

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION: A MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS* OF THE SECOND AFRICAN SYNOD

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This essay is a critical theological and pastoral study of the Working Document of the Second African Synod. The article engages the articles in the document which deal with the theme of reconciliation. This essay begins by exploring the Christological and ecclesiological foundations for an African theology of reconciliation as found in the working document. While engaging the significant aspects of the working document which relate to articulating an African theology of reconciliation, this essay shows the limitations of the document in its historical and cultural analysis of the situation in Africa. Drawing from a phenomenological hermeneutical engagement with African history, cultural grammar, and Christ-centered African Christian imagination, the essay widens the scope of theological engagement with the task of reconciliation in Africa. It does a theological aesthetics of reconciliation in Africa, by integrating diverse cultural, ontological, and Christological symbols within the African world on vital participation and vital union. Through the inculturation of vital participation as analogous to Trinitarian Communion, the essay shows how the Church in Africa can deal with the ever-revolving cycle of violence, conflicts, and divisions in the churches and political institutions which have all hampered the mission of building relationship and God's kingdom in Africa. The essay concludes by recommending four pastoral approaches through which the Catholic Church in Africa can be both a reconciled community and an instrument for reconciliation in Africa.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the Christological and ecclesiological foundations for an African theology of reconciliation. It draws these two foundations from the *Instrumentum Laboris*/ Working Document (hereafter WD) of the Second African Synod. While engaging the significant aspects of the working document which relate to articulating an African theology of reconciliation, this essay shows the limitations of the document in its historical and cultural analysis of the situation in Africa. Drawing from a phenomenological hermeneutical engagement with African history and cultural grammar, the essay widens the scope of theological engagement with the task of reconciliation in Africa. The essay concludes by recommending four pastoral approaches through which the Catholic Church in Africa can be both a reconciled community and an instrument for reconciliation in Africa.

1.2. A CRITICAL SURVEY OF THE *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS* PROPOSAL FOR RECONCILIATION

The *Working Document* of the Second African Synod offers some important theological and biblical insights on the path to reconciliation in Africa. The document signifies a new

commitment to move Catholic ecclesiology in Africa from a normativeness which was inflexible to local situations, to a more empirical account which integrates both the historical experience and concrete phenomenological social data of African Christians in its systematization. A synchronizing and universalizing theology which is often promoted by a normative ecclesiology is like a tidal wave which sweeps away local churches' creativity and ability to meet the challenges which are specific to their social context. This is because the context is the place where the universal is potentially present and Catholicism is universal to the extent it makes the particular part of the validating claim of any universality.¹ In addressing her mind to the challenges of reconciliation, justice, and peace, the Church in Africa signifies her intention to draw some of the data for her self-understanding from the African context. It is hoped that the proposals for meeting these challenges will not simply be a compilation of citations from papal documents, but rather answers that could be found from the heart of Mother Africa in her emerging and exciting Christian consciousness.

However, it must be noted that the document lacks a deeper engagement with the causes of conflicts and tension in Africa and the paths to be followed in addressing them. Of the 67 references in the document only 3 citations were African sources, all of which are from statements or documents of different Episcopal conferences of Africa.² The document is also filled with proof-texting from magisterial sources to ground or analyse generalized and often stereotypical conclusions about Africa. There seems to be no serious input made in this document by African theologians, the laity, African social scientists, peace activists, and civil rights leaders many of whom are Catholics. The absence of significant contributions to the WD from many local agents of reconciliation in the hidden alleys of African hamlets and streets whose heroic efforts continue to bring peace, wipe away tears from the eyes of many suffering Africans seriously impoverishes the document. The biblical theology of the document is also very anecdotal in the link between the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology to the theme of the Synod.

The *Lineamenta* was meant to stimulate discussion at the grassroots level and generate serious discussions which should have drawn from quantitative data taken from the concrete social condition of African Catholics. There were some symposia and dialogue sessions among African theologians from 2006–2008 in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Tanzania, but the WD does not seriously reflect some of the deliberations from these conferences. The document reflects the concerns of its authors to write a synodal document on the thoughts of the Vatican on issues which she thinks should occupy the African hierarchy and churches. This top-down approach is similar to the First African Synod of 1994 which for all the wonderful propositions which were made has not been fully understood, applied and lived in African Catholicism. Indeed, part of the apparent lack of interest in the second synod goes back to the same reason that synodal convocation, the choice of theme and topics have often been imposed from above, rather than being the fruit of a deliberate process from grassroots Catholics, in order to emerge from the heart of the Church, and those on the frontiers of faith in action.

On the other hand, it must be added that the reason for the lack of African voices in the document may not necessarily be because the African hierarchy, theologians, and laity were not invited to help shape the process. The *lineamenta* was an open document which was presented to African Catholics for consideration and reflection. However, there is often the very paralyzing accentuation in African Catholicism of anything that comes from Rome. This uncritical assimilation of *anything from Rome* may not necessarily be attributed to Roman control but to the failure of the African hierarchy and theologians to

plumb the depths of African cultural traditions as well as the riches of Catholicism to find the paths towards an African ecclesiology of abundant life. Many bishops in the continent easily shirk their pastoral responsibility or addressing specific pastoral challenges which often deal with reconciliation by making vain appeals to Rome. Thus what 'Rome' says, approves, and rejects are often an easy excuse for lack of creativity, dynamism, prophetic courage, and autonomy in today's African Catholicism. The other fundamental question is whether there is a real need for a second synod for Africa. Have the First African Synod's propositions actually been fully understood, studied, and implemented in African churches? Is there a new social context in Africa today different from 1994 as the WD claims (7–13)? Whatever be the case, the document will need to be broadened in the synodal conversations to fully do justice to the questions that it raises for the Church in Africa. However, treating the issues in Africa which relate to reconciliation, justice, and peace in a synod is too broad and daunting a task to be effectively dealt with in three weeks. I will concentrate in this essay on reconciliation.

1.3. THE TRINITARIAN ORIGIN AND DESTINY OF AN AFRICAN THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION

In the preface to the *Working Document*, Archbishop Nikola Eterovi writes; 'If the Church is to fulfill well the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to her by the Lord Jesus, she herself must become more and more a reconciled community, a place where reconciliation is proclaimed to all people of good will.'³ The document emphasises constantly that reconciliation is both the gift which the Church has received as well as a mission. As a gift, the Church has received through the Lord Jesus the ministry of reconciliation, as an offer of love from God the Father who in Christ unites all members of the Church in the bond of love, friendship, and communion in the inner divine life of the Trinity (Col 1: 20). Through communion with the Son and the Father, Christians have access to the Holy Spirit, who is the inner principle of reconciliation. Reconciliation is thus seen as drawing from Trinitarian communion into whom the Christian and the Church is inserted, as source, mission, and goal.

The mission of the Church is thus to draw men and women into this communion of love as the Second Vatican Document *Lumen Gentium* teaches; 'The Church in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.'⁴ What *Lumen Gentium* 2–5 teach about the Trinitarian origin and inner structure of the Church is directly linked to the Church's ministry of reconciliation. The Church is a reconciled and a reconciling community to the extent that she is rooted in Trinitarian communion; the Church's power and grace for reconciling the world is the more efficacious and fruitful to the extent that it draws from Trinitarian communion. The Church is not a sociological unit whose life, nature, structure, mission, and principles are based on purely sociological concepts and aims. She uses concepts drawn from social sciences for understanding the phenomenological basis of faith which relates to the condition of the Christian. But this *exitus – reditus* structure of the Church emerging from Trinitarian communion, and living from this communion and moving towards this communion as destiny is essential for properly theologizing and conceptualizing on the nature of the church and instruments at her disposal for reconciliation.

Trinitarian communion encompasses the whole of creation, in bringing about harmony, solidarity, peace, justice, and right order in relationship between humanity and God,

among men and women, and among the whole of creation. This connection of reconciliation to the cosmic order through a spiritual ecology especially found at the beginning of the first chapter of St Paul's letter to the Colossians (see Colossians 1: 15–20, especially vs. 20 where Paul teaches that through the shedding of Christ's blood all things in heaven and earth have been reconciled to God) is very important and bears striking resonance with African thinking on the meaning of life and communion.

The *Working Document* obviously is not meant to draw out the full implications of the theological insights loaded in some of the propositions made as it aims at offering a guideline which will be further elaborated in the Synod halls. One is thus led to elaborate further using African ontology on this aspect of Trinitarian communion as cosmic, through Christ's reconciliation of all things on earth and in heaven. Theologically, one could argue that reconciliation in African Christian theology should be constructed as an integrated and organic process. This seeks to bring about mutuality, through the removal of sin, selfishness, and individualism, and accentuating our inter-dependent relationships which enhance the possibility of every member of society having access to what in African traditions have been interpreted as vital participation, abundant life, and *ubuntu*.⁵ When I am not communicating and dialoguing with my brother or sister, when I discriminate against people from other ethnic groups or people outside my reference group, I am diminished. I am denying both myself and my brethren the wonderful prospect of participating in vital union. I am also by the same token withdrawing myself and my brethren from the inner enrichment and organic sharing which draws from our common life. The absence of reconciliation is a threat to cosmic fertility, because it makes it impossible for life to flourish through mutual interaction, participation, and communion.

An African theology of reconciliation conceives union between people and creation as both rooted in Trinitarian communion as well as constitutes the possibility for the fertility of creation. When people are united with each other, when a civilization of love reigns among people, there opens to them an unlimited access to Trinitarian communion, which in turn makes the earth and all people to yield their fruits. This is particularly related to African cultural tradition in which fecundity as such is organically understood as the harmony in creation. Thus, when there is war and bloodshed in the land, the earth and all living creatures suffer death and decay, just as new life, and new families flourish because there is harmony in creation.

The African continent is always depicted in many art works as *Mama Africa*. Africa's maternal image embodies the reality of a continent where life was once revered and preserved. This life refers to the totality of all life including the sacredness of human life, the sacredness of communal life and the common good over the selfish ends of individuals; the sacredness of the earth in general; and of the harmony between animals and humans, of the plants, the land, the streams and rivers and mountains, all having life. There are many African stories and fables that tell of the interior sacredness of creation, of the primacy of values like goodness, truth, peace, honesty and beauty, unity and love among others. There was a spiritual ecology among traditional Africa which represented the triadic spirit of the ancestors, the living and the not yet born; of the richness of the non-human world and their mutual interaction and implication for the procurement of the good of one and all. The maternal image of Africa is an invitation to reverence and respect for the highest values especially with regard to life, communion, and participation in vital union through reconciliation with God, family, clan, community, the cosmic order and the whole creation. These values were once cherished in African tradition, and they helped build relationships, and held African societies together. The inculturation of these

values in African theologies of the church will help ground the faith and pastoral praxis of the churches on reconciliation and infuse a new sense of meaning and direction to Africans.

The theological articulation of vital participation by Vincent Mulago is a valid African cultural framework rooted in authentic African worldview. This could serve the development of new language and categories taken from the African world to capture the meaning of reconciliation concretely as Trinitarian Communion. Unlike Placide Temples, Mulago interprets *ntu* as *life force* instead of *vital force*.⁶ Mulago had noted that African Traditional Religions can be considered based on four essential elements, namely: unity of life and participation; belief in the enhancement or diminution of beings and the interaction of beings; symbol as the principal means of contact and union; an ethic that flows from ontology.⁷

Two essential points (vital union/participation, and the enhancement and diminution of life) from Mulago's theology help to underlie that reconciliation is cosmic and that placing Christ theologically as the *principal source* and *concrete norm* for such participation could be a good starting point for an African theology of reconciliation. Christ gives us access to participate in Trinitarian communion; through the Holy Spirit we are led to share in the inner life of the Trinity which is defined by saving, sanctifying, and creative love, communion, friendship, relationality, community, and solidarity. All these aspects of Trinitarian Communion are already a religio-cultural grammar within African worldview on vital union as articulated by Mulago. This is particularly evident in African family tradition through which vital participation becomes concrete between the living, the dead, and the not yet born. However, in Christian theology of reconciliation the source, nature and destiny of reconciliation is deepened as being an invitation to enter into the fullness of Trinitarian life, the family of God. Thus, participation here is the sharing in divine life, as the beginning of the journey to the final consummation of this sharing in the divine life in heaven. Trinitarian communion enfolds believers and the whole creation into the family of God which has an analogical relation to natural bond of family line because it is a supernatural tie that is infinitely richer, higher and deeper than the natural family and supersedes blood ties in the family.⁸ But already, because this is an offer from the heart of the Trinity to the whole of humanity and creation, reconciliation becomes in the light of this African thinking, the condition of possibility for being a Christian because a radical openness to restoring and maintaining relationship with the other is tied to the ontology of Christian existence. Mulago's theology of participation demonstrates how this could be conceptualized in African thinking.

However, it is important to understand how Mulago articulates these concepts. Vital union, he argues is the bond joining together, vertically and horizontally, beings living and dead; it is the life-giving principle in all. It is the result of communion, of participation in the one reality, the one vital principle that unites various beings.⁹ Life is seen here not as mere physical existence, but an inseparable and inter-dependent mode of existing which draws from the ultimate source of all life, *Nyamuzinda* or the ultimate source of happiness, the *Imana* and from the ancestors. Life is participated existence with family, clan, community, ethnic group, ancestors, the land, earth, and God among others. To live is to be in the bosom of the community; it means to participate in the sacred life – all life is sacred – of the ancestors; it means a prolongation through descendants, and the community. Thus, life is understood in two ways: as community in blood, the principal and primordial elements, and as community in possessions, a concomitant element making life possible.¹⁰

Mulago argues further that vital participation could be increased or decreased through the things that favour the growth of life in the community or the things that bring evil like sorcery, witchcraft, spiritual or material injury, and evil spells. This underlies the grounds for reconciliation: the removal of sin, evil, selfishness, and negative forces which destroy life and harmony among people. In other words, conversion is needed to remove the roots of conflict, and division. While society encourages everything which promotes life, just as every service, all help and assistance count as a support and enhancement of life for those who benefit because these values correspond to the values which are enhanced, so also acts of injustice diminish the life not only of individual but of the community. This worldview obviously underlies the intimate bond and interaction between every constituent member of society the living and the dead, the human and the material, and all members of the ecosystem. All manifestations of life and being display this element of participation. Community is thus conceived as vital circuit in which everyone counts. This is the very hub whose pulsation is destroyed by the absence of reconciliation in the community. This organic view of life and reconciliation as embracing unity of the whole creation through the reconciling role of Christ is brought out by Pope John Paul II when he writes; 'In intimate connection with Christ's mission, one can therefore sum up the Church's mission, rich and complex as it is, as being her central task of reconciling people: with God, with themselves, with neighbour, with the whole of creation.'¹¹

This conceptualization of life as participation could have various layers and differentiation among different African peoples outside the Bantu group. However, it underlies the apprehension of life and relationship at the deepest level of interaction among African peoples as intimately participatory, and cosmic. When understood in the light of Christian theology, it means the sharing in Trinitarian Communion, the essence of this sharing is the inner divine life as gift, and *ad extra* the mission of making concrete this participation in vital union (Trinitarian Communion) through the Church's mission of reconciliation, and in active Christian living of a life of love, reconciliation, and forgiveness. This is the only way through which abundant life can be procured for all members of the human, natural, and cosmic world. Reconciliation deeply conceived in this cosmic sense is simply the restoration of this organic sphere of mutual interaction in which men and women as well as the material world of nature, animals and every member of the cosmic world have the freedom and accessibility to vital participation. Reconciliation thus means the removal of both the roots of sin and evil, as well their consequences, and the restoration of harmony which enables vital participation. It will, therefore, require recalibrating the various indicators used to access qualification for participation in vital union, especially the limiting exclusion imposed by ethnic, religious, political, and economic differences as well as an anthropocentric domination of the earth which is often the cause of the devastation of the environment through human agency. An examination of the Christological and ecclesiological foundations provided in the WD will show how vital participation in Trinitarian communion is made possible through Christ, is continued through the Church as her primary mission of bringing union among all peoples.

I will proceed to theologically elaborate and expand the WD's foundations through sources from African theology and cultural history underlying in each foundation how reconciliation is about our vital participation in Trinitarian Communion. The aim here is to show how reconciliation begins in Christ, is continued and celebrated in the Church as an essential part of her identity and becomes the mission of the Church in building God's kingdom through offering humanity especially in Africa the inconceivable prospect of becoming God's new people living a life of communion, love, reconciliation, and abundant

life. According to the WD these foundations of reconciliation, justice and peace could be addressed practically in Africa from three aspects of life: socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural.

1.3.1. Christological Foundation for an African Theology of Reconciliation

According to Archbishop Eterovi whose preface to the WD is very rich in theological depth on the meaning of reconciliation; ‘Central to the reconciliation between God and humanity is the pierced heart of the crucified Lord, from which blood and water continue to flow (Cf. Jn 19:34) in the sacrament of salvation. Through the cross, Jesus Christ has reconciled two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, destroying every hostility between them and making them one body (cf. Eph 2: 14–16).’¹² The reconciliation which Jesus won for us draws from his Cross, his total submission to God’s will. ‘For our sake He made the sinless one into sin a victim of sin, so that in him we might become the uprightness of God.’ (2 Cor 5: 21). Through his Cross, Jesus has also shown us the universality and depth of divine love. Hans Urs von Balthasar describes this kind of reconciling love this way: ‘This is the love that knows the depths. It lives in us, establishes itself within us as a center; we live from it; it fills and nourishes us; it draws us into its spell, clothing itself with us as with a mantle and using our souls as its organ. This is no longer ourselves: in a most immediate, hardly distinguishable proximity, this is the Lord in us.’¹³ An African Church which builds itself on Christ as the source of God’s reconciliation to humanity as a whole and to each person individually (WD, 40–45) must reproduce in herself the quality and type of love that Christ incarnates and which he has given to the Church. The kind of love which we have in Christ is shown to be a love that is inclusive and accepting of all people (WD86–88). It is a love that gives and forgives, a love that sacrifices and dies to self, a love that places service and humility as source and goal. It is above all, a love that saves and creates because it is united with the love of God the creating Father which goes out of itself to bring about a new creation freed from sin. It is faith in Christ which gives believers the dynamic moral force to have the mind that is in Christ Jesus in order to adopt concrete acts of love, compassion, solidarity, and friendship to all men and women (WD, 75–81). This is particularly concrete through the Eucharist and energised by hearing God’s word through which we are inspired by the Words and deeds of Christ, and strengthened in the work of reconciliation through re-presenting that which the Lord did in his public ministry.

It is important in articulating the Christological foundation of reconciliation to focus especially on how the Lord takes away our sins on the Cross and his public ministry. This is because what is at issue in the public square whether in Africa or elsewhere is not so much a theology of what the Lord did, but how this could become concrete in history. I suggest that the aesthetic dimension of Christology is often a good way of beginning. The theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, has demonstrated in his trilogy *The Glory of the Lord* (especially vol. 1) this dimension of Christological aesthetics. He writes of Christ as the archetypal form whose words and deeds are the form of the transcendental attributes of the good, unity, truth, and the beautiful. But he sees in beauty the highest expression of the form because; ‘beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendour around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.’¹⁴ Christ is a love-worthy thing not only as the form and figure of all that the human heart desires, but as the external expression of the primal ontological phenomenon of all that is beautiful, the splendour of the truth and the manifestation of the inner life of the Trinity. God’s Incarnation in Christ perfects the whole ontology and aesthetics of created Being. In the Incarnation, and in the

Words and deeds of Christ, God uses created being as a new language and means of expressing the face of God and the being of the divine essence. Jesus is not only Word, and Image of the Father, he is the form of the Trinitarian Communion. This is because God sent his Son and Revealer into the world, in the form of man, in order to translate for the world, the eternal self-expression of God into a language that the human person can understand. This Son, already as Word of God (*theos legon*) is God speaking through the mouth of God; and *legomenos* (God spoken) and he alone is able to give in 'the form of servant' (Phil 2: 7) the adequacy of the normative expression of the Word of God in human categories to the humble contemplative mind of the theologians and Christians who fall on their knees.¹⁵

The question which Balthasar asks at the beginning of *Love Alone is Credible* bears an important weight in helping us to establish the basic Christological foundation of a theology of the Church and the Christian life. He asks: 'What is specifically Christian about Christianity?'¹⁶ He goes on to ask another question whose answer is the same for the preceding question, which is: 'What is it that makes Christianity credible?' The principle of intelligibility and credibility of the Church and Christianity is not a wisdom that surpasses the knowledge of the world's religions through a divine utterance. It is not also a human achievement of personal and social fulfillment through revelation and redemption, but solely in terms of the self-glorification of divine love. By dying, descending into the dead,¹⁷ and rising to new life, Christ has made Trinitarian Love the Reality that holds all things together. He shows that divine love is beyond all creaturely determinateness, and is even a threat to it. Hence divine love in Christ has to become formless in the submission to the Father's will in order to assume that character of total availability which knows both the height and the depth. This love is a love which does not want anything for itself and overcomes abandonment, brokenness, rejection, and even violence through the Father's glory. This love is a reconciling love which according to Balthasar, is the mind of the Church, which the Church possesses subjectively in relation to Christ and therefore objectively as a norm for the mind of her members.¹⁸ In being drawn to the form of Christ, and being informed by the form of Christ's love, the Church and Christians receive from above their ultimate form which recasts everything (sin, division, despair, enmity, brokenness, discrimination etc) and reorders them.

Seeing the depth of this love demands that theologians and Christians become contemplatives. Contemplation here is not understood as withdrawing into monasteries to ponder the depth and height of the mystery of the God head. On the contrary, it demands being immersed in the life of Christ by seeing how his Word and deeds, or his teaching and example of constant submission to God's will gives us the perceptible attraction to do the same. It demands also of the Church and Christians to become immersed in history with the ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions which she bears across time and ages and read history in the light of Christ's continuing work through the Holy Spirit. It is only this form of Christ, which can snatch us up into a state of rapture, and draw us into the lighting rod of eternal beauty; while the bursting light from the life of Christ drenches other contrary light (sin, hatred, division, discrimination, lust for power, greed etc), and transports us into the heart of Trinitarian Communion.¹⁹ We can take one example among many others in the life of Christ to see how perceptible is the form of Christ as source, model and inspiration for reconciliation: the attitude of the Lord to sinners and his 'enemies.'

Any theology of reconciliation must project especially the aspect of conversion, divine mercy, and love, removal of the roots of sin, justice, restoration, and healing which are

dimensions of the archetypal form reflexive from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is particularly related to the attitude of Jesus to people, especially his willingness to forgive his 'enemies.' The Gospels show us many aspects and dimension of this model of reconciliation. In order to overcome the alienation, division, and bitterness which come from injustice, sin, and evil in society the Lord teaches us the higher virtue of forgiveness. In the first place, Jesus unlike the various religious communities around his time – for instance the Essenes of the Qumran community who admitted only the 'pure' – had a radical openness to all people. Jesus announces the good news that all are invited to the Lord's Table. This inclusiveness of Jesus was interpreted in Paul's letter to the Romans as the basis for building a community of faith and bringing glory to God: 'Accept one another, therefore, as Christ has accepted you, for the glory of the Lord' (Romans 15: 7). Commenting on this, Brendan Byrne, notes that in the Roman community to which Paul was writing, there were different races and nations, and people from diverse religious, political, and economic backgrounds, the Jews and the Gentiles. This community had to live together as a new family of God which while integrating their particularities had in the light of their new calling to transcend them for the glory of God. 'Accepting one another' becomes a Christian imperative which draws not from any natural claims and powers but from the life of Christ. The glorification of God in the Christian community can only come about, 'if the acceptance enacted by Christ flows through to mutual community acceptance of one another, in particular those 'weak in faith.' A familiar biblical pattern of motivation is operative here: what one has oneself received from God is bound to extend to one's fellow human beings (cf. Deut 24: 17–22; Matt 18:32–33).'²⁰

In the new kingdom of the Lord, sinners and saints, the weak and the strong, blacks and whites, the young and old, male and female, the poor and the rich are invited. As the preface for reconciliation has it 'enemies join hands of friendship' around the table of the Lord: 'for the son of man came to seek and save the lost.' (LK 19: 9–10). The consequence of this in an African theology of reconciliation is that vital participation in the Trinitarian Communion in Africa churches should be open to all without conditions. The radical nature of this invitation relativizes all the other internal and external dynamics which draw us apart from others.

Seeing the form in Christ will also draw us to ponder on the depth of divine forgiveness which Jesus manifested in his earthly life and on the Cross. He forgave the apostle Peter for denying him (John 21: 15–19); he forgave the apostles who abandoned him and his very executioners as well as those who brought false charges against him: 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' (Lk 23: 34). Forgiveness is enjoined on us by the word and deeds of Christ and as an essential condition for participating in the New Covenant in the Lord's Blood. From the foregoing theological analysis one can conclude that reconciliation is Christoform and cruciform.²¹ By fixing one's gaze on the Lord's ministry one understands that the Paschal Mystery was the consummation of his salvific acts already begun in the Incarnation and through his public ministry.

From these teachings and example we can draw the following important theological conclusion on reconciliation especially in the Church in Africa: (1) forgiveness, repentance, and mercy are essential to living the new covenant as God's reconciled family; (2) Christ is both our source and model of forgiveness; (3) the Christian is called to pardon always. There are so many heroic examples of reconciliation, mercy, and forgiveness in recent African history in South Africa, in the Congo, in Rwanda, in Cote d'voire, in Mozambique etc where many people dehumanized by apartheid, damaged by wars and injustice, and traumatized by genocide let go of animosity and forgave. Healing of memories which is an

essential part of reconciliation in many African communities will require acts of mercy and pardon, as well as a change of hearts and attitudes. It will also demand opening historical wounds through truth telling of what took place, genuine apologies, firm purpose of amendment, so that the requirements of justice will be met by mercy. In the history of the Church many martyrs going back to Stephen followed the Lord's example of letting go of evils by forgiving their persecutors and executioners. These holy souls have built up for us a fountain of mercy and forgiveness which we can all contribute to in order to bring to our people the inconceivable prospect of Trinitarian Communion and peace. Indeed, our irrevocable disposition towards bringing Christian pardon in our families, communities, churches and countries is the beginning of the healing of memory in many broken and hurting families, communities, parishes, dioceses and nations in Africa.

(4) Forgiveness is Trinitarian (Lk 6: 36; 2 Cor 5: 18). God has reconciled us in Christ, the divine Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit who makes us holy by removing the obstacle to divine operation in us. Thus, when I forgive it is not on my strength but from the strength I draw from my participation in Trinitarian communion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* enjoins this strongly: 'After his Resurrection, Christ sent his apostles, 'so that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations' (Lk 24: 47). The apostles and their successors carry out this 'ministry of reconciliation.' . . . not only by announcing God's forgiveness merited for us by Christ, and calling them to conversion and faith; but also by communicating to them the forgiveness of sins in Baptism, and reconciling them with God and with the Church through the power of the keys, from Christ.'²²

A theology of reconciliation in African Christianity will demand not only the proclamation of the message of reconciliation by the Church in Africa, but more importantly will model the ministry of the Church and the lives of Christians around the prophetic acts of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's preaching was not insubstantial proclamation but had an immediate impact on the hearers and those who observed his deeds. It was a strong call for conversion of life and for a turn towards God which immediately brought healing and liberty from the forces of evil. In the proclamation of Christ, the good news of God's kingdom became operative in the lives and condition of all those who accepted his message. The acceptance of the message of salvation brought reconciliation, redemption, the immediate experience of physical health, wholeness, freedom, peace, and spiritual liberation to those who embraced the message.²³ It is this form of Christ that we should aesthetically re-enact in daily commitments for reconciliation, justice, and peace, repentance, and a new life of grace and friendship.

1.3.1.1. Pastoral Considerations

The image of Christ is the best symbol around which a theology of reconciliation in African Christianity can be constructed because this image is at the center of Christian consciousness in Africa. It is also the reason why one observes the profusion of Christological symbols among African Christians and theologians. According to Charles Nyamiti, Christology is the most developed theme in African theology. His position was supported in the 1994 publication of the compendium of the history of Christianity in Africa by John Baur, who concluded that Christology is the central concern of African theology as they search for the foundation of Christian theologies in Africa.²⁴ Andrew Walls is right when he writes about the Christological foundation of African theologies;

The new religious systems of Africa are distinctively Christian in that they not only magnify the God component that has always been present in African religion, but also identify that component with the God of Israel and of the Scriptures, and with the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to say, they bring the elements of African religious consciousness into connexion with Christ.²⁵

In 1971, John Mbiti pointed out that even though there existed then many African Christologies, which responded to the questions that African Christians were asking about their faith, there was an evident 'Christological crisis' in Africa at that point in time. This crisis, in his thinking, was reflected in the failure of the African Churches and Christians to appropriate Christ authentically, that is, to receive and respond to Christ in ways that are relevant and meaningful to their mentality, experience and social condition. Mbiti and many other African theologians, who in the early 1970s were concerned about the lack of any well articulated theological systems in Africa, have developed different Christologies within the last three decades.²⁶

One can no longer talk of a Christological crisis today in Africa; rather, one should be seeking ways of putting the different Christologies in Africa into conversation with each other, and how they could be integrated into the life of the Church and the wider society. In the light of the theme of the Second African Synod, African theologians are encouraged to articulate the image of Christ who is able to inspire the Church and Christians in Africa to follow the path of reconciliation, justice, and peace. Constructing African Christologies of reconciliation, justice, and peace, poses a fruitful challenge to African theologians and Christians. This task entails constructing a Christology in which 'there is a meeting place where Christ is conversing with the soul of Africa.'²⁷ This means then that the main challenge facing African Christians and theologians is to show how Christ can help to heal and restore the wounded human hearts and souls in Africa which have led to destabilization, brokenness, conflicts, wars, and sufferings among the millions of Africans (WD, 11). The various Christological titles given to Christ in African theology do not fully respond to the Second African Synod's image of Christ. Some of the more prominent titles identified in today's African Christologies include: King Christology, Jesus the Liberator, Jesus the Healer, Jesus of the Poor, Jesus the Chief, Jesus the Witchdoctor, Christ the Ancestor, and Jesus the Guest, among others. All of these integrate various African cultural elements to penetrate and appropriate the New Testament Christologies and the dogmatic pronouncements (especially the Chalcedonian formulation) on the person of Christ.

However, the ancestral image has been pre-eminent in Christological reflections in Africa. This is because, from the point of view of African religious traditions, ancestral veneration, among most African ethnic groups, is at the heart of African Traditional Religions and morality. The image of the ancestor is widely experienced as capable of revealing the continuing presence of Christ in history, and links the past to the present in a concrete way. It is also capable of both unlocking the spiritual and ethical moorings of Africans in their search for Christ, while shedding light on the person of Christ and his universal offer of salvation for Africans in a new way. However, no foundation could be projected for African theologies of reconciliation without accountability to the ordinary African Christians on how to make sense of their Christian experience and relating it to how they enthusiastically embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. The challenge facing the Second African Synod in this regard is to develop an image of Christ which touches the depths of African Christian self-identity which is often disconnected from the theological formulations among today's practitioners.

In the first place, the socio-religious experience from which the images of Christ are drawn in theological grammar in Africa is often remote and convoluted. A cultural hermeneutical approach is needed which will go beyond material culture to the deeper levels of symbols, intentionality, so as to order and relate these to the inner world which shapes the worldview of African Christians. This has not been done effectively in African theologies because of the profusion of the adaptation and translation models in inculturation in African Catholicism based on material culture. As a result, inculturation theologies in Africa have been bogged down by a normative understanding of culture (both Catholic and African) and a narrow concentration on material culture without attention to discovering the historical patterns of meanings embodied in elements of material culture. African culture is not a reality lying there, but a complex construct which has multiple expressions. Also Catholic theology or Christian theology especially its Western brand is very diverse, hence the need for a more historical hermeneutical approach in order to enrich our understanding.

Inculturation theologies in Africa at the research level (using Bernard Lonergan's functional specialty in his *Method in Theology*) will require a worldview analysis. Material interpretations of culture concentrate on cultural products, patterns of behavior, rituals etc. It is a primary level of cultural understanding because it deals primarily with external dimensions of culture. This was what the missionaries who evangelized Africa, especially in the second wave of missionary work in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, concentrated on. Unfortunately, many African Christians and theologians who never practiced African Traditional Religions have understood African cultures in this limited sense. The belief systems, the worldviews, the categories, the logic, and epistemology which are the depth beyond the material culture or what Edward T. Hall²³ calls the 'hidden cultural grammar' have not been richly understood and integrated into the inculturation theologies in Africa.

The Christological images in current African theologies are thus incapable of capturing the African Christian imagination in a way that could help change the mentalities, prejudices, and divisions which have fuelled conflicts and wars in many African states as well as division and strife in many parishes and dioceses in Africa. Besides not being based on phenomenological cultural hermeneutics, they are also not sufficiently rooted in biblical theology thus limiting their abilities to speak to the African Christians from the perspective of their depth culture as well as from biblical narratives. The Synod should, therefore, accentuate more the biblical images of Christ, especially the aesthetic dimension of both the Incarnation, the public life and ministry of Christ and the completion of this aesthetics in the Paschal Mystery of the suffering, death, and Resurrection of the Lord. This is the narrative which is capturing the Christian imagination and consciousness of millions of African Christians and giving rise to folk Christology which is intuitive, direct and experiential among ordinary Christians in their prayer lives. This is why abandoning the biblical image of Christ for culturally borne Christological symbols is the main reason why the fruits of theological formulation in African theologies have not been translated into pastoral praxis and liturgical action.

The ancestral image for all its visibility in theological discourse in Africa is limited by (1) its lack of theological clarity on the continuing presence of Christ as ancestor when the historical Jesus never identified himself as ancestor; (2) a failure to address the image of fear associated with failure to fulfill ancestral duties and obligations; (3) the limitation of the ancestral image from the cultural perspective as prone to the exclusivity which comes from ancestral family bonds; (4) the conflation which comes in translating African

understanding of immortality as becoming an ancestor with the Christian belief in the resurrection.

However, the ancestral image is very powerful because every division in a family, in the clan or community is interpreted as wounding the ancestral spirit and diminishing vital participation. Many African families will retire into the ancestral grove even in contemporary African societies for dialogue and sober reflection guided by the spirit of the ancestor when dealing with intractable conflicts and division. The same happens when divisions and wars lead to blood shed and destruction. The healing rituals are meant not to bring about retributive justice, but to bring about restorative justice and satisfy the troubled spirits of the ancestors. The continuing reflection on the words and deeds of the ancestors helps the community to be bonded together and to increase the participation in vital union. This has an analogical relation to the aesthetic contemplation on the words and deeds of Christ. How we can transit from the ancestral image to the Christological image has been a very exciting and growing aspect of African theologies particularly pioneered by Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo. It is however, important that the Synod addresses itself to the challenge of finding some new Christological grammar taken from the African religio-cultural world as well as from Christian and biblical tradition which can inspire, and challenge African Christians to a renewed living of Trinitarian Communion which brings about dialogue, openness, reconciliation and a sharing in the life of the family of God with the peace, justice, and abundant life which it brings.

1.3.2. Ecclesiological Foundation

How does the WD see the role of the Church in Africa in the work of reconciliation? The WD uses the images of Church as the family of God, and Christians as the salt of the earth, and light of the world, as foundation. In addition, it applies the image to the socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic experience within and outside the Church. WD 35–39 through a brief commentary on the Sermon on the Mount specifies those to whom the message of reconciliation, justice and peace are addressed. The mission of the Lord and as a consequence the mission of the Church is addressed to the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers and those persecuted for justice' sake. The Church is called to be the instrument of God's Kingdom on earth and Christians who are salt of the earth and the light of the world have the mission of collaborating in the coming of the kingdom of God by reaching out to the hungry, the sick, strangers, the humiliated, the naked, and the prisoner who are all the least of the Lord's brethren (Mt 25: 40). The people who suffer most the absence of peace and justice in Africa, as well as those who are the pawns in the ever-revolving cycle of violence and conflicts in many African states and churches are the least of the Lord's brethren. The WD envisions the task of reconciliation as the Church's own way of putting the vision and mission of Christ into action.

At the individual level, the WD proposes that African Christians will look at how they can better be the disciples of the Lord by being actively involved in the mission of building God's kingdom of reconciliation, justice, and peace through their transformative presence as salt and light. Both images relate to the Christian identity on one hand, and the witness of life which naturally flows from this identity. Concrete examples of how this witness of life could be applied in African society which are to be considered by the Synod Fathers include, how the love of God could be found within the churches and how Christians can live a life of love, and mutuality, showing solidarity with the poor and through fraternal service of washing each other's feet especially those on the margins of society. This will

challenge the limiting cultural framework of ethnicity which has become a curse to building the Church as a family of God in Africa. In addition, reconciliation in Africa through Christian witness will challenge African Christians to make rooms in their lives for forgiveness and conversion of hearts (WD, 40–43).

Further more, this has implications for the Church because ‘The life of an ecclesial community, which truly incarnates the Word, become a lamp on the threshold of society as a whole, enabling people to avoid the paths which lead to death, and take instead those which lead to life, that is to say, in following Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. (Jn 14: 6)’²⁹ The essence of the Church is to be a reconciled family of God that lives, celebrates, proclaims, and witnesses to the inconceivable prospective of participating in the divine life of Trinitarian communion. This is the Church’s inner identity. This being of the Church shines through the efficacy of her sacraments especially the sacrament of reconciliation through which the ministry of divine love, mercy and justice are administered to the faithful. This sacramental action is not only efficacious through the concrete sacramental event, it shines forth the more through the inner identity of the Church, and the external acts of her members who through their way of living and through the story that is heard about the churches show that the Trinitarian communion is an offer which every Christian is participating in and which is offered to all who enter the Church.

This participation is undermined in many churches when pastors, bishops, religious men and women, and leaders at various levels of church life display in words and deeds actions that parallel the dictatorial tendencies in many governments in Africa. WD 53, 107–110 specifically underlies the importance of looking at the way ecclesiastical authority is being exercised in many parishes and dioceses. How much unity of purpose and love exists among priests working together in the same diocese, and between them and the local ordinaries? How united are pastors with their parishioners as servants of one another, and not masters over minors, or lords over their clients? Are African bishops united among themselves, or have they become partisan, sectional, ethnocentric, and biased? How effective are the Episcopal conferences in many African countries? Do national, regional and continental Episcopal conferences have a unity of purpose and speak with one voice?

The question of authority in the church I think is a major issue which is causing division in the church in parishes, dioceses, and at the national level in many African countries. Sometimes, sycophancy and rivalry among priests in their fight to please the bishops in return for ecclesiastical perks and gratifications have undermined unity, friendship and mutual sharing which could have advanced the mission of Christ. In some instances, a particular circle of highly privileged priests and religious who are favoured by the bishop because of ethnic, clannish, or partisan considerations control the diocese while the rest of the clergy are left on the margins, and in many cases begin to undermine the pastoral life of the diocese and gradually sow the seeds for division, conflict, and violence. The Synod should discuss how bishops could improve the quality of their service through a vulnerable mission which is humble, modest, simple, open to correction and admission of mistakes; transparent, accountable, and places the spiritual and material needs of the Christians above every other personal and hierarchical claim. There is a crying need for a more open and honest framework for holding the clergy and hierarchy accountable in the Church in Africa. When relationships break as they do quite frequently between bishops and their priests, or laity, and among priests or between them and their parishioners, or between superiors and their confreres, there are no adequate and open canonical frameworks to address these situations. This is because there are no specifications in the Canon Law on dealing with ethnic conflicts, caste system, priests who use African Traditional Religious

practices for healing ministries, rejection of a bishop or priest by the people of God on ethnic or clannish grounds, or when a bishop loses the support and confidence of the clergy. These are some unresolved sources of conflict which are often papered over through effete appeal to authority or to Rome, thus widening the gulf of division which imperil the mission of the Lord.

There is also the question of the increasing number of married priests and religious, or priests who have been suspended on moral or canonical grounds. The birth of the group *Married Priests Now* which is becoming visible in East and Central Africa through the influence of Archbishop Milingo³⁰ is a continuing challenge for reconciliation. How can the Church in Africa address the questions being raised by these groups, as well as many African men and women who have been suspended from receiving Holy Communion because they live in polygamous marriages or because their children married outside the Church? How are priests and bishops dealing with estranged Catholics who wish to return to communion in the church after brief or long time experimenting with Pentecostal and evangelical churches, or consulting *sangomas* (witch doctors), priests of African Traditional Religions, and fortune tellers in their search for answers to limit situations like death, terminal sickness, childlessness, misfortune in the family, ancestral curse, healing of family tree among others? The Church in Africa must concretely and externally show signs of being open to receiving the prodigal sons and daughters on one hand, and courageously address the internal factors and inadequacy within the church which lead people away from the Church or alienate some clergy, religious, and laity from the Church.

WD 93–95 points out the challenges which face the Church in Africa, especially the highly clericalized notion of church which has led many ordinary African Christians to identify the Church in Africa only with the hierarchy. This weakens the ability of the whole church especially the lay members of Christ's faithful to actively lead in faith-driven initiatives for reconciliation. There is also the need for Christian families to be sufficiently supported to grow into greater communion within as domestic churches and be an example in their communities of the way to live as reconciled people in diverse settings. The division in many African families and between families at community level has become more evident and disturbing as economic stress and population growth continue to undermine the traditionally accepted forms of adjudicating issues that deal with land tenure and ownership, debt repayment, age-long bonds and deeds, patrimony, marriage ties etc.

In the light of the foregoing, we can conclude that the basic ecclesiological foundation for a theology of reconciliation in African Christianity should be sought in (1) showing how the image of the Church as the family of God overcomes the limits and exclusivity which belonging to a family or a clan imposes from the African cultural perspective. In a sense, family is not an all inclusive concept in African tradition. Belonging to one family excludes me from other families in many ways. WD (87–89) makes a case for this image chosen by the Synod Fathers in the First African Synod of 1994 by pointing out that the Church in Africa must seriously show how African Christians can put their differences aside. This is based on the fact that belonging to Christ brings people together as brothers and sisters in one family as sons and daughters of God. In addition, it shows how the values tied to family tradition in Africa could lead to acts of solidarity, fellowship, sharing, respect for one another, hospitality, togetherness, dialogues etc. (2) the church as family of God should be conceived more appropriately from the point of view of blood relationship which defines kinship ties in African cultural traditions. Christologically considered, the family of God is built on the blood of the Lamb whose sacrifice on the Cross has made us a

new people, and a new family. The link with the blood of Christ makes a deeper connection with the cultural world of Africans especially overcoming the limiting factor of family. The bond created among Christians through the blood of Christ, sacramentally enacted through the rites of Christian initiation especially baptism will in this way transcend the blood ties of family, clan, or ethnicity which in many African communities ravaged by conflicts and ancient grudges and prejudices among and between clans and ethnic groups is sometimes seen as stronger than the water of baptism.

(3) The vital participation which I have interpreted as realized in the Church's being as drawing from Trinitarian communion is a more extensive reality, as it shows the possibility of salvation and reconciliation as being built into the inner structure of the church as well as in her mission. Thus prophetic ministry in the church in actions for reconciliation, justice, and peace is not an add-on to the being of the Church, but rather is the Church's way of being. This reality is most evident in the Eucharist in which Christ gathers his disciples and makes them a people, the sons and daughters of God, who are reconciled and at peace with the Father and one another, so that they, in turn, can be the means of reconciliation and workers of peace and justice (WD, 80). The Eucharist gives the grace of healing of brokenness at personal and group levels. The Eucharist takes away sin and draws the Christians to let go of sin, selfishness and pride which are the roots of sins. It also inspires Christians to forgive one another and to see in the life and person of Christ the very unity which is characteristic of the emergence of the kingdom of God. Above all, the Eucharist celebrates and enfolds Christians in the mystery of divine love; 'Since love abides here, there is no room for hate, vengeance and injustice. Indeed, an ecclesial community built on the Eucharist becomes a genuine sacrament of unity, fellowship and reconciliation in the midst of humanity. In this sacrament, the Lord wishes to crown with success every effort to make the world a place of glory for his Father, seeing that, according to St Irenaeus, 'the glory of God is a man truly alive.'³¹ It is then from the heart of a reconciled church that will emerge evangelically driven initiatives in the areas of inter-Christian dialogue, and dialogue with practitioners of African Traditional Religions, Islam and African Independent Churches (WD 99–102).

Concluding Theological Reflection on an African Theology of Reconciliation

Pope Paul VI underlies the importance of integrating cultural self-understanding and history in the formulation of mission theologies which track the movement and challenges that the church encounters as she crosses cultural frontiers. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* where he writes:

The Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture and cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any of them. (EN, 20).

Locating the place of mission and the kingdom of God in social and natural spaces of the people in their cultural context should be a major concern of all theologies of reconciliation. It acts as a mirror for seeing the presence of sin and its effects in the factors which bring about conflicts, divisions, hatred, and animosity in the structures of society and ecclesial community. I think this is an aspect of reconciliation in Africa which

was not sufficiently addressed in the Synod's Working Document. Even though WD refers in four places to inculturation or an appeal to African cultural tradition, it does not show how this could be perfected and applied to the church's reconciling efforts (WD, 22–23, 66, 73–74, 94). Especially missing in this document is the African palaver which is a cultural trope for a dialogical engagement in conflict situations and divisions, in order to bring about restorative justice and promote mutual co-existence. The document also continued the practice of seeing Africa as one unit hence all the issues addressed are applied to 'Africa' in a univocal term. It also renders cognate concepts in the singular (for e.g. Africa Traditional Religion, African culture, African philosophy). It ignores the current research and debate which we flagged in the previous section about 'African reality' being a construct to be read in a polyvalent manner instead of being seen as single reality.

An examination of the cultural and historical forces at play in contemporary Africa is necessary for understanding the deeper issues about reconciliation in African communities, churches and states. I have already indicated in the previous section the positive aspects of African ancestral tradition which could be integrated in African Christologies of reconciliation. However, the more fundamental concern of this essay is whether the African social and cultural traditions and history have been deeply explored in this document. The conclusion from our analysis is that more needs to be done in this regard if the Synod will bear fruits and not simply be a forum for citations of papal documents without showing how they are informed by the African context. More importantly, the call here is for the social context of Africans to be taken seriously and engaged broadly so that problematizing the issues of reconciliation, justice, and peace will help to increase understanding and the resources available within the Church for meeting the challenges.

Religion and culture are located within history because religion and culture are dimensions of human living in, and interpreting of their existence in the world and in their history. Thus, religion and culture whether African or Christian or both will raise questions of reconciliation, forgiveness, healing of memories, economics, politics, poverty, hope, eschatology, morality, justice and peace, among others. It will require interpreting how the presence of the kingdom of God in human history through the instrumentality of the church is to be sought in the midst of this history on one hand, and how human history is to be directed by the values of this kingdom on the other. Engagement with one's cultural specificity and lived historicalness through a critically conscious explorative appropriation of one's cultural, political, religious, and historical existence in their multiple expressions (African and Christian) is only the true path to an African theology of reconciliation. Even though the WD set out to do this, it does not seriously engage the issues it sets out to address. It is in the concrete that reconciliation becomes active as both gift and mission for the church. But more importantly, there is always hidden in the history of a poor people, under-currents which continue to generate tension and conflict because they reveal the presence of injustice especially fuelled by social sins. According to the Italian cultural theorist, Antonio Gramsci, there is always an 'infinity of traces' collected without the benefit of an inventory in the history of oppressed peoples.³² Thus, cultural productions are stubborn realities which continue to manifest themselves in different ways among oppressed people. The cultural domination of African space by slavery, colonialism, racism, and globalization, the insulting condition of absolute poverty that abuse the humanity of many Africans and the scourge of diseases and abject lack of means in Africa today make it imperative for an immersion in history in African theologies. This is a good way of discovering and naming 'the infinite cultural traces' which continue to negatively undermine the mission of the Church to bring about in Africa a reconciled

people who are at home with both their African and Christian identity as well as with the direction of history. There is a melange in African Christian consciousness, the interpretation and understanding of which are constitutive of any authentic theological systematization on reconciliation, ecclesiology or Christology.

We are dealing in Africa with a complex of factors which impact on the question of reconciliation. What I have tried to do in this essay is to highlight the specific challenges which the Church in Africa should address both *ad intra* and *ad extra* in her gift and mission as both a reconciled community and a reconciling instrument of Trinitarian communion. I have used African notion of vital participation to show that Trinitarian Communion is about sharing in the divine life, and this sharing brings about abundant life for every man and woman as well as for creation as a whole. This is so because vital participation is cosmic and integral underlining our mutual implication in an inter-dependent world. Reconciliation is thus necessary if we can have peace, justice, solidarity, and love among people and with the whole of creation.

In African Christian imagination, the person of Christ is shown to be the most magnetic and powerful in creating a Christian consciousness. Therefore, finding a Christological symbol of reconciliation is the surest path towards inspiring African Christians to overcome the numerous factors which we have shown bring about conflict, division, and wars in many communities and strains relationship within the heart of the Church in Africa. This Christological image it is proposed will draw from Trinitarian Communion and be a foundation for a new African ecclesiology which will produce Christians who will become salt and light to the African continent.

By way of conclusion we can make some four recommendations based on this study which could be assimilated in the African Synod's propositions for the Synod Fathers and Mothers. (1) A theology of reconciliation in African Christianity must go deeper to finding the causes of conflict in Africa. The Church in Africa cannot afford to make propositions for addressing a challenge of reconciliation which she has not understood and conceived rather narrowly. A more historical engagement will deal with the question of why the ethnic identity takes precedence over other national, Christian, and professional identities among most African Christians. Thus the 'we' is often understood narrowly as 'my ethnic group' and the ethical dimension of community becomes very exclusive and limiting. (2) A theology of reconciliation in African Christianity must also deal with the healing of memory and restoration of those who are wounded by historical injustices which goes back to many centuries, as well as those who are hunted by historical crimes and ongoing acts of injustice by the state, the Church or political establishment which bring inequality and poverty for many in Africa. This demands the return to the African palaver so as to re-establish dialogue, peace, and restorative justice through shared ethical discourse by mining the African moral universe of inter-dependent living through *ubuntu*.

This is particularly to be linked with how the common good, the natural resources, national wealth etc are distributed. This is why Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice³³ warn against 'reconciliation without memory' wherein churches and peace groups as well as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions push for the quick evacuation of wounded memories and seek an immediate but shallow peace without restorative justice which brings social transformation. The Church in Africa must not minimize the roots of conflicts within the Church in Africa and among African communities, or seek a cheap reconciliation³⁴ that buys temporary peace without justice and mercy. Herein lies the need for ongoing conversion, which will lead to a change of heart and attitude, and a radical change of aspects of African cultures which promote ethnocentric biases and prejudices.

Reconciliation will always deal with issues of justice, equality, human rights, the common good, and peace all of which are often tainted with ethnocentric biases in contemporary African political and ecclesial discourses. (3) A theology of reconciliation in African theology will show the aesthetic dimension of justice, repentance, mercy and forgiveness as Christological prolegomenon for building and rebuilding broken relationships and broken communities in Africa. (4) The Catholic Church in Africa must address the inner conflict of soul of some of her members who are caught up within both an ethnocentric way of seeing human relationships, and the idea of Church as the Family of God on a mission. The validity and credibility of the Church's instrumentality for reconciling African communities will depend on how she in her inner life shows that she is a reconciled community that celebrates and participates in the Trinitarian Communion of abundant life. A theological aesthetics of such a Church will become a narrative which is as beautiful as that of the Lord of the harvest.

Church Documents

'Instrumentum Laboris' *African Synod, The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace*. Downloaded PDF copy from the website www.vatican.ca
 , *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, Africa, 2002.
 John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1984.
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 Austin Flannery ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987.

Notes

1 Maximilian Heinrich Heim's study of the ecclesiology of the then Cardinal Ratzinger offers a helpful insight in showing the strengths and weaknesses of a communion ecclesiology with regard to the status of local churches. Particularly helpful is the debate between Ratzinger and Cardinal Walter Kasper on the theological status of the universal and local churches (*ecclesia in et ex ecclesiis* and *ecclesiae in et ex ecclesia* after the publication of the CDF's document, *Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*. See especially 331–429 of Heim's *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*. Trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005). See also Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*. Trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996); See also Kasper's theological arguments against Ratzinger's ecclesiology on the primacy of the universal church in understanding the meaning of the people of God, and his framing of the argument in terms of Plato's primacy of Idea and Aristotle's realism which places the particular prior to universal Idea in *Leadership in the Church: How Traditional Roles can Serve the Christian Community Today*. Trans. Brian McNeil (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003).

2 The same observation was made by some African theologians on the 1994 Synod about the Working Document of the 1994 Synod in this open letter by the editorial board of *New People Magazine*: 'A first glance at it shows that there are 171 quotes. All of them come from the general documents of the church, with Your Holiness being by far the most quoted. There is not a single quote from your numerous African apostolic trips; all your quotes are general documents, such as encyclicals and exhortations addressed to the whole church. The documents of Vatican Council II come in second place . . .' The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar is quoted five times, but there were no quotations from the first document from the Vatican which addresses Africa, *Africae Terrarum*. It is worrying that fifteen years later that African voices and the agency of Africans are still marginal in the shaping of the nature, meaning, and direction of the Church in Africa. See New People Editorial Staff, 'An Open Letter to the Holy Father: An African Synod without Africa?' in Maura Browne, ed., *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 63.

3 'Preface' to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, 2.

4 LG, 1.

5 Time and space do not allow me to develop further on the link between Ubuntu in the theology of Desmond Tutu and vital union in the theology of Vincent Mulago. However, *Ubuntu* is today one of the most current category from African communitarian ethic in reconciling communities and building inter-dependent relationship. It is also a force for toppling evil in society (injustice, racism, ethnocentrism, hatred, bitterness etc.) while preserving and promoting

both the individual's development as well as that of the community and the wider cosmic world. Ubuntu underlies an African *weltanschauung*, that we are enveloped in the community of other human beings, and caught up in the bundle of life. *To be is to participate*. The *summum bonum* of African understanding of life in the light of *Ubuntu* is that to live is to share, to participate, to be related and to be inter-dependent. *Ubuntu* means humanity and is related to *umuntu*, which is the category of intelligent human force that includes spirits, the human dead, and the living, and to *ntu*, which is God's being as metadynamic force. I will take up this study in a future work on the relationship between *ubuntu* and vital union in the theologies of Mulago and Tutu, with regard to the understanding of *ntu*, and life among the Bantu peoples of Africa. I have drawn this analysis from Michael Battle. For a good discussion of *ubuntu's* translation into a theological category for addressing Africa's social context with regard to reconciliation and apartheid see Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), especially pp. 38–53. For a philosophical engagement of *ubuntu* in the search for justice, peace, and reconciliation in South Africa, and as an ethic for restorative justice and political and social reconstruction see Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues* (NY: Routledge, 2002), esp. 85–107.

6 Benezet Bujo, 'Vincent Mulago: An Enthusiast of African Theology' in Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya, ed. *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003), 18.

7 Vincent Mulago, 'Traditional African Religion and Christianity' in Jacob, K. Olupona, ed. *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (NY: Paragon House, 1990), 120.

8 Nicholas Fogliacco's work is a helpful guide in showing the analogical link between the family of God and our natural family in developing the image of the Church in Africa as a family God, see 'The Family: An African Metaphor for Trinity and Church' in Cecil McGarry and Patrick Ryan, ed. *Inculcating the Church in Africa: Theological and Practical Perspectives with the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 120–158. Another rich social cultural approach to addressing this same image of the Church in Africa could be found in A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000). Charles Nyamiti's magisterial analysis of the state of African ecclesiology is a helpful critical summary of different positions on contemporary African ecclesiologies, and offers some illuminating perspectives on the Trinitarian origin of an African ancestral ecclesiology of communion and *koinonia*. See Charles Nyamiti, *Studies in African Christian Theology Vol. 3: Some Contemporary Models of African Ecclesiology: A Critical Assessment in the Light of Biblical and Church Teaching* (Nairobi: CUEA Publications, 2007).

9 Vincent Mulago, 'Traditional African Religion and Christianity', 120.

10 *Ibid.*, 123.

11 John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1984), no. 8.

12 Preface to WD, 2.

13 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, Trans. Erasmus S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), 33

14 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics Vol I: Seeing the Form*. Trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 19

15 Balthasar, 'Theology and Holiness' in *Communio International Catholic Review* (Winter 1987), 342.

16 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 9.

17 Commenting on the meaning of Christ's descent into hell, Alyssa Lyra Pitstick and Edward T. Oakes write: 'The full significance of this burden is apprehended in Sheol. In place of the *visio Dei*, Christ has a *visio mortis* as he contemplates the repulsive horror and self-isolation of sin's selfishness. Balthasar stresses that Sheol is not a place, however, but a condition and thus an intimate spiritual reality. Hence, just as a soul is united to God through the beatific vision (the *visio Dei*), so likewise Christ, in virtue of his *visio mortis*, does not merely 'see' sin objectively outside himself but is subjectively united and conformed to it: He is 'literally made sin.' Or, what is the same, sin becomes embodies (technically *enhypositized*) in the Son. The Father's rejection of sin thus takes the form of his abandonment of the Son in Sheol beneath the crushing weight of divine wrath against evil.' 'Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange' in *First Things*, n. 168 (December 2006), 27.

18 Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, 125–126.

19 *The Glory of the Lord*, 32–33

20 Brendan Byrne, *Sacra Pagina: Romans* vol. 6 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 429.

21 For a biblical theological development of reconciliation as Christiform and Cruciform through an extended reading of 2 Corinthians 5: 17–20 see my 'Blacks Against Blacks: Homeless to Reconciliation' in *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 51, nn. 1–2 (March–June 2009), 98–100.

22 CCC, 981.

23 Theological and Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *Jesus Christ, Word of the Father* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 65.

24 (See John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History, 62-1992* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications-Africa, 1994). Baur argues; 'The central theme in African theology is Christology. Although there are claimed to be 'innumerable Christologies' – referring to life-experience or such titles as Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Healer, Elder Brother and Master of Initiation – we were able to find only four elaborate treatises on the subject (Bujo, Nyamiti, Udoh, Wachege)', 304–305.

25 Andrew Walls, *The Cross – Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 129.

26 See for instance Hans Schwarz summary of this evolution of African Christology through the writings of John Mbiti, Desmond Tutu and Kwesi Dickson in *Theology in Global Context* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 500–516. A similar study is presented by Diane Stinton see her 'Africa, East

and West', in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Some Significant Christological works in Africa, include: Enyi Ben Udoh, *Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988); John Samuel Pobee, ed., *Exploring Afro – Christology* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992); Department of Systematic Theology, *Incarnating Christ Today* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001); Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor, An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

27 John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 7.

28 Edward, T. Hall, quoted in Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 33.

29 WD, 38

30 It is hoped that the interview which Archbishop Milingo gave to the Italian journalist, Michele Zanzucchi published in a book form in Italian in 2002 could be translated into English and French to be available to many Africans and non-African Catholics. In that book Milingo recounts his ordeals in Rome, his feeling of rejection, his pain and isolation at not being able to speak with the Holy Father, John Paul II when he (Milingo) was walking in the shadows of the valley of death. He also speaks of his love for God, and his agony at being misunderstood. While not an apologia for Milingo, it is important that the Church in Africa as well as the universal Church make genuine efforts to listen to the groans of many Catholics especially estranged priests, bishops, and laity which often lead to division and tension if not fully and openly addressed. See *Il Pesce Ripescato dal Fango* (The Fish Rescued from the Mud) (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2002).

31 WD, 81.

32 Tsenay Serqueberhan, 'Philosophy and Post-Colonial Africa' in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 14.

33 Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace, and Healing* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2008), 27–29.

34 On the futility of cheap reconciliation see Miroslav Volf, 'Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Perfect Social Environment' in Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen, ed. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 34–39.