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THE PRACTICE OF ORACULAR CONSULTATION AMONG SOUTH-WESTERN
NIGERIAN CATHOLICS AND TERRENCE TILLEY'S THEORY OF TRADITION
AND RULES FOR RELIGIOUS CLAIMS

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Abstract

The transmission of the Christian message among the South-Western Nigerians, like in many other parts of Africa is at best describeable as *Tradita*.¹ Often, *traditioning* as *tradita* ostensibly breeds a religious practice that does not reflect authenticity in either the religion received or the erstwhile religious and cultural *status quo*; because the host culture, by such process of 'traditioning' is not wholly carried along. This paper argues that tradition should not be reduced to *tradita*. Where that is already the case, claimed religious truths in the process of "re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to the culture,"² must be carefully delineated. This paper attempts a delineation procedure of claimed religious truths among Yoruba Catholics in Nigeria. It engages Terrence Tilley's five criteria for appraising claimed *religious* truth with an emerging tradition of *Ifá* oracular consultation among the subject population. It seeks to find out the viability of such practice as an authentic Catholic practice in an effort to make "faith becomes culture."³ The findings show that oracular consultation of *Ifá* does not totally pass the model criteria for inculturation, but it does provide a platform to better appreciate the socio-religious values of the people in inter-religious dialogue contexts and in educative conversation with their culture.

Introduction

The Christian church cannot pretend against confronting new pastoral and theological challenges arising from the now greater pluralism in the world. Though this situation is not new to the Church,⁴ the attitude and mode of relating with such situations have significantly shifted to an encouraged attitude of openness and educative conversation.⁵

¹ What was handed on as one would an object, distinct from a communicative process

² Aylward Shorter, "Inculturation of African traditional religious values in Christianity - how far?" <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/shorter.htm>. Retrieved, 11/20/12

³ *Faith becomes culture* is an expression used by John Paul II in describing inculturation, quoted by Alward Shorter, *ibid*.

⁴ By Church, for the purpose of this paper is meant the Catholic Church.

⁵ There have being much significant shift in the Church's teaching on attitude towards other religions since the Vatican II Council. Details of these are found in documents as "Nostra Aetate", "Ad Gentes," and "Gaudium et Spes." In

In like manner, theology has also moved from *theory* to *practice* stance to a more practical outlook that give vent to close consideration of faith in relation to practices, where “faith is the faith and the expressions are that by which we come to recognize and eventually to understand what it means to live in and live out that faith.”⁶ A consideration of theology in this mode necessarily entails a practical approach; hence Heitink observes that doing theology will by that fact entail applying a theory of action. To him, quoting Furet, a theory of action must contain the following elements: “it must deal with concrete domains of action, analyse the context of the action and the action itself in the present situation and with regard to its potentiality,” and on the basis of empiricism, this must be done “with the purpose of developing action models and strategies for the various domains of action.”⁷ Many contemporary practical theologians have taken up such development of action models;⁸ they generate models developed to make theology speak more practically to contexts and vice versa. This paper aims at taking one of such models by Terrence Tilley beyond his identified rules of engaging religious claims in the process of *traditioning* to a practical application of those rules. For a practical purpose, a case study of Oracular consultation by Catholics in South West Nigeria is made to test the rules. Profoundly, results from previous research carried out on Christian consultation of *Ifá* oracle shall be considered vis-à-vis Tilley’s rules of engagement to establish the viability of such practice as an authentic Catholic practice or otherwise.

Vatican II, Edited by Walter M Abbott, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), though much is still been expected in this direction in the African Church.

⁶ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 112

⁷ Heitink, Gerben. *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*. Eerdmans, 1999. p.130

⁸ For instance, works by Robert Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985) and Don Browning S. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and strategic proposals*, (Minneapolis: Fortress press:1991) are good examples of such works considered from local pastoral and academic applications respectively.

Traditioning of Christianity as *tradita* among the Africans

In contemporary Nigeria and perhaps, worldwide, a lot has changed from the attitude of past missionaries' blanket condemnation of socio-religious tradition of the people in the process of transmitting the Christian tradition. The unexamined rote followership of a Christianity that is garbed in foreign cultural and social colors is also no longer tenable. According to Tilley, and rightly so, "there have been marked shifts in the content of practices and beliefs we accept as 'given' on the basis of tradition"⁹ However, armed with the Church's disposition expressed in the spirit of *ad fontes* and *aggiornamento* and backed with documents such as *Nostra Aetate* and *ad Gentes*, many practices are now being traced back to their roots and are updated in light of transmitting the message of Christ to the nations.

That an African is deeply religious and tenaciously cultural is widely acknowledged.¹⁰ Traditionally, an African does not draw a sharp distinction between his personal acts from the overall consideration of the community, nor does he separate his 'secular' engagement from its relationship with the 'sacred', thus Mbiti wrote that in Africa, traditional religious practices are "... not primarily for the individual, but for his community [and] to be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community."¹¹ The Yorubas also share this religious identity, and have much to contribute to the Christ project from their own socio-cultural moulds. However, the

⁹ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 27

¹⁰ See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (London: Heinemann, 1969), p.2; Adrian, Hastings. *African Catholicism: Essay in Discovery* (London: S C M Press), 24; and/or Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: Scan Press, 1973), 13.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions*. 2.

practice of *tradita* rather than *traditioning* from the inception of Christianity among the people deprived her of some rich traditional religious values accruable from the peoples' culture.

What is implied from what have been said so far is clearly that since the advent of Christianity and Islam, what has changed considerably is not the acceptance of the foreign religions nor zeal of religiosity but their missionary approaches. The approaches of the harbinger of these religions were "... generally ineffective, primarily because most Westerners lack an understanding of the importance of African religion as an integral part of African culture and life."¹² Like many others, the missionaries of the Catholic extraction also missed the track; they were "deeply marked with the Roman spirit that took for granted that the catechism used in the Roman West was entirely suitable for Africans" and "that in the work of evangelization the emphasis must be on stamping out savage and immoral customs."¹³ With such disposition, Christianity was 'handed over' as an object to be received unexamined over and above the religious and cultural perception of the 'receivers'. Considering mission and evangelization from such perspective that pitches traditional religious heritages against Christianity, cultural and traditional religious practices go underground. The resultant effect is the side-by-side growth of traditional religious practices and Christianity by an individual; where the former often sustains the latter.

¹² Oduyoye, Mercy amba and Kanyoro, Musimba R. A, *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 9

¹³ Bujo, Benzet. *Africa Theology in its Social Context* (Kenya: St. Paul Publications, 1986).

Oracular consultation and *Ifá* divination among the Yorùbás

This section is by no means a detailed discussion on oracular consultation and *Ifá* divination among the Yorùbás but a brief background for the purpose of this study.

The word Yorùbá connotes a designation for the ethnic group that occupies the West of Nigeria as well as the dialect spoken by the group. In traditional Yorùbá socio-religious practices is the oracular divination, which is highly embodied in the *Ifá* divinatory pattern. One of the young Christians to whom the question of what *Ifá* is was posed in one of the interviews conducted by me simply replied, “it is a story telling session?” He was not far from the truth, but that is not the whole truth. Many scholars at different times have referred to the chapters and verses of *Ifá*, commonly referred to as *odu* and *ese* respectively as “myths.” Obviously, the *odu* and *ese* may be referred to as myths in the sense of philosophical rendition of certain truths situated in some distant past; such view is corroborated by the current Arch-Bishop of Abuja, Nigeria – John Cardinal Onaiyekan.¹⁴ While Imasogie¹⁵ refers to them as mere “couplets”, Benjamin Ray as ‘poems’¹⁶ Ikenga-Metuh calls them “divination figures.”¹⁷ One common thing characterizing each of these descriptions is that the *Odu* and *Ese* are collections of stories, proverbs and parables. By whatever name one may choose to refer to them, they are correlated chains of stories, proverbs and parables that encapsulate the Yorùbá religious belief systems.

¹⁴ John Onaiyekan. “*The Priesthood in Owe Traditional Religion*”. A Traditional Religion in West Africa, Edited by Agboola, A (Ed), Ibadan: Day – Star press, 1983), 49.

¹⁵ Osadolor Imasojie. *African Tradition Religion*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, 1985)

¹⁶ Benjamin, Ray. *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual and Community*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976), 107.

¹⁷ Emefie, Ikenga-Metuh. *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*. (Jos: Imico, Publishers, 1987). 175

Ifá is an age long tradition of the Yorùbás. Traditionally, hardly would any Yorùbá engage in any relationship (with people or environment, physical or spiritual) without consulting the gods, especially through *Ifá* divination mediated by an *Ifá* priest. The priest, by means of associated rituals conveys the messages of *Ifá* to the client – often, in the form of stories. It is through these stories that the Yorùbá culture inform and regenerate itself thereby preserving all that is considered good and memorable in that society. It is a deposit of the Yorùbá societal values and worldview and a means of keeping and disseminating the same despite the lapses and imperfections of human memory on which the system is based. According to Wande Abimbola, *Ifá* is an “attempt by a non-literate people to develop, preserve and disseminate the ingredient of their own culture... [hence it is] a store house of culture...[that] deals with history, mythology, belief, value system and the world view of the people”.¹⁸

The system, one might say, is both a skill and a science and it takes years to learn its rudiments. Apprenticeship is opened to whoever wishes to learn the art; hence it has men and women as priests. As a science it has operational formulas and laws and as an art it teaches how to avoid pitfalls in navigating the vicissitudes of life through words of wisdom and offering of sacrifices to the gods. *Ifá* is also used in determining what life holds for individuals or groups, as it is also perceived to offer guidance in private and corporate relationships. It is a compendium of codified experiences with much in stock to bequeath to humanity. In the words of Oluwo Philip John Neimark, *Ifá* has “no preconception about race, gender sexual preferences, it is about character, ... use of powerful positive energy to protect lives, yours and of those you love, to grow, to reach

¹⁸ Wande, Abimbola, *Ifá Divination Poetry*. (New York, N.Y: Nok Publishers, Ltd, 1977),31.

fulfillment, it empowers, accepts and deals with good character and of positive energy.” It aids in avoiding “fear, prejudice and discrimination.”¹⁹ Ironically though and perhaps in a somewhat different slant from Neimark, Nathaniel Ndiokwere observes that operational devices as *Ifá* are quite attractive to a people in an environment where insecurity is perpetuated by fears of evil spirits.²⁰

With the advent of Christianity and Islam, both of which trod the same path in passing general condemnation on most cultural practices associated with traditional religion, the patronage of *Ifá* by adherents of these religions became private and sometimes clandestine. With time, a parallel to *Ifá* modalities were founded in indigenous Churches.²¹ In most Yoruba States in Nigeria, one notices the enthusiasm with which people flock to the churches to ‘inquire of the Lord’ through prophets. Such ‘prophetic service’ is readily extended to non-members. The famous “*bayi I’Olorun awon omo ogun wi,*” that is, “Thus says the Lord, God of host” in The Apostolic Churches (TAC) exemplify the type of problem solving formulae that people perceive in attending such churches. Members and non-members rush in great numbers to receive such oracular utterances. Usually, the process begins with prayers and singing climaxing in an emotional work-up in which someone (under claimed influence of the Holy Spirit) suddenly introduces such phrases as the one above, and then goes on to announce ‘what God is saying.’ Attendants at the service may also go to the ‘visionary’ pastors for further consultation. In the Catholic Church where the place of ‘Prophets’ is not given in the

¹⁹ A Western *Ifá* priest and the founder of *Ifá* Foundation International: A United States Federal approved non-profit religious group, <http://www.Ifáfoundation.org/>.

²⁰ Nathaniel Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the Independent African Churches and in Biblical Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1981), p.94.

²¹ An extensive research was done by this author in 1996 in a Spiritan Catholic Major Seminary in fulfillment of a graduation requirement: *Ifá* Divination among the Owe Yoruba [A Theological Consideration for Christian Field Apostolate]. An unpublished research work submitted to the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu Enugu in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of BA Christian Religious Studies.

hierarchy of the church, some lay ministers and the charismatic movements occasionally provide such ‘opportunities’ through speaking in tongues, prophesy and faith healing. To many of these practitioners, such practices are not considered to be outside the tradition of Catholicism since such were evident in the early church era.²² The presence of, and *seeing of visions* by charismatic leaders, mostly among the lay faithful in the Catholic Church, has sustained some Catholics who are not attracted by direct meddling with the traditional oracular consultations. For Ndiokwere²³ this function has semblance with the work of the *Ifá* priest also known as *Babalawo*. He observes that ‘while the *Babalawo*’s service is considered a pagan divination, it is not considered as such in the context of Christian practice of inquiring of Lord.’²⁴ Hence, while some people patronize the *Babalawo*, many others patronize other churches for purposes for which they would have gone to the *Babalawo*.

The on-going scenario is readily observable in the practice of Christianity in Yorubaland amidst variation in details. The stance of the Church as echoed via various popes from Paul VI to Benedict XVI apparently recognizes what is good in these practices while sounding a note of caution. The 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.”²⁵ In other words, the Church encourages caution in “ensuring Catholic identity and

²² Passages like Acts of the Apostle 13:1 and documents such as *Didache* are often referred to in defence of such claims. The writer of *Didache* made it clear in the eleventh chapter of his work that Prophets and prophecy in the early church was widespread and went ahead to advice on signs by which an authentic one may be identified.

²³ Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution*. p.94.

²⁴ Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution*, *ibid*

²⁵ *Nostra Aetate*, Article 2.

communion with the Catholic Church.”²⁶ This is where the work of Tilley, on the need for authenticating the truth of religious claims becomes relevant.

Contextualizing Tilley’s work

In situating the work of Tilley for the purpose of this paper, Colleen Mallon’s *Globalization at large* comes to mind. Mallom asserts that *globalization*’ is “a work in progress”²⁷ with its general import on the individual, societies and the world as evident in its process of shaping and reshaping traditions in a globalized world. Mallon underscores the role of theologians in this “emerging world (dis)order” and its bearing on the lives of people.²⁸ He observes that the role of theologians must be practically situated around ‘living the Christian mystery in a globalized world’ where ‘our self-understanding as a faith community and our witness to the revelatory gift entrusted to us’ is met with new challenges.²⁹

Doing theology in the world today eschews patterns in which tradition is packaged as a thing to be handed on or over (*tradita*). Rather, according to Mallon “traditions must be understood as not important as the divine-human relationship.”³⁰ The church must realize herself as ‘universal in and through its diverse, contrastive... (and) disjunctive particularity’ as a “witness that is both faith-filled and credible.”³¹ Tilley joins the likes of

²⁶ See Charismatic Renewal – General in http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic_renewal.htm. Retrieved: 20th November, 2012. The emphasis is mine.

²⁷ Mallon, Colleen, M. *Globalisation at Large: approaching the Ecclesial Question of Tradition in the Twenty-First Century*. Vol. 50, in *New Horizons in theology*. Edited by Terrence Tilley, 135-159,(New York: Orbis Books, 2004),136

²⁸ Mallon *Globalization at large*, p.135

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Mallon’s *Globalization*, 154-155

³¹ Mallon’s *Globalization*, 155

Yves Congar,³² in addressing this issue under a somewhat witty title: *Inventing the Catholic Tradition*, where *Inventing* could mean to discover or to make.³³ Tilley tows the path that opens to the emerging reality of global inclusiveness as he asserts: Tradition is “a communicative process and a communicative practice,”³⁴ it is “not fixed but fluid,”³⁵ and while it is “neither made nor given,” it is “both constructed and given.”³⁶ Tilley notes that the method in discussing tradition hitherto has been theological, breeding dichotomy that maps out scholar/participants, given/made distinctions. He advocates for a departure of approach to historical and descriptive method because Tradition is better describe in terms of performance and practice.³⁷ This shift from the traditional relation of tradition to revelation in discussing Tradition with emphasis on “enduring practices”³⁸ is quite significant.

For Tilley, while "other concepts of traditions have presumed that the key is to know what a tradition is, [his] present approach presumes that knowing a tradition is much more fundamentally a knowing how to live in and live out a tradition."³⁹ This is a situation where “a religious tradition is best understood as an enduring practice or set of practices including a vision (belief), attitudes (dispositions, affections) and pattern of action.”⁴⁰

³² See, Yves, Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition*. Translated by Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough, (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

³³ http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/invent : From Latin *invent-* 'contrived, discovered', from the verb *invenire*, from *in-* 'into' + *venire* 'come'

³⁴ Tilley, *Inventing*, 9

³⁵ Tilley, *Inventing*, 6

³⁶ Terrence, *Inventing*, 15

³⁷ Tilley spent the bulk of his *Preface* and Chapter one on these details.

³⁸ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 45

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

Overall, Tilley's interpretation broadens the capacity for individual and communal participation in shaping and being shaped by tradition towards advancement in one's faith. The beauty in such model is its provision of a platform on which progressive contribution of positive practices is facilitated

Of Tilley and the theories of development and constancy in tradition

Although, Tilley does not subscribe to doing a theory of development and constancy in tradition because to him there will always be a problem in attempting to find continuity where it cannot be found,⁴¹ he, nevertheless recognizes the fact that there is a need to mount principles (rules) in discerning authentic developments from corruption. Few questions arise here, what is authentic about a thing? What makes an identity particular in plurality if developmental and continuity approaches to traditions are to be held suspect? In his arguments, he contends, "if a community abandoned principles... it would abandon the Christian tradition."⁴² Where that is so, could theories not be made to sustain that which is meant to constantly remain in continuing the tradition in practice? These questions are apt consequent on Tilley's consenting to continuity only in an act of judgment or appraisal that recognizes continuity not in such theory.⁴³ Borrowing a leaf from Browning there can be no such thing as theory that is not about something practical, there is also no such thing as practice devoid of all theory whatsoever.⁴⁴

Tilley specifically singled out John Henry Newman and Alasdair MacIntyre in discussing constancy and change in tradition. I perceive his argument as presenting faith as that

⁴¹ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 121

⁴² Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 113

⁴³ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 121

⁴⁴ This idea was well discussed in the introduction to Browning Book: Don, Browning, S. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and strategic proposals*. (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1991), 2-10.

which is preserved amidst constancy and change, in which case, authentic development entails preserving faith in various forms of its expressions as dogma, symbols, etc. He pointed out that for Newman, there are seven steps in an authentic faith among which is the preservation of idea.⁴⁵ But he observes, “if a community claiming to carry on the Christian tradition abandons its center in Jesus, it would not be an authentic development but a degradation of the tradition or the initiation of a separate tradition.”⁴⁶ Perhaps Newman might have found the theory difficult to apply as Tilley observed in the world in which he lived, that does not make such theory irrelevant. In contemporary times, there are such instances in practices that claim to exercise Christian tradition with clear marginalization of the central idea of Jesus. A clear example is in the case of a Christian movement whose leader Olumba Olumba Obu claimed to be God to his adherent.⁴⁷ Again, the spate of churches proliferation in Nigeria necessitate a need to have some independent yardstick in theory for ‘discerning authentic developments from corruption’ and to have some focus on what is authentically Christian even within the peoples’ cultural matrix. It is though a problem to continually interpret religious experiences in the light of *tradita*, given the fact that ‘reversal and fractures’ do occur in Tradition, however, the sieve of constancy and continuity could be used in delineating authenticity in what is presented via ‘reversal and fracture’ as Tradition.

In comparison, to a great extent Tilley favored Lindbecks’ *taxonomy of doctrines* at the expense of John Newman and MacIntyre’s theories of development because it is

⁴⁵ See these in Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 112-113

⁴⁶ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 112

⁴⁷ This is clearly demonstrated in the activities of a Nigeria based Christian movement of Brotherhood of Cross and Star.

contextual rather than developmental.⁴⁸ Tilley's baseline argument is that, "what makes two different patterns of practice... the same tradition is nothing less than the recognition that they are 'the same,' that 'we' share the same practice with 'them.'"⁴⁹ This argument does not seem to probe the guiding principle in variation of conversation between Christianity as a Religion that the accepting community sees as 'control parameter.' Such control parameter is what will make meaning in ethical queries where two individuals with homogenous cultures but varied religious dispositions are at stake. For instance, what ethical principles differentiate a Yorùbá traditional religion adherent from a Yorùbá Christian? Of course if we say 'non', then there is nothing peculiarly Christian about the latter and if we say there are, then there is a defining *Tradition* at play; and that will perhaps be the centrality of Jesus which Newman's theory considers the first 'test.' Doctrinally, are there no defining 'constant' that betray a sense of continuity in development that could also theoretically be presented as safeguards? Among the Yoruba Christians, the line between *Ifá* cult and Christianity continually becomes thinner,⁵⁰ thereby necessitating such theories that are not necessarily in exclusion of criteria – the likes of Tilleys, but such that could be made to function together, by deriving the criteria from a given theory.

⁴⁸ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 120

⁴⁹ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 121

⁵⁰ There is now modernized and reformed *Ifá* indigenous church, namely *Ifá* Orunmila Adulawo Ife Kowapo (The church of Orunmila Black Confraternity). They have published a liturgical holy book used in liturgical assembly in the same way the Christian use the Bible. The book contains a selection of certain Ese *Ifá* structured as Christian Bible.

A test of Tilley's criteria for life-shaping convictional claims in Oracular consultations
Tilley's model is attractively progressive and he no doubt understands the need for control of what goes on in the process of traditioning. Similarly attractive is his disclaimer on the 'use of administrative power to enforce adherence to novel innovations that are backed up by appeal to dubious or non-existent tradition as authoritative.'⁵¹
'Appeal to dubious or non-existent tradition as authoritative' could be one of the reasons responsible for Tilley's strong stance against theories for continuity but as said earlier on, such could be identified, sieved and thrown off board while retaining that which is identifiably sustaining in practices as Tradition.

For Tilley,

traditions are neither made nor found in any simple sense but rather are ongoing practices constantly being invented. Practices generate rules for continuing the practice. To recognize a tradition we can uncover its 'rules,' noting that rules and their application are both relatively constant in their continuity and often rather fluid in the inventive application of them."⁵²

It is on this basis that Tilley proposes the five rules by which this paper appraises the 'life-shaping convictional claims' of oracular divination developed in the peoples' practice of Christianity as Yorùbá.⁵³

According to Tilley, a claim can be appraised as true if it:

1. *Represents the world in which we live or part of it in a revealing way.* The Yorùbá *Ifá* compendium fulfills this criterion as it provides revelatory truth in

⁵¹ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*,40

⁵² Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*,151

⁵³ As earlier stated, data used in responding to the rules were derived from a research done in 1996 and 2008 on oracular consultation respectively.

parodies, myths, stories, sayings, etc that reveal God to the community, even in proto-Christian manner.⁵⁴

2. *Fits with other facts we recognize. Ifá*, considered in practical ways, of ‘the world as we know it’⁵⁵ is a function of the divinatory patterns that derive its functionality from the spiritual to the physical and directs same to subject of material composition. It does not operate in vacuum and is of direct bearing with that which allows for simulation in the African Indigenous Churches.⁵⁶
3. *Enables communities or individuals to be ‘true to themselves.’* Most Catholics who patronizes the *Babalawos*, *Onifás* or even other churches as the African Indigenous Churches for the purpose of ‘divination’ do so in pretense of other motives or under some cover.⁵⁷
4. *Enables one or shows one how to ‘be true to’ others and to the tradition carried on in practice.* This underscores individual faithfulness, even as models, in practice to the community. Two discomfoting issues arise here: the instance where the oracular practice is done in hiding cannot produce a model or an exemplar. Two, forebears were either seen as ‘brainwashed’ adherent holding to unexamined Westernized Catholicism or playing out a syllabus of catechism assimilated through rote learning. In the first instance, the practice is short of the measure but in the second instance, it appears Tilley’s rule is inadequate to measure such experience.

⁵⁴ See Abimbola, 'Wande. *IFA: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. (Nigeria, Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1976.

⁵⁵ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*,165

⁵⁶ A sub-thesis of Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution* discuss practical stimulatory patterns in this correlation.

⁵⁷ Ilesanmi, Ajibola, *SIST, BA Research Project*

5. *Enables their participants as individuals and a community to live in ways that propel them to develop revelatory insight, to utter fitting claims, to be authentically themselves and to keep faith with others.* This apparently summarizes the first four criteria and to use this as a single criterion will, as Tilley himself observed, be “very difficult and may be rather rare for an individual or a community”.⁵⁸

Summarily, considered from the lenses of Tilley’s criteria for practices that are true, oracular consultation as a cultural practice in the experiences of Catholics in Yorùbá land have values that talk to the identity and religious values of the individuals. For example, the Christian principle of one man one wife meets a parallel in *ifa*’s warning against polygamy in *oyeku Meji*’:⁵⁹

<i>Okan soso poro l’obirin dun mo</i>	One only is the best number of women that should
be in	
<i>Lowo oko</i>	a man’s house.
<i>Bi won ba di meji</i>	Make them two and you
<i>Won a di ojowu</i>	bring in jealousy
<i>Bi won ba di meta</i>	If they become three,
<i>Won a d’ eta n’tule</i>	they throw the house into disorder

However, going by the clandestine coloration in participating in the practice, there are many questions that still beg for answers in recognizing the practice as authentic Yorùbá Catholic practice. We must however acknowledge that there are beliefs in the *ifá* corpus that are not inimical to Christianity and that such basis could form explorable basis for dialogue.

⁵⁸ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 166

⁵⁹ Wande Abimbola, *Ijinle ohun Enu Ifá, Apa Kini*, Glasgow, 1968, 34

Beyond theory of tradition to application of rules for religious claims

Tilley's theory of tradition is clear and simple – that traditions cannot be reduced to *tradita* [what is transmitted].⁶⁰ They are neither made nor founded in any simple sense but rather are ongoing practices constantly being invented⁶¹ and reinvented.⁶² They are enacted and transmitted in particular practices⁶³ within which its grammar is made and founded. The grammar of the practices is that which shapes the individual and the community. They are the rules, and according to Tilley, neither the rules nor the beliefs essential to tradition are independent of the varying practices.⁶⁴

Considering the oracular consultation culture of the Yorùbás from the ongoing point of view, one understands and witnesses a tension between a Catholic Christian Tradition that is being guarded and such influence as the other practices that constitute a self-involving oracular culture. The result of this tension, if unchecked and delineated, may in the literal sense of Tilley's metaphor, not only make the Church “become a museum piece” but make her uphold a non-re-creative tradition⁶⁵ especially among the people. This is by no means a suggestion that the oracular culture be inculturated as it is but that an unbiased attentiveness to its content be made.

The Value of oracular patterns to a Catholic Practical Theology

From the search light of Tilley's criteria to delineate religious traditions that have no significant place for truth, as tested above, the status of oracular consultation as a

⁶⁰ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 151

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 152

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 152

⁶⁵ Tilley claims on page 152 of *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, “practices are malleable; a practice that remains so rigid as to be uninfluenced by the other practices that constitute a culture becomes a museum piece.”

Christian practice is found not to be totally true. This, however does not mean that there is nothing good or of relevance to the authentic development of the faith of the people.

The continued search for *thus says the Lord and* getting no conventional, humanly mediated oracle in concrete or precise answers in the Catholic Church Tradition, tends to breed a practice of Christianity that is laden with an edgy double belonging in South-Western Nigeria. As noted earlier, there are instances where oracular engagements in the Bible are cited as instances that corroborate and justify the people's practices; given the result of the test conducted, there is a need for a catechesis that will clarify issues around such reference points. As it is, the Catholic Church's ethical and religious presuppositions currently hold no significant sway on the people's experiences and tendencies to handle their fears and aspirations in the consultation of the oracles. Individual Catholics in this environment often take steps in practical handling of personal issues that may warrant oracular consultations without recourse to Catholic ethical and religious traditions. The offerings of oracular advices are often seen as more practical than the same ideal as mediated by the sacraments in the church and enforced by the priest and his lieutenants. To make a significant meaning of the Catholic ethical and religious presuppositions, the church must engage the oracular phenomenon in dialogue.

There is no doubt that *Ifá* offers an opportunity for dialogue with the socio-cultural imperatives of the Yorùbás. Since Practical theology as an action theology incorporates the study of the social sciences, a model of conversation between *Ifá* as an authentic soico-cultural pattern and Christianity could be justifiably established. Such conversation will offer Christians an opportunity to converse with the rudiments of the oracle in an

educative manner that will yield a better social, moral, religious and psychological self and communal re-creation.

What is needed is a purposeful engagement in practical theology or as Browning would say, a “critical reflection on the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action towards social and individual transformation.”⁶⁶ In this regard, a careful separation of what the people considered as a tradition transmitted from God through the ancestors to them and practices acquired in its expression could be a step towards a practical theology that addresses the situation.

Conclusion

The experiences of some Nigerian Yoruba Catholics with full recognition of that fact, expressed in their cultural consciousness, buttress the thesis of Tilley that traditions cannot be rightly reduced to *tradita* [what is transmitted]. The practice of ‘enquiry’ either of the Lord, as more pronounced among the adherents of the African Indigenous Churches or generally of the oracles, has become one of the main features in the religious inclinations of the Yorùbá people, hence a call for a careful practical theological intervention that will address such yearning and aspiration. Using Tilley’s five standards in appraisal of the peoples’ attempt to fashion a tradition that will help facilitate being authentically Catholic and proudly Yoruba, it is discovered that the oracular consultation is not totally an authentic practice but it does provide a platform to better appreciate the socio-religious values of the people in the context of inter-religious dialogue and in

⁶⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 36

educative conversation with Christian practices. Profoundly, its grammar need be subject to further studies in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition where “the institutional authorities do not and cannot ‘set’ the rules for its boundaries.”⁶⁷

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⁶⁷ Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 124

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PROPHET ZEPHANIAH AND THE DEEPENING OF FAITH IN ECCLESIAE
(CHURCHES) IN AFRICA AND AMERICA

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Abstract

Inspired by this Year of Faith, indicated in the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, the *Porta Fidei*, this paper reflects theologically on the place of the prophecy of Zephaniah, in the deepening of faith in *ecclesiae* (churches) in Africa and America. Located within his own *Sitz im Leben*, of the late pre-exilic period (640-609 BCE), and with emphasis on the nature of the rapport that exists between Israel and God, Zephaniah counters the idolatry, disobedience, and the faithlessness of his time; which is not different from ours today in the contexts of *ecclesiae* in Africa and America. For Zephaniah, God's relationship with his people is not just based on judging the covenant breakers, but on calling them to repentance and forgiveness in order to restore the remnant. Zephaniah shares faith, hope and love. He fosters unity, promotes zeal for the Lord through exemplary living, humility in service, consciousness of the abiding presence of God, initiative in charity and absolute trust in God; gifts mostly needed for the deepening of faith in *ecclesiae* in Africa-America.

Introduction

What follows is a timely theological reflection on the place of the prophecy of Zephaniah in the deepening of faith in *Ecclesiae* in Africa and North America. Timely, particularly in this *Year of Faith*, indicated in the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, the *Porta Fidei*.⁶⁸ With it, Benedict reminds over 1.2 billion global Catholics and Christians of the “need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ.”⁶⁹ He draws the attention of Catholic-

⁶⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, (Emeritus) *Apostolic Letter Porta Fidei, for the Indication of the Year of Faith* (Rome: 11 October, 2011). The Pope Emeritus declared October 11, 2012- November 24, 2013 as the Year of Faith. See also, Mitch Pacwa, *The Year of Faith: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics* (Foreword by Frances Cardinal George, Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, n. 2.

Christians to the importance of the *Catechism of the Church* and the Documents of Vatican II, both of which are precious and indispensable tools for faith renewal.⁷⁰

Benedict emphasizes “renewal,” “rediscovery,” “reinvigorate (ting)” “expropriate (ting)” of faith against what he describes as “profound crisis of faith that has (today) affected many people.”⁷¹ While articulating such contemporary difficulties of crisis of faith, he metaphorically utilizes traditional biblical concepts such as “desert” or “wilderness” (*midbār* or *'ārābā* in Hebrew, and *erēmos* in Greek), familiar to Israel’s prophets, particularly Zephaniah.⁷² This is made more explicit by Benedict XVI in his exhortation that “the Church as a whole and all her pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life and life in abundance.”⁷³

Looking at their roles Israel’s prophets, including Zephaniah, were pastors of their own time with the mission of leading their contemporaries from faithlessness and apostasies, idolatries and deserts or highways of their age, time and culture, back to God.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid., n.11.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2. Please note the additional expressions in the parenthesis (tings) and (today) are mine.

⁷² See, S. Talmon, “rB:d>mi midbār; hbr['ārābā” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry and translated by Douglas W. Stott; Vol. VIII, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 87-118 the etymology, meaning, occurrences, usages, historical spatial dimension, Qumran, OT usages and the theological meaning of *midbār*. For the latter, it refers to that epoch in Israel’s history that God showed benevolence, love, miracles, liberation, the covenant renewal (Deut 2:7; 32; Pss 78, 105, 106); the exodus tradition. God also made Nineveh a deserted place, punished them for apostasies (Zeph 2:13). In the desert God made his people his own (Jer 31:12; Hos 9:10). It also highlights Israel’s apostasies, idolatries and type of Israel’ sinfulness and rebellions (Exod 16:2; Num 14; 20:1-13; Deut 9:7; 32:51; Ezek 20:13ff. The latter is mostly what the Pope refers to here as difficulties and things that challenge contemporary faith (in this study- in Africa and North America).

⁷³ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, n. 2

⁷⁴ See Isaiah 40:3-5 for languages of “desert” and “highway,” and Ignatius M. C. Obinwa, “I Shall Feed Them With Good Pasture” (Ezek 34:14): *The Shepherd Motif in Ezekiel 34: Its Theological Import and Socio-Political Implications* (Forshung Zur Bible, Band 125; Würzburg: Verlag, 2012), 241, for various interpretations given to this passage. See also *Porta Fidei*, n. 7.

It is this same metaphorical highway or desert of the past, during the pre-exilic period (640-609 BCE), in which Zephaniah was sent to preach faith, that we are commissioned today in our time and culture. Although my essay focuses primarily on the message of Zephaniah, factors responsible for crises of faith in *ecclesiae* in Africa and America are also identified. It is my hope to demonstrate how Zephaniah's theology serves as didactic lessons or remedies for such crises.

Terms and Limitations

A few terms or phrases in this essay need further clarification such as *ecclesiae in Africa* and *America* and, of course, the notion of faith. By *ecclesia* in Africa, I am basically referring to the Church which is in continental Africa. It is the African family of God with their evangelizing mission, called to the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. This Church, along with her history could not be better previously well discussed, but in the documents of the last two African Synods of 1994 and 2009.⁷⁵ In these documents, Africa is broadly referenced since, irrespective of regional differences, there are faith and cultural values that bind it as a continental Church which is in communion with the universal Church. Conscious of dialectics between regional differences and values that

⁷⁵ Some of these documents are the *Lineamenta: First Synod for Africa, The Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: "You shall be my Witnesses" (Acts 1:8)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 1990); *The Church in Africa And Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: "You shall Be my Witnesses" (Acts1:8) Instrumentum Laboris* (Ecivitate Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1994); John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (Yaoundé, Sept 14, 1995); *Second Special Assembly for Africa The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You are the Salt of the Earth, you are the Light of the World...(Matt 5:13-14)" Lineamenta* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2006) and *Second Special Assembly for Africa The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You are the Salt of the Earth, You are the Light of the World...(Matt 5:13-14)" Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2009). See also, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orabator, *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod* (New York: Orbis, 2011), for further insight to this African Church addressed in this essay.

binds the African Church, particular examples are drawn from the Church in Nigeria as a case study so as to avoid over-homogenizing Africa.⁷⁶

Similarly, by *ecclesia in America*, this essay is limited to that Church to which Pope John Paul II in his 1994 *Apostolic Letter Tertio Millenennio Adveniente*, had convoked a special assembly for, and also addressed in his *Ecclesia in America*.⁷⁷ Although the Pope's emphasis in these documents are on Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States of America and perhaps Canada (countries of America), he chooses to speak of "America" in the singular few reasons: (a) because of their shared Christian identity and (b) because of the continent's cultural heritage and the unity that it fosters, in communion of everyone in the Lord.⁷⁸ In other words, granted that there are varieties of historical, social, economic and cultural diversities, the American hemisphere from the religious point of view has a shared and common Christian identity.⁷⁹ Commonality goes back to the faith-preaching to the new world, discovered more than 500 years ago, when Christopher Columbus set his foot on the Island of El Salvador. The door to this part of the world, a new world indeed, was thrown open for Christian immigrants from Africa (victims of slavery), Europe, Asia and Oceania. Arriving with their diversities, ethnicities, gifts, talents and cultural heritage they cherished a common search for a better life within the

⁷⁶See *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos.42-43 for some of these common cultural faith values, which include, a "profound religious sense, sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world." Also, there is a sense of individual and communal sins with social effects as well as the need for the rite of purification. Africans of all countries also have a deep sense of extended family structure and respect for the dignity of life.

⁷⁷ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n.38, 10 November, 1994; *Lineamenta; the Working Document of the Special Synod of the Americas, Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 1996); John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, (*The Church in America*) *Ecclesia in America; On the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 1999).

⁷⁸ *Ecclesia in America*, n. 5.

⁷⁹ Special Synod of the Americas, *Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ; The Way to Conversion and Solidarity in America, Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 1997), 3.

framework of basic Christian values.⁸⁰ As argued for Africa, without overlooking pluralism in different parts of America, it is my intention to limit discussion and examples to the United States (church and society), but also to indicate in each case relevant examples such as the context demands.⁸¹

Finally, and in terms of faith, John R. Connolly in his work “Christian Faith: A Contemporary View”, identifies two ways of defining Christian faith within the Catholic traditions that this study adapts: (1) the intellectual model and (2) the personalist model.⁸²

Connolly identifies the intellectual model with Vatican I which sees faith as “an intellectual assent to the divinely revealed truths which are contained in the teachings of the Catholic Church.”⁸³ The personalist model adopted by Vatican II, embraces “faith as a total personal commitment to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.”⁸⁴ Both councils describe the content and act of faith slightly differently. In the former model, the content of faith is the manifestation of divinely revealed truths, and the act of faith is the intellectual assent to those truths with its goal being the reception of and participation in a higher knowledge of God.⁸⁵ On the other hand, the latter model sees the content of faith as God’s personal manifestation of love in Jesus Christ, and the act of faith a total personal acceptance of God’s offer of love. The primary goal of this model is to lead the believer to a personal self-transforming experience of God’s unconditional love.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ This makes sense, since for many years I have lived, studied, and taught the faith in this part of the world.

⁸² See John R. Connolly, “Christian Faith: A Contemporary View,” in *The College Student’s Introduction to Theology* (Edited by Thomas P. Rausch; Collegeville; Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 91-106.

⁸³ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Today both models of defining Christian faith are still at play within the living tradition of the Church. However, Connolly seems to tend toward the Vatican II approach which stresses faith as “the human person’s total acceptance of and commitment to God’s personal manifestation of love as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ within the community of believers.”⁸⁷ In *ecclesiae* in Africa and America the challenging but logical question is, how can the theological message of Zephaniah be used to deepen the human person’s total acceptance of, God’s personal revelation of his love manifested in the person of Christ?

Zephaniah, Background and Theology

In order to address the above question, a brief comment on the prophet Zephaniah’s background and theology is necessary. As the ninth and the lesser known of the Twelve Minor Prophets of the seventh century BCE, it is very easy to glean his *Sitz im Leben* (life settings) through the lens of the following superscription, “the word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, the king of Judah” (Zeph 1:1). Clearly, Zephaniah preached in Judah alongside Jeremiah during the reign and the reforms of one of the praiseworthy monarchs of Judah, King Josiah (640-609 BCE).

But prior to King Josiah, Judah experienced terrible hardships and subjugations as a result of Assyrian hegemony. Judah was invaded in 701 BCE, by Sennacherib after which the Assyrian political center was dramatically moved from its former historical capital of Assur, to Nineveh. Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), another Assyrian King, expanded the legacy of Sennacherib, his father. He aggressively pushed towards the west,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

posing a credible threat to Egypt. By doing this, Assyria was digging “its grave,” thus risking its political dominance in the region. Esarhaddon was succeeded by Assurbanipal (668-626 BCE) who was resisted by the Egyptian and Babylonian military. Nabopolassar of Babylon (626-605 BCE) led the revolt particularly for Babylonian autonomy and freedom. Assur, the ancient capital of Assyria, finally fell into the pit dug by their kings, around 614 BCE. Similar fate faced Nineveh in 612 BCE. Egypt was also dealt a defeating blow during the famous battle of the Carchemish (605 BCE).

While all these power struggles were occurring, Judah was threatened by the decisions of their unfaithful and idolatrous kings, particularly Ahaz, who ignored Isaiah’s advice not to practice idolatry and not to rely on Assyria’s foreign assistance, or “apparel.”⁸⁸ Zephaniah would also later follow the tradition of Isaiah by preaching against those who practiced idolatries. This is evident when he declares “On the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, I will punish the officials and the king’s sons and all who dress in foreign apparel” (Zeph 1:8).⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Ahaz was succeeded by his son Hezekiah, popularly known for his exceptional goodness. Unfortunately, his goodness was short lived since his son Manasseh (687- 642 BCE) would revert to idolatry. Manasseh’s evil works are best heard from the lips of deuteronomistic historians, in 2 Kings 21:1-17:

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in JerusalemHe did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, following abominable practices of the nation whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed. He set up altars to Baal and also made an Asherah, as Ahab, king of Israel had done.

⁸⁸ This is a euphemism for foreign influences and idolatries.

⁸⁹ My English translations of biblical quotations throughout this essay are drawn from *Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible* (Revised Edition, New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing, 2011).

He bowed down to the whole host of heaven and served them. He built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD has said: In Jerusalem I will set my name. And he built altars for the whole host of heaven in two courts of the house of the LORD. He immolated his child by fire. He practiced soothsaying and divinations, and reintroduced the consulting of ghosts and spirits. He did much evil in the LORD's sight and provoked him to anger... The rest of the acts of Manasseh, with what he did and the sin he committed, are recorded in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah.

In his succession of two years, Amon (642-640 BCE), Manasseh's son, was not different from his father. He continued to do "what was evil the Lord's sight, as his father Manasseh had done," (2 Kings 21:19-26). After Amon's assassination in a palace coup, spearheaded by his officials, he was succeeded by his son, Josiah (640-609 BCE) who embarked on major reforms in Israel's history (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chr 34-36).

The story has it that as the Temple of Jerusalem was being renovated by the order of King Josiah the 'Book of the Law,' Torah, was discovered by the high priest, Hilkiah (2 Kings 22:8). When Josiah learned about this "Book of the Law" through his secretary, Shaphan, he "tore his clothes" (2 Kings 22:11) and reflected on its contents. Having confirmed with the prophetess, Huldah that what he heard was actually the Torah, he gave instruction for the texts to be publicly read and taught (2 Kings 23:1-23; 2 Chr 34:29-33). Josiah also swiftly moved for covenant renewal and general religious reforms across Judah.⁹⁰ It is within this context of cultural and religious reforms that Zephaniah's theology thrives alongside Josiah's.⁹¹

⁹⁰ See Thomas L. Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings and Scrolls* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 205-209 for this simple presentation of the times and historical background of Zephaniah.

⁹¹ For further details see Michael Ufok Udoekpo, *Re-thinking the Day of YHWH and Restoration of Fortunes in the Prophet Zephaniah* (Das Alte Testament im Dialog= an outline of an Old Testament dialogue vol. 2, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 86-97 where studies on the socio-historical context and setting of the prophecy of Zephaniah have recently been studied. Some of them include, H. Ferguson, "The Historical Testimony of the Prophet," *JBL* 3 (1883): 42-59; Donald L. Williams, "The Date of Zephaniah," *JBL* 82 (1963): 77-88; Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah:*

Theology of Zephaniah

In line with Josiah, Zephaniah's theological goal sets out to reemphasize the covenant relationship that exists between Israel and God (cf. Gen 15; 17; 22; Exod 19–24; 34; Jos 24; 2 Sam 7; Jer 31:31-34).⁹² Zephaniah believes that this covenant relationship hinges not only on judgment but also on love, mercy, salvation and restoration of the fortunes of the remnant. It also depends on the repentance from those idolatries perpetuated by the likes of Manasseh. The prophet's message is well captured in his "inherited" concept of the day the Lord (*yôm `ādōnāy*).⁹³ I call it "inherited" since this notion was heard from earlier prophets before him, particularly Amos 5:1-20:

Woe to those who yearn, for the day of the LORD. What will the day of the LORD mean to you? It will be darkness, not light. As if someone fled from a lion and a bear met him; or as if on entering the house he rested his hand against the wall, and a snake bit it. Truly the day of the LORD will be darkness, not light, gloom without any brightness."⁹⁴

From this text of Amos, Zephaniah adapted the notion of the day of the Lord (*yôm `ādōnāy*), in order to address the consequent judgment that accompanies the syncretism

Morphology and Ideas (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 41-44; G. Langohr, "Le Livre de Sophonie et la critique de l'authenticité," *ETL* 52 (1976):1-27; C. Stuhlmüller, *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk* (Collegeville Bible Commentary, OT 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 96-97; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1991), 163-164; Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 325-357; Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary; Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 275-278; James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 173-215; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah* (AB. Vol. 25 A; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 33-42; J. Vlaardingeboek, *Zephaniah* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 13-17 and G. Savoca, *Abdia-Naum, Abacuc-Sofonia, introduzione e commento* (ILB.PT 18; Milano:Paoline Editoriale Libri, 2006), 148-150.

⁹² See Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 197, where a discussion on Zephaniah's theology is rooted in the OT covenant theology as a whole.

⁹³ In Zephaniah chapter 1, this notion and in this form appears three times, once in verse 7 and twice in verse 14.

⁹⁴ See also Isaiah 2:12-20 where this message was heard long before Zephaniah thus, "For the LORD of hosts will have his day against all that is proud and arrogant, against all that is high, and it will be brought low... on that day."

and worship of those false gods prevalent in his times and culture. With this concept of the day of the Lord, Zephaniah then reminds everyone in Jerusalem, including the officials, and kings, of the danger of worshipping idols. Zephaniah condemns lavish and corrupt life styles. The prophet also emphasizes from the beginning, the theology of creation and the sovereignty of God, which goes back to the Book of Genesis.

In his very words, Zephaniah prophesies:

I will completely sweep away all things from the face of the land... oracle of the LORD. I will sweep away human being and beast alike; I will sweep away the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble; I will eliminate the people from the face of the land... oracle of the LORD. I will stretch out my hands against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; I will eliminate from this place the last vestige of Baal, the name of the idolatrous priests. And those who bow down to the roofs to the host of heaven, and those who bow down to the Lord but swear by Milcom. And those who have turned away from the LORD and those who have not sought the LORD (*lō bāqaš `ādōnāy*); who have not inquired of him.... I will search Jerusalem with lamps... They will plant vineyards but not drink their wine (Zeph 1:2-13)

In this passage, Zephaniah rightly suggests that while repentance and change of heart is urgent, it is also important to acknowledge the divine nearness. It is urgent to appreciate God's creative wisdom, his enduring role in human vicissitudes, and how devastating God's judgment could be to those who rebel against him. Zephaniah heightens this message dramatically and poetically thus:

Near is the great day of the LORD, near and very swiftly coming. The sound of the day of the LORD piercing- there a warrior shrieks! A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick black clouds, a day of trumpet blasts and battle cries against fortified cities, against lofty battlements (Zeph 1:14-16).

As terrible as this day sounds in Zephaniah's description, so also will be its effects on the faithless peoples and their communities. The day will make many of them walk like blind people with their blood spread on the street like dust, with stinging bowels like animal dung (v. 17). Their wealth will be useless particularly their silver and gold. He affirms the Lord as the sovereign of all creation. He creates and can reverse his creation, bringing an end to every creature (v. 18).

Additionally, faith and option for the poor are consistently important for Zephaniah. Since Zephaniah's theological themes are known for their unity with what precedes and follows, in chapter 2, the prophet returns to those who have not sought the Lord (Zeph 1:6).⁹⁵ He calls them the faithless and shameless nations. In the following words, he turns around and exhorts them to seek the Lord with all his spiritual and theological values (Zeph 2:1-3):

Gather, gather yourselves together, O nation without shame! Before you are driven away, like chaff that disappears; before there comes upon you the blazing anger of the Lord; before there comes upon you the day of the LORD's anger. Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who have observed his law; seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger.

Noticeable in this passage of exhortation is the facts that besides the faithless and the shameless nations he also invites everyone, particularly the poor and the humble of the land (v. 3), to seek the Lord, suggesting the universal flavor of Zephaniah's theology. Returning to these states of the humble of the land, invited along others to seek the Lord,

⁹⁵ See A Vanlier Hunter, *Seek the Lord: A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortation in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah* (Baltimore, Maryland: St. Mary's Seminary & University, 1982), 259 where, for example, he argues for the unity of the same theme of "day of the Lord" both in the preceding chapter 1:2-18 and that which follows in Zephaniah 2:1-3.

is the need to reflect deeply into the very nature of this humble of the land. Among them are the economically, politically, socially and spiritually poor. They also include those who obey the covenant or the precepts of the Lord. Some may also have survived the catastrophes of the judgment day (Zeph 1:14-18).⁹⁶ No other person can describe the state of this remnant better than the prophet Zephaniah in the following words:

But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD... the remnant of Israel. They shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue; they shall pasture and lie down with none to disturb them (Zeph 3:12-13).

Indeed, they shall not be disturbed because they are zealous for the Lord, exemplary in their life style, persevere in faith, humble in service and charity, trust in God and in his presence, with a renewed spirit of hope (Zeph 3:12-13).⁹⁷ Zephaniah in the rest of chapter 3 rolls out the last segment of his theology with the following hopeful words:

The LORD your God is in your midst, a might savior, who will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, who will sing joyfully because of you, so that no one may recount our disgrace. At that time I will deal with all who oppress you; I will save the lame, and assemble the outcasts, I will give them praise and renown in every land where they were shamed. At that time I will bring you home and at that time I will gather you; for I will give you renown and praise, among all the peoples of the earth, when I bring about your restoration before your very eyes, says the LORD (Zeph 3:17-20).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ See Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah* (AB. vol 25 A; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 98, where this has been confirmed. She stresses that "compared to 1:6' those who do not seek the Lord,' the humble of the land (which) appears in the prophets and in the psalms (e.g. Amos 8:4; Isa 11:4; Ps 76:10). It may be used for the lower economic classes or for those humble who have remained faithful to God's commandments."

⁹⁷ See Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 81-82 where the meaning of Zephaniah's Hebrew name *tsaphon*, meaning "protects" "hidden" or "he whom the Lord protects," is discussed. Generally the theology of God's protection to his faithful people is underlined. And I have also seen in these nine English letters of his name (Zephaniah), the following theology, "hidden" in what already has been discussed: Z= Zeal for the Lord, E=Exemplary Living, P=Perseverance in faith, H=Humility in Service, A= Abiding Presence of God, N= Newness of Life in the Lord, I= Initiative in Charity, A = Absolute Trust in God H= Hope and not Despair.

⁹⁸ See Udoekpo, *Day of the YHWH*, 109-195 where this has already been extensively discussed.

Therefore, we can conclude with Lawrence Boadt that Zephaniah “represents the best of Israel’s values brought together in a time of great difficulty. The prophet has sensitivity to evil among his own people, trust in Yahweh to protect the nation and a conviction, that as necessary as punishment may be, there will always be a new time of God’s favor for the people of the covenant.”⁹⁹

Zephaniah and Ecclesiae in Africa and America

This brings us face to face with the people of the new covenant, and to the very question earlier raised: how can the theological message of Zephaniah be used to deepen a human person’s total acceptance of, and commitment to God’s personal revelation of his love in the person of Christ within the ecclesial and Christian faith communities of Africa and in the United States of America?

Firstly, the Church in Africa is recognizable as part and parcel of the people of the covenant Zephaniah had cared for, but in a renewed way. Its long history of evangelization and faith challenges are expressed in the synod documents of the 1994 (*Lineamenta, Instrumentum Laboris* and *Ecclesia in Africa*). The triple phases recounted in these documents span from the ancient Churches in Egypt, North Africa (early first centuries) to the Churches in Africa South of the Sahara (fifteenth, sixteenth centuries) through the times of the evangelizing Church of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰

It is a fast growing post-nineteen century Church, in the midst of positive and negative signs of the times. Positively, maturity, resilience in faith, rich cultural values, promotion of missionary spirit, a heightened cultural, social, economic and political consciousness

⁹⁹ Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (second edition, revised and updated by Richard Clifford and Daniel Harrington. New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 301.

¹⁰⁰ *Lineamenta, First Synod for Africa, nos. 1-10. See also, Ecclesia in Africa, nos. 30-33.*

are found in this Church. Others are effort to inculturate or actualize the gospel, the Catechesis and biblical renewal, in the spirit of the Vatican II, which are observed particularly in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Second Synod.¹⁰¹ There are also further healthy and hopeful signs of growth discussed earlier in the *Lineamenta* of the same synod. They include, (a) “the remarkable increase in Africa of a number of Catholics, priests and consecrated persons, (b) the growing number of African missionaries in Africa and outside the continent and (c) the creation of a continental consultation platform for them.”¹⁰² Thus, during his inaugural homily of the Second African Synod, Benedict XVI, was prompted to describe Africa as “an immense spiritual lung” for humanity that seems to be in crisis of faith and hope.¹⁰³ And what sustains this “spiritual lung” includes the vitality of African liturgies and living ecclesial communities; the creation and restructuring of diocese and ecclesial territories; the growing role of the Church in promoting the continent’s development, especially in education, health, and the struggle for the emergence of legally constituted States. Positively, it also includes the great credibility which the church continues to enjoy among the African people.”¹⁰⁴

Negatively, syncretism, fragile faith, trust, disparity between the clergy and the lay faithful, lack of leadership and pastoral initiatives, intolerance among religious groups, or

¹⁰¹Second Special Assembly *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 22. Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 42-43.

¹⁰² Second Special Assembly for Africa, *Lineamenta*, n.6.

¹⁰³ See Nathanael Yaovi Soédé “The Enduring Scourge of Poverty and Evangelization in Africa” in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace*, 181-190 and Paulinus I. Odozor, “Africa and the Challenge of Foreign Religious, Ethical Ideologies, Viruses, and Pathologies, in *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, 214-225, for extensive commentaries on this image of Africa as “spiritual lung.” Positively, with so many cultural values Africa needs to be given an opportunity to offer its gifts and values responsibly to the rest of the world.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* See also the *Second Special Assembly for Africa Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 7 where the role of the Church within the context of this new socio-political context (from 1994 to 2009) is discussed in detail.

lack of adequate dialogue (particularly African Traditional Religion [ATR]),¹⁰⁵ are challenges facing the Church in Africa. Other negative elements are divisions, tribalism, widespread corruption and materialism among political leaders. There have also been perceptible assimilation of negative western influences “apparels” (through “globalization”) which has led to the erosion and corrosion of some traditional African family values, noted by the synod Fathers.¹⁰⁶ Other significant human problems were also noted and are worthy of mention:

The widespread deterioration in the standard of living, insufficient means for educating the young, the lack of elementary health and social services with the resulting persistence of endemic disease, the spread of terrible scourge of AIDS, the heavy and often unbearable burden of international debt, the horror of fratricidal wars fomented by unscrupulous arms trafficking, and the harmful, pitiable spectacle of refugees and displaced person... infant mortality rate continues to grow....In constructing the world, Africa is deliberately left out, being only remembered when its miseries need to be displayed or exploited.¹⁰⁷

In terms of forms or search of stable political leadership democracy is still in its infancy across Africa. In an effort to govern itself, incessant tensions, rivalries, tribalism and wide spread violation of fundamental human rights have become the order of the day in many areas of the African continent. These issues impede economic progress, leaving most of the citizenry in the state of abject poverty. Therefore, in the search for a greener pasture many Africans have migrated elsewhere.

¹⁰⁵ Much has been discussed and written on ATR, by expert in this field. For some insight see, E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: Problem of Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 106 where he particularly underlines beliefs in God, divinities, spirits, ancestors and the practice of magic, medicine, and each consequent cult are components of ATR. And *First Special Assembly for Africa, Instrumentum Laboris* (1994), 77-83 and *Second Special Assembly for Africa Lineamenta* nos. 25-26 for positive aspects of ATR (belief in supreme being,

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 23. Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 46-52.

¹⁰⁷ See, *Second Special Assembly for Africa, Lineamenta*, n. 8.

The foregoing list of weaknesses suggest that though much progress has been made, at least after the 1994 and 2009 synods, there is yet work to be done regarding matters of faith in Africa. This would require, among other measures, the internalization of the message of Zephaniah. I believe Zephaniah's theology if translated, taught and read in vernacular would offer Africa a relevant soothing effect.

Zephaniah's fearless attack on syncretism and false worships is related to previously mentioned situation of *ecclesia* in Africa today (Zeph1:4-8). Consequently, the prophet challenges the Church in Africa to re-think the idolatries of modern Africa namely, money, power, divisions and corruption of public officials.

From what has been said, Zephaniah was no doubt a champion of monotheism who lived within a polytheistic or monolatrous culture.¹⁰⁸ African Christianity, or Catholicism today in the midst of other monotheistic religions (Islam and ATR), is confronted with such monolatry.¹⁰⁹ African peoples cherish the notion of God as Supreme Being and Sovereign of all creation.¹¹⁰ As in the days of Zephaniah there were other divinities that played the role of God's agents, such as delegates or intermediaries. But the zeal in which the prophet brought into confronting the monolatry and the passion in which he

¹⁰⁸ By monotheism I am referring to the belief in existence, promotion of only one God and exclusive worship of him, which in its strict sense was a gradual process in Israel, realized only from the time of Deutero-Isaiah. Similarly, polytheism is used here as the recognition and worship of many other plurality of gods, each independent and co-eternal. See Joseph Jansen, "Monotheism," in *The New Dictionary Theology*, (eds. By Joseph Komonchack, et al., Bangalore; India: Theological Publication, 1999), 674-676 and Robert Gnuse, "The emergence of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: A Survey of Recent Scholarship," *Religion* 20 (1999), 315. On the other hand, by monolatry I mean the belief in the oneness of the godhead only in reference to worship, because ontologically there is an acknowledged plurality of gods. The exclusive worship of a god within a certain social location is enforced by prohibitions of allegiance to other deities. Cf. Nili Fox, "Concept of God in Israel and the Question of Monotheism," in *Text, Artifact and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (eds., Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; Rhode Island: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 326.

¹⁰⁹ See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (New York: Praeger, 1969; idem, *Concept of God in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1970). He has conducted studies on several African peoples and countries.

¹¹⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 28-38.

exhorted his community to “seek the Lord” (Zeph 2:1-3), could be related to the *ecclesia* in Africa.

Besides being for Africa an exemplary promoter of universalism and monotheism, I see in Zephaniah’s theology a common interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, a subject of delight for many and recent African theologians.¹¹¹ Zephaniah suggests a theology of dialogue, clearly seen today as an urgent and indispensable instrument for evangelization, peace, progress, and deepening of faith, consistently affirmed by the Vatican II, and by the 1994 and 2009 synod fathers.¹¹²

In the famously quoted and discussed *Nostra Aetate*, for instance, the Second Ecumenical Council insists that the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy even in other religions outside Christianity, who “often reflects a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”¹¹³

On the same note, Roland D. Witherup in his commentary on *Dei Verbum* rightly sees the Bible, the Word of God, of which Zephaniah is an integral part, as an ecumenical starting point for Christian and Catholic communities and their families.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Needless to recycle them here, but the following two recent texts are worth mention, even though I do not agree with the entire contents, Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence* (Interreligious Studies vol 3: Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010) and Bakeni John Bagna, *The Encounter of the African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity In Northeastern Nigeria: Towards A Contextual Theology of Interreligious Dialogue* (Dissertatio Ad Lauream In Facultates S. Theologiae Apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in urbe, Romae 2012).

¹¹² For Dialogue in the synod documents see First Synod for Africa, *Lineamenta*, n. 28; *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 75-111; *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos.65-67; Second Special Assembly for Africa *Lineamenta*, nos.27-30 and in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 99-102.

¹¹³ *Nostra Aetate*, n. 2. See also Vatican II on Ecumenism; Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 1993); Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate* (Rediscovering of Vatican II; New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 130. See also Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 273-289.

¹¹⁴ Roland D. Witherup, *Scripture: Dei Verbum* (Rediscovering of Vatican II; New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 77-102. See also Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, the Word of the Lord, Verbum Domini* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2010), particularly nos. 109-120 where the “Word of God and Culture,” and “the Word of God and Interreligious dialogue” are discussed.

The injustices and violence that fills African streets were also repudiated by the ancient Prophet Zephaniah. He preached against those “leap (ing) over the threshold and fill (ing) the house of their masters with violence and deceit” (1:9). He condemned tyranny, irresponsible leadership, violation and exploitation of the poor, the remnant, and the weak (common in Africa today), to whose disadvantage laws were bent (3:1-4; 12-13), a theme recently taken up by Pope Francis in the homily which inaugurated his Petrine Office. In this homily, Francis like Zephaniah (Zeph 1:16; 2:10; 3:11) cited hatred, envy and pride as interior causes of sin, or vices that defile lives everywhere.¹¹⁵

Finally, if I may reiterate, the Church in Africa would need to be soothed and nurtured by the message of Zephaniah: zeal for the Lord, exemplary living, perseverance in faith, humility in service, abiding presence of God, newness of life in the Lord, initiative in charity, absolute trust in God and hope of God’s favor and restoration. The prophet’s way of life must be repeatedly communicated to the people of Africa (Zeph 3:17-20).

Similarly, Zephaniah could be related to the *ecclesia* in America whose blossoming milestone of evangelization and faith is expressed in the synod documents for the Church in America alluded to in this study. First of all, let us acknowledge that the America has continued to cherish a faith encountered more than 500 years ago, in the living Jesus. This is one of America’s greatest gifts which have also given birth to a variety of positive fruits.

One of such fruits is the number of saintly men and women that the *ecclesia* in America has produced. Saints, of course, are true expressions of the deepening of faith and

¹¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Homily of the Holy Father Pope Francis; Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman’s Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome* (Saint Peter’s Square, Tuesday, 19 March 2013, Solemnity of St. Joseph).

Christian identity in America.¹¹⁶ Also, the shared cultural, religious and historical differences and values brought by immigrants greatly and uniquely influenced evangelization in America. This is true particularly in the area of popular piety, “the increasing participation of people in pilgrimages to shrines (especially Marian shrines), the tradition in families of baptizing children, the giving of alms for the souls in Purgatory and celebrating Masses for the deceased, observing patronal feasts with their characteristic processions and the celebration of Holy Mass (generally attended by large numbers of people), devotion to the saints, not only those of the universal Church but also those of the American continent.”¹¹⁷ *Ecclesia* in America is also positively present in the area of education, particularly for the poor and the needy, as well as in the promotion of fundamental human right and social justice.¹¹⁸

As in the case with the Church in Africa, many good things have been said about the Church in America. Yet there are still areas of appeal for conversion and deepening of faith in Christ. Firstly, there is threat to family values, which seems to be part of the difficulties confronting the faith even in Europe today. Joseph Ratzinger lists three of these difficulties: the disappearance of faith in the doctrine of creation, metaphysics and eschatology.¹¹⁹ For the scope of this essay let me pick for a discussion only one, the disappearance of faith in creation theology, in which the gifts and values of American families are deeply and originally rooted. In the creation account of Genesis, God the

¹¹⁶ See *Ecclesia in America*, n. 15 for the list of some of these American saints beginning from Saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617) “the New World’s first flower of holiness,” proclaimed by Pope Clement X in 1670.

¹¹⁷ Second Special Assembly for America, *Lineamenta*, nos. 13-14, *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos.17 - 19 and *Ecclesia in America*, nos. 16-17.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 18-19. See *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 20.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “Retrieving the Tradition: Difficulties Confronting the Faith in Europe Today,” in *Communio* 38 (Winter 2001): 729-737.

creator, “created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female...God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth” (Gen 1:27-28).¹²⁰ Possibly delineated from this account Genesis’ account is the dignity of the human persons, male and female, children, marriage, sexuality, family unity, ecology and planets, the omnipotence of God and the divine values of love, peace, generosity and life. Today much of it is under the scrutiny of threats of court decisions and reinterpretation, of which the council Fathers called for caution.¹²¹

Secondly, there are in America today, noticeable fragmentations and divisions, as well as cultural, racial and religious dichotomy or discrimination.¹²² The synod fathers think these phenomena are, among many other factors, a result of the “de-humanizing tendency spread by media, exalting violence, eroticism and a mentality undermining the human and evangelical values of the peoples of America.”¹²³

Thirdly, besides issues of division, there are negative signs of globalization among countries within and outside the continent of America. This is perceived in forms of corruption, materialism, relativism and secularism. Others are drug and sex trafficking, accumulation of foreign debt, religious bigotry, arms struggle, abuse of guns, culture of

¹²⁰ See Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us*, (New York: HarperCollins Publications, 1989), especially 205-206 where the summary of the interpretation of the term “image” (*tzelem*) and “likeness” (*demut*) is discussed.

¹²¹ *Ecclesia in America*, n. 82. See also, Michael Ufok Udoekpo, *Family Functions and Children’s Education in Modern Society* (Ikot Ekpene, Nigeria: Pathom’s, 1997).

¹²² See also *Ecclesia in America*, nos. 64-65, the questions of discrimination against people of other descent especially Africans are discriminated against with unjust treatment of immigrants.

¹²³ Second Special Assembly for America, *Lineamenta*, no.28.

death, pride among office holders, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.¹²⁴

Fourthly, Kenneth J. Long builds on this note of socio-political shortcomings, as suggested by the very title of his work: *The Trouble with America*, not necessarily unconnected to the faith of the American people. These troubles, according to Long, include what he calls pride in the belief that America is the best country ever, pluralism and its discontents, constitutionalism and limitation of virtues, capitalism and the ethos of greed, making a mess at home and war mongering outside.¹²⁵

The lists of the aforementioned challenges are inexhaustible. However, Zephaniah can speak to what has been indicated. This is so beginning from the very subject of creation theology. Most exegetes believe Zephaniah had contact with the creation narrative (Gen 1–2; Zeph 1:2-3).¹²⁶ Lack of faith in creation theology, denial of God's omnipotence, dominion and orderliness smacks of idolatry and attracts God's judgment. Zephaniah warns of this judgment, on the day of the Lord, in language of the reversal and destruction of creation (Zeph 1:2-3). Just as the religious failures of ancient Judah affected the totality of the society's life, disorderliness and denial of the creative works of God comes in different forms today, in modern society, and can lead to family or faith-breakdown. It can also lead to selfishness, exploitation of the weak, abuse of women,

¹²⁴ See *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 55-63.

¹²⁵ Kenneth J. Long, *The Trouble with America: Flawed Government, Failed Society* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), xvii-89. Although I do not agree with all that he says. But Long appears to be familiar or share the views of, Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble With Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1984), whose main emphasize is on the need for good leadership. And I will recommend after the likeness of the Good Shepherd described in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34.

¹²⁶ See Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible 25A; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 80-84, specially the emphasis on the fact that cult and worship allows or enables practitioners to participate in creation.

children and animals.¹²⁷ Re-reading Zephaniah closely in this light can bring soothing effects to *ecclesia* in America.

Zephaniah's message can also serve best in the culture of assemblage of immigrants from different parts of the continents or with unique historical, cultural, religious and economic differences that America has come to represent. The monotheism that Zephaniah preached is cherished as well by Christianity, Islam and Judaism, ATR etc., prevalent among religious dialogue partners in the America today, as in Africa. The pride, selfishness, injustices, bad and reckless leaderships, turning deaf ears to God's creative wisdom, exploitation of the poor and the remnant (Zeph 2:3, 3:12-13), socio-political class inequalities, addressed by the synod fathers, Joseph Ratzinger, Chinua Achebe, Kenneth Long and others are the very topics addressed by the prophet.

Finally, the value of Zephaniah for the Church today, cannot be overemphasized. Additionally, the fact that Zephaniah 3:14-18a is read on the Third Sunday of Advent Year C, in different languages, with its message of hope and the joy of the Lord, is quite consoling. On Tuesday of the Third Week of Year A, Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13 is also read. It is here that the messianic salvation is promised to the poor and the remnant. Also Zephaniah 3:14-18a is repeated on the 21st of December with emphasis on the abiding presence of God in our midst. Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13's theme on the poor and lowly, is repeatedly stressed by this prophet on the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year A. Interestingly alongside Matthew 5:1-12, the famous sermon on the mountain, Zephaniah foreshadows messages of faith, love and hope heard in the Gospels (Matt 25: 14-15; 27:47; Mark 15:33; John 12:31-36) and in the writings of Saint Paul (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-57).

¹²⁷ See the issue of ecological concern as discussed in *Ecclesia in America*, n. 25

Conclusion

This discussion can go on. But let me conclude that although the *ecclesiae* in Africa and America today are separated from Zephaniah by over 2000 years, evidently, the socio-political, cultural, moral and religious problems he encountered are not peculiar to the world of antiquity. They are peculiar to us as well, even in a rapidly changing society with new contexts and challenges of poverty, war, terrorism, injustice, idolatries, divisions and individualism. In this Year of Faith and beyond, Zephaniah shares faith, hope and love. He fosters unity, promotes zeal for the Lord, exemplary living, humility in service, consciousness of the abiding presence of God, initiative in charity and an absolute trust in God. Most assuredly, these are the soothing gifts needed for the deepening of faith in *ecclesiae* (churches) in Africa and America.

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WEALTH AND DIVINE BLESSING:
A STUDY OF THE THEOLOGICAL CORRECTION IN PROVERBS 10:22
IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

It takes very little to perceive the pervading trend of preachers in African media, particularly in Nigeria. Ubiquitous might be the correct term to describe what seems to distort the common believers' understanding of the message of the Sacred Scripture. Can human beings purchase or procure God's blessings with their wealth, which are sometimes fraudulently amassed? Many preachers in Nigeria tilt to affirmative response to this searching question. This paper surveys the new phenomenon among Christian preachers, analyzes the new trend as it seeks possible solutions in the same Sacred Scripture, which the preachers employ in persuasively making their point. The Book of Proverbs 10:22 provides a theological solution to many of the texts that seem to convey contradicting views in the Bible. A general background of this verse in the Book of Proverbs is considered highly essential in arriving at its message. Since the paper is centered in Africa, with particular focus on Nigeria, the background of the problems in the Nigerian situation is highlighted. Related and relevant texts in the Book of Proverbs and other parts of the Old Testament are studied in order to elucidate the import of Proverbs 10:22. The highlight of the paper remains this one verse in the Book of Proverbs for it forcefully corrects a deviation that corrodes both faith and moral.

Introduction

*The blessing of the LORD makes rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it (Proverbs 10:22)*

Conscientious, responsible and devout Christians, who have manifested their commitment to the Church in various ways, would be filled with utter amazement, confusion and even unbelief at the new trend of preaching which they frequently receive today from a great number of their religious leaders. That great sense of responsibility and belonging which has spurred them on in their firm support of the Church, of which they consider themselves as active members, is now commercialized in the guise of

erecting and sustaining physical edifice, the Church, and personnel. These popular preachers, who employ every available means to convince their hearers of their subjective theory, base their argument on the Bible. The Sacred Scripture, which should be expounded for it to accomplish its divinely ordained purpose (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17) is appropriated by the preachers for some other intentions rather than that for which it is destined.

Serious studies and reflections on the new wave of teaching, which claims a strong correlation between wealth and divine blessing, are timely. This is because the adverse effects of this teaching are almost palpable in our society, especially in the faith of many Christians. Wealth, like many other gifts we possess in this world, comes from God; it is a blessing from above, particularly when it is genuinely acquired. However, the point, which the preachers strongly propagate, is that this divine gift is conditioned by what human beings are able to do for God.

I have chosen in this paper to study Proverbs 10:22 which in a clearly stated distich offers a theological correction to this teaching. The strophe of this poem is studied in the contexts of the varied opinions on wealth presented in the Book of Proverbs. Our choice of the Proverbs is informed by its unique features in the Old Testament. It is didactic like many other wisdom texts of the Old Testament. “The aim is evidently to encourage and advocate what are regarded as good attitudes and action, which preserve family life, uphold the economic strength of the household by hard work and prudence in financial affairs, and to discourage violent and irresponsible social behavior”.¹²⁸ This is greatly challenged by the doctrine which equates wealth with divine blessing. One

¹²⁸ R. E. Clemens, “The Sources of Wisdom”, *Understanding Wisdom: Sources, Science, and Society*; edited by Warren S. Brown (Philadelphia – London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000) 16.

believes that a study of Proverbs 10:22 in the context of other Old Testament texts that share similar view will be of immense help to many Christians, especially in our present society, who are already beset by teachings that are contrary to what they previously know and have lived.

A literary approach with some emphasis on the poetic nature of Proverbs 10:22 is adopted in this work which is presented in four parts. I part from identifying the problem that this paper addresses. The point made in Proverbs 10:22 is understood in the context of how the Book of Proverbs presents wealth. This paper also takes cognizance of other texts that share similar view with this verse.

Identifying the Problem

Integral part of human life and an essential part, indeed, is wealth (riches) with all its varied connotations. From the narrative on the account of creation, the Creator freely gave this to human beings (cf. Genesis 1:29). However, as a consequence of our first parents' disobedience to God's command (Genesis 3), human beings are compelled to toil in order to acquire their possessions: "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:17). The strong belief in God as the sole and unrivalled Creator of all that exist attributes to the same Creator the source of human possessions.

However, lived human experience is fraught with inexplicable disparity in what humans consider as wealth. While some are ostentatiously rich,¹²⁹ others, out of no fault of theirs,

¹²⁹ A Kiganda (in Uganda) proverb stresses that God showers his blessing like air upon the rich [*omukisa mpewo, nobwogalawo guyinira*] (cf. James Ndyabahika, "The Attitude of the Historical Churches to Poverty and Wealth: A Challenge for African Christianity", *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* vol. 23.2 [2004] 200).

wallow in abject poverty. The Sacred Scripture, which is graced with both divine and human authorships, has tried in various ways to proffer some explanations to this obvious fact in human life. Most of these explanations are found in the Biblical Wisdom Literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Sirach) and Wisdom Psalms (cf. Psalm 49), which, more than any other part of the Bible, deal with observable human experiences and teach human beings how to live humanly in this world.

The multifaceted nature and varieties, sometimes contradictory, of these solutions given to inequality in distribution of human possessions have given undue opportunity to many preachers of our contemporary society who both misappropriate the Sacred Writings and exploit the less informed audience. The Sacred Scripture is clear on this: Wealth is a blessing from God; he gives and generously too (Genesis 26:12-14; cf. 24:35). “For the countryman’s mentality, which is the mark of pre-exilic Israel and Judah (even its literate upper class), it was a matter of course to see wealth as a proof of God’s special closeness”.¹³⁰ The question, nevertheless, remains: Is God’s gift conditional or unconditional. If it is conditional, what are the conditions? If, on the other hand, it is unconditional, why does the Bible appear incongruous in presenting this? One observes that the Scripture does not have just one sided answer to this, because both the righteous and the ungodly enjoy this divine gift. Sometimes, the unrighteous are more privileged; this has in no small measure generated the age-long reflection on theodicy (argument in defense of God’s goodness despite the existence of evil), which the author of the Book of Job attempted to resolve.

¹³⁰ Christoph Levin, “The Poor in the Old Testament: Some Observations”, *Religion and Theology: A Journal of Contemporary Religious Discourse* vol. 8 (2001) 254.

Ubiquitous, indeed, in our Nigerian society today and appalling among those who should lead instead of misleading, is the strong belief that God's gift of wealth is conditional. "Quoting selected passages in the scriptures members are made to believe that God is more interested in the gift than the giver".¹³¹ Such preachers avail themselves of Scriptural passages which they subjectively interpret. They teach that we receive in proportion to what we give God. Is this not in the Bible? Jesus' words, which they use out of the contexts of the same Sacred Scripture, are employed to buttress their points: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38). In fact, the last part of this verse insists that "human generosity will be rewarded by divine superabundance"¹³² (similarly in the same Luke 8:18; 19:25-26). Another text, equally appealing like the one just cited, plays an important role in this: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything; you may share abundantly in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Our popular preachers fail to understand the injunction that committed interpreters of the Sacred Texts should arrive at the literal, spiritual and fuller sense of the Bible only when they have requisite grasp of the contexts of the Biblical texts.¹³³ Unruly neglect of these contexts invariably leads to misinterpretation and misappropriation of God's Word,

¹³¹ Efe M. Ehioghae, "Between Religiosity and Prosperity", *Tell Magazine* (Wednesday 9 May 2012) telling.com/tellmobile/newspage.php?id=1377

¹³² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (The Anchor Bible vol. 28; London: Doubleday, 1981) 641. It is also observed that in Isaiah 67:7, Jeremiah 32:18 and Psalm 79:12, the Lord repays evil deeds of men as he rewards their generosity.

¹³³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993) II B.

which has been communicated in human language. Random citation of the Biblical texts out of their contexts seems to betray some level of ignorance of the message of the pericopes the preachers utilize. Were they not taught during their formative years? Or, are they compelled by other intentions?

This kind of preaching is uppermost in a good number of sermons we hear, both from Catholic preachers or writers and other Christians. Their motives for such interpretation drastically deviate from the contexts and meaning of the Biblical texts and contexts; for theirs, of course, is neither motivated by contextualization of the texts, nor inculturation. Rather, they are propelled by a strong desire, egoistic in nature, to extort 'money' from the affluent of the society. Actually, they benefit from the wealth that accrues from the result of their preaching. This is evident in their materialistic style of life seen in their flashy, expensive cars and gadgets, buildings in their family houses and beyond, costly gifts to friends and relatives. All these are unbecoming of the life these preachers have publicly vowed to live. Our preachers have well-calculated words, expressions and gestures and they know when to strike and the appropriate audience. Period of Annual Harvest appears the most favorable for this 'business' whose merchandise is God's Word, the Sacred Scripture.

Does God really boost human wealth simply because the possessor is generous to the Church through the preacher? Affirmative to this is the position of a good number of our 'eloquent' preachers, who base their argument on the Bible. The Book of Proverbs, with its contents coming from varied authors, times and places, seems an appropriate response to this pressing problem. The fact is that this book is a collection of many opinions, and one of them is on the correlation between wealth and divine blessing. One finds this, as I

have attempted to do below, in what the many maxims in the book teach on the sources of human riches. In the maze of all the conflicting opinions on this issue, a theological correction glitters like gold in heaps of 'refuse'. This glittering text in the Book of Proverbs, which finds its resonance in other parts of the Bible, has attracted my attention, and it is the matrix of this paper. Wealth is a divine blessing; but is this blessing conditional?

Wealth according to the Book of Proverbs

Abundance of valuable possessions or money, material prosperity, opulence, affluence, valuable or expensive goods, luxuries are some of the terms that modern languages employ in order to convey the meaning of wealth or its synonym, riches.¹³⁴ It is a reality in human life; and on purely human level, it is one of the deepest aspirations of everyone to have possessions. This desire is closely related to another which is the quest for a secure life; general, human conviction is that wealth guarantees this security. Being a significant part of human life, diversified opinions on wealth and its cognates permeate sapiential aphorisms, especially those found in the Biblical, Wisdom Literature, to which the Book of Proverbs prominently belongs.

Perspectives about wealth, according to the Book of Proverbs, are communicated by the two recurrent Hebrew terms of its semantic field in this book. The first is a noun *hôn* translated as 'wealth' or riches;¹³⁵ and the second is the verbal root 'šr which occurs in the Book of Proverbs as verb conjugated in different Hebrew verbal patterns; as adjective

¹³⁴ This definition is according to *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* vol. 2. Oxford: University Press, 2002⁵.

¹³⁵ E. Kutsch, "hôn", *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997) 364-368.

(*’āšîr* often rendered “rich”, both as adjective and noun), and the noun *’ōšer* “riches”.¹³⁶

A close reading of the human reality to which these terms refer manifests varied, human perceptions and attitudes towards wealth. There seems to be some underlying questions and issues regarding wealth that the sages in the Proverbs attempted to address. Some are theological in nature as they relate wealth to divine-human relationship; others are purely sapiential as the writers wrote from observable human experiences. These can be grouped under the following headings.

Sources of Wealth

The Book of Proverbs clearly addresses the issue of the provenance of material possession. The fundamental issue is that everyone desires to have and enjoy wealth; while some are fortunate, others on the other hand seem less privileged. Where then does the source of wealth or riches lie? Just like other human problems tackled in Biblical, Wisdom Literature, there are wide-ranging views on the origin of human wealth.

The personified Wisdom, best understood in her biblical expression as a communication of God,¹³⁷ has a particular mission to human beings. Part of her mission is to give wealth to them. Speaking of this gift in a distich that bears an intensifying, synonymous parallelism in the second part of the strophe, Wisdom asserts “Riches and honour are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity” (Proverbs 8:18; similarly in 3:16; 24:4). If the personified Wisdom is understood as a communication of God, divine gift, this gift that comes from Wisdom is God’s gift. The Book of Proverbs is explicit on this when it traces the source of human wealth to God (10:22; 22:2).

¹³⁶ M. Sæbø, “‘āšar”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. XI (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001) 417-422.

¹³⁷ Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002) 133.

Wealth can also be acquired through inheritance. This seems the allusion being made in Proverbs 19:14a: “House and wealth are inherited from parents”. It is natural for wealthy parents to pass on their wealth to their children. The second part of this verse introduces another gift which exceeds natural inheritance: “but a prudent wife is from the Lord”. The point is that there are things that must be purely considered as divine gift, things that are not mediated. One of such gifts, according to this text, is the gift of a prudent wife. Parents can leave their riches for their children, but, according to this proverb, life companions are directly from God.

Some of the sages in the Proverbs affirm that wealth is a reward of hard work. In a comparison that includes a frequent antonym in the semantic field of the term wealth, the wise has this to say: “The lazy do not roast their game, but the diligent obtain precious wealth” (Proverbs 12:27). Similarly in 10:4: “the hand of the diligent makes rich”. Closely related to this is the tracing of riches to personal virtues: “The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honour and life” (Proverbs 22:4; compare 21:21). One can procure wealth through hard work and virtuous life. Such virtuous life is partly manifested in self-control. Wealth acquired through diligence could be lost when there is no restraint in spending (Proverbs 21:17; 29:3). Moderation in life that knows no extravagance paves the way for richness.

On the other hand, there are those who fraudulently acquire their own wealth. They do this by extorting poor persons (Proverbs 22:16a); or through aggression (Proverbs 11:16). The following aphorism shows that wealth is sometimes obtained by deceit: “One who arguments wealth by exorbitant interest gathers it for another who is kind to the poor” (Proverbs 28:8). In such a case the Lord, who is the just judge, defends

victims of such injustice which the law forbids (cf. Exodus 22:24; Deuteronomy 23:20). Wealth acquired in this way is described in Proverbs 13:11a as “wealth hastily gotten”; it does not last for it dwindles until it reaches extinction. On the contrary, a person who honestly and gradually accumulates wealth increases it steadily (Proverbs 13:11b).

Wealth as a Guarantee for Security

Security as the central reason for human quest for riches is prominently presented in the Book of Proverbs. It is also the reason why many strive by all means to accumulate material things. The sages employ some metaphors in expressing this singular role of riches in human life. In Proverbs 10:15, it is called *qiryat 'uzzô* literally ‘a city of his strength’; or simply ‘a strong city’, a ‘fortress’. The antithetical parallelism in this verse helps us understand the meaning of this phrase; because, the proverb is concluded in the second stich in this way: ‘the poverty of the poor is their ruin’. According to this parallelism, *m^ehittāh* which means ‘terror’ (cf. Isaiah 54:14), ‘ruin’ (Psalm 89:41), ‘destruction’ (Proverbs 10:14) is the antonym of *qiryat 'uzzô*. Proverbs 18:11 is similar to the content of 10:15, especially in their first parts. The second stich of 18:11 explains further the meaning of *qiryat 'uzzô*: *ûk^ehômāh nišgābāh b^emaškîṭô*: ‘in their thought it is like an inaccessible wall’. Fortress and inaccessible wall are expressive of that security that riches give; these are an incentive to human insatiable quest for wealth.

Akin to the above is another proverb found in 13:8: “Wealth is a ransom for a person's life, but the poor get no threats”. Our contemporary Nigerian society will not find it difficult to understand this proverb, for many have experienced it in their lives; particularly in the ubiquitous ill of kidnappers who demand some ransom for their victims. Usually those kidnapped are the affluent from whom the captors desire to get

money or other valuables. Indeed, the poor get no threat from the wicked. Wealth plays a dual function here, for it attracts the envy of the ungodly; it is also a ransom paid to extricate oneself from such covetousness. This might have inspired another proverb which advises: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist” (23:4). Similar teaching is found in the wise words of Amen-em-ope, who taught in Egypt between 1250-1000 BC: “Do not spend tomorrow’s riches / Today’s wealth is all you own. Do not set your heart on material goods / Time makes beggars of us all / Do not work to lay up a surplus, / Toil only for what you need”.¹³⁸

Good friends are source of protection in life, and it is a blessing to have them (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; Sirach 22:19-26). Wealth in a way attracts many friends; for the rich have many friends. In 14:20 this human reality is presented in an antithetical parallelism that underscores the fate of the poor. While the rich have many friends around them, “the poor are disliked even by their neighbors” (14:20a). Riches generate social disparity, for they project the wealthy at the expense of the poor (19:4).

Some Negative Attitudes toward Wealth

Unconstructiveness with regards to riches or wealthy persons is not lacking in the maxims of the sages, particularly when wealth is considered as procured in a wrong way. Although riches give social status, they can be a taunt for those who have tainted themselves in order to acquire them. Thus the sages teach that “a good name is to be chosen rather than riches, and favor is better than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1; cf. Ecclesiastes 7:1; Sirach 41:12). “Good name” in this synonymous parallelism corresponds to *hēn* here translated as “favor”. Nuances of this Hebrew noun include

¹³⁸ V. H. Matthews – D. C. Benjamin (eds.), “Teachings of Amen-em-ope”, *Old Testament Parallel: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 278.

“agreeableness”, “attractiveness” or pleasing quality. A person who fraudulently amasses riches loses this human quality. In the words of the sages, it is better to be truly human than to be rich in a questionable manner.

Riches give protection or security in this life, but human beings should not place their trust in them, otherwise they make gods out of their wealth. In Proverbs 11:28, those who put their trust in their possession wither because, wealth, though good and comes from God, it should not take the place of God in one’s life. On the other hand, the righteous rich flourish like green leaves (11:28b). This calls to mind similar comparisons in Psalm 1:1-3, where the righteous are like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in due season. In Psalms 52:7-8; 92: 12-14, they are said to be planted in God’s house. In other words, they are firmly rooted in God; they remain there permanently, and have life communion with God.¹³⁹ Persons who place their trust in material possessions are devoid of this inner joy and peace which are characteristics of the righteous.

There is punishment reserved for those who are in a hurry to accumulate riches. They will lack that blessing which is given to the faithful (Proverbs 28:20). Even in our society today, “anyone who gets rich quick is suspect”.¹⁴⁰ According to the Proverbs, they deserve punishment because of the means they use in obtaining what they have. In 28:20 such persons are antithetically parallel to the faithful who receive God’s blessings. This is because, “the wise person desires moderation and contentment with respect to

¹³⁹ Cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 230.

¹⁴⁰ Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (World Biblical Commentary 22; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1998) 217.

material goods, since the temptation to violate covenant relationships is often more acute in the extremes of affluence and deprivation”.¹⁴¹

Riches bestow social status on those who possess them, but it does not follow that all rich persons are wise: “The rich is wise in self-esteem, but an intelligent poor person sees through the pose” (Proverbs 28:11). A rich person can be foolish and a poor person can be wise. What determines both situations is attitude to life. Prestige which accompanies riches is not a sign of wisdom, for a poor person who fears God could be wiser than a rich person.

In the day of wrath, calamity, especially death, riches are useless; they cannot save. The only thing that can deliver a person in such a situation is righteousness: “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4; cf. 10:2; Job 21:30). Riches are only for this world; they are merely means and not the end. When a rich person dies, he does not carry his wealth; he leaves it in this world for other people to enjoy (cf. Psalm 49:6-8). However, they can be useful only when used in serving the Lord: “Honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce” (Proverbs 3:9).

Wealth and the security it offers could be a source of great pride, and makes the wealthy speak and act haughtily over those who are poor. Such proud rich answers roughly because of his wealth; but the poor, because of their lowly state, are more courteous and humane (Proverbs 18:23; cf. 22:7; Sirach 13:3).

Some of the sages advise that it is better to be poor than to be rich: “Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one’s ways even though rich” (Proverbs

¹⁴¹ Patricia F. Walter, “Wisdom about Wealth and Poverty”, *The Bible Today* (May/June 2011) 160.

28:6). Human integrity outshines riches. There are others who would prefer neither riches nor poverty (Proverbs 30:8). Excessive riches can lead to spiritual deprivation,¹⁴² because there is the tendency among the rich to depend on themselves and their wealth instead of on the Creator.

Dialectic of Wealth as a Divine Blessing

The first stich of Proverbs 10:22 clearly states that: *birkat YHWH hî' ta'ăšîr* “the blessing of the Lord makes rich”. Wealth, according to the sages, is a divine blessing; it comes from God as we have seen above, or from the personified Wisdom as God’s communication. Israel’s surrounding cultures also share in this belief.¹⁴³ Wealth in this sense does not, definitely, include that acquired wrongly. On account of this positive meaning of wealth, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes 5:19 and 6:2 attributes human riches to God. As God and Creator, he is the source of all that human beings have. Riches, which are realities in human life, are also from him. He gives it as a blessing to his creatures. Preachers of prosperity good-news could take advantage of this passage when they want to extort more money from their hearers. The text actually teaches that the blessing of the Lord makes rich. This, nevertheless, is just the first stich of the maxim, for its theological correction is found in the second part of the strophe.

Blessing is an effective and irrevocable word which produces the effect which it expresses. The key word is the Hebrew root *brk* that bears the basic meaning of blessing and other derivatives. In the creation of human beings, God blessed them and bestowed on them his blessings in these words: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and

¹⁴² James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1998) 71.

¹⁴³ Catherine M. Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community* vol. 40 (Brill 2002) 198.

subdue it” (Genesis 1:28; cf. 28:1-4; Psalms 67:1; 128:5). In this blessing and in others in the Bible, there is an implicit promise that God will enable human being to fulfill its content.¹⁴⁴ In the blessing we find in Genesis 1:28, God spoke directly to our first parents. This direct address differentiates this blessing from that seen in Genesis 1:22, which is on the blessing of animals. The first underlines that close relationship that exists between God and human being; this is already alluded to in the creation of man in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:27; cf. Psalm 8:4-5).

Some benefits are conveyed in a blessing; it could be prosperity, fertility or power. However, the act of blessing is not just about the benefits that form the contents of the blessing. The essential thing is the relationship between the person imparting the blessing and the recipient of the blessing. This has to do with the positive relationship between the two; it is, indeed, the primary factor in a blessing. In other words, blessing manifests a positive relationship between two parties.¹⁴⁵ “The recipient and others become aware of the value of the relationship and hence its desirability”.¹⁴⁶

The authors of the Biblical texts understood this fact but have other preoccupations which, in fact, persist in our time. The questions often asked are: If God gives riches as blessing to human being, to what category of persons does he give? Why is it that some are rich and others poor? Sometimes those who, according to human reckoning, are righteous and striving to please God in this life are poverty-stricken. On the contrary, the crooked in character enjoy the wealth of this life. In our present society,

¹⁴⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987) 33.

¹⁴⁵ Kent Harold Richards, “Bless/Blessing”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 1 (London: Doubleday 1992) 754.

¹⁴⁶ Richards, “Bless/Blessing”, 754.

popular preachers who want to incite their audience to donate more to the Church believe that the more they give, the more they receive.

In point of fact, some texts of the Old Testament, particularly in the Wisdom Literature, attribute wealth as divine blessing to human positive attitude to God. The righteous are the recipients of this blessing. If the personified Wisdom is understood as divine communication, as explained above, those who find Wisdom have this positive relationship with God. Wisdom that they have found and experienced in life leads them to wealth (Proverbs 3:16; 8:18; 14:24). In Proverbs 22:4 (cf. Psalm 112:4), riches are reward for humility and fear of God. In other words, in these texts this divine blessing is given to those who are righteous.

Whenever riches are associated with the ungodly, the Old Testament prophets did not hesitate to voice their social criticism. This is true of Jeremiah 5:17; Hosea 12:8; Ezekiel 27:33; Zechariah 11:5. The point is that this divine blessing seems to be given to wrong persons. This problem of those who do not, by human judgment, deserve wealth still endures in our day. It is a crucial aspect of theodicy, which still remains a mystery in human life. The Book of Job intensely protests against this. Still on the line of those impious rich persons, especially those against whom the prophets spoke, one observes that they acquired their wealth by extorting the poor. These poor, however, are beloved by God (Deuteronomy 10:18; Proverbs 22:22-23), and there are many laws that aim at protecting them (Exodus 22:25; 23:3,6,11; Leviticus 14:21; 19:10,15; Deuteronomy 15:11; 24:12,14,15). The existence of the poor “was seen as a warning not to take one’s

own prosperity as a matter of course, while help for the poor was the occasion for showing respect for the Deity”.¹⁴⁷

Although this paved the way for the spirituality of the poor, such spirituality as developed in Second Isaiah and post-exilic Psalms does not have sociological association of the terms for poverty.¹⁴⁸ The poor in these later texts are not necessarily materially poor.

Proverbs 10:22 as a Theological Correction

Correction is necessary when what is expressed in words or deeds does not seem to represent the reality, or the common belief in theological sphere. We see in the foregoing paragraphs the multifaceted opinions on wealth as a human reality by the many voices in the Book of Proverbs. It is not in any way surprising that all these varied viewpoints, some of which are even conflicting; exist in one single book of the Bible. The reason for such variety is attributed to the nature of the Book of Proverbs, which is a compilation of wise sayings stemming from different authors, theological beliefs, human situations, and places. “A moral code undergirds it, but the real intent is to train a person, to form character, to show what life is really like and how best to cope with it”.¹⁴⁹ Each of these basic scopes of the Book of Proverbs has wide-ranging views that bestow on the book its special character. Furthermore, each theme ought to be studied in its context which could either be its present position in the book or its original context before it was incorporated into the corpus of the Proverbs.

¹⁴⁷ Christoph Levin, “The Poor in the Old Testament”, 255.

¹⁴⁸ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994) 74.

¹⁴⁹ Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 15.

The Context of Proverbs 10:22

Segmentation of the contents of the Proverbs has been differently present by scholars.¹⁵⁰

A simplified structure of this book states a five part structure: Chapters 1-9 as Prologue; 10-22:16: The First Collection of the Proverbs of Solomon; 22:17-24:24: The Sayings of the Wise; 25-29: The Second Collection of the Proverbs of Solomon; 30-31: The Epilogue.¹⁵¹ Each of these parts has a superscription in the Hebrew version of the book. Proverbs 10,22 falls in the “First Collection of the Proverbs of Solomon”, which is chiefly marked by antithetic parallelism in the strophes. The first chapter of this collection is indeed a collection of sayings, which may not be categorized outright as “the life of the just one” as some have done.¹⁵² The reason for this objection is that Proverbs 10 frequently compares the righteous and the unrighteous in almost all the strophes; and it is this that forms the basis for the antithetic parallelism in the text.

Proverbs 10:22 seems to be one of the few strophes in this chapter that do not have this dominant antithesis. The particle *w^e* is rather conjunctive instead of the frequent disjunctive meaning it bears in this chapter. This is also reflected in all the translations in different modern languages that carefully rendered the particle with “and” or its equivalent. Another feature that distinguishes 10:22 from other strophes in this chapter is that it does not mention the righteous or the unrighteous as in other strophes. Rather, it contains a general statement whose context should be sought in the global context of its content; that is, the correlation between divine blessing and wealth. Worth noting is the

¹⁵⁰ See for example the division of this book by Thomas P. McCreesh, “Proverbs”, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992) 455; Murphy, *Proverbs*, xix; Gilberto Gorgulho – Flora Anderson, “Proverbs”, *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 862-863.

¹⁵¹ Gilberto Gorgulho – Flora Anderson, “Proverbs”, 862-863.

¹⁵² Gilberto Gorgulho – Flora Anderson, “Proverbs”, 869. These writers extend this subtitle to chapter 12.

content and sentence structure of 10:15, which has some affinity with 10:22 in that both of them mention wealth or rich. While verse 15 follows the common trend of chapter 10 in making a comparison between the rich and the poor and their diversifying fate in life, verse 22 focuses on the nexus between divine blessing and wealth, with a significant clause in its second stich. Commenting on v.22 Scott writes “complementary to the view of prosperity in v.15 is the counsel against pursuit of wealth for its own sake, and the warning against the uncertainty of its possession”.¹⁵³ In our opinion, and as we will attempt to prove below, v.22 is not merely complementary, it is a theological correction of a viewpoint that does not follow orthodox theological belief. What then is this orthodox belief that v.22 defends, and what are the opinions it persuasively opposes? These are the fundamental questions that the following paragraphs will address and which are the underlying points in our discussion so far.

Interpreting the Text

The full text of Proverbs 10:22 in its Hebrew version reads: *birkat̄ YHWH hî' ta'ăšîr, w^êlô-yôsip 'ešeb̄ 'immāh*: “The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it”. This is the translation according to the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*. The first stich does not pose any difficulty; it is clearly stated and understood that the text equates God’s blessings with material possession. In the second stich, the subject of the verbal phrase *w^êlô-yôsip*, appears ambiguous. The *NRSV* cited above takes YHWH in the first line to be the subject. On its footnote, a variant is provided: “and toil adds nothing to it”. In this translation *'ešeb̄* is the subject of the verb, and *birkat̄* “blessing” is understood as the indirect object. The explanation is that human toil does not add anything to God’s blessings. While this explanation perceives the text from man’s point of view; that is,

¹⁵³ R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1965) 84.

human labor adds nothing to divine blessing; the rendition seen in the actual text of the *NRSV* seem to perceive it from God's perspective: God gives blessings and does not add sorrow.

In fact the verb 'to add' in the context is construed as hiphil imperfect masculine singular (*yôsip*), which corresponds to YHWH, the implied subject of the construct chain in the first stich. Following this, YHWH adds no sorrow, toil with his blessing. On the other hand, 'ešeb could also be the subject of the verb (*yôsip*). This is where the ambiguity plays its role. It is either God who does not add 'ešeb or 'ešeb adds nothing. The absence of object marker before 'ešeb exacerbates this difficulty; for it would have helped to clarify the rendition. Nevertheless, the meaning and the message of the sentence is not lost; both translations convey the same message. One has to note that the antecedent of the feminine pronominal suffice in 'immāh "with it", literally "with her", is *b^erākāh* "blessing". Moreover, the word 'ešeb bears two basic interrelated meanings. Firstly, it means "toil", "labor" which generates pain and sorrow. Secondly, 'ešeb means "pain", "sorrow" which is a consequence of toil and labor. It is instructive to note that a word, 'iṣṣābôn, from related root is the one used in the curse of both Adam and Eve after their fall; "toil" in Adam" labor is called 'iṣṣābôn (Genesis 3:17), and the "pain" in Eve's childbearing is also 'iṣṣābôn (Genesis 3:16). In Proverbs 10:22 the word 'ešeb occurs only six times in the Hebrew Bible and all in poems (Genesis 3:16; Proverbs 5:10; 10:22; 14:23; 15:1; Psalm 127:2). It "refers to laborious activity, all pain-inducing".¹⁵⁴

A close reading of the passages where this word occurs seems to give inkling of its meaning in Proverbs 10:22 and the appropriate interpretation one can accord it. Apart

¹⁵⁴ Terrence E. Fretheim, 'šb, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* vol. 3 (Carlisle Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996) 483.

from Proverbs 15:1 where *'eṣeb* connotes “offending”, all the rest point at toil or pain that precedes joy or a form of wealth or riches. Eve’s pain will lead to the joy of having children. In Proverbs 5:10 *'eṣeb* indicates that which gave rise to accumulated wealth squandered by aliens. In Proverbs 14:23 the sage avows: “In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty”. In this poem, *'eṣeb* precedes profit, which corresponds antithetically to poverty in the second stich. In other words, *'eṣeb* leads to wealth. Finally, in Psalm 127:2, a text which I shall take time to analyze below because of its affinity with Proverbs 10:22, human toil is ineffective if God does not grant his blessings to the laborers.

From this cursive reading of the limited passages where *'eṣeb* occurs in the poetic section of the Hebrew Bible, one can confidently attempt an explanation of the theological correction in Proverbs 10:22: *birkat YHWH hî' ta'āšîr, w^llō-yôsîp 'eṣeb 'immāh*: “The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it” [“and toil adds nothing to it”] (NRSV). In other texts where *'eṣeb* “toil” occurs, it leads to a form of joy, wealth. In our text, Proverbs 10:22, it is God’s blessing that makes one rich and not human labor. This, however, does not in any way exclude human effort nor does it encourage laziness which the sages in the Book of Proverb constantly refute (cf. 10:26; 12:24,27; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). In point of fact, Proverbs 10:22 “propounds a radical theological correction: ‘The blessing of Yahweh makes rich, and [one’s own] toil adds nothing to it’”.¹⁵⁵ Preachers, who persuade their audience to believe that God’s blessings in form of wealth can be procured by human effort only, would learn from this! Are there similar orthodox texts projecting and defending this view in the Old Testament? What are the texts or passages that the sage in

¹⁵⁵ Sæbø, “‘āšar”, 422.

Proverbs 10:22 intend to put a right? Or tersely put, what is the sage in Proverbs 10:22 correcting?

Proverbs 10:22 and Similar Texts in the Old Testament

From our foregoing explanation of Proverbs 10:22, I have discovered the line of thought of the author of Proverbs 10:22. Wealth is a blessing from God; it is gratuitously given, not because of any merit of human being. This obviously contradicts some of the bold assertions seen in other parts of the Book of Proverbs above. These will be explained further below. The theology one finds in Proverbs 10:22, which I have also identified as orthodox, is shared by other Old Testament writers, who probably were defending the same course as the writer of Proverbs 10:22.

From the two accounts of the creation in Genesis 1-2 and their echoes in other parts of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, everything that exists in this world belong to God. The author of Psalm 24:1-2 articulates this in the following words: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers”. All that human beings purport to have belongs to God. They cannot, against the common opinion of our popular preachers, give God what belongs to him with the intention of procuring wealth for themselves.

In Isaiah 66:1-2, when the people thought that they would please God by fulfilling their religious duty of building a house for him, the Lord taught them the true sense of erecting a house for him: “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to

whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word".¹⁵⁶ The last part of this instruction teaches that "the *word* rather than the place or the sacrifice is significant".¹⁵⁷ This is the essential thing that our popular preachers neglect in their quest to extract money from their listeners.

Essence of wealth is to have enough food in this life. In Genesis 1:29-30 God greatly enriched the newly created man and woman. He gave them everything he created as their possession. These were gratuitously given for they did not toil for them before God gave them these possessions. It was also not because of their merits or any other thing that came from them. They had not given God anything that justified such copious gifts from the Creator. Furthermore, at this initial stage there was not yet discussion about righteousness or unrighteousness. They were blessed and given wealth that no other after them can claim to have. This is, indeed, a reflection of "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it" ["and toil adds nothing to it"].

God's choice of Abraham and the wealth of this patriarch were not in any way attributed to what he had given God. God freely gave him, made him rich when he went to Egypt (cf. Genesis 13); this blessing extended to his family members, for Lot, his nephew was equally blessed with great riches. His greatness and for what he is forever remembered is not these riches with which God freely blessed him but more for his unalloyed faith and trust in God (Sirach 44: 19-23; Hebrews 11:8-22). This firm faith made him willing to sacrifice his only son to God. He could be compared to the group of those who tremble at the word of God (Isaiah 66:2). Our popular preachers often cite

¹⁵⁶ For some detailed study on these verses, see among many others E. U. Dim, *The Eschatological Implications of Isaiah 65 and 66 as the Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2005) 119-128.

¹⁵⁷ John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC 25; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987) 355.

Abraham's riches to entice their hearers to give more. As it is always the case, they mention him out of context for they avoid the essential virtue of this 'friend of God' (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23), his faith. "Prosperity gospel preachers would actually be doing a disservice to the nation if they continue to preach material prosperity without equally preaching righteousness or right doing".¹⁵⁸

Why did God choose the people of Israel and allowed his Son to come from this race? Did they do anything for God? Were they the most holy or powerful nation? Discussing the election of the people of Israel, Deuteronomy 7:7 has an answer to all these: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you-- for you were the fewest of all peoples". God freely gives his blessing, for he cannot be conditioned; "it is a matter of grace".¹⁵⁹ Everything belongs to him and he gives according to his design which eludes human understanding.

"Without God, human toil is useless; daily bread and children are gifts from God".¹⁶⁰ The author of Psalm 127 fully shares the theological perspective of Proverbs 10:22. I have seen above that wealth, according to some texts in the Proverbs, guarantees security. Psalm 127, following the view of Proverbs 10:22, disproves this, especially in the introductory words of this Psalm: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain". Human toil adds nothing to God's blessings. Closely related to the point made in Psalm 127 is the content and the message of the instruction found in Deuteronomy 8:11-18. The Israelites

¹⁵⁸ Efe M. Ehioghae, "Between Religiosity and Prosperity", telling.com/tellmobile/newspage.php?id=1377

¹⁵⁹ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9* (WBC 6A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001) 156.

¹⁶⁰ This is taken from the explanatory note on Psalm 127 in *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Doubleday: New York, 1990.

were reminded not to forget God who guided and guarded them during their experience in the wilderness. They survived that experience because God loved them and not because of what they did for God. Proverbs 3:5 teaches: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight”.

Opinions needing to be corrected

On the basis of what I have discussed so far, the view of which Proverbs 10:22 is a theological correction is clearer at this point. In fact it is a teaching expressed in various ways in the same Book of Proverbs, and which our popular preachers strongly propagate: wealth as a divine blessing is conditional and it is conditioned by human contribution. In the words of our popular preachers, human beings are blessed in proportion to what they give God. Therefore, they are faced with a strong incentive to give more with the intention of receiving more blessings. The consequence is, of course, an unreserved flight from the spirit of the Good News, poverty in spirit.

In the context of Proverbs 10:22, the view that the sage rectifies is that which insists that divine blessing in form of wealth comes to human beings through their effort (cf. Proverbs 10:4). Riches, it says, are acquired through human diligence. In the thought of the sage in Proverbs 10:22, there is need to correct this because some work hard, employing all the tactics available to them, but they are still not making any headway. That this is the background from which our text emerged could be substantiated from the import of the term *'eṣeb* “toil”, pain” which appears in the second stich. It is an indisputable fact that wealth is a divine blessing. This blessing is not given to human beings because of their personal labor or toil; for divine blessing is freely given.

This, however, does not rule out the importance of human labor and effort in this life. The point that Proverbs 10:22 underlines in its theological correction is divine absolute source of human wealth. Such absoluteness rescinds the claim of our popular preachers that one can 'buy' divine blessing. When these preachers incite their audience to give in order that the givers will be enriched, it has been observed that their interest is not necessarily on the welfare of those giving; in other words, altruistic but for the preachers selfish interest. This is why it is extortion in disguise; it is deceit in religious garb.

The text of Proverbs 10:22, though composed many years in the past, speaks strongly today to our Nigerian contemporary preachers who use all available means to convince their audience to donate exorbitantly during religious services. The faithful give and generously too because of such persuasion from their pastors. On the other hand, the pastors really get what they want for their intention for such preaching is purely and selfishly subjective.

Conclusion

Recurrence and widespread of a practice does not authenticate it or make it lawful. In the same way, the fact that many preachers are today inclined to relating wealth or prosperity to be a measure of divine blessing based on how much individuals give to God does not make it orthodox. I have discovered in Proverbs 10:22 and many other texts in the Old Testament that God's blessings are freely given to human beings; it is not conditioned by what human beings give to God. Everything we have comes from him who is the sole Creator of all that exist. This, however, does not imply that human beings should not work hard to earn their living. They work and allow God's will to be done in their lives.

The strong emphasis on the relationship between wealth and divine blessing by some preachers is often motivated by personal interest on the part of the preachers and greatly influenced by the existing corrupt traits in the society. Religious leaders have allowed themselves to be lured by evil wave in the society instead of conquering it by the same Sacred Scripture which they misappropriate.

What is needed is re-education of all, especially the religious leaders, equipping them more with the necessary tool they need for their ministry. One of the things they need is in-depth and committed study of the Sacred Scriptures in their formation houses. The rest of the faithful who are often victims of the effects of their preaching need similar training according to their level. This is a great challenge to Biblical scholars in our country whose area of specialization seems to be undermined by popular preachers.

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A Case for the Use of Condom as a Therapeutic Means by Discordant Couples in the
Roman Catholic Moral Tradition

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Abstract

As the Catholic hierarchy continues to teach against the use of condom in the fight against the spread of HIV globally, a significant percentage of people globally are at risk of being infected. Statistical information on the rate of infections in Africa and other parts of the world shows that a very high percentage are women who live in discordant relationships. This paper attempts to draw attention to this group of people and remind the members of the Catholic hierarchy, especially those in the African continent, that this is the moment of grace for the Roman Catholic Church to protect, defend, and affirm the rights of these people to use condom as prophylactic in their attempt to prevent infection and also to live out fully their marital commitments with their spouses.

Introduction

With the increasing number of HIV infections globally and the statistics on discordant couples, the need for a thorough approach to the eradication of and/or prevention of the spread of the disease is pertinent especially in Africa where the disease has endangered national economies and generations of children who have been left parentless. The Roman Catholic Church's position has always been one of support and care for those infected or affected by the disease. Globally, the Church provides the

largest care for HIV infected persons through many social agencies.¹⁶¹ Its magisterium continues to teach, while rejecting the use of condom as a viable way of preventing the spread of HIV, that the safest way to eradicate the spread of HIV infections is either by abstinence or by being faithful within the context of marriage. It argues further that there need to be a “value-approach” which should focus on teaching young people how to live responsibly.¹⁶² Nevertheless, this does not mean that the approach presently articulated by the Church with respect to the use of condom as prophylactic cannot be improved upon especially as the global community is now beginning to be more aware of the reality faced on a daily basis by discordant couples whose situation has not been engaged by the Catholic Church yet. It is in light of this that I argue in this paper a case for the use of condoms by discordant couples as one among many practical steps that can be used to curtail the spread of the disease. Though views presented in this paper are relevant to the global community, my main audience is the ecclesial authorities in the Roman Catholic Churches in the African continent who have a fundamental responsibility of guiding their people in matters that affect them morally and socially.

In this paper, the term discordant couples refers to couples where one is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative and they are living in a marital relationship. I am more interested in such marital relationships that are sacramental within the canonical

¹⁶¹ Timothy P. Flanigan, “The Catholic Church and HIV and AIDS,” Catholic News Agency (April 21, 2009), <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column.php?n=750> (accessed January 29, 2013).

¹⁶² See “Statement of Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations” (New York, June 10, 2011), in http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2011/documents/rc_seg-st_20110610_aids_en.html (accessed September 1, 2013).

understanding of that term by the Catholic Church.¹⁶³ I engage this focus group because they, like other Catholics, are in need of a proper guidance from the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

I engage this topic by critically evaluating the current study on the effectiveness of condom as a means for preventing the spread of the HIV virus. As a way forward to resolving the Church's resistance to the use of condom in the sexual act, I trace the understanding and development of the usage of the principle of *epikeia* in its moral tradition. I do this by showing how it can serve as a new path to interpreting the use of condom as a permissible act within the context of a monogamous marital relationship. To show the urgency for this approach, I begin this paper by presenting a real case study that I came across recently in my pastoral work.

Case Study:

Joseph and Mary live in the city of Makurdi, Nigeria.¹⁶⁴ They have been married for five years with no children. Recently, they decided to seek medical help. Their doctor suggested they undergo some medical tests to determine the cause of their inability to have children. Part of the routine test was the HIV antibody test. The results showed that Joseph was HIV positive and Mary was HIV negative. They called my friend (name withheld) to ask him what to do in light of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on HIV, marriage, and contraceptives. He advised them to consult with their pastor. They are practicing Catholics who intend to continue to be sexually intimate in their marriage. They consulted their pastor on what to do and he advised them to live as celibates. He

¹⁶³ See Code of Canon Law. Latin- English Edition (Washington D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1989), Canon 1055.

¹⁶⁴ I have used fictitious names to represent the couples in order to protect their identities.

discouraged them not to use condoms since the Roman Catholic Church is against its use even in situations like theirs.

Statistics on discordant couples:

There have been various surveys done in the past among those living with HIV in many countries and regions by the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS);¹⁶⁵ not much attention was given to discordant couples until recently in 2010 when the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) decided to engage this issue by sponsoring a global debate on how to engage this emerging phenomenon among people and families living in discordant relationships.¹⁶⁶ Recent statistics on discordant couples in some African countries amount for one-third of new infections.¹⁶⁷ The present conditions surrounding marriage and the access to medical care in many countries contribute to this reality. Couples are not necessarily required to undergo medical tests to determine medical compatibility. Even if medical testing was easily available, there is no canonical legislation, in my opinion, that bars discordant couples from getting into a valid sacramental marriage in the Roman Catholic Church's tradition.

165 For a brief discussion on the focus of more than two hundred surveys done by the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) from 1984 to 2000 see Vinod Mishra, et al., "HIV testing in national population-based surveys: experience from the Demographic and Health Surveys," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* (2006) vol. 84: 537 - 545.

166 See The World Bank and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Emerging Issues in Today's HIV Response: Debate 3. Discordant Couples and HIV Transmission* (August 26, 2010), in http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHIVAIDS/Resources/375798-1297872065987/Debate_3_Summary_R3_tagged.pdf (accessed September 1, 2013).

167 UNAIDS, "New HIV Infections by Mode of Transmission in West Africa: A Multi-Country Analysis," Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (March, 2010) 20 - 22 http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/countryreport/2010/201003_MOT_West_Africa_en.pdf (accessed January 29, 2013).

Recent survey carried out among discordant couples in 2008 by The Aids Support Organisation (TASO), the Institute of Infectious Diseases (IDI), and the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Uganda shows that among recent infections, forty-six percent of these are living in monogamous relationships.¹⁶⁸ It has been the case in the past to conclude quickly that these infections occur because of sexual promiscuity. Unfortunately, such an impression has shaped the Catholic magisterium's attitude toward HIV infections. The faithful have repeatedly been told to avoid sexual infidelities and embrace either a life of chastity or monogamous marital relationships.¹⁶⁹ There has been a minimal effort to address the possibilities that may account for how monogamous couples, who are faithful to each other, can become infected with the virus. In the African context, cultural and social norms surrounding the marital contract have sometimes facilitated an increase in HIV infections. Many Africans live in rural areas where healthcare facilities are not available and these Africans enter into marital relationships without knowing they are already infected. Also, many women and men are coerced into arranged marriages by their families who sometimes are illiterate and have no knowledge of the HIV status of the couples. Also, many healthcare facilities do not have the resources to provide risk-free services. They sometimes reuse injections and other medical tools without proper sanitization policies in place. Patients who use such

¹⁶⁸ Reuters AlertNet. "Uganda: New Hope for HIV-discordant Couples" (Nov. 14, 2008) <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/0398b84a311b4bfc4b973950c9136a8c.htm>, (accessed April 22, 2009).

¹⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia and Botswana, on Their "Ad Limina Apostolorum" Visit (June 10, 2005), #4 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cevang/documents/rc_con_cevang_20100524_profile_en.html (accessed January 29, 2013). See also John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa* (September 17, 1995), #116 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa_en.html (accessed January 29, 2013).

facilities are exposed to the possibility of being infected even when they are faithful partners within a monogamous relationship. One should also not forget the fact that poverty has also contributed immensely to the increase in HIV infections in Africa. Very few medical facilities provide free HIV testing. Many of those living in rural areas who earn less than one dollar a day cannot afford the cost of HIV testing. They simply rely on fate; hoping they will not be married to an HIV infected person.

In 2006, the World Bank report on discordant couples living in Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania stated that two-third of couples infected with HIV are discordant couples.¹⁷⁰ Recently, in 2010, the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) co-hosted the third in a series of discussions and debates on issues related to the global response to HIV infections and preventions. Participants at the debate and discussions pointed out that “in most sub-Saharan African countries, three-quarters of adults aged 20 to 49 years are in a cohabiting union. Once married, more than 90 [ninety] percent of reported sexual exposures are with cohabiting spouses.”¹⁷¹ The discussants also pointed out that in Lusaka, Zambia and Kigali, Rwanda, genetic sequencing of HIV infections showed that 79 [seventy-nine] percent of new infections were from the spouses. Of these new infections, 75 [seventy-five] percent were men and 84 [eighty-four] percent were women who were in monogamous marriages. Furthermore, the discussants also noted that in Southern African countries, new HIV

¹⁷⁰ Damien de Walque, "Discordant Couples: HIV Infection among Couples in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania," World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3956 (The World Bank: Development Research Group, 2006), p. 7, http://emlab.berkeley.edu/users/webfac/bardhan/e271_f06/dewalque1.pdf, accessed on April 22, 2009.

¹⁷¹ World Bank/ USAID, “Emerging Issues in Today’s HIV Response: Debate 3. Discordant Couples and HIV Transmission”

infections among discordant couples had an annual percentage range of between seven to eight. In East and Central African countries, the percentage of new HIV infections among discordant couples was between two and half and four and half. Furthermore, a recent article published in the journal, AIDS, while arguing that in the twenty countries where new HIV infections were studied in sub-Saharan Africa among discordant couples was low in relation to the general population with HIV infections, stated that the average percentage of new infections among discordant couples was twenty-nine percent and had the range of ten to fifty-two percent. Though the authors hold this view, it is still a matter of grave moral urgency to articulate a way of prevention among discordant couples.¹⁷²

Among economically disadvantaged people, who also are discordant couples, women are denied the voice to resist such unions.¹⁷³ Many arranged marriages that have financial benefits to the family of the woman seem to be prevalent in many countries. These social and cultural practices, which most often continue the spread of HIV, need to be discouraged. The focus should not only be on just reciting arguments for or against risky behaviors that contribute to the spread of HIV infections. It should also include a thorough reflection on the social and cultural practices that necessarily lead to such risky behaviors. Making HIV testing easily available to all persons can help to create an

¹⁷² See Hiam Chemaitelly, et al, "Only a Fraction of New HIV Infections Occur within Identifiable Stable Discordant Couples in sub-Saharan Africa," AIDS, vol. 27 (2) January 14, 2013: 251 - 260.

¹⁷³ Statistical computations have it that in the year 2000, more than fifty percent of infected persons with the HIV virus in the world will be women. See Jon Fuller, "AIDS Prevention: A Challenge to the Catholic Moral Tradition" America, Vol. 175, No. 20 (Dec., 28, 1996), p. 14. In the case of Uganda, HIV among discordant couples amount for sixty percent of HIV infected persons. See Reuters AlertNet. "Uganda: New Study Shows Low Condom Use among HIV Discordant Couples" (Feb., 14, 2008) in <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/f12e335c1a180147d55ddf57d09bdc81.htm>, (accessed April 22, 2009).

environment where future couples can objectively evaluate their decisions to contract a marriage.

African Catholic bishops must be courageous and engage the current narrative on HIV infections coming from the Vatican with a resolved purpose to engage the realities faced by their people. They must address those cultural norms that oppress women and increase the risk of HIV infections. The fact that women are mostly affected in the continent begs for an aggressive as well as a prophetic engagement with the cultural norms that silent the voices of women in defining their lives in communities that are mainly controlled by men.

The Catholic Church's Teaching on HIV

It is of great concern that the Church officially has no policy that specifically addresses the reality faced by discordant couples. There is currently no church document that specifically addresses this issue and how to prevent HIV infections originating from sexual acts they engage in within the boundaries of sacramental marital unions. The teaching of the magisterium is to categorically view the use of condoms as a morally intrinsic evil act. No discussion is given to such situations faced by discordant couples, even though the moral tradition of the church has always created exceptions in cases which fail to fit within the confines of a general teaching on a moral subject. A good example in this stead is the treatment of contraceptives in article fifteen of *Humanae Vitae*; where Paul VI recognized exceptions to the general rule in the Church's condemnation of the use of contraceptives in relation to artificial regulation of conception. This approach of Paul VI in acknowledging exceptions to the rule will be explored below

within the confines of the application of the principle of epikeia as a tool for arguing for the use of condom as a prophylactic by discordant couples.

During the trip to Cameroon and Angola in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI called attention to the HIV epidemic in Africa and the need for responsible sexual behavior. He argued against the use of condoms even as prophylactics and stated that they only worsen the epidemic.¹⁷⁴ This view of the pope does not address the African situation. Sexual promiscuity is not the only cause of HIV infection among discordant couples. Not to call attention to the need for an approach that will address the situation faced by discordant couples is to miss a pastoral opportunity.

One cannot deny that the institutional church makes it its priority by calling attention to the need for medical and pastoral care for those infected with HIV.¹⁷⁵ In fact, the Catholic Church provides more than twenty-five percent of the global care given to those infected with the disease.¹⁷⁶ However, the institutional church ought to urgently engage the dilemma faced by millions of Africans who need guidance on how to tackle the reality they are faced with on a daily basis as they live out their marital vows while also faced with the risk of being infected by their spouses.

174 See Benedict XVI, Interview of the Holy Father Benedict XVI during the Flight to Africa (March 17, 2009)

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090317_africa-interview_en.html (accessed January 29, 2013).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Javier Lozano Barragan, "Our Vision of Health Must be Holistic," presented during the 26th Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. (27 June, 2001) <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/pchholst.htm> (accessed April 23, 2009). See also, Statement of Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations."

In 2001, during the 26th Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Delegation of the Holy See, in its final statement to the assembly, had this to say:

The Holy See wishes to emphasize that, with regard to the use of condoms as a means of preventing HIV infection, it has in no way changed its moral position... the Holy See continues to call attention to the undeniable fact that the only safe and completely reliable method of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV is abstinence before marriage and respect and mutual fidelity within marriage. The Holy See believes that this is and must always be the foundation of any discussion of prevention and support.¹⁷⁷

John Paul II, while addressing the International Conference on AIDS in 1989, argued against artificial means for preventing the disease. In his words:

It is extremely harmful to the dignity of the person, and therefore it is morally illicit to support as AIDS prevention any method which violates the authentically human sense of sexuality, and is a palliative for those deep needs which involve the responsibility of the individuals and of society and right person cannot admit that the fragility of the human condition instead of being the motive for greater care be used as a pretext of yielding to a way of moral degradation.¹⁷⁸

Addressing the problems facing society and those infected with HIV, the United States Catholic Bishops Conference writes; "The threat of epidemic and endemic disease will be most serious for groups most heavily seeded with HIV infection. These are IV

¹⁷⁷ Delegation of the Holy See, "Final Statement to 26th Special Session of the General Assembly" (27 June, 2001) <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/pchfinal.htm> (accessed April 23, 2009).

¹⁷⁸ John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*. English Edition, (4 December 1989), p. 3 as quoted in Godwin C. Okeke, "HIV/AIDS and the Christian Response" *The Church and HIV/AIDS in West African Context*. Edited by Ferdinand Nwaigbo, et al. (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), 2005), p. 41.

[intravenous] drug users and homosexual and bisexual men who have sex with men, as well as their female sexual partners and offspring."¹⁷⁹

Following the official position of the magisterium, the Ethiopian Catholic Bishops published a pastoral letter on HIV/AIDS in 2007 titled: "Love as our Main Tool of Overcoming HIV/AIDS."¹⁸⁰ In the document, the bishops reiterated argument that the safest and sure means of reducing the spread of the disease is within marriage and a responsible lifestyle that encourages fidelity and chastity. While also recognizing the plight of women in their country, no mention is made of the dilemma faced by women living in discordant relationships.

In 2006, the President of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), Archbishop John Onaiyekan (recently made a cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI), writing on behalf of the episcopal conferences in Africa and Madagascar, called attention to the fact that despite the medical care being provided the rate of HIV infections is on the increase.¹⁸¹ He calls for a more robust approach, one that revives the best of society's moral codes that emphasize the whole-human person and the place of human sexuality. He argues for a responsible sexual behavior within the context of marriage. No attempt is made to engage the threats and the rate of infections occurring

¹⁷⁹ See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called to Compassion and Responsibility* (United States Catholic Conference: Washington, D.C., 1990), chapter I, section 7

¹⁸⁰ Ethiopian Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Letter on HIV/AIDS: "Love as Our Main Tool of Overcoming HIV/AIDS," (February 25, 2007), in http://www.caritas.org/activities/hiv_aids/sinethemba_a_caritas_response_to_aids.html?c=467 (accessed September 2, 2013).

¹⁸¹ John Onaiyekan, "Greeting For World AIDS Day, 2006," *Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar* (December 1, 2006), in http://www.caritas.org/activities/hiv_aids/sinethemba_a_caritas_response_to_aids.html?c=467 (accessed September 2, 2013).

within marriage even when the partners are faithful to each other but are unaware of what they bring to the marriage - HIV infections.

In all the documents and statements mentioned above there is no mention of the peculiar situation facing discordant couples. While arguing for the need for responsible sexual behavior, the United States bishops' conference argues that the use of condom as a means of reducing/preventing the risk of HIV infection is unreliable. It argues that such a behavior will only lead to sexual promiscuity. Hence, it advocates for strict monogamous relationships in the context of marriage.¹⁸² However, the recent statistics on discordant couples presented above is in tension with the bishops' and popes' arguments. As was noted above, many Africans do not know their HIV status before or after becoming married. Those who are already infected unknowingly infect their partners. Whether the infection occurs before or after the marital contract is immaterial. What matters is how the Roman Catholic Church will address the situation faced by these discordant couples.

Since majority of new HIV infections are in Africa, one would think that there will be a consensus among the African Catholic bishops, who constitute part of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, in their effort to tackle this epidemic. They have been divided on the approach to preventing HIV. Generally, most of them have accepted the general magisterial position; that any form of the use of condom is a false approach to managing and preventing the disease. The use of condom, they argue, only leads to promiscuity. A better solution to the epidemic, they state, is abstinence and/or faithfulness in monogamous relationships within the context of marriage. In line with this argument, in 2001, the South African Bishops released this statement: "condoms may

¹⁸² Ibid, chapter IV, section 3.

even be one of the main reasons for the spread of HIV-AIDS. Apart from the possibility of condoms being faulty or wrongly used they contribute to the breaking down of self-control and mutual trust.¹⁸³ This view was also repeated by Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, the president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa (SECAM), while affirming the condemnation of the use of condoms in the fight against HIV infections made by Benedict XVI in 2009.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, in 2011, the Vatican representative to the United Nations made the following statement: “The Holy See in no way endorses contraception or the use of condoms, either as a family planning measure or in HIV/AIDS prevention programmes.”¹⁸⁵ Also, Benedict XVI, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Africae Munus* addressed to the Roman Catholic Churches in Africa called for a change in behavior and gave examples of what the change should entail: “sexual abstinence, rejection of sexual promiscuity, and fidelity within marriage...”¹⁸⁶ He, along with other voices in the magisterium condemning the use of condoms in the fight to prevent HIV infections, failed to address the reality faced by discordant couples who are in committed monogamous relationships. As stated above, HIV infections do not always

¹⁸³ See www.zenit.org, "African Bishops Assail Condom use in AIDS Fight" in <http://www.zenit.org/article-2067?l=english>, (accessed on April 23, 2009).

¹⁸⁴ See Catholic News Agency (CNA), “African Bishops Show Support for Pope Benedict’s Condom Comments” (May 13, 2009) in http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/african_bishops_show_support_for_pope_benedicts_condom_comments/ (accessed August 6, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, “Interventions: Statements of the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations,” 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Before the Third Committee on Item 65(a): The Girl Child (New York, 22 November 2011) in <http://www.holyseemission.org/statements/statement.aspx?id=341> (accessed August 6, 2013).

¹⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, Post -Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Africae Munus* (Ouidah, Benin, November 19, 2011), article 72, in http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus_en.html (accessed August 6, 2013).

arise from sexual promiscuity. The economical and socio-cultural norms faced by millions of Africans have and continue to make Africans vulnerable to the realities of HIV infections. It is true, as argued by Benedict XVI, that to tackle the spread of HIV in Africa, the global community must make it its priority. However, knowing fully well the unbalanced relationship that Africa has with the rest of the global community and all the negative factors that play themselves out within the relationship, the Church should encourage a different approach that includes the use of condom in the treatment and prevention of the disease among discordant couples. This plight faced by this group of people ought to be part of the discourse by the magisterium.

On the other hand, a growing minority opinion among the bishops in the world is beginning to critically engage the commonly held view that any use of condom is sinful. In 2005, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Spain stated that the use of condom in certain cases and responsible sexual behavior could actually reduce the spread of HIV infections.¹⁸⁷ This is a shift from the Holy See's position that the use of condom does not reduce the spread of HIV. But it should be noted that this statement by the Spanish bishops was later retracted in favor of the Vatican's position.¹⁸⁸

In 2006 the Kenya Episcopal Conference published a book titled; *This We Teach and Do* (volume One- Policy). In it, the bishops call attention to the crisis facing their people as they live with the pains caused by HIV/AIDS. Addressing the situation faced by discordant couples, the bishops had this to say:

¹⁸⁷ BBC News, "Spain Church Cautious on Condoms" (19 January, 2005) in <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4187181.stm>, (accessed on April 23, 2009).

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Williams, "Spanish Bishops Rebut Spokesman's Support of Condoms" *The Washington Post* (Thursday, January 20, 2005), p. A19

Our heart goes out to those infected and their families, especially to discordant couples (one spouse being HIV+, the other negative) and infected couples (both spouses being HIV+). While constantly renewing the universal teaching of the Church in this time of AIDS, we encourage priests, sisters and other pastoral agents to assist discordant and infected couples to form their consciences with regard to how they will live out their marital relationship, and make decisions that are life-enhancing and faithful. Drawing from the love of Christ that culminates in the Pascal Mystery, such couples may find themselves called to live the challenge of love in relation to sacrifice for the sake of the uninfected spouse and of the children.¹⁸⁹

The fact that the bishops of Kenya are open to the possibility that not all might find abstinence in marriage a viable path to follow justifies the argument being made in this article. While I do not deny the fact that discordant couples have many options open to them, this paper addresses the option that allows such couples to continue to be sexually intimate while also being responsible by taking the precautions necessary to prevent the spread of the HIV virus.

There continue to be arguments posited in favor of the use of condoms by church officials. Among these are Cardinal Godfried Daneels of Brussels, Belgium, who argues that the use of condom in a discordant marital relationship should not be viewed in the same light as the use of condoms outside of marriage. In the case of discordant couples, condom serves as a "preventive action against disease or death."¹⁹⁰ This view has also been articulated by the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini Archbishop Emeritus of Milan, Italy. He argues that in the case of discordant couples the use of condom is a lesser

¹⁸⁹ Kenya Episcopal Conference, *This We Teach and Do. Volume One - Policy* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006), p. 30.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

evil.¹⁹¹ Another outspoken voice in the case for the use of condom is Bishop Kevin Dowling of the Diocese of Rustenburg, South Africa. I had the favor of conversing with him at the just concluded Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya from August 14 - 16, 2013. He reminded me of the crisis faced by the people he ministers to where more than forty percent are HIV positive and most of them are women are economically disadvantaged. Rather than see them as persons living immorally, Bishop Dowling informed me of the complex situations faced by these women who are faced with the systemic social marginalization in a world that has become very hostile to those who are disadvantaged. From a pastoral context, he argues that condom can serve as part of the ethics for life whereby those who cannot abstain from sexual intimacy have the recourse to condom rather than risking their lives by engaging in unprotected sex.¹⁹² From my conversation with this wise bishop, I saw myself standing before a man who is truly concerned about the plight of his people. His deep love for the gospel in relation to the realities faced by the poor has led him to take up this cause even when he has had to suffer humiliations for his courage from higher authorities within the structures of the magisterium of the Catholic Church. Bishop Dowling calls the Catholic Church to the plights of millions of women and girls in many cultures that are coerced into unsafe sex by men. Also, the views of Benedict XVI on the use of condoms to prevent HIV infections has not always been consistent. In 2009, while

¹⁹¹ Henry Kaiser Family Foundation, "Global Challenges: Washington Post Examines South African Bishop's Advocacy for Condom Access" Kaisernetwork.org (April 27, 2006) in http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?hint=1&DR_ID=36876, accessed on April 24, 2009.

¹⁹² Nora Boustany, "AIDS Crisis Shapes Bishop's Stance" The Washington Post (Wednesday, April 26, 2006), p. A19.

flying to Cameroon on a six-day visit to some African countries, Benedict XVI stated that the use of condom in the prevention of HIV infection may worsen the situation.¹⁹³ This sparked a global reaction among Catholics and non-Catholics. In 2010, Benedict XVI, in his book, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times* argued that in certain cases among sex workers, the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV can be permissible.¹⁹⁴ What is most encouraging of Benedict XVI's view is an attempt to engage the complexities involved in HIV infections. Many have argued, I included, that his view should also include the plight of discordant couples and not just male sex workers. Recently, Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese in Nigeria was interviewed by John Allen of the National Catholic Reporter. During the interview, Onaiyekan opined, while recognizing that this issue has not been settled definitively by the magisterium, that in the case of discordant couples he was of the view that the use of condom by them was a justified moral act.¹⁹⁵

Statistics on the Use of Condom in the Prevention of HIV:

Against the background of some church leaders' opinions that condoms do not provide the safety popularly acclaimed by advocates it is important to present scientific data on the role condom plays in the prevention or spread of HIV. In 2001, a report was

¹⁹³ See Riazat Butt, "Pope claims condoms could make African AIDS crisis worse," *The Guardian* (March 17, 2009) in <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/17/pope-africa-condoms-aids> (accessed August 6, 2013).

¹⁹⁴ See Nina Mandell, "Pope Benedict XVI: Condom use OK, in certain circumstances - but not to fight AIDS" *Daily News* (November 20, 2010) in <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/pope-benedict-xvi-condom-circumstances-fight-aids-article-1.454535> (accessed August 6, 2013).

¹⁹⁵ See John Allen and Joshua J. McElwee, "New African Cardinal Talks Voting Blocs, Secret Meetings, His Vote," *National Catholic Reporter* (March 5, 2013) in <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/terms-personality-meet-dolan-africa> (accessed August 6, 2013).

released by the National Institutes of Health, which summarized the study of the effectiveness of the prevention of HIV infection using condom. The report states: "Beyond mutual lifelong monogamy among uninfected couples, condom-use is the only method for reducing the risk of HIV infection and STDs available to sexually active individuals."¹⁹⁶ The report focused on three aspects that determined its conclusions. These include the nature of the condom, the medical condition and use by the individual in question, and the lifestyle of the person who uses the condom. The study focused on the male condom, which happens to be the most commonly sold and bought prophylaxis.

The report categorized the distinction between the efficacy of condom and its effectiveness. The efficacy is determined by the nature of the condom, the way it is manufactured, and the products used in manufacturing it in relation to their ability to prevent the spread of the HIV virus. The effectiveness is determined by the actual use of the condom by the individual. This concerns the consistent use of the condom and the proper usage of it by the individual.¹⁹⁷

In the report, it is stated that between the consistent use of condom (which does not necessarily equate to proper use) and the non-usage of condom the chances of HIV prevention is eighty-five percent among discordant couples.¹⁹⁸ This view was also articulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its report on condoms for HIV prevention in 2009. In the report, it was stated that condoms, when used correctly, have "an 80% or greater protective effect against the sexual transmission of HIV and other

¹⁹⁶ National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, "Workshop Summary: Scientific Evidence on Condom Effectiveness for Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Prevention" (July 20, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 17.

STIs.”¹⁹⁹ Also, recently on March 25, 2013, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) backed this claim and pointed out that though condoms cannot completely prevent HIV infections, they definitely have a very high percentage of prevention which is based on both laboratory and epidemiologic studies. The CDC also claimed that this view was based on “theoretical and empirical data regarding the transmission of different STDs, the physical properties of condoms, and the anatomic coverage or protection provided by condoms.”²⁰⁰ The following should be noted; while the efficacy of condom is one hundred percent theoretically when it passes both the water leakage and virus leakage tests, the practical usage does not equate to one hundred percent. Attempts have and continue to be made by health workers to educate people on the proper usage of condoms in the fight against HIV infections

While the use of condom does not have one hundred percent protection, it does have more protection than unprotected sex among discordant couples. It is important to trace within the church's moral tradition arguments that can support the use of condom by discordant couples. The principle of epikeia can be used as one argument for allowing the use of condom. Below is the historical development of the principle and its application.

What is Epikeia?

I am in agreement with the definition given by Lawrence Riley. Epikeia is more than just the interpretation of the law. Rather,

The function of epikeia [is] to go beyond the words of the law, and having determined the intention of the legislator (not the intention which is

¹⁹⁹ World Health Organization (WHO), “Condoms for HIV Prevention” (March 25, 2009) in <http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/condoms/en/> (accessed August 6, 2013).

²⁰⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Male Latex Condoms and Sexually Transmitted Diseases” (March 25, 2013) in <http://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/brief.html> (accessed August 6, 2013).

expressed in the words of the law, but rather that which constitutes an exception or a contradiction to those words), to deviate from the course clearly prescribed by the words of the law, on the basis of the belief that the lawmaker in enacting the law benignly excluded from it the case at hand.²⁰¹

This will be the working definition of *epikeia* in this project. The case at hand, which has necessitated the application of *epikeia*, is presumed to be covered by the law, but the principle of *epikeia*, which makes concrete the evangelical command – salvation of souls is the highest law- makes possible the in-depth evaluation of the intention of the lawgiver.

Applying the Principle of *Epikēia* as an Argument for the Use of Condom for Discordant Couples:

In the history of the use and understanding of *epikeia*,²⁰² a great deal is attributed to Aristotle who first articulated this principle. In the Aristotelian usage, it refers to the "correction of the law where the law "sins" by reason of its universality."²⁰³ In the Aristotelian usage of *epikeia* (equity), the relation of it to justice is not one of total reduction of one into the other. Rather, there is a bond of closeness in both and of distinction.²⁰⁴ Applying *epikeia* to justice, Aristotle reminds us that it is not an attempt to make right an unjust law; rather, it proceeds from the recognition that the law, which stipulates general principles, may not account for the complexities of human conditions.

²⁰¹ Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikēia in Moral Theology* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), p. 243

²⁰² The chronological study of the usage of *epikēia* within the context of moral theology will be drawn from Lawrence Joseph Riley's dissertation along with contemporary applications of the principle.

²⁰³ Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikēia in Moral Theology*, p. 9

²⁰⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by J. A. K. Thomson (London: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 139-140.

Hence, Aristotle posits; "This is the essential nature of equity; it is a rectification of law in so far as law is defective on account of its generality. This in fact is also the reason why everything is not regulated by law: it is because there are some cases that no law can be framed to cover, so that they require a special ordinance."²⁰⁵ In other words, the deficiency that epikeia corrects is not a deficiency based on the law itself but on the contingencies of human conditions, which has brought about the present predicament.²⁰⁶ Again, Aristotle, in Nicomachean Ethics, seems to insinuate that an individual can correct the deficiency of the law that is universal by applying epikeia in his/her particular situation that the law does not cover or is ambiguous about.²⁰⁷

Before Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274 C.E.) developed his theological views, Cardinal Laborans (1110 - 1190 C.E.) and St. Albert the Great (1193/1206 1280 C.E.) had treated the principle of epikeia in aspects of Christian life and church governance. Cardinal Laborans applies this principle to papal authority. He equates epikeia to equity and argues that the Roman Pontiff through "pious deliberation can relax the censures incurred from breaking the law in particular cases, should the law and the censures be found too rigid and detrimental to the good the lawgiver intended."²⁰⁸ This attitude is still very much present in the Church's canonical regulations – the salvation of souls is the supreme law.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 141

²⁰⁶ See Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, p. 20; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 140

²⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 141

²⁰⁸ Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, "footnote 24," p. 26.

²⁰⁹ This is the ultimate guide for the canonical process in ecclesiastical governance. Following the Latin tradition of putting the most relevant word in a sentence last, in the Roman Catholic Church's Canons, the last canon reminds all that in the administration of

St. Albert the Great, treating the principle of epikeia, argues that a private citizen can apply the principle without immediate recourse to the authority of the lawgiver. He presents his argument within the context of arguing for the application of the principle of epikeia to laws that give general prohibitions.²¹⁰ This is possible because of the principle of epikeia, which does not follow the letters of the law but the spirit of the law. Applying this to the case at hand, I will conclude that the magisterium can dispense discordant couples from the prohibition against condom and the couples themselves can dispense themselves from such prohibition. This view is based on the fact that the use of condoms by discordant couples falls outside the scope of an intrinsically evil act; at least the magisterium has not made such a declaration as was the case articulated in the treatment of the use of condom to prevent pregnancy in *Humanae Vitae*. This distinction has also been made by such ecclesial figures like Cardinal John Onaiyekan.²¹¹

Thomas Aquinas appropriates most of Aristotle's views on the understanding and application of the principle of epikeia. He argues that it is both a virtue and a part of Justice.²¹² Recognizing the right of individuals to apply epikeia to their particular situations, Aquinas argues that such individuals are not judging the law but their present situation. This is in keeping with the Augustinian notion of the enduring rightness of a

canonical decrees, epikeia should be the guiding principle; for it is the basis for redemption. See notes on Canon 1752 in John P. Beal, James A. Coriden and Thomas J. Green (Editors), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 1847.

²¹⁰ See Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, p. 27.

²¹¹ See John Allen and Joshua J. McElwee, "New African Cardinal Talks Voting Blocs, Secret Meetings, His Vote,"

²¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 120* in <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3120.htm>, accessed on March 13, 2009.

law which when found to be good and enacted, cannot then be "licit to judge about them, but according to them."²¹³

Jean Charlier de Gerson (1363 - 1429 C.E.) grounds this principle within divine law. He argues, "The psalms being words of justice are the justification for the use of epikeia."²¹⁴ Saint Antoninus (1389 - 1459 C.E.) reasoning along with Gerson, calls attention to where in Scripture the application of epikeia is used in deviating from divine law. Commenting on the statement of Mattathias in 1Machabees 2:41; where he and his colleagues decide to fight on the Sabbath if attacked, else, they be wiped out from the face of the earth; Antoninus argues that this is the direct application of the principle of epikeia which mitigates/suspends the direct application of divine law concerning the Sabbath.²¹⁵

Francisco Suarez (1548 - 1617 C.E.) is one theologian that gives extensive treatment to the principle of epikeia. At this point, I am interested in showing how he links the private good to the common good. He argues that "epikeia, by preserving the private good of the individual is also preserving the common good of the community since, the individual affects, directly or indirectly, the good of the entire community."²¹⁶ Applying this approach to the case in question, the good of the couple is both a private and a public one. Conjugal love is not only a private good. It fully expresses the humanness of the couples and leads to a self-understanding of who they are as persons. This point is articulated by John Paul II when he writes: "Sex decides not only the

²¹³ See Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, XXXI (MPL, XXXIV, 148) as found in Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, p. 29

²¹⁴ Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, p. 53

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 55

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 75-76

somatic individuality of man, but defines at the same time his personal identity and concreteness..."²¹⁷ The protection of one's health, as well as that of the other couple, is both a personal and a public good.

Aquinas on Eternal Law and Natural Law as Argument for the Use of Condom:

Though, it is a popular view, as argued by Riley, that Aquinas does not recognize the place of *epikeia* in matters concerning natural law, it is appropriate to address Aquinas' understanding of not just natural law but how it relates to eternal law as well. And, how, if possible, one can argue for a place for the application of the principle of *epikeia* to natural law, based on natural law's connection to eternal law. This study is important because most often the church's magisterium has argued that the teaching against the use of contraceptive is rooted in natural law.

Establishing the relationship between eternal law and natural law, Aquinas defines natural law as the effects of eternal law that is known by human reason non-holistically unlike the essence of eternal law, which is known only to God himself. In other words, natural law is eternal law not in its "true essence for this is known only to God himself, but in its reflection."²¹⁸ This reflection does not entail a contradiction to the true essence of eternal law but it is of lesser intensity with regard to the true essence of eternal law. Natural law, as a reflection of eternal law, is known by humans through reason and because of the degrees of the formation of the affects of human reason, is known in a non-exhaustive way by humans.

²¹⁷ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body, The Theology of the Body. With a Foreword by John S. Grabowski, Ph.D.* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), p. 79.

²¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae Partis*, Q. 120.

A further implication of natural law as a reflection of eternal law deals with the changeability or expansion of natural law.²¹⁹ Though Aquinas argues that the change of natural law with regard to its "first principles is not possible," he goes on to state that "...it [Natural law] may be changed in some particular cases of rare occurrence, through some special causes hindering the observance of such precepts..."²²⁰ It is important to state here that the argument that this statement of Aquinas buttresses his position that natural law is always unchangeable is unfounded. While dealing with the issue of change in natural law, Aquinas introduces two types of change with regard to natural law, one has to do with "addition" and the other with "subtraction." Aquinas clearly agrees that Natural law can change with regard to "addition," where divine and human laws "add what was not previously there to natural law for the benefit of humans."²²¹ This is particularly important to understanding human situation in relation to understanding natural law. Articulation of natural law is conditioned by human experiences. Hence, as human experiences expand and progress, the understanding of natural law also expands. Relating this to the case at hand, the understanding of human sexual relations, if it falls under natural law, ought to be open to a fuller understanding in relation to the new reality of discordant couples. This is in agreement with the development in knowledge of the eternal law through natural law. Through new situations faced by humans, the understanding of natural law will also have to expand to handle the new experiences.

On the level of change as subtraction, while Aquinas concedes that in "particular cases of rare occurrence, through some special causes hindering the observance of such

²¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a.5

²²⁰ *Ibid*

²²¹ *Ibid*.

precepts" natural law can be changed through subtraction; he fails to state what such cases entail. However, one can deduce from Aquinas' argument that what changes in natural law by subtraction is not the essence of the law itself, so that "what was previously good is now regarded to be evil."²²² Rather, it has to do with the benefit of the law to a particular person within a particular concrete situation. Aquinas' view cannot be reduced to situational ethics because he does not opine that the morality of any act is determined solely by the situation or context in which it is performed.

More Arguments for the Use of Epikeia in Cases Involving Natural Law:

Cardinal Thomas Cajetan (1469 - 1534 C.E.) argues that there are two categories of natural law; one deals with laws that are "universally true." These laws cannot be mitigated or dispensed of in anyway. This aspect of natural law is what is today referred to as intrinsically evil acts or moral absolutes. Examples of these include blasphemy and idolatry. The other category deals with laws that, though, are of natural law origin; do not require obedience in all instances. Cajetan argues by postulating Aquinas' argument that restitution of goods is not always binding, especially if the restitution will lead to injury either of the owner or of others. However, it should be mentioned that this argument by Aquinas is in relation to human law and not natural law.²²³ Applying this to the case at hand, the moral obligation to engage in unobstructed conjugal love will not be binding since it will lead to a greater evil than good. Also, the use of condom, while it is intrinsically evil when used solely to prevent conception, as pointed out in *Humanae Vitae*, is not an intrinsically evil act and also falls outside the domain of moral absolutes

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 96, a. 6; Lawrence Joseph Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, pp. 263-264

when it is used to prevent a greater harm. This was argued in *Humane Vitae*, article fifteen. The argument presented in *Humanae Vitae* is that such use of condom as prophylactic is for therapeutic purposes. Here, Paul VI makes a critical distinction; use of condom to prevent conception is intrinsically evil when the main reason is to prevent conception. In the latter case, the main reason for the use of condom is for therapeutic reasons. Intentionality is significant in this context. Even when an act is considered an intrinsically evil act, intentionality is still present because it factors in the description of the act. Let me explain this further. Murder refers to the deliberate killing of another person. In this definition of murder, the word deliberate represents the type of intentionality that makes such an act intrinsically evil. On the other hand, manslaughter is not an intrinsically evil act because the primary intention is not to cause the death of another person.

Cajetan follows up Aquinas' argument on the mutability of natural law by arguing that natural law has two aspects to it. There are aspects of natural law that are by nature universally binding (acts that they forbid are considered intrinsically evil), they do not account for the applicability of epikeia. There is the other aspect to natural law that, though laws of this nature demand obedience, account for particular situations, thus, creating room for non-obedience of them, since obeying them will result in harm.²²⁴ Cajetan argues for the use of epikeia in such instances by reading the clause in Aquinas' argument for the changeability of natural law by subtraction in rare cases,. He argues that such a statement points to the opinion that within natural law, not all laws demand the same necessary obedience. This approach does not deny the essential truthfulness of the

²²⁴ Lawrence J. Riley, *The History, Nature and Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, p. 263

law; rather, emphasis is on the benefit for a particular person in a particular situation. This understanding, again, supports the use of condoms by discordant couples. While upholding the importance of the law against contraceptives, in the case of discordant couples, condom serves a higher good. It is not used as a direct act against the will of God but as a means to living out the will of God. In this case, the will of God is both intimacy and self-preservation.

Alphonsus de Liguori (1696 - 1787 C.E.) situates his contribution within the context of pastoral prudence. His approach is a balance between the rigorist views that uphold the letter of the law and the lax or probabilist views first advocated by Bartolomé Medina (1527 - 1581 C.E.). To best understand Liguori's view, it is important to give a synthesis of Medina's position. He was a Dominican professor of theology at the Spanish University of Salamanca in the sixteenth century (his followers became known later as the Salmanticenses). He argued that in matters of doubt when one is faced with a moral issue, one can follow a probable solution even if there are other more probable solutions available.²²⁵ In other words, the least probable option is morally acceptable. To counter this position, the rigorists argued for the more probable solution in matters of moral doubt. The rigorists argue with the impression that all moral actions do have the possibilities of possible options and a ranking of the certitude of these possible options. Hence, they came to be called the probabiliorists. This is where the contribution of Liguori becomes poignant. He operates with three presuppositions.²²⁶ First, that the deposits of the

²²⁵ Julia A. Fleming, *Defending Probabilism: The Moral Theology of Juan Caramuel* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006) p. 5

²²⁶ For a detailed account of the progression and presuppositions shaping the thought of Alphonsus de Liguori see Theodule Rey-Mermet C.Ss.R., *Moral Choices: The Moral*

Christian faith; scripture, dogmatic proclamations, and canonical declarations, do not always provide lucid solutions to every moral problem encountered by humans in general. Second, that it is within God's nature to be free and since humans are made in God's image, humans must always be able to exercise their freedom. Third, humans must always obey a clearly defined law that addresses a particular situation without any doubt. The third presupposition addresses the probabilist position of Medina. Liguori recognizes the need to reject the necessary conclusions of Medina's position, which makes all moral actions and problems relative. For Liguori, a probable option in moral choices is not a sufficient reason to evoke probabilism. Rather, it is only when there are two equal probable options that human freedom becomes a necessary means for making a moral choice. Equiprobabilism is a moral system that takes for granted the need for adequate formation of conscience. A well-trained conscience is able to judge between competing moral arguments, thus situating the application of epikeia in the realm of the individual. Also, equiprobabilism recognizes the moral right of humans to exercise the gift of freedom in matters that the will of God is not easily discernible.²²⁷

Equiprobabilism, as a development of the understanding of epikeia, is concerned with the dilemma of resolving ambiguities in moral situations in such a way that the moral end for resolving such ambiguities leads not just to the common good but to the eternal good. Unlike a mere following of the letters of the law, which can sometimes be detrimental to both the common good and the eternal good, the spirit of the law which

Theology of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Translated by Paul Laverdure (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori, 1998)

²²⁷ Ibid, pp. 74-75.

can be discerned through the principle of equiprobabilism helps to resolve moral stalemates.

Liguori accepts the presupposition that in the moral life, there can be instances when moral choices can be equally valid. For him, such equally probable solutions to a moral problem are not determined by some mathematical calculations of the points for the validity of the position. Rather, it has to do with how convincing such positions are to the deliberative conscience of the person in question. In other words, equiprobabilism is a process involving a person or community of persons involved in resolving a moral issue which concerns them in the here and now. Thus, the entire moral history, education, state of life, and psychological history of the persons involved count in determining how the person(s) decide between equally valid solutions. The concern of equiprobabilism is not that the solutions are invented by the person to justify his/her action(s); rather, the issue involves what a person is to do when faced with two equally valid moral claims to resolving a particular moral dilemma. When faced with two morally valid solutions, the question to be asked is not only what is the good to be derived from this action, but how does this good reflect both ones personal good as well as the common good. In the case in question, marital fidelity is morally valid from a legalist point of view but a consequence of such fidelity in this instance is suicide on the part of the couple without HIV and murder on the part of the couple with HIV. To avoid such negative consequences, the principle of *epikeia*, as articulated by Liguori would settle for another valid moral solution, which has a lesser negative consequence. The use of condom helps to make intimacy possible while reducing the risk of infection considerably and makes self-preservation possible to a greater degree.

One can also argue that the use of condom in this case does not necessarily equate to the Church's understanding of contraceptive. To buttress this point, it is appropriate to reference *Humanae Vitae*. In this encyclical, Paul VI writes, "...the Church does not consider at all illicit the use of those therapeutic means necessary to cure bodily diseases, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from—provided such impediment is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever."²²⁸ Applying this papal statement to the argument for the use of condom by discordant couples, such usage falls under medical necessity. To buttress this, first, there is no direct intention to refuse the gift of life. Second, there is the medical necessity for a healthy living, which in this case amounts to preventive procedure. Contraceptive, in the context of this quote, is any act that is directly intended with the direct effect of making the gift of life proceeding from the sexual act impossible. In this situation, there is no direct intention to negate the possibility of the gift of life. The direct intention here is medical self-preservation.

Conclusion:

As has been noted above, discordant couples are caught up in the crossroads of fulfilling the good of marriage and their own health. This calls for the total giving of the self to the other in a way that each one makes himself/herself available to the other spiritually, psychologically, sexually, physically, and emotionally on one hand; and on the other hand, preserving their health and the health of the other.

The giving of the self in marriage ought to be life affirming. By this, the act of giving oneself to another should be such that each partner's health is nourished and not jeopardized. Thus, actions that are life denying ought to be avoided. In this case, unsafe

²²⁸ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, July 25, 1968), par. 15.

sex will amount to life denying. As the church tries to address the HIV epidemic in a holistic manner, it is important that a distinction between medical necessity and promiscuity be made when referring to the use of contraceptives.

I repeat again that it is a moral obligation on the part of the bishops and pastors in the different Catholic communities in the African continent to make this issue a moral necessity. The plague brought upon the people of the continent through HIV infections can only be tackled effectively when everyone engages it without fear of being censured by the Vatican. The primary responsibility of these moral agents is not to defend the views of the Vatican especially when those views sometimes fail to address the situation of almost a billion people on the African continent. The primary responsibility of these ecclesial figures is to their faith communities and to engage the conditions faced by them. Though I do not advocate the idea that the magisterium is redundant in its views, I am more of the opinion that the views of the magisterium must be engaged critically by all who are concerned and aware of the dilemma faced by millions of discordant couples globally and particularly in Africa. The fact that the Kenya Episcopal Conference has called attention to the case of discordant couples and the need for a more pastoral approach to the issue is encouraging. The task of priests and bishops, as well as nuns and those with pastoral responsibilities in the African Catholic Churches ought to reflect a pragmatic approach to tackling the situation faced by discordant couples. It will be injurious to these persons if the pastoral agents simply recite to them what the official position of the magisterium is - one that does not address specifically the case of discordancy and HIV infections.

Authentic human wisdom entails proper engagement and sharing of ideas among the human community and reaching conclusions that are relevant to bettering human life. The chronological presentation of the discourse on the application of epikeia above buttresses this view. Over centuries, moral theology was able to engage human situations by building on the collective wisdom on how to apply this principle of epikeia to moral dilemmas faced by the people. This process is urgently needed today if our mothers, sisters, brothers, fathers, and children are to have a future free from the ills brought about by HIV and AIDS. Too many people have died and continue to be infected for us to ignore the urgency of finding a workable solution to the plight of discordant couples.

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Review of *Catholic Theological Ethics, Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference* by James F. Keenan (Editor) 2011, Orbis Books, New York, 337 pp.
Reviewed by *Odomaro Mubangizi*

Abstract

Seventeen theological ethicists from seventeen different countries try to address the most pressing moral issues of the twenty first century using various methodologies, but also reflecting their diverse cultural backgrounds. What emerges is a truly global discourse covering issues such as interreligious dialogue, the interface between theological ethics and history, exclusion and marginalization, moral discourse, political ethics, new paradigms for identity and family, justice, equity, gender, HIV/AIDS in the context of health care, and what direction theological ethics will take in the future.

Introduction

Catholic Theological Ethics, Past, Present, and Future is a publication of the proceedings of the July 2010 international conference of 600 theological ethicists held in Trent, Italy. The selected essays are by authors from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Ghana, India, the Ukraine, the United States, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This was a follow-up conference to the meeting that took place in Padua in 2006. The editor of the book James F. Keenan gave an apt justification for holding the conference in Trent thus:

“Theological ethics was defined by the Council of Trent: we became a specific discipline within theology. The compartmentalization of theology into the plan for seminaries was what gave birth to a separate enterprise known as moral theology’ (p. 1). Topics covered at the conference included: authority, conscience, sin, gender, ecological sustainability, health, economy, history, natural law, food security, love, family, immigration, and the emotions. The agenda of the conference is well captured as “...to find a way of retrieving a model of theology that does not rush to declare orthodoxy and unorthodoxy but rather one more anxious about whether we are understanding the challenges facing us in the first place” (p.2). This is no doubt a new paradigm of doing theology that sets off

by comprehending real life issues and challenges instead of imposing tailor-made solutions.

True to the new paradigm of theologizing that is issue-based, the presenters of papers were drawn from diverse background: laity, clergy, bishops, women, men, young scholars, seasoned and retired professors, activists, and non-Catholics. The meticulously planned international conference that gave rise to the book under review is unprecedented in its diverse methodologies and choice of issues that were addressed.

Structure and Themes

The book is well structured and divided in four parts, that are in turn subdivided into sub-themes with corresponding chapters. The historical consciousness of the new theological paradigm is captured by the chronological frameworks in which the discourse is set: part I deals with ethics and interreligious dialogue in a globalized world, covers catholic, protestant, and Muslim perspectives. In this part theologians who lead the discussion are: Archbishop Bruno Forte, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and Ahmad Syafii Ma'arif.

Part II deals with the past and situates the conversation in the theological framework of Trent with a historical sensitivity. In this part is also addressed the issue of missing voice in theological discourse—those left out of theological discourse on the basis of their gender and race. The discussion in this part is lead by *inter alia*, Paolo Prodi, Laurent Magesa and Regina Ammicht-Quinn, Brian Massingale, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike.

Part III proceeds to address methodological issues in moral reasoning by focusing on rationality, moral discernment, and methodology in African ethics. Some of the pressing contemporary issues are addressed under the main themes of political ethics and health issues. These include: war and violence, ethical challenges of urban life, challenges of

catholic social teaching in troubled states of Africa such as Zimbabwe, justice and equity in health care systems, health from a gender perspective, HIV/AIDS and its prevention. Part IV looks to the future as if to map out the task ahead for theological ethics. Issues covered in part IV are grouped into three major thematic areas: first, identity, reciprocity, and familial relations; second, pressing global social challenges, theological ethics in the future.

The book also has an excellent index of the main concepts, phrases and thinkers that the authors mention. Apart from few exceptions, the various essays have solid references that make the work truly scholarly and well researched. The reader is helped greatly by a brief introduction that summarizes the main arguments of each part. And to help the reader know the authors a bit better, a short biographical note is given at the end of the book.

Main Arguments

It is very difficult if not impossible, to summarize main arguments of 31 essays from world-class theological ethicists, addressing a broad spectrum of issues using diverse methodologies. *Catholic Theological Ethics* is encyclopedic in the strict sense of the term and one will be at pains to identify any major contemporary moral issue that is not addressed in one way or another. First of all it needs to be pointed out that *Catholic Theological Ethics* is situated in a historical context. Secondly, the authors engage various theoretical frameworks in contemporary scholarship such as critical theory, feminism, racialism and identity discourse, African palaver ethics, globalization and hermeneutics.

Doing ethics in a globalized world demands that there should be dialogue among Muslims, Christians, believers in African Traditional Religion, and women (p. 9). Ethics can only be possible if there is transcendence, gratuitousness and responsibility, justice and solidarity.

Using the Council of Trent as an illustration, essays on the past demonstrate that ethics should be done on a historical context, and that attention should be paid to excluded voices especially women, people of Latin America, Asia, Africans and people of African descent (pp. 37-39).

Turning to the present, the essays focus on moral reasoning. A synthesis of made of the 1970s debate by resolving the tension between autonomous ethics and ethics of faith, with the latter grounded on the theology of creation, while the former is grounded on the theology of redemption. The two only differ in emphasis (p. 126). The possibility and necessity of moral discernment can be located in three major human experiences of moral obligation, free choice, and love (p. 126). Contributing to the debate on moral reasoning from an African perspective, Bénézet Bujo argues that an African ethical system includes three models of relationships: with the community, ancestors, and those yet to be born.

For Bujo, moral discourse takes place both communally and cosmologically, thus palaver ethics. The link between humans and the cosmos is well articulated by Bujo: “There is a vital flow between the human being and the cosmos, so that there is a genuine solidarity in creation that ultimately binds everything to the Supreme Being who is God” (p. 150)

Key themes under political ethics are addressed with fresh and original insights. A new moral framework for dealing with the just war theory is proposed with the goals of unifying the whole human family, charity as universally extended companionship, civic

concord, and concord between nations (p. 162). Another moral challenge of contemporary society is urban life that poses unique moral dilemmas. The ambiguity and complexity of urban life challenges any claim to objective ethics since urban life is marked by ethical pluralism. The other current issue that theological ethics has to address is the role of the laity in promoting catholic social teaching in Africa amidst a clericalized church.

Under health care issues, a case is made for justice and equity, since disease and illness are also a result of social and political factors (p. 185). An often neglected issue is that of gender perspective to health, hence a gender analysis of health is needed. Given the continuing scourge of HIV/AIDS, the issue of serodiscordant couples challenges health care providers and the church to sympathetically and realistically examine methods of prevention such as condom use.

Finally, *Catholic Theological Ethics* looks to the future. Arguments under identity reciprocity and familial relations, point to a new paradigm on how marriage, family, and power in the Church are to be conceived. Three novel concepts are added to the notion of marriage: intimacy, reciprocity, and identity. Under pressing global social challenges, arguments focus on a critique of neoliberal economics using the case of Zambia, an ethical-theological perspective on sustainability, and the challenge of citizenship amidst rapid migration.

How will theological ethics look like in years to come? While discussing the future theological ethics, Reinhard Cardinal Marx identified three columns on which moral theology rests: teaching of magisterium; normative propositions by social ethicists and moral theologians; and "...those who translate the social teaching into reality in specific

movements and political actions...” (p. 275). In terms of methodology, the approach will be biographical, that is, based on real life experience of the theological ethicist. This approach is in the tradition of Johann Baptist Metz with the assumption “...that there is no antithesis between mysticism and politics, or between active responsibility for the world and spirituality” (p. 276). This clearly is akin to St. Ignatius of Loyola’s vision of “finding God in all things” and “being contemplatives in action.” The challenges that theological ethics will have to address include: a new formulation of natural law and human reason; freedom and autonomy; particularity and universality. Some practical challenges that theological ethics will have to address are: globalization and the quest for the global common good; dignity of the human person, democracy. Networks within the church will be crucial in addressing these challenges (p. 280).

The theological ethics of the future will also embrace gender perspective with a historical consciousness, that will in turn shape a new understanding of human sexuality (pp. 283-285). Theological ethics will have to build bridges across disciplines and be critical of the totalizing tendencies of globalization. And finally, theological ethics needs to be liberated from the sin of racialization and racism.

Appraisal and Conclusion

Catholic Theological Ethics is no doubt a primer in theological ethics, and will take a while before it can be rivaled in thematic complexity, rigorous analysis, diversity of methodology, and attention to context. The three temporal dimensions covered, past, present and future, help the reader to appreciate the trajectory of theological ethics.

Given the diversity of issues and competencies of scholars who have contributed to this *magnus opus* the reader is warned that the book is better approached as a reference text,

and not something one can read in one sitting. The good thing about the book is that it is well arranged in clearly demarcated themes and sub-themes. Essays of varying scholarly rigor and theological intensity are included. For some not initiated in post-modernism, some scholarly trends such as feminism and racial discourse, will be quite intriguing. True to the invitation for new approaches to theological ethics, the book employs a multidisciplinary approach. While there is great attention to context and historical consciousness, there is not much biblical perspective in all the essays. This is probably the only and major shortcoming of the book.

The book is highly recommended for any one who wants to get a good grasp of the status of catholic theological ethics in the 21st century. Scholars, development agencies, healthcare providers, undergraduate and graduate students, advocacy groups, policy makers, and church hierarchy, will all find this book an invaluable resource, in dealing with the complex ethical issues of the 21st century. And yes, if you thought moral theology cannot be fun and imaginative, try Julie Clague's "Gender and Moral Theology: a Shared Project" in which she narrates Gender and moral theology: a love story (pp. 293-294). In Africa where stories dominate discourse, this narrative technique might be worth considering for developing an authentic African moral discourse imbedded in proverbs, folktales and fables.

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