020b). Faith formation of the youth through the media mindfulness wheel in the digital age will build their critical thinking skills, such as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media messages. They can bring their values and Gospel values into conversation with those messages. The youth will be able to ask questions about the media they consume and create their own content, thereby allowing them to think more deeply and consciously about the media environment.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, media mindfulness stands as a vital and transformative tool in the faith formation of African youth navigating the complexities of the digital age. Today's media landscape is not merely a backdrop to young people's lives; it is the very environment in which they form identities, build relationships, and interpret the world around them. From social media platforms to streaming services, digital content shapes their values, emotions, and aspirations, often more powerfully than traditional institutions. Therefore, catechesis that seeks to be relevant and impactful must engage this reality head-on. Rather than viewing digital media as a threat to spiritual development, the Church must recognise it as a dynamic space for evangelisation and formation. A well-planned, inclusive catechetical approach should not only use media to communicate the message of Jesus Christ but also teach young people how to critically engage with the media they consume. This means helping them discern the values embedded in media messages, understand the techniques used to influence perception, and reflect on how these messages align or conflict with the Gospel.

Media literacy, when framed as media mindfulness, becomes a catechetical imperative. It equips youth with the tools to interpret media through the lens of faith, fostering a deeper awareness of how media affects their thoughts, behaviours, and spiritual lives. By integrating media mindfulness into faith education, we empower young people to become not just passive consumers but active, discerning participants in their media culture, capable of recognising truth, resisting manipulation, and embodying Christian values in their digital interactions. Ultimately, teaching the faith today cannot be separated from the digital experiences that shape everyday life. To reach the hearts and minds of African youth, catechesis must be lived within the media culture they inhabit. Only then can the message of Christ be truly incarnated in their lives, guiding them not only within the church environment but also through the screens they carry in their pockets. Media mindfulness is not just a strategy; it is a spiritual discipline for the digital age, preparing our youth to live faithfully, think critically, and witness boldly in a world saturated with media.

Sr. Dr. Elizabeth Titilayo Aduloju is a member of the congregation of the Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel and lectures at the Department Mass Communication at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. She holds a Ph.D. and teaches media literacy and other communication courses. Her research areas include new media/digital literacy, media ethics, new media, and social media with a particular interest in helping children and youth make the best of the digital era, space and time. She is at present a Sub-Dean of the Students Affairs at the Catholic Institute of West Africa and a member of the Media and Information Literacy Coalition of Nigeria. Dr. Aduloju has published several articles in reputable national and international journals.  
taduloju@gmail.com

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## CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

By  
William Ikre

### Abstract

Climate change and the ongoing ecological crisis represent not only scientific and political challenges but also profound ethical dilemmas that question humanity's sense of justice, responsibility, and relationship with the environment. This paper explores these crises through the lens of intergenerational justice, emphasizing obligations to future generations who will inherit the consequences of present inaction. It also addresses global inequality, recognizing that vulnerable populations contribute least to emissions yet suffer the most severe impacts. Building on traditions in environmental ethics, including stewardship, ecocentrism, and sustainability, the article highlights the moral imperative for systemic transformation. The analysis considers international frameworks such as climate justice principles and the precautionary principle, while drawing on voices from both the Global South and grassroots climate movements. By framing the climate emergency as a moral and ethical crisis, this study argues that meaningful solutions require not only technological innovation but also a transformation of values toward equity, humility, and care for all life. The conclusion emphasizes that the pursuit of a just and sustainable future relies on cultivating ethical responsibility that extends beyond borders and generations.

**Keywords:** Climate change; ecological crisis; ethics; justice; responsibility; environment; intergenerational justice; global inequality; environmental ethics; stewardship; ecocentrism; sustainability; climate justice; precautionary principle; climate movements

### Climate Change and Ecological Crisis: An Ethical Perspective

#### Introduction

Climate change and ecological crisis represent two of the most pressing challenges of the twenty-first century, with consequences that extend far beyond science and economics into questions of justice, responsibility, and morality. The rising frequency of extreme weather events, loss of biodiversity, sea-level rise, and environmental degradation highlight the urgency of addressing these issues not only as technical matters but also as ethical ones.<sup>1</sup> The Niger Delta region of

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<sup>1</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 43. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch>. (Accessed, 15/09/2025).

Nigeria, one of the most oil-rich yet environmentally devastated regions of the world, exemplifies the intersection between climate change, ecological collapse, and ethical neglect.<sup>2</sup>

The global scientific consensus, articulated in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, warns that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have driven unprecedented planetary warming, intensifying floods, droughts, and sea-level rise.<sup>3</sup> While these effects are global, their burdens fall disproportionately on vulnerable communities in the Global South. In the Niger Delta, decades of oil exploitation, gas flaring, and frequent oil spills have resulted in large-scale ecological destruction.<sup>4</sup> Communities dependent on fishing and farming face polluted rivers, infertile soils, and rising health risks, while oil multinationals and state actors extract immense profits.<sup>5</sup>

This reality highlights an essential ethical paradox: those least responsible for the crisis suffer its worst impacts. Climate change and ecological degradation in the Niger Delta must therefore be analyzed through the lens of distributive justice, human rights, intergenerational responsibility, and ecological ethics.<sup>6</sup> Doing so allows us to frame the crisis not merely as an environmental challenge, but as a moral failure that demands urgent redress.

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<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta* (London: Amnesty International, 2009). 13-14. Available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org>. (Accessed, 15/09/2025).

<sup>3</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch>. (Accessed, 15/09/2025).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2011). Art. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jędrzej George Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil Companies and Village Communities* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2000). 97.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The Niger Delta case is not isolated but emblematic of a broader global injustice. Vulnerable communities, from those in Bangladesh to small island states, face parallel struggles.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the Niger Delta offers a stark, localized example where global warming converges with extractive industries, weak governance, and systemic corruption, resulting in a compounded ecological and ethical crisis.<sup>8</sup> By situating this crisis within ethical frameworks, this essay argues that a sustainable and just response to climate change requires not only technological and policy solutions but also a profound ethical reckoning that centers justice, accountability, and human dignity.

### **Climate Change:**

Climate Change (CC) has become one of the most widely used terms due to its importance and relevance over the past four to five decades. The Online Cambridge Dictionary would define it as “changes in the world's weather, in particular the fact that it is believed to be getting warmer as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.”<sup>9</sup> The National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) thinks that it is “any long-term change in Earth's climate or the climate of a region or city. This includes warming, cooling, and changes besides temperature.”<sup>10</sup> The characteristics of Climate Change are increases in average global temperature (global warming); changes in cloud cover and precipitation, particularly over land; melting of ice caps and glaciers and reduced snow cover; and increases in ocean temperatures and ocean acidity

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 87.

<sup>8</sup> Cyril Obi, “Oil Extraction, Dispossession, Resistance, and Conflict in Nigeria’s Oil-Rich Niger Delta,” *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 30, no. 1–2 (2010): 223–36.

<sup>9</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/climate-change> (Accessed, 12/07/2025).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/5-8/features/nasa-knows/what-is-climate-change-58.html>

– due to seawater absorbing heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.<sup>11</sup> Among other things, it affects every aspect of human existence: environmental, social, economic, political, and geographical. Because of its far-reaching influence, it has been described by Pope Francis as a “global problem with grave implications”.<sup>12</sup> Climate here is seen as the general weather conditions usually found in a particular place.

On the other hand, weather is the conditions in the air of the earth, such as wind, rain, or temperature, especially at a particular time over a specific area.<sup>13</sup> From the above, we can deduce that CC in its very nature is not a positive sign. It is a worrisome development that threatens the existence of man and other inhabitants of the planet Earth.

### **Ethical Frameworks for Understanding Climate Change**

Addressing climate change and ecological crisis requires moving beyond scientific data and economic cost-benefit analyses to engage with questions of moral responsibility, justice, and fairness. Ethical theories, such as deontology, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and rights-based approaches, provide crucial frameworks for understanding the duties of states, corporations, and individuals in addressing global warming.<sup>14</sup> These theories help guide decision-making by focusing on principles such as preventing harm, ensuring equity and justice, and promoting sustainable development, thereby clarifying responsibilities for climate mitigation and adaptation.

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in *Climate Change: Impacts, Vulnerabilities and Adaptation In Developing Countries*, <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/impacts.pdf> (Accessed, 23/08/2025).

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis. *Laudato Si* (On the Care of Our Common Home) The Holy See, 24th May 2015. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (Accessed, 23/08/2025).

<sup>13</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/weather> (Accessed, 22/08/2025).

<sup>14</sup> Paul G. Harris, *What's Wrong with Climate Politics and How to Fix It* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013). 39-47.

## Utilitarian Ethics

Utilitarian ethics provides one of the most influential frameworks for evaluating climate change policies. As Peter Singer and other utilitarian thinkers argue, the principle of minimizing harm and maximizing overall well-being requires a strong commitment to mitigation strategies that prevent catastrophic outcomes.<sup>15</sup> For instance, aggressive reduction of carbon emissions can be justified on utilitarian grounds because the aggregate benefits—averting sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and mass displacement—far outweigh the short-term economic costs to industrialized nations. This approach also extends to adaptation, where allocating resources to vulnerable regions enhances overall global welfare by reducing avoidable suffering. However, critics caution that utilitarian reasoning can sometimes obscure issues of fairness, as it risks prioritizing aggregate outcomes over the rights of marginalized groups.

## Deontological Duties and Rights-Based Approaches

In contrast, deontological ethics emphasizes duties and rights rather than outcomes. Grounded in Kantian philosophy, this perspective emphasizes the moral responsibility of states, corporations, and individuals to refrain from treating others merely as means to an end.<sup>16</sup> Applied to climate change, this means industrialized nations have an obligation to reduce emissions because continuing to pollute knowingly violates the rights of others—particularly vulnerable populations whose livelihoods depend on fragile ecosystems. This perspective also informs international agreements such as the Paris Accord, which can be seen as attempts to codify duties of responsibility and accountability. Rights-based approaches, like those developed by Henry Shue,

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cambridge University Press, 2011). 231.

<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Yale University Press, 2018). 98.

stress that basic rights—such as subsistence and security—are non-negotiable and must be protected even in the face of competing economic interests.<sup>17</sup>

### **Justice, Equity, and Intergenerational Responsibility**

One key approach is distributive justice, which emphasizes the fair allocation of burdens and benefits. John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness suggests that inequalities are only justified if they benefit the least advantaged.<sup>18</sup> Applying this principle to climate change, affluent nations that have historically emitted the most greenhouse gases bear a greater responsibility to support vulnerable communities.<sup>19</sup> This resonates strongly in the Niger Delta, where oil wealth enriches multinational corporations and Nigerian elites, while local populations endure pollution and poverty.<sup>20</sup>

A related approach is climate justice, which argues that climate change is not just an environmental problem but also a profound issue of equity and human rights. Henry Shue emphasizes that those who contribute the least to the problem are often the most vulnerable to its harms.<sup>21</sup> Scholars such as Simon Caney and Dale Jamieson further argue that climate justice necessitates the recognition of transnational obligations that extend beyond borders and across generations.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ecocentrism**

Another framework is ecocentrism, also known as deep ecology, which shifts the ethical focus from human-centered (anthropocentric) views to the intrinsic value of ecosystems. Arne Naess,

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). 60-62.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). 35.

<sup>20</sup> Cyril Obi, "Oil Extraction, Dispossession, Resistance, and Conflict in Nigeria's Oil-Rich Niger Delta," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 30, no. 1-2 (2010): 219.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 25-62; Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—and What It Means for Our Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 169-175.

the founder of deep ecology, argued that non-human life forms possess inherent worth independent of their utility to humans.<sup>23</sup> This perspective is crucial for regions like the Niger Delta, where mangroves, wetlands, and fisheries sustain not only human livelihoods but also ecological balance. When oil spills destroy biodiversity, the harm is not only economic but also a violation of ecological integrity.<sup>24</sup>

### **Intergenerational Justice**

Ultimately, the concept of intergenerational justice emphasizes the duties owed to future generations. As Stephen Gardiner has argued, climate change presents a “perfect moral storm” because the most severe impacts will be felt by people not yet born, who lack political voice today.<sup>25</sup> In the Niger Delta, where ecological destruction has already compromised farmland and fisheries, intergenerational injustice is evident: children and grandchildren will inherit degraded environments with diminished opportunities for survival and dignity.<sup>26</sup> By framing climate policy as not only a question of present obligations but also of legacy, intergenerational justice redefines sustainability as a duty rather than a policy preference.

Taken together, these ethical frameworks provide tools for analyzing the Niger Delta crisis in moral terms. They compel us to ask not only what can be done to mitigate harm, but also who should act, who should pay, and how justice can be restored.

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<sup>23</sup> Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement,” *Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1973): 95.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2011), Ch. 5: “Vegetation, Aquatic and Public Health Issues,” 179-180.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 152.

<sup>26</sup> Nnimmo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2012), 101-103.

## Global Climate Change, Justice, and Inequality

Climate change is fundamentally an issue of global inequality. While its causes are concentrated in the industrial activities of wealthier nations, its most devastating effects fall disproportionately on poorer countries and marginalized communities.<sup>27</sup> This unequal distribution of responsibility and vulnerability lends climate change a distinctly ethical dimension, challenging the prevailing political and economic order.

Historically, industrialized nations, including the United States and members of the European Union, as well as emerging economies such as China, have contributed the majority of cumulative greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>28</sup> According to the UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*: “large parts of Africa, many small island states, and vulnerable coastal regions will face some of the most damaging effects of climate change—including threats to food security, health, and livelihoods—despite contributing least to global emissions.”<sup>29</sup> This dynamic exemplifies what Thomas Pogge describes as the “global order’s unjust structure,” where the benefits of industrialization are unevenly distributed, but its harms are shared globally.<sup>30</sup>

The Niger Delta exemplifies this injustice on a microcosmic scale. Oil production has generated billions of dollars in revenue for the Nigerian state and multinational corporations, yet local communities remain trapped in poverty, suffering ecological devastation and climate

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<sup>27</sup> Paul G. Harris, *What’s Wrong with Climate Politics and How to Fix It*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch>. (Accessed, 15/09/2025)

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World* (New York: UNDP, 2007), 24.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002). 23.

vulnerability.<sup>31</sup> According to the United Nations Development Programme, more than 70 percent of people in the Niger Delta live on less than \$2 a day, despite the region providing the majority of Nigeria's export earnings.<sup>32</sup> The ecological costs—spilled oil, gas flaring, and deforestation—are borne locally, while the profits flow to national elites and foreign investors.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, climate change, according to Bassey, “threatens the livelihood, food availability, and health of the population. Coastal erosion, flooding, and subsidence have already affected most of Africa's coastline, and problems are bound to increase unless urgent actions are taken to build resilience.”<sup>34</sup> These impacts disproportionately affect women, children, and rural communities, which rely directly on natural resources for their survival.<sup>35</sup> From an ethical perspective, this raises profound questions about distributive justice: who should bear responsibility for addressing these harms, and how can the benefits of development be shared more equitably?

Globally, the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR), enshrined in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, acknowledges that while all states share responsibility for addressing climate change, wealthier countries with greater historical emissions have a larger obligation to act.<sup>36</sup> Yet the failure of industrialized nations to fulfill commitments to climate finance, adaptation support, and technology transfer underscores the

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<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta* (London: Amnesty International, 2009). Available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org>. (Accessed, 13/09/2025).

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Niger Delta Human Development Report* (Abuja: UNDP Nigeria, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Jędrzej George Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, 225-231.

<sup>34</sup> Nnimmo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Chuks Okereke, *Global Justice and Neoliberal Environmental Governance: Ethics, Sustainable Development and International Co-operation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 62.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (New York: United Nations, 1992), art. 3, para. 1.

persistence of global injustice.<sup>37</sup> For regions like the Niger Delta, this translates into continued ecological vulnerability with little meaningful international assistance.

The ethical challenge is therefore twofold: first, to hold historically high-emitting nations accountable for their disproportionate contribution to climate change; and second, to ensure that resource-dependent regions such as the Niger Delta are not condemned to sacrifice ecological integrity for economic survival. This requires not only national policy reforms but also a transformation of global governance to prioritize justice, equity, and sustainability.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Niger Delta: A Case Study of Ecological Crisis and Ethical Neglect**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria illustrates, in stark terms, the intersection of climate change, ecological degradation, and ethical neglect. Rich in oil and gas reserves, the Delta has become one of the most environmentally degraded regions in the world due to decades of intensive extraction, weak regulation, and systemic corruption.<sup>39</sup> This ecological crisis raises pressing ethical questions about corporate responsibility, state accountability, and the rights of affected communities.

Oil exploitation in the Delta began in the late 1950s, and since then, more than 7,000 documented oil spills have contaminated rivers, farmland, and mangrove forests.<sup>40</sup> According to the United Nations Environment Programme's landmark *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (2011), some areas are so polluted that groundwater contains benzene levels 900 times above World Health

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<sup>37</sup> J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley Parks, *A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). 239-242.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, 152.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Watts, *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta* (Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books, 2008). 66-67.

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International, *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta* (London: Amnesty International, 2009). Available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org>. (Accessed, 17/08/2025).

Organization guidelines.<sup>41</sup> Gas flaring—burning off natural gas during oil extraction—has also contributed significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution, with severe health impacts including respiratory diseases, cancer risks, and acid rain that corrodes roofs and depletes soil fertility.<sup>42</sup> Anyadike, alludes to this in *Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Conceptual and Empirical Issues*, saying that: The greatest concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> resulting in global warming are the result of burning of fossil fuels, gas flaring and desertification, meaning that human activities are primarily responsible for climate change, measures to mitigate the effects and impacts of climate change will involve among others, legislative and technological approaches.<sup>43</sup>

Despite generating immense revenue for both the Nigerian state and multinational corporations, the Niger Delta's communities remain deeply impoverished. The United Nations Development Programme has described the paradox as “poverty in the midst of plenty.”<sup>44</sup> Villages located near oil wells and pipelines often lack access to clean drinking water, electricity, and healthcare, while suffering the direct consequences of spills, flares, and ecological collapse.<sup>45</sup> The situation exemplifies what ethicists call “double injustice”: communities are deprived of the benefits of resource wealth while bearing the full brunt of environmental harm.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2011), 9.

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Communities* (New York: Human Rights Watch, January 1999), 66–72; United Nations Environment Programme, *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2011), 9, 64–67, 162.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond N. C. Anyadike, *Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Conceptual and Empirical Issues*, Enugu Forum Policy Paper 10, (2009). 13.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Niger Delta Human Development Report* (Abuja: UNDP Nigeria, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Cyril Obi, “Oil Extraction, Dispossession, Resistance, and Conflict in Nigeria's Oil-Rich Niger Delta,” *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 30, no. 1–2 (2010). 220–223.

<sup>46</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 19.

Corporate actors, particularly Shell, ExxonMobil, and Chevron, have been repeatedly accused of neglecting their responsibilities. Court cases in both Nigerian and international jurisdictions have revealed patterns of environmental negligence, lack of compensation, and complicity with state security forces in suppressing local protests.<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International has documented cases where oil companies failed to clean up spills for years, leaving farmland infertile and water sources poisoned.<sup>48</sup> From an ethical perspective, this constitutes a violation not only of environmental stewardship but also of basic human rights.

Local communities have responded through various forms of resistance, from peaceful protests to militant insurgency. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, mobilized global attention in the 1990s to the plight of the Ogoni people, emphasizing the injustice of ecological destruction.<sup>49</sup> Saro-Wiwa's execution by the Nigerian government in 1995, widely condemned internationally, remains a symbol of the ethical failures of both state and corporate actors in addressing the Niger Delta crisis.<sup>50</sup>

Today, the region stands at the intersection of ecological crisis and climate vulnerability. Rising sea levels threaten to inundate coastal settlements, increased rainfall intensifies flooding, and degraded ecosystems undermine resilience to climate shocks.<sup>51</sup> Without urgent ethical

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<sup>47</sup> Jędrzej George Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, 119.

<sup>48</sup> Amnesty International, *Clean It Up: Shell's False Claims About Oil Spill Response in the Niger Delta* (London: Amnesty International, 2015). Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org>.

<sup>49</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992). 81.

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Ogoni Crisis: A Case-Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: HRW, 1995). 40-43.

<sup>51</sup> Nnimmo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa*. 113.

engagement—rooted in justice, accountability, and ecological responsibility—the Niger Delta risks becoming a permanent sacrifice zone in the global fossil fuel economy.

### **Corporate Responsibility, Governance, and Ethical Accountability**

The Niger Delta crisis underscores the ethical failures of both multinational oil corporations and the Nigerian state. Extractive industries operate under what Michael Watts calls a “petro-violence” regime, where oil wealth becomes entangled with corruption, repression, and ecological harm.<sup>52</sup> From an ethical standpoint, this raises the issue of corporate responsibility and the moral obligations of both states and businesses toward communities affected by resource extraction.

Oil corporations such as Shell, Chevron, and ExxonMobil have long claimed adherence to corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks, emphasizing environmental management and community development projects.<sup>53</sup> However, numerous independent reports have shown that these CSR initiatives are primarily symbolic, serving more as public relations tools than as meaningful interventions. Frynas *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Oil and Gas Sector* argues that while firms often publicize environmental and social programs, many such initiatives fail to address underlying structural issues or to deliver substantial change<sup>54</sup>. Amnesty International, for example, has documented Shell’s repeated failures to maintain pipelines properly, its delayed responses to oil spills, and its manipulation of spill investigation data.<sup>55</sup> Such practices contradict

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Watts, *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*, 30-33; 120-127.

<sup>53</sup> Wayne Visser, *The Age of Responsibility: CSR 2.0 and the New DNA of Business* (Chichester: Wiley, 2011). 150-200.

<sup>54</sup> Jędrzej George Frynas, “Corporate Social Responsibility in the Oil and Gas Sector,” *Journal of World Energy Law & Business* 2, no. 3 (2009), 183.

<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International, *Clean It Up: Shell’s False Claims About Oil Spill Response in the Niger Delta* (London: Amnesty International, 2015). Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org>. (Accessed, 20/08/2025).

the ethical principles of stewardship and accountability, leaving communities exposed to ongoing harm.

The Nigerian state also bears significant responsibility. Decades of rentier governance have entrenched corruption, mismanagement, and elite capture of oil revenues.<sup>56</sup> Despite being the custodian of national resources, the government has frequently sided with oil companies against local communities, deploying security forces to suppress protests and protect extraction sites.<sup>57</sup> These actions represent a violation of the state's ethical duty to protect the rights and welfare of its citizens. Instead, governance has often prioritized economic interests over ecological and human rights concerns.

International frameworks, such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), emphasize that corporations must respect human rights and avoid complicity in human rights abuses. At the same time, states must protect their citizens from such violations.<sup>58</sup> Yet in the Niger Delta, these principles remain largely aspirational. Litigation efforts in Nigerian and foreign courts have yielded some victories for affected communities—for instance, Dutch courts have held Shell partly liable for oil spills in Nigeria—but systemic accountability remains elusive.<sup>59</sup>

From an ethical standpoint, the Niger Delta exemplifies what Stephen Gardiner has termed a “perfect moral storm.” Gardiner argues that climate change represents “a perfect moral storm

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<sup>56</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). 54-58.

<sup>57</sup> Cyril Obi, “Oil Extraction, Dispossession, Resistance, and Conflict in Nigeria’s Oil-Rich Niger Delta,” *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 30, no. 1–2 (2010), 224–226.

<sup>58</sup> United Nations, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework* (New York: United Nations, 2011), 13.

<sup>59</sup> Chima Williams and Channa Samkalden, “Landmark Judgment Against Shell in Dutch Court,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 13, no. 2 (2021): 451–456.

because it brings together many problems that each would be serious on its own: together, they threaten disaster”<sup>60</sup> — a diagnosis equally applicable to the oil-related ecological crisis in the Delta. Here, multiple failures converge: weak governance and regulatory capture, corporate negligence in spill prevention and remediation, and the broader injustices of a global system that externalizes ecological costs onto marginalized communities. This ethical framing gains particular significance when viewed alongside recent developments in legal accountability. In their analysis of the *landmark judgment against Shell in the Dutch Court*, Chima Williams and Channa Samkalden show how, for the first time, a transnational oil company was held directly liable for pollution in Nigerian villages.<sup>61</sup> The judgment not only exposes Shell’s corporate misconduct but also highlights the complicity of state structures that historically failed to protect local populations. Interpreted through Gardiner’s lens, such cases underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms to prevent the recurrence of what is, in essence, a sustained moral storm borne disproportionately by the most vulnerable.

Drawing on Henry Shue’s framework of climate justice, the Niger Delta can be conceptualized as a site of “triple injustice.” First, environmental destruction has been pervasive: oil spills, gas flaring, and ecological collapse undermine the health of ecosystems and human livelihoods, echoing Shue’s insistence that those least responsible for environmental harm often suffer its gravest effects.<sup>62</sup> Second, the region’s resource wealth has not translated into prosperity for its inhabitants. Instead, communities face deep socio-economic deprivation, mirroring Shue’s argument that climate change and ecological degradation disproportionately burden those already

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<sup>60</sup> Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Chima Williams and Channa Samkalden, “Landmark Judgment Against Shell in Dutch Court,” 391–402.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 2–4.

marginalized, depriving them of the means to adapt or recover.<sup>63</sup> Third, Niger Delta communities are marked by political exclusion. Despite bearing the brunt of environmental harm, they remain largely voiceless in decisions about oil governance and climate policy, exemplifying Shue's claim that justice requires protecting those least able to defend their own interests in global and national arenas.<sup>64</sup>

Interpreted through Shue's ethical lens, the Niger Delta illustrates how overlapping forms of vulnerability magnify injustice, demanding responses that combine environmental remediation, equitable resource distribution, and genuine political inclusion. Thus, addressing these injustices requires a reorientation of governance structures to prioritize the well-being of local communities and to hold corporations accountable not only legally but also morally.

Moving forward, solutions must integrate principles of environmental justice, transparency, and participatory governance. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, ensuring independent monitoring of oil operations, and enforcing liability for environmental damage are crucial steps in mitigating environmental risks.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, corporations must move beyond token CSR initiatives and embrace genuine ethical accountability, recognizing the rights of communities as equal stakeholders in the management of natural resources.<sup>66</sup>

### **Ethical Alternatives and Pathways for Sustainability**

In addressing the intertwined crises of climate change and ecological degradation, particularly in vulnerable regions such as the Niger Delta, a shift toward ethical alternatives and sustainable

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<sup>63</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 38-40.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 171-174.

<sup>65</sup> Augustine Ikelegbe, "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 223-225.

<sup>66</sup> Nnimmo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa*. 157-158.

pathways is imperative. As Bryan G. Norton argues, “sustainability is best understood as an intergenerational obligation: to preserve the integrity and resilience of ecological systems so future generations may flourish,”<sup>67</sup> a vision that demands grounding in justice, stewardship, and responsibility. Moreover, sustainability entails a practical ethic of care, since “adaptive management requires that humans act as stewards of ecosystems, learning from experience while safeguarding ecological integrity over the long term.”<sup>68</sup> The current extractive model, based on short-term profit and fossil fuel dependency, has proven ethically indefensible and ecologically destructive.

One ethical pathway involves promoting renewable energy systems that reduce dependence on fossil fuels and provide cleaner, more equitable access to energy. Nigeria, despite being Africa’s largest oil producer, also possesses abundant renewable energy potential in solar, wind, and hydropower.<sup>69</sup> A transition toward decentralized, community-based renewable energy systems could simultaneously reduce emissions, create local employment opportunities, and enhance energy security.<sup>70</sup> Such an approach aligns with the principle of distributive justice, ensuring that communities long burdened by oil extraction benefit directly from sustainable development. Without such alternatives, the cycle of ecological devastation and poverty will continue.

Another pathway is ecological restoration and reparative justice. The UNEP Ogoniland Report estimated that full environmental recovery of polluted areas in the Niger Delta could take up to 30

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<sup>67</sup> Bryan G. Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). 320.

<sup>68</sup> Bryan G. Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management*, 339.

<sup>69</sup> International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), *Renewable Energy Prospects: Nigeria* (Abu Dhabi: IRENA, 2015); See also: International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), *Renewable Energy and Jobs – Annual Review 2021* (Abu Dhabi: IRENA, 2021), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Godfrey Akpojivi, “Renewable Energy and the Nigerian Economy: A Case for Decentralized Power,” *Energy Policy* 144 (2020): 111–118.

years.<sup>71</sup> Yet progress has been slow, hampered by corruption, corporate negligence, and lack of political will.<sup>72</sup> Reparative justice requires not only cleanup but also compensation for affected communities and accountability for multinational corporations.<sup>73</sup> Globally, similar principles apply: nations most responsible for ecological harm must contribute to restoring ecosystems and supporting those most affected. This aligns with Henry Shue's notion of "protecting the vulnerable," emphasizing the moral obligation to repair harm done to disadvantaged communities.<sup>74</sup>

Equally important is inclusive governance and participatory decision-making. For too long, local communities in the Niger Delta have been excluded from meaningful participation in decisions affecting their lands and livelihoods. Strengthening mechanisms for free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), as well as ensuring community representation in environmental monitoring, are crucial steps in achieving this goal.<sup>75</sup> Such participatory governance embodies the principle of procedural justice, allowing those most affected to have a voice in shaping their futures.

Education and cultural transformation also play a key role. Climate change and ecological crises are not merely technical problems; they are moral and cultural challenges requiring shifts in values and priorities. Scholars such as Naomi Klein argue that climate change demands a reevaluation of economic systems based on growth and exploitation, toward models that emphasize resilience,

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<sup>71</sup> UNEP, *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2011), 94.

<sup>72</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Communities* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 55.

<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Communities* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 55.

<sup>74</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*. 19.

<sup>75</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Free, Prior and Informed Consent: An Indigenous Peoples' Right and a Good Practice for Local Communities: Manual for Project Practitioners* (Rome: FAO, 2016), 43-45.

equity, and ecological balance.<sup>76</sup> In the Niger Delta context, grassroots environmental movements—such as Environmental Rights Action and the Niger Delta Women’s Movement—demonstrate how ethical resistance can generate alternative visions of sustainability rooted in local knowledge and solidarity.<sup>77</sup> “Ethical resistance” is grounded not just in opposition, but in moral values such as justice, responsibility, care, solidarity, that use non-violent, deliberative, often locally grounded methods; and that aims not merely to protest but to build alternatives.

Finally, addressing these crises requires global solidarity. The Niger Delta’s suffering is not an isolated tragedy but part of a wider system of ecological injustice, wherein resource frontiers in the Global South bear the costs of consumption patterns in the Global North.<sup>78</sup> A truly ethical response requires international cooperation, climate finance, and technology transfer to ensure that vulnerable regions are supported in adaptation and transition.<sup>79</sup>

The ethical pathways to sustainability thus encompass more than technical solutions. They demand a profound moral reorientation—one that prioritizes the dignity of communities, the health of ecosystems, and the rights of future generations. Without such an ethical transformation, sustainability will remain an empty slogan, and regions like the Niger Delta will continue to bear the burdens of a failing global order.

## Conclusion

The climate change and ecological crisis are not merely a scientific or political issue; it is, above all, an ethical challenge. Its roots lie in centuries of exploitation, extractivism, and unequal

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<sup>76</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014). 58.

<sup>77</sup> Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, *Community-Led Monitoring of Oil Industry Impacts in the Niger Delta* (Benin City: ERA/FoEN, 2018), 4-8.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008). 112-115.

<sup>79</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). 29-31.

development, which have concentrated benefits in a few hands while externalizing costs onto vulnerable communities and ecosystems. The Niger Delta exemplifies this pattern vividly: a region endowed with vast natural wealth but reduced to poverty and ecological devastation through exploitative practices and political neglect.<sup>80</sup>

Globally, the crisis demands recognition of both historical responsibility and present vulnerability. Industrialized nations, which contributed most to cumulative greenhouse gas emissions, bear an ethical duty to lead in mitigation, provide climate finance, and support adaptation efforts worldwide.<sup>81</sup> Without such commitments, the ecological crisis will deepen existing inequalities, exacerbating divisions between the North and South, the rich and the poor, and between present and future generations.<sup>82</sup>

At the same time, solutions must be rooted in justice and sustainability. A just transition away from fossil fuels must protect workers and communities; ecological restoration must prioritize those who suffer most from environmental harm; and international governance must move from voluntary pledges toward binding commitments that ensure accountability.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of Indigenous and local knowledge is not optional but central to building resilient and just futures.<sup>84</sup>

Ultimately, the ethical perspective insists that climate change and ecological crisis cannot be resolved by technical fixes alone. They require a profound moral shift: from exploitation to

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<sup>80</sup> Michael Watts, *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> IPCC, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 17.

<sup>82</sup> Farhana Sultana, "The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality," *Political Geography* 91 (2021). 5.

<sup>83</sup> Dimitris Stevis and Romain Felli, "Global Labour Unions and Just Transition to a Green Economy," *International Environmental Agreements* 15, no. 1 (2015), 42.

<sup>84</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 120.

stewardship, from profit-driven growth to ecological balance, and from indifference to solidarity. As Henry Shue reminds us, fairness and protection are the cornerstones of climate justice.<sup>85</sup> The Niger Delta, like countless other sites of ecological struggle across the world, testifies to the urgency of this shift. It challenges the international community to adopt a vision of justice that transcends borders, acknowledges intergenerational responsibilities, and restores dignity to both people and the planet.

WILLIAM IKRE, CSsR., is a Catholic priest of the Redemptorist Congregation. I graduated from the Alphonsian Academy in Rome with a Licentiate and a Doctorate in Moral Theology. I currently teach at the Dominican Institute in Ibadan, Nigeria, where I also serve as the dean of studies. Email: wtikre@yahoo.com

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<sup>85</sup> Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*, 112.

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## THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

By:

Kelvin Banda and Moses Chanda

### Introduction

This paper explores the significant interaction between philosophy and theology in the African context, partly as disciplines of inquiry but largely as conceptual components, with a focus on how they affect mission throughout the continent of Africa. The paper applies postcolonial and decolonial ideas and viewpoints to properly understand complexities of this connection. The paper acknowledges the critical impact decolonisation – more specifically, the deconstruction of colonial influences through the African perspective on philosophy and theology today – plays. Understanding this method also clarifies some of Africa’s current existential issues.

To shed more light on the intricate web of their interaction, the paper, first outlines, the history, present, and future of philosophy and theology in Africa. Second, the study examines how missionary work has influenced philosophy and theology in Africa, as well as the difficulties encountered in advancing these fields during the postcolonial and decolonisation eras. The study concludes by outlining the present issues in African philosophy and African Theology.

### 1. Philosophy and Theology in African Context

African Theology and African Philosophy are two fields of study that have taken into account the historical and cultural contexts of the continent while building their analytical frameworks.<sup>86</sup> The field of Theology is concerned with the systematic study of the divine, including [organised] religions, belief systems and rituals.<sup>87</sup> Philosophy, on the other hand, investigates issues of existence, ethics, truth, knowledge, and human experience.<sup>88</sup> Significant aspects of both disciplines have guided humanity over the years, demonstrating certain connections between them

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<sup>86</sup> Marumo, O.P. & Chakale, M. “Understanding African philosophy and African spirituality: challenges and prospects,” *Gender & Behavior*, (2019), 11695.

<sup>87</sup> Zachhuber, J, “What is Theology? Historical and Systematic Reflections,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 21, 3-4 (2021), 198.

<sup>88</sup> Priest, G, “What is Philosophy?” *Philosophy* 81, 2 (2006), 189.

despite their rather diverse approaches and methodologies, including their ontological and epistemological foundations. Among some of these relational elements are the values and ways in which they have influenced their application in Africa's context of the intellectual environment.

Arguably, understanding Africa's rich philosophical and theological traditions and the depth and diversity of their applications requires an understanding of their fundamental elements. The subsequent discussions examine the various ways that the two disciplines are related. Again, as stated in the introductory section of this paper, it is crucial to note that though this paper loosely uses the terms, African Philosophy and African Theology to mean scholastic disciplines, and discussion in the paper largely presuppose the conceptual applications of significant of the two disciplines within the African context.

## 1.1 African philosophy

The conceptual understanding of African philosophy suggests the integration of the historical, cultural, and intellectual dimensions of the continent into its supposed inquiry.<sup>89</sup> This supposedly all-encompassing approach spans many worldviews, traditions, and philosophical stances common within African societies. Understanding the distinctive qualities and contributions of African philosophy, according to Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada,<sup>90</sup> demands an acquaintance with its fundamental concepts and their supposed significance within the African context. The following sections discuss some of these concepts.

### 1.1.1. Communalism

In contrast to some western philosophical traditions that are said to prioritise individualism, African philosophy is said to place a significant focus on communalism.<sup>91</sup> Scholars, claim that this emphasis underscores the importance of relationships, shared ideals, and community welfare. The idea of communalism which has its root in the African proverb 'I am because we are,' is predicated on the idea that every member of the community is interconnected.<sup>92</sup> *Ubuntu*, a Bantu term that

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<sup>89</sup> Marumo and Chakale, *Understanding African philosophy and African spirituality*, 11696.

<sup>90</sup> Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L., & Agada, A, African Philosophy of Religion: Concepts of God, Ancestors, and the Problem of Evil. *Philosophy Compass* 17, 8 (2022), 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ochieng'-Odhiambo, F. "African Philosophy of Communalism," In *Handbook of African Philosophy*, (2023) 1.

<sup>92</sup> Hord, F. L., Okpara, M. L., & Lee, J. S, *I am because we are: Readings in black Philosophy* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 479.

supposedly embodies human interconnectivity, compassion, and reciprocal duty is one example.<sup>93</sup> This suggests that *Ubuntu* shapes African philosophical thought by fostering a sense of humanity towards others and a shared destiny. One can, however, wonder if communalism is idealised and if it ignores internal disputes and power dynamics in favour of oversimplifying the complexity of African communities.

### 1.1.2 Oral Tradition and Storytelling

African philosophy has a robust oral history intricately linked to narrative, according to Ilmi's observation in *African Traditional Philosophies*.<sup>94</sup> There is a debate on the prevalence of oral history in African traditions. According to proponents, African societies' elders and sages have historically communicated their thoughts, wisdom, and knowledge orally through proverbs and folklore, rather than in writing. It is widely acknowledged that storytelling is a powerful instrument for communication, a way to transmit philosophical concepts, preserve cultural memory and cultivate a sense of self.

These oral traditions are thought to include important philosophical ideas and moral precepts that explore important topics related to life, morality and the human experience.<sup>95</sup> Griots or traditional storytellers, are shown as being crucial to the transmission of this information from one generation to the next. The romanticisation of oral traditions, however, can be questioned considering possible biases, errors, and the evolution of narratives over time. Furthermore, there are worries that the accessibility and diversity of African philosophical viewpoints may be restricted by the idea that oral tradition is the only or main means of philosophical communication.

### 1.1.3 Pluralism, Diversity and Holistic Worldviews

African Philosophy is a diverse and pluralistic field rather than a single, homogenous tradition.<sup>96</sup> African Philosophy includes many different philosophical traditions,<sup>97</sup> such as Afrocentricity, Yoruba philosophy, Akan philosophy, and *Ubuntu* ethics. Similarly, there are many different

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<sup>93</sup> Van Breda, A.D, "Developing the Concept of Ubuntu as African Theory for Social Work Practice," *Social Work* 55, 4 (2019), 440.

<sup>94</sup> Ilmi, *African Traditional Philosophies*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Sone, E, "African Oral Literature and the Humanities: Challenges and Prospects," *Humanities* 7, 2 (2018), 3.

<sup>96</sup> Imafidon, E, "Beyond continental and African philosophies of personhood, healthcare and difference," *Nursing Philosophy* (2021), 6.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groupings in Africa, and each has its philosophical traditions and viewpoints. This pluralism promotes discussion, idea exchange, and the appreciation of many points of view. The statement contests any oversimplified endeavours to standardise African philosophical ideas and emphasises the necessity of a sophisticated, situation-specific comprehension of every custom. One of the characteristics that should set African thought apart is its diversity.

In terms of its worldviews, African philosophy purportedly distinguishes itself through an assertedly holistic worldview, characterised by a comprehensive understanding of reality that purportedly incorporates all facets of existence—ranging from the material to the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions.<sup>98</sup> This holistic perspective ostensibly recognises the interdependence of diverse facets of existence, spanning the environmental, societal, and spiritual realms.

Issues of cosmology, metaphysics, and the intricate interplay between the material and spiritual dimensions are purportedly frequent topics of discussion among African philosophers.<sup>99</sup> The claimed centrality of African metaphysical concepts revolves around notions such as spiritual intermediaries, ancestor veneration, and vital energy. Advocates assert that this all-encompassing philosophical approach elucidates the intricate interactions among various aspects of life, ostensibly tracing its origins to indigenous African cosmologies.

However, critically examining these assertions necessitates a nuanced consideration of the empirical and epistemological foundations underpinning these claims. The characterisation of African philosophy as distinctly holistic demands scrutiny, particularly in discerning whether such an overarching framework adequately captures the diverse and dynamic philosophical traditions across the continent. Additionally, an interrogation of the alleged prevalence of discussions on cosmology and metaphysics within African philosophical discourse prompts an exploration of the breadth and depth of these deliberations, considering potential regional variations and the impact of external influences.

Moreover, the presentation of African metaphysical concepts, such as spiritual intermediaries and ancestor veneration, found in contexts such as the Yoruba and Akan philosophy can have some

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<sup>98</sup> Ilmi, A.A, “African Traditional Philosophies” in *Gender, Democracy and Institutional Development in Africa. Gender, Development and Social Change* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2019), 8.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

specific contextual differences.<sup>100</sup> It therefore can be misleading to envelope these cultural specificities into one box and term it, African philosophy. As such, one significant point is that a critical inquiry should assess the extent to which these concepts are universally representative of African philosophical thought or if they reflect localised traditions that may not resonate uniformly across the continent.

## 1.2. African Theology

African spirituality, religion, and civilisations have all contributed to the development of African theology, a dynamic and diverse subject of study that has grown over time.<sup>101</sup> It is a distinctive theological viewpoint that captures the variety of African religious worldviews, experiences, and traditions. Examining the essential elements of African theology requires drawing attention to its unique qualities, contextual significance, and close ties to the spiritual and cultural identities of the African people.

### 1.2.1 Indigenous Spirituality and Ancestral Veneration

As articulated by Igboin,<sup>102</sup> the underpinning of African theology in traditional African spirituality is a distinctive hallmark of the discipline. One of the distinctive features of African religious practices is cultivating a harmonious relationship with the divine, including the cosmos. Indigenous African spirituality acknowledges ancestors' role as intermediaries between the mortal and the divine, alongside the acknowledgement of spiritual forces in everyday existence.<sup>103</sup> Rituals and practices within African religious frameworks pivot around venerating ancestors as a conduit for seeking guidance, perpetuating cultural memory, and fostering a sense of temporal continuity. This facet of African theology sheds light on integrating indigenous belief systems into the discourse of theology.

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<sup>100</sup> Imafidon, *Beyond continental and African philosophies*, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Magezi, C. & Igba, J.T, "African Theology and African Christology: Difficulty and Complexity in Contemporary Definitions and Methodological Frameworks." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74,1 (2018), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Igboin, B.O, "Beliefs and Veneration of Ancestors," In: Aderibigbe, I.S., Falola, T. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 108.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

### 1.2.2 Contextual Theology

Contextual theology is highly valued in African Theology, meaning that theological speech and contemplation are firmly anchored in the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the African people.<sup>104</sup> African theology places a strong emphasis on the need to solve problems and challenges pertinent to African communities, in contrast to Western theology, which has frequently been criticised for its disconnection from local contexts. When it comes to regional problems and topics like poverty, social justice, the environment, and post-colonial experiences, contextual theology is quite receptive. African theologians work on these issues to offer theological guidance and insights that align with Africans' everyday realities.

### 1.2.3 Liberation Theology and Social Justice

The tenets of liberation theology, originating in response to socio-political injustices, particularly within the milieu of post-colonial Africa, profoundly impact African Theology.<sup>105</sup> Recurrently, African theological perspectives align with principles of economic empowerment, social justice, and the liberation of marginalised persons and communities. The conceptual basis of African theology contends that theological discourse should serve as a tool for emancipation and transformative societal change, a sentiment consonant with the ethos of liberation theology. This theological paradigm advocates for elevating human dignity and dismantling oppressive institutional structures.<sup>106</sup> Noteworthy figures such as Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu have spearheaded the intersection of theology with social justice and human rights issues.

### 1.2.4 Interconnectedness and Ubuntu

The foundational underpinning of African theology resides in the concept of interconnection, closely intertwined with the *Ubuntu* ideology.<sup>107</sup> *Ubuntu*, an African philosophical framework, accentuates the interconnectedness of individuals and their inherent humanity. African theologians frequently invoke this concept as a guiding principle in their theological analyses. The emphasis

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<sup>104</sup> Magezi and Igba, *African Theology and African Christology*, 2.

<sup>105</sup> West, G, "Africa's Liberation Theologies: An Historical-Hermeneutical Analysis. The Changing World Religion Map," In: Brunn, S. (eds) *The Changing World Religion Map*. (Dordrecht: Springer 2014), 1972.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Ochieng'-Odiambo, *African Philosophy of Communalism*, 1.

on interconnection underscores the importance of a shared sense of responsibility, fellowship, and mutual care.<sup>108</sup> It beckons theologians to deliberate upon communal well-being, societal cohesion, and reconciliation matters. This perspective dramatically influences ethical considerations and theological constructs within the African context.

### 1.2.5 Interfaith Dialogue

African theology, according to Magezi and Igba underscores the imperative of interfaith dialogue,<sup>109</sup> given the diverse religious landscape prevalent across the continent, encompassing traditions such as Christianity, Islam, indigenous African faiths, and various syncretic belief systems. The active engagement of African theologians in interfaith dialogues reflects a commitment to fostering mutual respect and harmony among these diverse religious communities. Such dialogues serve as platforms for collaborative endeavours on shared concerns, including but not limited to peacebuilding, healthcare, and education. In this manner, interfaith conversation plays a pivotal role in facilitating the bridging of religious divides within the context of African theology, thereby accentuating the coexistence and diversity inherent in the religious fabric of the African continent.<sup>110</sup>

## 2. Relationship between philosophy and theology within an African context

The conversation surrounding the interaction of philosophy and theology in African contexts is complex and dynamic, having developed over many centuries. In Africa, the study of philosophy and theology are not distinct fields; they are intertwined and influence and enhance one another. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the complex interrelationship between philosophy and theology within an African framework, emphasising its shared themes, historical interdependence, and distinctive features.

### 2.1 Historical Interconnectedness

Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada posits that the profound intellectual legacies intrinsic to Africa constitute the foundational nexus between philosophy and theology throughout the continent's

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<sup>108</sup> Hord *et al.*, 1995:479

<sup>109</sup> Magezi and Igba, *African Theology and African Christology*, 2.

<sup>110</sup> Magezi and Igba, *African Theology and African Christology*, 2.

historical trajectory.<sup>111</sup> For them, preceding the advent of Western religions and philosophies, African societies autonomously cultivated distinctive religious and philosophical frameworks. These indigenous belief systems, comprehensively addressing the interplay among individuals, the natural environment, the supernatural realm, and existential quandaries, laid the groundwork for a holistic worldview.<sup>112</sup>

Notably, Christianity and Islam were arguably introduced to Africa as foreign ideals. Although there are various other religious groupings on the continent, the two religions are more prominent. The two religions encountered well-established philosophical and theological traditions upon their introduction to Africa. Contrary to supplanting indigenous customs, these foreign belief systems often coexisted, interacted, and evolved synergistically with their African counterparts. African philosophers and theologians adeptly integrated novel religious tenets with their pre-existing belief systems, engendering a synthesis of ideas that reflects a nuanced and dynamic interplay between indigenous and introduced thought.<sup>113</sup> This nuanced historical interaction underscores the resilience and adaptability of African intellectual traditions in the face of external influences.

## 2.2 Common Themes

The following common ideas link African philosophy and religion and contribute to their interconnectedness:

- **Cosmology:** understanding to comprehend the nature of the world, creation, and humanity's place in it, cosmological issues are explored by African philosophy and religion.<sup>114</sup> They frequently stress how everything is interrelated.
- **Morality and Ethics:** both fields study morality and ethics, delving into ideas of fairness, morality, and human responsibility.<sup>115</sup> African ethical frameworks, like *Ubuntu*, place a strong emphasis on the health and interdependence of communities.

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<sup>111</sup> Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada, 2022:2.

<sup>112</sup> Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada, 2022:2.

<sup>113</sup> (Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada, 2022:2)

<sup>114</sup> Agboada, E, "African Christian Theology and Christology: A Study of the Contributions of Kwame Bediako," *E-Journal of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences* 4, 3 (2023), 314.

<sup>115</sup> Molefe, M. & Maraganedzha, M, "African Traditional Religion and moral philosophy," *Religious Studies* (2022), 1.

- Ancestral Veneration: African philosophy and theology emphasise honouring one's ancestors.<sup>116</sup> It is widely held that ancestors mediate between the living and the divine as a reflection of the interdependence of past, present, and future generations.
- Social Justice: African philosophy and theology are dedicated to addressing oppression, inequality, and poverty.<sup>117</sup> They frequently support emancipation and human dignity.

### 2.3 Unique Characteristics

African philosophy and religion differ from their Western counterparts despite having specific shared characteristics:

- Community: a high emphasis on community is found in African philosophy, which reflects how intertwined people are.<sup>118</sup> This collective viewpoint frequently opposes Western individualism.
- Oral Tradition: traditionally, oral traditions, storytelling, and rituals have been used to convey African philosophy and theology instead of written books.<sup>119</sup> African culture is well ingrained in this oral tradition.
- Syncretism: native beliefs are mixed with those of other religions by African theologians and thinkers.<sup>120</sup> This syncretic approach makes a distinctively African expression of philosophy and faith possible.
- Contextual Relevance: African theology and philosophy provide special attention to challenges unique to African societies.<sup>121</sup> African identity, post-colonial issues, and colonialism are among the topics they discuss.

In the African context, philosophy and religion have a complex and entwined relationship characterised by similar themes, historical connections, and distinctive features. African philosophy reflects the continent's multifarious intellectual traditions, multifaceted religious environment, and unwavering dedication to social justice, ethics, and interconnectedness. The

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<sup>116</sup> Igboin, 2022:108.

<sup>117</sup> West, *Africa's Liberation Theologies*, 1972.

<sup>118</sup> Ochieng'-Odhiambo, *African Philosophy of Communalism*, 1.

<sup>119</sup> Ilmi, *African Traditional Philosophies*, 8.

<sup>120</sup> Ogbonna, N.I. & Agaba, S, "Syncretism in Relation to African Tradition Religion: Why the Uproar?" *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies* 8, 6 (2021), 88.

<sup>121</sup> Magezi and Igba, *African Theology and African Christology*, 3.

philosophical and theological conversation in Africa is being shaped and altered by this relationship, which adds to the continent's intellectual vibrancy and cultural diversity.

### 3. Impact of Mission-Work on Philosophy and Theology in Africa

Examining the impact of mission work on philosophy and theology in Africa is a complex and multifaceted undertaking that mirrors the continent's historical engagements with diverse ideologies and religions. The arrival of missionaries representing Christianity and Islam in Africa wielded substantial influence over indigenous belief systems, shaping and sculpting African philosophy and religion trajectories. To comprehensively grasp this dynamic, it is imperative to scrutinise the historical and contemporary ramifications of mission work across various disciplines, emphasising the inherent potential and challenges it has engendered.

#### 3.1 Historical Foundations

Sakupapa explains that Africa's theological and philosophical landscape underwent a profound transformation during the colonial era with the advent of Christian and Islamic missionaries. Because of these missions, which sought to convert Africans to Christianity or Islam, educational institutions, churches, and other places of worship were established. It is possible to distil the influence of missionary work on African philosophy and religion into five main categories.<sup>122</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Syncretism

Syncretism was typical as African cultures encountered foreign religious systems.<sup>123</sup> Mixing native African traditions with Christian or Islamic teachings is known as syncretism. As a result, distinctive versions of Islam and Christianity emerged that combined native worldviews, cosmologies, and rituals.

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<sup>122</sup> Sakupapa, T.C, "The Decolonising Content of African Theology and the Decolonisation of African Theology: Reflections on a Decolonial future for African Theology," *Missionalia* 46, 3 (2017), 407.

<sup>123</sup> Ogbonna, N.I. & Agaba, S, *Syncretism in Relation to African Tradition Religion*, 88.

### 3.1.2 Disruption of Traditional Belief Systems

Native African belief systems frequently declined or were replaced by missionaries' presence.<sup>124</sup> The continuity of traditional African religious and philosophical thought was called into question by this disturbance. Oral customs and traditions have been lost or weakened in number.

### 3.1.3 Translation of Religious Texts

The Bible and the Quran were among the holy writings' missionaries helped translate into African languages.<sup>125</sup> This influenced Africa's linguistic development and helped foreign religious ideas spread. For instance, David Livingstone a missionary explorer from Scotland arrived in Zambia in 1851 and settled among the Lozi people. Within a short period, he learnt the culture and language of the Lozi tribe. As a result of this, he made a crucial impact to translate both and New and Old Testaments into Lozi language.

### 3.1.4 Education and Literacy

Africans have access to education and literacy due to missionary schools.<sup>126</sup> This made it possible to interact intellectually with indigenous and foreign ideologies and theologies. Graduates from these institutions went on to play essential roles in the growth of African theology and philosophy.

## 4. Challenges and Opportunities

Several complex challenges and opportunities have influenced the impact of mission work on philosophy and theology in Africa. Some of them include the following:

### 4.1 Cultural Hegemony

Since missionaries frequently occupied influential and powerful positions, there was occasionally a risk of cultural hegemony.<sup>127</sup> They suppressed or undervalued native African ideas in favour of

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<sup>124</sup> Sakupapa, T.C, *The Decolonising Content of African Theology*, 410.

<sup>125</sup> Mbuwayesango, D.R, "Bible Translation in the Colonial Project in Africa and Its Impact on African Languages and Cultures," in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (2018), 496.

<sup>126</sup> (Meier zu Selhausen, 2019:25)

<sup>127</sup> Iwara, I.E, "Cultural hegemony and Africa's development process, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 9 (2015), 120.

imposing their own theological and philosophical viewpoints. One factor that led to a loss of cultural autonomy was this difficulty.

#### **4.2 Preservation of Indigenous Thought**

Through syncretism, many African communities maintained their native belief systems despite the difficulties presented by missionary efforts.<sup>128</sup> This preservation made the ongoing development of distinctive African theologies and philosophies possible.

#### **4.3 Intellectual Engagement**

Africans were able to critically engage with both native and foreign ideologies and theologies thanks to the education they received at mission institutions.<sup>129</sup> Graduates from these institutions went on to play significant roles in influencing African intellectual philosophy.

#### **4.4 Postcolonial Identity**

The ongoing formation of African identity is intricately intertwined with the legacy of the missionary tradition, a dynamic that persists amid the enduring repercussions of colonialism. This enduring tension profoundly influences how African philosophy and religion navigate the complex terrain of identity, autonomy, and cultural heritage. The narrative surrounding the impact of mission work on African philosophy and theology is nuanced and in a state of continual evolution. It is a chronicle of the intricate historical interplay between foreign religious doctrines and indigenous belief systems, highlighting the challenges and opportunities engendered by these cultural exchanges.

The enduring legacy of missionary endeavours remains a consequential element within Africa's intellectual and theological landscape, particularly as the region transforms the postcolonial and decolonial eras. The adaptability, synthesis, and establishment of distinct identity exhibited by African philosophies and theologies on the global stage stand as a testament to their inherent resilience

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<sup>128</sup> Ogbonna, N.I. & Agaba, S, *Syncretism in Relation to African Tradition Religion*, 89.

<sup>129</sup> (Meier zu Selhausen, 2019:25)

## 5. Challenges faced in the development of philosophy and theology during the postcolonial Period

Africa's postcolonial era was pivotal for the evolution of philosophy and theology. After gaining independence from colonial forces, African countries have numerous obstacles to overcome in their attempts to reshape their intellectual, religious, and cultural spheres. There are substantial obstacles that African philosophy and theology faced throughout the postcolonial era until modern times. Some of these include the following:

### 5.1 Loss of Cultural Heritage

The cultural legacy of Africa was significantly impacted by the colonial era.<sup>130</sup> Native African ceremonies, belief systems, and customs were frequently suppressed or compromised by colonial forces. This loss of cultural legacy severely hampered the advancement of African philosophy and religion. Numerous communities encountered a cultural disorder, finding reconnecting with their pre-colonial worldviews difficult. It became difficult to restore and revitalise ancient traditions while fitting them into modern theologies and ideologies.

### 5.2 Theological Syncretism

With the persistence of Christianity and Islam, native religious customs saw a comeback throughout the postcolonial era.<sup>131</sup> Many Africans tried to combine aspects of their native beliefs with Christianity or Islam, a technique known as syncretic practices. Despite allowing cultural customs to be preserved, syncretism also brought theological difficulties. African theologians struggled with the issue of how to lead their faith faithfully amid syncretic religious settings.

### 5.3 Political and Ethnic Conflicts

Ethnic and political strife have plagued postcolonial Africa, impeding the advancement of philosophy and theology.<sup>132</sup> Communities have been uprooted, cultures have been destroyed, and scholastic endeavours have been put on hold because of conflicts. Theological stances have occasionally been used as weapons to inflame racial conflicts. Due to these obstacles, African

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<sup>130</sup> Iwara, *Cultural Hegemony and Africa's Development Process*, 120.

<sup>131</sup> Ogbonna, N.I. & Agaba, S, *Syncretism in Relation to African Tradition Religion*, 88.

<sup>132</sup> Blanton, R., Mason, T.D. & Athos, B, "Colonial Style and Post-Colonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, 4 (2001), 474.

theologians and intellectuals have found it challenging to concentrate on their intellectual and spiritual growth.

#### 5.4 Access to Education and Resources

A substantial impediment hindering the progress of philosophy and theology in postcolonial Africa revolves around the formidable challenge of accessing high-quality education and resources.<sup>133</sup> The unavailability of adequate funding, limited presence of academic institutions, and scarcity of research resources significantly hampered the endeavours of numerous scholars. This pervasive obstacle not only curtails the potential contributions of African intellectuals to the broader landscape of international philosophical and religious discourses but also retards the organic evolution of indigenous intellectual traditions.

In the wake of the African postcolonial era, persistent challenges have emerged as formidable barriers to advancing philosophy and religion. Despite the adversities inherent in this context, African philosophers and theologians have exhibited remarkable resilience, steadfastness, and ingenuity in navigating the complexities associated with decolonisation, syncretism, cultural revitalisation, and the pursuit of academic excellence. Paradoxically, the trials encountered during this epoch have served, in many respects, as catalysts for progress on both intellectual and spiritual fronts, contributing substantially to the rich tapestry of contemporary African philosophy and religion. The enduring legacy of the postcolonial era attests to the vibrancy and endurance of African intellectual and religious traditions, persisting and evolving as Africa advances into the twenty-first century.

#### 6. Decolonisation and the Creation of Philosophy and Theology in Africa

The liberation of African states from colonial authority, known as decolonisation, was a significant turning point in the continent's history.<sup>134</sup> This era significantly influenced the advancement of philosophy and theology in Africa, in addition to denoting political independence. Native African philosophical and religious traditions were created and brought back to life in large part because

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<sup>133</sup> Oyeshile, O.A, "On Defining African Philosophy: History, Challenges and Perspectives," *Humanity & Social Sciences Journal* 3, 1 (2008), 57.

<sup>134</sup> Welz, M, Decolonization and Liberation, 23.

of the struggle for self-determination and cultural reclamation. This section highlights significant advancements and difficulties in the complex relationship between decolonisation and the rise of philosophy and religion in Africa.

### **6.1 Reclamation of Indigenous Philosophy**

The decolonisation process led to a renewed focus on native African philosophy.<sup>135</sup> Local philosophical traditions had frequently been neglected or suppressed during colonial authority in favour of Western ideals. African philosophers started the reclamation process – reviving and recreating indigenous philosophical thought – as soon as colonisation ended. This renaissance facilitated the rise of ideas rooted in African spiritual and cultural traditions.

### **6.2 Theological Syncretism and Transformation**

Ogbonna and Agaba are of the view that theological ideas could be reevaluated and transformed because of decolonisation.<sup>136</sup> Accompanying the persistence of Christianity and Islam was a renaissance of indigenous religious ideas and practices. Syncretism is the practice of many African cultures combining aspects of imported religions with components of their faiths. Theological issues were raised by this syncretism, but it also promoted a return to more conventional spiritual practices.

### **6.3 Intellectual Independence and Decolonised Thought**

During the decolonisation era, African philosophers and theologians expressed their intellectual independence.<sup>137</sup> To engage with African cultural, historical, and spiritual experiences was to pursue decolonised philosophy. Redefining African philosophy and theology, scholars focused on worldviews and narratives unique to contexts.

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<sup>135</sup> Kessi, *et al*, “Decolonizing African Studies,” *Critical African Studies* 12, 3 (2020), 272.

<sup>136</sup> Ogbonna, N.I. & Agaba, S, *Syncretism in Relation to African Tradition Religion*, 89.

<sup>137</sup> Kessi, *et al*, *Decolonizing African Studies*, 272.

#### 6.4 Bridging Cultural Divides

Within the diverse African environment, bridging cultural divisions was another necessity of the decolonisation process.<sup>138</sup> Philosophers and theologians must reconcile various worldviews and religious practices within a single country. Philosophy and theology have benefited from this effort to unite people while honouring cultural variety.

#### 6.5 Challenges of Ethical and Moral Renewal

The period of decolonisation in Africa brought to the forefront salient moral and ethical considerations, prompting a comprehensive reassessment of ethical standards and moral frameworks as the continent undertook the process of identity reconstruction.<sup>139</sup> The pivotal role played by theologians and philosophers in navigating the complexities of establishing new moral paradigms is evident through their active engagement in dialogues addressing justice, ethics, and human rights.

Within the annals of African history, the era of decolonisation exerted profound transformative effects on philosophy and theology. This epoch catalysed the resurgence of indigenous philosophical concepts, the reclamation of customary religious rituals, and the emergence of an intellectual class emancipated from colonial rule. Theological syncretism during this period facilitated the expression and exploration of spirituality. The enduring and intricate interplay between decolonisation and the evolution of philosophy and theology in Africa constitutes a dynamic, complex interaction that remains indispensable to the continent's ongoing intellectual and spiritual vitality. The challenges inherent in this transformative process, whether in reclaiming cultural heritage or resolving moral quandaries, persist in influencing the trajectory of African spirituality and philosophy.

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<sup>138</sup> (Blanton *et al.*, 2001:474)

<sup>139</sup> Molefe and Maraganedzha, *African Traditional Religion and Moral Philosophy*, 1.

## 7. Encountering Present Challenges in African Philosophy and Theology

Significant changes have occurred in African philosophy and theology, especially since decolonisation. Cultural reclamation, the resurgence of indigenous philosophy, and the dynamic interaction between indigenous and foreign belief systems have all influenced these professions. African philosophy and theology nevertheless face difficulties today that have an impact on their advancement and their relevance. The difficulties that African philosophy and theology face today highlight the necessity of constant critical engagement and adaptation. Some of these are discussed below:

### 7.1 Cultural Relevance and Globalisation

The swift advancement of globalisation has given rise to intricate inquiries on the cultural significance of African philosophy and theology.<sup>140</sup> There is a chance that these native systems will be overwhelmed by global civilisations. Modern academics struggle to engage with global philosophical and religious discourses while retaining cultural authenticity.

### 7.2 Interfaith and Inter-philosophical Dialogues

The difficulties of engaging in interfaith and inter-philosophical discussions arise as Africa's religious diversity grows.<sup>141</sup> The cohabitation of Christianity, Islam, traditional African faiths, and other belief systems begs the concerns of intellectual synthesis and theological harmony. It is a modern struggle to have productive conversations while honouring the diversity of beliefs and opinions.

### 7.3 Ethical and Moral Complexities

African philosophy and religion today must negotiate rugged moral and ethical terrain.<sup>142</sup> There are many difficulties regarding ethical, just, and human rights issues in a social and political

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<sup>140</sup> Afolayan, A.L. & Falola, T, "Introduction: Rethinking African Philosophy in the Age of Globalization," *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy* (2017), 2.

<sup>141</sup> Pratt, D, "Interreligious Dialogue: Ecumenical Engagement in Interfaith Action," In: Engebretson, K., de Souza, M., Durka, G., Gearon, L. (eds) *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education*. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4. Springer, Dordrecht. 2010,103.

<sup>142</sup> Molefe and Maraganedzha, *Molefe, African Traditional Religion and Moral Philosophy*, 1.

environment that is changing quickly. Scholars must be well-versed in philosophy and theology to address problems like ethical relativism, human rights abuses, and social inequities.

#### 7.4 Eco-philosophical and Environmental Concerns

Environmental and ecological issues are of growing significance in today's globe.<sup>143</sup> African philosophy and religion are now responsible for confronting these issues from an indigenous standpoint. In addition to considering the influence of ecological shifts on theological discourse, academics are delving into how conventional beliefs and philosophies might support ecological preservation and sustainable living.

#### 7.5 Access to Education and Resources

For researchers studying African philosophy and theology, unequal access to resources and education remains problematic.<sup>144</sup> Many aspirant intellectuals do not have access to high-quality academic resources, research facilities, or education. Creating inclusive academic environments, giving voice to up-and-coming voices, and providing access to research opportunities for individuals with little means are the challenges.

African philosophy and theology are dynamic fields constantly changing to meet the opportunities and difficulties of the modern world. Academics in these areas must deal with shifting cultural norms, interfaith discussions, complex ethical dilemmas, environmental concerns, and promoting fair access to resources and education. African philosophy and theology can continue to significantly impact the intellectual, moral, and spiritual landscape of the continent if they meet these problems head-on and remain flexible.

Researchers investigating African philosophy and theology confront a persistent issue characterised by glaring disparities in access to resources and education, as underscored by Kessi *et al.*<sup>145</sup> The prevalent challenge lies in the many aspiring intellectuals precluded from accessing high-quality academic resources, adequate research facilities, and quality education. The imperative task at hand involves the establishment of inclusive academic environments,

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<sup>143</sup> Kelbessa, W, "Environmental Philosophy in African Traditions of Thought," *Environmental Ethics* 40, 4 (2018), 309.

<sup>144</sup> Kessi, et al, *Decolonizing African Studies*, 272.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

amplifying emerging voices, and the provision of research opportunities for individuals with limited means.

The realms of African philosophy and theology constitute dynamic fields perpetually evolving to address the opportunities and challenges inherent in the contemporary world. Academics within these domains grapple with the fluidity of cultural norms, engage in interfaith dialogues, navigate intricate ethical dilemmas, contend with pressing environmental concerns, and advocate for equitable access to resources and education. The potential impact of African philosophy and theology on the continent's intellectual, moral, and spiritual landscape hinges upon their proactive confrontation of these issues and their sustained adaptability in the face of evolving circumstances.

### Conclusion

The enduring relationship between African Philosophy and African Theology, shaped by centuries of cultural nuances and spiritual quests, remains a pivotal force in shaping the intellectual landscape of the African continent. Philosophy, rooted in analytical thinking, grapples with fundamental questions about existence, morality, truth, knowledge, and the human experience, providing a structured framework for understanding life's complexities. In contrast, theology, characterised by systematic inquiry, delves into religious doctrine, rituals, and the divine, encompassing a broader study of diverse religious traditions.

This paper explored the pragmatic relationship between philosophy and theology, guiding the human experience across epochs. Focusing on the influential role of mission work, it navigates postcolonial and decolonial thought, emphasising the pivotal role of decolonisation and utilising deconstruction to unveil contemporary challenges. This intellectual journey weaves African philosophy and theology's past, present, and future, elucidating their complex relationship and evolution.

Subsequent sections in the paper delved into crucial features, interconnectedness, the impact of mission work, challenges in the postcolonial period, and the nuances of decolonisation. The paper concludes by engaging with current challenges in African Philosophy and Theology, offering a holistic understanding of their enduring relevance in the ever-evolving narrative of African intellectual pursuits.

Kelvin Banda is a master's student studying Philosophy with a focus on fundamental and systematic theology in Theology at St Augustine College in South Africa. [kaynestop@gmail.com](mailto:kaynestop@gmail.com)

Moses Chanda is a master's student of Applied Ethics with specialisation in Bioethics at Stellenbosch university in South Africa. [moseschandah@gmail.com](mailto:moseschandah@gmail.com)

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**The Impact of Advanced New Media Technologies and Social Transformation on Religious Practices in Contemporary Nigeria: Exploring Changes, Challenges, and Continuities in Religious Life**

By

Dr. Chibugo Lebechi, DDL and Tyolumun Kinga-Upaa, SJ

**ABSTRACT**

Rapid technological advancement has led to radical social transformation that is deeply affecting the evangelical counsels and shaking the very foundations of religious life across the world. Access to the Internet and use of modern technological gadgets has become such a common feature in religious communities that one finds them and the very future of religious life and spirituality at great risk. This paper explores the interplay between technological advancement, rapid social transformation, and the requisite disciplines of religious life in the Nigerian context in an attempt to extract the impact of new technologies on the current state of religious life as well as forecast its future. We examine evolving landscapes to underscore how members of religious orders, congregations, and societies negotiate the tensions between social expectations, the use of modern technology, and the lived experiences of their vowed life. With this, we identify some of the changes in traditional values of religious life that have been occasioned by contemporary technological developments. The study has become essential as our bibliographical survey shows that not much has been done in the area of navigating the intricacies of the effect of the growth of technology on religious life in the Nigerian context.

**Keywords:** Religious Life, Technology, Social Transformation, Contemporary Nigeria, Changes, Challenges, Continuities.

**INTRODUCTION**

Even though the Internet and social media form the catalyst for contemporary advancement in all spheres of life, not much has been done to evaluate their effects on religious life<sup>146</sup> in Nigeria. This

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<sup>146</sup> This is a form of consecration through which some individuals specially dedicate themselves to God. It is a way of living the Christian life that passes through the profession of the Evangelical Counsels poverty, chastity and obedience. The term “evangelical counsels” is used because the religious vows are integral to the teachings and message of Jesus. It is a life recommended (counselled) according to the gospel (*euangelion*, via Latinised *evangelium*). It is a lifestyle that portrays the gospel values as seen in the life of Christ. Those who make a choice of this life are required to promote the gospel values. Of course, the gospel life is the life of Christ himself, manifested in his poverty, chastity and obedience.

is more surprising, especially that scholars project that new media<sup>147</sup> is fast becoming the natural habitat for human existence shaping the entire realm of our humanity by transforming our cultures, beliefs, and identity (Tajuddin, *et al.* 2024,1; Gan 2010, 8; and Danaan 2016, 61-62; Lievrouw, 2011, 7). Benedict XVI echoes the utility of new media in his single-page message to the world on the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day (WCD) in 2011 by stating that “The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself... and giving birth to a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships and building fellowship.”<sup>148</sup> Dyikuk submits that in general, ICT and new methods of information gathering have made life much easier today (2022, 30), and their wide range of influence have been captured by Anagwo who sees digital influence in every realm of the human culture, including Catholic worship (2023, 1). This is why the Church’s understanding and declaration of media technologies as an indispensable gift from God to humanity for the smooth functioning of modern societies is not a surprise (C et P, para 6). Therefore, as social beings, those called to religious life in this context cannot sit and play ostrich in a fast-moving digital world, especially as the Church has equally recognised modern gadgets as avenues through which human beings can experience the divine. Vatican II specifically declared the functions of modern technology and its gadgets as geared towards human entertainment and instruction as well as towards the spread of

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<sup>147</sup> The term “new media” encompasses the rise of digital, computer, and information and communication technology networks in the late 20th century. In essence, new media refers to modern gadgets that are created through the interaction between humans and computers, particularly the Internet (Lievrouw, 2011, 7). Examples of these mediums include websites, online social networks, online forums, and other platforms that utilise computers as their means of communication. Social media, new media, and modern gadgets will be used interchangeably in this paper. Although social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) are all part of new media, not all new media are social media. Social media are programs created for fostering social interactions (Creeber and Martin 2009, 3).

<sup>148</sup> See also “Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication” in the post-conciliar document, *Communio et Progressio*, para. 2, hereafter referred to as C et P.

the gospel and support of the Kingdom of God (*Inter Merifica*, para 2, hereafter referred to as IM). In his address to the world on the 44<sup>th</sup> WCD in 2010, Benedict XVI had earlier echoed the need for the Church to express itself through the “different voices” provided by the digital marketplace. Consequently, the guidelines for priestly life and ministry in Nigeria enjoin ministers to make use of all means of media communication in the process of evangelisation. The religious should not be found wanting in exploitation of this that has become the new normal and brought about the era of unprecedented connectivity and access to information. Being digitally literate is an imperative for the religious in Nigeria as it would save them from being taunted by the media, as they will be able to discern when there is the danger of breaking their religious discipline or violating the vows. Furthermore, digital literacy will also help the religious to stay safe, especially in the face of the rising insecurity in Nigeria, as digital media is a haven for quick dissemination of information. Hence, it is important that the religious are acquainted with these gadgets to ensure their own security. Advanced knowledge of this media is equally necessary for fending off Internet fraud that is not uncommon in the Nigerian context.

Despite the enthusiasm of society over many opportunities that advanced new media technology brings, there is a flip side to it as it poses challenges to society. Pope Francis underscores this reality in his one paged WCD message by calling attention to the ambivalence of social media alongside its inherent opportunities. He observes that “new media is fraught with risks and associated pathologies” (2024). Many of these challenges have implications for religious life and the Evangelical Counsels which can be framed in terms of tensions between modern media and traditional values of religious life. Despite these tensions, scholarship on the new-media phenomenon and its relationship with religious culture has largely addressed the positives that characterise this relationship in Nigeria, underlining the importance of appropriating gadgets into

religious worship and the need to enhance competences and ensure compliance in their use among religious groups.<sup>149</sup>

Our study joins the growing corpus of literature on the relationship between new media and religion and its importance in religious practices in Nigeria but does this by crossing from the popular isle of the positives to analyse negative impacts as they bring their influence to bear on religious life which is at the very core of religion. Curiously, nothing yet exists in the literature that addresses the experience of negative exploitation of new media in religious communities, at least in the Nigerian context. We shall do this by juxtaposition of the useful aspects of new media and the aberrations which have led to misuse and abuse by some religious to see how this situation is completely reshaping religious life and positioning it for the future.

#### **NEW MEDIA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE IN NIGERIA**

As already indicated, new media are useful tools for enlightenment and transformation (Gan 2010, 9). In this section, we shall look at four important areas among others where new media tools have been applied for positive transformation. These include community building, growth in media knowledge, compliance, and global recognition, education and enlightenment, and data storage.

First, new media are very congenial and provide extraordinary opportunities for increased openness and rapid spread of information using numerous digital platforms. By this they deliver amazing avenues for positive interpersonal engagement and community building, which are at the core of religious life. Data from concrete observations, focus-group discussions, and Eze, *et al.*

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<sup>149</sup> See Musa (2018 and 2019), Dyikuk (2019 and 2022), Adeyoyin, *et al.* (2016), Danaan (2016), Ihejirika (2008), Dyikuk, *et al.* (2021).

(2023)<sup>150</sup> reveal that digital media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and several others are extensively used in most religious communities in Nigeria today. These digital media spaces go to great extents to resolve the problem of loneliness, social exclusion, lack of communication and miscommunication as information is easily and smoothly disseminated through the different digital groups. That is why Dyikuk declares that digital platforms serve to boost community involvement and create warmth in a community (2022, 34).

These platforms can sometimes bridge the hierarchical gap between religious superiors and their subjects. Since modern communication gadgets are not space bound, they have become extremely convenient means for superiors of religious orders, congregations, and groups to communicate with those on mission. With such communication moving faster and easier today than in the days of analogue, without the hinderance of space and time, it has become normal for those on mission to be given necessary guidance even in real time and be heard and attended to quickly (Tajuddin, *et al.* 2024, 3). Accordingly, Danaan calls new media the “most friendly communication forms that bring the world together (2016, 71),—and in relation to this to religion Anagwo declares that cyberspace itself has become “another [global] Christian Community” (2023, xix) as it mediates the great transmission of religious information and establishment of spiritually supportive communities across borders.

Second, religious congregations in Nigeria are already experiencing high growth in media knowledge, compliance, and global recognition of their identities and activities. It is refreshing to

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<sup>150</sup> The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation launched a study in 2022 of the work of all Catholic Religious Sisters in Nigeria and the report published in March 2023 reveals this great extent of the use of new media not just as consumers of it but the religious themselves are actively participating in the training of those seeking to become new-media compliant. Likewise, an ongoing focus group of female religious of various congregations hosted at Veritas University Abuja as well as our general observations both affirm this fact.

see that both the young and old members of these groups are keeping abreast with the digital revolution as many of them have smartphones, laptops, iPads and notebooks among other gadgets. These have helped in promoting knowledge in ICT and digital compliance among the religious. Beyond individual communication, many religious communities are gaining global recognition for their work through these digital means as they continue to participate in the transformation of the way and manner of production, distribution and audience consumption of media content (Danaan 2016, 63). Nigerian religious have joined the global trend where different religious orders all over the world now conveniently interact with one another and reach out to others in evangelisation. Thus, they are taking full advantage of the Internet which has created knowledgeable opportunities that enhance the flow of information that continues to improve shared ideas across national frontiers (Danaan 2016, 71; Adeyoyin, *et al.* 2016, 2). Consequently, information about the life, charism, and apostolates of most religious communities in Nigeria is easily accessible online using their websites and other social media platforms such as Facebook pages, Instagram, WhatsApp, and many others.

Third, another opportunity new media presents to religious communities is their use to improve education through enlightenment. Digital media is advancing the cause of education and learning by significantly improving the quality of teaching and the learning experience for both teachers and learners. Digital media with the Internet offers access to “a much broader range of knowledge and information than any conventional library, personal knowledge network, or print publication” (Adeyoyin, *et al.* 2016, 2). Religious groups in Nigeria are huge beneficiaries of this opportunity to easily access materials online that are educative and mind building. These materials are of enormous help to those groups that are in the educational apostolate and skills formation. Furthermore, much of the available material online are helpful for deeper understanding and

appreciation of the meaning and theology of the evangelical counsels. It is now common to see religious evangelising, catechising and teaching others on interesting topics through their Facebook handles, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. This educational dimension is quite broad and extensive, leading to endless possibilities.

Finally, new media provides a lot of cloud data storage facilities through platforms such as Google, and iCloud. No doubt, many religious congregations are benefitting from this and using them to keep their data safe. Furthermore, it avails members of religious orders the opportunity for instantaneous access to data about their congregations and even about themselves since the new media makes it easy to store mass of information on one platform (Adeyoyin, *et al.* 2016, 15).

### **CHALLENGES OF THE NEW MEDIA TO RELIGIOUS LIFE IN NIGERIA**

Although new media offers a vista of opportunities for religious life, the intersection between new media and religious life is also fraught with daunting challenges that impinge on the total consecration to God and community life of the religious. As already highlighted above, religious life is a way of living the Christian calling and spirituality which passes through profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Essentially, the traditional aim is for the religious to live a life of contemplation of God totally free of worldly distractions that might arise from material wealth, narcissistic pleasures bereft of the love of God and neighbour, the exclusive desire for self-fulfillment, and tendency to be self-controlling without concern for the common good. In other words, the religious are consecrated persons dedicated purely to the service of God. Therefore, religious life is a living like, with, and for Christ, to continue the same mission of salvation as Jesus wanted it. It comprises *communio* or community which is lived in face-to-face encounters with individuals from different backgrounds who make themselves available to live in a communion and fellowship of brothers and sisters in relationship of common sharing (Njoku

2014, 21). This reality can only be made possible by community living and prayer, both individually and communally, bound together by the profession of vows. The nature of the vows that make up religious life could be seen as intrinsically opposed to certain ways of using the new media and some models of life promoted by it. This is where the challenges of the new media to religious life arise and to which we now turn.

### **New Media and the Evangelical Counsels**

Through evangelical counsels, the religious are expected to live in a manner which limits engagement with material wealth and emotional relationships by curtailing excessive consumerism to remain focused on those values promoted by the Kingdom of God, such as selfless love and compassion, humility and service, righteousness and justice, purity of heart and integrity, and prudence and temperance. That is why the religious are called to a chaste life which involves the renunciation of marriage and sexual gratification to promote total commitment to the love of God and neighbour with interior freedom (Vatican II, *Perfected Carities*,<sup>151</sup> 12). In some ways the use of new media with its modern gadgets continues to pose serious challenges to the actualisation of this loving relationship with God and neighbour. Too much use of gadgets by the religious leads to addiction, consequently, creating a sense of vulnerability in the individual and the community. There have been deep concerns expressed about the level of access to and consumption of inappropriate content made available on Internet websites and promoted by social media platforms to which the religious sign up.

Like cancer, this situation which is also potentially destructive begins as something small and continues to grow if unchecked. Unfortunately, there are hardly any noticeable attempts to address

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<sup>151</sup> Hereafter referred to as PC.

this trend. As of now, there have not been any document attempting to establish a healthy threshold, giving clear indications on how the religious ought to engage with the use of new media in Nigeria that can be beneficial. Individual members of congregations just employ these gadgets as they deem necessary. Consequently, some usage denoting lack of prudence and decorum has been detected, and even elements suggesting the surfing of unwholesome and sexual sites that are detrimental to the vow of chastity. Because of the delicate nature of conversations around sex and sexual experiences in religious spaces, data on inappropriate consumption of online content by the religious is very hard to come by and even the mere mention of its possibility might be frowned at and draw the irk of powerful religious authorities. In a sense, The subject of sex and its sexual experiences are still regarded as taboo. It is therefore difficult to propose or implement meaningful counselling and therapy towards those addicted to social media sexual exploitation.

Online interactions have also led some religious into compromising positions that have developed into inappropriate online relationships. Some of these interactions are done using pseudo names or outright anonymity thereby creating a situation where the religious normalises and grows in insincerity. With this, these acts endanger more than just the vow of chastity. This is by no means a condemnation of the religious having a network of friends on social media platforms; on the contrary, our emphasis is on making sure that while the religious work to freely build supportive online networks of relationships, they must also eschew whatever that can be inimical to the essence of religious life itself. The religious must listen to the voice of Benedict XVI who, while addressing the Superiors General (May 22, 2006) declares that the vow of chastity cannot be inscribed in the framework of worldly logic.

It is perhaps a positive thing that the religious are not just online content consumers but are also creating content. Many religious in Nigeria have taken to online content creation using TikTok,

Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. The Church supports this move and enjoins those with the requisite disposition and skills not just to keep abreast with new media but participate in digital and online evangelisation. Unfortunately, a significant number of Nigerian religious are tending toward displaying of contents about themselves that impinge on the true identity of religious life. There is nothing wrong with religious taking up dancing on social media mostly if such dance wears the face of evangelisation. Dancing skills can be a wonderful tool for youth ministry and evangelisation; however, when religious engage in dancing on social media that promotes pride and arrogance, materialism and greed, narcissism, and deceptiveness which are values that are unhealthy or inimical<sup>152</sup> to the religious call then it displays the attitude that goes against the very call of the religious vocation. In fact, whether for entertainment or any other social use or for evangelisation, the church admonishes everyone with love for God and humanity to engage with the media in responsible fashion and be mindful of the kind of content that they put into circulation through it (Benedict XVI, 43<sup>rd</sup> WCD). Hence, it is important that the religious become media savvy, only fully utilising the opportunities that modern technology provides for them to be constructive in how they are used (John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I, 2002).

By their vow of poverty, the religious are called to renounce earthly possession. This poverty instils moderation in the use of things and inspires simplicity of life. Meanwhile, the desire for acquisition and use of modern gadgets adversely confronts the living of the vow of poverty among Nigerian religious as it promotes unhealthy competition among them. Social media is prone to false living through disinformation and propaganda. People exhibit a lot of fake life on social media and the Nigerian religious have shown that they are not immune to the temptation. In fact,

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<sup>152</sup> For instance, some religious in Nigeria have become content creators in ways that are not proper to religious life, such as seeing a female religious dancing on social media with very tight dresses and goes on to deliberately show their back sides.

some appear to be trapped in this online falsehood about their true identity where they constantly portray themselves to be who they are not. Consequently, some religious have become extremely materialistic, constantly getting lured into the consumerist culture (Benedict XVI's May 22, 2006, address), in the bid to belong to online trends. Just as many people in secular society are acquiring modern gadgets only to make a show of them and perhaps intimidate others (Oladutun 2019, 5), religious are increasingly entering into this online-display attitude of their cars, latest smartphones, iPads, and even new houses to entice or intimidate their followers. This lifestyle is contradictory to the simplicity and contentment that the vow of poverty is meant to inspire.

Personal Internet merchandising also appears to have crept into religious life as some Nigerian religious have become increasingly active on the Internet in networking businesses. While it is permissible for such business activities to be undertaken for the benefit of the entire religious community, a significant amount of the time members of religious congregations are engaging in these businesses without the knowledge and permission of the lawful authorities. There have been instances where some religious superiors attempted to compel certain members of their congregations to quit media platforms because of the crisis of merchandising without any success. This can also be a sign of weaknesses in the manner some religious congregations are failing in adequately providing for the needs of their members, a situation that requires an in-depth study.

Religious obedience is not primarily a submission to laws; it is a life lived with alertness to the Spirit; and attentiveness to the things that really matter. In professing obedience, the religious offer full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and united permanently and securely to God's salvific will (PC, 14). Furthermore, obedience for the religious entails aligning one's personal will to that of the collective mission of one's congregation or order. In other words, religious life entails the readiness to "marry their personal ideal with the institutional ideal" (Ossai

2015, 82). However, through information and forms of enlightenment acquired using new media, the practice of the vow of obedience is being impinged upon as more religious are becoming increasingly demanding of self-assertion and autonomy and are rationalising and questioning the necessity of the vow of obedience. Much of the rationalisation among some religious is coming from following social media influencers who promote anti-spiritual messages (Danaan 2016, 71).

Since new media have encouraged everyone who wishes to exercise media autonomy to do so, some religious in Nigeria have also imbibed online secular ideologies that challenge their commitment to obedience. Some proponents of autonomy see the traditional understanding of the vow of obedience as obsolete and an obstacle thereby creating a flying misconception that the vow of obedience limits individual rights and freedom. *Prima facie*, this might appear the case but again could be the consequence of wrong understanding of power relations as exercised among members of religious congregations and is based on misconceptions of authority as promoted by the new media itself.

### **New Media and Community Life**

Community life is another essential feature of religious life that has not been spared by the use of new media. Ordinarily, this new technology has all the potential to positively enhance the experience of community life as it opens avenues for connectivity and spiritual and psychological support among members of religious congregations and communities. Indeed, many examples of this exist; however, many others also exist of dangers to it. Generally, community life is about being present to one another by living and working together to achieve set goals. Therefore, in religious community one lives a life of convocation (*convocare*), being called with others with whom one must share his or her life in a variety of ways to achieve common spiritual objectives

(Ossai 2015, 125). Observably, the digital revolution is militating heavily against the physical presence of members to one another by creating ‘gadgeted communities’<sup>153</sup> in alternative.

Benedict XVI was right in 2009 when he lamented in his message on the 43<sup>rd</sup> WCD that obsession with virtual connectedness was isolating individuals from engaging in the richness of real social interaction. It seems commonplace today that even while physically present in the community, some religious prefer to stay in their individual rooms and digitally exchange information with one another. Much as one must appreciate the rich relevance of new media to religious life, this situation is potentially dangerous as it strikes at its very core and is not only promoting addiction but also enhancing individualism and fragmentation instead of developing cohesion in religious communities. Digital interaction should not be seen as substitute for real interpersonal community among religious (Danaan 2016, 71). So far, digital-media use is leading to increased loss of empathy and insensitivity in religious communities.

Besides ‘gadgeted communities’, another phenomenon of ‘e-community’<sup>154</sup> is dangerously on the rise among religious. There is a phenomenon trending in Nigeria today of large numbers of religious joining other online spiritual communities, prayer groups, and associations where they

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<sup>153</sup> By gadgeted communities we mean a situation where some members of religious houses tend to form community with their communication gadgets to the exclusion of human beings living with them in the same space. Over time this attitude inclines toward excessive consumerism in a form of overaccumulation of gadgets which take the place of physical social and spiritual interaction with the other members of their communities.

<sup>154</sup> E-religious community is a phenomenon that comes in two forms. The first refers to a situation where while loosely coexisting in the same physical space religious grow more inclined towards communicating via the use of social media with other people living at great physical, moral, spiritual, and ideological distances from the religious community or even faith. The second is about the manner of administration of religious communities where superiors resort to the use of Internet and digital devices as means for controlling members of the community even while being physically absent from it. This contradicts the traditional role of the superior which was more to co-ordinate and care for the wellbeing of the persons in community and less to act as daily controller of personnel and community finances.

are more active than in their commitment to their religious congregations. This is not limited to Nigerian religious living and working in Nigeria but extends to Nigerian religious working outside the shores of the country. Social media video clips abound of such religious appearing at physical conventions and prayer meetings of these groups that are not even Catholic. This too has come with severe consequences as several complaints have been heard from many religious communities about many of their members being constantly absent from community activities because of engagement with their 'e-communities'. The situation makes it possible for individual members of congregations to violate boundaries and let out sensitive community information to the public due to a false sense of autonomy. In his 2006 message at the occasion of the 43<sup>rd</sup> WCD, Benedict XVI decried this situation where many religious are spending so much energy and resources to develop and sustain online relationships and fellowships at the cost of their availability to engage with their religious communities.

Digital media has served to create 'e-communities' where 'distance superiors' administer the community remotely often from very far distances with the use of online resources. Increasingly, for some religious it like the purpose of being a superior is to control people and affairs. But the whole idea of a community is that a superior be physically present within it to co-ordinate and ensure the wellbeing of the members (*cura personalis*). In other words, there was not to be a community in the absence of a superior. That is why the superior of a community could not be away from it for more than twenty-four hours without appointing an acting superior because the duty of care which is the service and authority of the superior demands a persevering presence (Benedict XVI, 22 May 2006). This traditional understanding of the role of a community superior is increasingly under threat from the advantages offered by the new media. Superiors have become mere managers of communities and dispensers of permissions and resources, tasks they know they

can now perform in diaspora with the use of social media. This comes with huge consequences as some of them stay away from their communities for lengthy periods without reasonable justification.

### **New Media and Evolving Prayer Patterns and Spiritualities**

Traditionally, the religious are called to pious, contemplative, and meditative prayer that reflects the humility of Jesus and his desire to connect to the will of God the Father and act only according to it. It has a communal character which makes it liturgical because it is the entire community united in prayer seeking God's favour for the community as well as the world. It recognises and follows the mysteries of Jesus' life without preference for one mystery over the others, even looking forward in hope to participating in his death and resurrection at the last day. Both the individual and liturgical aspects of the prayer of the religious are meant to be carried out in a pious and dignified fashion. Before this, which could be termed as new media intrusion into spirituality, religious communities were known as sacred places of silence for recollection which provided spiritual atmosphere that guaranteed mental and psychological healing. A world turning increasingly noisy and dangerous to mental health stands in absolute need of such places. Unfortunately, new media and its modern gadgets are constantly eating away at the roots of the healthy and therapeutic spiritual silence that marked the sacred spaces housing religious life, despite the fact that the progress of the devout soul lies in silent prayer.<sup>155</sup> That is why Pope Francis in his 2024 message to consecrated persons decries the assault of contemporary society on silence which has led to its banishment and consequent neglect of the interior life. The Pope observes that

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<sup>155</sup> See chapter 20 of Thomas A Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* where he attributes this progress to silence and quietness.

this assault has found agents among some religious and consecrated persons who have caught themselves in this web of modern progress that cancels silence and moderation for the essentially noisy and pompous worldly lifestyle.

This notwithstanding, e-communities among Nigerian religious continue to contribute to series of changes in the way that they pray, sometimes in very animated fashion. While admirers of these new patterns of prayer see them as positive and spirit filled with reform, critics see them as spiritual distraction. These distractions are thought to be responsible for the blatant show of impiety and chaos that one is increasingly witnessing at religious ceremonies in communities such as ordinations and the religious profession. Because of easy availability of gadgets almost everyone becomes a photographer, media practitioner, or even social media influencer during these liturgical ceremonies. It is not uncommon to see priests and religious answering calls and sending text messages during liturgy.

In some churches and chapels, liturgical books such as lectionaries, missals, and breviaries have been taken over by dust as people prefer to use their phones or iPad notebooks for liturgical celebrations. Contrary to expectation, new media is no longer serving as supplementary but complete replacement for sacred liturgical books and materials.<sup>156</sup> Those against this trend would argue that religious must refocus themselves on leading people into deeper relationship with God by remodelling their lives on what they preach. Allowing gadgets to interfere with their own religious life is spiritually wrong and certainly unhelpful in catechising others to guard against the abuse of new media.

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<sup>156</sup> See Musa (2019, 74) for the assertion that New Media, like other media ought not supplant, but only supplement the traditional methods of worship.

## SIFTING OPINIONS WITHIN RELIGIOUS LIFE AND CHARTING A WAY

### FORWARD

In preparation for this article, we engaged in random fashion discussions and interviews at different occasions with gatherings of both male and female religious within Nigeria, seeking for a way to navigate the complex reality that religious life has found itself in because of the incursion of the digital age. What came out strongly was that it would be out of order in contemporary culture to jettison the use of digital media among the religious in Nigeria, despite the countercultural nature of religious life, it is still a life lived within society and must have social significance for those it serves. Hence, these religious reasoned that there was the need to integrate the use of new media in society with their religious calling but in ways that are not contradictory to ethical behaviour, social responsibility, and spiritual growth and maturity. Despite expressions of great concern for the obvious misapplication of the new media among religious in Nigeria, many continuously fell back to the phrase *abusus non tollit usum* (abuse does not cancel use), arguing that the fact that something good is misused by some people does not negate its usefulness, especially giving the benefits earlier recounted in this article.

In accounting for the abuses, the conversations blamed structural problems such as lack of exposure and generational identification; and explicating the structural problems, most of the contributors submitted that some religious communities are structured in ways that do not give a sense of belonging to their members. Some religious communities create an atmosphere where members feel dejected. When a community supposed to be a home becomes toxic, its members feel unhappy and withdrawn and inferiority complex sets in. These engender feelings of loneliness and insecurity and when accentuated make the individual look for external solace, which is being provided today by the new media. According to our participants, such alienation from the religious

community is part of the reasons why some religious have become more committed to online communities whose objectives fly in the face of those of their religious communities.

Furthermore, respondents identify another contributory factor for the abuse of the new media in fundamental defects in the formation programme of a significant number of religious orders in Nigeria. Some formation programmes are framed like the ten commandments, full of prescriptions of what those in formation must not do. When left with negative prescriptions of what should never be done and without clear stipulation of what one ought to do, or even the principles of operating within the gray areas of the interaction between traditions of religious life and modern social pressures, the religious leave the formation house in false security and confused about how to interact with society in general, sometimes getting easily carried away by its wave. To curb this situation, respondents underscore the need for those in formation to be exposed to the realities of society. This can be done through the insertion of lessons in formation programmes on the appropriate use of new media for religious and the development and constant revision of the ethics that should guide its use by religious.

Explaining further, respondents also identify the rigidity that characterises the formation of some religious orders as an important factor as it causes those in formation to close themselves up to proper orientation and integration during formation. As a result, a lot of things go wrong immediately after their profession of religious vows which sends them into society to live and work among people with different values, some of which tend to be at odds with those of religious life. Often one sees a disconnect in character between when one is a novice and when one receives profession as member of the religious order. This informs the reason why some religious do not take kindly to the correction of either their legitimate superiors or even peers when called to order

regarding abusive uses of the new media as they feel that the profession of vows changes their status to the degree that they are beyond fraternal correction and reproach.

Generational identification has also been cited by discussants as a critical factor in the use of new media among religious. Although we do not yet have statistics to formally back up the claim, it has been observed that most of the abuses in the use of new media among the religious in Nigeria is located among the younger generation. As they follow their peers online, these young religious feels attracted to what they do with this new technology to enhance their popularity and create opportunity and so are sometimes lured into it. So far it appears that all content creators among the religious in Nigeria are of a certain generation, and no matter what content they are creating or impact their content is having on people and their faith, it is important to evaluate the impact it is also having on these young content creators in religious life. Sometimes to flow with their peers, some of the young religious content creators on social media create content that is contrary to faith and religious life.

### **New Media and the Future of Religious Life**

While the foregoing may not yet spell doom for religious life, new media has already altered it significantly and placed it in the need of some kind of reform to guarantee its future by maintaining the gospel values at its centre. Having looked at the opportunities and challenges, the religious need to be proactive in the process of reform to keep control of the impact of social change that is transforming traditional forms of life and expression. Obviously, this requires deep discernment among the religious and within the Church. This call follows the advice given by Pope Francis that since we appreciate the huge advantages of social communication, there should be regulatory and preventive measures guiding its use to forestall “disturbing scenarios” (24 January 2024).

Earlier in his 1998 address to the episcopal conference of the United States of America, John Paul II called the Church to the imperative of moving with emerging changes in the society with the necessity of clearly explaining the relationship of the faith and all its aspect to these changes through proper catechesis to avoid misunderstanding, abuses, polarisation, and scandal.

To answer these calls, clear norms and support structures are needed to safeguard religious life within the dynamics of faith development, technological advancement, and social transformation. As it has become imperative for the religious in Nigeria to be media savvy, so is it as a matter of urgent necessity to have guidelines and policy to inform the patterns of use of new media for them. Such guidelines and policy should be communicated in ways that encourage the religious to take ownership of them and use them as materials to foster positive growth and bring about personal and communal fulfillment. They should neither sound punitive nor alarmist but as the work of love proposed to protect and enhance meaningful progress. For now, that is what is required to help everyone to engage with social media in a way that would not put religious life in “bad light” (Dyikuk, *et al.* 2021, 307). These norms and support structures should be incorporated into the formation programme of religious communities.

In the light of this it would be necessary to review the entire formation programmes. Renewal is paramount to the life of the Church, as it is often said that the Church is in constant renewal – *ecclesia semper reformanda*. In the same vein, religious life stands in need of constant adaptation and renewal (PC 1-2). Most religious congregations founded in Nigeria are still operating formation programmes that are almost obsolete, and even some of those founded abroad with hundreds of years of history but working in Nigeria continue to give dated interpretations to their formation and traditions despite the Church’s counsel to open up to sincere and transformative dialogue with the changing “conditions of our time” (PC 2). Religious formation today must be

deliberate in pursuing ICT literacy for both the young and elderly since new media offers lots of opportunities for personal development and evangelisation. It is, therefore, pertinent for religious communities to consider including media literacy and awareness in their initial formation programmes and renewal programmes and retreats.

As part of this renewal, religious communities should embrace openness to current realities by making formation programmes less rigid in a way that encourages deeper interpersonal interaction at a level that promotes mutual respect and admiration between the formators and those in formation. Furthermore, congregations should strive to provide the needs of their members so as to prevent them from getting pushed into private Internet merchandising. Responsible and accountable use of digital media among the religious in Nigeria can only be achieved by the promotion of moral vigilance. Morality, properly developed, helps people cultivate the right behaviour that enables them to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong. Hence, if religious congregations should instill in their members those ethical principles that guide the right use of social media handles, they will inspire vigilance and diligence (Dyikuk et al. 2021, 306). Finally, right morality brings about discipline and decorum that are needed to guide against perverse online content, helping to maintain ethical boundaries and protect the integrity of the vows. It is only by taking such positive steps that the future of religious life can be guaranteed.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we have argued that digital technology and the Internet have significantly altered the way religious life is lived today in Nigeria, with their advancement both enabling and subverting it. Despite this ambivalence, the religious have a duty to keep engaging with new media in a diversity of ways by embracing its transformative character while rejecting its destructive

passions. By engaging with opinions of some religious living and working in Nigeria via focus group discussion, we have drawn up proposals and shown ways through which advancement in digital technology can be made to help the transformation of the spiritual and social life of the religious while limiting or avoiding altogether its adverse effects on religious life. Our recommendations aim at helping religious in Nigeria and elsewhere to synergise their spiritual life with new media advantages without compromising their core values. They underline the pertinence of religious engaging with the new media in a way that prevents them from falling victim to their risks and promoting maximal usage of their benefits for the enhancement of religious life.

Dr. Chibugo Lebechi, DDL is a Lecturer in the Department of Theology, an adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Religions and Development Studies, also an adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria. Staff email address: [lebechic@veritas.edu.ng](mailto:lebechic@veritas.edu.ng)

Tyolumun Kinga-Upaa, SJ is a Lecturer in the Department of Religions and Development Studies, and an adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, both of Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria. Staff email address: [kinga-upaat@veritas.edu.ng](mailto:kinga-upaat@veritas.edu.ng)

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**INVESTIGATING THE UNDERSTANDING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ADHERENCE  
TO CATHOLIC ETHOS IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE  
COPPERBELT PROVINCE OF ZAMBIA**

By: Patrick Chilambwe

**ABSTRACT**

The distinctive characteristic of a Catholic School must primarily be its ethos – Catholic ethos. This is basically the school environment or culture that permeates all its operations. Catholic ethos should serve as the primary motivating factor for parents/guardians, pupils, etc., for choosing to study at Catholic schools. However, it has sometimes been reported and noted that in some instances, what motivates parents/guardians, pupils, etc., may be other than the touted Catholic ethos. Hence, one of the salient issues that needs to be addressed as it keeps on coming out in Catholic education discussions is the need for clarity of the identity, essence and *raison d'être* of Catholic educational institutions given the ever-changing operating environment. This research is an attempt to investigate the understanding, implementation, and adherence to Catholic ethos by Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. It is a way of understanding why parents/ stakeholders seem to hold Catholic secondary schools in high repute and thus prefer them to other schools.

The findings suggest that there is a general understanding of Catholic ethos in many schools. However, it is difficult to establish the link between the Catholic ethos and the preference for Catholic schools by many stakeholders.

Key words: Development of Education in Zambia; Impact of Catholic Schools in Zambia; Catholic Ethos; Catholic Education; Charism; Theological Literacy; Spiritual Capital.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Today a Catholic school finds itself operating in an ever-changing, challenging, increasingly plural and secular period. These issues are posing a serious threat to sustaining the Catholic identity of schools. Hence, there is a need for a “clearer awareness and consistency of the Catholic identity of the Church’s educational institutions all over the world” (The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue, 2022). Indeed, according to Pope Francis, “we cannot create a culture of dialogue if we do not have identity” (Pope Francis, Dialogue between His Holiness Pope Francis and the Students, Teachers and Parents of Collegio San Carlo of Milan, 6 April 2019).

The distinctive identity of a Catholic school is usually referred to as its ethos, reinforced by the spiritual capital of the educators. In the Catholic educational system, a source of capital that is essential in the proper understanding, implementation, and adherence to Catholic ethos is spiritual capital. It is an empowering sense of mission, purpose or an inspirational and sustaining spiritual energy or resource in one's work.

Catholic ethos essentially implies the 'spirit of the school' (O' Donnell, 1986) or the 'school climate' (Freund, 2001). Catholic ethos is the interface between the school and its environment; hence it impacts the way the school operates. It is thus the relation of the school to its ethos that defines its relations with other stakeholders.

In its considered view, the Catholic Church believes that Catholic schools must provide an environment which can afford every learner/member holistic formation. In as much as Catholic schools are generally well regarded in many parts of the world, including in Zambia, there are some difficulties also encountered (The Catholic School, 1977).

Catholic schools are sometimes criticised because of what some people think are lapses in the system. For example, some people think that the witness of some staff is questionable. Others think that Catholic schools are a means of proselytism. Still others think that Catholic schools are redundant especially in those countries where the state plays a very big role in education. In other jurisdictions, Catholic schools are accused of discriminating against the poor. Lastly, they are also accused of not offering holistic formation that can prepare learners to become convinced and articulate Christians ready to take their place in social and political life.

However, despite some negative sentiments from some quarters, it is generally held that Catholic schools offer an alternative which is holistic.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The section briefly traces some historical developments of formal education in Zambia from the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods focusing on Catholic education. The section highlights the major developments in Catholic education in Zambia in the periods mentioned and also educational problems in Zambia at independence and afterwards. Further it looks at the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church after independence in terms of education provision. Additionally, it discusses the impact of Catholic Schools in Zambia; and finally looks at what is touted as the distinctive characteristic of Catholic education-Catholic ethos.

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The historical context of the *Zambian* education system reveals that the general provision of education has passed through three major stages namely education under the British South Africa Company (B.S.A.C); education under the British colonial government; and education after independence in 1964 (Carmody 2002, 796). The immense contribution of the missionaries where the Catholic Church played a significant role in education continued throughout the three phases. According to Simposya, missionaries had such a tremendous impact on the provision of primary and secondary school education such that without their effort the development of education in the present-day Zambia could have been delayed for a long time (Simposya, Available at: Uni Wuppertal <https://www.sambia.uni-wuppertal.de> › Sambia. Accessed, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024).

Hence, it is not surprising that it is posited that missionaries are the founders of formal education in Zambia as it would be very difficult to fathom any serious discussion on educational matters that may not involve the missionary contribution (Simposya, Available at: Uni Wuppertal <https://www.sambia.uni-wuppertal.de> › Sambia. Accessed, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024). It must be pointed out, however, that Catholic education in Zambia has largely been influenced and impacted by the policies of the civil government of the day. This is true even from the earliest days up to the present.

## **2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA**

### **2.2.1 Education during the Period of the British South Africa Company Rule: 1891-1924**

The Catholic Church in Zambia has been involved in formal education since the late 1890s up to the present time (Snelson, 1974; O'Shea, 1986; Kelly, 1996; Carmody, 1999; Kelly, 1999; Carmody, 2002, pp. 775-804; Carmody, 2003; Carmody, 2004; Hinfellar, 2004; O'Brien, D., 2006; Mwanakatwe, J. M, 2013; Hambulo and Kalumbi, 2017, PP 39-48).

The first phase saw the pioneering work of the Church, undertaken by the White Fathers in the north in 1891 with the arrival of three (3) French Missionaries of Africa at Mambwe Mwela (Hinfellar, 2004). The first mission was founded at Kayambi near Chief Makasa in 1895 (O'Shea,1986). In the South of Zambia two (2) Jesuit missionaries crossed the Zambezi River from Zimbabwe and founded missions at Chikuni in Chief Monze's area as well as Kasisi near Headman Lusaka in 1905(O'Shea,1986; Hinfellar, 2004). The other missionary wave came in the 1930s with the arrival of missionaries from various congregations in Zambia. The Capuchin Friars

from Ireland settled at Livingstone and Barotseland while the Italian Conventual Friars went to the Copperbelt province (Hinfellar, 2004).

Hence the setting up of mission stations heralded the introduction of Western education to the present-day Zambia, known as Northern Rhodesia at that time (Snelson, 1974; Kelly, 1999; Carmody, 2004; Hinfellar, 2004; O'Brien, 2006). The primary motive of the first wave was to enhance the conversion of the local people through the provision of literacy skills (Guillon, 1975). Thus the first formal schools were centres to train catechists (O'Shea, 1986). This point has also been underscored by that the early years of Catholic education in Northern Rhodesia were a tool for primarily propagating and conversion to the Catholic faith (Hastings, 1994; Henkel, 1989). In addition, missionary schools not only began an 'educational revolution' but they also planted the seed for formation of groups of social cohesion and mobility among Africans (Hastings, 1967). Many of people who formed the earliest African groups e.g., social welfare groups that advocated and propagated for rights for Africans were products of missionary education (Hastings, 1994).

### **2.2.2 Education during the Period of the British Colonial Rule: 1924- 1953 and 1953-1963**

The second phase comprised two (2) sub-phases namely education under British Colonial rule (1924-1953) and education under the Federal government that amalgamated the territories of Rhodesia (Northern and Southern Rhodesia) and Nyasaland (1953-1963). This period was generally characterised by resistance from the colonial government to offer education to local people for fear of revolt against the colonial administration (Snelson, 1974). The colonial government, however, participated in the provision of education at a very minimal and transactional level. They came up with two systems of education that ran parallel to each other; one for the Europeans which was well funded and had the needed resources and the other for Africans which also included coloureds and Indians but was poorly funded. Nonetheless, Catholic education was still offered to local people especially those that showed willingness to convert to Catholicism (Snelson, 1974; Hambulo, 2017; Hambulo & Higgs, 2019).

### **2.2.3 Educational Provision after independence (1964 –up to date)**

#### **2.2.3.1 Educational Problems in Zambia at Independence (1964)**

Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) was under colonial rule for about 73 years and yet only 100 local graduates, 1500 people with local school certificates, and 6000 junior secondary school leavers had been produced during this period (Mwanakatwe, 1974). Such a scenario already paints a picture of some of the challenges that confronted the newly independent Zambia in 1964. The new

republic faced numerous problems. However, generally three seem to stand out namely the critical shortage of the needed human resource, dealing with a segregated education system that essentially favoured Europeans against Africans, and dealing with very high expectations from the Zambian populace with regard to benefits from newly acquired independence.

In its quest to deal with the mentioned problems, the government formulated developmental aims and objectives. The first aim was to build human capacity through training the much-needed educated and skilled local personnel. The second aim was to amalgamate the two systems of education into one. The last one was to look for possible solutions to pacify the general populace that had heightened hopes and aspirations from the new government (Kelly, 1999; Simposya, Available at: Uni Wuppertal <https://www.sambia.uni-wuppertal.de> › sambia. Accessed, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024).

Further, in order to achieve these aims and objectives, some actions were lined up. These included to increase the number of educational facilities at all levels, to train local people in various skills and afford them access to education, attain primary education for everyone, integrate two racially education systems into one, to encourage girl/woman education, to meet Zambian expectations following attainment of independence, and to improve the education system over that of previous governments (Kelly, 1999; Simposya, Available at: Uni Wuppertal <https://www.sambia.uni-wuppertal.de> › sambia. Accessed, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024).

These aims, objectives, and action plans were going to be realised using some strategies basically the development and implementation of the national development plans. (Lumpa, 2018).

The Emergency Development Plan (1<sup>st</sup> January, 1964 -31<sup>st</sup> December, 1964) was formulated in the wake of independence that was going to occur later in the same year basically to supplement the existing colonial government Capital Development Plan (1961–1965. In other words, the Emergency Development Plan was crafted to start making changes to the education sector in light of the forthcoming independence. Its major thrust was to offer more educational facilities to the neglected African population (Simposya, Available at: Uni Wuppertal <https://www.sambia.uni-wuppertal.de> › sambia. Accessed, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024).

The Transitional Development Plan ran from 1st January 1965 – 30th June 1966. Its major purpose was to continue and build on the plans confided in the Emergency Development Plan.

The First National Development Plan (1st July 1966 – 30th June 1970) abolished school fees and also increased places at secondary schools.

### 2.2.3.2 Educational Challenges and Strides in Zambia in the 1970s-1990s

The Second National Development Plan (January 1972 - December 1976); its major thrust was to deal with the large numbers of school leavers at various levels of education. Usually, such people did not possess the needed skills that would make them fit into the labour market and society after leaving school.

The third national development plan (1979-1983) aimed at increasing the number of educational facilities in the country. The fourth National development (1989-1993) was intended to raise the standards of mathematics and science subjects as well as to improve the technical and agricultural aspects of education.

It must be pointed out that the education system in Zambia suffered major financial challenges from 1980 which saw a decline in resource allocation to the sector. Hence most of the objectives of the plans could not materialise. In the quest to seek alternatives and ways of funding education, a national conference was held in 1991 and resulted in the publication of a document entitled *Focus on Learning*; it urged stakeholders to lobby the government and the cooperating partners to rethink adding more funding to the education sector.

In 1996, the government adopted a National Policy on Education in a document called *Educating our Future*. It was based on the democratic principles of efficiency, equality, equity, partnership, accountability and cost effectiveness (Educating our Future, 1996). These principles were going to be achieved through a liberalized and decentralized system of education. Further, the document called attention to building capacity through training, infrastructure and equipment, logistics, funding, etc. Given the decline in funding to education since the 1980s, *Educating Our Future* promoted the cost-sharing arrangement among all the stakeholders that included government, the beneficiaries such as learners, families, community, industry, non-governmental organisations, etc.

In 2006, the government of the Republic of Zambia crafted a document entitled Zambia Vision 2030. This document was premised on the following principles namely sustainable development, upholding democratic principles, respect for human rights, fostering family values, a positive attitude to work, peaceful coexistence as well as upholding good traditional values (Zambia Vision 2030, 2006). However, the attainment of such ideals will largely depend on offering quality education to the citizens.

Zambia has been facing numerous challenges that have retarded socio-economic development. It is therefore posited that the fulcrum that can assist with solutions to this state of affairs is quality, values-based and empowering education that can churn out graduates who not only think outside the box but should also be imbued with a proper human anthropology and the view of wealth. Graduates should combine academic and entrepreneurial skills as well as moral values; hence they should be job creators and not job seekers as the current situation seems to be the case. Holistic education coupled with needed skills and knowledge should be at the new centre of the curriculum if it has to lead to sustainable socio-economic development.

### **2.2.3.3 Educational Provision: The Catholic Church and the State**

The third phase, education after independence, was characterised by the nationalisation and state control of many schools even those belonging to missionaries including Catholic schools (Carmody, 2002; Carmody, 2003). Given that some schools still remained under missionary control, the new Zambian government went into a working partnership with all the Christian missionary representatives who had schools. The Catholic Church aimed at retaining control and cementing the management of its schools that had been taken over by government. Hence the Church had to implement and ensure high educational standards encompassing both the academic and religious mission in their schools in order to strengthen the partnership (Mwanakatwe, 1968; Hambulo, 2019). As a result by 1967, the Catholic educational institutions had grown up to 19 secondary schools; representing 21% of secondary places, 16% for boys and 34% for girls (Camordy, 2002:803; Hambulo, 2019). However, there was a setback in 1973 when the Church handed over primary schools and remained with few secondary schools and two (2) teacher's colleges (Carmody, 2003). During this period and after Catholic schools endured a frustrating moment as sometimes government policies led to a preponderance of non-Catholic staff and pupils in their schools. This was coupled with the introduction of scientific socialism in the 1980s which largely contradicted the Catholic faith and threatened the implementation of Catholic ethos. It was not until 1991 when the newly elected government enacted the Education Act of 1993, which gave mission schools greater freedom in terms financing, pupil enrolment, staff recruitment, and curriculum development (Carmody, 2003).

Consequently, the number of Catholic education institutions in various forms and arrangements has continued to grow up to the present. The Catholic Church represents 31% of the Catholic education institutions in Zambia. According to the Education Office of the Zambia Conference of

Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) there are many secondary schools owned by the Catholic Church under the various categories in Zambia.

It is therefore not uncommon today to find Religious Congregations, Dioceses, and even parishes owning and running educational institutions ranging from trades schools, secondary and primary schools, orphanages and Cheshire homes, as well as kindergartens, etc.

### **2.3 THE IMPACT OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND CATHOLIC ETHOS IN ZAMBIA**

This section looks at the impact of Catholic schools in Zambia, and in particular the Copperbelt province, as well as what constitutes Catholic ethos. It is generally taken for granted that Catholic schools in Zambia and particularly in the Copperbelt province are held in high repute and consequently sought after by many stakeholders due to their supposed adherence to Catholic ethos. However, there is a paucity of empirical information to support that position. Insights in this section will later be crucial in the formulation of research questions as well as the part dealing with results and discussion. Hopefully it will shed light on whether the good reputation of Catholic schools can attributed to its adherence to Catholic ethos.

#### **2.3.1 The Impact of Catholic Schools**

In Zambia, just like in all countries where there are Catholic schools, it is expected that they operate in accordance with the educational tenets enshrined in the Catholic education philosophy because it represents an official Church position on all matters of education. In fact, it is by adhering to the directives provided by this declaration that Catholic schools assume their authentic Catholic identity.

Catholic educational institutions are mostly associated with the provision of quality education as normally the salient features that constitute quality educational provision are evident within Catholic schools all over the world including Zambia.

In Zambia in general and the Copperbelt Province in particular, Catholic schools in the various categories mentioned above are equated with quality education and thus held in higher repute for various reasons (Chisempere, 1993; Kabwe, 2010; Hambulo, 2016).

As with the rest of the country these schools are sought after by many people. According to Hambulo and others, Catholic schools enjoy such a good repute as “in Zambia almost everyone associates high standard and quality education to Catholic education because of aspects such as; high teacher motivation, good leadership, high quality students, high learning achievement, desired

curriculum, good infrastructure, total development of the learners (intellectual and spiritual), good learning environment and others evident in Catholic schools.” (The Post, 2011, Empowerment through Education, 2004:4; Hambulo, 2016; Hambulo, Cheyeka, Haambokoma, Milingo, p.50).

It is usually argued as well as a considered view that a constructive school ethos is a necessary feature that can significantly contribute to a conducive school environment, improvement, and sustainability.

Some of the salient features of quality education usually talked about are motivation for teachers, good administration, high quality students, good results for students, achievement, desired curriculum, good infrastructure, holistic approach to education (intellectual and spiritual), good learning environment and others evident in Catholic schools under normal circumstances. Thus, Catholic education has enjoyed such a good reputation from the earliest times such that they remain the best choice (The Post Newspaper, 2011).

This is the good reputation Catholic education has earned over the years among the people in Zambia. From the aforementioned, it can be stated that this is a positive educational trend that has been experienced in these schools for many years stretching back to their inception in the early 1890s.

### **2.3.2 Catholic Education and Ethos in Catholic Schools in the Copperbelt Province**

This section discusses the status of Catholic education in Copperbelt province. It further delves into what constitutes Catholic ethos in the school.

#### **2.3.2.1 Status of Catholic Education in Ndola Diocese**

Catholic education arrived with the coming of missionaries to the Copperbelt in the 1930s. The first missionaries were Conventual Franciscans from Italy who set up a mission at Bwana Mukubwa in Ndola (O’Shea, 1986). The missionary expansion on the Copperbelt Province in Zambia led to the creation of mission schools in several places.

At the moment, education matters pertaining to Catholic schools are handled under the department of Catholic education at the diocese. The department grew out of the initiative of late Bishop De Jong to create a forum for Catholic teachers to exchange ideas and reflect on their role in schools. This initiative resulted in the creation of a department of education headed by a secretary. After many years of working in the periphery the Commission for Catholic Professionals in Education was created in 2010 and comprised the education secretary and all heads of Catholic schools in the diocese. In 2013 the diocese created a policy on Education and Training for the diocese (Education

and Training Policy, 2013). In 2014, the Commission for Catholic Education in Ndola diocese issued guidance on the Catholic ethos called Catholic Ethos in Catholic Schools in Ndola Diocese (Catholic Ethos in Catholic Schools, 2014).

According to the Annual Report of the Diocese of Ndola to the Holy See the following are the educational institutions in Ndola diocese: kindergarten -28; Primary or Elementary-40; Secondary Schools-17; Skills, Technical and Professional Training Centres-8; Faculties for Ecclesial Studies not incorporated in the university-2; University for Secular Studies-1.

### **2.3.2.2 Nature of a Catholic School**

Catholic education arises from the Church's mandate of proclaiming the salvific message to all people. Evangelisation is the primordial mission of the Church. The Church was founded to proclaim the good tidings of salvation to all human beings (The Catholic School, 1977). Hence Catholic education, through its schools, fundamentally expresses the mission of the Church to proclaim the good news to all people and as an instrument of evangelisation. (The Catholic School, no.9). A huge portion of the Vatican II Council documents draw on the Church's motherhood to reveal her mystery and her pastoral action. Hence the image that the Vatican Council drew from the Church Fathers and that still abides today is that of the Church as mother and teacher (Gravissimum Educationis, 1965). It is thus underscored that the Church, "is the mother who generates the believers, because she is the bride of Christ." (Congregation for Catholic Education, "The identity of the Catholic school for a culture of dialogue", no. 8).

This mandate entailed and still does that the Holy Mother, the Church, must be concerned with the formation of the whole person e.i, holistic development. In order to "to fulfil the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore, she has a role in the progress and development of education" (The identity of the Catholic school for a culture of dialogue", Congregation for Catholic Education, no. 10).

It then means that education offered by the Catholic Church through her schools must be an integral part of her identity and mission and not merely motivated by a philanthropy that solely responds to social needs. Christ being the foundation of the whole educational enterprise of a Catholic school entail that, "the Catholic school is committed thus to the development of the whole man, since in

Christ, the Perfect Man, all human values find their fulfilment and unity” (The Catholic School, 1977, nos.35-36).

### **2.3.2.3 Salient Features of a Catholic School**

The salient features of a Catholic school emanate from the principal teachings of the Church. In short, these are derived from the Magisterium documents. Although there might be many but generally five principles are usually considered. According to these tenets, Catholic schools should be inspired by a divine mission, be models of Christian communion, and be places where learners and others can encounter Christ in prayer, scripture, and sacraments. The other two are that Catholic schools should be places where learners are integrally formed as human persons and that such schools should impart a Christian world view.

#### **a) Inspired by Divine Mission**

According to the official teaching of the Church, Catholic education is basically an expression of the mission of salvation. It is also an instrument of evangelisation (Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, Vatican City, 1977, 5-7; Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican City, 1965) 2; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Teach as Jesus Did* (Washington, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972; Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Educators*, Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008).

#### **b) Models of Christian Communion and Identity**

This principle asserts that Catholic education is, above all else, a question of communicating Christ in the lives of others. It is a place where learners and teachers become united in communion with Christ. This communion should begin at home where parents should ensure the education of their children and then later this can be extended to the school community. Hence every Catholic school community should foster an ecclesial experience where members (staff and learners) give public witness in both word and deed. It is also needed that administrators and teachers possess the needed formation and skills to foster such an environment. They must also lead by example (*Educating Together* 10, 12-14, 48.; Code of Canon Law 793 §1; *Lay Catholics in Schools*, 22; *The Catholic School*, 1977, 53; *The Religious Dimension of Education*, 26, 28, 29, 34 & 44; *Educating Together*, 5 & 50; *Lay Catholics in Schools* 18; United States Conference Catholic Bishops, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary & Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, Washington, DC, 2005).

**c) Encounters Christ in Prayer, Scripture, and Sacraments**

A Catholic school community draws strength and inspiration from prayer, scripture and sacraments. This is their main source of spiritual energy and encounter with Christ. Therefore, a robust plan of action must be drawn where activities in terms of prayer, scripture, and sacraments are imbedded in the action plan of the school calendar [(The Catholic School (1977) 54-55; Pope Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* (Vatican City, 1929) 15-17, 76; Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City, 1993) 2675; *Educating Today and Tomorrow I*, 1b.; Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican City, 1979) 23; *Educating Together* 17, 26; *The Religious Dimension of Education* 78, 79, 83 )].

**d) Integrally Forms the Human Person**

Catholic education aims at forming learners integrally i.e., physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual aspects [The Catholic School on the Threshold, 4, 9 & 10; *The Religious Dimension of Education* 51, 55, 63, 84, 95 & 98; *The Catholic School* (1977) 7; *Educating Today and Tomorrow III*; *The Catholic School* (1977) 12, 37, 45; *Educating Together* 46; *Educating in Intercultural Dialogue* 64-67)]. The church believes and teaches that the human person is an *imago dei* i.e., formed in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, the aim of Catholic education is to assist learners to become children of God. Learners from Catholic schools are expected to bear witness to the mystical body of Christ by respecting others as humans, leading apostolic lives, being of service to others as well as continuing to build the Kingdom of God in all their actions (*The Religious Dimension of Education*, 95; *The Catholic School* (1977) 7; *Educating Today and Tomorrow III*).

**e) Imparts a Christian Understanding of the World.**

Catholic education must transform the world with a Christian world-view [ (*Lay Catholics in Schools*, 12; *The Catholic School* (1977) 15, 26, 36, 49; *The Religious Dimension of Education* 34, 51, 52, 53; 57, 100 & 108; *The Catholic School on the Threshold*, 14; *Gravissimum Educationis*, 5, 8)]. Learners at Catholic Schools are expected to be like leaven in the world. They must work towards the evangelisation of cultures as well as the promotion of the common good in society through their profession or vocation (*The Catholic School on the Threshold*, 10; *The Catholic School* (1977) 12, 45; *Educating Together*, 46).

**2.3.2.4 Catholic Ethos**

The word 'ethos' originates from the Greek word 'ethikos' which literally means custom or habit. Ethos refers to the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person,

group, or institution. Ethos refers to the essential or basic conduct of an individual human life or group of people. Hence, it is the distinctive and objective characteristic of a culture or a group that can be observed, described and experienced. In other words, an ethos “is a way of living, behaving and doing things by people who, though diverse, follow common values and are united by a shared vision of life. It is often therefore used in a way that is closely linked with ‘culture’ and ‘philosophy’ (Stock, 2012, p.18). While bearing in mind that an undertaking such as defining any institution’s ethos may be hard, is, however, important to do so as an ethos assists in making an institution’s life more distinctive, conspicuous, and unambiguous.

However, according to Caitlin Donnelly “school ethos, defined as the observed practices and interactions of school members, often departs considerably from school ethos defined as those values and beliefs which the school officially supports. On the basis of the data it is argued that much of what we understand of school ethos is superficial and contradictory” (Donnelly, 2000).

After Vatican II Catholic schools were directly connected to the evangelising mission of the Church. Hence, it is now held that by her very nature the Church has the right and the obligation to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:20). Through the mandate to proclaim the mystery of salvation to all people and of restoring all things in Christ, the Church must adopt a holistic view to the human person (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965). The responsibility of educating is an ecclesial responsibility as the Church just like a mother is bound to give to her children an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ.

Thus Catholic schools participate in the Church’s evangelizing mission of bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth. More particularly, they are places of evangelization for the young and other school members. This vision or ideal can be accomplished if such schools understand, implement, and adhere to Catholic ethos in a practical way.

#### **2.3.2.5 Outward Signs of Catholic Ethos**

Catholic ethos should be observed and be conspicuous in the school culture. Therefore, it has to be embedded in the genuine commitment of an individual as well as organisational members that include staff and learners to the teachings of Christ and the Church. The following are some of the common characteristics of Catholic ethos (Stock, 2012, p.19).

##### **(a) A School’s Legal Governing Documents**

According to the Code of Canon Law, Can.803 §1: “a Catholic school is understood to be one which is under the control of the competent ecclesiastical authority.” This entails that it must

have a set of legal governance documents which, among other things, stipulate its Catholic identity.

**(b) Mission Statement**

A Catholic school should must have a clear mission statement imbedding the life of the school and its members in the person of Christ and the official teaching of the Church.

**(c) Governance**

The governing authority or the board of the school plays a very key role in setting the right strategies for understanding, implementing, and adhering to Ethos. Owing to this fact, it means that the majority of the members of the governing body should be practising members of the Catholic Church.

**(d) Leadership and Management**

Leadership and Management of a school include the head teacher/principal, deputy head teacher head teacher/deputy principal, heads of departments, Chaplain, senior teachers, and even teachers. In the same vein, if Catholic ethos is to be implemented, this group plays a key role in setting the right atmosphere and environment. This is the actual group that is in charge of the daily operations of the school. The major part of this group must be composed of practising Catholics.

Additionally, leadership and management should demonstrate genuine personal witness by authentically living the gospel values and abiding by the teaching of the Church daily. It is only when this is done that the school community become witnesses to the presence of God.

**(e) Partnership and Collaboration**

A robust relationship or linkages with critical stakeholders such as the diocese in which the school operates should exist. Other important partnerships are those with the nearby parish community/the community that the school serves, families of the learners, and others.

**(f) Religious Education and the whole curriculum**

Religious education should be mainstreamed and not be seen as a fringe course. The teaching of religious education should form the basic motivation for the parents and stakeholders to prefer Catholic schools. In short, these schools should be preferred because of the teaching of religious instructions to the learners.

**(g) Liturgy and Prayer and Promotion of a Culture of Vocation**

At the heart of any Catholic school is the commitment to regular liturgical celebrations and prayer. Promoting the culture of vocation entails that the school must foster a climate where learners interpret their life in view of the divine plan. In short, learners must be assisted to always contemplate about the plan that God has for them in their life.

(h) Chaplaincy

Pivotal in understanding, implementing, and adhering to Catholic ethos is the chaplaincy.

(i) Charitable Outreach

Catholic schools must endeavour to make a good footprint in their communities through various charitable works and other actions.

(j) Code of Conduct

An explicit code of conduct setting out or delineating the expectations from various stakeholders must be put in place. Based on gospel values as well as the teaching of the Church, the code must clearly enunciate the expected forms of behaviour for stakeholders.

(k) School Buildings and Physical Signs

Special attention must be paid to school buildings and signs so that they convey as well as enhance the correct atmosphere and message to all the stakeholders.

The section highlighted the development of formal education in Zambia with a particular focus on Catholic education. Catholic education is a product of Catholic missionaries who came to Zambia in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was interlinked with evangelization such that the first schools were catechetical centres to equip catechists. After independence Catholic education underwent various challenges that included too much state intervention to the extent of making it difficult for the Church to implement its ethos. However, during the 1990s the mission schools were given freedom to operate. Thus Catholic schools developed and enhanced their attractiveness to various stakeholders even non-Catholics. Today Catholic schools are sought after by many people. The question people have been asking is the reason many people prefer Catholic schools.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Catholic Church in Zambia has been involved in education since the late 1890s up to date. The involvement of the Catholic Church in education has largely been at primary, secondary,

tertiary (colleges, trade schools, etc.). It was not until 2008 that the Church got involved in tertiary education when it set up a university.

It must be noted that the Church's involvement in education at different levels comprises a variety of categories and dispensations. Hence some schools run by the Church are state-owned but the Church is acts as an agent. There is another category of religious/Church run schools. This can either be owned by a diocese or a religious congregation.

In the Copperbelt Province, Catholic schools came with missionaries in the 1930s. As with the rest of the country, these schools are sought after by many people. In Zambia, in general, and the Copperbelt Province in particular, Catholic schools in the various categories mentioned above are held in higher repute for various reasons. Probably, one distinctive characteristic of these schools is the ethos as enshrined in the official teaching of the Church. Catholic ethos is underpinned by spiritual capital or the witness and exemplary life of the educators which can a positive formative influence on learners. As a result of the perception of the quality of education offered at Catholic schools, it is not uncommon to see many parents, guardians, prospective pupils from different Christian denominations and even faiths avidly seeking a place at a Catholic school.

However, as much as this is evidently a position or belief held by many people there is a paucity of knowledge on the actual understanding, implementation, adherence, and practice of Catholic ethos in Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

### **3.2 AIM OF THE STUDY**

This study investigates the understanding, implementation, and adherence to Catholic ethos in Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

### **3.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main /major objective of the research was to investigate the understanding, implementation, and adherence to Catholic Ethos in Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

The research findings were analyzed according to the research objectives. We had three major specific research objectives namely:

1. To find out the nature and understanding of Catholic Ethos in Catholic schools on the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. This objective was meant to find out the views of stakeholders on the nature and understanding of Ethos in Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia.

2. To find out what was being done about the implementation of Catholic Ethos on the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. In other words, the idea was to find out know whether Catholic Ethos was actually being done.

3. To find out about the adherence to Catholic Ethos in Catholic Schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. In short, this objective was designed to measure the frequency in terms adherence to Catholic ethos.

Each objective had a research question, which in turn had several sub questions. The idea was to gauge the extent to which some salient features of Catholic ethos is entrenched in the life of the school.

The following were the research questions:

1. To find out the views or understanding of some stakeholders (Head teachers, Deputy Head teachers, senior teachers, teachers, parents/guardians of pupils, and pupils) on the nature of Catholic Ethos in Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia?

2. To find out about the implementation of Catholic Ethos in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia (Whether it is being done).

This objective aimed at identifying the roles played by various stakeholders (Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher, Heads of Department, Chaplain, Senior Teachers, Teachers, Parents/Guardians, and Pupils) in implementing Catholic ethos through various activities.

We discovered that the common means that schools use in implementing Catholic ethos include Mass, Catechism lessons, support of Associations like Holy Childhood, Workshops (nature not fully explained), retreats, recitation of the Rosary, days of recollection, observance of Patron Saints Days.

3. To find out about the adherence to Catholic Ethos in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia (How often it was observed).

This objective aimed at finding out whether Catholic Secondary Schools had a code of conduct for various stakeholders at the school and whether that code of conduct was adhering to Catholic Ethos; and whether the office of the chaplaincy was established and functional.

On whether the school had a code of conduct for management, staff and pupils, all the schools indicated that they had a code of conduct.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The research questions were generated from the above-stated objectives. This study used aspects both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative research approach employed was the qualitative methodology namely ethnography which literally means “writing about people” (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). This type of research involves the study of people in their own environment through the use of methods that include participant observation and interviews.

The researcher investigated the Catholic Secondary Schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia which stood at seventeen (17). These are grouped as follows: four (4) are private schools run by religious congregations; nine (9) schools are grant-aided; two (2) are combined schools; the other two (2) are special schools.

Purposeful sampling which is also called as selective sampling is a sampling technique that is mainly used by researchers employing a qualitative approach to identify participants who can offer thorough and comprehensive information on the phenomenon being studied. Purposeful sampling involves studying such cases as people, organisations, cultures, events, critical incidents etc. The reason for choosing this methodology is because is ‘information rich’ and illuminative. Hence, they give useful manifestations of the phenomenon of study or interest (Johnson and Christensen, 2014).

Given the population above and using purposeful sampling, the following was the representative sample size involved seven (7) participants Schools; 2 private schools run by religious congregations/Church; 3 grant-aided schools run by the Church; 1 combined school run by a religious congregation; and 1 Special school. Further, the participants at each school were eighteen (18) translating into a total of participants being 126.

The following were participants at each school: 1 Head Teacher; 1 Deputy Head Teacher; 2 Heads of Department (1 male and 1 Female); 2 Senior Teachers (1 male and 1 Female); 4 Teachers (2 Male and 2 Females); 4 Parents/Guardians (2 Males and 2 Females); and 4 Pupils (2 male and 2 females).

Table 1: Summary of Sample Size

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Number per School</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Retention Rate</b>
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		Expected from schools		
Head Teacher	1	7	7	100.00%
Deputy Head Teacher	1	7	5	60.00%
Chaplain			3	
Senior Teacher	2	14	11	72.73%
Teachers (staff)	4	28	26	92.31%
Pupils	4	28	28	100.00%
Parents and Guardians	4	28	11	-54.55%
Head of Department	2	14	8	25.00%
Total		126	99	72.73%

Table 1 above shows the number of people to whom the questionnaires were distributed. The results obtained show that, out of the 126 respondents, 99 questionnaires were received, representing 72.73% retention rate.

The data collection methods or instruments that were used were interviews through questionnaires and focus groups. Given the nature of the study namely qualitative research and ethnography in particular, NVivo software was used to analyse the interviews and focus group discussions and then thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data and is applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts. Participant responses were analysed in order to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly.

This helped the researcher to delve into the understanding that participants have about Catholic Ethos. Secondly, implementation was judged by the amount of time activities that fall into the category of Catholic ethos carried out. Thirdly, adherence to Catholic Ethos was evaluated based on specific policies implemented by schools that reflect adherence to Catholic Ethos.

## 5.0 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted spiritual capital as its theoretical framework. It is our conceived view that Catholic ethos may be understood, implemented, and adhered to appropriately in those Catholic schools whose agents are inspired by a profound sense of spiritual capital. Therefore, this section starts by exploring social capital, which is a larger concept where various sources of capital can be located. This is followed up by a section on spiritual capital and related concepts and finally the paper later delves into Catholic ethos.

The study adopted a theoretical framework known as spiritual capital which is also associated with the bigger concept of ‘social capital’ because it is based on ‘values’ grounded in society. Hambulo argues that “the evolving philosophies of Catholic education or Catholic education policies and Zambian national education policies since Zambia’s independence (1964) are social constructs consisting of values formulated by social institutions, that is, the Catholic Church and the Ministry of Education (MoE) respectively” (Hambulo, 2016).

The term social capital, which became prominent since the 1990s, can be traced and found in the works of such figures as Adam Smith, Alex De Tocqueville, Emile Durkheim, J Hanifan, and others. However, the contemporary usage might be attributed to Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Robert Putnam, and Francis Fukuyama, among many others (Halpern, 2006). There is no single definition of social capital as it is a term debated by various writers in social sciences.

Social capital generally refers to networks and relationships of collaborations among people and defines the intangible resources of community, shared values and trust which form the fabric of daily life (Field, 2009). It refers to the “social networks, norms and sanctions that facilitate cooperative action among individuals and communities (Halpern, 2009).

Social capital is an important economic resource as it is based on mutual trust which is essential for socio-economic life and ancillary activities since “if people who have to work together in an enterprise trust one another because they are all operating according to a common set of ethical norms, doing business costs less (Fukuyama, 1995).” The opposite might happen where there is mistrust so much so that business depends very much on “formal rules, regulations, which have to be negotiated, agreed to, litigated, and enforced, sometimes by coercive means.” (Fukuyama, 1995). This leads to high transaction costs. Social capital also refers to the connections and relationships of trust and reciprocity which may enhance a more secure and pleasurable life than would be possible in a state of nature (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995).

Trust “is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community” (Noteboom, 2002). Social capital then “is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It must be stated that capital can take a variety of forms that are essential in understanding the structure and dynamics of differences in society. However, our focus in this article is on spiritual capital and how it can enhance the understanding, implementation, and adherence to Catholic ethos.

## **5.1 SPIRITUAL CAPITAL**

### **5.1.1 Significance of Spiritual Capital**

The concept of ‘spiritual capital’ as it relates to the educational system has been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986 and 1991; Grace 2010). Pierre Bourdieu observed that although the economic way of thinking had dominated both public policy and social sciences; it had confined itself to a narrow focus on economic capital and thus excluded other forms of capital like the cultural and social capital. He thus expanded the forms of capital to be considered in the analysis of any education system to include economic, social, and cultural capital, etc. According to him, it is impossible, “...to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not only in the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu 1986, 242, also quoted in Grace 2010, 118). In the Catholic educational system, a source of capital that can play an essential role in ensuring the proper understanding, implementation, and adherence to Catholic ethos is spiritual capital.

Spiritual capital can be seen as a “sustained sense of mission, purpose and hope...” which empowers one in their work (Grace, 2010). Hence it is an inspirational and sustaining spiritual energy or resource in one’s work. According to Grace (2002), “Spiritual capital can be a source of empowerment because it provides a transcendent impulse which can guide judgement and action in the mundane world. Those within education whose own formation has involved the acquisition of spiritual capital do not act simply as professionals but as professionals and witnesses” (Grace 2002a, 236). Davies and Guest (2007) emphasise the believer as an agent of spiritual capital rather than being defined by the hierarchy of the religious tradition.

It must be noted, however, that spiritual capital is a term that is easily mixed up with related terms/concepts such as religious capital, charisma, theological literacy, etc., but it is somewhat different.

Bourdieu (1991) conceptualized the idea of religious capital, which according to him was the “monopolization of the administration of the goods of salvation by a body of religious specialists...of deliberately organized corpus of secret (and therefore rare) knowledge” (1991, 9). In this conception, religious capital translates into such things as, membership in the Church and participation in rituals like Mass, access to sacred spaces, doctrines, etc., (Casson, 2010, p.206). Religious capital is usually linked with institutional religion and defined as “the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture” (Stark and Finke 2000, 120).

For Baker and Skinner (2006, 455), spiritual capital is the ‘energiser of religious capital’ implying that it provides ‘the value system, moral vision and a basis of faith’.

Grace further distinguishes spiritual capital from related concepts such as theological literacy and charisma. According to Weeks and Grace (2007), theological literacy “is the ability to communicate knowledgeably how the faith of the Church relates to contemporary everyday experience . . .” This implies that one has to have a good understanding of relevant theological matters, to be able to communicate that knowledge effectively as well as linking it to contemporary issues and challenges.

The other term associated with spiritual capital is charisma. It is basically “‘a gift or power of leadership or authority’ to which is added ‘hence the capacity to inspire devotion or enthusiasm’” (Lydon, 2009). Charisma therefore implies having a distinguishable inspirational gift of the Holy Spirit that enables one to become a charismatic leader.

Making a distinction between spiritual capital and theological literacy on one hand as well as charisma on the other, Grace (2010) explains that “Spiritual capital, it can be argued, draws upon theological literacy but adds to it the dimension of a personal witness to faith in practice, action and relationships. Spiritual capital compared with charisma is also a form of personal empowerment but not of such a high order. It is not the dramatic charisma and charisma of exceptional leadership but rather the sustaining resource for everyday leadership in Christian living and working.” In other words, an individual needs theological literacy to strengthen their spiritual capital and charisma assists to sustain spiritual energy.

This research views spiritual capital as an animating and energising spiritual resource that should be acquired, witnessed, and exchanged (Casson, 2010). While linked to the hierarchy and the religious tradition, spiritual capital still recognizes and prioritizes the agency and witness of an individual. Thus, it is also moulded and transferred by individuals according to the situation and as needed. It can be concluded that spiritual capital as described above remains a vital resource for Catholic educators as well as learners.

### **5.1.2 Spiritual Capital as the enlivening power in Catholic Education.**

As defined and conceived above, spiritual capital of the educators can be seen as the enlivening power in the understanding, implementation and adherence to Catholic ethos. Headteachers play a pivotal role in guiding schools as some intuitively understand that they are “stewards of the spiritual and Catholic developments of their students” (Friel 2018, p.82). As much as this is the correct view, there is also need to empower other educators at the school. This is because of the fact that the quality of an institution largely depends on those that compose it. In this case, the role that other educators play in a Catholic school is critical and vital to the formation of the learners. However, some scholars have observed that spiritual capital is depleting or declining among Catholic head teachers (Grace, 2010) given the decline in the numbers and influence of religious orders. Others such as Friel (2018) observed that while many Catholic head teachers are inspired by spiritual capital drawn from their resources as well as those of the wider community “... these resources are maintaining rather than developing or deepening their spiritual lives.” This calls for a real need and effort to deepen the spiritual capital not only of the leaders of schools but all the educators.

Several efforts and initiatives have been taken and are being made in this direction. Therefore, the next section is focused on the initiatives of the Church as guided by the Congregation for Catholic Education. The Church in its document by the Congregation for Catholic Education entitled *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* noted the vital vocational role that the lay Catholics were going to play in sustaining Catholic education. In other words, realising the declining numbers of religious men and women in Catholic schools with the concomitant effect of their waning influence, the Church embarked upon the promotion of the role of the lay educators. It, thus, equated the lay teaching profession to a vocation. This was, as already stated above, necessitated by the decline in numbers as well as the waning influence of the religious men and women in Catholic schools.

According to the document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, “every Christian, and therefore also every lay person, through baptism, has been made a sharer in “the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ...” (no. 6). This participation by the lay faithful in the salvific mission of the Church is practically done through their apostolate.

The document further asserted the importance of lay Catholics in schools. The document asserted that as participants in the evangelizing mission of the Church, the lay faithful were expected to be zealous as well as authentic witnesses of the faith. In other words, observed behaviour speaks louder than words. Authentic witnessing by the lay faithful in this case basically entails that the practical lives of people must bear testimony to the salvific message.

In order to underscore this message, the document explains that

“conduct is always much more important than speech; this fact becomes especially important in the formation period of students. The more completely an educator can give concrete witness to the model of the ideal person that is being presented to the students, the more this ideal will be believed and imitated. For it will then be seen as something reasonable and worthy of being lived, something concrete and realizable. It is in this context that the faith witness of the lay teacher becomes especially important. Students should see in their teachers the Christian attitude and behaviour that is often so conspicuously absent from the secular atmosphere in which they live. Without this witness, living in such an atmosphere, they may begin to regard Christian behaviour as an impossible ideal” (*Lay Catholics in Schools*, 32).

Further, by calling upon the bishops, priests, and religious men and women, the Church endeavoured to cherish permanent formation of the lay educators given the dearth of the consecrated in Catholic schools. Archbishop Miller observed that the formation of priests, religious men and women was more solid due to its nature and structure. It affords people the experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, listening and reading the word of God, discernment, their heritage of rich pedagogical traditions, etc., (Miller, 2006). Friel (2018) succinctly puts this idea as an ‘immersion in a religious community’. Indeed, Archbishop Miller (2006) underscored the need for the formation of lay educators when he stated that lay educators by emphasising that they can only become authentic and effective representatives of the educational tradition of the Church that can be equated to their professional formation if there is a serious and deliberate religious formation.

The results of a research project undertaken by Grace (2010) revealed that many committed school leaders came from active religious families where prayer and Mass was valued. Secondly, the religious background of such agents was reinforced by going to schools (primary, secondary, colleges) run by religious congregations. Hence some had even felt called to religious life due to going to Catholic educational institutions. Those that felt not called to religious life still “acquired

a strong sense of lay vocation for teaching” because of the models they encountered in terms of religious teachers and college lecturers (Grace, 2010, p.122).

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 OBJECTIVE 1

1.The aim of objective 1 was to find out the nature and understanding of Catholic Ethos in Catholic schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. In short, the objective was deigned to find out whether the various stakeholders understand Catholic ethos.

It aimed at addressing the understanding of Catholic ethos in terms of a schools’ commitment to Catholic ethos, conformity of mission and vision statements to Catholic ethos, and the set-up of the governance structure in terms of Catholic ethos.

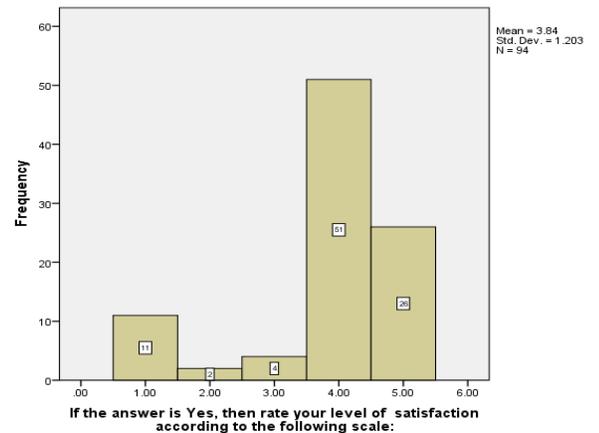
The objective further sought to identify the commitment of schools by looking at the presence of the legal ecclesiastical framework supporting Catholic ethos.

Hence using the presence of legal ecclesiastical documents supporting Catholic ethos as a benchmark was positive in almost all the schools involved. However, the nature of such documents was not clearly stated.

Furthermore, it was necessary to know whether such information is also known by the learners. In addition, it was important to find out whether schools had governing authorities/boards and whether such boards/authorities had policies and procedures that conformed to Catholic Ethos. It was discovered that most of the schools had but lacked specificity.

Responses from some of the sub key questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Does the school have Ecclesiastical Legal Governing Documents?	83.3	0.0	16.7
Do the legal governing documents specify the	94.2	5.8	0.0

Figure 1



Catholic identity and character of the school?			
Do these documents mention the Ecclesiastical authority under which the school operates?	91.5	8.5	0.0
Is the Mission statement explicitly based on the role of Christ and the teaching of the Church?	91.7	8.3	0.0
Are the specific roles and responsibilities of the board clearly spelled out?	95.8	4.2	0.0
Is it a requirement that the policies and procedures enacted by the governing board conform to gospel values?	92.6	7.4	0.0

Table 2: Responses from some sub key – questions under section A

Table 2, shows the results obtained from some of the sub questions of question one in the questionnaire. The results obtained show that 83% of the respondents indicated that the schools have ecclesiastical documents, 94.2% stated that the legal governing documents specify the Catholic identity and character of the school and 91.5% indicated that the document mention the authority under which the schools operate.

Figure 1 shows a histogram generated by the data from the respondents on the level of the specificity of Catholic identity in the essential documents. The

result obtained shows a mean value of 3.84, indicating results that are generally left leaning towards the agree section of results of satisfied with the degree of specificity of Catholic identity and character of the school in the essential documents.

In addition, the respondents were asked to rate the degree to which the leadership practically lives out and conforms to gospel values. It was indicated that the majority adequately live out the gospel values even if the minority disagreed as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2

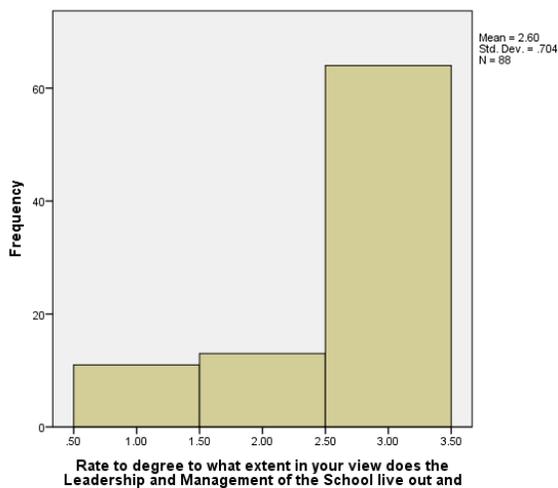
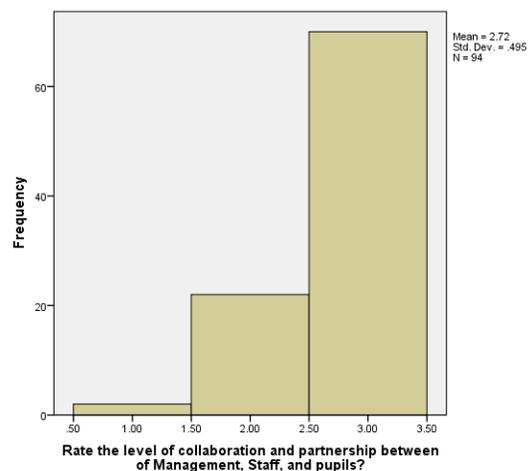


Figure 3



n  
r,  
d

Further, there were diverse views on some sub questions. For example, on whether the stakeholders understood the Ecclesiastical authority under which the school operated; groups such as Deputy Heads, teachers, pupils thought that it was the government of the Republic of Zambia.

The histograms in figures 2 and 3 generated the ratings of the extent to which the school leadership and management lived out the gospels and the level of corroboration between management, teachers and pupil in the schools, respectively.

The results obtained show that both figure 1 and figure 2 have means that are leaning towards the right, implying agreement in the question asked. However, regarding whether the mission statement of the school was explicitly based on the role of Christ and the teaching of the Church; some senior teachers, heads of departments, pupils showed a negative response to the question. This is different from prior expectations. It implies that perhaps there is need to ensure continuous emphasis/orientation on the implementation of spiritual capital of catholic ethos.

It was noted that there is a general understanding of Catholic ethos in many schools. However, some key constituencies such as teachers and pupils did not entirely agree that they understood Catholic ethos very well.

## **6.2 OBJECTIVE 2**

The second objective aimed at finding out about the implementation of Catholic Ethos in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. In other words, the target was to find out whether Catholic ethos is actually implemented in Catholic secondary schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

### **a) Means used to implement Catholic ethos**

It was discovered that the common means that schools use in implementing Catholic ethos include Mass, Catechism lessons, supporting of Associations like Holy Childhood, Workshops (nature not fully explained), retreats, recitation of the Rosary, days of recollection, and observance of Patron Saints Days.

Table 3

Who are the respondents	Rate the adequacy of the involvement of management in the implementation of Catholic ethos				Rate the adequacy of the involvement of staff (teachers and others) in the implementation of Catholic ethos				Rate the adequacy of the involvement of pupils in the implementation of Catholic ethos			
	Not at all	Fairly	Adequately	Total	Not at all	Fairly	Adequately	Total	Not at all	Fairly	Adequately	Total
Head Teacher	0	1	5	6	1	3	3	7	0	2	4	6
Deputy Head Teacher	0	0	5	5	0	0	5	5	0	1	4	5
Chaplain	0	2	0	2	0	3	0	3	0	3	0	3
Senior Teacher	0	2	9	11	0	1	10	11	0	5	6	11
Teachers (staff)	3	0	23	26	3	4	19	26	0	7	19	26
Pupils	2	14	10	26	0	20	4	24	4	14	8	26
Parents and Guardians	0	2	9	11	0	7	4	11	0	6	5	11
Head of Department	0	0	6	6	0	4	4	8	0	2	6	8
Total	5	21	67	93	4	42	49	95	4	40	52	96

**b) Involvement of Staff (management and teachers) as well as pupils in the implementation of Catholic ethos.**

Table 3 shows the distribution of responses on the question that sought to rate the adequacy of the involvement of staff (management and teachers) as well as pupils in the implementation of Catholic ethos.

Sections in green are a series of responses that negate the adequacy of each of the stakeholders in implementing Catholic ethos, as they border between not at all and fairly. The results obtained show that in terms of the specific roles of the involvement of staff (management and teachers) as well as pupils in the implementation of Catholic ethos was basically a ‘blame game’.

It was discovered that Head teachers felt that teachers and pupils were not doing enough in the implementation of Catholic ethos. Heads of department felt that the Chaplain was not doing enough in the implementation of Catholic ethos. Teachers felt that management was not doing enough in the implementation of Catholic ethos. Pupils blamed both management and teachers for not doing enough in the implementation of Catholic ethos, but parents/guardians felt that all parties were playing their role in the implementation of Catholic ethos.

**c) The Place and Value of Religious Education in the Whole Curriculum**

The response was that religious education is taught in all the schools.

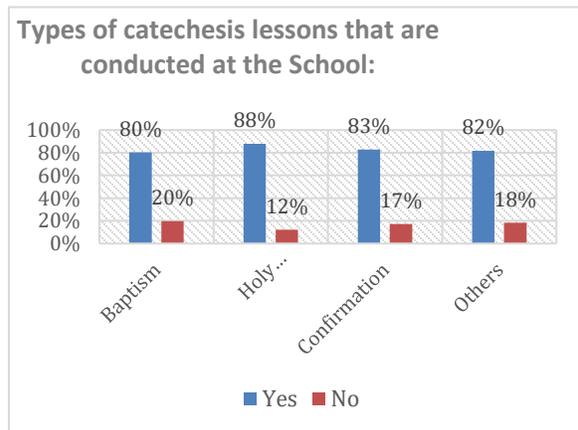
**d) Spiritual Life through Liturgy and Prayer**

Firstly, on the rating of management’s commitment to the spiritual life of staff and pupils, it was noted that teachers and pupils felt that management was committed to liturgy and prayer; most of the schools indicated that they had Mass varying from 1 to 5 times in a week.

Table 4

Rate the degree to which the display of icons and symbols help the community and visitors to experience and respect the uniqueness and sacredness of this learning environment?				
The respondents	Not helpful	Fairly helpful	Very helpful	Total
Head Teacher	0	2	3	5
Deputy Head Teacher	0	0	3	3
Chaplain	0	3	0	3

Figure 4



Senior Teacher	2	4	4	10
Teachers (staff)	0	0	23	23
Pupils	6	8	8	22
Parents and Guardians	0	0	11	11
Head of Department	2	2	4	8
Total	10	19	56	85

Figure 4 shows the results obtained on what type of catechesis lessons that are conducted at the schools and table 4 shows a cross-tabulation table on the respondent's rating on how the display of icons and symbols help the community and visitors to experience and respect the uniqueness and sacredness of this learning environment.

With regard to the types of catechesis lessons that are conducted at the school it was found out that Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation were conducted. On whether the school buildings and surroundings had well-crafted and maintained symbols and icons clearly representing the Catholic faith, all the schools reported that they had a crucifix in all classrooms. Some had a statue of the Blessed Virgin and Images of Saints in some designated places.

On rating the degree to which the display of icons and symbols helped the community and visitors to experience and respect the uniqueness and sacredness of the learning environment, the response from senior teachers, Heads of department, and pupils was that the way such symbols are displayed was not helpful, as shown in table 4.

### 6.3 OBJECTIVE 3

The third objective was designed to find out about the adherence to Catholic Ethos in Catholic Schools in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. In other words, the objective investigated whether

Catholic ethos is embedded in the life and culture of the school by trying to inquire about how often it is observed.

**a) Impact of the Code of Conduct**

With regard to the degree to which the code of conduct clearly differentiates the kinds of conduct that are acceptable and those that are not acceptable in a way that is unique to Catholic Institutions, the tables below show the results obtained.

Table 5

Does the school have a code of conduct for management, staff and pupils?			
Who are the respondents	Yes	No	Total
Head Teacher	6	0	6
Deputy Head Teacher	5	0	5
Chaplain	3	0	3
Senior Teacher	10	0	10
Teachers (staff)	23	3	26
Pupils	20	2	22
Parents and Guardians	7	4	11
Head of Department	6	0	6
Total	80	9	89

Table 5 shows the results on the presence of the code of conduct for management, staff and pupils. From the results above, it was discovered that some schools felt that the code of conduct does not adhere to Catholic ethos; this response mainly came from teachers, pupils, and parents.

Further investigation resulted in the calculation of the mean and establishing the empirical rule range. The results are presented below.

Table 6

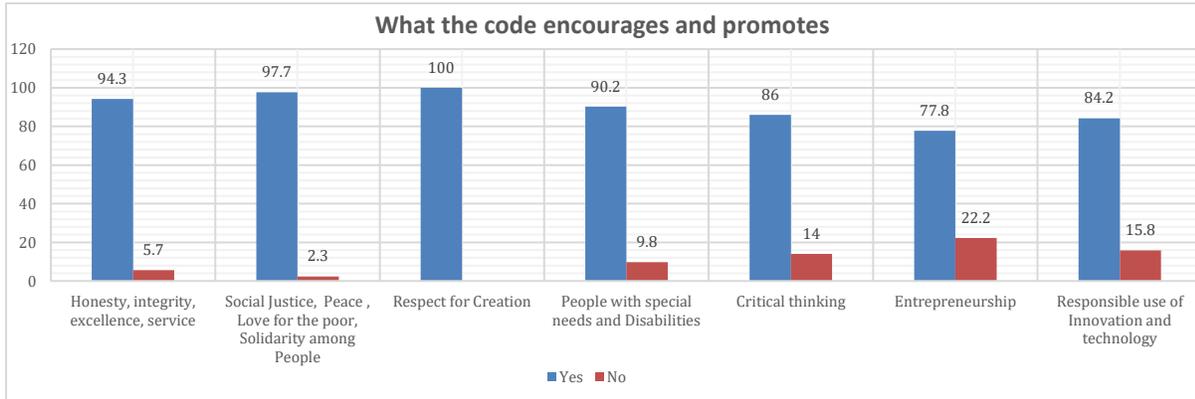
Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	60% Empirical Rule Range	
Rating of the degree to which the code of conduct clearly differentiates the kinds of conduct that are acceptable and those that are not acceptable in a way that is unique to Catholic Institutions	2.363 6	0.79	1.5 7	3.15

Table 6 shows an analysis of the variables indicated above. The results obtained show a mean value of 2.3. Despite the value being above 2, it is relatively close to 2, a point of neutrality in effect. In addition, the empirical rule range show that among the 68% of the respondents are within one standard deviation, some of the respondents are on the area that negate that the code of conduct differentiates the kinds of conduct that are acceptable and those that are not acceptable in a way that is unique to Catholic Institutions. This finding is different from prior expectations and also

indicated that perhaps that is need to refine the manner in which the code of conduct is implemented in the school in relation to promoting Catholic ethos.

The study also sought to identify specific values that the code of conduct promotes as shown in figure 5 below.

Figure 5



The study found that 94.3% of the respondents indicated that the code promotes honesty, integrity, excellence, and service. While 97.7% indicated that it promotes social justice, peace, love for the poor, solidarity among people. However, all the respondents stated that the code promotes respect for creation, 90.2% stated that it respondents stated in promotes helping and recognizing people with special needs and disabilities, 86% of the respondents indicated that it promotes critical thinking, 77% of the respondents indicated that it promotes entrepreneurship, 84.2% stated it promotes responsible use of innovation and technology.

**b) Chaplaincy (Spiritual Care of Management, Staff and Pupils)**

Figure 6

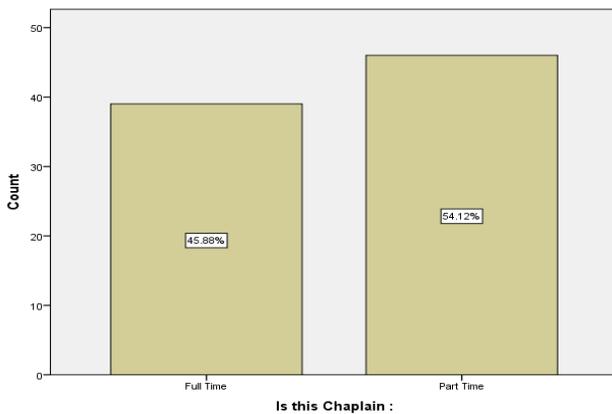


Figure 6 is a bar chart that shows the portion of chaplains who are full-time and those that are part-time. The results obtained show that some schools had a Chaplain on full-time, and those that did not have reported visits of chaplains. However, only less than half of the schools had a full-time Chaplain.

On rating the degree to which staff and pupils were accompanied by the chaplain, the general response was that it was adequate; the results are shown below.

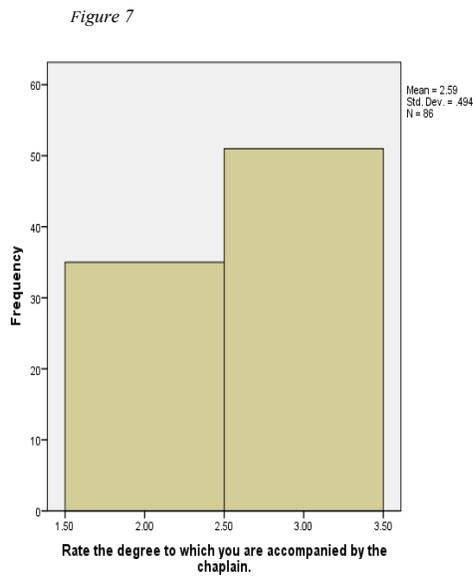


Figure 7 shows a histogram generated by the data obtained when the respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they were accompanied by the chaplain. The result obtained shows a mean value of 2.5, indicating that the responses were marginally left leaning towards the rating of adequacy.

### c) Experiencing the Life of the Gospel

On whether stakeholders adequately experienced the life of the gospel through pastoral care, support and guidance that they

Table 7

Do you experience the life of the gospel and humans through pastoral care, support and guidance you get through the Chaplaincy?			
Who are the respondents	Yes	No	Total
Head Teacher	6	0	6
Deputy Head Teacher	5	0	5
Chaplain	3	0	3
Senior Teacher	10	0	10
Teachers (staff)	19	7	26
Pupils	11	11	22
Parents and Guardians	4	0	4
Head of Department	8	0	8
Total	66	18	84

got through the Chaplaincy, the response was that it was adequate. However, some teachers and pupils still felt that it was not adequate as shown in table 7. These results obtained show that 7 teachers, representing 27% of the teacher samples, and 11 pupils, representing 50% of the pupil samples, indicated that the chaplaincy does not adequately offer an experience of the gospel through pastoral care, support and guidance. This is also different from our prior expectations and indicates a possible area for improvement in the implementation of Catholic ethos in those institutions where pupils and teachers provided such responses.

## 6.4 DIFFERENCES

The analysis was also done with regard to the differences in terms of locality (rural/urban) and setup (boarding/Day). Various metrics were used to gauge the adherence to Catholic ethos.

### 6.4.1 RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOLS

#### a) Observance of Mass

It was discovered that rural schools had more Holy Masses than their urban counterparts.

b) Chaplaincy

It was noted that no rural or peri-urban school had a full-time chaplain.

c) Catechesis

According to the findings catechesis was done more in urban than rural schools/ some rural schools did not even have baptism lessons.

d) It was difficult for rural schools to state their position on values such as social justice, etc., such spaces were blank.

e) There was low collaboration between parents and schools in rural setups.

#### **6.4.2 BOARDING/DAY SCHOOLS**

a) All boarding schools had spiritual guidance and counselling sessions.

This was absent in day schools.

b) Boarding schools had more celebrations of Holy Masses compared to day schools.

c) Boarding schools seem to have more robust academic systems than their day counterparts. It is a way of keeping learners engaged in school activities for longer periods.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study has generally revealed that there are gaps in terms of the understanding, implementation and adherence to Catholic Ethos in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

Induction and socialization programs for staff and learners were generally missing. This is a serious matter in the sense that grant-aided Catholic schools that form the bulk of the Catholic secondary schools do not have the power to choose teachers for their schools. The current memorandum between the Government of the Republic of Zambia and the Catholic Church in Zambia is that only the Headteacher and the deputy headteacher can be chosen by the church. In principle, the Ministry of Education has the authority to send any teacher regardless of their denomination or even religious views to any school.

It was also discovered that the population of teachers who are Catholic was generally low compared to those who were not. In addition, generally Catholic teachers did not seem to exhibit the needed zeal and enthusiasm in implementing Catholic ethos.

Many schools did not have established chaplaincy offices but they just had an ad hoc arrangement with the local area priest.

A clear connection between understanding, implementing, and adhering to Catholic ethos as a major motivating factor for choosing Catholic schools could not be established. This is mainly owing to the somewhat vague coupled with little understanding of Catholic ethos by stakeholders. In addition, the importance of spiritual capital and charisma as a motivating factor for staff to choose to work at Catholic schools was generally lacking.

This gap may be overcome by rethinking how Catholic ethos is understood, implemented and adhered to by various stakeholders.

Dr. Chilambwe holds a Doctorate (PhD) and an STD in Theology and Religion with specialization in Theological ethics from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KULeuven), Belgium which he obtained in 2011. His doctoral research was on business ethics: ethical/socially responsible investing. His main research interests include fundamental Ethics and Applied Ethics which includes Business Ethics; Peace Ethics/Studies; Social Ethics; Ethics and Economics/ Ethics of Wealth Creation; Ethical Leadership: Spirituality in Management; Sustainable development/Sustainability, etc.

Other qualifications include a Licentiate (STL), Master of Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion and a Master's (MA) degree in Religious Studies from KULeuven; Master of Business Administration degree (MBA) from the Copperbelt University (CBU) in Zambia, with specialization in services marketing, human resource management and industrial relations, small scale business management and entrepreneurship, Bachelor's Degree in Sacred Theology from Pontifical Urbanian University, and a Diploma in Philosophical and Religious Studies from St Augustine's Major Seminary in Kabwe, Zambia.

Born in Mufulira, Copperbelt, Zambia he completed philosophical studies in 1989 and theological studies in 1992. After finishing the two years of pastoral experience, he was ordained as a diocesan priest for Ndola diocese in 1994. Dr. Patrick Chilambwe worked at the Zambia Catholic University (ZCU) in 2011 to 2024 as a lecturer Faculty Dean, and Deputy Vice Chancellor. He served two terms concurrently as Vice Chancellor at the same university.

As a priest, Dr. Chilambwe held various church positions in Ndola Catholic Diocese. He has administered at various Parishes since 1994. Others include National Chaplain for the Zambia Workers Christian Movement (WCM), National Chaplain for Young Christian Workers (YCW) in Zambia, National Chaplain for Zambia Apostolate to children (ZAMAC) and Director of the Pastoral Centre, and diocesan coordinator for Justice and Peace (CCJP), all between 1996 to 2002. He also held senior positions in the Diocese of Ndola such member of the college of the Bishop's Consultors and Vicar General and Diocesan Administrator. Dr. Chilambwe is a member of several professional organizations in Zambia and beyond.

[pat\\_chilambwe@yahoo.com](mailto:pat_chilambwe@yahoo.com)

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**JESUS AS ANCESTOR AND DIVINE CONQUEROR: EVALUATING KWAME  
BEDIAKO'S NOTION OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF THE  
CHALCEDONIAN FORMULA.**

By

Idahosa Amadasu & Matthew Salako

**Abstract**

*This paper explores Kwame Bediako's notion of Jesus as Ancestor and Divine Conqueror in light of the Chalcedonian Formula. Bediako attempts to contextualise Jesus Christ within African spirituality by portraying Him as the Great Ancestor and the Divine Conqueror, a Divine figure who resonates with African cultural and religious consciousness. Bediako's articulation seeks to bridge African traditional religiosity and orthodox Christian doctrine by affirming Christ's roles as mediator and victor over evil. The portrayal of Jesus as Divine Conqueror effectively connects with the African understanding of spiritual warfare yet requires theological refinement to align with the Chalcedonian Christological Formula. However, the evaluation of Bediako's Christology reveals a critical gap: while it effectively affirms the functional significance of Christ in African categories, it does not sufficiently engage with the ontological distinctions embedded in the Chalcedonian Formula, specifically, the inseparability and distinctiveness of Christ's two natures. This gap results in a partial theological synthesis that risks undermining Chalcedonian orthodoxy by some cultural categories. This study, therefore, seeks to advance African Christology by integrating Bediako's culturally resonant images with a more robust theological context grounded in the hypostatic union as defined at Chalcedon. This paper adopts expository, analytical and critical methods.*

**Keywords:** African Christology, Ancestor, Divine Conqueror, Chalcedonian Formula, Hypostatic Union and Spiritual Warfare,

## Introduction

The Chalcedonian Formula, developed during the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, serves as a foundational theological structure for articulating the nature of Jesus Christ. The Council was convened to address Christological heresies of Nestorianism, which divided Christ into two persons, and Monophysitism, which confused or merged his divine and human natures into one. The council declared that Christ is “one and the same Son,” fully divine and fully human.<sup>157</sup> This declaration, known as the Chalcedonian Definition, affirms that Christ's two natures exist in a perfect and indivisible union: “without change, without confusion, without separation, and without division.”<sup>158</sup> The theological formulation safeguards the integrity of both natures, emphasising that Christ’s divinity is not diminished by his humanity, nor is his humanity overwhelmed by his divinity. The Chalcedonian Formula remains a cornerstone in Christology, preserving the mystery of the Incarnation and affirming Christ's role as the divine Saviour and perfect mediator for humanity.<sup>159</sup>

In African theology, Kwame Bediako’s work, particularly *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*,<sup>160</sup> significantly contributes by contextualising Christ’s identity within the African cultural context. He employs the images of Jesus as an Ancestor and a Divine Conqueror figure that resonate deeply with African spiritual sensibilities. By presenting Christ as the Great Ancestor, Bediako highlights Jesus’ full humanity and relational role within African traditions, where ancestors function as protectors and mediators. Furthermore, his image of Christ as a Divine Conqueror emphasises Jesus’ victory over spiritual forces, a dominant theme in African cosmology.<sup>161</sup> Thus, we can deduce that Bediako’s Christology attempts to bridge African traditional religious categories and the Chalcedonian affirmation of Christ’s full divinity and humanity, rendering Christ both accessible and theologically orthodox in the African context. This

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<sup>157</sup> Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 30th ed. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), 60.

<sup>158</sup> Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press). 186.

<sup>159</sup> Roch Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 2002), 245.

<sup>160</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, (Oxford: Regnum Africa, 2000).

<sup>161</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 27.

research paper evaluates Kwame Bediako's notion of Jesus as Ancestor and Divine Conqueror in the light of the Chalcedonian formula.

### **I. The Chalcedonian Formula: Theological Framework**

The Council of Chalcedon, convened in 451 AD, was pivotal in clarifying and affirming the Church's doctrinal understanding of the person of Christ. It was a response to various heresies that threatened orthodox Christology, particularly Nestorianism, which proposed that Christ existed as two separate persons, one divine and one human and Monophysitism, which blurred or fused Christ's two natures into a single nature.<sup>162</sup> To counter these errors, the council solemnly defined Jesus Christ as "one and the same Son," fully divine and fully human. He is "complete in his divinity and complete in his humanity," existing without mixture, without confusion, without division, or without separation.<sup>163</sup> This means Christ's divine and human natures coexist perfectly within one person (hypostasis), without compromising or blending either nature.

Furthermore, the council emphasised that Christ's single person, or hypostasis, is the locus of two distinct yet united natures. This directly rejected the Nestorian notion of a duality of persons and the Monophysite error of one nature-confusion. The Chalcedonian Definition affirms that Christ's two natures remain "unchanged, unconfused, undivided, and inseparable."<sup>164</sup> This safeguards the full integrity of both natures: Christ's divinity is not reduced by his humanity, nor is his humanity swallowed up by his divinity. The council also reaffirmed that Christ is "begotten from the Father before all ages according to his divinity" and "born of the Virgin Mary in time according to his humanity."<sup>165</sup> This doctrinal formulation preserves the central mystery of the Incarnation, namely, that Jesus Christ, as one person, is both fully God and fully man. By maintaining the fullness of Christ's humanity, the council affirmed that he is like us in all things but sin, thus able to redeem humanity from within. The Chalcedonian Formula, therefore, remains essential in upholding Christ as both the divine Saviour and the perfect human mediator.

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<sup>162</sup> Richard A. Norris Jr., ed. and trans., *The Christological Controversies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 155.

<sup>163</sup> Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 61.

<sup>164</sup> Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 61.

<sup>165</sup> Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 61.

## II. Kwame Bediako's Notion of Jesus as an Ancestor

Kwame Bediako portrays Jesus as the ultimate Ancestor in African religion; a central and essential concept and role embedded in African traditional religious and cultural systems. In many African societies, ancestors play a vital role as mediators between the divine and the human realms. They are sources of identity, protection, guidance, and blessing for their descendants.<sup>166</sup> Bediako taps into this cultural understanding to present Christ as the “Great Ancestor” who transcends all human ancestors by offering guidance, protection and granting eternal life. In addition to these roles, understanding Jesus as an Ancestor highlights the communal dimension of Christian faith in Africa.<sup>167</sup> African traditions emphasise the collective nature of identity, where an individual's identity flows from and is intrinsically linked to the collective identity. This communal orientation is central for the Christian life, where believers see themselves as part of the “Body of Christ” extending beyond their local community to the universal Church.<sup>168</sup> By associating Jesus with the ancestral role, the African Christian identity is grounded in personal salvation and deeply interconnected with the community's salvation. Therefore, Jesus, as the Great Ancestor, affirms the relational nature of salvation that encompasses both individual transformation and communal restoration.

Furthermore, Bediako emphasises that Jesus, as the Great Ancestor, is the ultimate source of identity for African Christians. In African traditions, ancestors are crucial in defining one's place within the community and the larger cosmic order. By identifying Jesus with the role of the ancestor, he shows how Christ provides a renewed identity for African believers, uniting them with the global Christian family while affirming their local cultural heritage.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, this concept of Jesus as an Ancestor bridges the past and the future, integrating African Christians' ancestral heritage with their Christian hope for eternal life. In African cosmology, ancestors are seen as continuing to influence the present world, their legacies shaping the spiritual lives of descendants. By equating Jesus Christ to the ultimate Ancestor, Bediako reconfigures this spiritual framework, suggesting that while ancestors continue to impact the lives of the living, Jesus offers a definitive and eternal relationship with God. He becomes not only the link between past and

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<sup>166</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 10.

<sup>167</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 23.

<sup>168</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 24

<sup>169</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 24.

present but also the promise of eternal communion with the Divine, fulfilling the deepest longings of African spirituality for an enduring connection with the sacred.<sup>170</sup> This understanding is in tandem with his broader vision of Christianity as a universal religion that can be genuinely African without losing its global essence.

Also, Jesus as an Ancestor offers protection and mediation, functions that are central to the traditional African conception of ancestors. For Bediako, the protective and mediatory role of Jesus mirrors the ancestral tradition but surpasses it. While African ancestors mediate between the living and the spiritual realm, Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, provides not only physical protection but also spiritual reconciliation with God.<sup>171</sup> This resounds with the African need for security in a world perceived to be governed by spiritual forces, thus making Jesus both culturally relevant and theologically profound.

### III. Jesus as a Divine Conqueror

In *Jesus in Africa*, Kwame Bediako portrays Jesus as the Divine Conqueror, a central figure in African spirituality who overcomes spiritual forces, evil, and fear.<sup>172</sup> This image reflects a crucial aspect of African traditional religion, wherein spiritual battles against malevolent forces are integral to understanding life's challenges. For African Christians, Jesus takes on the role of *Christus Victor*, who protects his people and actively conquers these spiritual forces.<sup>173</sup> Bediako integrates this deeply rooted cultural concern to show how Jesus brings liberation in the spiritual realm and everyday life. This depiction positions Jesus as the ultimate victor over evil, offering both protection and triumph to believers.

His portrayal of Jesus as Divine Conqueror is firmly grounded in the African worldview, where the reality of spiritual warfare is a central and daily existential concern. For instance, Bediako describes how Jesus is seen as the one who subdues hostile spiritual forces, such as *Sasabonsam* and *Mmoatia*, mythical and dangerous beings in the African cosmology of his native Akan folklore.<sup>174</sup> Jesus, as the Conqueror, is the one who makes the forest safe for hunters and twists off the heads of evil spirits, offering not only physical safety but also spiritual deliverance.

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<sup>170</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 39.

<sup>172</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 47.

<sup>173</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 48.

<sup>174</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 52.

This powerful imagery of Jesus as Divine Conqueror resonates strongly with the Chalcedonian Christological formula, emphasising Christ's full divinity. The Chalcedonian definition asserts that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine, and his divine nature grants him transcendent power over sin and death.<sup>175</sup> In the African context, where spiritual forces are perceived as real and active, Christ's divine nature is critical, as it affirms his power to conquer such forces. Thus, Bediako's emphasis on Christ's victory over evil echoes the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ as God incarnate, who overcomes sin and evil with divine authority.

This vision of Christ as Divine Conqueror also aligns with the Church's proclamation of Christ's triumph over sin and death. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that:

Christ went down into the depths of death so that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). Jesus, "the Author of life," by dying destroyed "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil," and delivered "all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Hebrews 2:14–15; cf. Acts 3:15). Henceforth the risen Christ holds "the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18), so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."<sup>176</sup>

This affirms the theological truth that Christ's power is not merely symbolic but efficacious; he truly liberates humanity from the dominion of evil. In the African religious imagination, where malevolent spirits and fear of supernatural harm remain existential concerns, this doctrinal truth becomes pastorally reassuring: Christ has already conquered the ultimate enemies of sin, death, and the devil and continues to exercise this victory in the lives of the faithful. Bediako's Divine Conqueror thus becomes a culturally grounded image of a universal reality. Christ the victor who guards, defends, and saves his people.

The Letter to the Hebrews, too, recognises the ongoing spiritual battle in the life of the Church and the believer. Hence it states: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."<sup>177</sup> This passage underscores that all the faithful are called to engage in the

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<sup>175</sup> Walter M. Abbott, ed., "Definition of Chalcedon," in *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), 25–26

<sup>176</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised ed. (Nairobi: Pauline Publication, 2001), no. 635

<sup>177</sup> Hebrews 12:1–2, New Revised Standard Version.

battle of faith, with fortitude and perseverance, following the path of the Cross. This ecclesial vision situates Christ's conquest not merely as a past historical event but as an ongoing spiritual dynamic in which believers participate. Bediako's Christ is thus not a passive figure of comfort, but a militant Saviour who empowers believers to confront the forces of darkness, both external and internal. This understanding not only upholds the Chalcedonian affirmation of Christ's divine agency but also invites African Christians into active discipleship inspired by a Christ who continues to subdue all things under His feet, including the spiritual forces that seek to enslave.

This vision is further echoed in classical theological reflection. In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas reflects on Christ's victory over sin and death through his divine nature. For Aquinas, Christ's divine nature is essential in defeating evil, as human power alone is insufficient for such a conquest. He explains that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary to defeat Satan and liberate humanity from the bondage of sin.<sup>178</sup> This resonates with the image of Christ as Divine Conqueror, overcoming evil forces with divine power and ensuring salvation for humanity. Similarly, St. Augustine in *The City of God* emphasises Christ's triumph over evil through the resurrection. He presents Christ as the one who defeats the spiritual forces of sin and death, liberating believers from their power.<sup>179</sup> For Augustine, this act of divine conquest is essential to Christ's role as redeemer and protector. His insights complement the image of Jesus as the one who delivers and safeguards the faithful from the spiritual dangers that threaten them daily.

#### **IV. Universality and Accessibility of Christ**

Bediako further emphasises that while Jesus is fully present in African cultural idioms, he is also universally accessible. This dual dimension of Christ's identity aligns with Scott Hahn's theological reflections on Christ's kingship and universality. In *The Lamb's Supper*, Hahn describes Christ as the cosmic ruler who transcends all cultures and nations yet is intimately present in each believer's life.<sup>180</sup> This supports the fact that Christ can be embedded in African spiritual realities and remain the Saviour for all humanity. Jesus' role as the Divine Conqueror is

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<sup>178</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 1, art. 6, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, accessed May 25, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

<sup>179</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), Book XX, Chapters 9–10.

<sup>180</sup> Scott Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 107.

not limited to Africa; it expresses his universal kingship and authority over all creation. The Chalcedonian Definition affirms this universality by upholding the doctrine that Christ is one person in whom two distinct natures, divine and human, exist “without mixture, without confusion, division, or separation.”<sup>181</sup> This Christological formula provides a theological basis for asserting that Christ can be both universally accessible and culturally particular. Because Christ is fully divine, his saving power transcends all temporal and cultural boundaries. Simultaneously, as he is fully human, his experiences, suffering, and relationships are genuinely meaningful to people of every culture and historical epoch.

Therefore, the Chalcedonian formula provides a solid foundation for asserting that Christ is universally salvific and relatable. In this light, Christ’s power to conquer spiritual forces in African contexts, vividly portrayed in Bediako’s theology illustrates a culturally resonant expression of a universal truth that Christ’s divine power is accessible to all people across diverse cultural landscapes.<sup>182</sup> This affirms both his transcendence and immanence in accordance with Chalcedonian Christology. By situating Jesus within the African cultural context, he demonstrates that Christ’s divinity is not only theologically coherent but also pastorally and culturally accessible to all peoples, thereby enriching the global Christian understanding of Jesus.

## **V. Evaluation in Light of the Chalcedonian Formula**

While using analogical categories such as “Ancestor” is affirming and provides meaningful structure and continuity within the worldview of African Christians, like all analogies, it ultimately falls short of fully capturing the mystery it seeks to express. The application of the African notion of the Ancestor to Christ, though rich in cultural and relational significance, presents a theological challenge when viewed in light of the Chalcedonian formula. The Council of Chalcedon declared that Christ is “to be acknowledged in two natures, without change, without confusion, without separation, and without division,” thereby safeguarding the full integrity and distinctness of both

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<sup>181</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 85.

<sup>182</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 160.

his divine and human natures united in one person.<sup>183</sup> In contrast, the concept of Christ as Ancestor often emphasises Christ's immanence and relational presence in a way that may risk blurring these distinctions. African understandings of ancestors as mediators, protectors, and moral exemplars focus more on communal relationality and continuity with the living than on metaphysical categories.

Furthermore, the model of Christ as Ancestor lacks some essential elements in the Chalcedonian definition. In African tradition, an ancestor must typically meet four main criteria: live a long life, die a good death, have children, and live a morally upright life.<sup>184</sup> While Christ certainly lived a sinless and morally perfect life (Hebrews 4:15), he did not live to old age, die a peaceful or socially honourable death, nor did he have biological children. This mismatch calls for a theological reevaluation of the notion of ancestorhood in African culture, perhaps shifting the emphasis from biological longevity to the salvific and moral quality of life, and the enduring impact on the community through spiritual kinship rather than bloodline. This rethinking can be deepened by drawing on biblical categories such as Christ as the "firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15), "firstborn from the dead" (Revelation 1:5), and "firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). These titles, which point to Christ's primacy, preexistence, and spiritual headship, provide a metaphysical basis for understanding him as Ancestor not merely in a biological sense, but in terms of authority, origin, and relationship.

A more theologically robust African Christological model may be found in the image of Christ as Divine Conqueror, which better reflects Christ's transcendent authority and the Chalcedonian insistence on his full divinity and full humanity. Scripturally, Christ's authority over spiritual and natural realms is evident in his many miracles and exorcisms. He casts out demons (Mark 1:23-26), rebukes storms (Mark 4:39), walks on water (Matthew 14:25), and raises the dead (John 11:43-44), thereby demonstrating divine power. These acts reflect his divine nature and his authority over creation. However, they also occur within his embodied human ministry, and he expressed compassion, fatigue, and sorrow. This posits that the Divine Conqueror title should not be seen as emphasising only Christ's divinity. Instead, his victory is achieved through his human

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<sup>183</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed., "Definition of the Faith of the Council of Chalcedon" (451), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 85–86.

<sup>184</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108–110.

suffering, death, and resurrection, revealing the integrity and cooperation of both his human and divine natures in his one person (Cf. Phil. 2:8-11). He is a divine conqueror, not through the earthly power of dominance but through the power of love that manifested in his complete solidarity with man. This union of his divine and human natures is essential to interpreting Christ's authority and miracles in a way that faithfully reflects the doctrinal clarity achieved at Chalcedon, where each nature operates according to its own properties within the unity of the one person, without confusion or division.

The image of the Divine Conqueror also offers a richer response to the historical heresies of Arianism and Monophysitism. Arianism denied the full divinity of Christ, arguing that he was a created being, subordinate to the Father.<sup>185</sup> This heresy undermined the doctrine of the co-eternity and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. By contrast, the Chalcedonian formula affirms that the Son is "consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead," directly rejecting Arian subordinationism. When rightly understood, Christ's authority over spiritual forces supports this affirmation of full divinity.

However, care must be taken not to use the title of Divine Conqueror in a way that overemphasises Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity, a danger associated with Monophysitism. This heresy argued that Christ had only one nature after the Incarnation: divine or a hybrid of divine and human.<sup>186</sup> In Monophysite thought, Christ's humanity was effectively absorbed into his divinity, thereby compromising the integrity of his human experience. Chalcedon decisively rejected this by insisting on two complete and distinct natures. Therefore, to serve as an effective Christological model, the image of the Divine Conqueror must not only show Christ's power over evil but also his power to overcome evil through his vulnerability, suffering, and solidarity with the human condition. His conquest of sin and death was not achieved through divine might alone, but through obedience unto death (Hebrews 5:8-9), resurrection, and the redemptive transformation of suffering in a concrete human journey. Thus, when properly balanced, this model can affirm both the divinity and humanity of Christ and highlight the central theological insights of Chalcedon.

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<sup>185</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 226.

<sup>186</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 545.

Despite these theological tensions, the effort to inculturate Christological expressions remains valuable. Just as the early Church Fathers, such as Athanasius and Augustine, engaged Greek philosophical concepts like *logos* and *ousia* to explain the mystery of Christ,<sup>187</sup> African theologians today may use indigenous categories like Ancestor and Divine Conqueror to express Christ's identity in culturally meaningful terms. However, these expressions must be subjected to rigorous theological scrutiny to ensure they do not distort revealed truth. Ultimately, the Chalcedonian formula is the doctrinal anchor for these contextual explorations. The culturally adapted images of Christ must preserve the truth that he is one person in two natures, without confusion, change, division, or separation. When rightly understood, the title of Divine Conqueror can affirm Christ's triumph over evil through both divine authority and human suffering, reinforcing the full scope of the Incarnation. However, without sufficiently showing the humanity of Christ, this model risks falling short of capturing the depth of the mystery of the Word made flesh.

#### VI. **Significance of Bediako's Christology for African Theology**

Kwame Bediako's Christology emphasises the importance of expressing the mystery of Christ using culturally meaningful African categories, particularly the concept of the ancestor. In traditional African religion, ancestors are revered not merely as the dead but as spiritually present figures who serve as mediators, moral guides, and protectors of the community. Bediako draws on this understanding to present Jesus Christ as the "True Ancestor," one who mediates between God and humanity, not in a syncretistic sense, but in a way that illuminates the biblical truth.<sup>188</sup> By doing this, Bediako shows that African culture, when correctly interpreted and purified through the Gospel, can offer authentic insights into the universal truths of Christian faith without compromising doctrinal integrity.

This theological synthesis supports the Church's call for inculturation.<sup>189</sup> One can say it has a Christological root in the reality expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* no. 22, that Christ "fully

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<sup>187</sup> Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 178.

<sup>188</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 31.

<sup>189</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World), no. 20, December 8, 1975, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html).

reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”<sup>190</sup> Rather than erasing cultural identities, Christ enters every culture to redeem and elevate it.<sup>191</sup> In this light, the African understanding of ancestorhood can serve as a meaningful lens through which African Christians grasp the mystery of the Incarnation. Addressing Christ as Ancestor recognises his role as the source of spiritual life, moral exemplar, and enduring presence in the communion of the faithful. The image of Christ as Ancestor emphasises his ongoing presence, moral leadership, and communion with his people in a way that resonates with African communal values and cosmology.<sup>192</sup> By his unique achievement in perfect atonement through his own self-sacrifice, and by effective eternal mediation and intercession as God-Man in the divine presence, he has secured eternal redemption (Hebrews 9: 12) for all who acknowledge who he is for them and what he has done for them, who abandon the blind alleys of merely human traditions and rituals, and instead, entrust themselves to him.

Moreover, this Christological approach helps African Christians understand the humanity of Christ in practical terms. Scripture teaches that Christ was “tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin” (c.f Heb. 4:15). This directly challenges the popular notion that human weakness necessarily leads to sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, even when Christ’s human nature recoiled from suffering, he submitted his will to the Father, saying, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Lk. 22:42). His obedience in suffering becomes a model for African believers, showing that faithfulness is possible even under great duress.<sup>193</sup> As such, the saying that ‘the flesh is weak’ should not be used to excuse moral failure but to highlight the need for grace and perseverance in doing God’s will.

Thus, Christ as both Divine Conqueror and Ancestor becomes a compelling theological image for African Christians. As Divine Conqueror, he defeats sin, death, and demonic powers.

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<sup>190</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), promulgated by Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965, par. 22, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), 811.

<sup>191</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate), no. 52, December 7, 1990, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html).

<sup>192</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 379.

<sup>193</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 91.

Kwame Bediako highlights how the African worldview recognises Jesus' cosmic victory as essential to salvation. As an Ancestor, he remains intimately connected to his people, guiding and interceding for them.<sup>194</sup> He explains how the African worldview embraces Christ's victory over sin and death as central to salvation. Building on Bediako's foundation, Laurenti Magesa contributes a complementary perspective by exploring how traditional African ancestral reverence can be harmonised with Christian Christology. Magesa shows how traditional African ancestral reverence can be harmonised with Christian Christology not by uncritically transferring all aspects of ancestral veneration to Christ, but by reinterpreting the core values of communal belonging, moral authority, and continued presence through the lens of the Incarnation. This approach addresses earlier critiques by acknowledging that the traditional criteria for ancestorhood (such as dying at old age or having biological descendants) do not apply directly to Christ. Instead, Magesa proposes that Christ fulfils and transforms the ancestral role in a unique and transcendent way. He is not merely a human ancestor elevated to divine status but the eternal Son who entered human history and became the firstborn of a new redeemed humanity through his death and resurrection.<sup>195</sup> In this light, the image of Christ as Ancestor purified of ritualistic or metaphysical implications incompatible with the Gospel can serve as a culturally resonant and doctrinally faithful expression of his ongoing presence and intercession. Far from diluting Chalcedonian Christology, such reinterpretation deepens it within an African context by showing how Christ's full divinity and full humanity engage meaningfully with African categories of thought.

## **VII. Contribution to Global Christian Theology**

Kwame Bediako's Christology profoundly contributes to global Christian theology by showing how the person and work of Christ can be faithfully articulated through the lens of African cultural categories, particularly that of the Ancestor and Divine Conqueror. His approach challenges the long-standing assumption that Christian theology must rely on Western philosophical frameworks to maintain orthodoxy. Instead, he shows that African theological reflection can be fully legitimate and deeply orthodox when rooted in African religious experience

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<sup>194</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 106.

<sup>195</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 137.

and worldview.<sup>196</sup> This emphasises how he draws from African religious traditions (like ancestor veneration) to articulate orthodox Christology in a culturally meaningful way.

By invoking the concept of the Ancestor, Bediako situates Jesus as a familiar and authoritative figure within African cosmology, one who maintains communion with the living, offers moral guidance, and mediates between the human and divine. This mirrors the Pauline Christological affirmation: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”<sup>197</sup> At the same time, he presents Jesus as the Divine Conqueror, who overcomes death, evil spirits, and all cosmic powers (cf. Colossians 2:15), resonating with African concerns about spiritual warfare.<sup>198</sup> These culturally grounded yet theologically sound categories enrich the global Church's understanding of Christ's mission by contextualising it within an African worldview.

Bediako's Christological method parallels the early Church Fathers' theological strategy, as Gerald Bray expressed in his work: *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* He noted that Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria used Greco-Roman philosophical concepts to explain the faith to Hellenistic audiences.<sup>199</sup> This engagement with Stoic and Platonic categories, such as Logos, enabled early Christians to articulate the mystery of the divine Word in terms accessible to their cultural context. Similarly, Bediako draws on African categories to express core Christian truths in a language and imagery that resonates deeply with African cultural consciousness. By way of being more specific, we can deduce that what justifies Bediako's cultural engagement is the pastoral need to evangelize a people and inculturate the Gospel in categories, images, and archetypes rooted in their lived worldview so that they may be fully evangelized, abandon double religious allegiance, and embrace Christ without compromising their cultural identity. This method mirrors the early Church's theological adaptation and echoes with the Church's enduring call for inculturation. As affirmed in *Redemptoris Missio*, “a faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out.”<sup>200</sup> Thus, Bediako's

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<sup>196</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 66.

<sup>197</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>198</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 22.

<sup>199</sup> Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2009), 25.

<sup>200</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990, no. 52.

inculturated Christology reflects theological continuity with the early Fathers and fidelity to the Church's missionary mandate.

Furthermore, Bediako's work contributes to the ongoing theological conversation about the 'translatability of the gospel,' a notion that scholars like Lamin Sanneh emphasise. Unlike many other world religions, Sanneh argues that Christianity is inherently translatable; it can be genuinely expressed in any language or culture without losing its essence.<sup>201</sup> Bediako's Christology exemplifies this principle: it does not dilute doctrinal content but re-expresses it in meaningful categories to African people. This approach validates the possibility that other non-Western cultures can develop authentic theological expressions that remain faithful to the core tenets of Christianity.

Nevertheless, Bediako recognises that while theology must be contextual, it cannot be entirely relative. Certain truths of the Christian faith are universal and non-negotiable, such as the divinity and humanity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the reality of the Resurrection.<sup>202</sup> These core elements transcend cultural boundaries and must be preserved in all authentic theological formulations as clearly expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. For instance, while the image of "Ancestor" can serve as a meaningful Christological expression in the African context, it must be carefully distinguished from traditional ancestral worship, which involves veneration of deceased human relatives and may imply a plurality of mediators. In Christian theology, among humans, Christ alone is worshipped as the true God and the sole Mediator between God and humanity (Cf 1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore, identifying Christ as Ancestor is a cultural adaptation that emphasises his ongoing presence, relational closeness, and spiritual headship rightly directed toward divine worship. In this way, he affirms the necessity of cultural expression and the preservation of doctrinal integrity.

By rooting Christology in African cultural thought, Bediako establishes that African theology is not peripheral but integral to the global theological enterprise. Indeed, African theology brings uniquely African analogies and understandings with new insights to the understanding of the mystery of the divinity. His work affirms that African Christians can fully embrace the gospel without abandoning their cultural identity. Instead, they are called to allow the gospel to transform

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<sup>201</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 39

<sup>202</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 43.

their culture, just as Western culture was transformed through centuries of Christian engagement.<sup>203</sup> In doing so, he opens new avenues for theological reflection, where Christ is universally relevant and culturally fully divine, fully human, and fully present in every culture.

### Conclusion

The Chalcedonian formula provides a robust theological framework for understanding Christ's full divinity and humanity, a doctrine foundational for Christian theology. Kwame Bediako's portrayal of Jesus as both Divine Conqueror and Ancestor illustrates how this doctrine can be culturally adapted to African contexts without compromising orthodoxy.<sup>204</sup> His approach demonstrates that Christological truths can be meaningfully communicated through culturally resonant images like the ancestor. However, adopting Christ as an Ancestor raises significant theological concerns, especially given that Christ does not meet the traditional African criteria for an ancestor.<sup>205</sup> This criticism should be reconciled, rather than bypassed. Simply rejecting ancestral worship does not fully resolve the tension, especially since Christ is still identified as the Ancestor and worshipped. One promising solution is to incorporate the biblical affirmation of Christ as the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5), which allows us to reinterpret Christ as a Proto-Ancestor in the sense proposed by Benezet Bujo.<sup>206</sup>

In this theological reconfiguration, Christ, by his death, resurrection, and glorified status, becomes the source of life, communion, and ongoing intercession functions akin to ancestral roles but elevated and fulfilled in his divine-human person. Worship of Christ in this light does not collapse into syncretism but represents the theological elevation and redirection of ancestral reverence toward its true fulfilment in the risen Lord. Just as early Christianity adopted and transformed Greek philosophical concepts like *logos* and *ousia*, refining them through centuries of theological dialogue, African Christianity must engage its cultural categories with critical

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<sup>203</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed., "Definition of Faith" (451), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 85–86.

<sup>204</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 97–98.

<sup>205</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *African Theology Today* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2002), 118

<sup>206</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 81–82.

faithfulness.<sup>207</sup> This paper is a modest contribution to this process of inculturation, demonstrating that culturally rooted Christological models, when carefully refined, can deepen rather than dilute the central truths of the faith. Through this lens, African Christians are invited to encounter Christ within their own cultural heritage while allowing the gospel to purify, fulfil, and ultimately redirect their symbols toward the mystery of the Word made flesh.

Moreover, Bediako's use of the ancestor category challenges Western theological frameworks by reexamining their assumptions about universality, cultural neutrality, and the sufficiency of Greco-Roman categories in articulating the mystery of Christ.<sup>208</sup> While the Chalcedonian formula rightly affirms Christ's full divinity and humanity, it was articulated using Western metaphysical concepts such as *substantia*, *natura*, and *persona* terms rooted in Greco-Roman philosophy. These categories, while precise and now immutable in their Christian usage, were shaped by specific cultural and philosophical milieus and do not exhaust the range of possible faithful expressions of Christology. Bediako's approach does not reject the councils but models how their doctrinal content can be faithfully translated into African conceptual frameworks, such as ancestorhood and communal cosmology.<sup>209</sup> By expressing the Chalcedonian Christ in African idioms, Bediako expands the richness of Christological discourse and critiques the latent assumption that Western categories are universally normative. This cultural engagement contributes to a genuinely *catholic* theology; one that is universal not because it speaks in one cultural voice, but because it resonates meaningfully across many. His method demonstrates that doctrinal fidelity and cultural creativity are not mutually exclusive but foster a more inclusive, dialogical, and responsive global theology. In this way, African Christology does not displace the councils but fulfils their intention by bringing the truth of Christ more fully into the lived realities of all peoples.

In this light, Bediako's Christology does not merely accommodate African thought; it critiques and elevates it by aligning it with the central dogmatic affirmations of the gospel, as articulated in the Council of Chalcedon. He demonstrates a clear awareness of the need to uphold the confession that Jesus Christ is one person in two natures, fully divine and fully human, without

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<sup>207</sup> Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 78–84.

<sup>208</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 78–80.

<sup>209</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 78–80.

confusion, change, division, or separation.<sup>210</sup> His portrayal of Jesus as the ultimate Ancestor who transcends death, possesses divine authority, and offers eternal communion is grounded in this Chalcedonian framework. By interpreting Christ's divine-human unity through African categories, Bediako does not dilute orthodox doctrine but rearticulates it in culturally intelligible ways. This reconfiguration invites African Christians to recognise the fulfilment of their deepest religious longings in Christ while also calling them beyond cultural limitations to a fuller apprehension of divine revelation. Thus, Bediako's theological vision is not a departure from conciliar Christology but a contextualised witness to its enduring truth. His work is a testament to the ongoing relevance of Chalcedon and the Church's mission to proclaim Christ in every tongue and tradition.

Fr. Idahosa Amadasu is a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City, Nigeria. He is currently a Formator and an Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Seminary of All Saints, Uhiele, Ekpoma in Nigeria. He obtained his doctorate in Theology from the Catholic University of Leuven in 2013 with a dissertation on the theology of Joseph Ratzinger.

[idahosaamadasu37@gmail.com](mailto:idahosaamadasu37@gmail.com)

Matthew Salako is a final year Theology Graduate student at the Seminary of All Saints, Uhiele Ekpoma.

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<sup>210</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., "The Definition of Faith" (451), in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 26.

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## EFFECTS OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ON THE AFRICAN MASQUERADE SYSTEM

By

Abdulmalik Adakole Amali Ph.D.

And

Adebayo John BADEJI Ph.D

### Abstract

This research paper explores the multifaceted impact of Christian religious beliefs on the African masquerade system. It delves into the historical introduction of Christianity in Africa, particularly Nigeria, and contrasts its monotheistic tenets with the polytheistic and communal foundations of African Traditional Religion (ATR). The study examines how the advent of Christianity has led to significant shifts in social control mechanisms, cultural identity, educational paradigms, and material culture, including traditional dressing, architecture, and the preservation of valuable artifacts. While acknowledging some benefits brought by foreign religions, the paper highlights the disruption caused to indigenous social, economic, religious, and political systems. It further investigates the resilience and adaptation of masquerade practices in the face of these changes, demonstrating how some traditions have persisted despite the powerful influence of Christian doctrines. The paper utilizes a theoretical framework encompassing cultural assimilation, religious syncretism, and conflict theory to analyze the complex interplay between these belief systems. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and analysis of the material presented herein, this study aims to provide a critical and nuanced understanding of the ongoing dialogue between Christian beliefs and the African masquerade, framed by the inescapable reality of interculturality.

**Keywords:** Christianity, African Traditional Religion, Masquerade System, Cultural Impact, Religious Syncretism, Cultural Assimilation, Nigeria

### Introduction

Religion, a fundamental aspect of human civilization, has profoundly shaped societies across the globe, influencing cultural norms, social structures, and individual worldviews. As defined by Emile Durkheim (Chukwudebelu, 2024), religion encompasses a cohesive set of beliefs and practices centered on sacred elements, fostering a sense of community and shared identity. This profound influence is particularly evident in African societies, where traditional religious systems have historically served as the bedrock of communal life and cultural expression.

Among the myriad of global faiths, Christianity stands as a dominant force, influencing over two billion adherents worldwide. Its monotheistic foundation, emphasizing a singular, omnipotent, and benevolent God, marked a significant departure from the polytheistic traditions prevalent in many ancient societies. The historical trajectory of Christianity, particularly its expansion into Africa, profoundly challenged indigenous belief systems, notably African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its associated cultural practices, initiating significant cultural and religious transformations. This engagement frequently resulted in a complex interplay of assimilation, resistance, and syncretism, where traditional practices either adapted to or subtly integrated Christian tenets (Orihentare, 2019).

The arrival of Christianity in Nigeria, initially through Portuguese missionaries in the fifteenth century and later through a transformative wave of Protestant and Catholic missions in the nineteenth century, initiated a profound cultural and religious transformation. This imposition profoundly challenged indigenous belief systems and led to the decline of traditional practices, often labeled as “pagan” or “barbaric.” This perception led to concerted efforts to eradicate or suppress traditional religious expressions, including masquerade systems, which were viewed as antithetical to Christian doctrine (Okonkwo & Eyisi, 2018). However, this imposition often faced resistance, resulting in complex syncretic processes where indigenous beliefs gradually reappeared within or alongside Christian frameworks.

This paper seeks to explore the intricate and often contentious relationship between Christian religious beliefs and the African masquerade system, critically examining how this encounter has profoundly reshaped, challenged, or even led to the abandonment of this quintessential traditional practice, and the subsequent socio-cultural ramifications on

various facets of African society and culture. It further investigates the mechanisms through which Christian doctrines either assimilated, rejected, or inadvertently preserved elements of the masquerade system, thereby illuminating the dynamic nature of cultural adaptation and religious integration.

The analysis presented in this paper is grounded in a critical, post-colonial perspective that acknowledges the epistemic violence inherent in the missionary and colonial project. While the critique of this violence is widely acknowledged, this study maintains a balanced analytical and moral-theological judgment. Specifically, the authors recognize that African Traditional Religion (ATR), while serving as the spiritual, social, and cultural bedrock of African communities, is not a monolithic or wholly unproblematic system. Like all human institutions, ATR and its associated masquerade systems can be associated with exclusionary practices, gender bias, or the enforcement of rigid, sometimes oppressive, social hierarchies. Therefore, this paper moves beyond a mere romanticization of African cultures to identify both the life-affirming and the potentially problematic aspects of ATR. Conversely, while Christianity is often presented as a disruptive and superseding force, its introduction also brought new educational and social structures. This study aims to provide a nuanced perspective that avoids the dualistic trap of viewing ATR as entirely coherent and Christianity as solely destructive, instead focusing on the complex reality of interculturality and the dynamic interplay of power and adaptation.

This study holds significant value for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the ongoing academic discourse on religious encounters and cultural change in Africa, offering a focused analysis on the often-overlooked aspect of masquerade systems. Secondly, by detailing the implications of Christian beliefs on these traditional practices, the study provides crucial

insights into the dynamics of cultural preservation and transformation in a globalized world. Thirdly, the identification and application of a theoretical framework will enhance the analytical rigor of the study, providing a robust lens through which to understand similar religious and cultural interactions. Finally, the findings and recommendations of this paper can inform cultural policy making, promote interfaith dialogue, and foster a deeper appreciation for the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Africa, particularly among younger generations who may be increasingly detached from traditional practices.

This study primarily focuses on the effects of Christian religious beliefs on the African masquerade system, with a particular emphasis on Nigeria. While acknowledging the diversity of African cultures and masquerade traditions, the scope will be limited to general trends and illustrative examples rather than an exhaustive survey of all African masquerade forms. The research relies heavily on existing academic literature and the material presented herein. A limitation of this study is the absence of primary empirical data collection, such as interviews or field observations, which could offer more localized and contemporary perspectives. However, the comprehensive review of secondary sources aims to mitigate this limitation by synthesizing a broad range of scholarly insights.

## **Literature Review**

### **African Traditional Religion (ATR) and the Masquerade System**

African Traditional Religion is an indigenous belief system deeply interwoven with the cultural fabric of the continent, functioning as a comprehensive framework that guides daily life and social order. Unlike missionary religions, its teachings are primarily passed down through generations via oral traditions, including myths, proverbs, and rituals. ATR is characterized by its belief in a supreme being, a pantheon of lesser deities, and revered

ancestral spirits, all of whom are believed to actively influence the living and contribute to the maintenance of communal harmony and values. This spiritual worldview emphasizes the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical realms, fostering a holistic understanding of existence that contrasts with the often dualistic perspectives of Abrahamic faiths. Furthermore, unlike proselytizing religions, ATR is typically inherited rather than converted into, reinforcing its deep connection to specific ethnic identities and communal histories (Abar, 2019).

A significant manifestation of ATR is the African masquerade system, a rich cultural performance where masked figures embody ancestral spirits, deities, or social commentaries. These masquerades are not merely entertainment but serve crucial roles in social control, law enforcement, spiritual guidance, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Masquerades are believed to embody ancestral spirits who return to the living world to guide, protect, and enforce social norms. These ritualistic performances serve as a powerful medium for moral instruction, reinforcing community values and regulating behavior through symbolic representation and dramatic enactment. While often serving positive social functions, a critical perspective acknowledges that these systems, like all human institutions, can also be associated with exclusionary practices, gender bias, or the enforcement of rigid, sometimes oppressive, social hierarchies. They embody normative standards of good behavior and governance, serving as ancestral figures who originally established the laws (Casimir et al., 2015).

In this capacity, these masked figures play a crucial role in maintaining social order, overseeing moral conduct, and guarding against threats to communal harmony. The mask itself is a pivotal element in these rituals, often accompanied by elaborate costumes,

pulsating music, and dynamic movements, all designed to evoke a powerful spiritual presence (Micah et al., 2022). The intricate craftsmanship of the masks and the associated regalia frequently convey profound symbolic meanings, reflecting complex cosmological beliefs and societal hierarchies (Asigbo, 2012; Micah et al., 2022). For instance, among the Igbo people, masquerades known as Mmanwu are physical manifestations of deceased ancestors, serving as a vital link between the spiritual and physical realms and playing critical socio-political roles beyond mere entertainment (Nwanna, 2017).

### **Christian Religious Beliefs and Historical Context**

Christianity, a global religion with a profound impact on diverse cultures, is fundamentally monotheistic, centered on the belief in a single, all-powerful God. This concept represents a significant departure from the polytheistic traditions that once dominated many societies. The Christian faith is encapsulated in the Holy Bible, which serves as its sacred text, and revolves around the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, its founder. The doctrine of the Trinity (God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is a central tenet, illustrating a complex unity within the divine essence (Brower & Rea, 2005).

The introduction of Christianity to Nigeria is traced back to the fifteenth century with the arrival of Portuguese missionaries, followed by a more substantial and lasting wave of missionary activity in the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, Christianity had established a strong presence in Southern Nigeria, leading to significant social and cultural transformations (Fitzpatrick, 1925). The influence of Christian doctrines, frequently perceived as conflicting with indigenous beliefs, has contributed to a decline in the practice of traditional customs. This perception has often resulted in the view of African Traditional

Religion as fundamentally antagonistic to Christian principles, thereby leading to its marginalisation and discrediting.

The interactions between traditional African belief systems and introduced Abrahamic religions have historically involved periods of conflict and misunderstanding. Christian missionaries often criticized indigenous practices and spiritual elements, which contributed to the stigmatization of African Traditional Religion as primitive or malevolent. These perceptions were influenced by certain Christian discourses that sought to establish theological dominance. A more productive engagement, however, is found in the theological concept of inculturation, which differs fundamentally from syncretism. Inculturation is a critical process that assumes the positive, life-affirming aspects of a culture, rejects its negative or inharmonious aspects, and thereby enriches both the Christian faith and the indigenous culture. Conversely, syncretism is the uncritical mixing of harmonious and inharmonious aspects of faith and culture. Consequently, traditional African religious practices, such as masquerade systems, were frequently suppressed because they were considered incompatible with Christian principles and missionary objectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To comprehensively understand the complex interactions between Christian religious beliefs and the African masquerade system, this study employs a theoretical framework drawing upon concepts of cultural assimilation, religious syncretism, and conflict theory. These sociological and anthropological perspectives provide valuable lenses for analyzing the dynamics of religious change and its impact on traditional cultural practices.

### **Cultural Assimilation Theory**

Cultural assimilation refers to the process by which a minority or subordinate group adopts the cultural norms, values, practices, and often the identity of a dominant or host culture. In the context of this study, cultural assimilation provides a framework for understanding how Christianization efforts in Africa have historically sought to supplant or transform indigenous religious expressions, including masquerade traditions, to align with Western Christian paradigms (Kalu, 2010). This process often involves the gradual abandonment of traditional practices in favor of those deemed more compatible with the dominant religious framework. This theoretical lens helps to explain the historical pressures exerted by missionary activities, which often portrayed African traditional religions as primitive or demonic, thereby encouraging converts to abandon masquerade practices (Aluede & Ikhidero, 2024).

### **Religious Syncretism Theory**

In contrast to assimilation, religious syncretism describes a dynamic process where distinct religious beliefs, rituals, or symbols blend or merge, leading to the creation of new, hybrid forms of spirituality. This theory recognizes that religious encounters can result in the deliberate integration and reinterpretation of traditions rather than outright replacement, allowing for the coexistence and adaptation of elements from multiple belief systems. This theoretical perspective acknowledges that individuals and communities can selectively incorporate aspects of Christianity into their traditional belief systems, or vice versa, resulting in unique religious expressions that diverge from either original form (Murphy et al., 2015). Contemporary scholarship, especially within African theological discourse, increasingly recognizes syncretism not as an anomaly but as a natural and often unavoidable

outcome of religious encounters, reflecting a dynamic interplay between different spiritual frameworks (Nmah & Udezo, 2015).

### **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory, in a sociological context, posits that society is in a perpetual state of conflict due to competition for limited resources. When applied to religion, it suggests that religious change and transformation frequently arise from power struggles and ideological clashes as different religious groups or belief systems contend for dominance, influence, and control over societal norms and institutions. This perspective is particularly salient when analyzing the historical and ongoing tensions between Christianity and African traditional religions, where the struggle often involves the control over spiritual authority, moral frameworks, and community identity. This competition often leads to social stratification and the marginalization of certain religious practices, creating a dynamic where traditional systems, like masquerades, may be suppressed or transformed under the influence of the more dominant religious paradigm (Niedźwiedź, 2023; Kgatle & Ngubane, 2023).

### **Implications and Adaptation of the Masquerade System**

The introduction of Christian religious beliefs into African societies, particularly Nigeria, has had profound and multifaceted implications for the African masquerade system. These theoretical frameworks cultural assimilation, religious syncretism, and conflict theory collectively provide a robust analytical lens through which to examine these changes.

### **Erosion of Traditional Practices and Social Control Mechanisms**

Cultural assimilation, in particular, offers a clear explanation for the direct suppression and eventual abandonment of masquerade practices. Before the advent of Christianity, African societies relied on a complex web of traditional practices and institutions to maintain social

order and cohesion. These included swearing oaths, forming blood pacts, undergoing trial by ordeal, consulting oracles, making vows, and participating in secret societies, all of which derived their authority and effectiveness from being deeply intertwined with religious beliefs and customs, thereby serving as powerful deterrents and mechanisms for social control. The African traditional religion, for instance, relied heavily on rituals to reaffirm corporate beliefs and invigorate the individual's role in society, a practice often challenged by the new religious paradigms (Alamu & Dopamu, 2020).

The introduction of Christianity significantly disrupted these indigenous systems, often leading to the dismantling of traditional authority structures and the erosion of practices central to maintaining societal norms and resolving disputes (Salihu et al., 2019). This disruption often manifested as a decline in the perceived legitimacy and efficacy of traditional forms of justice and governance, as new converts increasingly turned to Christian-based legal and ethical frameworks (Ngangah, 2020). Consequently, the influence of Christian teachings often led to a decrease in participation in indigenous ceremonies and rituals, including masquerade performances, as these were frequently seen as incompatible with Christian doctrines (Agyeman & Awuah-Nyamekye, 2018). This cultural shift was often exacerbated by missionaries and colonial administrators who actively suppressed traditional practices, viewing them as pagan or primitive, which further accelerated their decline (Nwaka, 1978). This suppression frequently led to a dramatic reduction in the social and religious functions of masquerades, stripping them of their former prestige and communal importance (Mensah et al., 2020). This change led to a reduction in the traditional social control mechanisms that historically supported African communities, prompting many societies to seek alternative methods to uphold order and address social challenges.

### **Impact on Cultural Identity, Education, and Material Culture**

The pervasive influence of Christian religious beliefs in Africa has not merely altered but profoundly transformed the landscape of indigenous cultural practices. While introducing some advancements, this encounter has primarily led to significant and often disruptive consequences, challenging and reshaping African social, economic, religious, and political systems, notably through the suppression of traditional practices like the masquerade system.

The introduction of Western education, often spearheaded by Christian missions, marked a pivotal shift in African societies, bringing with it concepts of rationalism and individualism. This new educational paradigm frequently challenged the holistic, community-centric approaches of indigenous education, which traditionally integrated cultural knowledge and spiritual beliefs (Ezedike, 2019). This shift contributed to the erosion of cultural identity by devaluing traditional knowledge systems, including the cosmological significance of masquerades.

Furthermore, the process of assimilation profoundly reshaped material culture. This is evidenced by tangible changes such as new dressing patterns, altered architectural designs, and the deliberate destruction of traditional artifacts, all reflecting a comprehensive transformation towards Western Christian paradigms. The deliberate destruction of indigenous religious symbols, including masquerade regalia and sacred groves, epitomizes the extent to which cultural assimilation sought to eradicate pre-Christian spiritual frameworks (Gbekor, 2020). This iconoclastic destruction, motivated by a desire to erase indigenous spiritual practices, parallels historical patterns of cultural suppression observed globally, making it challenging to reconstruct pre-colonial African belief systems (Strother,

2020). Statues devoted to African gods and masquerades were removed from households, market squares, and palaces, and in some cases, burnt or destroyed. This loss of tangible cultural heritage has made it difficult for scholars to conduct meaningful research and has deprived future generations of a direct connection to their ancestral past. The powers of divinities and deities, once revered and respected, were undermined and treated with contempt, leading to a significant loss of cultural and spiritual capital.

### **Adaptation and Resilience through Syncretism**

Despite the significant challenges posed by Christian religious beliefs, the African masquerade system has not been entirely eradicated. This paper, while emphasizing the decline, also highlights the resilience of African spirituality. This resilience can be understood through the lens of religious syncretism, where traditional practices adapt and persist in new forms. While some masquerade traditions may have been abandoned, others have evolved, incorporating new elements or reinterpreting their significance in a contemporary context. This adaptation often involves a subtle integration of indigenous beliefs within the dominant religious framework, allowing for the preservation of cultural identity amidst external pressures (Quan-Baffour, 2018).

For instance, some masquerade practices might have been recontextualized as cultural performances rather than purely religious rituals, thereby enabling their continuity in a secular or multi-religious society (Scotch, 1961). This dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and external influence underscores the complex strategies employed by communities to maintain their heritage. The continued existence of masquerades, even in altered forms, demonstrates the inherent human need to preserve cultural identity and spiritual connections, often by subtly integrating traditional elements into modern practices.

Rather than outright eradication, a more nuanced process of cultural "cannibalisation" has often transpired, where elements of foreign cultures are selectively absorbed and indigenized, stripping them of their original symbolic meaning and re-contextualising them within existing indigenous frameworks (Okoye, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

This research has explored the profound impact of Christian religious beliefs on the African masquerade system, establishing that the introduction of Christianity to Africa, particularly Nigeria, initiated a complex process of religious and cultural transformation. Initially, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its integral masquerade system served as the bedrock of social control, cultural identity, and spiritual expression within indigenous communities. Masquerades were not merely performances but embodied ancestral spirits and enforced societal norms, playing a crucial role in maintaining order and transmitting cultural values. The study has demonstrated that the encounter between these two belief systems is best understood through the lenses of cultural assimilation, religious syncretism, and conflict theory. Assimilation explains the missionary-led suppression and iconoclasm that led to the erosion of traditional social control mechanisms and the destruction of material culture. Conflict theory highlights the power struggle for spiritual and moral authority. Crucially, syncretism accounts for the resilience and adaptation of the masquerade system, which persists in new, often secularized or reinterpreted forms, thereby preserving elements of cultural identity.

The problem, therefore, lies in understanding the depth and breadth of these implications, particularly how Christian beliefs have reshaped, challenged, or even led to the abandonment of the African masquerade system, and the subsequent socio-cultural

ramifications. The findings underscore the need for a balanced, critical approach that acknowledges the complexities and imperfections of both ATR and Christianity in the African context.

### **Recommendations**

**Promote Critical Intercultural Dialogue:** Encourage theological and cultural scholars to move beyond dualistic narratives and foster a dialogue that critically assesses both the life-affirming and potentially problematic aspects of ATR and Christianity.

**Support Cultural Preservation and Documentation:** Efforts should be intensified to document and preserve the diverse forms and meanings of African masquerade systems. This includes oral histories, visual records, and the collection of artifacts, ensuring that future generations have access to this rich cultural heritage. Museums and cultural institutions have a vital role to play in this regard.

**Integrate Traditional Arts into Education:** Educational curricula should be revised to include the study of traditional African arts and social structures, such as the masquerade system, not merely as entertainment but as sophisticated systems of governance and spiritual expression.

**Encourage Inculturation over Syncretism:** While syncretism is a natural process, religious leaders should be encouraged to pursue inculturation the critical and positive integration of cultural elements to enrich faith without compromising the integrity of either the cultural tradition or the religious doctrine.

### **Abdulmalik Adakole Amali, PhD**

Abdulmalik Adakole Amali is an Associate Professor of Technical Theatre in the Department of Performing and Film Arts at the University of Ilorin. His experience in academia has established him as a leading expert in scenography. Amali's research focuses on Technical Theatre, Theatre Design and Technology, Film Arts, Performance Aesthetics and Cultural Studies. As an educator, Amali is passionate about creating and engaging inclusive learning environments that support

students, conducting research, providing community services, and participating in committees to help develop the university's instructional plans, organization, and grading exams and tests. He has supervised numerous undergraduate and graduate students. Amali holds a B.A. in Creative Arts from the University of Maiduguri and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the Department of Performing Arts at the University of Ilorin. He is a member of the prestigious Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA), among other notable professional organizations. [amali.aa@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:amali.aa@unilorin.edu.ng)

**Adebayo John Badeji, PhD**

Adebayo John Badeji is a Nigerian seasoned academic and Production designer specializing in theatre and film production design. He is a lecturer in the Department of Performing Arts, Music and Film Studies at Lead City University, Ibadan. His academic research focuses on integrating technology into theatre and film production design. With over a decade of professional experience and several academic publications, he has established himself as a force in academia and Nigeria's entertainment industry. He has served as Production Designer, Art Director and Set Designer for numerous notable projects, including films, television shows, and theatrical productions. [badeji.adebayo@lcu.edu.ng](mailto:badeji.adebayo@lcu.edu.ng)

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**THE ORIGIN, EFFECTS AND RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA TO THE MENACE OF THE HERDSMEN PHENOMENON**

By

PROF. P. U. NWOSU

DR. O. A. AJETOMOBI

DR. S. E. IYANDA

DR. M. O. OLORUNNIMBE

**ABSTRACT**

The activities of herdsmen have turned into serious challenges in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central part of the country. This has created an atmosphere of worry as hardly a day would end without reports of brutal attacks on people and communities. At the outset, it was thought to be a misunderstanding between farmers and herdsmen, but recent studies point to another dimension, with attacks being carried out against communities and churches. These attacks, without doubt, are having adverse effects on security networks and on the religious activities of people, including hindrance of national development. This study aims at examining the origin, impacts of Fulani herdsmen and the response of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to the menace of herdsmen activities. The objectives of the study are to highlight the activities of the herdsmen and suggest ways through which the menace could be resolved to enhance national development and human wellbeing. The methods adopted in this study include survey, historical and empirical analyses. The findings of the study show that some of the activities of the herdsmen are dangerous, leading to loss of lives and properties. Riding on these dangerous activities, farmlands and places of worship have been affected. In the face of this, CAN leadership has not been able to speak collectively. Only few voices have been heard both at national and international levels. The study concludes that herdsmen battle with the issue of identity and misplaced human values. Ways through which the challenges could be resolved are suggested for national peace and development.

**KEY WORDS:**

Christian Association of Nigeria, Herdsmen, Menace, Response

**INTRODUCTION**

The present study explores the response of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leadership to the challenges of herdsmen in North Central Nigeria. The North Central states in Nigeria comprise of Kwara, Niger, Kogi, Nasarawa, Benue and Plateau.

Nigeria, within the last three decades, has been facing various challenges ranging from religious, economic and security issues. These challenges impact on the socio-economic growth of Nigeria. In the last fifteen years, another dimension of these challenges emerged. It was rooted in insecurity and was commonly known as “Boko Haram” (Olorunnimbe and Nwosu 2020: 124). The group perpetrated various atrocities such as killing, kidnapping, and abduction of school children.

The insecurity took another angle as herdsmen started attacking indigenes of certain parts of Nigeria, namely Benue, Plateau, Taraba and other parts of North Central Nigeria. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, over seventy people were killed in Benue by these herdsmen. Thereafter, some clergy were killed while going for morning worship and various villages were sacked in Benue, Plateau, Taraba and Kogi.

A few months down, the herdsmen insecurity spread to Kaduna and some states in the Southern parts of Nigeria like Delta, Ogun, Ekiti and Oyo State. It became worrisome as people could not go to the farm or travel from one area to another freely. It was reported that the herdsmen intend to forcefully deprive the natives of their legitimate lands. The menace of the herdsmen has continued without the government combating or arresting the situation.

The negative impacts of these killer herdsmen have received media attention. Utterances and responses of the political groups escalated the crisis. The *Myetti Allah* Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) claims to be the voice of these herdsmen and their utterances at times, show that they have links at the corridors of power (Edieya 2019: 74).

As the case maybe in Benue and Jos, the church was worst hit by the activities of the killer herdsmen in the sense that all people killed on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, were Christians celebrating Christmas and New Year (Olorunnimbe and Nwosu 2020: 124).

Various bodies came out to condemn the incessant killings and the inactions of the governments to bring the culprits to book. Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) was among the bodies that condemned the dastard acts. But the issue remains on how CAN responded to the phenomenon beyond mere condemnation. Was the response of CAN effective? Why has the response not been taken seriously by the government and the killers?

To this end, this study, sponsored through the 2024 senate research grant, university of Ilorin, Nigeria, examines the response of CAN to the menace of herdsmen including the inability of the body to speak with a collective voice against the wicked acts and the government. The study proceeds in the following subheadings: theoretical framework, survey methodology, findings and discussions and then, conclusion.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The ultimate intention of God for the entire humanity is wellbeing. This is expressed in practical goals like a relationship with God so that God could teach humans how to live fully human lives with Him, with each other regardless of tribe or religious affiliation and live in community. (MacCammon, 2008: 23). Yet, the sacred book of some religion introduces questions

about conflict, punishment and mercy in the divine-human relationship and relationship among people. In the light of the above, the mythical story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-16 accounts for the ancient and ongoing tension between farmers and herdsman particularly in Nigeria. It points to rivalry and how it spreads and intensifies over time (MacCammon, 2008: 42). It also marks a significant shift in the understanding of evil, conflict and human relations and how to keep them in check, especially through proper understanding and dialogue. The mythical narrative of Cain and Abel begins on a bright note thus, “now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.” Next she bore the brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruits of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So, Cain was very angry and his countenance fell” (Genesis 4:1-5).

Taking God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” to heart, Adam and Eve moved on in life. In giving birth to Cain, Eve willingly acknowledged her dependence on God for fertility. This shows a sign of humility which was soon rewarded with the second child, Abel. The central and archetypal human conflict began when God reacted negatively to Cain and his offering. But why is God displeased? Could it be that Cain was tired of sibling rivalry, which is common in sacred narrative? Perhaps he simply did what was necessary to gain favour with God. Whatever the case, this became the beginning of the conflict in human relations and motive of choices.

God reassured Cain that if he does well and works out of pure motives as Abel apparently did, then his offering will be accepted. But if he works only for self-serving ends and does not get what he feels he deserves, then jealousy and anger will tempt him to take matters into his own

hands. From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the challenges of human relations will always be. Humans can master it if they seek dialogue and understanding of what God commands. The acceptance of human offerings and cordial relations are determined now by the quality of their motives.

While sociologists of religion have been interested in religious identity and in the case of Nigeria, tribal and religious identity, there has been less attention and focus on religious and tribal identities among those who cross religious borders as in the case of herdsmen. Much of the literatures available suggest that individuals abandon former religious identities including ethno-religious ones when they join or come to a new community or are in a new environment (Shekat and Wilson, 1995: 993 – 1026). According to Ammerman (2003), religious identities centers on and relate to “religious” actors, ideas, institutions, and experiences that play a role in the story of who we are and who I am (p. 216). It arises from the interplay of structures and frameworks. Ammerman (2003) focuses on the influence of religious identities in interaction and narrative as well as the ways in which they are embodied. Cadge and Davidman (2006), on their own part, opined that religious identities are multilayered. In their study of Buddhist religious identities, they demonstrate how some religious identities are seamlessly achieved and chosen. While research on the Jewish case challenges this assumption, the issue of herdsmen in Nigeria throws up further insights. Ethnographic literature and cross-cultural studies seem generally ignored. Thus, this study rides on mythical narrative of Cain and Abel, and on ethno-religious identity illuminating with religious mobility.. It extends insights from the context of CAN leadership by examining its various responses to the menace in North central states of Nigeria.

#### **SURVEY METHODOLOGY (FIELDWORK SUMMARY)**

The fieldwork for this study was based on survey method. The method was used to collect data from the respondents in the field. This happened in two periods, between July to September, 2024 and November, 2024 to February, 2025. The methods used to collect primary data were mainly group focused interviews and participatory observation.

A total of fifty five informants were interviewed. The respondents were mostly religious specialists. They were chosen because the focus of the study is to get the response of CAN leadership, to the challenges of herdsmen. They were conversant with the menace of herdsmen in their various localities. The information provided by some CAN leaders was used to ascertain and confirm whether the North Central states possess common experiences and challenges of the menace.

The instrument used to collect primary data was oral interviews and on sight visits. The majority of respondents were interviewed singly but whenever possible, focused group discussion was used. There were nine such groups of two to six people making a total of twenty six CAN leaders in selected areas. The approach was appropriate because it enabled the researchers to probe where respondents' answers were not clear.

To minimize problems in the field, several precautions were taken. Which included the use of research assistants. Twenty research assistants were engaged from the areas of study where they are well known to the respondents. Visits in advance to the key CAN leaders in selected areas were made. We also attended local meetings organized by CAN such meetings were described as CAN neighbourhood committee. There we took chance to explain to the leaders the research mission.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

By definition, CAN is an association of Christian churches in Nigeria with distinct identities, belief in the Trinity, and recognizable church structures. The association resulted from

the meeting of a group of church leaders of many denominations. The meeting was held at the National Catholic Secretariat, Lagos on the twenty seventh, August, 1976. Events and situations in Nigeria between 1975 and 1976 caused much worries for Christians. This made them push efforts by holding various meetings. It was during such meetings that the name to be given to the gathering was suggested. Jatau, in his interview with Enwerem (1978) explained.

Those who went from the north to represent the Northern states had an association which was formerly named the Christian Association of the North. The Northern delegates said if it is going to embrace the whole country, why not make it “Nigeria”. So we all agreed. It was accepted and that gave birth to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

Present at the meeting were thirty-three church leaders from thirteen denominations. These include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, The African Church, Presbyterians, The Salvation Army, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), The Apostolic Church, United African Methodist (UAMC), The Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), The Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCIN) and the TEKAN Churches (Olorunnimbe and Nwosu, 2020: 126). At these meetings, the church leaders thought it wise to be calling one another together. They decided to retire to the convenient sport at the Catholic Secretariat, Lagos and there they formed CAN.

There was a challenge of Church unity in Nigeria then and up till now. The challenge spurred the church leaders to action and thus broke the walls of pride and self-centeredness. The Holy Spirit used this to stir the zeal of oneness and unity in the heart (Olorunnimbe and Nwosu, 2020: 126). Williams puts it thus:

The Holy Spirit had another plan.... The Church leaders were destined to be founders of a very important Association which by the grace of god will ultimately bring together into one fold all those who claim the fatherhood of God through Jesus Christ... And so, what many years appeared – the coming together of the Roman Catholics and impossibility, different shades of Protestants –

became under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a simple, spontaneous and effortless achievement (Enwerem 1978: 9).

The church leaders accepted the formation of CAN as the work of the Holy Spirit. The birth of CAN was simple, spontaneous and effortless achievement. According to Enwerem (1979), by the end of 1978 branches of CAN had spread in ten of the then nineteen states of the Federation. And since then, it has been spreading across the country with Zonal, local government and individual churches.

The central aim and objective of CAN is to promote understanding, peace and unity among the various people and strata of the society in Nigeria through the propagation of the gospel (Olorunnimbe and Nwosu, 2020: 128). To what extent is this objective reflected in the herdsmen phenomenon in the North Central parts of Nigeria? This is the focus of the next discussion.

The history of herdsmen in Nigeria dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries. That was the period Fulanis started migrating into the northern parts of Nigeria known as Hausa Empire. The migration was from Senegambia region. Now they are spreading into about 20 states which cut across the West Africa and the Sahel as well as Western Sudan and Central African Republic (Tanko, 1991:105). After the Uthman Dan Fodio jihad, the Fulani integrated within the Hausa population or ethnic group of Northern Nigeria. During the dry season when tsetse fly population had reduced, Fulani herdsmen would move their cattle to the middle belt zone and they would return to the north at the outset of the rainy season. This confirms Faulkner (2017) assertion that members of such groups (as Fulani herdsmen) are linked not just by shared religious beliefs, practices and affiliation but also by shared family ties, neighborhood, language, history tradition, and culture. (p. 449). These enhanced social ties are seen to strengthen group members' commitment to one another and affect group members' religious mobility, especially for Fulanis whom ethnicity and religion are rightly linked.

Basically, the Fulanis can be found in Mali, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic (CAR), Togo, Nigeria, Ghana and beyond (Olorunnimber and Nwosu, 2020: 128). In an interview with a prominent CAN Leader, Ajewole notes;

The Fulani herdsmen mostly move with their cattle from one place to another in search of grazing land especially in the dry season. When the Fulani light-skin herders are migrating, they are often accompanied by their dark-skinned sedentary kinsmen who are better educated and more dynamic in politics and finances, versed as Muslim than the farmer.

The Fulanis are the major providers of milk and beef in Nigeria. Their contribution to the dairy industry in Nigeria is impressive. About 90% of the cattle in Nigeria are owned by the Fulani (Anichie, 2020: 128). They are also responsible for the production of Hides and skin in Nigeria – with the fall of Sokoto caliphate, Colonization and the introduction of cattle taxes in Nigeria, the Fulani herdsmen dispersed into the southern part of the country and have since then become itinerant herders, settling anywhere but mostly in the forest places (Olorunnimber and Nwosu, 2020: 128-129).

In light of the above, there has been constant conflicts between herdsmen and farmers especially in the North Central Nigeria. The farmers accuse the herdsmen of destroying their farm lands. At the initial stages, the clashes were resolved peacefully as herdsmen at times, were asked to pay restitution for damages, over time, as reported by an eye-witness, “the Fulanis justified their destructive actions by claiming that the farmers were denying them grazing land when there was no other option. This led to the killing of 63 people in 2013 which later increased to 1,229 people in 2014” (Ajibefun, 2018: 133-139).

Benue State in North Central Nigeria was the most affected by the menace of herdsmen phenomenon. In 2018 while celebrating the New Year festival, about 73 people were killed by

herdsmen in Guman and Logo Local Government Areas, of Benue. On this wicked act, Avwomakpa notes that,

you have to see the corpses of these people to understand the pain and agonies that families of the dead are going through. The corpses consisted of men, women and children. The people were massacred in their homes by heartless people and their properties set ablaze on the first day of the New Year. Imagine those lifeless bodies who entered into the New Year with hope and aspirations being killed mercilessly like that.

The eye-witness further narrated his experience at the burial ceremony organized by Benue

State government for the victims of the massacre. It made one to wonder how harmless herdsmen living among people suddenly became ruthless and harmful. In this regard, Modupe recalled the Fulani herdsmen known in their childhood,

The Fulanis that we grew up to know, were the cattle-rearers who went about with sickles and rods, leading their cattle even selling cheese and milk. In villages, one wonders who are these ones going about with sophisticated weapons.

This was the mutual concern of the majority while considering the gravity of destruction done by the herdsmen to their host community. All of the respondents discuss and note that herdsmen portray identity attachment that are largely ingrained and habitual, persisting despite religious and geographical exit or relocation. Despite the herdsmen's movements they remain attached to their identities. According to Fauilkner (2017), 'despite their exits, these individuals (herdsmen) remain attached to their identities primarily because they are so deeply ingrained but also because they remake them in their new secular contexts' (p. 450-451).

The opinion of Fauilkner (2017) is made concrete in the posture of the spokes group of herdsmen, the *Miyetti Allah* Cattle Breeders' Association of Nigeria (MACBAN). They demonstrate actions believed to be callous and often do not show empathy to the victims of Fulani herdsmen attack.

The attacks by the herdsmen were not limited to the farmers. It extended to religious communities and churches for instance, two priests and dozens of parishioners were killed in April,

2018 in Benue State. Other states witnessed attacks aswell. This included Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba and Kogi.

Comparison of Patterns of attack and CAN responses illuminates contextual factors. Altogether, findings suggest that ethno-religious identities are not mutually exclusive of other identities. This points to the complex nature of human identity. It is multilayered and constructed in particular contexts in interaction with existing notions about religious groups. The challenge is to achieve harmonious coexistence in North Central States and Nigeria generally. Hence, the discussion turns to the response of CAN to the menance of herdsmen phenomenon.

In the Punch Newspaper of June 8, 2020 was a headline: “Northern CAN Knocks Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders...” in the news report Christian Association of Nigeria in the 19 northern states and Abuja called on department of State Services (DSS) and the police to caution Miyetti Allah Association against its statement capable of causing crisis in the country. The call by CAN leadership in the Northern Nigeria was not taken seriously by the DSS. In this regard, Christian Leaders were warned to desist from making speculative statements capable of heating the polity. On another development, CAN President, Ayokunle came out to condemn the continuous killings of people, especially Christians by the herdsmen. In a workshop organized by CAN leadership in Kwara State on July 6, 2018, Ayokunle lamented that:

It seems as if the government of the day has decided to kill us for herdsmen. Last week, many of our people were killed by Fulani herdsmen, who wanted to lay claim to our land. The level of killings by these herdsmen has taken an alarming state. Most of our roads are no longer safe. We went to the president to complain about these killings, he seemed not to regard our calls. Most of our service chiefs failed to listen to us. Even when any arrest is made, they were immediately released, and the complainant became the accused. This can lead to anarchy.

At the end of the workshop, members of CAN expressed their dissatisfaction on the state of the nation under the then Buhari presidency. It was “a situation in which human life had no value but a cow has value than human beings” (Olorunnimbe and Nwosu, 2020:131).

Ayokunle also added that herdsmen under the name of Miyetti Allah have contributed to the killings of Christians in some northern communities. He, as a Leader in CAN called on the Federal Government to declare Miyetti Allah a terrorist group and order the arrest of its leaders for prosecution. In another development, Adewole, a former secretary of Ilorin City CAN, lamented the level of wickedness exhibited by herdsmen against Christians. He opines:

It seems Nigeria has been divided into two. Namely, Fulani herdsmen and other sections. One seems not to understand why their lawless acts are treated with kids' glove. If Christians should rise up to counter these people now, they will try to give it another colouration. What a nation? No equity and justice.

The foregoing highlights the CAN leadership stance of condemnation of the atrocities of the herdsmen. In North Central Nigeria, Echioda also criticized the continuous silence of the government over the activities of Myetti Allah which has been shielding the killer herdsmen. Opoola, on his own parts, challenged the reaction of most Christian leaders, noting that most of them cannot speak against the menace of herdsmen with a single voice.

In light of the above, it was made salient that Christians and their leaders do not have collective voice against the menace. Christian leaders spoke at various fora but there seemed not to be proper coordination for their voices and actions. It seems only few voices spoke against the activities of the herdsmen simply because there is disunity among the rank and files of Christian leadership in Nigeria (Olorunnimber and Nwosu, 2020: 132).

An instance was at a point when the Northern Christian Elders' Forum (NCEF) wanted a combat response to the activities of the herdsmen, but CAN National Leaders thought that dialogue could solve the problem. “Onaiyekan at an interreligious conference at the University of Ilorin,

raised a concern on the response of NCEF, which he cautioned could heat the already boiling nation the more” (Olorunnimber and Nwosu, 2020: 132). Put differently, CAN leadership approached the menace of herdsmen in Nigeria from opposite directions and different lanes. This approach was heightened by a divisive block which made up CAN national leadership. Added to this, is the fact that past leaders of CAN seem to have gone underground in the face of the excessive attacks of herdsmen on farmers, communities and religious houses.

The Catholic Block of CAN leadership in Nigeria and at the regional levels has been very clear, outright and blunt in condemning the violence and killings carried out by the herdsmen. In a Press Statement by the Catholic Diocesan Priests Association (NCDPA), Makurdi Diocese, the body made courageous statements on the persistence of killings, violence and displacements of innocent citizens in Benue State. The firm stance focused on justice and peace thus: “our people are being killed and driven from their ancestral homes on a daily basis, with their livelihood destroyed and eaten by cows. Homes and churches are burned down...since 2001.” This stance was taken in advocacy for justice and in defense of the suffering people of middle belt region of the North Central States as submitted by Terfa Beba, chairman, NCDPA, Makurdi Diocese, Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Going by the logic of the discovery of this study, the menace of herdsmen is still on in Nigeria Herdsmen and farmers are not supposed to be suspicious of each other. CAN Leadership faces the challenges of building bridges and covering gaps in the various blocks that form CAN. Again, the clear understanding of shared religious beliefs and ethno-religious groups in Nigeria and beyond is relevant for peace and integral development. Scholars contend that ethno-religious groups like herdsmen hold social and cultural ties which help them sustain connections to their

ethno-religious groups even when they do not hold the group's beliefs or engage in its practices. Identity attachments of herdsmen need continuous study since they are largely engrained and habitual. They are persistent despite religious exodus and migration. They are remade often in their new secular contexts. Indeed, the herdsmen menace blurs the boundaries between religion and ethnicity. But where cordial relations and areas of specialization are recognized, there may be mutual respect including undue or avoidable conflict such as being witnessed, almost everywhere in Nigeria between herdsmen, farmers and the host communities. Religion and ethnicity appear to be indispensable in human existence. It would seem that they have been coexisting, and they will continue to coexist. As human beings, we learn a lot from each other if there is humility and openness of mind, including making one's ethnicity and religion to have respect for other people's ways.

P.U.Nwosu is a professor of Comparative and African Religion, Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, ILORIN, Nigeria. His research findings focus on ancestral societies, peaceful coexistence among cultures and religions He is a Research Fellow, The Prophet's Chamber, Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity, Nagel University, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Nwosu was among the awardees of 2024 Faculty Based Senate Research Grant, University of Ilorin. [nwosu.pu@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:nwosu.pu@unilorin.edu.ng)

O.A. Ajetomobi is a Faculty member of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. His major area of research is church history and interreligious dialogue. He is an awardee of the 2024 Faculty Based Senate Research Grant, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

S.E.Iyanda is an upcoming scholar of Comparative Religious Studies in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. He is an awardee of the Faculty Based Senate Research Grant, 2024.

M.O.Olorunnimbe is a scholar of Church History and African Christianity. He is of the Department of Religions and an awardee of the 2024 Faculty Based Senate Research Grant of which this publication is one of the outcomes of the grant.

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## ***Nostra Aetate* at Sixty: A Contextual Appraisal of the Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion**

By

Theobald Muchunguzi

**Abstract:** This purpose of this paper is to investigate and deepen the understanding of the dialogical relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), in the context of 60 years since the proclamation of the Vatican II's Declaration on the Church Relations with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (1965). To achieve this, the theological investigation employs a qualitative hermeneutical theological method both in its positive and speculative perspectives. The study presents a brief critical analysis of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, highlighting the paradigm shift of the Church's approach to other religions. It then delves into the significance and the role played by ATR, as part and parcel of God's economy of salvation, meaning that ATR is foundational for the African people's openness to the divine transcendence. Despite the centuries of misinterpretations, denial and external influences, ATR continues to persist and thrive in Africa as a powerful African vita-centric force and a catalyst for African cultural identity. The main ethical and religious issue confronting the African people today, is how to address the inter-human and tribal divisions among them, and to promote peaceful interfaith coexistence across varying religious affiliations. In this regard, the study investigates a number of socio-anthropological, theological and ethical challenges that have historically obstructed genuine dialogue and mutual enrichment between Christianity and ATR. The article suggests new possible interfaith avenues that need to be explored and acted upon so as to foster amicable and truthful dialogical coexistence between Christianity and ATR for human salvation. In short, the paper strongly advocates for ATR to be universally recognized as a valid dialogue partner in the light of *Nostra Aetate*.

**Key Words:** Interfaith Dialogue, African Traditional Religion, Theology of Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, Economy of Salvation, Cultural Heritage, Conversion, Mission, Evangelization.

### **Introduction**

This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of The Vatican II Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church with non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, which is the Catholic Church's '*Magna Carta*'<sup>211</sup> for interreligious dialogue. This paper investigates the sixty years of dialogical relationship between Christianity and ATR, owing to the fact that prior to Vatican II Council (1962-1965), there existed a long lasting period of mistrust and suspicion. In *Nostra Aetate*, the Council highlighted in unambiguous language the Church's absolute rejection of the deicide charges against the Jews. It equally ventured to dramatically overturn the narrative that for

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<sup>211</sup> This Latin expression, literally translated as 'Great Charter' is not an official Church designation but a scholarly convention used symbolically to signifying a document of prime importance in the practice of interreligious dialogue.

centuries cast a long shadow of suspicion and condemnation over all non-Christian religions including ATR. In this regard, the Vatican II: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.”<sup>212</sup>

To achieve its purpose the study adopts qualitative hermeneutical theological method in both in its positive and speculative perspectives. It utilizes essentially existing secondary data gathered from available literature research, mainly from the Christian theological sources, including Sacred Scripture, Sacred Church Tradition, under the guidance of Ecclesial Magisterium, as well experiential African theological discoursed. The article is articulated into three main sections. The first section analyses the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* highlighting its genesis, historical context and reception. The second part discusses ATR as part and parcel of God’s economy of salvation, indicating that despite a long period of denial by foreign anthropologist and early Western Missionaries, ATR continues to constitute the backbone of African religiosity and Spirituality. It remains foundational for the African people’s openness to the divine transcendence. The last part presents a cross sectional survey of the dialogical relationship between Christianity and ATR, focusing on the historical background, Universal and African Church Magisterium teaching, challenges and obstacles, as well as the way forward for the harmonization of the relationship. It is in this theological perspective, that the article proposes new avenues to foster amicable, truthful and genuine dialogical coexistence between Christianity and ATR for human salvation. These include; the deeper engagement in dialogue *ad intra* as a starting point, the search for common grounds of discussion, the profound knowledge and respect for the interlocutor, as well as the attitudes of humility, flexibility, mutual trust and repentance.

### ***Nostra Aetate*: General Overview**

*Nostra Aetate* stands a landmark Vatican II document that launched a historic new positive attitude of understanding, respect, dialogue and collaboration between the Catholic Church and the religions of the world. While maintaining that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone, *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges other religions and reveres the work of God in them. Moreover, the document recognizes the Church’s own historical shortcomings challenging members of the Church to speak

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<sup>212</sup> The Vatican Council II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (28 October 1965), 2.

up against any religious oppression or discrimination.<sup>213</sup> Ultimately, *Nostra Aetate* is a prophetic as it rightly forecasts the relationship between dialogue and healing. From time immemorial, human beings have, in varying degrees, been in need of healing from all kinds of brokenness, and on this, Africans are not an exception. By exhorting humanity to move beyond the violence and brutality that so often characterized the past relations between religions, *Nostra Aetate* offers a simple, yet profound recipe for healing when it urges the Church's sons and daughters to embark with determination on the path of dialogue.<sup>214</sup>

#### *Historical Context and Genesis of Nostra Aetate*

*Nostra Aetate* affirms Jesus Christ as universal savior and recognizes the positive salvific value of the religions of the world. It is worth noting that *Nostra Aetate* was one of the most controversial documents of Vatican II Council.<sup>215</sup> Though it represents one of the first items on the agenda of the Council, it was one of the last documents to be approved by the Council and promulgated by Pope Paul VI. The declaration reflects Vatican II's optimistic and serious engagement with the spirit of *aggiornamento*, 'bringing up to date,' that is, the Church's self-conception and relation to the world.<sup>216</sup> Precisely, *Nostra Aetate* was an expression of the Council's desire for a genuine encounter with all peoples, in their concrete lived realities. Within Catholic settings, the document poses the challenge of reaching out to others, whatever their cultural or religious backgrounds, in ways that draw all together in fellowship, based on genuine acceptance and dialogue.<sup>217</sup> Through the affirmations of this document, the Church became less apologetic and more optimistic, marking the beginning of its seeing itself as part of a pluralistic world.

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<sup>213</sup> Emmanuel Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegration, Nostra Aetate* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 216.

<sup>214</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 162.

<sup>216</sup> John XXIII, *Gaudete Mater Ecclesia* (Mother Church Rejoices), The Pope's opening Speech to the Council, 11 October 1962.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Cyndi Nienhaus, "Nostra Aetate and the Religious Literacy of Catholic Students," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 17, no.1, (September 2013): 67-80.

From the day of its promulgation, there has been an enduring commitment of each roman pontiff to the tenets of *Nostra Aetate*. In fact, without the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, events such as, the Inter-religious World Prayer for peace in Assis (27<sup>th</sup> October 1986), the encounter of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi, marked by the historical signing of a Document on Human Fraternity (2019), would have likely never happened.

### **ATR in God's Economy of Salvation**

African societies have a rich spiritual belief system that influences daily life. Indeed, from time immemorial Africans are believed to be “notoriously religious.”<sup>218</sup> In traditional Africa, religion plays a major role in forming people's worldview. ATR remains fundamental and foundational to the understanding of the ontology, the identity and belongingness of African people. It means that ATR is deeply rooted in cultural practices, communal bonds, and openness to divine transcendence. When African people conceive the universe as being God's creation, they are inevitably looking at the universe in a religious perspective. We can say, therefore, that the African conception of the universe is ultimately and profoundly religious and they approach it and treat it as such.<sup>219</sup> In the same theological vein, Kwame Bediako underscores the African traditional religious understanding that depicts a universe conceived as a unified cosmic system, essentially spiritual, in which the physical acts as the sacrament spiritual power.<sup>220</sup> In such a conception, the Transcendent is not separate from the realm of regular human existence, since human existence itself participates in the constant interplay of the divine-human encounter. It implies that, at the heart of ATR is the divine-human relationship for the fulfilment of humanity's divine destiny.

Moreover, ATR encompasses religious beliefs and practices, a complex and diverse spectrum of belief systems that vary across different ethnic groups and regions of Africa.<sup>221</sup> Central to ATR are the belief in a Supreme Being and the belief in a pantheon of deities or divinities, and the

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<sup>218</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: Heinemann, 1989), 1.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1975), 35.

<sup>220</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, (Akropong-Akuapen: Regnum African, 2013), 92.

<sup>221</sup> 3Cf. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-religions> (Accessed 02/04/2024).

spirits, who mediate between the divine and humanity. Moreover, the ancestral veneration, the spiritual essence of nature, the interconnectedness of all living beings, the use of magic, myths, rituals and sacrifices are fundamental ingredients of ATR. In this respect, Mbiti recalls, the five-fold categories of what he called African ontology in which God, Spirits, Man, Animals, Plants and Inanimate beings exist in a unity which when broken up destroys these modes of existence.<sup>222</sup> The African theological discourse's main concern is to articulate the elements of grace in ATR which prepare Africans for the salvific encounter with Jesus Christ, unique and universal savior. In his attempt to explain God's economy of salvation basing on the African traditional value of ancestorship,<sup>223</sup> Charles Nyamiti focuses on the "economic dimension of the ancestral trinitology by indicating how the ancestral relationships and activities in the Trinity are extended into the man Jesus and through him into human beings and the entire cosmic universe."<sup>224</sup> In so doing, Nyamiti seeks to affirm Jesus' ancestral status for all the Africans.

### **Misunderstandings, Stereotypes and Misinterpretations of ATR**

African Traditional Religion went through a long period of denial, misunderstanding and misinterpretation mostly by foreign travelers, anthropologists and even early missionaries. The misconceptions of ATR mainly by Westerners and their disciples have been ubiquitous and detrimental throughout history. A number of biased terminologies were used to define African religion including; fetishism, animism, ancestor worship, naturism, paganism, and primitive religion. The African religious roots manifested in their rituals (relation with the Supreme Being and the spirits, rites of initiation and passage to adulthood; ancestral veneration), their music and dance, and their prayers and other spiritual and religious observances were considered by the first missionaries to be barbarism, fetishism, idolatry, or something diabolical 'whose exact contours

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<sup>222</sup>Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 35.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Schreier, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 12.

<sup>224</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *Studies in African Christian Theology*, Vol. 2, *Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: An Essay on African Christology*, (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2006), ix. See also Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 35.

were unknown.<sup>225</sup> All these practices and devotions were deemed contradictory to the new religion of the missionaries, and they were simply and purely banned among the proselytes, under pain of exclusion from the Christian community. According to Nyamiti, for too long, embracing Christ and his message meant rejection of African cultural values. Africans were taught that their ancient ways were deficient or even evil and had to be set aside if they hoped to become Christians.<sup>226</sup>

The foregoing misconceptions often arose from cultural biases, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, superiority complex, as well as lack of information and exposure to diverse African worldviews and belief systems. For instance, at the contact with the traditional *Haya* people in north-western Tanzania, European missionaries sought to simplify their complex cosmology, by disregarding the ancestral connectedness and the presence of numerous spirits (*abachwezi*), the spirits of the ancestors (*emizimu*) governing various aspects of life. In the light of this, Fr. Edmond Cesar, a missionary and researcher from the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) who arrived in Kagera in 1909, was surprised to discover a strong belief in God among the indigenous non-Christian *Haya* people, contrary to what was wrongly being propagated. Commenting on this phenomenon he wrote:

At first sight, the *Bahaya* religion seems to be just superstitious, but looking closely behind the practices of divination, black and white magic, grotesque ceremonies and the like, one discovers a spiritualistic base indicating a primitive revelation. The names given to the Supreme Being like *Rugaba* or *Ruhanga* and others are daily on their lips and they are pronounced with great reverence. The ancestors do not get the same kind of respect.<sup>227</sup>

This was the case in many African ethnic groups at the onset of primary evangelization. The observation of Fr. Edmond was already reflected in thoughts of Placide Tempels in his ground breaking work entitled *Bantu Philosophy*, considered as the first researched template of African Philosophy and Religion. In this work, Tempels narrated the essence of African philosophy,

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<sup>225</sup>Benezeth Bujo, *Introduction à la Théologie Africaine*, (Basel : Shwabe Verlag, 2008), 41.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 10.

<sup>227</sup> Cesard, Edmond “*Comment les Bahaya interprètent leurs origines,*” *Anthropos* 22, no. 3/4 (1927) : 450.

religiosity and spirituality before the interferences and influences by Western colonizers.<sup>228</sup> Below is the discussion on some common misconceptions regarding ATR.

- *Uncivilized and Ahistorical Cultures*

In the opinion of the Western anthropologists and early missionaries, “there was no acceptance of any existence of anything called African history and ATR.”<sup>229</sup> This is because “the one without history cannot have a religion.”<sup>230</sup> There was indeed a widespread fallacious conventional wisdom claiming that “Africa did not know God prior to its Arab incursion and European colonialism.”<sup>231</sup> It was equally affirmed by some anthropologists such as Edward Taylor (1832-1917) and James Frazer (1854-1941) and philosophers such as Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) that illiterate and untutored Africans could not know God since the conception of the very idea of God requires philosophical knowledge.<sup>232</sup> They considered indigenous practices such as polygamy, initiation rites, ancestor veneration and other practices as primitive and uncivilized.<sup>233</sup> Due to this missionary approach to Africa which had generally denigrated and negated African religion and culture, there was no room for “relevant theological

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<sup>228</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Translated by A. Rubbens, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1952)

<sup>229</sup> John D. Fage, (ed.), *Africa Discovers Her Past*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1. See also Ann B. Stahl, “Africa in the World: Re-centering African History through Archaeology,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 70, no. 1, (2014): 5. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24393744>, (Accessed 3/12/2024).

<sup>230</sup> Philippe Denis, “The Rise of Traditional African Religion in Post - Apartheid South Africa,” *Missionalia: South African Journal of Mission Studies* 34, no. 2/3 (2006): 312.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Ambe J. Njoh, & Fenda A. Akiwumi, “The impact of religion on women empowerment as a millennium development goal in Africa,” *Social Indicators Research* 107, no.1, (2012):1.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Denis, “The Rise of Traditional African Religion in Post - Apartheid South Africa”, 312.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Leonardo Mercado, “The Change in Catholic Attitudes towards Traditional Religion”, *Dialogue & Alliance* 18, no. 2 (2004/2005): 99.

and missiological principles of engagement and interaction with African Traditional Religion and culture.”<sup>234</sup>

- **ATR Considered as Tribal Non-Revealed Religion**

Basing on the fact that ATR has no written scriptures some Western scholars of religion were reluctant to consider it as anything more than a tribal non-revealed religion.<sup>235</sup> It is true, ATR unlike Christianity and Islam does not have Scriptures or written holy texts. The lack of codified and written texts on African beliefs and practices made it difficult for foreigners to have an in-depth knowledge about them. It was hard for them to conceive a religion dependent on oral traditions. However, according to Laurent Magessa, such an argument is based on a refusal to look carefully into history; for even a religion like Judaism, was an orally-based religion for many centuries before its oral story was codified in writing.<sup>236</sup> In the same way, in the context of Genesis and cosmic religion, God reveals himself through nature and creation. In ATR, the natural world with its beauty, complexity and order of creation, is seen as a manifestation of God’s power and presence. This entails the general revelation which is natural and displayed by God’s creation and which is accessible to all people of all times and in all places.

Furthermore, a good number of books and articles on ATR have been written by outsiders without any personal experience of this religion. “These writers, however sympathetic and broadminded, looked at ATR from the standpoint of an outsider who is not really personally involved in the religion at stake.”<sup>237</sup> As Evans Pritchard put it “none of the influential anthropologists theocratizing about ATR had ever been near primitive people. It is like a chemist who never thought it necessary to enter a laboratory.”<sup>238</sup> Examining the context of past attitudes towards the

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<sup>234</sup>Yusufu Turaki, *Engaging Religion and Western Worldviews: A Christian Theological Method*, (Carlisle-Cumbria: Langham Publishing, 2000), 70.

<sup>235</sup>Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 17.

<sup>236</sup>Cf. Laurent Magessa, *African Religion: The moral Tradition of Abundant Life*, (MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 86.

<sup>237</sup>Patrick A. Kalilombe, “The Salvific Value of African Religions”, *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 21, n° 3 (June 1979): 145.

<sup>238</sup> Evans Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965), 6.

ATR, Patrick Kalilombe asserts that as far as this religion is concerned, the main stereotypes were formulated by Church missionaries especially starting in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>239</sup>

- *Primitive Animism or Paganism*

Western missionaries and mostly European explorers often viewed ATR as archaic, primitive and pagan due to its rituals and animistic<sup>240</sup> practices. It is true, Africans in their traditional setting acknowledge the existence of spirits, which inhabit objects like trees and mountains. However, this is to be understood in the context of the African worldview in which God is considered to be supreme, having under him a number of divinities and spirits. According to Mbiti, the belief in the presence of spirits in the world has nothing to do with worshiping these spirits. Christianity and Islam also acknowledge the existence of spirits, but neither of them is considered to be animalistic.<sup>241</sup>

Moreover, misled by the antiquity of the forms of belief and practices of ATR, missionaries relegated it to a system of old facts, whose meanings were no longer valid. They failed to acknowledge and discern the authentic inspiration in ATR and its importance for human salvation. The use of pejorative terms was intended to draw some clear distinctions between themselves and the natives who they believed were worshiping false gods. These were often being used as derogatory words to describe non-Christian and non-Moslem Africans. Yet there were many people in Europe and America who neither Christian nor Moslem, and who were often wholly irreligious, but surprising these were never called pagans.<sup>242</sup>

- *Polytheistic Beliefs and Idol Worship*

There was a common misconception among Western anthropologists and missionaries that ATR involves idol and ancestor worship, where practitioners worship physical idols or objects as well as their forebears. In many African cultures, a belief in multiple deities, spirits, and ancestors is common. However, this does not qualify them to be called polytheistic since the concept of a

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Kalilombe, "The Salvific Value of African Religions," 146.

<sup>240</sup>Cf. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 18.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 19.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Kalilombe, "The Salvific Value of African Religions," 147.

unique Supreme Being is strongly enshrined. John Mbiti, conceives the unity and plurality of God, “affirming that every African people recognizes one God, but admitting that some people have other divinities in their cosmology which are mainly the personification of God’s activities or deified national heroes.”<sup>243</sup> Moreover, it should be stated that in ATR, Africans do not worship cultural idols, objects nor their departed ancestors. In reality, ATR emphasizes the veneration of ancestors, spirits, and natural forces as intermediaries to the Supreme Being, rather than worshipping these spirits themselves. Since the departed relatives are believed to continue caring for their surviving families, the latter perform the acts of respect to them. According to Mbiti;

The acts of veneration of the departed relatives do not signify worshipping them but acknowledging their intercessory role and affirm people’s belief that the departed of up to four or five generations should not be forgotten.<sup>244</sup>

In sum, it is worth noting that addressing these misconceptions requires a sincere engagement in cross-cultural dialogue, promoting cultural sensitivity, and recognizing the diversity and richness of ATR as valid and valuable belief system. Laurent Magessa affirms that “the historical contact between Christianity and ATR has been predominantly a monologue, bedeviled by assumptions prejudicial against the latter, with Christianity culturally more vocal and ideologically more aggressive.”<sup>245</sup> In light of this, what happened was largely Christianity speaking about ATR, not allowing ATR to speak about itself. This was a critical mistake to disregard the common stream of living history that ensures connectivity between various religious traditions of humanity. The error consisted in actually stressing “aspects of discontinuity between Christianity and African cultures and traditional religion to such an extent that they excluded the aspects of continuity between them.”<sup>246</sup>

### **Persistence and Prevalence of Traditional Religion in Africa**

Despite centuries of external influences, including missionary activities, colonialism, slavery, and globalization, ATR has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Indeed, in many

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<sup>243</sup>Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 51.

<sup>244</sup>Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 18.

<sup>245</sup>Magessa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 86.

<sup>246</sup>Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, xi.

regions of the African continent, the successful implantation of the major religions of humanity such as Islam and Christianity did not lead the indigenous people to abandon completely their traditional gods and religious practices.<sup>247</sup> It is worth noting that a good number of converts to Christianity and Islam in Africa remain fundamentally faithful to their traditional spirituality grounded on the traditional cosmological worldview.<sup>248</sup> Their religion is an integral part of their daily life that helps them withstand the hard times of life crisis. Several key factors have contributed to the continued presence and resilience of ATR across the African continent.

- **African Traditional Religion as a Vita-centric Force**

It is worth noting that in African context, religion is a way of life for the African people. The fact that Africans are notoriously religious is so obvious that it is no longer an issue for debate among scholars today. Religion embraces all the aspects of human life both at individual and community level.<sup>249</sup> Africans' *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* are inextricably intertwined with their religion. People take religion with them and in them wherever they go.<sup>250</sup> The only noticeable distinction is between the more religious and the less religious individuals in terms of the frequency of their visits to the shrines and temples, to consult with the diviners, perform rituals, or transmit messages to the ancestors. "The observance of rules of conduct, the practice of rituals, and the recognition of the ever presence of the living dead, is to allow individuals to coexist in harmony with other members of the community in order to please God."<sup>251</sup> In a nutshell, traditional African religion is part and parcel of African cultural heritage. According to Mbiti, it starts before birth and does not end after death. Whether Africans are part of the modern organized religion today or

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<sup>247</sup>Cf. Ram Desai, ed., *Christianity in Africa as Seen by Africans*, (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1962), 2.

<sup>248</sup>Cf. Goodman Khathide A., *Spirits in the First-Century Jewish World, Luke-Acts and in the African Context: An Analysis*, (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2003), 14.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Arthur Leonard G., *The Lower Niger and its People*, (London: Frank Cass., 1966), 429.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 1.

<sup>251</sup>Gibreel Kamara M., "Regaining our African Aesthetics and Essence through our African Traditional Religion," *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no.4, (2000): 503.

not, they invoke God in their everyday conversations. In fact, the word ‘God’ and its derivatives in various African languages is one of the most uttered words in their daily conversations.<sup>252</sup>

- *ATR as Cultural Heritage and Identity*

ATR serves as a cornerstone of African cultural identity, shaping traditions, values, and social structures that have been passed down through generations. In this respect, Africans view ATR as an integral part of their heritage, connecting them to their ancestors, communities, and the land. According to John Mbiti, “Africa has a very rich heritage of what past generations of African peoples thought, did, experienced and passed on to their children. This heritage forms a long line which links African forefathers and mothers with their descendants who now feel proud of it.”<sup>253</sup> He asserts that religion is by far the richest part of African heritage and as a result, it is found in all aspects of human life. In traditional Africa, the line of demarcation between what is sacred and what is secular is so insignificant that it is almost impossible to differentiate the two. Religion shapes and determines people’s spirituality, culture, social life, political organizations and economic activities.<sup>254</sup> ATR is therefore, closely linked with the traditional way of African life, while at the same time, this way of life shapes religion as well.

- *Environmental and Ecological Harmony*

In many societies, ATR has persisted owing to its insistence on the respect and the safeguarding of the natural environment, recognizing the cosmic interconnectedness of humans, animals, plants, and the environment. The traditional African cosmology which is enshrined and expressed in ATR promotes sustainable practices, and harmonious coexistence with the natural world. Traditional Africans have a deep cognizance that “the environment is not just a physical reality but also a sacred reality and a resource of spiritual treasure worthy of veneration.”<sup>255</sup>

Moreover, indigenous Africans believe that the environment is not just for the living being but equally for the dead and the unborn. In this respect, intergenerational solidarity and collective

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<sup>252</sup> Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, xi.

<sup>253</sup>Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2

<sup>254</sup>Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 10

<sup>255</sup>Appiah-Kubi, “African Traditional Worldview: Indigenous Resource for Re-Thinking Global Faith and Eco- Cultic Spirituality,” 171.

environmental conservation are highly valued. From time immemorial, Africans have developed various eco-friendly cultural and religious practices which are highly religiously and culturally valued. Though these practices are not originally meant to promote environmental concerns, they intrinsically enshrine an ecological significance. In line with the spirit of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*,<sup>256</sup> these practices have for long contributed to traditional Africans' concern for our common home. These practices include the keeping of sacred groves, the totemism and the taboo systems.<sup>257</sup>

- *Adaptability and Resistance to Colonialism*

ATR has demonstrated the capacity to adapt in various situations by incorporating elements from other belief systems, such as Christianity, Islam, and modern spiritual practices. This flexibility allows ATR to survive from hostile external influences, and maintain relevance in changing socio-cultural contexts. Many ATR practices have persisted, blending with other belief systems such as Christianity and Islam to form syncretic religions like *Vodou* in Benin and Haiti or *Kimbanguism* in Democratic Republic of Congo. This ability to synthesize diverse spiritual traditions reflects the enduring vitality of ATR in the face of the changing landscape. Indeed, ATR served as a form of resistance against colonial impositions, prejudices, and cultural erasure. Many Africans upheld their traditional religion as a symbol of resilience, cultural pride, and resistance to external dominance. The denial of African religiosity and spirituality by the foreign missionaries was regarded by Africans as an indirect "use of the gospel to declare the superiority of Western value systems and using this claim to justify European conquest and exploitation of Africa."<sup>258</sup> In some areas, missionaries were not only perceived as turning Africans away from their culture, but also

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<sup>256</sup>***Laudato si*** (Praise Be to You) is a pontifical encyclical letter on the Care for Our Common Home, issued by Pope Francis on (May 24, 2015). It was Pope Francis' first social encyclical as it specifically addresses moral issues. It is the first encyclical in the history of the Roman Catholic Church to be devoted entirely to the environmental issues. Cf. David Cloutier, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Laudato-si> Accessed 20/02/2022

<sup>257</sup>Cf. Samuel Asiedu-Amoako et al., "Environmental Degradation: A Challenge to Traditional Leadership at Akyem Abuakwa in the Eastern Region of Ghana," *American Journal of Indigenous Studies* 1, no.1 (2016): 7.

<sup>258</sup>Bonganjalo Goba, "The hermeneutics of African Theologies," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 12, no. 2 (1998): 19.

as agents of colonizing Africa.<sup>259</sup> In most cases, Western Christianity had failed to meet the African aspirations and created a serious vacuum in their lives as it took from Africans a religion which was functional and useful in their lives.<sup>260</sup> This was the main reason for resistance in some African cultures.

In sum, the persistence of ATR can largely be attributed to its cultural significance, spiritual depth, adaptability, ecological harmony, resistance to external pressures and its inter-generational transmission. These factors collectively contribute to the enduring presence and resilience of ATR as a valuable and integral aspect of African cultural heritage and identity. Indeed, ATR is here to stay and it is, therefore, too early in the day to declare its requiem on the African continent and even beyond African borders.

### **Relationship between Christianity and ATR: Historical Background**

The relationship between Christianity and ATR has historically been marked by tension, mistrust, suspicion and hostility. Until the modern era, ‘unbridled feelings of superiority’ was still guiding Christian and missionary attitudes. However, a host of African Christian thinkers and the Church Magisterium during and after Vatican II Council marked the change of attitude, ushering in a new era of positive understanding and peaceful coexistence.

In this regard, to many Post-World War II African Christian thinkers, the imposition of the missionaries provoked a real question of identity. This became a catalyst for the publication of the collective theological manifesto entitled, ‘*Les Prêtres Noirs s’interrogent*’ (1956), translated as ‘*The Black Priests Question Themselves*’ with contributions from a number of French speaking African and Haitian theologians and scholars.<sup>261</sup> This was one of the important milestones in the process of African cultural, theological and religious emancipation. In writing this book, the black priests were keen to lay the groundwork for Negritude movement of liberation, while remaining

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<sup>259</sup>Cf. Simon Maimela, “Religion and culture: Blessings or curses?” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 5, no. 1 (1991): 7.

<sup>260</sup>Philip Moila, “The African version of Christianity,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 5, no. 1 (1991): 37.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Pierre Diarra, “*Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent : Colloque pour le 50<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du livre, réédité aux éditions Karthala en 2006,*” *Histoire et Missions Chrétiennes* 1, no.1 (2007): 156.

in communion with their hierarchical universal Church. They focused on how the Africans can welcome the Gospel without rejecting their rich cultural values.

Along the same lines, the African Negritude movement was organised into the *Societe Africaine de Culture* (African society of Culture) under the leadership of Alioune Diop (1910-1980). This was an association of African writers whose main objective was to promote African cultural heritage. They organised two congresses of Black writers and artists, in which leaders were trained to work with people of different religious beliefs, with emphasis particularly on taking ATR seriously in all their undertakings. Even though this body was not a religious organisation, it provided a platform where people of different religious beliefs could gather as equals, thus preparing a weighty background for dialogue between Christianity and ATR.<sup>262</sup> The African elites emphasised that political independence must go hand in hand with religious independence and that it high time for the colonial mentality regarding ATR to change.

In 1970, an important symposium was held in Porth-Novo (Dahomey) on ‘Traditional African Religion as a source of civilization values.’<sup>263</sup> In attendance were many African intellectuals from various religious backgrounds who attempted to define ATR as the main foundation of Black culture.<sup>264</sup> It was also emphasised that ATR was comprehended as the invaluable deposit of African values that constitutes an important bridge between the African people and the believers of other faiths such as Islam and Christianity. Owing to its spirit of tolerance and lack of the proselytizing missionary agenda, ATR also provides a spirit of cooperation and harmonious coexistence for the people of different religions; accounting for a solid foundation for interreligious dialogue in Africa.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Cf. Mutombo Nkulu N’shengha, “Interreligious Dialogue in Black Africa among Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33, n° 4 (Fall 1996): 535.

<sup>263</sup> Aguessy Honorat, “Concerning ‘Traditional African Religions as a Source of Civilization Values,’” *Présence Africaine* 74, (1970): 94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24350167>. (Accessed 30/03/2025).

<sup>264</sup> David Adamo, “Christianity and the African traditional religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no.1 (2011): 8.

<sup>265</sup> Nkulu N’shengha, “Interreligious Dialogue in Black Africa among Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion,” 535.

## Church Magisterium

On the part of Church Magisterium, the Vatican II Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* is a landmark document that laid a profound foundation for a possibility of a renewed relationship with non-Christians anchored on the common origins, purpose and destiny of humanity. In *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II made possible the positive encounter between Christianity and ATR by recommending genuine dialogue and admitting that there are some lights of truth and goodness enshrined in these religions and originating from the same God, the creator of all people. It was affirmed:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.<sup>266</sup>

In the same aftermath of Vatican II, the Vatican published a document entitled *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (The Holy Church) in 1966, which called for a setting up of study groups to deepen the Church understanding ATR. The most spectacular response to this call came from Zaire, where as early as 1967, Vincent Mulago gwa Cikala established a centre for research on ATR at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Kinshasa. The centre was renowned for its publication of a good number books and the organization of international symposia on African Theology and ATR.

Pope John Paul II promoted interreligious dialogue during his pontificate. He changed the name of the Secretariat for 'Non-Christian Religions' set up in 1967, to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to avoid the negative connotations of the terminology 'Non-Christian.' This Council was mainly to promote theological research on dialogue with Islam and ATR in Africa. The Pope also intentionally appointed Cardinal Francis Arinze, the son of a Nigerian chief, to head the Pontifical Council for Interreligious dialogue.<sup>267</sup> The Nigeria prelate wrote a pastoral letter entitled, '*Attention to African Traditional Religions*, which many consider as the first Vatican document to take ATR seriously as a dialogue partner in the African context.<sup>268</sup> The letter suggests

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<sup>266</sup>*Nostra Aetate*, 2.

<sup>267</sup>Leonardo Mercado, "The Change in Catholic Attitudes towards Traditional Religion," *Dialogue & Alliance* 18, no. 2 (2004/2005): 102.

<sup>268</sup>Leonardo Mercado, "The Change in Catholic Attitudes towards Traditional Religion," 102.

that “the better ATR is understood by the agents of evangelization, the more suitable will be the presentation of Christianity to Africans and in so doing, the Church will be more and more at home in Africa, and Africans will be more and more at home in the Church.”<sup>269</sup> This letter equally encouraged African theological faculties and Ecclesiastical institutes such as those in Kinshasa, Nairobi, Port Harcourt and Abidjan to create and promote awareness concerning the dialogue with ATR.<sup>270</sup>

It is important to note that the approval of *Nostra Aetate* set in motion a dynamic of dialogue that continues to engage the Church even today. The dialogue with people of other religions is the Church’s very style of life and mission.<sup>271</sup> It is in the very nature of Church’s pilgrim journey on earth. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope St. John Paul II presented dialogue with other religions as an integral feature of the Church’s evangelizing mission which does not stand in opposition with the Church’s obligation to proclaim Christ: “In light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue.”<sup>272</sup> The two should be linked in the context of mission *Ad Gentes*.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, ‘Pastoral Attention to African Religions’ Letter to the Episcopal conferences of Africa and Madagascar, Rome, (25 March 1988), 1. <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/vatican.html> (Accessed 2/04/2025).

<sup>270</sup> Nkulu N’shengha “Interreligious Dialogue in Black Africa among Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion,” 535.

<sup>271</sup>According to Vatican II’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* “the Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Cf. AG 2. See also LG 1.

<sup>272</sup>Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

<sup>273</sup> *Ad Gentes (To the Nations)* is the Vatican II Council’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church promulgated on December 7, 1965. This document addresses the Church’s mission to spread the Gospel to all nations and peoples. It establishes evangelization as one of the fundamental missions of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church (CCC 811-865). According to Majawa, the Church is essentially missionary in its origin, identity, mission and destiny. Cf. Clement Majawa, “50 Years of *Ad Gentes* in Africa,” *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission* 2, (2016):8.

In sum, from Vatican II onwards, the Catholic Church spoke of sincere respect toward other religions, because they can lead their practitioners to the encounter with Christ, the Lord and Saviour. In this regard, Patrick Kalilombe, asserts that ATR has been a medium, through which God has been communicating with the traditional Africans until the advent of Christianity.<sup>274</sup> However, this should be done with prudence. The invitation to prudence meant that a road remained to be travelled to remove every shadow of a doubt in the understanding of non-Christian religions, including ATR.<sup>275</sup>

### **African Response: From *Ecclesia in Africa* to *Africae Munus***

*Nostra Aetate* did not explicitly mention ATR in its categorization of the non-Christian religions. The African Bishops then began to envisage a platform that would allow for a deeper discussion on African contextual realities. This would open avenues for the better understanding of the identity of the Church in Africa, of African religious roots, and the role to be played by ATR in God's universal economy of salvation. Two African synods were very instrumental in promoting the culture of dialogue between Christianity and ATR in African context.

### ***Ecclesia in Africa***

In 1994, African Bishops gathered in Rome for the first African Synod in modern Catholicism. The Synod included 'Interreligious dialogue' in its agenda amongst the top priorities of the Church in Africa. Pope John II's Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* underscored the need for honest dialogue as a Christian attitude inside the believing community as well as with other believers and with people of good will.<sup>276</sup> The document argues that various forms of division among Africans needed to be healed through this dialogue. In this respect the Synodal Fathers emphasized the importance of Dialogue *ad intra* which is to be practiced first of all within the family of the Church at all levels. They then underscored the need for dialogue *ad extra* including

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<sup>274</sup> Patrick Kalilombe, "The Salvific Value of African Religions," 147.

<sup>275</sup> Jean Baptiste Sourou, "African Traditional Religion and the Catholic Church in Light of the Synods for Africa: 1994 and 2009," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14, (2014): 143 Downloads//African\_traditional\_religion\_and\_the\_Catholic1 (Accessed 01/04/2025).

<sup>276</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, 65.

ecumenical dialogue with other churches and Ecclesial Communities, interreligious dialogue with Muslims and dialogue with African traditional religion.<sup>277</sup>

Regarding ATR, the Synod proposed a serene and prudent dialogue so as; to protect Catholics from negative influences which condition the way of life of many of them and to foster the assimilation of positive values in the context of Christianity. These values, such as the belief in the Supreme Being, can even be seen as a preparation for the Gospel (*preparatio evangelica*),<sup>278</sup> because they contain precious Seeds of the Word (*semina Verbi*)<sup>279</sup> which can lead, a great number of people to be open to the fullness of Revelation in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>280</sup> The practionners of ATR should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided. African Christians were called to discern what was good in their traditional spiritual roots and to make peace with them. It was only in this way that faith could become culture and touch all the sectors of life in Africa, since ‘a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived.’<sup>281</sup>

### *Africae Munus*

The second Synod for Africa was held in October 2009 under theme of the Church in African in the service to reconciliation, justice and peace. In his post-Synodal Exhortation, *Africae Munus*,

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<sup>277</sup> Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 49; 65-66.

<sup>278</sup>The Latin concept ‘*Preparatio evangelica*’, translated ‘preparation for the Gospel’ refers to the idea that God, in His providence, has been preparing humanity throughout history for the coming of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel. Early Christians argued that God had already endowed the ancient traditional cultures with ideas and themes that would grow to fruition once they were interpreted in a fully Christian context. Cf. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122.

<sup>279</sup> The concept ‘*Semina Verbi*’ which translates to ‘Seeds of the Word,’ highlights the presence of truth and grace in various cultures, recognizing that God’s revelation is not confined to the explicit teachings of the Church. The Church articulates this understanding as part of the Church’s mission to engage with the world, fostering dialogue and respect for other beliefs while affirming the fullness of truth found in Christ. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 843-856.

<sup>280</sup>Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 67.

<sup>281</sup>*Ecclesia in Africa*, 78.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed not only the desire to adapt to new demands in the era of globalization. The document asserts that “owing to its rich theological and philosophical foundations, ATR is the fertile cultural and spiritual soil from which most Christian converts spring and with which they continue to have daily contact.”<sup>282</sup> Regarding dialogue between Christianity and religious experiences, *Africae Munus* proposes three conditions: Firstly, to develop a deep respect for people of other religions and their respective traditions without any discrimination; secondly, to safeguard the integrity of the Christian faith; thirdly, to continue with the Church’s commitment for *Missio Dei*<sup>283</sup> since dialogue is the space for mutual enrichment which does not intend to contradict the Church’s mission to proclaim the Good News of salvation.

### Challenges and Obstacles of Dialogue

From the brief history of the encounter between Christianity and ATR, it has been observed that a number of obstacles have rendered this dialogue difficult and sometimes impossible. To start with, the hostilities on the part of Christianity against ATR have mainly been the result of inherited stereotypes developed by past missionary theology emerging from the superiority complex and lack of sufficient knowledge or ignorance about the nature of ATR. Along the same lines, the practitioners of ATR were labelled pagans, heathens, idolatrous, polytheists, barbarians, superstitious, fetishists, and primitive.<sup>284</sup> ATR was considered the ‘empire Satan’ which was to be fought against and banished. These stereotypes led to a lack of respect for the depth and richness of African spiritual traditions, making genuine dialogue difficult. On their part, some African converts considered their former religions synonymous to misery and superstitions. In this context, adherents of ATR had no future within or outside the Church, and a relentless war of eradication was organized against them, rendering dialogue unimaginable.

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<sup>282</sup> Cf. *Africae Munus*, 93.

<sup>283</sup> The concept of *Missio Dei*, which is translated as ‘Mission of God’ generally refers to the understanding that mission is rooted in the very nature of God and His purpose for humanity. It emphasizes that God is actively involved in the world and that the Church participates in God’s mission of salvation for all humanity. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 849.

<sup>284</sup> Leonardo Mercado, ‘The Change in Catholic Attitudes towards Traditional Religion,’ 93.

Moreover, there is a problem of inadequate research on ATR and lack of theological resources and frameworks within the Catholic Church that adequately address the complexities of ATR. Subsequently, these shortfalls limit the ability of the Church leaders, pastoral agents and theologians to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with African traditions. In the same vein, the emergence of fanaticism, fundamentalism and competitions among Christian denominations constitute a serious threat to genuine dialogue. The truth is that religious fanaticism is not compatible with ATR and culture, because African culture has a great level of religious tolerance.

Furthermore, there is a genuine concern among some Christians that engaging with ATR may lead to syncretism, mainly when the elements of both religions are improperly mingled. This fear can obstruct open dialogue and create an atmosphere of suspicion. It goes without saying that many Christian theologians equate dialogue with ATR to a step toward syncretism, whereby even the process of inculturation or Africanization of Christianity is seen as a corruption of Christianity.<sup>285</sup> As a result, Christianity is absolutized at the expense of ATR making genuine dialogue impossible.

To sum up, as articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Church emphasizes the importance of respect and mutual understanding in interreligious dialogue.<sup>286</sup> The Church encourages the faithful to approach such dialogues with an open mind, recognizing the intrinsic value in the spiritual insights and practices of other traditions and religious experiences.

### **Way Forward and Recommendations**

To begin with, the Church should prioritize genuine dialogue *ad intra*. This is to say, genuine dialogue should have its starting point within the Church communities before moving out to meet the practitioners of ATR. At all levels in dioceses, parishes and Small Christian Communities, Church members should be able to express their concerns without fear of being blacklisted or maltreated. Church leaders should be artisans of conducive atmosphere for deeper listening and promote guileless discussion at all. It means that there must be a guarantee for freedom in love, not only of thought, but also of action. Since the Church accommodates people from different

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<sup>285</sup>Ariarajah, S. Wesley, "Toward a Theology of Dialogue," Paper presented at a Consultation on Asian and African Contributions to Contemporary Theology, (Bossey: Ecumenical Institute, 1976), 5.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 843-845.

tribes, races, social status and background, there is a need for a genuine dialogue among the members within the Church for mutual understanding and enrichment.

In the same theological vein, to achieve a genuine and fruitful dialogue between Christianity and ATR, the two parties should endeavor to find a common ground for discussion. Indeed, diversities and differences between the two cannot be ignored. However, a wide range of convergences and similarities can facilitate people's interaction with one another, so as to discover areas of mutual enrichment.<sup>287</sup> According to *Nostra Aetate*, such convergences include the common origin in God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the common experience of the divine providence and the common heavenly destiny for all.<sup>288</sup> Other convergences may include; common concern for human dignity, common search for the answers of fundamental questions of human existential condition, common values, fears, joys and sorrows. It is also irrefutably important for each religion "to recognize the fact that it is all human life, not just a segment of it called the religious life and that all human beings, are part of God's activity in the world and share common destiny."<sup>289</sup>

Furthermore, the profound knowledge and respect for the interlocutor is another key factor for genuine dialogue between Christianity and ATR: It is absolutely important for Christianity to cultivate the culture of openness and to take its partner more seriously seeking to appreciate African rich cultural heritage and popular wisdom. Needless to say, "unlike dialogue amongst theologians, community based dialogue at the grassroots level has prioritizes the popular wisdom that makes the community live together in peace despite all sorts of differences."<sup>290</sup> To be genuine this dialogue has to consider the African human community as the locus of God's activity, becoming a space for deeper relationship between Christian community and human community.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Jerarld D. Gort, "The Search for Interreligious Connivance, ongoing challenge and charge," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29, no. 3 (2008): 756.

<sup>288</sup> *Nostra Aetate* 1.

<sup>289</sup> Ariarajah, Wesley S., "Toward a Theology of Dialogue," 3-4.

<sup>290</sup> Nkulu N'shengha, "Interreligious Dialogue in Black Africa among Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion," 552.

<sup>291</sup> Adamo, "Christianity and the African traditional religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement," 8.

In this regard, Christians are invited to deepen their understanding of the nature and foundations of ATR as they embark on a long spirit-filled journey of genuine dialogue.

An attitude of humility, flexibility mutual trust and repentance should be embraced by all the agents of evangelization, instead of rigidity, dogmatism, denominational absolutism and arrogance in a dialogue that has to engage many sensitive issues. All pejorative terminologies have to be banished. This will involve the epistemological *metanoia*, aiming at doing away with all the negative language against Africans and their traditional religion. To achieve this, the serious study of African theology of inculturation and African cultural heritage should be prioritized in all ecclesiastical faculties and institutions, because these are foundational for promoting meaningful and genuine interfaith encounters in Africa.

### **Conclusion**

It is important for us Christians to appreciate in this commemorative year, the most fruitful dimension of *Nostra Aetate*; the view that dialogue (especially the dialogue of life and action) can contribute so much in promoting greater openness, affection and respect towards ATR. In the light of this, the reception of *Nostra Aetate* in African demonstrates that genuine dialogue with ATR is not merely a pastoral strategy, but also a theological necessity, rooted in the Church's own understanding of salvation history. This endeavor will contribute to establishing the kind of peace that the world cannot give (Jn 14:27). The time to celebrate the 60 years of existence of *Nostra Aetate*, should go hand in hand with a deeper commitment to embrace the path of reconciliation and dialogue. In view of this, Vatican II Council, particularly in the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* has sown numerous seeds, and now Africans are beckoned to take up the challenge and help these seeds to take roots and bear abundant fruits on the African soil and even beyond. ATR is to be universally recognized as a valid dialogue partner in the light of *Nostra Aetate*, since it plays a major role of preparing people's hearts for the genuine encounter with Christ. This is mainly because it enshrines numerous African cultural values which are potentially capable of guiding African towards the encounter with the Gospel message, in view of conversion and authentic prophetic witness. The article has no any pretense of being exhaustive. It rather stimulates an open-ended theological discussion that calls for endless engagement in the realization of peaceful coexistence between Christianity and ATR.

Rev. Dr. Theobald T. Muchunguzi is a Tanzanian Missionary priest in the Society of Missionaries of Africa (M.Afr) also known as White Fathers (W.F). Ordained priest in 2010, he was sent to Lubumbashi-DRC, where he served in parish ministry for seven year as curate and priest for seven year. In 2019, he obtained a Licentiate Degree in Systematic Theology at the Catholic University of Congo – Kinshasa. He then followed a one-year course in Religious Formation Ministry in Dublin- Ireland. In 2025 he was awarded a Doctorate degree in Systematic Theology at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Langata Campus – Nairobi, Kenya. He is currently lecturing at CUEA and since 2020, he has been a formator in the Missionaries of Africa Theological Formation House, Balozi – Nairobi. He also serves a chair of the Board of Directors of a non-governmental faith-based organization: Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART – Kenya). His areas of theological interest for research include Trinitology, Christology, Soteriology, African Theology, Inter-faith Dialogue, Ecumenism, African Traditional Religion and Christian Theology of Religions.

[muchunguzi2007@yahoo.fr](mailto:muchunguzi2007@yahoo.fr)

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Review of "*Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence.*"

Fr. Prof. Michael Ufok Udoekpo  
Veritas University, Abuja Nigeria  
Department of Theology  
[ufokism@yahoo.com](mailto:ufokism@yahoo.com); [udoekpom@veritas.edu.ng](mailto:udoekpom@veritas.edu.ng).

The Latin title of this document "*Antiqua et Nova*"("ancient and new") was inspired by the text of Matthew 13:52 that says, " And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." Approved by Pope Francis on 14 January, 2025, AN was given in Rome, at the offices of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith (DDF) and the Dicastery for Culture and Education (DCE), on 28 January, 2025. With it, the Church invites us to a positive anthropological and ethical discernment regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI). As a committed dialogue partner on global issues, she requests parents, teachers, pastors, bishops and those who share in the conviction that scientific and technological advances should be directed toward serving the human person and the common good to "dedicate themselves to this critical subject with care and attention."(no.5). AN has 117 paragraphs grouped into six sections including an introduction, a concluding reflection and an extensive reference list.

In Section I ("Introduction," [nos1-6), AN., presents a road map of the entire document. Drawing from the Genesis creation account (Gen 1:27; 2:15) and the Sirach's affirmation that all human skills, abilities and scientific creativity come from God (Sir 38:6), AN, addresses the anthropological and ethical challenges raised by AI, including an imitation of the human intelligence that designed it in the first place. For instance, there is an ethical concern about "the growing crises of truth, in the public forum," if a trained AI generates "artifacts" with a level of speed that rival or surpasses what human can do. This can lead to the production of texts or images indistinguishable from human compositions, or providing solutions not foreseen by the programmers. AN acknowledges that, today, marks a new and significant phase in human's engagement with technology, which has impacted interpersonal relationships, education, work, art, healthcare, law warfare, and international relations.

In Section II ("What is Artificial Intelligence," [nos. 7-12), AN., appeals to the 1956 work of an American computer scientist, John McCarthy, et al., ("A Proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence"[31 August 1955]), and defines artificial intelligence

as "that of making a machine behave in ways that would be called intelligent if a human were so behaving." It adumbrates on its historical rapid advancement from "narrow AI" systems to Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Narrow AI is designed to handle limited tasks such as translating languages predicting the trajectory of storm, classifying images, and answering questions. Some advance systems rely on using machine learning which relies mostly on statistical inference and algorithms, rather than logical deduction. These systems augment or supersede what humans can do in areas of data analysis, image recognition and medical diagnosis. AGI is single system capable of operating across all cognitive domains and performing any task within the scope of human intelligence, raising the fear of its "superintelligence," and the possibility of eclipsing the human person(no.10). Assuming that "intelligence" can be used in the same way to refer to both "Human Intelligence" (HI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), AN explains that, while HI is a faculty that pertains to the person in his or her entirety, AI is understood functionally, since the activities of the human mind can be broken down into digital steps that machines can mimic or replicate.

In Section III ("Intelligence in the Philosophical and Theological Tradition,"[nos. 13-35), AN lays emphasis on the "rationality," "embodiment," and the "relationality" of the human persons. This does not end with interpersonal communion of the human persons, but extends to their "relationship with the Truth," that finds its ultimate expression in God, who transcends the physical and the created world. AN, stresses on the biblical theology of creation (Gen 1-2, Wis 9:9; Jer 10:12; Dan, 2:2'-22; Isa 45:18; Ps 8; Ps 74:12-17 and Ps 104) and acknowledges the human persons as co-creators or stewards of the divinely created world, to cultivate and care for it, as stressed by Pope Francis (Encyclical Letter *Laudator Si'* [May 24,2015]). AN basically recommends "an integral understanding of the human intelligence." Intelligence from the Christian point of view, is "the integration of truth into the moral and spiritual life of the person, guiding his or her actions in light of God's goodness and truth," (nos. 26-28). Human intelligence, according to AN, cannot be reduced to acquisition of facts, algorithms or the ability to perform specific tasks. Rather true intelligence is shaped by divine love, which, "is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5).

Additionally, Section III, draws attention to the limits of AI. While AI is "an extraordinary technological achievement capable of limiting certain outputs associated with human intelligence, it operates by performing tasks, achieving goals, or making decisions based on quantitative data

and computational logic"(no.30). Positively, AI can help humans integrate data from a variety of fields, model complex systems and foster interdisciplinary connections. Yet, AI is confined to a logical-mathematical framework exposing its inherent limitations. Contrarily, HI develops organically throughout the person's physical and psychological growth, shaped by myriads of live experiences in the flesh, including emotional responses, social interactions. AI lacks a physical body. It relies on computational reasoning and learning based on data sets and recorded human experiences and knowledge. AI can simulate aspects of human reasoning, and perform specific tasks at a very high speed. But this is a fraction of the human mind who can make moral discernment, understand and actively engage with reality all dimension. AI lacks the richness of corporality, relationality and the openness of the human heart to truth and goodness. AN., cautions that the very use of the word "intelligence," in connection with AI can be misleading and risks overlooking the treasure that is in the human person. AI then, could be seen not necessarily as "artificial form of the human intelligence but as a product of it."(no.35).

Section IV stresses "The Role of Ethics in Guiding the Development and Use of AI," (nos.36-48), and attempts to find out how AI can be used with God's plan. This is possible since all scientific technology and achievements must be seen as gifts from God. In as much as many scientific developments have brought countless blessings to human beings, the negative sides must be checked. This includes those aspects that threaten the sanctity of life, the dignity of the human person, whom technological development must be directed to serve(no.38). AN, emphasizes the importance of moral responsibility grounded in the dignity and vocation of the human person who is a moral agent and not the machine. This must serve as a basic criterion for developers, owners, operators and regulators and users of AI. The use of AI must be "accompanied by an ethic inspired by a vision of the common good, an ethic of freedom, responsibility and fraternity, capable of fostering the full development of people in relation to others and to the whole creation"(no.48).

Section V, raises 10 important "specific questions" that touch on the practical and ethical ways of using AI include: (1) AI and Society, (2)AI and human relationship, (3)AI, the Economy and Labor, (4) AI and Healthcare, (5) AI and Education, (6) AI, Malformation, Deepfakes, and Abuse, (7) Privacy and Surveillance,(8) AI and the Protection of Our Common Home, (9) AI and Warfare (10)AI and our Relationship with God. Commenting on some of these questions, AN, urges that, development and use of technology must recognize that we are one human family in agriculture, education and culture. AI must be used for the promotion of the common good in the society in

relation with one another. No matter how we anthropomorphized AI, no AI application can genuinely experience empathy, love and compassion. Therefore, we must avoid misrepresenting AI as a person. AI in the economic-financial and labor aspects must be carefully examined. While AI promises to boost productivity by taking over mundane tasks, care should be taken so that AI does not deskilling workers or force them out of work and labor market, which is the logical consequence of "technological paradigm" that Pope Francis addresses in his *Laudato Si'* of May 2015. In fact, since work is part of human life, the goal of AI should not be to replace human work and labor. Same responsible use of AI in health care and education sectors are stressed in this section.

Citing the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*[28 October 1965, pars 1: AAS 58, 1966, 729]), the document insists that "true education strives to form individuals with a view toward their final end and the good of the society to which they belong," (no.77). Education, at any level should aim at holistic formation not mere passing of facts and data to human person. The relationship between the teacher and the student is indispensable, since teachers do more than just conveying knowledge. They are called to model human qualities and inspire the joy of discovery. Their presence motivates students both in the content they teach and the care they show their students. Teacher's bond must foster trust, mutual understanding and the capacity to address each person's unique dignity and potential (no.79). As noted in Pope John Paul II (Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* [August 15 1990, n.7]), "in the world today characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the task of a Catholic University assumes and ever greater importance and urgency,"(no.83). AN., also draws from Pope Francis (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* [29 January 2018, 9-10), and appeals that, "in a particular way, Catholic Universities are urged to be present as great laboratories of hope at this crossroads of history. In an interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary key, they are urged to engage "with wisdom and creativity," no.83).

AI must not be used to spread false information or illegally violets people's privacy or limits other's freedom by illegitimate surveillance or abuse of our common home. Weaponization of AI can also be detrimental to the common good, rather it is important that AI recognizes that every gift, including technology is from God (nos106-107).

In the concluding reflections of Section VI (nos.108-117), AN, weaves together the preceding and discussed advantages and delimitations of AI in light of the specific questions raise. It reminds

every one of our anthropological and moral responsibilities in using AI. AN, does this, by pointing to Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'*, par.105). Here, Francis emphasizes the need for the growth of "human responsibility, values and conscience," proportionate to the growth in the potential that this technology brings (no.108). Echoes of this is heard in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* [December 7, 1965, par 34). *Gaudium et Spes* calls on humanity to recognize that "with and increase in human power comes a broadening of responsibility on the part of individuals and communities"(no.108).

AN also calls on all to reflect on the questions whether in the context of technological progress human beings are better spiritually, morally, and more aware of the dignity of their fellow human persons or more responsible and open to their fellow neighbors, especially the weak and the poor(no.109). AN, advises all to reevaluate how to use individual applications of AI and to avoid "digital reductionism,"(no.112). It recommends integration of "true wisdom" in the use of AI, so that we may not become spiritually and morally barren (no.113). Such "wisdom of the heart," is "the virtue that enables us to integrate the whole and its parts, our decisions and their consequences." (no.114). *Antiqua et Nova* finally recommends our openness to the grace of the Holy Spirit, who "enables us to look at things with God's eyes" since the person's perfection is not measured by information or knowledge they possess, but, by the depth of their charity," manifested in how we incorporate or use AI to promote the common good as well as care for our common home (nos. 115-117).

We are very grateful to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education for this great service done not only to the Church and her institutions, including schools and hospitals, but to the society as a whole.

Michael Ufok Udoekpo  
Professor of Biblical Theology  
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