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Dan Chițoiu & Corina Domnari

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SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

Guest Editor

Frederick Aquino

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Editorial Policy

MEΘEXIS Journal of Research in Values and Spirituality is a peer-reviewed journal, open access, printed and online. The journal aims to bring the best in academic research on values and spirituality to scholarly or interested public audience. It seeks to promote informed debate, and is not tied to any one particular viewpoint. The journal presents a range of views and conclusions within cultural and spiritual traditions, publishing invited & not invited papers and reviews. It is a publication of *The Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality*.

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KENNETH ADEWOLE ADESINA

EDITORIAL NOTE

It's a great honor to have Professor Frederick D. Aquino as Guest Editor of the third Issue of *Methexis Journal*. He is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at the Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University, and director of the undergraduate philosophy minor. Some of his publications include *Communities of Informed Judgment* (Catholic University of America Press, 2004), *An Integrative Habit of Mind* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), *Receptions of Newman* (Oxford, 2015), co-edited with Benjamin J. King, *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* (Oxford, 2017), co-edited with William J. Abraham, *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry Newman* (Oxford, 2018), co-edited with Benjamin J. King, and *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*, co-edited with Paul Gavrilyuk (Oxford, 2022). He also has published articles and chapters on John Henry Newman, Maximus the Confessor, John Cassian, deification, philosophical receptions of scripture, and religious epistemology (e.g., fallibilism, the epistemic function of emotions). He is currently writing a book that explores the relevance of John Henry Newman's thought for issues in contemporary epistemology.

This Issue includes three research articles dealing with spiritual perception. *Dan Chițoiu* evaluates the ways how philosophical paradigms were understood in the light of spiritual perception as well as their impact on spiritual practices. He investigates how spiritual perception was engaged in the doctrines of Plotinus, Maximus the Confessor, Isaac of Nineveh, and Gregory Palamas. *Manuel Sumares* inquires the way that Sergius Bulgakov made it a point of including, in several of his writings, accounts of epiphanic moments that constitute experiential groundings for the strenuous thinking produced in his sophiological theology. Sumares understands these accounts as pathways into some of the most central themes of Bulgakov work. *Ioan Alexandru Tofan* provides a discussion on the relationship between visible and invisible following some ideas of Jean-Luc Marion. Its main argument is that both in art and in iconography it is not the visible that offers a way

of access to the invisible, but it is the invisible that makes it possible.

Part two of the Issue includes three African perspectives on values and spirituality. *Philip Ujomu* proposes to develop a tenable idea of Ubuntu ethical perspective for global order. As an endogenous construct for world peace, Ubuntu theory and practice requires a less emotive, politicized and more inclusive, interdependent conceptual and theoretical articulation to be more acceptable and defensible to friend and foe alike. *Temisan Ebijuwa* finds that the debate of the age long relationship between faith and reason, as diverse sources of knowledge of reality, has been on for quite some time and the quest for a clearer elucidation at this time is imperative as well as compelling because of the sordid condition we have found ourselves in the world today. *Kenneth Adewole Adesina* considers the basis for the application of the Ciceronian ideals of formation to the Church should be done by examining within the realities and experiences of the Church, the similarities of contexts, contents, structures, practices, and means.

Editors

RESEARCH ARTICLES
Spiritual Perception

The Contours of Spiritual Perception: A Brief Note on Perceptual Training

Frederick D. Aquino
Abilene Christian University

There has been a growing interest in thinking critically and constructively about the contours of spiritual perception (SP). One aim involves making philosophical sense of SP. How, for example, are statements about perceiving things divine to be construed philosophically (e.g., “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”)? What are the conditions under which perceiving the divine is possible? What are the objects and features of SP? Is it comparable to other types of perception (e.g., physical, moral, aesthetic, and value perception)? What is the relationship between the perceptual and the conceptual? In what ways can conceptually-loaded forms of SP become epistemically beneficial or distorted?

Recent work in perception theory has provided some helpful resources for pursuing such questions.¹ For example, perceptual training is important in many fields of knowledge. It’s clear that an important part of the spiritual life involves honing the capacity to perceive things divine. Such a process does not take place in a vacuum but is conditioned by the relevant background beliefs, dispositions, practices, and virtues in a congenial environment. The focus here is on the conditions under which people depend on structures, practices, and others to improve their

¹See, for example, Frederick D. Aquino and Paul L. Gavrilyuk (eds), *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*. This collection of essays argues for the possibility of spiritual perception. It also seeks to make progress towards a constructive account of the different aspects of spiritual perception while exploring its intersection with various theological and philosophical themes, such as biblical interpretation, aesthetics, liturgy, race, ecology, eschatology, and the hiddenness of God. The interdisciplinary scope of the volume draws on the resources of value theory, philosophy of perception, epistemology, philosophy of art, psychology, systematic theology, and theological aesthetics.

perceptual capacities. The training of SP will often involve a long process of moral, spiritual, and intellectual preparation.²

The point here is not to suggest that perceptual training fully captures or encompasses all of SP, nor is it to restrict SP to a few unique individuals with high-level perceptual training, such as mystics. However, the training of SP plays an integral role in redirecting our misapplied cognitive capacities or perceptual distortions. It requires deep immersion in a set of practices, materials, processes, and people over the long haul. A crucial aspect of the training of SP, then, involves focusing on the complex and inextricable relationship between the cultivation of a stable and properly disposed habit of mind and the different levels of SP.

An important research project along these lines will involve clarifying the role that particular virtues (e.g., purity of heart, love, humility, apatheia, discernment) and practices (e.g., prayer, fasting, contemplation) play in forming, guiding, and shaping the training of SP. Greater clarification on a case-by-case basis is needed. Thus, it will take analyzing the structure, aim, and role of each virtue and practice to figure out how each contributes to the training of SP.

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² See, for example, Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015); Isabel Gauthier, Michael J. Tarr, and Daniel Bub (eds.), *Perceptual Expertise: Bridging Brain and Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), T. M. Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

Spiritual Perception. Paradigms and Pathways

Dan Chițoiu

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Abstract: This paper consists in evaluating the way some philosophical paradigms were understood in the light of spiritual perception as well as their impact on spiritual practices. First, I inquire therefore about the degree in which spiritual perception was engaged in the doctrine of Plotinus, a doctrine that had provided us with the necessary language for expressing notions concerning the spiritual discipline. Then I discuss the novelty of Maximus the Confessor perspective on spiritual perception, comparing it with the perspective of Isaac of Nineveh in the Syrian tradition. Finally, I talk about Gregory Palamas understanding on the senses' role in spiritual perception and its importance for the hesychast practice in the Christian East.

Keywords: Perception, Senses, Spiritual, Human, Self

Introduction: Post/Super/Hyper-Human Condition

The *more-than-human* is nowadays an omnipresent topic in the philosophical discourses, the scientific research, or in the various forms of fiction. The propensity towards super-human attributes is now obvious, with the recent technologies providing support for such quest. A discussion on the spiritual senses is a matter of supreme importance for the current debates on transhumanism. Transhumanism assesses the implications of using new sciences and technologies in improving the human mental and physical abilities. As a doctrine that is shared by philosophers as well as scientists, transhumanism believes that ameliorating and correcting the imperfections of human nature is not only possible but absolutely necessary. However, this expansion of the human abilities and correction of all human imperfections involves an immense danger which is the Transcension of the human nature boundaries. Human beings should thus suffer a radical

transformation toward a ‘posthuman’ condition, and that takes a certain kind of transcendence: transcending human nature through technological means. The current state of the scientific research and technological applications boosted the credibility level with this very prospect of improving human nature, and we refer to both advances in genetics and in the areas of artificial intelligence. The transcendence aimed by transhumanism seeks a leap and a discontinuity from the human nature as we know it. Clearly, throughout the history of European philosophy of the past centuries, scenarios of overcoming human nature and becoming super-human, had constantly emerged. The actual state of technology takes this recurring theme from ‘above’ to ‘trans’, but the basic feature of this paradigm entails those same ends sought ever since the time of Renaissance. A crucial aspect has always been the radically enhanced ability of knowledge and *perception* at the same time. Super-man can know *differently*, but can also *perceive* differently.

A debate on the existence/possibility of spiritual perception should start by asserting the existence of the spiritual senses, as distinct from physical ones. First of all there are some aspects though that need to be clarified: if the spiritual senses do exist, are they active continuously, or just in exceptional instances; what relationship is there between spiritual senses and physical senses, do they duplicate the latter ones, interfering in any way; and if the spiritual senses are activated only in certain situations, what are the effects on the body?

On the other hand, evaluating the paradigms of the spiritual perception understanding should focus on several matters, including; how does the act of spiritual perception manifest, does it belong to conscious and volitional activity, or is it rather a passive process; what does facilitate the act of spiritual perception; is spiritual perception a conscious or unconscious act, and if it is a conscious act, to which extent, and, lastly, what is the role of spiritual practice in gaining spiritual perception?

Further on I will indicate how these aspects related to the spiritual senses and spiritual perception have been formulated by several major doctrines when assessing the human nature in its transcendent openness.

Origins of a Paradigm: Plotinus and the Need of Spiritual Perception

Plotinus is the author with quite a strong impact in imposing the vocabulary related to the spiritual experience, but also

in stating its goals. For Plotinus, the human self, in its upward oriented inner path, aims at uniting itself with the *One* from which all reality emanates, that *One* SupraBeing, the Beyond Being. The spiritual experience that essentially surpasses the human's natural capabilities implies the overcoming of a fallen and inauthentic status. Plotinus says that the human self can be shaped, and this is done through virtues, as tools that can temper emotional impulsiveness and even more than that. Three degrees of virtue are asserted, among which the higher virtues belonging to intellectual activity, capable of keeping the mind steady in the contemplation of transcendent forms. Through the practice of virtue one can achieve self-knowledge, which is, in the first instance, a kind of inventory of the levels of the self. Through this "self-understanding" is produced, through a radical movement, *the return to self*. Plotinus claims that there are laws governing the way our mind operates, originating in the self-observation level, and thereby setting the manner in which all judgments are made about sensible objects.¹ The impressions received from sensations are thus evaluated according to categories such as good or bad, but the act of judgment is performed in line with the benchmarks set by the Intellect. These laws provide us with guidelines that basically constitute our common opinion of ourselves, but at the same time are a sign that within us there is something higher, a truly divine core. Its integral presence and full activation, the actual source of the laws of our mind, can be achieved through renunciation of the ordinary self and union with *Nous*, the noetic level. This is the only way man can become *Nous*.²

There are two sources of perception, because being human means having impressions from both the sensible and the intelligible world, and this overlap causes an impossibility of possessing whole truths, so our mind is filled with impressions. Spiritual perception is the only one that can acquire true knowledge which can solely be obtained by separating impressions from the sensible level. Spiritual perception is not produced by senses belonging to the spiritual level, but actually emerges when the return to self takes place, as a self-consistent activity aimed at experiencing the union with the source of the intellect. Spiritual perception is a path leading to a self-level where normal intellectual functioning is transcended and transformed into non-dual experience of identity with the source that makes it possible.³ From

¹ D. M. Hutchinson, *Plotinus on Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 12.

² Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), V 3 [49].17.39.

³ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V 3 [49]. 3.23-29.

the Neoplatonic perspective, to know oneself one must be a God. Plotinus argues that man *transcends* this way *his own humanity*.

Spiritual Perception as Mediation and Unification: Maximus the Confessor

In the Patristic approach, the possibility and meaning of spiritual perception were viewed from a different perspective. At least two fundamental aspects were dissimilar in this paradigm of spiritual perception: there cannot be an exclusive result of the human initiative and, secondly, the purpose of one's spiritual experience is not the identification with its source, because there is an unquestionable ontology-based distinction between the subject and the object of the experience.

Patristic anthropology describes humans using the paradigm of *person*, which implies another understanding of the soul-body relationship, as well as a different role of the body in the spiritual experience. The person is body *and* soul, not essentially and predominantly soul, so when affirming the existence of spiritual senses, this must be done together with the physical ones. In this anthropological paradigm there can be no diminution of the role of perception viewed primarily from the angle of the physical senses in relation to the spiritual ones. There simply cannot be just a spiritual perception by leaving aside or nullifying the contribution of the senses of the body. So, the fundamental aspect that had to be expressed in the patristic tradition was the relationship between the physical and spiritual senses in this realm of spiritual experience. There have been several approaches on the issue of parallelism between the two sources of perception. The differences in perspective on the relationship between the spiritual and physical senses, as well as on the question of various ways of perception depending on its source, were a sign of the implicit anthropologies coming from two great horizons of spiritual practice, the Greek-Byzantine and Syriac one.

In the Greek Patristic tradition, the most eloquent approach is that of Maximus the Confessor, for whom *soul* is not a distinct, separate entity with autonomous activity, since it cannot be understood otherwise than together with the body, with which it does not however mix or confuse. This bodily life of humans is not seen as a proof of their fall and imperfection, because the soul and body were actually given to cross the gap and chasm separating wo/man from the purpose of his/her earthly existence. Maximus describes as the essential aspect of human nature the rational propensity, thus distinguishing between two kinds of will; but if *the*

natural will is proper to the human nature, *the gnostic will* is proper to the personhood level of human (*hypostatic*). The anthropological model 'proposed' by Maximus is evident: there is a parallelism between the physical and spiritual senses, each of them having their own and distinct activities.

This distinction is nevertheless made to express the most important aspect of Maximus' doctrine, the concept of *mediation*. Wo/Man's existence purpose is to unify the entire created reality, and then to unify it with its Creator. This purpose is fulfilled by overcoming and unifying several polarities, such as those between created and uncreated nature, between sensible and intelligible beings, between earth and sky, or between man and woman⁴. It is further asserted that wo/man is not only composed of soul and body, but also of various distinct 'parts' and capacities or faculties, as long as she/he is in a fallen state, which can and should be restored.

This anthropological perspective, focused on restoration and mediation, expresses an ever-repeated pattern in the works of the Greek patristic authors where the theme of cosmic rationality and cosmic harmony is a reiterated assumption. The act of mediation and unification not only preserves the polarities, but brings them into a primordial harmony and higher order that has been lost through the Fall caused by original sin. The physical senses cannot be absorbed, diminished, annihilated in any way by the act of mediation. Wo/Man, being a laboratory of creation, brings both sources of perception into play, or else the unification process through *the gnostic will* would not be possible. Though they have distinct goals, both the intelligible and sensible part are naturally related to each other through an indissoluble power that binds them together. Maximus describes three natural and interrelated movements of the self. This noetic arrangement entails three modalities of knowledge, according to intellect or mind (*vous*), according to discursive reason (*logos*) and according to sense-perception (*aisthesis*). Though each one of them has its own natural motion, the unifying movement of these modalities is the reintegration of the self. Hence, the faculties of sense and reason are correlated and interrelated by the mind, while the spiritual subject owns the indissoluble power to unite them.⁵

⁴ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1995), 173.

⁵ Frederick D. Aquino, "Maximus the Confessor," in *The Spiritual Senses. Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk & Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107.

Syriac Perspective on Spiritual Perception: Isaac of Nineveh and the Rapture Peak

In contrast, a distinct Patristic perspective on spiritual perception – archetypally expressed by Isaac of Nineveh – appears in the Syriac Christianity. Isaac lives in the same seventh century as Maxim, but he is driven by other goals, using altogether a different vocabulary, as well as a different manner of expression. Isaac's texts do not follow the rigors of discourse from the Classical Greek philosophy, indicating nonetheless a different kind of rigor and precision that come from the necessities dictated by the practical spiritual experience. Thus, the existence of a parallelism between the spiritual and physical senses, and of the relations between them is no longer in question, the focus being shifted to the *state of rapture*, the one in which the actual spiritual experience occurs. Spiritual perception is described as a state of discontinuity with the normal functioning of mind and senses, and that takes place when the mind and senses cease to function in a natural way.⁶ This is also the reason why the word 'rapture' is used here: even if that implies a radical discontinuity with the normal state of mind, it is not the result of a human effort, but is made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Although there are affinities that can be found with the state of *ek-stasis*, as it was described by Neoplatonism, or by some of the Greek Fathers, what Isaac writes about this radical experience of the discontinuity of the mind in the state of rapture is different. Isaac claims that in the state of rapture the mind is engulfed with wonder receiving by the Spirit a deep understanding that pours unexpectedly into the soul, keeping the mind still. This is how an unlabouring mind looks like: in rapture there is no longer meditation, conversation with thoughts, no worries about that anymore, there is only a state of wonder outside and beyond human perception. Senses remain steady, and all thoughts are in awe, filled with a glorious vision.⁷

This pattern of spiritual perception implies a suspension of senses, whether physical or spiritual, since in rapture both mind and senses enter a state of immobility, the contemplative amazement being actually the only thing happening, in other words an experience that cannot be theorized.

⁶ Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part. Chapters 4-41*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Louvain: Peters Publishers, 1995), 3. 52.

⁷ Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part*, 35. 1.

The Palamite Paradigm of Spiritual Perception: The Vision of Uncreated Light

However, the assertion of a parallelism between the spiritual and physical senses involves several difficulties that became more obvious in the Hesychast controversy during the 14th century. In the famous dispute between the supporters and opponents of Gregory Palamas, the very role of senses in spiritual perception has been the central point of disagreement. The cultural context of the era was different from the seventh century, so the language was far more specialized and conceptually developed.

Gregory Palamas argued that knowledge involves the whole human being and not just his intellect, and has the shape of a relationship. He was expressing this way an anti-essentialist perspective on human. When talking about the ultimate and supernatural capability of human knowledge, Palamas developed a doctrine where knowledge addressed the whole human being and not just his mind. The criticism of Balaam, his main opponent, consisted in the fact that Gregory identified supernatural with immateriality. Palamas states that spiritual does not preclude material, while supernatural is in evident contradiction with the created world, and this way rehabilitates matter, which until his time had been despised due to the spiritualist tendencies of Hellenism. Knowing God does not require an exteriorization between the subject and object of knowledge, but a *union* of these two.⁸ Palamas says that the intellect does not receive divine illumination by its own power, but only to the extent it is made possible by the grace of God. The vision of uncreated light by means of intellectual perception is shown in analogy with the bodily eyes' perception. Perceiving the uncreated light, however, requires purification of the intellectual vision as well as an illumination from God. Therefore, a preparation is absolutely required. Perception at this level is not done through the bodily eyes, nor through the intellect, but through the Holy Spirit. On such level, wo/man is aware that sees supernatural light which surpasses natural light, but does not know with what he/she sees this light, nor can investigate its nature, because the Spirit through which he/she sees it is impenetrable. The ecstasy as described by Palamas should not be seen as a mind withdrawal from the body, but as transcendence of the human powers, following the self-concentration of the mind, achieved through divine illumination. When the mind is

⁸ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 204.

concentrated in its own energy, self-conversion and self-observation are induced, and wo/man transcends and communes with God. Thus, through the descending ecstasy of God and the transcendent ecstasy of human, the mystical meeting and union is achieved: the mind is deified and communicates this grace to the body. The mind, being incorporeal, is not closed inside the body, but also outside of it, as it is connected to it. Centered within itself in the heart, the mind rules through all soul's faculties. Thus, self-control is cultivated by controlling both the content of sensory perception and its orientation.

A hallmark of the palamite anthropological and gnoseological view is his conception of *faith*. For Palamas, faith is different from any intellectual pursuits, being the equivalent of the union with God. In *Triads* there are several passages where Gregory expresses his understanding of faith: "Our holy faith is a vision of our hearts which goes beyond all sensation and all understanding, for it transcends all intellectual faculties of our souls. How is it that by vision we see what is promised for us in the time without end which is to come? By the senses? But faith is a firm assurance of our hopes; that is why the Apostle also called it 'evidence of things not seen.' Is there no intellectual faculty to see things we hope for? But how could that be, since they have never entered heart of man?" And in another place: "What is faith? Is it a natural faculty, or a supernatural one? Surely supernatural. That is why no one can go to the Father except through the Son who has lifted us above ourselves, granted us the deifying simplicity, and brought us back to unity with the Father."⁹ So, *faith* is described as a supernatural faculty granting the possibility of knowing God. Gregory surpasses dualistic interpretations of the spiritual senses, and he does that by diverting from the Evagrius' pattern on spiritual perception, where these senses were essentially a faculty of intelligence, as opposed to the body. The human being is understood as one and indivisible unity; supernatural grace is granted to the whole wo/man, and not to the mind only.¹⁰ Intelligence and senses only when transformed by grace are able to unite with God. Palamas says that "the sensual and intellectual faculties constitute means of knowing beings; they are limited to beings and manifest the Divine through these beings. But those who possess not only powers of sensation and intellection, but have also attained spiritual and supernatural grace, are not limited by beings

⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), II, 3, 3.

¹⁰ Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 172.

in their knowledge, but know also spiritually, above sense and intelligence, that God is Spirit, for in their entirety become God, and know God in God.”¹¹ “Spiritual light is not only the object of vision, it is also the faculty enabling us to see; this is neither sensation nor intellection, but a spiritual power distinct, in its transcendence, from all created cognitive faculties.”¹² Divine grace is not distinct from wo/man, but is divine life granted to wo/man.

From Paradigm to Pathway: The Hesychast Practice

Gregory Palamas’ perspective on spiritual perception is exceptionally important due to his major role played in establishing the framework of spiritual practice in Eastern Europe, leaving also an indelible mark on its culture. The Palamite paradigm of understanding spiritual perception involves a series of assumptions that have become milestones in assessing the human nature and its ultimate reality. Spiritual practices in the Eastern Europe were done according to the guidelines given by the Palamite Hesychasm: the possibility of attaining spiritual perception was not doubted, and its acquisition was seen as a corollary of well-guided and oriented practice. Skepticism about the possibility of genuine spiritual perception does not exist in this tradition. After the 14th century, the Palamite paradigm of spiritual perception was the formula that no longer represented a topic of controversy. *More-than-human* is indeed the goal of spiritual practice in the Christian East, and this was to be achieved not by improving human capabilities through technological means, but rather by involving the body and the senses. That is why the corpus of writings compiled under the name of *Philokalia* was so successful in the Post-Byzantine Christian East: a selection of texts perfectly suitable for guidance in gaining the spiritual experience of uncreated light. The original Greek version of *Philokalia* was later translated into other languages, with an increasingly impact on the spiritual life in the Christian East. The Palamite paradigm of spiritual perception, withdrawn out of its framework, has been an important factor in shaping the cultural identity of the Eastern Europe.

Gregory Palamas acknowledged that divine energies can only be known through experience, so the Palamite paradigm of spiritual perception also gave to the Eastern Christianity certain spiritual criteria, becoming a true *path* of spiritual practice. This path, seen as a sum of milestones to be followed in acquiring

¹¹ Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, 31.

¹² Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2, 141.

spiritual perception, implies practical experimentation, and involves a long series of attempts, returns, failures, resumptions. The spiritual experience is essentially under the sign of possibility: André Scrima, the contemporary Romanian theologian, describes it as *what comes from trials*, it is *knowledge by trial*. As Scrima indicates, the term ‘experience’ comes from Greek *peira*, meaning ‘trial’ (its root being identical to *pyr*, fire – putting into the fire).¹³

Conclusion

What is and how can be attained the spiritual perception was a constant quest, starting with Plotinus and then reiterated in every relevant period since then. I hereby invoke four major views on the spiritual perception, each of them with a really great impact. The first two views, formulated by Plotinus and Maximus were the result of a major concern in theorizing the frameworks of the spiritual perception and its consequences on human nature, while the expression of the other two views stemmed from practice, from the experience of this quest for acquiring spiritual perception. Isaac of Nineveh gave us his expression on the ways in which spiritual perception is experienced in the search for the state of rapture: the phrases and words used in his testimony were an attempt to accustom them to all stages of spiritual experience. That is why his texts were famous and used from that time till today as an experiential guide. Isaac’s words on the spiritual experience had a tremendous impact on the Russian and Romanian spiritual practice (mostly in the post-Byzantine time), but in general on the entire Orthodox Christianity. Gregory Palamas did a similar thing when answering to the objections made by Barlaam, expressing a view based exclusively on spiritual practice, and that is why he had, as Isaac, difficulties in wording his experience. So, it can be said that the Hesychast practice has been shaped by the Palamite doctrine, while its intention is pragmatic, that is to set the pathway to spiritual perception. Both approaches in outlining the practical steps toward attaining spiritual perception were, nevertheless, integrated in what is the hesychast practice of today. They are not, by any means, contradictory, but only lay distinct highlights when indicating capabilities of human experience. These pathways were integrated in the spiritual guidance across the entire Eastern Christianity, yet having distinct expressions due to the different cultural horizons and historical contexts. This is a strong point in

¹³ André Scrima, *Experiența spirituală și limbajele ei (Spiritual Experience and its Languages)* (București: Humanitas, 2008), 199.

arguing that human potentiality is so complex, and a striking fact in the spiritual practices that aim the transcendent perception. The conclusion is that they cannot be reduced to any technical or scientific approach, no matter how advanced are they. Yes, humankind can and should be enhanced, but by which means? The promise made by transhumanism seems to be extremely limited when compared to the generous scope of the spiritual practice.

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The Experiential Grounding of Bulgakov's Sophiological Theology

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Abstract: Sergius Bulgakov, Orthodox priest and philosophical theologian, made it a point of including, in several of his writings, accounts of epiphanic moments that constitute experiential groundings for the strenuous thinking produced in his sophiological theology. They are instructive both in regard to his personal life and as pathways into some of the most central themes of his work, namely, consubstantiality, interconnectedness, death/dying, Divine-humanity, and catholicity.

Keywords: Sophia, Epiphany, Sophiological Theology, Spiritual Experience

Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) has many admirers outside or on the margins of the Orthodox Church and his work has currently been of increasing interest to theologians.¹ Nevertheless, relatively few of his Orthodox brethren make much of him as an

¹ Notable examples of this recent surge of interest are the International Conference, dedicated to Bulgakov and hosted by the University of Fribourg, in September 2-4, 2021; the Summer/ Fall issue of the *Wheel* (26-27, 2021; and the publication of *The Sociology of Death: Essays on Eschatology: Personal, Political, Universal*, trans. Roberto J. de la Noya (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021), and Bulgakov's *Spiritual Diaries*, trans. and ed. Mark Roosien, and Roberto J. de Noya (Brooklyn: Angelico, 2022). About Bulgakov's growing recognition in the wider theological world, the comment advanced by the contemporary Orthodox theologian and priest (in this regard, an exception to the rule), John G. McGuckin deserves mention: "His theology, detested and censured in his lifetime by the Russian Church in Exile as being too innovative, has since come to be reassessed and appreciated as having engaged with profound issues in a unique way that was both traditionalist and forward looking. Bulgakov's stature as one of the great Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, of any church, is unmistakable." *The Eastern Orthodox Church, A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), loc. 3236, Kindle.

exemplary proponent of Christian Orthodox theology, someone from whom they might learn for the sake of their Orthodox faith. Still, he expressly adhered to it and its liturgical and dogmatic tradition. An uncommonly gifted thinker and immensely erudite, he consistently maintained that Christian revelation is most powerfully expressed and interpreted in the Orthodox Church and openly manifested his conception of her in a book precisely entitled, *The Orthodox Church*² – not to mention his position as the Dean of Saint Sergius Theological Institute in Paris (1925-1944) as a testimony of his dedication to her. Yet, a cloud remains over his name in most quarters of the Eastern Church and, generally speaking a silence. Concerning this, Robert Slensinski, a Greek Catholic priest, who authored *The Theology of Sergius Bulgakov*, wonders about such a lack of adherence and contrasts it to the interest demonstrated in him coming from Catholics and Anglicans.³

For the sake of economy, and perhaps relevance as well, we shall not dwell here on the ecclesiastical censure that Bulgakov's reworking of sophiology provoked in the 1935 at the Institute in Paris; suffice it to say that he was exonerated. Coming to the point of it all, Rowan Williams' observation about why it is that Orthodox believers tend to find his thinking off-putting sounds right. In his "General Introduction" to *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, Williams suggests that,

[Bulgakov] is not the typical representative of the Orthodox theological world; but, despite the caveats entered by many recent Orthodox theologians, he is the *kind* of theologian he is because of his Orthodox formation and commitment, and he demonstrates what is at present a vastly important fact – that theology in the Byzantine tradition is capable of engaging with modernity and post-modernity with unexpected vigour and integrity.⁴

² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988).

³ Among the Catholics, besides Slensinski, *The Theology of Sergius Bulgakov* (Yonkers: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), 1; Aiden Nichols', *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2005) offers good summaries and commentaries on the key aspects of Bulgakov's thought. Among Anglicans, Rowan Williams, and John Milbank recognise the debt they owe to his work.

⁴ Sergii Bulgakov, *Towards a Russian Political Theology*, ed. Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 18. One of the most remarkable figures in contemporary Christendom, Rowan Williams was introduced to

Indeed, Bulgakov does come to his subjects from a different angle, but not only was he reading and analysing the works of Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas well before they became the source of so much inspiration for Orthodox thinkers from the second-quarter of the 20th century onward. These authors, and particularly Palamas, provided the theological support for extending the transfiguring power of divine energies unto the cosmos itself, an important contribution to the Christian sophiology as Bulgakov conceived it. Hardly reformist in intent, Bulgakov's deeper wish is to move beyond the antinomic, or paradoxical, formulations of dogmatic positions that, while admirable in themselves, still inhibit – he believes – a fuller discussion the ontological content of Christian revelation in the image of Divine-humanity, namely, the depths of its consubstantiality and catholicity (*sobornyi*).

Granting the impressive scope of Bulgakov's theological vision and its systematisation realised principally in two trilogies,⁵ our more precise intention here is to appreciate the place that ecclesial piety has in the way he himself probes, illuminates and renders intelligible the epiphanic moments in his own life. In other words, ecclesial piety, and more especially understood around the theme of conciliarity (*Sobornost*) as a defining characteristic of what makes the Christian Church "Orthodox," provides the imagery, drawn from her scriptural and liturgical sources, as well as dogmatic guidelines, for his philosophical and theological thinking. There is much to learn from the epiphanic moments about Bulgakov himself who retrospectively reconstructs how they affected him personally and became thematically important for the Orthodox theology that he advances. They obviously have existential significance for him, but it is equally clear that he wishes his readers and disciples to know about them as experiential groundings for his Christian sophiology. Some of the experiences are mentioned in a way that relates significantly to the thematic of

Russian Christian thought by Nicholas Zernov while at Cambridge and, from that encounter, was led to study the works of Bulgakov, Lossky, Dostoevsky, etc.;

⁵ Bulgakov's minor trilogy consists in: *The Burning Bush*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). *The Friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). *Jacob's Ladder*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). The major trilogy: *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). *Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2002), 1.

book-length writings, namely, *Unfading Light* and *Sophia, the Wisdom of God – An Outline of Sophiology*; others are central to shorter reflections and essays, the point being that they too ultimately exemplify the workings of universal sophianicity in which he himself is a participant. For him, they, each in their own way, involve an implicit call to draw near to that which, in reality, constitutes them, namely, a *syzygy*, a close, synergistic pairing, underlying the religious experience and demanding an artful philosophical approach to bring it to conceptual light.

The ideas guiding this philosophizing are not united in a ‘system’, but in a certain *syzygy*, an organic articulation, a symphonic connection. From such a philosophical-artistic plan are demanded, on the one hand, faithfulness and precision of self-reflection in description of religious experience, in the exposition of ‘myth’, and on the other hand the finding of a corresponding form that is sufficiently supple and capacious for its disclosure.⁶ Thus, Bulgakov does not hide the keys to his thinking: religious experiences do indubitably happen, but require a mode of approach capable to do justice, to correspond, to their nature and what is actually being given in them; couched in mythico-poetical language, their inner-form can give rise to thought but requires an approach, eventually a sophiological one, “sufficiently subtle and capacious,” in order to explicate its potential for ontological revelation. However, the awareness of the symphonic, inter-penetrating, consubstantial character of the *syzygy*, is not only about a conceptualizing discipline, bringing some degree of intelligibility to what is changing in him on their account. Along with that, he expresses, in his Preface (“From the Author”) to *Unfading Light*, a desire for a philosophical propaedeutic that would enable him “to incarnate in speculation some religious contemplations connected with a life in Orthodoxy.”⁷ Moreover, he recognizes and assumes that philosophical work is itself artistic, or more precisely, the art of creating concepts, embedding them in a narrative framework, invoking a “world” of experience lived from within as well as without.⁸

⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), loc. 689, Kindle.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari make a convincing argument about the peculiarity of the artistic dimension in philosophizing and in the inventing of concepts in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991). In his own way, Bulgakov anticipates what these post-structuralist authors have to say, but the notion of conceptual creativity in relation to

In regard to the religious character of crucial experiences in his life and the way he seeks to ground them in the symbolism of Orthodox devotional language, Bulgakov himself indicates specific instances that he wishes to make known as revelatory of his own inner transformation that is at once personal and exemplary. We believe that they may be counted among those realised by gifted religious figures, “the saints, ascetics, prophets and [...] living monuments of religion,” and worthy to be appreciated as such.⁹ With this in mind, we shall consider below the events centred around the “the three calls,” cited in *Unfading Light*, the visit to *Hagia Sophia*, and his lifelong acquaintance with “death and dying.” They are all coordinated with the more discursive facet of his theological explorations that he clearly endeavours to share for the sake of Christian Orthodoxy and the catholicity of the Church, the full expression of which remains her principal task and to which the notions of consubstantiality and *syzygy* ultimately refer.

The Three Calls

Against the background of having left Seminary and his subsequent attraction to Marxist materialism, Bulgakov describes his return to faith as an awakening in his soul by “mysterious calls,” drawing him out of the intellectual smugness that he had managed to acquire over a period of ten years.¹⁰ The first occurred while on a train travel through the Caucasus Mountains at sunset. His soul was stirred and made him see more in nature than dead landscape; the beauty that it invoked seemed to him more than something admirable in itself, but suggested to him that it could be as well something personal, indeed, someone. “And suddenly in that hour

religious experience is already established in the Slavophile tradition of thought established by Khomiakov and Kireevsky in the first half of the 19th century. While Bulgakov is manifestly part of this tradition, his work not only expresses the concern for the catholicity of the Church as realised, for those involved, in the Russian appropriation of Orthodox Christianity but arguably surpasses the effects of the East/ West dichotomization by deepening the potential for universality that Orthodoxy, in the name of *Sobornost*, already contains.

⁹ Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 7.

¹⁰ It is significant that the signaling of “three calls” echo Soloviev’s three dreams of Sophia. At a decisive point in his spiritual journey, he did decide to “follow” Soloviev as *maître à penser*: “All is life he strove to follow [the source of light] and called others to it. Let us follow him!” “Vladimir Solovyov: Scholar and Seer,” in *Sergius Bulgakov: A Bulgakov Anthology*, ed. James Pain and Nicolas Zernov (WIPF & Stock: Eugene, Oregon), 48.

my soul became agitated, started to rejoice and began to shiver; *but what if ... if it is not wasteland, not a lie, not a mask, not death but him, the blessed loving Father, his raiment, his love ...?*"¹¹

The hypothetical "what if?" refers to the possibility that, after all, his childhood of simple, joyful faith, when he felt that he lived in the presence of God, was not illusory and that, on the contrary, the intellectualism ("petty, vile, and banal") that he later adopted indeed was. He ridiculed the treasure that he once had. Now, looking back, he recalls with compunction, "Oh, I was held captive as in the clutches of 'learnedness', that scarecrow set up for the intelligentsia mob, the half-educated crowd, for fools! How I hate you, progeny of half-education, spiritual plague of our days, infecting youths and children!"¹² With sunset, the immediacy of the experience passed, but his soul persisted in hearing the call of the blessing that he experienced as "one eternal unmoving *today*," beyond life and death, without any biblical suggestion of divine communication. The revelation consists just in its being there, yet, "[...] that moment of meeting did not die in my soul; this was her apocalypse, her wedding feast, the first encounter with Sophia."¹³

The second encounter did not involve a journey eastward and a possible personhood inhering in the cosmos. It had to do rather with an experience of the West, an immersion in the softer world of cultured Germany. But the theme of personhood reappeared in the form of the painting of Sistine Madonna that he discovered in Dresden's Zinger Museum. Life's sophianicity came to him from a different direction. Like the sunset light of the Caucasian mountains that invaded his soul, the eyes the "Queen of Heaven approaching on clouds with the Pre-eternal child" reflected in the "mature wise eyes of the Child," spoke to him of readiness for suffering: She by a sword to her heart; Him on the place of Golgatha.¹⁴ Both express divine sacrificial love, that is, the primordially of Christian martyrdom, a sign that dying is the necessary condition for life. This great truth, and not merely an aesthetic experience, came home to him in the Dresden Museum, to which he returned on successive mornings in order to relive and prayerfully absorb this new awareness. Even as he still thought of himself as a Marxist: "the ice of my heart melted and a kind of knot

¹¹ Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 8.

¹² Ibid., 8. What Bulgakov might mean by intelligentsia mob, the half-educated crowd, finds an interesting expression in C.S. Lewis' *Abolition of Man*. Such is described there as "men without chests."

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

in my life came undone.”¹⁵ So, inevitably the “what if” question was reawakened for a second time. Intellectually, his ideas about the world were aligned in accordance with the Marxist creed. But, about the latter, creeping doubts about their workability in real life of Marxist ideas were coming to the surface. About the former, he could not deny the experiences that profoundly moved him. To state the situation as Wittgenstein might have: he was, in principle, held captive by that picture constructed around his academic position and reputation, but *that* picture was not really his, the one of his fathers, the one closer to of the “what if?” that moved his soul and was introducing distinctly different content to feed his mind: “Who can say how and when love is born in the soul and bestow on it one’s insights? But for some time, I knew with complete reliability that this had already happened. And from that time on, a golden chain stretched out in my soul.”¹⁶ The will to be tutored to see things differently, namely, to have his insights shaped by love, namely, of the sacrificial kind as imaged in “the Queen of Heaven and the pre-eternal Child.” For this to happen, it required one more experience of disorientation in order to find himself.

The third encounter took place during a retreat in the wooded grounds of a monastery. He was lodged there in an unused hermit’s hut for prayer and in the hope of experiencing God’s presence. To that end, he participated in the divine services. At a given moment and finding himself unmoved by a celebration of Vespers, he walked out of the church building. In a confused state, he wandered back to where he was staying, but ended up instead at the door of the cell of an elder, sensing that the monastic—like the father of the prodigal son—was actually waiting for him. There his confession was heard: “I left him then, forgiven and at peace, trembling and in tears, feeling myself borne up inside the churchyard as if on wings.” Upon seeing him, a “fellow-traveller” who met him on the path uttered, “the Lord has passed by.”¹⁷ He realized that repentance opened the door that God has long left open for him, and so Bulgakov did have his encounter with God.

From the sophianicity of the cosmos of the first calling and the perception of absolute self-givingness of true personhood, configured in the mystical complicity the Holy Virgin and her divine Son and Logos of creation, of the second, in the third one, he experienced repentance and the depths of the sacramental life of the Church, the assembly of the holy ones in the Lord Jesus Christ:

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 11.

¹⁷ Ibid.

“I looked at everything with new eyes, for I knew that I too was called and I was really taking part in all this: [...] And I was granted to taste the most holy Body and Blood of my Lord... ”¹⁸ The hypothetical “what if?” has gradually given way to insights shaped by love and to the acquisition of spiritual sight: what once appeared to him under the categories of Marxist theory of economy now is seen as an invitatory participation in the economy of grace. Or better, what he once perceived as an awkward fit between the ideas of the intelligentsia and the struggle of ordinary people is now set against a more all-encompassing synaxis, namely, the one anticipating the ultimate syzygy/ symphonic connection of Divine Sophia and the created Sophia, inscribed in course of history under the sign of eternal yearning for communion.

The Great Church of Hagia Sophia

The timespan of the calls that gradually loosened the hold that Marxism had on him was quite lengthy: the first in the Caucasus occurring in 1896, during his twenty-fourth year; the second in Germany, probably at the beginning of stay that would have lasted between 1898 and 1901; and the third at the hermitage in 1908. Particularly crucial in the process would firstly have been his attraction to German idealism and subsequently, moving toward the last encounter, the discovery of sophiology, first via Soloviev’s works and then more markedly through Father Pavel Florensky’s Orthodox rendering of it. In any case, we should keep in mind his intent, in the name sophiology, of bending the givens of the German philosophy in the direction of Christianity as lived in the Russian Orthodox Church, which priested him in 1918, practically concomitant with the Bolshevik revolution. Expelled on the 30th of December 1922, from Simferfol/Crimea with other intellectuals in disagreement with the reigning Bolsheviks, he travelled westward on the Black Sea, stopping first in Constantinople where he visited the Church of the *Hagia Sophia*.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ In his Introduction to *Burning Bush*, of which he was also the translator, Thomas Allan Smith reminds us that, during the period of time extending from 1918 to 1923 and under the influence of Soloviev, Bulgakov was drawn to the idea that unification of the Russian Church under papal authority would be a means of her survival. Having pondered the desirability of conversion to the Roman Church, he changed his mind as he encountered the state of the Catholic Church upon his return to European lands that had begun with this trip to Constantinople. But it must be said that he was none too happy about what he saw in the “vulgar” Phanar, much less

This would have been nearly a thousand years after Prince Vladimir's emissaries made, in 988, their own visit there, reporting back about the incomparable worship that they witnessed there. As the story goes, the experience was so uplifting that they lost the sense of where they were: they entered sure they were on earth, but the beauty of the place, as well as the worship practiced there, transfixed them. They were famously reputed to have said, "[...] we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. [...] We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations." Bulgakov's more studied appreciation appears in the *Introduction of Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, published in 1935. It begins with what he recalls from his notes upon entering the church of *Hagia Sophia* around 12 years before. For the significance that it has for him, we quote it in its entirety:

Those who have visited the church of St Sophia in Constantinople and have fallen under the spell of what it reveals, will find themselves permanently enriched by a new apprehension of the world in God, that is, of the divine Sophia. This heavenly dome, which portrays heaven bending to embrace the earth, gives expression in finite form to the infinite, to an all-embracing unity, to the stillness of eternity, in the form of a work of art which, though belonging to this world, is a miracle of harmony itself. The grace, lightness, simplicity, and wonderful symmetry of the structure account for the fact that the weight of the dome and even the very walls seems to dissolve completely. An ocean of light pours in from above and dominates the whole space below – it enchants, convinces, as it seems to say: I am in the world and the world is in me. Here Plato is baptized into Christianity, for

interesting than Eyup (a district of the city), where he saw in the Muslim worship there something more edifying. In any event, Smith opines that, "[...] in Constantinople his visits to Hagia Sophia reawakened that slumbering fascination with heavenly Sophia" (loc. 170, Kindle). Therein lies considerable irony: Sophia resolved the matter of his interest in Roman Catholicism, but it eventually caused him harm among some of his own Orthodox brethren. Two salient points made in Smith's account are (1) the reinforcing of his Orthodox faith and his determination to act in her defense and (2) the complete turnabout of his appreciation of the Sistine Madonna upon a renewed visit to Dresden and the Zinger Museum: the Madonna was the same, but he had changed and could see nothing iconic or sophianic about her, merely human beauty (loc. 145- 68, Kindle).

here, surely, we have the lofty realm to which souls ascend for the contemplation of ideas.²⁰

Herein we have a central feature of Holy Sophia: it reveals how it is that the world, in its materiality, is in God. It is a revelation that enjoys the collaboration of human creative activity, of its artistic impulse to aspire palpably, as in prayer, to that which is transcendental to it, namely, already living it as an invitational divine presence, infinite but unifying through the prototypical forms coming from above that engage and enlighten the human soul. The dyadic character of Sophia, appearing here in the image of “heavenly dome” and embracing the earth “in the form of the work of art,” is an expression of the ultimate truth of consubstantiality-as-syzygy that is the revealing instance that left Bulgakov spellbound in his visits to *Hagia Sophia*. But what is to be especially retained is the seamlessness which he wishes to accentuate within differentiated natures. The weight of the dome and the walls dissolve in the architectonics of the church, yielding to the grace, lightness, and simplicity of form of its dome. The Hellenic baptism of Plato is thus consummated in the Christian dogma of consubstantiality.

In his own explanation following the passage, he underscores the legacy of pre-Christian Platonism for the benefit of the coming ages, implying that it will be left to its Russian inheritors to bring out the full meaning of Divine Sophia as a protective canopy over the created cosmos. Though, in her very iconicity, the *Hagia Sophia* reflects the rightness of the dogmas of the Ecumenical Councils that ultimately define the Eastern Church, her full meaning cannot be contained in the historical, political, and theological context of Justinian Byzantium. “Byzantine theology as such has left behind no explanation of that to which this ecclesiastical architecture bears witness. It only

²⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God – An Outline of Sophiology* (London: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 1. The account of the experience as cited here is substantially the same as written in notes taken on the day after the visit. See, “Autobiographical Notes,” as included in *Sergius Bulgakov: A Bulgakov Antology*, and the section within it, “Hagia Sophia”. The latter version is preferred in our rendering only because of the wider perspective it offers in regard to its place in the Orthodox tradition. The original notes have the peculiarity of insisting on the sophianic relationship between Plato and the spirit of Byzantine culture, exemplified in the church’s architecture: “The pagan Sophia of Plato beholds herself mirrored in the Christian Sophia, the divine Wisdom. [...] Plato was the prophet of Sophia in paganism,” 14.

bequeathed its hieroglyphic sophiology, as a theological problem, to the generations which succeeded it.”²¹

Bulgakov is clearly looking back here and reflecting on the impact of his visits to *Hagia Sophia* at a distance of a little more than a decade. Bulgakov has a marked tendency to envision the course of history in the light of a glorified humanity with transformative effects on the surrounding natural world. Something of this is already manifest in his early attachment to Marxism, but the series of avowed experiences of a mystical character during a period of about twenty-five years, including now that of the great church of Constantinople, shifted the vectors that would lead him to orient his philosophy of economy progressively in line with what the Church signifies, what the *Hagia Sophia* reveals exemplarily. He had already been rethinking the sophiological approach to philosophical theology under the inspiration of Soloviev and the guidance of Florensky, but the experience of Holy Wisdom in the form of an all-embracing physical structure, itself sustained by the heavenly powers, set the path for his future task on behalf of the revealed God and in continuity with Russia's peculiar and ongoing commitment to it. Catherine Evtuhov expresses this nicely: “Bulgakov lived himself the experience of Vladimir's envoys: indeed, in this stone incarnation of the Platonic world of ideas, he knew not whether he was in heaven or on earth.”²²

Like Thomas Allan Smith,²³ Evtuhov values the “visits” as a defining moment in Bulgakov's life, coming as it did in the sequence of events that included his expulsion from his country and serious doubts about the survival of the Russian Church. Evtuhov's own rendering of it is interesting and worth registering. She considers the experience as provoking in Bulgakov another apocalyptic vision, wherein he saw Muslims peaceably and orderly worshiping in a Mosque, formerly Justinian's church, and this seemed to Bulgakov to be good and the possible fulfillment *Hagia Sophia's* mission to bring humanity ecumenically together. This would be the true vocation of the third Rome, and that of the Church:

It would become again the meeting place of heaven and earth experienced by Vladimir's emissaries almost a

²¹ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God – An Outline of Sophiology*, 2.

²² Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890-1920* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 232.

²³ See note 19.

thousand years earlier. [...] The last twenty years of Bulgakov's life were a playing out of the vision in the mosque, as, amidst the petty scrambling of émigré existence, he launched an extraordinarily ambitious, messianic effort to reinterpret Christian doctrine for the modern age.²⁴

In any case, among the events that would have had a decisive impact on Bulgakov's thinking and represent a renewed commitment to bring their meaning to light, the church of the *Hagia Sophia* qua work of art had the special power to reveal a truth about divine reality that surpassed the conceptual tools at the disposal of the Byzantine theologians of the time. The divine reality of which he speaks corresponds to dogmatic pronouncements of the Ecumenical Councils. There the Fathers did indeed demonstrate "theological creativity," but fell short of the kind of clarification that would enable Orthodox theology to proceed further in its vocation to address the fulness of Christ and the universality of its relation to all of creation. However, in an argumentative pattern that will repeat itself throughout his work, especially in what comes from the Greek Fathers, he will admire their creativity, which, led by the Holy Spirit, allowed them to make right dogmatic statements in spite of the limitations of their arguments *per se*. That is, they were saying great truths that outran their capacity to express them with sufficient precision, but yet were accepted as Orthodox and received canonical status and celebrated as such by the believing faithful. And so it is with the truth expressed in the *Hagia Sophia*: "Byzantine theology as such left behind no explanation of that to which this ecclesiastical architecture bears witness. It only bequeathed its hieroglyphic sophiology, as a theological problem, to the generations which succeeded it."²⁵ As art, it was the ultimate and last realization of greatness that is properly Greek in inspiration; as *ecclesia*, it points beyond the New Rome in the name of the universal Church.

In the continuation of the *Outline's* Introduction, Bulgakov traces the itinerary towards a delayed unveiling of Christian sophiology in the late nineteenth century but still in the ambit of the promise that the Third Rome holds out for Church and the humanity that she wishes to call to salvation. In sum, he tells us that the Old Rome would never know how to assimilate her message

²⁴ Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sick: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890-1920*, 233.

²⁵ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God – An Outline of Sophiology*, 2.

of catholicity that is signalled in its all-encompassing dome, focused as it was on its pope and its strong sense of hierarchical coordination over its widespread network of churches. About the Third Rome, having accepted the Orthodox faith from Byzantine missionaries, it knew how to keep the promise of an eventual revelation of St Sophia's full meaning. But, still, that will continue for many centuries to be hidden in the architecture of its churches and the symbolic sophiology of its celebrations, either around the figure of the *Theotokos* (prefiguring creaturely Sophia), or Christ (prefiguring divine Sophia): they both represent the Wisdom of God. That which was conceived in Hellenism and made manifest in Christianity stands in need of a new conceptual impulse in order to reinvigorate Holy Tradition and to bring it newly in line with the spirit of catholicity that constitutes its divinely inspired mission. Retrospectively situating epiphanic experience of his visit, he conjugates his intuition of Byzantine theology's inability to penetrate the mystery of *Hagia Sophia* with the sophiological ideas cultivated by Soloviev and Florensky and gradually liberated from Jacob Boehme's gnostic acceptance of it and its workings in the philosophical idealism of Hegel and Schelling. At bottom, it took Russian genius, resourced "from holy tradition, which silently pervades the whole history of the Eastern Church,"²⁶ not only to enhance and enlarge Christian Hellenism, but also to safeguard the essence of the Christian faith in modern times, namely, that which concerns Divine humanity. Sophiology provides a renewed perspective of the theandric shape of the course of history that is essential to the Christian worldview. Again. "As the dome of St. Sophia in Constantinople with prophetic symbolism portrays heaven bending to earth, so the Wisdom of God itself is spread like a canopy over our sinful though still hallowed world."²⁷

As *Unfading Light* demonstrates, much of what he thinks about the sophianicity of the created world is indicative of the active mediating presence, Sophia, realizing the bond between the uncreated and the created. In other words, the idea had been already meditated upon before the visit to *Hagia Sophia*. For example, "Occupying the place *between* God and the world, Sophia abides between being and super-being, she is neither the one nor the other, or both at once."²⁸ In this work, her function as mediatrix acquires various attributes: as a Platonic *metaxu*, as the Angel of the creature, as the exterior expression of Divine love, as *natura*

²⁶ Ibid., 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 219.

naturans and base for *natura naturata*, as Eternal Feminine where the mysteries of the world abide, and the like. In sum, they represent attempts to situate the reality of sophianic experience as an articulating energy. Some twenty years later, at the time of his ecclesiastical trial, he is able to provide in the *Outline* a rounded-out account of what he means sophiology as theological support for the dogmas defined by the seven Great Ecumenical Councils and the Orthodox readings of the *Theotokos* and the Church. The notions coming, strictly speaking, from non-Orthodox sources would be, as far as he is concerned, properly transmuted and made compatible with the Orthodox faith. It seems on the face of it that non-Orthodox sources in the West should not be exempted from this possibility as long as it speaks to what is already available in Holy Tradition, which would necessarily include the Scriptures, composed under authority of the Old Covenant and revealed in the fullness their meaning in the New. The trilogies aim to bring this out in function to the providential actions of heavenly sent (or wrought) persons constitutive of the sophianic inner form that ultimately define the way to salvation and to the new heavenly and earthly creation.

Bulgakov thus finds Byzantine theology wanting in its understanding of the depths of meaning contained in the architecture of the *Sophia*. The transformed sophiology of Germanic origins, once successfully made compatible with Orthodox doctrine, can find true home in the Wisdom literature of the Bible. Bulgakov will advocate consistently for sophianicity's presence in the created order and is, thereby, accessible to all of humankind and in the cultural productions, manifesting yearning for the divine everywhere awaiting for inspired Scripture to put them aright. As we have seen just above, the mediating factor would be the Russian experience of having, on the one hand, assimilated the Byzantine mode of thought and the achievements of what Florovsky calls "Christian Hellenism," and, on the other, assimilated the idea of divine Sophia, emerging in the origins of transcendental thought of Germanic thinkers, who themselves did not have the conceptual means to grasp the full dimensions of Holy Wisdom. What we have is a curious analogue between the Russia and Israel: as the "Church of Israel" was to instruct the nations in true wisdom in anticipation of the Advent of God's Anointed One, the Church of Russia is to instruct the nations in the fullness of that wisdom as the Church of the Anointed One who is God and whose Kingdom is at hand.²⁹ The

²⁹ In Rowan Williams' reflection on "Bulgakov and Anti-Semitism" at the end of his work dedicated to Bulgakov's political theological, the former

plenitude of such a mission in its thoroughgoing catholicity can only be expressed in an Orthodox theology capable of integrating into itself meaning of *Hagia Sophia*.

Developing his sophiological theology alongside Christian Hellenism, he had already had his return-to-the-Fathers moment around thirty years before the Parisian interest in the *ressourcement* of theology. The question for the moment is that of the experience of the *Hagia Sophia* and the envisioning of furthering of Christian Hellenism through the divine energies communicated through, for example, the Church of Israel, or the modern philosophical investigations that announce the presence of the irreducible "I" in personhood and in the immanence of the Trinity. Human creative activity presupposes the sophianicity of creation can be open to a synergetic participation in the source of Life which is self-giving. Human cultural efforts can be revelatory and may reflect of that which is made known to mankind in Scripture and, thus, capable of finding its place in Holy Tradition. The Hellenic sense of the wholeness need not be compromised. On the contrary, it could be enhanced. Moreover, the call to creativity appears impoverished as a notion if it does not involve transmuting in the light of divine Wisdom that which is given to be thought and acted upon in accordance with revealed content for the sake of salvation and Life itself.

Bulgakov is a visionary. He describes himself as having epiphanic experiences that enlarge and points beyond the horizon of what is visibly before him and into the invisible in its fullness. What is seen and temporal engages that which encompasses it. Bulgakov sets his "sights" onto eschatological reality of divine Wisdom, expressive of the kenotic God and the promise of the transformative energies, like the dome of the *Hagia Sophia*, who is apocalyptically to come. Again, "An ocean of light pours in from above and dominates the whole space below – it enchants, convinces, as it seems to say: I am in the world and the world in me." It is the prefiguration of the Lord's Second Coming in Parousia,

Archbishop brings up the issue of the participation of assimilated Jews in the Bolshevik revolution. Bulgakov warns about anti-Semitic revenge on the part of Christians. But what interests us here is the distinctiveness of Russia and Israel as peoples of destiny that Bulgakov sees in them and the promise of their eventual coming together. Transmitting Bulgakov's thinking, Williams says, "[there will a creative period in history] if Russia and Israel can find how to live together: no other people is destined for religious creativity to the degree that Russia is, yet Israel remains the sole chosen race. In their symbiosis we may look for a new vision of Christ, and a recovery of the spiritual roots of Christianity," 296-97.

of heaven bending to earth. Hence, Bulgakov's most insistent prayer that is both the last lines of the last book of the New Testament and of his last, as well as greatest, work, *The Bride of the Lamb*: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come! Even so, come, Lord Jesus." This is the ultimate apocalyptic prayer in anticipation of the eschaton. Bulgakov looks over the edge of the visible and the dying and onto an excess of reality that is hoped for. Still, it is open to be grasped and experienced through linguistic and liturgical symbolic expression, structured around divinely inspired Scripture and the historical establishing of covenants with a chosen people. Faith engenders faithfulness and faithfulness the light, leading mind and will to contemplate the inner-connected reality of Divine Humanity that has come and will come again.

Death and Dying

Many commentators who review Bulgakov's early life refer to his long acquaintance with death. It starts with the fact that his father was priest-in-charge of a cemetery church. So, he was constantly present at funerals and burial services. He also saw many of his siblings die at a young age. Thus, from early on, he was able to deal with death in a way that it was permeated with Orthodox religiosity. From what we have already seen, Bulgakov acquired the habit of meditating on the key events of life that were significant marks in his becoming aware of divine presence. These influenced his theological vision and the mission that he conceived for it.

The death of a son, still a young child, in 1909, a year after the third experience of his conversion, set him decisively on the course of life in the Church. Evtuhov's account of the importance that this death had on Bulgakov is significant: "More than any purely intellectual discovery or political experience, the boy's death became a critical landmark in Bulgakov's spiritual return to the church."³⁰ Given his disposition for radicality and maximalism, returning to the Church would entail the creative resolution of his own ongoing positioning as an "intelligent" with his populist sympathies. He believed that, in the Church, the Russian faithful could be guided into the all-embracing reality of ecclesial wisdom:

³⁰ Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sick: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890-1920*, 133.

Together with the church I took into my soul the Russian people, not from without, as some sort of object for worship and exhortation, but from within, as my own being, *one* with me. There is no popular and, so to speak, popularising element than the church, precisely because there *is* no 'people', there is only the church, one for all and uniting everyone.³¹

In other words, wherever the Church is, she proclaims that God is and will be all in all. In the mean-time of history, while she anticipates the Kingdom yet to come, she serves as a remembrance of the communal spirit of the early Church, celebrating at once her Lord's enthronement with the Father and invisible presence amongst them.

The death of Ivashechka would thus reinforce this strong sense of communion and inter-connectedness of created reality with the divine. The language used to describe the experience of his son's funeral recalls that used in his vision of *Hagia Sophia* a decade so later "[...] paradise waiting only to bend over you, to stand guard over your grave," but also that attributed to Vladimir's delegates in middle Byzantium times "The liturgy was proceeding. I do not know where it took place, on heaven or on earth... 'Escorted invisibly by angelic ranks ...' "³² In *Unfading Light*, he inserts the account of the funeral while arguing for the special character of religious experience as that which leaves all other evidence behind in regard to the certitude that remains with the one who has it. It is -he says- akin to the experience of the prophets: when the Lord "spoke," communicating to their hearts a word sounding "louder than all the thunders of the world, more convincing and trustworthily than [their] whole understanding."³³ More acutely than the other epiphanic events that we have noted, this one took him more explicitly into the mystery of Christ, whereby dying constitutes the path to a reawakening to something of extraordinary depth about love. Finding himself in a place that is beyond understanding, yet – like Job and Abraham before him – accepting it in faith, God spoke to him with clarity in the darkness of his soul's abandonment to the Father's will.

³¹ Ibid., 24.

³² Also, "Your mother fell down with a scream: 'The heavens have opened!' She thought that she was dying and seeing heaven [...] and heaven was opened, in it our apocalypse was accomplished" (Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 14-5).

³³ Ibid., 14.

For the only time in my life I understand what it means *to love* not with a human, self-loving, and mercenary love, but with the divine love with which Christ loves us. It was as if the curtain separating me from others fell and all of the gloom, bitterness, offense, animosity, and suffering in their hearts was revealed to me.³⁴

Bulgakov's personal passion, expressed *in memoriam* of his son's falling asleep, aligns his thoughts and feelings with the kenotic character of the trihypostatic God, a divine suffering beyond measure in comparison to us, yet still comparable in the transformative sacrifice bearing glory and robbing death of its victory. Reminded of Saint Paul's being taken up to the third heaven, he rose above the interestedness of the reciprocity of human love to have a prophet's perception of Christ/ God's love for a fallen human race which He has come to save. The curtain was taken away at that moment and, as the heavens opened, he had a vision that gave him the fullest possible grasp of the oneness of humanity before God. The conviction of universality had already been cultivating from the time of his Marxist convictions, then through the mediation of these in idealist philosophies, and finally in his reengagement with the Christian faith. Now, God spoke to him at the same time that the boy was speaking to him. He came to the realisation of how it was that God spoke to the prophets: "I knew then with ultimate certitude that God spoke to me and thus he spoke to the prophets as well. [Recognising the difference of status, nevertheless,] as a creature I and a prophet are the same thing, and he speaks to the creature."³⁵

So, God spoke to him; the divine (Sophia) reaches down to embrace his created person (Sophia). The heavens opened and he was allowed to see, in accordance with the grace given him, what the prophets saw when God spoke to them: He reveals His purposes to His lost people and the extent to which He is to go to save creation by placing it in the order of the uncreated. The invisible abundance of Absolute self-giving Life makes itself known as an articulate originating presence in the form of a word, calling all to salvation. The prophets hear the word for future reference, as it were. Once chosen and called out from the midst of worldly distractions, the prophet's life consists in attentive hearing to receive the word that speaks to him and in him for edification of others capable of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 14-15.

listening to inspired speech. For these, the heavens open, visible reality is briefly transfigured and revealed (in its sophianicity) for what it is in the mind of the Creator God.

Still within *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov inserts yet another account contributing to his conversion and that has also to do with the theme of death. This one complements the opening up of the heavens with a paeon to Matter-mother: "Great mother, damp earth! In you we are born, by you we are nourished, we touch you with our feet, and we are turned back into you." But, at the same time, "Mother earth! From you that flesh was born which became the womb for the incarnated God, from you he took his most pure Body."³⁶ Against this thematic background, he recalls receiving a notice from the "Land" of his birth that a female member of his family was to be laid to rest.³⁷ He returned straightaway to his home village church, accompanied the prayers and procession to the grave, and duly tossed some earth on the lid onto the coffin: "The Great Mother opened her womb to receive her."³⁸

Years later, Bulgakov faced his own death as one afflicted with cancer and having to endure operations attempting to deal with it. A second operation took place during Holy Week and fits in with Christ's Passion. Death did not happen, but the dying gave him a taste of God forsakenness that Christ knew, a plunging "into a kind of darkness" and "the shadow of death."³⁹ And like Christ, love for humankind persisted in his soul undergoing torture: "A man cannot die except in the state of God-forsakenness, just as the universal man, the new Adam, could not die in his God-manhood. I knew Christ was in my dying, I felt his nearness [...]. He could only help me in my suffering and dying with me."⁴⁰ Christ is the hypostatic manifestation of the universal/ particular, God-man, whose own dying is paradigmatic of what means for a human being to be dying; His divine nature weakening, that is, God-forsaken, as His flesh was dying. The entire experience, on the one hand, speaks of the radical *kenosis* implied in the Incarnation, His thorough identification with the human condition: "Death approached him in his humanity. And his dying was the agony of all human agonies.

³⁶ Ibid., 191-92.

³⁷ Though not explicitly identified, the deceased is likely his mother: "I prostrated myself before [the grave], this bright and sacred object, overshadowed by the farewell blessing, like a trembling boy on the breast of his mother" (Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 192).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pain, James, and Zernov Nicolas (eds.), *Bulgakov: A Bulgakov Anthology* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock, 1976), 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

In its humanity it was natural, i.e., it was not lightened by being merged with the divine power.”⁴¹ However, on the other, these moments of illumination could be read back into the lively perception of what Christ endured as He died. In other words, the dying Christian can understand himself, even then, as experientially knowing Christ in His longsuffering and as participating with Him in creation’s “groaning and yearning” for the wholeness of salvation. And even here, in recalling Saint Paul’s exclamation of creation’s inherent responsiveness to the call to salvation, Bulgakov remembers to bring into view the intrinsic liveliness of the cosmos.

Clearly, Bulgakov can only speak with precision about the experience of his dying that he was able to recall. However, in the specific case of Bulgakov and given the series of epiphanic experiences that has led him deeper and deeper into the Christian conception of the fullness of life, the mystery of dying and death have been partially revealed and hold out the promise of good things still to come.

[Belief in immortality] can become something self-evident, not admitting even question or doubt, for those who have come to know eternal life within the limits of this world, for those who have encountered God in the life of the spirit, for those who have experienced through love a revelation of death. However, in both cases death represents a *transcensus* into another life, one which remains largely unknown to us.⁴²

Thus, the same confidence is attained by those immersed in the life of prayer, namely, those whose knowledge comes from devotion and sacrificial love. Here again, a first-person experience (I, we) constitutes the primary factor in postulating the conviction that death must be situated in relation to an antecedent and superabundant Life. Clearly, from a purely critical third-person perspective, death is quite literally problematic, namely, looked upon as an irresolvable “problem:” all that can be said is that death happens to living things and human beings are no exception. That which had been alive but is now without life can appear as a phenomenon in the space/ time dimensions of the cosmos. The scientific positivism that critical epistemology encourages eventually resolves the problem with the thesis of annihilation of life in the face of death. Physical nature would constitute, in this

⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

⁴² Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 349.

case, the backdrop for all living reality. Such radical naturalism that runs contrary to Bulgakov's experience and the philosophical theology that he carefully comes to articulate in relation to it.⁴³

For Bulgakov as he presents it more systematically in *The Bride of the Lamb*, the very *possibility* of death is inscribed in the idea of divine creation *ab nihilo*. God, in the act of creating out of nothing did so by establishing this nothing as a condition for creation. From it, He brings forth that which is to have temporal and spatial existence, namely, that which is subject to becoming (*me on*) and is meant to fulfil its place in the created order. Thus, logically, In God's creative freedom, the *condition qua non* for the emergence created being is the postulating from within God's Life a non-being that, in itself, does not have the power of being, but does necessarily accompany all things created. As such, the nothingness of non-being does not denote death with a power of its own, for it is originally complicit with life-giving acts of creation which did not contemplate death as annihilation, but merely as a state of life, i.e., death must be understood on the basis of life and not vice versa. Death should not be contemplated as more than an expected consequence of man's mortality. "Man was not originally created for death, the natural *possibility* of immortality was implanted in him."⁴⁴

Human being is grounded in divine life and it is to this life that it is connaturally inclined as its rightful telos. In a fundamental sense, man cannot die, *non posse mori*. However,

⁴³ The Roman Catholic author, associated with existentialism, Gabriel Marcel, offers a useful distinction between "problem" and "mystery": problem as that which can be dealt with at a critical distance; mystery as that with which we are at once immediately involved, and involves us. Death can be empirically acknowledged in a dead body, but *our* death is a mystery, the meaning of which remains hidden; it cannot be objectified, just as it cannot be avoided. Nevertheless, it can be faced with "creative fidelity," consisting of decisive acts that contribute to the attainment of personal freedom, fully realised in relation to the living God, whose reality is ontologically excessive in relation to objectifications of all sorts. This could describe, from another perspective, at least this aspect of Bulgakov's engagement with the mystery and promise of death. But also from a Western source, Michel Henry's reversed phenomenology is built around the primacy of self-giving Absolute Life and has much that is compatible with Orthodox thinking. See my, "Saint Gregory Palamas' Critique of the 'Mind-out-of-Body' in the Contemporary Purview of Michel Henry's Reversed Phenomenology," in *Orthodox Mysticism and Asceticism: Philosophy and Theology in St Gregory Palamas' Work*, ed. Constantinos Athanansouplos (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2020), 120-41.

⁴⁴ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 350.

through sin and with the weakening of his natural psychophysical equilibrium, a contrary tendency, *non posse non mori*, has gained a foothold and death constitutes a constant threat to human being. Thus, the conviction about the insuperability of death goes *pari passu* with the debilitating of the complex ontological composition of man to face death as an act of life as not more than that; in death, the energy that ought to exist is not absent, but paralysed. And yet, in this *transcensus* from height to fallenness, death has become at once a source of spiritual horror and despondency, coexisting with bodily suffering and weariness derived from the ills of having a corruptible body. Again, just as is necessary to contemplate death in reference to divine life that is all-embracing, a full understanding of fallen human condition appears in the light of the Resurrection of the Incarnate Word, establishing the unity of life, whereby the uncreated source of the human soul and the created body that is extensive to the cosmos remain interconnected in incarnate personhood. In this way, the immortality that human being can attain is one that, “encompasses both death and resurrection. Both the one and the other, accomplished in Christ and in Him, in all humankind, have so to speak, their ontological place in human nature, fully assumed by the Lord in His incarnation.”⁴⁵

Bulgakov offers, thus, a metaphysics for a proper appreciation of death. Its appearance within life does not constitute failure on God’s part but can be attributed to the micro-cosmic character of human being – very different and ultimately richer than that of bodiless angels. Man is “God-earth, an incarnate godlike spirit.”⁴⁶ The unique status of human being in creation leads Bulgakov to extend his metaphysical conjectures to the post-death conditions of existence upon the provisional separation of the soul (which retains life) from the perishing body. “The spirit *lives* beyond the grave by virtue of its immortality and the divine energy that it has [...].”⁴⁷ No longer impeded by corporeality in its fallen state, the human soul in its spiritual-psychic state awakes to the spiritual world that it once shared with the angels. However, the yearning to achieve reunion with the psychic-corporeal being, once enjoyed in the created earthly order, persists and the task consists henceforth “to go to the end of himself, not only in mortal life, but also in the afterlife state” to the achieve full resurrected life and full realization of true humanity.⁴⁸ Understood, going to the end of oneself involves

⁴⁵ Ibid., 355.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 352.

⁴⁷ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 362.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 359.

self-judgment, renewed self-knowledge and utter responsibility for our actions in the presence of God. In other words, experience continues ongoingly and self-knowledge increases with repentance and in accordance with the (now) inevitable knowledge of God Himself.

Bulgakov's defense of the final recapitulation (*apokatastasis*) of the entirety of all creation in God, who will be all in all, follows Saint Gregory Nyssa's lead this matter of universal salvation. The principle in operation is that judgment is not only a matter of retribution but a life as a continuum extending from this side of death and then still unfolding in the afterlife as souls are receiving Christ's teaching. The telos is always salvation for that which the Creator God conceived for and placed in the created order. "The main significance of the afterlife consists in living out of the fullness of life to the end as a preparation for the universal resurrection and a continuation to the fullness of the sophianicity of creation."⁴⁹ In the end as in the beginning, the being of creation, drawn from nothing by divine will, carries with it the intent of divine Sophia for universal communion.

At the heart of Bulgakov's rationale for why it is that *non posse mori* is his recourse to the Pauline (and patristic) tripartite anthropology: *pneuma/ psyche/ soma*. In the intermediate stage of afterlife, it is granted that the body does perish so that the first expression of immortality resides in the intimate bond between the spirit and the soul, being mindful however that the soul was hitherto embodied. (From the point of view of the body, it is equally correct to say that it is ensouled as long as it has it is alive). This affirms an ontological continuity between the soul and the created order of the material world and, through it, the spirit abides in both. Therefore, it is not merely the case of human being having an uncreated, divine dimension alongside of a created, bodily one. From the supra-physical energy of the spirit to the perspectives opened up in the created world through the economy of human endeavour, a vital connection is realized. In this as well, humankind differs from the angels: "No human spirit can exist independently of the world"⁵⁰ and the bonds it necessarily has with corporeality is not abrogated with death but, through the bodily Resurrection of Christ, can be restored and continued. With Christ's assumption of the entirety of human nature, even its death, in His Incarnation, the intended ontological condition of human being is thus recreated.

⁴⁹ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 375.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 355.

Through the lens of Christ's death and Resurrection for the salvation and life of the world, namely, the destroying of death by death, the disorder of the fallen world, namely, that pertaining to *non posse non mori*, is turned aright: death is hereby known as an act that takes place in the infinitely larger reality of Life, revealed as intimately related to self-giving love, unceasingly realised within the immanence of the Tri-hypostatic God and communicated to the creation brought forth through His kenotic action of Trinity. Concerning the extent of the redemptive action, Bulgakov reminds us of Christ's *descensus* into Sheol as indicative of the extent to which God who is love does indeed go to restore salvation to all. The issue now is the "all" of those save. The response is noteworthy:

In the afterlife, there is no place for anything that is not Christian, even among non-Christians, although, of course, each individual receives the revealed redemption differently, depending on his freedom. It is necessary to add to this the power of the Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, reposing upon the Son during His earthly life and in His Resurrection, and annihilating hell by the 'radiance of divinity'. The doors of hell are powerless to impede access to the 'rushing wind' (Acts 2:2) of the Pentecost and the appearance of the 'tongues of fire.'⁵¹

The effects of the Pentecostal out-pouring of grace knows no bounds and, while acknowledging varied destinies of the members of the human race, the God of all sees them as one. Moreover, each one is destined to experience abandonment at the hour of death and will endure the afterlife as part of the unfinished business of universal salvation. Once again, the same continuum of life extends from earthly existence through death and into the next dimension of being where changes in individuals can effectively occur as they rise above their fallen condition. In sum, judgement and retribution are not finally a matter of pure passivity, but a process of change and the degree of preparation to receive godlikeness in accordance with an individual's personal logos, or theme: "Man's sophianicity is manifested not only in life, but also in death, in the world on this side, as the general and unique theme of his being."⁵² All of which suggests that the afterlife involves a constant striving in consonance with a specific calling into being, each to his own for glory of all in Christ.

⁵¹ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 371-72.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 375.

In sum, the place that death has in Bulgakov's theological investigations has long roots in his family history. But it was the death of his young son that brought him more deeply into mystery of death as an act of life. Already inclined from the time of his ties to Marxist theory to think in terms of humankind as a whole, he embraced communion as fundamental to the Christian Church's teaching of life on earth and in the hereafter, along with the hope that all human being who passes through godforsaken-ness in the experience of death, i.e., in accordance with the Cross and its overcoming of death, will in the end be made worthy of salvation.

Conclusion

Advancing the case for Bulgakov's Christian theology with striking assertiveness some fifteen years ago, Milbank considered that, alongside Henri de Lubac, Bulgakov, is "one of the two truly great theologians of the twentieth century."⁵³ Closer to our time, in a piece, dealing positively with Bulgakov, he continues thus, "A the dawn of the twenty-first century, it increasingly appears that perhaps the most significant theology of the two preceding centuries has been that of the Russian sophiological tradition."⁵⁴ And, of course, Bulgakov eminently represents this promise for him. Finally, and equally germane to our subject, Milbank very recently raised the level of his estimation of Bulgakov's place in the theological enterprise from the limits of the last century to the entirety of modernity.

[Christian philosophy as he conceives it] is a reflection on Christian 'myths' and 'dogmas' – in the sense of primordial written language or cognitive reflections that have been liturgically acquired such a collective status. He is arguably the very greatest modern theologian just because he realized, like the Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin, that the only real Christian theologian is the one who directly assumes the philosophical task in the light of the Holy Scriptures.⁵⁵

⁵³ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2005), 104.

⁵⁴ John Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon," in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, eds. Adrian Pabst, and Christoph Schneider (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 46.

⁵⁵ John Milbank, "Foreword, 'From Grammar to Wisdom,'" in Sergius Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)*, trans. Stephen Churchyard (Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2020), xxi.

What Milbank says in this passage taken from his Foreword, “From Grammar to Wisdom” to the English translation of *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)* accurately describes how Bulgakov goes about his theological investigations and, possibly, about Bulgakov’s ultimate worth.

Milbank clearly means to promote Bulgakov as one of the high points of theological culture that, even in the West, deserves recognition, or, eventually, must simply come around to having it. However, in underscoring the experiential groundings of Bulgakov’s literary production, we have wished to accentuate the import of these personal revelations that contributed to the eschatological vision that characterizes his thinking. “The three calls,” the visits to *Hagia Sophia*, and his moving reflections on death and dying, such revelations are constitutive of his faith, they are apocalyptic disclosures, whereby “the future [is] deposited in the present, but it is not limited by this, for it contains the revelation about what God does with the world through his providential agency and his omnipotence.”⁵⁶ It matters much that Bulgakov does not treat these matters merely as dogmatic concepts to be contemplated abstractly; what he has to say implies ontological participation with that which was simply but decisively given to him such that those who would eventually encounter his writings know about these experiences and to learn from them, *along with* the extensive, multi-layered meditation on the simultaneity of the Divine and creaturely sophianic orders, a sophio-logic existing between the heavenly and the earthly. To this suggestion, we might finally add: *along with* his conviction that the mystery of human destiny is most truly played out in the history of the Church, ever exposed to trials yet sustained ultimately by the tri-hypostatic God, who is disposed to descend towards humankind, to embrace it, and communicate to it the transfiguring and deifying power that it possesses, through the divine hypostases, on behalf of all and for all.

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⁵⁶ Bulgakov, *Unfailing Light*, 213.

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The Seen and the Unseen in Art

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Abstract: This article provides a discussion of the relationship between visible and invisible following some ideas of Jean-Luc Marion. Its main argument is that both in art and in iconography it is not the visible that offers a way of access to the invisible, but it is the invisible that makes possible the organization, the depth and, finally, the meaning of the visible. Thus, the gaze is not an instrument that follows the forms and the things of the world, but a response to the calling of the invisible that is neither recognized, nor interpreted, but still present and irreducible.

Keywords: Visible, Invisible, Gaze, Icon, Painting, Jean-Luc Marion

Introduction

In his essay about the obsolescence of man,¹ Günther Anders wrote, decades ago, that the modern man's relation to the world (to the "entire world," in fact) is mediated by images. In exchange, the word, that used to be seen by the Romantics as the genuine mirror of the world, become more and more silent. The fact that images – mostly when they overwhelm the world – constantly entail the danger of becoming a means of mind-numbing tools because, unlike texts, they fail to show the relations making up the world, and they only depict isolated pieces of it; hence, they hide the world by showing it. The above defines a "post-literary illiteracy" derived from the "global wave of images" specific to 20th-century society. Several researchers have pointed out the image abuse, the essentially iconographic character of current information. Such authors were interested in finding a code to "decipher" the current cultural products. The outcomes of these researchers may be

¹ Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Band I. Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1956).

summed up as follows: our world craves the image that “shows” and represents everything as accurately as possible without leaving anything undepicted. Man’s search must not exceed the “seen” because it already says everything. Whatever is not encompassed in an image is non-essential, illusory, and phantasmal.

Due to its sufficiency and completeness, the image – especially televised – replaces the world. A model, an emblem, thus replaces the real. Things per se are forgotten; image is all there is for the contemporary man. What is the use of thinking about the world when its images say all there is? However, Günther Anders notes that a model must meet another condition other than reliability to be “believed:” to be “sensational.” Paradoxically, the model image replacing the world is equally real and sensational. Thus, its goal is to make the “public” believe in the *sensational*. This is where lies subtly insinuate. The image lies and conceals through its essence. The essential difference between it and the world represents the game space of lies. From this moment on, the effects are all-encompassing: the manipulation power of those “ruling” the images is one of them; the isolation and gradual shutdown of man into an impersonal pattern is another example. The marginalisation of those who fail to fall into the pattern, do not believe in it, and try to be free thinkers is the most apparent sign of the total domination of the imaginary over the real world.

Retrieving the Distance

The source of the impasse is the attempt to forget the unseen, ultimately, to bestow a complete and absolute character upon those represented on screen. The rest of reality – left by the image, obviously – is completely forgotten. The invisible of the world is exiled. It is definitely one of the underlying causes for the lack of faith specific to our century.

Upon concluding this state of affairs, one problem is finding the real among the multitude of patterns structuring the culture of the time. However, given the statements above, the real becomes the equivalent of retrieving the distance separating it from the image. Finding the world in this context means retrieving the unseen, the undetectable, the infinite nuances impossible to perceive by all that is offered to the senses. The hidden dimension of things eventually saves them from the lie. Seeking the invisible becomes the foremost task of cultural soteriology. At that exact moment, though, another dimension opens, i.e., the religious one. The uttering of the unseen saves both this world and the other. The Creator and his creation are comprised within the same game of

conscience. Which brings us to the question: who takes on the task of seeking the invisible? One of the answers is art. Painting – using image par excellence – saves the image from the self-oblivion that contemporary media has thrown upon it. It is not so much painting per se but its specific reception. The gaze, the search of the eye guided by a painting or image, may restore the lost difference I mentioned in the beginning.

Anticipating, it may be stated that the spectator of a work of art must learn to see that the painting conceals and hides; the unseen supporting the things shown. Explaining the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, Martin Heidegger shows that the gaze within the Greek philosopher's allegory is directed towards what the sources of light in the cave and outside it makes visible. The eye catches what is immediately available to the sight. Subsequently, the gaze dwelling on the visible things must learn to get beyond them to reach the invisible, supporting the unconcealing. All representations of the world – regardless of their form – share this feature. Mircea Eliade – in *From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan* and more – proves that, for archaic mythologies, the epiphanies (appearances/manifestations) are always preceded by an occultation, a concealment; they also end in another concealment. It leads to a new epiphany, and so on indefinitely. The same happens with works of art: all appearances and all images are supported by something unshown; the more significant the latter, the more mysterious and valuable the work of art. Understanding an artistic creation in this context means acknowledging the presence of the unseen and, secondly, letting yourself be immersed and dominated by it, not attempting to diminish and reduce it to the “seen,” which fades in time.

The Aestheticians of the Invisible

The aim of painting is not to reproduce or abandon the visible but, as Paul Klee suggests, to “make visible the invisible,”² thus turning the latter into the true protagonist of the painting. The discovery of the concealed and mostly grasping that they provide all the visible through their essence represents the ultimate model of aesthetic contemplation. What becomes visible proves the existence of the other; the latter are those out forward and pointed out. According to Nietzsche, art “is the great means of making life

² Paul Klee, “Creative Credo,” in *The Thinking Eye. The Notebooks of Paul Klee I*, ed. Jürg Spiller (London: Humphries & Co., 1961), 76.

possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life”³ (*Posthumous*). In *The Will to Power*, the German philosopher sees, in the same spirit, art as a countermovement of the “decadence” forms of man, i.e., modern religion, morality, and philosophy. The “aestheticians of the invisible” do not contest the affirmation of life, either. To them, though, the passion of the visual takes a deviated route: to avoid self-enclosing, it must do justice to the invisible with all its mysteries and creative energies. Hence, a contemplator of the work of art acquires more freedom concerning the object of his gaze. The visible, with its forms and colours, does not limit or enforce a specific orientation once it is considered as born from the essentially free space of the invisible.

Following a suggestion made by Andrei Pleșu – according to whom the pedagogy of silence is, first and foremost, free of violence – it may be stated that the unseen or, more likely, its foresight highlights the shapes of the painting or the sequence of sounds as a game providing other alternatives, too, not exhausting the world, but only paving the way to its depths. Various works within the History of Philosophy try in their own way to do justice to the invisible in art.

Notably, Heidegger’s interpretations of Plato point out this topic. According to the Greek philosopher, the goal of forms is to announce and conceal the in-formed simultaneously. They mediate just as beauty mediates between the sensuous and the intelligible; this mediation lifts the soul from mundane things to eternal ideas. It occurs because, among those “far away,” beauty is the closest, revealed to the most “terrestrial” sense, i.e., the eye. Upon commenting on the fragments within *Phaedrus* expressing the idea, M. Heidegger states, “The beautiful is what advances most directly upon us and captivates us. While encountering us as a being, however, it at the same time liberates us to the view upon Being.”⁴ An offspring of remoteness, beauty chooses the nearest proximity as its dwelling. By loving it, we may embark on the paths of Being. Hence, eros is man’s answer to this beauty. Both the Platonic and the Christian traditions develop these ideas specifically.

Hegel may also serve as a reference point. In the prefatory remarks to his *Aesthetics Lecture*, the German philosopher shows how the origin of *aesthetics* from the Greek *aisthesis* may seem deceitful. In his aesthetics, he does not focus on the senses, the

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), 452.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume I: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 196.

investigation of the sensible, i.e., of the direct things. On the contrary, “the beauty of art is beauty born of the spirit and born again, and the higher the spirit and its productions stand above nature and its phenomena, the higher too is the beauty of art above that of nature.”⁵ Hegel continues, “spirit is alone the true, comprehending everything in itself, so that everything beautiful is truly beautiful only as sharing in this higher sphere and generated by it.”⁶ Thus, for Hegel, artistic beauty acquires its nobility by referencing the spirit – concealed in their appearance and supporting them from a higher point. Hence, the unseen spiritual movement dominates the artistic object by mysteriously suggesting visible forms, colours, or sounds. This time, too, the unseen is the one that sets in motion the gaze to provide meaning to the directly depicted things.

In the same context, it is worth noting Bergson, for whom aesthetic contemplation is a way to live the connection between the intimacy of the world, the individual and unrepeatable creative evolution, and the surface of things (categorisable and discursively identifiable).

In this case, Bergson’s philosophical ideas include that beauty is one of the appearances taken by the depths of the world. It is provided by intuition – in our case, aesthetic intuition – penetrating beyond the world of senses and reason to detect directly (through unmediated experience) the hidden background of things. This time, too, an artistic work aims to depict the invisible. The lines traced by the painter are mere support facilitating the passage to the “other side,” the silent field of essences. Thus, the infinite, the unseen, reassert their presence. At the same time, the visible things only now acquire genuine value.

The examples provided above can represent a foundation for a new philosophy of the image freeing the end of times from the tyranny of the visible.

By recognising – behind each painting or photograph – the existence of an inexpressible *rest* that supports the expressible, it is possible to show the world its richness and the irreducibility to patterns or simulacrum.

This reform in the way of looking at an image leads to a better relation to the real and even to the image itself. Iconoclasm – as another attitude generated by the excess of the image – does not represent only an early ecclesiastical attitude. The abstract

⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art I*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 2.

⁶ Ibid.

painting of our century – through the categorical marginalisation of the forms reminding the world – is the same thing, essentially. Thus, we may find a common point in that – from both positions – we try to find an “absolute” beyond the world, for which visible forms can only be inadequate.

*The Invisible revealed in the Visible*⁷

Understanding the game that intertwines the visible and invisible and reducing the latter within the painting, the work of art, in general, may restore the lost dignity of the image. Together, they also solve the problem of accessibility of the unworldly. Jean-Luc Marion's attempt seems exemplary from this perspective.

In his writing *The Crossing of the Visible*, the French philosopher indicates two ways of the invisible revealed in the visible. The first way is the one of perspective, which “in its own way, also provokes a paradox. Rather, it imitates the paradox by inverting the relation it has established between the visible and the invisible. (...) The paradox offers a counter-appearance, while perspective suggests a breakthrough of the gaze. The paradox poses a visible that belies the visible.”⁸ The paradox perspective exceeds and contradicts the visible. The gaze seeks the void in its contemplation. However, as J. L. Marion notes, not the dazzling vacuum of the absence of things but the void making their elevation possible. Upon analysing a painting such as *The Marriage of the Virgin* by Raphael, the French philosopher notes that the sky framed by a door of the building (not the real sky that is painted usually among others as an element of the decor but an ideal, abstract sky) supports and provides a space to “play” for all the objects of the painting. “The visible is able to reduce itself since the invisible – the space of the sky encased by the door which is opened onto and by nothing – enables it to be in the open space.”⁹ It is the invisible in the painting that provides reality to the visible of lines and colours. However, the sky is not the one bringing the

⁷ The next two sections were partially published in “Ce este de văzut,” *Teologie și filosofie între Orient și Occident. Actele simpozionului internațional organizat de Centrul „Sfinții Petru și Andrei” și Academia Catolică Val de Seine*, eds. Iulian Dancă, Jean-François Petit, Lucian Dîncă (Târgu-Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2020), 45-57, and „Eros and Charity: On Seeing the Other,” in *Phenomenologies of Love* (Leiden et. al.: Brill, under press).

⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

imperceptible in the painting; the potential imaginary lines to be traced fulfil this role (e.g., *Lamentation of Christ* by Dürer).

Without these elements “opening” things to the unseen, the gaze of the one contemplating the painting gets tangled in an overwhelming and unreal world due to the agglomeration of the forms within its composition. The invisible renders authentic what can be perceived by the senses, not their mere perception. A painting is all the more “masterful” as the suggestion of the ineffable discovers the traces of things better.

As seen by J. L. Marion in his observations, the treatment of the work of art suggests another phenomenon discussed by the French philosopher, i.e., the revelation. At the beginning of a 2001 conference on the pericope describing the encounter on the road to Emmaus, Marion asks, “Why do we believe so strongly in God Our Father and so little in Christ?” The solution provided by the French philosopher may be understood starting from a strange type of phenomenological object, i.e., *the saturated phenomenon*, which should make visible what could not be objectified.¹⁰

Following Kant’s scheme of constituting the phenomena, the saturated phenomenon becomes, in fact, possible as intuition overflows the conceptual frameworks of the intellect, “according to quantity, invisible phenomena; according to quality, phenomena the look cannot bear; according to relation, absolute phenomena; finally, according to modality phenomena that cannot be looked at.”¹¹

The one who “receives” the phenomenon in such a manner receives it with the implied vagueness given that the intellect fails to order the data of the intuition. Experiencing the phenomenon this way actually means experiencing an inability, making clear the experience of one’s finitude. The subject receives a “pure donation” without being able to describe anything in its field. Thus, the donating intuition of the phenomenon manifests itself in its entire purity and completeness, unrestricted by the conceptual limits inherent to the subject. The “paradox” of such a relationship is apparent in reversing the relation between the *phenomenon* and the ego.

In the case of the classic phenomenon, dependence is clearly expressed in the idea of constituting the phenomenon into a subject.

¹⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” in *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: the French debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 176.

¹¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner, and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 112.

The structures of the cogito provided the phenomenon with one form or another. In the case of saturated phenomena, though, the ratio changes: far from constituting the phenomenon, the ego perceives it constitutes it.¹² The ego is staggered by the intuitive overflow of the phenomenon. The latter precedes and cannot be included in an intellectual setting. The saturated phenomenon uses the subject to show itself, to tell its truth but does not accept being reduced to it. The phenomenon, in general, can only be completed, as such, through a limit-case: appearance only starts from itself in this case. Furthermore, the ego itself can be understood as starting with the saturated phenomenon, which realises, on the one hand, its finitude and, on the other, its constitutive possibilities. Such an “appearance that is purely of itself and starting from itself, that does not subject its possibility to any preliminary determination”¹³ is called, according to Jean-Luc Marion, *revelation*. The invisible, as the onlooker’s inability to understand or speak about what he sees, plays a fundamental, even constitutive, role in the revelation. Such an example is the theophany, where an inconceivable “invisible gaze” ultimately envisages and loves me.

The Invisible Gaze

The issue of interpreting the episode of the road to Emmaus can thus be clarified, along with the answer to the initial question raised by Jean-Luc Marion in the conference mentioned earlier. The sight of the Risen Saviour and His reconnaissance as Christ is in a principled inconsistency. The revelation of the Risen Christ occurring in Emmaus is a relevant case of a theophany – essentially, a saturated phenomenon. Jean-Luc Marion shows that the disciples’ certitude regarding the identity of the Risen makes it impossible to adjust the exemplary donation phenomenologically. Christ appears (gives Himself) in excess of intuition and free of intellectual limitations. Once the latter tries to dominate the donating intuition, the donation itself disappears. The finite egos of the disciples cannot encompass the infinite. The encounter featured in the pericope above is an example of a meeting between the subject and the saturated phenomenon.

The answer to Marion’s initial question becomes apparent: faith – the French philosopher notes – does not overcompensate for a “deficit of evidence,” but it makes an excess bearable. It replaces the intellectual receptivity incapable of coping with the

¹² Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” 210.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 215.

overwhelming intuition. Unlike God the Father, Christ is always at the origin of an overwhelming revelation; hence, it always requires faith from the faithful. And sometimes the need to believe is overwhelming and tested, as we know well: Peter's apostasy is such an example.

Thus, revelation is a privileged example of how the invisible and the "unseeable" can dominate and structure the entire field of the visible. The case is very particular: concerning the paintings, as Jean-Luc Marion states in another place, the visible remains the spectacle's protagonist. Though it references the "beyond", another world, his gaze remains possible. Concerning the theophany, as we have seen, the gaze is, by definition, helpless. The two cases presented above are at the two extremes of the visible and invisible relationship.

An intermediary case, edifying through its complexity and capacity to reunite contrary solutions, is the icon. In *The Saturated Phenomenon*, it is defined as "a particular face that I love, which has become invisible not only because it dazzles me, but above all because in it I want to look and can look only at its invisible gaze weighing on mine."¹⁴

The icon (an encounter of the crossing gazes, as I will detail later) is a particular way in which the invisible does not violently refuse the visible. Still, it also does not leave it immovable.

The permissiveness of its unseen and its discretion justifies, on the one hand, the dispute around the icon. However, the fundamental role acquired by a significant part of the Christian tradition can also be explained starting with the particular embodiment of the ineffable into stone or wood.

The icon depicts a face every time. Moreover, not the lines within it count, but the *gaze* of the onlooker. Whereas not represented graphically, the saint's gaze makes an icon what it is, for a faithful prays, and, as he looks at the icon, his prayer becomes an address as undetectable as the saint's gaze. "The painted gaze invisibly responds to the invisible gaze of the one in prayer, and transfigures its own visibility by including it in the commerce of two invisible gazes – the one from a praying man, taken through the painted icon, to look upon an invisible saint, the other the gaze of the invisible saint covered with benevolence, visible through the painted icon, looking upon the one in prayer."¹⁵ The colours and lines of the icon mediate the surprising encounter between the two "invisible." Without them, the face-to-face encounter between God

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 20.

and man searches for other vehicles to manifest itself. The inner voice and the voice heard in prayer are also places of encounter. However, the specificity of the icon resides in immediateness, which may also lead to contrary phenomena. Christ's face, as seen in the icons, is sought more likely through his gaze, and when it is absent (i.e., the invisible of the prayer does not receive an answer), faith is shattered. Looking at *Christ dead* by Hans Holbein, prince Mishkin exclaims: "Why, that picture might make some people lose their faith!"¹⁶ The empty gaze and the cadaveric hues of the Son of Man strike the one who looks at the painting mentioned above. Any prayers uttered when looking at it would remain unanswered, and the absence of the gaze makes it impossible for the two worlds to make contact. The painting strikes the onlooker with its cruel materiality. The excerpt from *The Idiot* shows that the physical details (i.e., the tumefied face, the open eyes, the traces of torture) are apparent to the one looking at Hans Holbein's masterpiece. The absence of the invisible gaze shades the divine into oblivion.

All study of the icon from a theological and aesthetic perspective starts with the phenomenological understanding of the gaze and its characteristics. The invisible and the infinite insinuate between those of the world, now more than in any other case of phenomenological object.

According to Marion, standing in front of an icon already means being called by it. The faithful do not focus on a saint's clothes, mouth, or gestures when looking at an icon. "Not his or her mouth, nevertheless more expressive of the intentions than other parts of the body, but the eyes—or more exactly the empty pupils of the person's eyes, their black holes open on the somber ocular hollow. In other words, in the face we fix on the sole place where precisely nothing can be seen."¹⁷ Hence, the icon concerns precisely the excess of presence that one cannot grasp, the meaningless hyperbole of the interpretation: the gaze. Invisible, non-presentable, it is outside the constitution of the cogito. Its trait as a phenomenological object is another: "The icon gives itself to be seen in that it makes me hear [understand] its call."¹⁸ The answer of the one who looks at an icon is an endless hermeneutics of the invisible gaze.

Without making up a particular meaning, the calling gaze becomes an endless history of meanings for the recipient. The excess of intuitions is the cause of invisibility, namely, a failure to make

¹⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnet (London, Melbourne, Toronto: William Heinemann, 1913), 212.

¹⁷ Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, 115.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 118-19.

oneself visible. The underlying donation is excessive, infinite, “an event, renewed without ceasing.”¹⁹ Its truth becomes a history of this renewal to be followed persistently. Hence, prayer and faith prove their eschatological dimension unequivocally.

Consequently, the gaze as a fundamental element of the icon has a paradoxical status: unseen, it calls the faithful and compels him to a never-ending answer. Thus, the visible components, constituted by the cogito, are transferred to the background and only facilitate the ineffable encounter of the two gazes. To this end, the icon’s image is “weakened” to prevent its self-sufficiency. We get an even greater insight into the “constitutive” function of the invisible within the icon due to the observations made by Marion in *The Crossing of the Visible*. The author states that all icons reference God the Father, ultimately, though he is rarely featured in Christian art. “But Christ does not offer only himself to my gaze to see and be seen; if he requires of me a love, it is a love not for him but for his Father; if he demands that I lift my eyes to him, this is not at all so that I see him, him only, but so that I might see also and especially the Father.”²⁰ Already invisible, Christ’s gaze actually suggests another level of the invisible – an invisible “prototype.”

Hence, the logic of the image is shattered. It no longer becomes a standard of the real or self-sufficient. It becomes a mere (and entirely inadequate) vehicle. In this point, both the similarity and difference concerning the painting show their power. The similarity lies in the constitutive role of invisibility, in bestowing upon the real and the representable the nobility of what goes beyond the apparent. The difference, on the one hand, is that, in the case of the painting, it is the perspective that transforms the work of art into an “un(fore)seen” climb towards the visible. In the icon, it is the gaze weakening the visible and submitting it to the unseen. The game between the two registers is still on, but the rules and requirements have changed.

However, in every example above, the visible is not self-sufficient. The unseen presence is necessary for the onlooker to perceive the work of art as such. Often, to receive it properly is precisely to make the imperceptible present by forgetting all that falls into the realm of the senses.

¹⁹ Ibid., 122.

²⁰ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 57.

Conclusion

The paradoxical nature of the artistic images reminds me of a short story by Borges titled *The Disk*. It features a bizarre object – the disk of Odin – with only one side, as per the legend. It belongs to Isern, the king of the Secgens. It is invisible but perceptible through a quick gleam. Whoever has such an item – invisible and suggested by the sun's rays – is perpetually sovereign. Indeed, power is not provided by mundane things but solely by their unexpected intertwining with what lies beyond the world.

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IN FOCUS

African Perspectives on Values and Spirituality

Ubuntu' Ethical Perspective and the Global Order

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Abstract: The world is increasingly becoming a global village and so distance and culture as markers of boundaries do not seem to be as distinctive and effective as before. Should this be a source of worry? Most human races at different times made efforts to bring humanity together with varying degrees of success. This paper tries to develop a tenable idea of Ubuntu ethical perspective for global order. As an endogenous construct for world peace, Ubuntu theory and practice requires a less emotive, politicized and more inclusive, interdependent conceptual and theoretical articulation so as to be more acceptable and defensible to friend and foe alike. To start with, antagonism from related foreign dominating worldviews raises relational and dialogical issues about the meaning of humane global order from an African viewpoint. The search for a paradigm for World Development is urgent given the real consequences of a (neo)colonial tendency has threatened the development of most countries due dominant lopsided paradigms of alienation, exploitation and marginalization within Global North- South relations. A development paradigm or philosophy of development for the world at large requires an ethical basis for human existence in political and social order. Presently, our world is beset by the problem of a negative dominant social paradigm (DSP) or core social values of hatred, intolerance, the abuse of human rights, dehumanization, exploitation, authoritarianism, poverty and oppression. So, to build a viable and stable endogenous paradigm for development we use the main pillar of interconnectedness among human beings which is central to Ubuntu as a social system and value system to underscore some desirable key moral and democratic values generally required for human liberation and transformation. The research question is: What concrete elements or values of Ubuntu can be useful as paradigms of a stable, viable and progressive world order? Specifically, our findings suggest that Ubuntu ethics is defined by a set of human values or qualitative correlates central among which are reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, emphasis on human dignity and the value of human life

as well as consensus, tolerance and mutual respect. Thus, the paper argues for a possibility utilizing ubuntu ethical correlates as materials for establishing humane sociopolitical orders worldwide.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Ethics, Communalism, Community, Human Person, Human Dignity, Moral Values

Problematising Human Nature and our common Humanity

The questions of the proper way that human beings should behave in society and how to bring humanity together remain two key issues in philosophy and have been an ancestral challenge for human society all through the ages. Philosophers, social studies scholars and governments variously tried to tackle these concerns. Humanity faces a continued struggle with human nature that reveals ancestrally negative elements such as hate, racism, colonialism, crimes, slavery, tribalism, corruption, greed, genocide, wars and other vices. These negative features of human nature oppose and contest with the positive values of man (Imagination, Virtue, Intelligence, Kindness, Choice, Will, Creativity, Humanitarianism, and so on). So, there is a struggle about the role of the human being as the primary material of the universe. Given the above situation, why ought human beings to desire a humane, cooperative and humanistic social and political order? An answer could be that in every generation men struggled with control or strength versus helplessness or weakness and so human beings sought to work together to accomplish the insurmountable or what one person found unattainable. Like the philosophers of security will say security is beauty; beauty is harmony. So family, village, clan, association, institution, city, state, amalgam, conglomerate, merger, partnership, commonwealth, country, world, and so on, were essentially efforts to identify, recognize, congregate, integrate and organize people for a higher purpose of our common humanity.

Today as always, our living together purposively in view of our common humanity is threatened by a wave of divisions, instability, disorder and insecurity arising from the fact that some negative attributes of an individual or group human nature (greed, ignorance, violence, hate, discrimination, unfair treatment, impunity, intolerance, authoritarianism and so on) can be projected into society as (corruption and bad governance, anachronism and irrational fear of the 'other', wars, hate speech, racism and ultra-ethnicity, genocide and crimes against humanity, apartheid, xenophobia, sectarianism and dictatorship, disobedience to the rule

of law, inequity in resource distribution, lack of social justice, Nazism, jihadist extremism, tyranny, siege mentality, cult of personality and abuse of power and so on).

This is life-threatening. So to curb these human excesses we beam our searchlight on some binding forces of our common humanity which promote sharing and learning of common global experiences and threats. We push an argument for a conception of cross-cultural communication, extended conversational circumstances that promote mutual cooperation. This effort in part, requires a dialogical approach that applies human relational interaction to safeguard our collective human values, survival and humanity. The modern world is increasingly becoming a global village where experiences are communicable and interactive such that an event in one region can inevitably affect other regions several thousands of kilometres away. Given such interconnections and the ensuing diversity it is clear that basic social values of mutual respect, cooperation and social justice cannot be overstated in nurturing responsible human persons and building stable viable human societies.

What is the logic or causality that drives the above analysis? The main point here is that human nature is capable of struggle and passivity, good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice. Is this paradoxical? Should we be bothered about this? Where is the value of social order or social control? We may argue that moderating the individual human nature is an arduous task that man seems equipped for using corrective mechanisms such as conscience, family values, education, laws, culture and tradition, even critical intelligence and rationality. Despite these variables why does it seem that a human being still exhibits some unwholesome traits? What is the solution to this problem? Why should the Africans take this issue seriously? There is a concern for establishing and sustaining higher ideals of moral life, stronger value systems and more inclusive social or human values for moderating human beings in society. In the society human beings are moderated by ethics or the science of human behavior which may be descriptive or normative. Other instruments of moderation or social control include; statutes and rules, natural or positive laws, ethnic or religious practices, technology and technological styles, conventional customary or cultural ways of life as well as moral suasion and public opinion. It means then that human nature can be the subject of human nurture such that certain natural and social traits can be carried over into the human society through

social life, politics, culture, laws, and other developmental behavioral value systems.

There are two traditional ways of maintaining order in a human community; the social and the political. First is the political order. This is a means of social control based on the obedience to law and order as well as adherence to the rule of law by government and citizens of larger societies or countries. In such a society laws are central to peace and development because these embody properly laid down rules by the political and legal authorities, which are binding on all members of society without exception. In the political order, affairs are conducted formally or officially and the focus is on statecraft for the common good as well as political authority for the collective security of all. However, the political order is always under attack by subversive and insidious forces of deception, manipulation, terrorism, fraud, ethnicity, impunity, mistrust, nepotism among the rulers and the ruled. This truncates efforts to attain the public good within the political order.

Secondly, the social order presumes regularity, stability, predictability and organisation arising from kinship ties, associations and friendly relations. Organization and control of social life are central to social order using the tool of negotiation and bargaining arising from balancing the conflicts of interests existing among individuals and the society. The social order operates within smaller groups such as ethnicities, tribes, family as a system of control. When the social order is expanded into a social system or scheme of social relations then it can also be applied to larger human formations such as countries using rules, regulations, laws, moral codes and cultural practices. In this manner, a social order defines the political, economic and social roles, rights and duties of people. Unfortunately, a social order is easily threatened by the antagonism and restiveness of dominant or provincial ethnic and religious groups that have put their directing principles and values of egoism, hate speech, intolerance and injustice ahead of human values. So despite these mechanisms or strategies for managing humanity there are still problems hence the need for a continuous search for an ethical or political principle or value for dealing with the tendencies in human behaviour.

Can there be an African philosophical input to this conversation? What connects human thoughts to theory formulation and then to practice or social life? Can the Africans survive without strong endogenous analytical reasoning, theoretical analysis and conceptual frameworks for conceptualizing and explaining reality? Thought or thinking is essential to human

life anywhere. A human being that exhibits problems with thinking deeply and properly can pose a danger to himself and others. This is a clear evidence of the value of logic which theoretically and scientifically separates good from bad thinking using arguments, rules, axioms, formal systems, meta-logic and so on. Logic is important to human life, because just as an athlete trains the body rigorously to excel in the mental and physical aspects of sports, most academic disciplines and their sub-branches train the human mind mostly, to become calculative, systematic, adept and rigorous in processing ideas and mental categories. Specifically, the Africans are now challenged on the need to think right; allow their thought to dwell on posterity using adaptable and ingenious basic human values that promote life and well-being such as consensus, fair treatment, critical appraisal, respect for others and knowledge, lawful behavior and tolerance of diversity of human experience for building stable and viable social and political order on the continent. Global modernity and civilization in so far as it relates to contemporary Africa shows that some knowledge and practices considered anachronistic are still being practiced.

In this contemporary era, we notice that some people in social and public life across Africa face a very serious problem of separating right and wrong behaviour in the public domain. This is particularly seen in a local case study of Nigeria, where poor public ethics and public trust has triggered corruption, abuse of power, disruption, instability and disorder, disrespect for human dignity and well-being of the people at different levels of society. We are challenged to seek better ways of improving the way people behave in public arena, hence, an urgent need to improve the ethical quality of performance in social and public and professional life, to promote security, communal living, and ethics among professionals. One effective way of addressing this problem is to evolve an alternate progressive ethical culture, by pursuing domestic policy that conceptually and evidentially elevates the pedestals and domains of moral conscience or consciousness among those who formulate, implement or influence social policies in different areas of public life- in Government, Business, Education, Law, Medicine, Science and Technology as well as Communication using more inclusive or integration oriented human values of Ubuntu.

So the problem under study is clear. Human behaviour is critical to the survival of the human race. The question arises: How can human behavior be managed or controlled politically or ethically? An examination of the idea of Ubuntu dwells significantly on its social and ethical dimensions. The African continent by and

large, faces development challenges in the technological, economic and socio-political aspects that are defined and tackled taxonomically and restrictively thus leading to conflict and dislocation in the economic, social and political orders. On the one hand, conceptualizing development traditionally compels us to see it specifically in terms of the technological, economic or political advancement of a country or race. Yet, there is the imperative of construing the development question holistically so as to highlight the concern for humanity. Here, the holistic approach suggests on the one hand, the pooling together of concomitant aspects of development such as we have in the core values combined to form the Millennium Development Goals or Sustainable Development Goals [MDG or SDG]. On the other hand, a holistic view, in a more important way, highlights a man centered ethical view of development, without which even the technological and physical could be contradicted and compromised. This man-centered view, in turn, accommodates major humanistic and ethical elements or dimensions that define and promote human survival. So the ethical and humanistic approach, in turn, also converges with the concept of Ubuntu to emphasize on the human condition and the human interest.

Over the ages the apparent low rate of success in answering the question of proper human conduct in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust behavior is easily seen in the diverse threats facing our world today. Some of the main threats to peace and progress are; socially disruptive man-made worldviews as (ethno-religious conflicts, terrorism, world wars, proxy wars, racism, class antagonism, sex discrimination, racism, hate speech, injustice, inequity, corruption, poverty), medical/ health challenges as (epidemic and pandemic diseases such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, avian flu, polio, Malaria, Corona virus), natural evils and environmental hazards as (desertification, floods, erosion, refugee crisis, pollutions from mineral explorations, natural disasters-earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tornadoes), political ideologies as (Nazism, expansionist radical Islamic theocracy-'Wahabism' or 'Salafism,' right-wing extremism, colonization, fascism, tyranny, communism, dictatorship, authoritarianism), cultural predispositions (ignorance, tribalism, intolerance, corruption, disregard for the rule of law, segregation, fundamentalism, refusal to accept modernity, anachronism, impunity, uncritical and unscientific rationality or thinking and exploitative value systems as individualism, feudalism, capitalism), among others.

Philosophical Views on Human Nature and the Human Person in Hobbes, Kant and Ghandi

What, if at all, is human nature? What is the link between human nature and Ubuntu if at all? We must share the view of Berry who insists that “social and political organization has to accommodate itself to the human nature and not vice versa.”¹ In other words, human nature is a primal symbol in the quest for security in human existence. Human nature has to do with certain physical and non-physical elements of man. According to Dewey human nature can be defined by the innate needs of human beings and he says:

I do not think it can be shown that the innate needs of men have changed since man became man or that there is any evidence that they will change as long as man is on the earth. Needs for food and drink and for moving about, need for bringing one's power to bear upon surrounding conditions, the need for some sort of aesthetic expression and satisfaction, are so much part of our being.²

Furthermore, Dewey points out that “pugnacity and fear are native elements of human nature. But so are pity and sympathy.”³ From the above analysis, there is a natural dimension of security as embodied in human nature and its operations. So human beings can act as individuals, but a lot of things are beyond the individual as so require the formation of large groups of human beings living together for the greater good, such as the family, village, county, town, tribe, nation, State and so on, to accomplish what is beyond an individual man. So human nature has to do mainly with the social nature of man. According to Mackenzie, “human association, societies are first formed for the sake of life; though it is for the sake of good life that they are subsequently maintained. The care of the young, the preservation of food and drink, the provision of adequate shelter and protection would suffice to account for the existence of

¹ Christopher Berry, *Human Nature* (London: Macmillan Educational Limited, 1986), xiii.

² John Dewey, “Does Human Nature Change?” in *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 3rd edition, eds. Daniel Bronstein, Yervant Kirkorian, Philip Wiener (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Incorporation, 1974), 116.

³ Ibid., 118.

human societies.”⁴ These natural feelings and instincts of humanity are themselves again constrained by some other natural factors. According to McShea, “men need what other animals do not, a method for the restoration of the functionality of feelings. Their freedom to imagine all possible things cannot, consistently with survival, entail enslavement to the necessity of action on the basis of an emotional reaction to each imagination.”⁵

The analysis of human nature takes a different dimension when an attempt is made to separate the individual aspect from the universal aspect as we see when Bacon sets the pedestals of the operations of human nature at two distinct but important levels. This, he does through the theory of idols. According to Bacon human nature is captured by the idols. The idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. The idols of the Cave are the idols of the individual man. For everyone (besides the errors common to human nature in general) has a cave or den of his own, which refracts or discolours the light of nature; owing to his own proper and peculiar nature.⁶

The individual and the universal aspects of human nature make sense when we situate human nature theoretically starting with Hobbes view. Hobbes basic argument is that after all said and done, human beings who are essentially egoists seem to get along better with one another⁷ when they aim at justice construed as the pursuit of individual advantage with a cooperative setting. In other words, given that limited resources and conflicting interests characterize human life then people can expect to further or promote their interests, if they live harmoniously with others in the society.⁸ Thomas Hobbes views the human person within the ambits of the idea of the Leviathan. The leviathan retains immense and illimitable powers over men and materials and is thus capable of guaranteeing justice. Hobbes made it clear that the conception of justice and security offered by the leviathan became imperative due to the low life expectancy, ominous danger and insecurity of life and

⁴ John Mackenzie, *Outlines of Social Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 35.

⁵ Robert McShea, “Human Nature Ethical Theory,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* xxxix, no. 3 (March 1979): 389.

⁶ Francis Bacon, “The Four Idols,” in *Readings in Philosophy*, eds. John Randall Jr., Justus Buchler, and Evelyn Shirk (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), 92.

⁷ Kai Nielsen, “Conceptions of Justice,” in *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics* 1, ed. Mary Hawkesworth (London: Routledge, 1996), 86-7.

⁸ Ibid.

possessions in the state of nature. Central to the imperative of security, survival and justice in Hobbes is the appreciation of the circumstances prevailing in the state of nature. Hobbes traces the emergence of the Leviathan to the nature of man and the conditions of the state of nature. He says that nature has made men equal in the faculties of the body and mind. Despite that there are differences in the way men are endowed with such faculties, these differences are not so considerable as to allow one man certain qualities that others do not have. For him, this equality of ability among men gives rise to the equality of hope or the belief that all have the same chances of attaining their ends. This equality gives rise to disputes over the resources of nature, in which people exercise their powers in order to conquer, dispossess or deprive weaker ones of their lives, liberties and properties. Therefore, Hobbes contends that the equality of men gives rise to a condition of mutual destruction in which no man can be sure of emerging victorious or subsisting for a reasonable length of time.⁹

According to Hobbes, that period of human existence when men live without a common power to control them all or arbitrate among them is called "the state of war."¹⁰ In this state, every man is against every man. Hobbes takes care to point out that this state of war encompasses not just conditions of actual conflict, but also the state of existence in which men are disposed to behave as if they are in a state of war. Furthermore, in the state of nature or war where every man is every man's enemy and the security and protection of life and property is not assured, there is no industry or fruitful labour. And other human activities like culture, art and society do not exist. For Hobbes, the state of nature is the state of war. It is the state of the violence and anarchy of every one against the other. This condition of life is typified by the inability to guarantee survival and peace for any reasonable length of time. One of the most distinctive features of the state of nature is the fact that it does not guarantee the individual or aggregate of interests except there is a normative exit using the facilities of a contract. Hobbes informs us that it is absolutely important to note that, "to this warre of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. J. Somerville (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), 142.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no injustice.”¹¹

The outright repercussion of this is that, “in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing; and therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be).”¹² This is not all about the state of nature. Hobbes informs us that “worst of all, there is a continual fear and danger of violent death. Put simply, the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”¹³ Against the background of the absence of a common power, law, notions of justice and injustice, right and wrong in the state of nature, Hobbes says that the passions and the reason of man lead him to search for peace. Man’s quest for peace arises from his fear of death, and his desire for those resources necessary for adequate living. By desiring peace and co-operation, man uses reason to fashion some convenient articles of peace out of the right and law of nature. According to Hobbes, the right of nature is the liberty that all men have to use their powers to preserve their lives, while the law of nature is a general rule derived from reason, which forbids a man to destroy his life or the means of preserving his life. For Hobbes, the first and basic law of nature is to seek peace, while the second laws of nature enjoins a man to readily give up his right to self-defence if others show a willingness to do likewise.

He notes that a man gives up his right to self-preservation either by renouncing or transferring it. A right is renounced when one does not care to whom the benefit goes, while a right is transferred when one intends that the benefit goes to some specified persons. Hobbes maintains that the acts of rights renunciation or transfer are conducted through declarations and transactions binding the participants to a term of agreement. The goal of rights transfer is the guarantee of security of life and the means of preserving life. In effect, the realization of the shortfalls of the state of nature would pave the way for the emergence of the commonwealth. According to Hobbes, social order as the great Leviathan, commonwealth, state is an artificial man created to protect and defend the natural man. He says that “the sovereignty of the leviathan is its artificial soul which gives life and animation to the whole body.”¹⁴ In his view, the Leviathan’s strength lies in

¹¹ Ibid., 188.

¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan in Social and Political Philosophy*, 110.

¹³ Ibid., 143.

¹⁴ Ibid., 139.

the wealth and riches of all its members. And every part or member of the Leviathan is induced to perform his duties by the sovereign who has the power to punish or reward.

For Hobbes, contract is the name given to the mutual transfer of rights among men. It is the basis of the commonwealth, which exists in order to ensure that lives are preserved and made happy. The protection of life and property is guaranteed in the commonwealth, only when men erect a common power on whom they confer all their powers and strengths. Hobbes notes that "this common power can be one man or an assembly of men."¹⁵ The commonwealth is attained through the processes of the transfer and renunciation of the rights of man and the laws of nature. The commonwealth emerges from the debris of the state of nature that was defeated by the superior logic and opportunistic inclination of men. The commonwealth, according to Hobbes, is the only source of security both from human nature, natural forces and other material creations of men. The commonwealth is the aggregation of an institutional arrangement of a multitude that has covenanted through the social contract to form and live in the society in order to assure themselves of mutual defense, peace, progress and protection from internal and external dangers. The power of the sovereign, conceived as either the ruler or the society, is central to attaining justice and security.

The appealing, systematic and well-articulated justice theory of Hobbes suffered from certain internal contradictions that paved the way for the emergence of other views. Hobbes theory of justice and security did not fully account for the dangers arising from the illimitable powers that were bestowed on the sovereign as ruler. Hobbes did not reckon with the fact that these powers would pave the way for dictatorship, primitive accumulation, misappropriation, authoritarianism and the eventual denial of the same justice and security of lives and property as we find in Africa. It was this unresolved paradox of justice and security that other theoreticians tried to address.

What is human nature devoid of fair treatment and rule guided behavior? Kant offers a conception of the human being that thrives in an atmosphere guided by rules, neutrality and fairness. Kant's impartiality theory as explained by Nielsen calls for some basis for respectful, fair and equal treatment of all. The impartiality theory of justice holds that "the function of justice is to provide a reasonable basis of agreement among people who seek to take due

¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan in Social and Political Philosophy*, 148.

account of the interests of all.”¹⁶ The reason for behaving justly is that whatever happens to a person matters in and of itself. As such, people should not look at things from their own points of view alone, but they should seek a basis for considering the views of others.¹⁷ In other words, the concept of a person, which is operational in the impartiality theory of justice, is that a person is a self-originating source of valid claims. And we accept the claims of that person because we feel that his interest is equally important as ours.

Kant contents that justice is that relation of men to one another which contains the conditions under which it is alone possible for everyone to obtain the right that is his due.¹⁸ This implies that given the essence of justice as “the aggregate of those conditions under which the will of one person can be co-joined with the will of another in accordance with a universal law.”¹⁹ This means that one’s act is just only if it exhibits the character of being amenable to the acts and freedoms of others under a universal ordinance. The highlight of Kant’s justice is the most striking point that “a man realizes his true self when he acts from the moral law.”²⁰ The moral imperative concerns or affects every being that is capable of being subject to obligation. And only those actions that are done from the motivation of duty can be said to retain moral worth. Duty is the nothing other than ensuring that our actions necessarily derive from acting out of reverence for the law.²¹ As Korsgaard insists “the essential character of law is universality. Therefore, the person who acts from duty attends to the universality of his or her principle.”²² Thus, according to Kant the vital law of justice is the categorical imperative. Evidently, “the categorical imperative only expresses generally what constitutes obligation. It may be rendered by the following formula: Act according to a maxim which can be adopted at the same time as a universal law.”²³ As

¹⁶ Nielsen, “Conceptions of Justice,” 86-7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice: Part I of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1990), 143.

¹⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁰ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 254.

²¹ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1960), 104-10.

²² Christine Korsgaard, “Kant,” in *Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy*, eds. Robert Cavalier, James Gouinlock, and James Sterba (London: Macmillan, 1989), 211.

²³ Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, 241.

Ebbinghaus rightly notes, "the categorical imperative determines the concept of duty solely as regards its form. It states only what duty as such is and consequently what all duties have in common."²⁴ However, Wiredu has argued that rules especially rules of morality make sense to us not merely on the basis of Universalizability but more importantly on the basis of the connection between morality and human interests.²⁵ Rules do not make sense as rules rather they retain significance as rules intended to achieve specific purposes. Apart from those purposes there is the question of the context and effectiveness of such rules. What happens when a rule works in some place or time, and not in another?

The belief that human beings can be decent, reasonable, responsible and good if properly formed is not exclusive to any culture or race. But one major exponent of this view is Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi revered leader of India who brought a new idea to the quest for human nature. Gandhi preached love for all human beings and mutual respect for each other. He believed that humanity takes a centre stage as children of God and there should be no discrimination or unfair treatment of others on the basis of belief colour, creed, caste or religion. There needs to be respect for others' feelings. Essentially, Gandhi despised prejudice, hate, selfishness and colonialism of any sort. In a sense he preached the universality of human nature and by so doing a better world where all human beings can live together in peace and develop their respective humanity without fear or favour. His target was to make human life better by upholding human dignity through the promotion of human and social values.²⁶ From the above we see clearly that the search for humane and orderly social living and mutual respect among human beings in society has been an age long issue throughout the history of philosophy of society. Let us examine some pitfalls of an African human nature.

²⁴ Julius Ebbinghaus, "Interpretation and Misinterpretation of the Categorical Imperative," in *Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Wolff (London: Macmillan, 1968), 214.

²⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, "Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of Some African and Western Conceptions of Morals," in *Conceptual Decolonisation in African Philosophy, Four Essays*, ed. Olusegun Oladipo (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995), 36.

²⁶ Y. Kesavulu, "Ghandian Trusteeship as an Instrument of Human Dignity," *Gandhi Marg* 25, no. 4 (Jan-March 2004): 1.

Ubuntu as a Philosophical Concept for Collective Security

To start with, what is a philosophical idea? Philosophical ideas are the intellectual materials or mental entities used by philosophers to do their conceptual and analytical jobs. The conceptual work of the philosopher involves simplifying and clarifying fundamental ideas that guide human life. Simplifying is about analyzing and analysis has to do with evaluation and study of the meanings of concepts and asking questions about them. Philosophers like to ask perennial and fundamental questions and seek answers to them, where possible. The way a human being or race asks questions, reasons or thinks is crucial to security and survival. Philosophers critically and argumentatively attempt to answer these questions because ultimately, philosophical thinking aims at breaking down a lot of bad reasoning, stereotypes and prejudices that arise from our living in this world. Some of these prejudices and stereotypes are not delivered to us deliberately or with the desire to mislead us, rather we may have been born with them. Philosophy also encourages openness and tolerance as well as the need for us to allow alternative ways of viewing the world. These are ideas and ideals that are not easily attained or even conceptualized among humans and even more so among philosophers. It seems that we ought to key into the quest to alter or change the behavior and experience of man from the natural tendencies of human nature. Human nature in most evidential cases seeks to be primitively egoistic, harmful to others, intolerant, anachronistic, oppressive, disobedient to the rule of law, emotional and disdainful of the rules of logic, human achievement, objectivity and sound reasoning. This is the truth about human beings. This is one reason why there is a need for Ubuntu.

Ubuntu as a cosmology or a view of the universe or specifically a conception of human society needs to be examined seriously as an indigenous ethical or social alternative to the *status quo* due to certain gaps noticed in the modern world as a whole. Such gaps are prevalent in both the developed and developing societies. The above shortfalls can be summarized this way: In most societies in the world today, we currently experience a conflict between the affirmation of formal political freedom and its tolerance of racial, religious, tribal and socioeconomic inequalities which breeds alienation and contradicts the human dignity and freedom. This makes us to question the inequality and imposition of selective humanism and exclusion strategies that pervade most parts of the world today. The reality of dehumanization and disempowerment

focuses on a dominant value-system that pursues exploitation, lack of rule of law and structural discrimination as core values. These features are easily seen for instance, in the hegemonic domination or might is right in international politics, bad governance of African rulers arising from a political culture of neo-colonial state-centralism, foreign imposed top-down social engineering and other strategies of marginalization. Marginality and marginalization reflect a faulty existential belief in political and economic discrimination that causes problems for vulnerable peoples.

More specifically, there is a need to clarify, in what way(s) if at all, can a philosophical study of Ubuntu contribute to the theoretical and practical quest for development in Africa? What are the logical and empirical properties of a philosophical view of development? The material dimension of development calls for a careful application of the dividends of science and technology to exploit and control the physical environment, while the moral aspect of development is made up of the consistent endeavor in regulating, as well as improving human relationships via the promotion of equality and mutual cooperation.²⁷ As such philosophical view of development basically examines the idea of agency or the human factor and the role of ideas in fostering development. Ubuntu and development share the quest for human dignity and cooperation in common. Dignity and cooperation require a sense of fairness, negotiation and dialogue as ingredients of a developmental social order built on human, humanistic and humane values. Let us look at a few of these viewpoints as a backdrop to Ubuntu.

The Need for Ubuntu as a Construct for our common Humanity

This effort has both the theoretical and practical dimensions that are required for the society to enjoy peace, order, security and development. All stakeholders and social actors need to revise the ethical dimension of their lives, focusing on the foundations of society and the development of moral principles in the practical cultural situations of African public affairs. A theoretical and practical study of ethics fulfils the need to make philosophy more down to earth, by making professionals more intellectually responsive to ethical and social challenges in the environment and ethically guided decision-making in key areas of

²⁷ Monday Igbafe, *Basic Issues and Theories in Philosophy of Development* (Ekpoma: Inno Printing Press, 2003), 2-3.

public life. The idea is to develop in decision-makers and administrators a high degree of sensitivity to questions of right and wrong, and of moral obligation in policy matters. Also, some effort will be made to address public ethics shortfalls and citizenship/trust issues that have compromised national development, civility among the citizens and governmental efficiency. Lastly, there will be a desire to strengthen the intellectual foundations of our private and public lives by building a social and ethical system that will reinforce our main institutions, and engender feelings of tolerance, justice, equity and fairness in a multi-ethnic and multi religious society such as Nigeria.

At one level, Ubuntu can be said to be an idea or a belief about the way the good life should be so it is normative or prescriptive. The concern about how one ought to live his life in the society remains one of the fundamental topics of philosophical investigation all through human history. A number of scholars have offered different responses to this question with varying degrees of success. Elements of the ubuntu ideal could be located in the works of scholars of different eras from all around the world;²⁸ thus, in our view endorsing its global inclinations and acceptability. Such personalities, Mwase says include; John Rawls, Desmond Tutu, Martin Buber, Mohandas Ghandi, Immanuel Kant among others. Other prominent exponents of Ubuntu include Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela. One immediate implication of this is that the primitive elements that comprise ubuntu as a cultural and historical experience can be universalized and so can be found within and across nations and tribes.

Ubuntu is in a more important sense, a value system, a scheme of social relations or a way of life that determines human personal and social actions in the cultural, political and economic domains of life in a society. It can be seen as a principle for guiding and underwriting human behavior at the individual, group, national and even possibly the international level. The absence of the human values of Ubuntu poses a threat to social life at the national and international levels, and thus becomes a problem for urgent attention. Accordingly, our argument is in stages and is quite simple: firstly, no human being or institution or race or country will remain in this world forever, at least not as a physical living being. Time is short and physical and

²⁸ Isaac Mwase, "Aspects of Ubuntu for International Research Ethics," *Fifth Annual Teaching Skills in International Research Ethics Workshop* (Indiana University: Centre for Bioethics, April 17- 19, 2013).

institutional death is inevitable. Even this earth has an expiry date. No man or race or country is perfect that is why we are called human beings or human society- fallible, finite and often fickle. So if no human being or race or institution or society will remain in this world forever, then time is short and demise is inevitable.

As a result therefore, no idea can be absolute or perennial in a complex, temporal, relative and finite world. Given this fact, it follows that we need to be critical of any position that imposes on others, a unitary or mono-logical way of living in the world; of doing philosophy. Any such effort to deliver a one-sided view of the universe, as the gospel truth especially from a metropolitan and hegemonic viewpoint, undermines the very core value of tolerance, openness and criticism that the diversity of humanity points us to, and perhaps philosophy too points us to variety, despite its many weak points. In every generation, humans were faced with the reality of struggle against an exaggerated dualism, arrogance, hypocrisy, derision and fear of the unknown and the inability to genuinely respect 'difference,' that ensures that people find it very hard to uphold the core ideals and values of freedom and fairness so as to transcend existing barriers imposed by culturally-bound knowledge, rise above prejudices and pettiness in human nature. Such haughtiness made it difficult to affirm the intrinsic value of mutual and sincere recognition, accommodation and tolerance of other views different from one's own. This quest for fairness and justice across the world is what defines the imperative of African philosophy as a field of study. The focus here is to bring to the awareness of the Africans like other races, the need to work harder and attain human dignity and self-definition as well as establish well-ordered and self-reliant societies in most parts of the continent. This is one sure pathway to dignity and freedom. We seek a critical and conscious construction of an endogenous idea or basis of social and political order that can form the bedrock of liberation and transformation on the continent by putting our African humanity first in all we do. Every politics, religions, corruption, racism, tribalism, crimes, oppression will die if our humanity fizzles out physically- as a species or ontologically- in our unique human essence.

The great paradox here is that without human nature and the struggle to contain its excesses, the ultimate pursuit of the four H or 4Hs; humanization, humanitarianism, humanity, humanism will be impossible to attain. Accordingly, if a diversity of humanity is central to even the survival of man and the world, then one of the primary arguments that may be quite an uphill task to accomplish here is the demand that; all efforts should be directed at the good of

all or majority of human beings. The above is one way that the endogenous ethical variant of Ubuntu emerges as a solution to the problem of community which deals with power relations among human beings and their living together peacefully for a common purpose. Hence, are we challenged to seek better ways of improving the way people behave in the public arena? Is there an urgent need to improve the ethical quality of performance in social and public and professional life, to promote peace, security and communal living? For the society to enjoy peace, order, security and development, all stakeholders and social actors need to revise the ethical dimension of their lives, along Ubuntu lines, focusing on the foundations of society and the development of moral principles in the practical cultural situations of African public affairs. There are two issues that require conceptual clarification here. First is whether tradition and modernity have vitiated Ubuntu and second is if the political idea of democracy is in harmony with Ubuntu ethos? Let us start with the first one. Ubuntu in the traditional society would not have been a major problem due to the unanimity, communalism and homogeneity of the traditional society of pre-colonial Africa based on kinship ties and other shared values such as common blood, language, culture and history that promote some prominent African values as hospitality respect for elders, conscious search for consensus and inclusive social order, etc. So, in this sense the nature and practices of a traditional society would in fact uphold and encourage Ubuntu human values as a basis for improving humanity.

Put simply, we may argue further for the place of man in the cosmos or existence. Understood from the point of existence or cosmology, human beings have only this planet- earth to call their own for now. Even the concerted efforts of the space explorers, trans-humanists and post-humanists to interface machines and man, to use science to seek habitable planets outside earth have encountered challenges. Their scientific and technological efforts have struggled with the problems of managing space-time, distance, gravity, microgravity and biological and technological issues and limitations arising from man's projection of himself and even his machines into space. These (present) obstacles show that human beings should treat our earth with caution because it is the only single place that is currently known to habitable for man. Any major problem here on earth will most likely spell extinction level crisis for humanity. So, the oppressive, one-sided, reckless and careless use of the world's resources that have led to climate change and global warming have the prospect of extreme consequences that

bring to the forefront once again the need for human beings to live together for mutual cooperation and the common good. The quest for the common good has been an ancestral quest since man appeared on earth and in this era we are looking at the prospects of Ubuntu ethical and political values for fulfilling this desire or agenda of peaceful and progressive human interconnectedness, cooperation, respect and interaction.

The Quest for a Community of Humanity through key Socio-Political and Moral Essence and Essentials of Ubuntu

There are two issues that require clarification here. First is whether tradition and modernity have vitiated Ubuntu and second is if the political idea of democracy is in harmony with Ubuntu ethos? Let us start with the first one. In a modern era or era of modernity Ubuntu is more difficult to attain given some very alienating, anonymous and universal features attached to modernity such as urbanization, education, larger populations, Westphalia Statism, complex social laws and behavior, etc. Yet some features of modernity also promote Ubuntu especially in societies that try to allow key elements of technology, socio-economic order and institutionalization to work efficiently. So, in this present day what is CCTV, biometrics, internet, social media, etc? Whatever else these innovations exemplify, they are still basically technologically driven attempts to interconnect people; for them to 'see' one another, more properly for security or citizenship reasons. In the past we have the traditional African value of respect for the elders which is intrinsically good as all would become elders and expect to be accorded respect due. But the point is that today modernity promotes respect but it is now broader to be seen as respect for human dignity and human rights, as well as human achievement. As such elements of Ubuntu can still be seen in an era of modernity although it may not express itself in the old way when there were small tightly knit tribes. Today we talk about e-communities driven by shared experiences and beliefs such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. So, Ubuntu is evolving and is a subject of social change while it is changing constantly. Our purpose in this paper is to abstract the essentials of Ubuntu in a way that is acceptable to all. This is the dialectics of Ubuntu; the coming in and out of existence; manifesting differently in every generation. For example, most recent agitations around the world were planned online and took governments and societies unaware until execution. Recall the Arab Spring in North Africa and Nigerian END SARS

protests. So, Ubuntu is evolving and is a subject of social change while it is changing constantly. Our purpose in this paper is to abstract the essentials of Ubuntu in a way that is acceptable to all. This is the dialectics of Ubuntu; the coming in and out of existence; manifesting differently in every generation.

Next is the issue of democracy and Ubuntu. The truth is that Africa has faced an ancestral problem of foreign domination both physically and at the level of ideas. Colonialism, which expropriated African lands, resources, value systems and populations, is a ready example among others. So how do we develop endogenous ideas and human values for cultural identity, developmental social order and security on the continent and even for Africans in the diaspora? Let us admit that democracy at least in its ancient form started with the ancient Greeks who in fact also modified it to give pride of place to public debates and conversations, egalitarianism or 'Doctrine of the Peers' as well as separation of powers. So, it is the human values embedded in democracy that we are interested in primarily. This value addition or value chain is especially important for a philosopher. So even in the modern era current trends in democracy that have been passed down or exported to other parts of the world from modern United Kingdom and United States of America need to be seen in terms of the values they embody and not the particularities of their application in those specific societies. So even multiparty variants, opposition, elections, media, and so on, all of these are still about involvement and interconnection of human beings.

The key human values of democracy include; giving people a voice and choice through participation and consent at least politically. Also, there are values of tolerance, accommodation and respect for others through freedoms, dialogue, and rule of law, negotiation through lobbying, interaction, consensus, litigation and public enlightenment, as a well as the belief that a human being gives his best as an individual and a group member, when he is a stakeholder or contributor to social life through ethical behavior, trust, compassion, commitment and living together for the common good. This constellation of human values that puts humanity first; agrees that self-perseveration and life-promoting behavior is primary to the survival of all societies, are easily seen as the basis of the link between Ubuntu and democracy.

We are obliged to pose the following questions in order to apprehend the concept of Ubuntu:

- i. What is Ubuntu?

- ii. What constitutes the logical and empirical properties Ubuntu?
- iii. Why should Ubuntu be taken seriously as a philosophical idea?
- iv. Can there be an African theory of Ubuntu as an indigenous ethical perspective?

The essence of Ubuntu is the focus or reference to the interdependency of human beings; the idea that a human being is a complete person to the extent that the society gives him or her recognition as a person and allows him or her to realize the full potentials and benefits of being a human person.²⁹ Also Ubuntu emphasizes the importance of other people or the society in the life of a human being. It highlights the fact that a person cannot do without others. Our individual lives are intricately and inextricably tied to the lives of others and we all need to cherish these interrelations and interconnections. The essentials of Ubuntu remain the emphasis on the fact that such interconnection should be guided by kindness, respect, cooperation, openness, accommodation and willingness to work for others' interest. The difficulties that human beings encounter when pursuing the above goals and behavior illustrate clearly why Ubuntu is required. So, the philosophical basis of Ubuntu rests on the belief in, and realization of our common humanity; our sense or perception of being part of the whole human family.

Thus, the idea of ubuntu retains a cocktail of features or values. Notable among such values or elements are respect for human dignity, the value of the human person, an ethic of care and compassion, as well as a push for key moral and democratic values such as consensus, dialogue and tolerance among others. What is at the heart of ubuntu is a moral norm; a directing principle for governing human action; a pattern or principle of human relations; a system of interaction by which human beings can positively develop themselves individually and collectively. More importantly, ubuntu is meant to foster a means of probable escape from, or mitigation of certain egoistic, oppressive, denigrating and conflictive elements inherent in human behavior as a result of his nature or nurture. Put simply, ubuntu promotes the desire to establish an ethical basis for human existence. Human existence may not make much sense unless there is a room for an ethical dimension. What then is ethics? Ethics is the normative science of

²⁹ Mwase, "Aspects of Ubuntu for International Research Ethics," 1-2.

human behavior. It is the study of the way that human beings ought to behave and conduct their affairs in order to live properly, responsibly and productively.

Ethical Dimensions of Ubuntu

Understood philosophically (normatively and prescriptively) a more important question is: Why is ethics needed by human beings? What is the ethical dimension of ubuntu? Ethics is one of the social structures for moderating human actions so as to live a meaningful and productive life. Other social instruments for managing human behavior include law and social conventions. In any case, ethics is useful to human beings because it studies the rules and parameters of right, good, proper conduct in human personal, social and professional life. Scholars have also constructed some ethical theories to be used for understanding the moral foundations of the human experience. For some Africans, human experience at the social level can be promoted positively through the philosophy and ethics of ubuntu. Now what is ubuntu ethics? Ubuntu could then be conceived as an ethical system or a moral way of life because it seeks to promote the social nature of human beings. Human beings are social because they need to, or desire to, live together. Human beings are also social because, they need to cooperate with each other, in order to attain the common good or purpose. Pursuing the common good is a central element of the social, ethical or moral life. Morality and moral values are necessary for human beings. The ubuntu principle emphasizes some of these elements.

What is morality? Why is it important for human existence? Morality has to do with a set of rules for guiding human behavior and a set of reasons or grounds of moral obligation. Why are we obliged to be moral or behave morally? Morality is needed because it does not only harmonise interests, it also affirms the importance of the human person as an end. To say that man is an end in himself is to say that man is a being who has intrinsic worth or value as an end and, therefore, whose interests have to be given sympathetic consideration. Morality also tries to cultivate in people, certain desired traits of character such as honesty, fairness, truth, justice, kindness, compassion and the respect for human dignity.³⁰ The

³⁰ Philip Ujomu, "Morality, Democracy and Social Order: Conceptual Issues in the Search for Community" (PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 2001), 94-105.

feeling of consideration and sympathy for others remains key values of morality. These values explain why the human person as a moral agent ought to be viewed as a being endowed with dignity, freedom and responsibility.

What is the logical relationship between these under listed allied ubuntu concepts? The ideas include: the respect for human dignity, the value of the life of the human person, an ethic of care and compassion, as well as a push for key moral and democratic values such as consensus, dialogue and tolerance. The unique conception of the human person or being that ubuntu defends rests on the belief that a human being or human person has a worth that is not quantifiable in instrumental or extrinsic terms. The worth of the human being is seen in his self worth or dignity. This dignity is a priceless item or quality that gives rise to all other claims that we make in regard of being human. Dignity is intrinsic to the human being by virtue of his being human, and dignity requires that human beings be addressed and treated in ways that demonstrate their intrinsic worth, freewill, freedom and responsibility to themselves and others.

Such qualities are significant and valuable because of the opportunity they provide for human beings to live in a productive, peaceful and purposeful manner. These qualities compel us to uphold the value of human life as an inalienable right, deserving of respect and protection under the law, morality and customs. This claim does not detract from the fact that actual human societies have fallen far short of these ideals and values. Such deficits and shortfalls serve as impetus for the principle or values of Ubuntu to be proposed as a way out of the human predicament. The value of human life is the more appreciated and regarded when human beings show humaneness and compassion to one another as members of a species or mankind. Compassion is a moral virtue and a moral value. Respect for others and compassion to them combine together to foster consensus. Consensus is important because it fosters interaction and reconciliation.

Consensus is based on recognition, consultation and agreement. These values emphasize the need to ask and receive the consent of others in decision making. We get peoples' consent, not merely out of courtesy, but because such consent understood as choice and voice, are required for inclusive and socially responsible and responsive decision making. When we have the urge to seek consensus or mutual accord then we are more disposed to pursue dialogue construed as conversation, negotiation or reconciliation. The end result of dialogue is to have an agreement or settlement.

As such dialogue presupposes some sort of positive communication, sincerity, openness and accommodation of others. These values are the bedrock of what is referred to as tolerance. Tolerance is the opportunity we allow for others around us especially those who do not share our beliefs, ancestry, language and ways of life, to thrive and survive without undue obstruction or hindrance from the rest of us. The whole idea is to create a world whereby all parties or members can aspire to attain their fullest personal and social development unfettered by petty prejudices typical of human nature and discrimination occasioned by inimical institutionalized injustices.

As some African tribes will posit that 'he who is alive can do a thousand things.' Life is paramount for existence and so much is built around the value of human life. Interestingly, Ubuntu which seeks the interaction and interdependence of human beings upholds the principle of the value of human life, as a something that needs to be made a priority within the society. The aim is to increase the chances of comfort, well-being and progress among the generality of the people or the greater number of people in the society through cooperation and consideration for others. The concrete impact of this principle is easily seen in the level of human dignity, quality of life and standard of life of the citizens across the classes. The value of human life could be that core value that can counter marginality and marginalization in the polity, depoliticize the different domains of social life to the extent that some elements can drive all our activities.

The value of human life embraces other notions such as: the respect for the rule of law, obedience to covenants or conventions, respect for the contributions of others as stakeholders, respect for fair treatment and fair play in social interaction, respect for human talent and attainment and a respect for logical thinking and superior ideas as the driving force of social progress. So we place a value on human life when we define a set of operative principles that determine our estimation of the human being as constitutive of certain features that earn him a particular treatment or consideration.

Ubuntu Humanism and the Search for Moral and Democratic Values

How is Ubuntu tied to human values? Human beings live by values or things that are important or desirable to them. Such things or values may not always be beneficial. But when something

or a value is altogether of benefit, desirable and important to man then it becomes a human value. Given that human behaviour is critical to the survival of the species or the human race, Ubuntu as a cosmology or conception of human society, needs to be discussed seriously as an ethical alternative to the *status quo* due to certain gaps noticed in the modern society as a whole. Such gaps are prevalent in both the developed and developing worlds. Marginality is an ideologically false humanism that privileges a few over the many, affirms the domination of superior ability and power that yields immense gains in control and wealth that is disdainful and adverse in its teleology on other human beings. Certain globally pervasive yet problematic ideologies such as, capitalism and colonialism, basically promote marginality due to their established values of alienation, exploitation, repression, dehumanization and inequality of workers and aborigines. Essentially inequality and inequity breed a group of aggrieved, frustrated and vulnerable people who may become a threat to themselves and others. These include rural dwellers, the low income earners, politicians and business people disfavored by the current government in power, medium and low level government workers, women, pensioners or retired workers, rural peoples, uneducated people, physically challenged persons, destitute children, and the mass of unemployed and underemployed youth largely outside the coverage of human dignity and social welfare.

What sort of ethical correlates or moral values can emerge from the ubuntu principle to mitigate or slow down this surge of discrimination, inequity and loss of human dignity at the national and international levels? It seems that the ethics or ethos of ubuntu avails us the opportunity to seek life promoting or life enhancing values. Values in themselves are things we desire, our choices, things that are of interest to us. We require moral and democratic values that facilitate the realisation of a better quality or standard of life in the society. Certain positive moral and democratic values are aimed at promoting peace, justice, harmony, co-operation, consideration, compassion, honesty and transparency among human beings. The three moral values crucial to the establishment of ubuntu in social order are the respect for human dignity, compassion and justice.

Of particular importance is the value of respect for human dignity as a major element of ubuntu ethics. The dignity of the human person is maintained by imposing freedom, choice and responsibility upon him. Responsibility is assured by the allocation of rights and corresponding duties. Rights and duties are ordained

in order to ensure human dignity and respect. Some of the basic rights of man are inalienable; such as the right to life and protection of property, the right to be free, self-determining and responsible. Such rights are more easily defended in some types of society rather than others. For instance, what are the key principles, features, institutions, values of a democratic society that facilitate ubuntu ethics? The primary democratic values are freedom, equality and justice. However, we may include tolerance, participation, dialogue and fair treatment among others. What is the link between ubuntu and such democratic values?

The idea is that there are certain ways of doing things that human beings ought to embrace because these promote human wellbeing, peace, stability, security, inclusiveness, actualization of individual human potential, consensus, participation and prosperity in the social system. Democracy ought to be encouraged due to some reasons outlined below. Democracy as a political or social system promotes certain values. Some of the key values of democracy affirm the basic fact that, despite the differences in human talents, gifts, strengths and endowments, the similarities between men are more profound and significant than the differences between them. Such talents and diverse qualities can be used for the benefit of the human person and society.

More importantly, every man is recognised as a being that possesses equal moral worth, human dignity, moral responsibility and freedom, just like any other man.³¹ Some of the equalities which democracy upholds may be social, economic, political and legal. For instance, politically, a democracy allows each man the right to vote, and be voted for, and the right to engage in other forms of legitimate political association. Also, democracy affirms legal equality of every man before the law and the provision of equal opportunities for all. Democracy nurtures a sense of participation in social life and ensures that everyone retains a stake in the society and its resources, through socially just policies, opportunities and actions. In this way, democracy ensures that everyone participates in promoting the social goods he has participated in producing. Democracy, by allowing each person to exercise his intelligence, talents and creativity, ensures that he is accountable as a stakeholder in the society. The individual can be seen to be valuable. He can add value and make a contribution to the social

³¹ Dewey, "Does Human Nature Change?" 475.

John Dewey, "A Defense of Democracy," in *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*, ed. J. Burr (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 321-22.

system. More so, by allowing popular elections, debate on issues of collective concern, freedoms of worship, speech and association, and equality before the law, democracy offers individuals greater opportunity to realise their human potentials. Ubuntu simply put is that principle that seems to allow the human being to attain his fullest potential in a manner coterminous with other human interests.

Ubuntu and cross-cultural Relations

In what way is ubuntu connected to the quest for mutually respectful cross-cultural relations? Culture understood as a way of life is a given of human existence. The world is so large that a lot of cultures exist, and there ought to be ways and principles for guiding intercultural relations. The reality of cultural relations in the recent centuries, have tilted towards colonization and domination. This raises serious issues in African philosophical discourses. Whatever constitutes the merit or demerit of the above issue in African philosophy, the point is that there was a central assumption that the Africans were different from other races, that the African ways of life were different from other ways of life, in a way that implied that the Africans were sub-human or inferior. The question is: is this really true? The theory of ubuntu leverages on a new ethical approach that attempts to tie human beings together rather than divide them; reconciles human beings rather than segregate them physically and intellectually.

Granted that cultural universals such as the ability to learn language, a moral sense, a sense of aesthetic appreciation and a common biological foundation, exist as the important basis of providing room for objective meanings such as can underwrite human communication;³² it is vital to note that human beings still make very conscious and deliberate efforts to interact and communicate effectively and productively with others. This point simply shows that despite the universals of culture, the differences between cultures are real and consequential. If intercultural communication was actually very easy to achieve why then do we experience so much intolerance, oppression, marginalization and racism in the different parts of the world today. Hence, it is clear

³² Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 14-20.

Kwasi Wiredu, "Are there Cultural Universals," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, eds. Pieter Coetzee, and A. P. Roux (London: Routledge, 1998), 31-2.

that cultural particularities cannot be overlooked, in the question of human communication, merely on the ground that we all are human beings on the basis of evidence from biology. Cultural particularities are not accidental in nature rather they are products of ages of formation and reformation within the human constitution, as he or she relates to others and the environment. Thus, cultural particularities are indeed realities which sometimes can exert the force of life and death on persons and properties, individuals and societies.³³ This point is especially significant when we examine the conditions of those groups all over the world who are suffering some form of oppression, marginalization or deprivation. Ubuntu offers a probable sustainable pathway for humans to relate with each other more respectfully and productively.

The process of recognising difference(s) between cultures around the world, allows us to seek more viable and enduring ways of establishing and sustaining dialogue between cultures, on a platform of mutual recognition. The idea of dialogue in intellectual and social relations actually suggests the need for conversation, which in this context implies a conscious and systematic effort to foster a dialogue or exchange, leading to a peaceful reconciliation and harmonization of divergent interests.³⁴ Only the establishment of a social atmosphere of peace, justice, cooperation and mutual recognition can bring about enduring communication between human beings. Ubuntu reveals its ethical quotient by recommending specific rules and principles that ought to guide human behaviour.

Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and other Orientations to the Quest for a Global Human Family: any Role for Ubuntu Ethics?

To understand why we are asking about the possibility of a global Ubuntu, we need to understand the idea of “Realism” as a driver of the modern national and international State system as established by Westphalia in the 1600’s. Understood philosophically, Westphalia was nothing other than a system of social and political control of society; a way of governing of human beings that was not always primordial, free and fair in its design

³³ Philip Ujomu, “Cultural Relations, Human Communication and the Conditions for Intercultural Relations: A Critique of Anta Diop and Kwasi Wiredu,” in *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa*, ed. H. Igboanusi (Ibadan: Enicrownfit, 2001), 165-88.

³⁴ Ibid.

and experience due to its organic nature. This nature allows conformity to the Will of Sovereignty understood as the core value of the State or conformity to the Will of a Sovereign or the distinctive character of the individual ruler as a vector of the State's core value. So why is this notion of realism important? Realism means different things in different fields such as logic, epistemology, international relations art and film among others. We are interested in realism in politics. A realist view basically asks us to see things or people the way they are actually, the way they appear to us or present themselves to us in this real life of individual experience. According to Roscoe Pound, realism means: "fidelity to nature, according to the accurate recording of things as they are as contrasted with things as they are imagined to be or as one feels they ought to be."³⁵ Realism describes what people are actually doing. For instance, human nature is the way it is; egoistic, difficult and unpredictable at best. Also, the world is a tough, gruelling, cruel and challenging place to exist in. So, we need to manage it that way and make the best of the situation by looking for pragmatic or practical solutions that can work in real life. In the Westphalia State system, the statist viewpoint sees the State as the centre of the universe; rights, burdens and benefits are to be defined and distributed by the state and its agencies. The state retains control over all the domains of life political, economic, military and educational. It exercises a prominent majority power in quantity and quality over all other sectors in the society; private or civil society. Any country like Nigeria that runs this system of government runs the Statist society or statist- corporatism. Statism and realism are two sides of one coin.

The Statist-Realist militarist system or the state-centric realist view of security is the dominant idea of security since after Westphalia. It is explained by Ayoob, "the term security has traditionally been defined to mean immunity (to varying degrees) of a state or nation to threats emanating from outside its boundaries or individuality or sovereignty. A nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values. By security we mean the protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation: political independence and territorial integrity."³⁶ It means that "nations like individuals must predicate

³⁵ Roscoe Pound, "The Call for Realist Jurisprudence," *Harvard Law Review* 44, no. 5 (Mar. 1931): 697.

³⁶ Mohammed Ayoob, "Security in the Third World: The Worm about to Turn," in *International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (1984): 41.

their relationships on given well-conceived and properly defined precepts and norms. Such values and value-systems are the ground norm for rallying all sections of the peoples.”³⁷ This is the most common and prevalent view of security in the modern era. Militarist-Realism or the insistence upon raw military power as a political theory or instrument of security suffered a two-pronged defeat: firstly, the problem of the ascendancy of a greater military power over another leading to spiralling conflict, arms races, genocide, violence and eventually the mutual decline or expiration of the combatants. This is what we mean by a security dilemma, a process by which “states are permanently arming themselves in order to protect their borders. Through this, the unintended consequence of pursuing such a policy is to create a feeling of insecurity among one’s neighbors. Thus, one state’s effort to ensure its own security becomes a source of insecurity for other states.”³⁸ However, Hoogensen and Rottem have offered the clearest possible reason why we must move away from the realist view of security. They observe that, “state security is essential but does not necessarily ensure the safety of individuals and communities.”³⁹ The world has grown so complex and some problems so global that crude statist-realism can no longer cope with present day global security and environmental challenges. So to respond to worldwide security concerns, the entire world has moved on to regional and global level solutions that are beyond and individual state(s). So what is possible the way forward?

Plato, the teacher and master of philosophers, will say that security is beauty; beauty is harmony; harmony is when all things are doing what they are best suited for by nature and or nurture. So the power of combined action or energy for peace and unity is needed for natural justice and social justice. This is how Ubuntu can become a way of integrating and socializing human beings. From the above, a question or issue to be addressed is to find out the extent to which ubuntu can apply itself to the global condition. In what way(s) can ubuntu manifest in the context of the problems and prospects of cosmopolitanism and globalization. To start with globalization; it has to with two related ideas: the interconnectedness of the human beings and locations of the world

³⁷ Chris Alli, *The Federal Republic of Nigeria Army: The Siege of a Nation* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2001), 101.

³⁸ Nizar Messari, “The State and Dilemmas of Security: The Middle east and the Balkans,” *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 4 (2002): 416-17.

³⁹ Gunhild Hoogensen and Svein Rotten, “Gender Identity and the Subject of Security,” *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 2 (2004): 158.

and the interdependency of human beings on one another due to the almost seamless flow of information via technology, migration, telecommunication, people, products, values and ideas all around the world. For Kearney, "globalization describes social, economic, cultural and demographic processes that not only take place within nations, but also transcend them. Globalisation deals with the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles ways and vice versa."⁴⁰

On its part, cosmopolitanism refers to the idea that contemporary trends and processes in the global order are increasingly giving rise to a more physically compact world where human beings share a universal or global membership of the world. This universality and an inherent rejection of any exclusionist tendency is presumed to rest on the idea of our common humanity as a community of mankind and the possibility of a world citizenship or individuals becoming citizens of the world or earth. According to Pogge, a person who adopts the cosmopolitan idea can be seen as citizen of the world. The world at large is the focus of cosmopolitanism. A human being may be referred to as cosmopolitan, when he is well travelled, understands and respects other societies and cultures, interacts and inter-relates easily and properly with other races and peoples. A town or group can also be cosmopolitan to the extent that it is inclusive and accommodating of diverse languages, religions, ethnicities, cultures and lifestyles. Cosmopolitanism refers to a commitment to the above idea and ideal of citizenship of the world.⁴¹

Ordinarily these two concepts of globalization and cosmopolitanism are sufficiently clear conceptually and well discussed intellectually. Both concepts are consequential for the theory and knowledge of ubuntu because of the current reality of social discrimination and political inequities and economic inequalities in the form and character of our human experiences worldwide. Consequently, such imbalances and turbulence pose a challenge to the positive manifestation of both ideas as directing principles of human interrelations and progress. This simply means that in concrete terms, globalization can be unfair due to power

⁴⁰ M. Kearney, "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalisation and Transnationalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, (October 1995): 548.

⁴¹ Thomas Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism," in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* 1, 2nd edition, eds. Robert Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas Pogge (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2007), 312.

tussles and hegemony, class distinctions, trade and financial imbalances and social justice deficits across the world, while cosmopolitanism may be hypocritical due to cultural discrimination and racism, tribalism, as well as prejudicial and oppressive immigration laws and practices currently prevalent worldwide. The successful application of these two concepts entails a maturity of mind, civilization, and liberality that is in really short supply around the world today. Hence there is a need to revisit the prospect of ubuntu with regard to global peace and security.

It is clear, therefore, from the above analysis that, the two concepts of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, in fact, problematise; rather, than serve as a solution to queries about the basis of our common humanity. As such the idea of ubuntu (re)emerges to define and establish the key concepts required for the effective and responsible operation of values at the international level. The way ubuntu can lend itself to reforming the global order or human behaviour at the international level is to transpose the localized values of tolerance, human dignity, consensus, respect for others, compassion and the pursuit of the common good to the activities of nations within the international system. This is a tall order indeed, not merely in the conceptualization, but also in the application of the ubuntu ethic to the international spaces. Our courage or confidence to take on this challenge, rests on the possibility ubuntu offers to have a fresh and innovative look at the global dynamics of human relations.

Another way to understand the discourse is to argue that there is a sense in which the idea of ubuntu foreshadows the notions of globalization and cosmopolitanism. The three concepts are easily linked by their common vision and mission of seeking and explaining the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings and human creations. The quest for a common fate and unity of humanity is not a negative thing in itself. This is a significant point to note because even though cosmopolitanism and globalization are not originally African concepts or constructs, yet they emerge as a result of the search for strategies to mitigate selective humanism, exclusion and intolerance among human beings. In fact globalization and cosmopolitanism have significant impacts on the African world. When we include the idea of ubuntu as refinement of the vision of global human interdependence, we notice that the three concepts in a sense aspire or end up with the same goal to bring humanity together. Despite the common thrust that the three principles possess, they actually reveal different logical designs and causality. The challenge that they have in

common is that agency or human nature plays a role in human institutions in a way that ends up working at cross purposes from the original aim. Therefore, ubuntu as an African contribution to the quest for our common humanity and the mitigation of the ancestral predicaments of humanity is a continuation of the tendency towards enlightenment or modernity in the way that human beings deal each other. These three ideas reflect overlapping shades on the continuum of humanization and development of our sense of humanity at the local and global levels.

From the above, therefore, a second point emerges. This is that in emphasizing these areas of convergence between the three notions we can then observe the way that ubuntu definitively contributes to the clarification of the quest for a global ethics of change and development. Ubuntu pursues change in human nature by distilling the key values required for personal and social liberation and transformation. The ethics of ubuntu whether it operates at the local, national or international levels rests on the following philosophical foundations. We may pose the question of moral obligation afresh: What, if at all, ought to be the ground of moral obligation? Why ought we to embrace the values of ubuntu as ethical imperatives? How do the ethical features of ubuntu accommodate the concerns about moral autonomy of agency? The answer lies in the following argument below: First, let us reframe the above questions more simply and generally as: What ought to be the basis of man's ethical behaviour? How does ubuntu qualify in this regard?

Ubuntu as a Philosophy of Man or a philosophical Anthropology

Human beings are required to exercise freedom and responsibility as morally sensible and autonomous agents in private and public life. This is the basis of human dignity and moral sense. However, the exercise of freedom and responsibility among humans also depends on man's activities as a social being within a culture and society. Human beings as social creatures need to live together by having a sense of belonging and working for a common purpose. Peace and cooperation are, or at least, ought to be, the two major ends of social life in a human society. Social life is made interesting through the establishment of laws, morality and conventions that promote the life of individuals and the society. The tussle between life-promoting values and life-threatening values illustrate the dynamics of the contest for dominance between self-regarding values and other regarding values.

Put simply, man survives and thrives because he can separate life-promoting actions from life-threatening actions in terms of their deontology or rules and even more importantly their consequences or teleology. The former, acts that promote life, are approved, desired and considered desirable. The latter, which are acts that undermine life, are prohibited, punished and undesirable. The desirable or desired is defended by rules and positive rewards while the undesirable is deterred by punishment and disapproval. To a large extent we may ask individuals, groups, nations and the world at large to behave in a morally and socially responsible and responsive manner due to the fact that it is right to do so also. Put simply we encourage or promote moral norms and moral values due to reasons behind and consequences of actions. This is the approach or understanding that had been defended by ethical universalism and utilitarianism.

We could introduce some extra justification here. Viscount Samuel is correct when he declares that “men’s actions are governed by their ideas: right ideas lead to good actions and good actions bring welfare: wrong ideas lead to bad actions and bad actions bring suffering and disaster.”⁴² Our point is that ubuntu demands ethically or morally sound behaviour due to the fact that human beings are related to each other in time, space and history, by virtue of their direct interrelations and their common humanity. Human beings are interrelated because of the social necessity of mutual cooperation with the fellow human beings. Mutual cooperation is an imperative due to the presence and reality of forces and elements that are greater than and far beyond human powers and comprehension. Such elements are for instance, God, nature, providence, destiny and history.

If the above is the case then individuals can be useful to themselves and to others on the ground that they are provided the right human values as directing principles of human behaviour as well as the enabling social opportunities and conditions in order to develop and be productive for the good of the self and of humanity. Interestingly the deep and foundational consequence of human interaction suggests that people in fact do actually work for themselves when they work for others or they feel that they are working for others. Much of the time, the things you do to or for others have a way of returning to you as positive or negative reward. This is so due to the interrelationship between human beings and

⁴² Samuel Viscount, “Philosophy and the Life of the Nation,” *Philosophy* xxxi, no. 118 (1956): 199.

societies. Therefore, the reason for adopting the human values of ubuntu rests on the concept of purpose. This is the idea that; in applying the ubuntu principles or values to the life of the individual or humanity at large, we are working for a lower and higher purpose or end.

Every human being we may argue requires or even deserves this opportunity of the human, humane and humanistic values of ubuntu, to fulfil himself and benefit the self and the rest of humanity. Individuals and groups grow and progress because people make sacrifices for others within families, communities, countries and the world at large. Thus, the need for humans to be hurtful, hateful, wicked, cruel, and destructive of good and productive things, can be viewed or queried as an inimical action that is needless and perhaps ineffectual in the existential scheme of things. Ubuntu in its ethical dimension offers us a prospect for change in human nature as well as social and political life that can be positively consequential for the security, peace and progress of humanity. Ubuntu seems to offer the interesting possibility of an ethical notion or concept that could be both teleological and deontological; it upholds a rule of interconnecting human beings using values such as humaneness, compassion and the dignity of life. It also focuses on the positive outcome or goal of bringing different races and classes of people together for peace, progress and survival.

Conclusion

Ubuntu remains an endogenous paradigm of development in Africa. We utilized Ubuntu ethics to countermand the current dominant social paradigm (DSP) of hatred, intolerance, abuse of human rights, internal and external colonialism, dehumanization, exploitation, authoritarianism, poverty and oppression that plagued the world and Africa specifically. Ubuntu as a value system or construct relied on the template of some key moral and democratic values for African liberation and transformation. Ubuntu ethics established a set of values whereby human beings lived according to certain human and humane principles such as reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, emphasis on human dignity and the value of human life as well as consensus, tolerance and mutual respect. Ubuntu ethical correlates served as materials that established stable and viable human relations in the national and even the international system. Ubuntu conceptualized as an ethical idea and praxis, was a powerful tool that made Africans

more capable of tackling their natural and man-made existential predicaments.

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Faith, Reason and the Challenges of Epistemic Claims¹

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Abstract: The debate of the age long relationship between faith and reason as diverse sources of knowledge of reality has been on for quite some time and the quest for a clearer elucidation at this time is imperative as well as compelling because of the sordid condition we have found ourselves in the world today. The world is bedeviled by a number of challenges that has questioned the realities of our social existence, as it relates to how we perceive ourselves, neighbors, circumstances and experiences in our contemporary society. As a result, there seems to be a general dislocation of our sense of values, hope and confidence necessary for the activation and sustenance of the matrix of social solidarity and human development. Some scholars have poignantly seen science as the only solution to existential problems. Peter Throdahl, for example, writes that: “In an age in which science and reason are required to find real solutions to very real problems in an extremely complex world, science is often taking a back seat to religious dogma and political agendas. My fear, as well as yours, is that the younger generation will be educated without an appreciation for scientific process and our solutions to modern-day problems will not reflect the knowledge of the day. What a chilling and dark future that would leave for us all.”² It is important to note that we are aware that “productivity and positive results of science plays an important role in human emancipation, aspiration, self-fulfillment and social progress, but that contrary to Throdahl’s expectations, they do not certainly exhaust the depth of human

¹ This paper was first read at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria at the instance of the Postgraduate School on Wednesday, 23rd February, 2022. I appreciate the contributions of the Postgraduate students of the seminary. I thank specially Rev. Prof. John Eyinnaya, Rev. Prof. Emiola Nihinlola and all those that made impressive contributions during and after the lecture.

² T. Peter Throdahl, “Faith and Reason are not Mutually-Exclusive; we need both,” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 4, 2005, 1.

knowledge and their aspirations;”³ otherwise, there would not have been need for the debate under review. My motivation in this study, therefore, is to activate a certain kind of conversation that will change our understanding or at least make some skeptics have a second look at the tension between faith and reason as two ways of knowing and interpreting human realities.

Keywords: Faith, Reason, Convergence, Epistemic Claims

Introduction

The thrust of this paper is the clarification of the ‘seemingly’ controversy between faith and reason as two ways of knowing or as sources of justification for religious beliefs. The drive to do this arose from a number of observations in literature to the effects that both are seen by many scholars as incompatible and to others to use Possenti’s phrase quoting Pope John Paul, that “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth... .”⁴ Since both can serve this cognitive function, philosophers and theologians have become increasingly concerned about how the two are related and how one can treat claims that emanate from each source. While some have argued that faith and reason are in sharp contrast over certain propositions or methodologies, others have held that there cannot be any genuine conflict between the two – arguing that “reason properly employed, and faith properly understood will never produce contradictory claims.” Yet, scholars of the logical positivist persuasion like Otto Neurath, Moritz Schlick and Alfred Jules Ayer have argued contrary to the above that there is any domain of thought or human experience that is driven by faith, claiming instead that all meaningful ideas or statements are accessible through thorough ratiocination. Thus, arguing that it is impossible for a non-rational or trans-rational form of language can hold meaningful cognitive content. This, therefore, poses threats to how a seemingly alternate source of knowledge upon which religious beliefs can rest could be attained.

In this study, I want to contend that in spite of the apparent differences of the two sources of justification of religious beliefs,

³ T. Ebijuwa, “Confluence of Ideas: Philosophy, Tradition and the Challenges of universal Values,” *36th Inaugural Lecture Series*, Ogbomosho, Nigeria, 2021 (Nigeria: Ladoke Akintola University of Technology), 8.

⁴ Vittorio Possenti, “Faith and Reason: What Relationship?” *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 59, no. 1 (2016): 4.

they are complimentary and harmoniously related; in that in their quest at understanding realities and interpreting nature and human existence, there are certain claims whose truths cannot be solely demonstrated by each source of knowledge.

From the above, it will not be out of order to seek for evaluation of both sources of knowing carefully in order to provide a better narration of the theoretical interpretation, which will reflect most faithfully reality of the discourse of the relationship between faith and reason and how it affects Christianity, the goal and purpose of human solidarity and social existence.

Clarification of Terms

To understand the relationship between faith and reason, it is important to clarify these two terms. This is with a view to providing an appropriate theoretical context for the analysis of the relationship between faith and reason as they affect our ways of knowing and the goal of human existence. Let me start my build up by clarifying what is meant by faith.

Faith

As articulated by Mark Baham, faith is undoubtedly the cornerstone of the Christian worldview.⁵ The product of the heart that is recognized as faith drives how Christians interact with the world, their neighbors, and what shapes their hopes for the future and the understanding of their social and physical environments. As a vital force in the life of a believer, faith is a subtle but critically significant part of the Christian experience, at once hard to adequately define in all its nuance, but at the same time immensely powerful and life changing.⁶ This is the reason perhaps Soren Kierkegaard sees "...faith as the most important task to be achieved by a human being, because only on the basis of faith does an individual have a chance to become a true self."⁷ William Craig describes faith as a step of commitment or trust, taken when the individual knows something to be true and is ready to commit wholeheartedly to it.⁸ In his "The Sentiment of Rationality,"

⁵ Mark Baham, "Faith and Reason," *ResearchGate*, June, 2020, 4, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342275819_Faith_and_Reason.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Soren Kierkegaard," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed November 10, 2017, 7, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/>.

⁸ William Craig, "What is Faith," filmed 2012, Veritas org, 4:00, <https://www.veritas.org/talks>.

William James defines faith in the following manner: Faith is the “belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance.” So, faith is not only compatible with doubt, but it requires its possibility.⁹ It is oriented towards action: it is a kind of “working hypothesis” needed for practical life. The Letter to the Hebrews succinctly expressed the idea of faith in a delightful manner, liking it to a physical substance and explaining how it serves as evidence of the ultimately scientifically unverifiable or to say it differently as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrew puts it; faith is concerned with “the confidence of things which are hoped for, and the certainty of things which are not seen” (Heb., 11:1). Of course, things not seen here have spiritual undertone and do not mean things that one cannot see because they are small.

It should be noted that when we consider the ordinary usage of faith as we have it in Craig above and as defined by the Advanced Learners Dictionary, we are likely to see a definition that includes terms like, “trust,” “belief” and “confidence”. For example, “confidence or trust in a person or plan.”¹⁰ Of course, once an individual you trust or have confidence in something or somebody, such must believe in that thing or person. As averred by Tavani, if we carefully look at the notion of religious faith, we are likely going to encounter at least two different senses of the concept of faith.¹¹ While one has to do with faith as an *act*, the other sees faith in terms of its *content*. Although, it is possible for one to believe that the two senses are inseparable in the sense that the content of one’s faith (i.e., doctrine, principles and articles that comprise a certain faith) might well inform an individual’s act of faith in the decisions, choices or commitments he/she makes, we are not likely to see as we coast along in this study any form of division in our attempt to unpack the concept of faith as it relates to our interpretation of human realities. Let us quickly see the distinction.

⁹ William James, “The Sentiment of Rationality,” *Mind* 4, no. 15 (July, 1879): 320.

¹⁰ Albert Sydney Hornby, *Advanced Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 231.

¹¹ Herman Tavani, “The Classic Debate on the Relationship between Faith and Reason: Some Challenges from the Perspective of Relativism and Postmodernism,” *Insight: Rivier Academic Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2.

Faith as Act and Faith as Content

As stated above, let us consider the concept of religious faith as an act of believing or an act involving trust or commitment. Saint Thomas Aquinas sees faith as an “act of the intellect assenting to the truth at the command of the will,”¹² or simply put, the mind’s assent to what is not seen. In a similar vein, John Locke describes faith “as an assent to a proposition”¹³ and William James speaks of “faith as our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters.”¹⁴ This aspect of faith involving activity or act, however, can also be said in the words of Paul Tillich, to refer to the *dynamic sense of faith*. In this sense, faith cannot only be seen as one’s interaction and interpersonal encounter with God, it can also be conceived as a form of commitment that people make to a way of living in different social contexts or one’s commitment to a vocational form of religious life.

In addition to the above, and as already highlighted, faith can also be conceived in terms of its content, that is, in terms of the contents of the beliefs as opposed to an individual act of believing. Here, the direction of faith is in terms of a certain set of religious beliefs and doctrines, rather than an individual subscribing to those beliefs. This sense of faith having to do with the collection of principles and doctrines is what Ravi Zacharias called substantive sense of faith.¹⁵ In its substantive understanding, religious faith is likened to the collection of articles and doctrines or even dogma-beliefs which define what it means to belong to a certain religion say Baptist Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Roman Catholic and host of others. In this context, therefore, it is important to note especially when the issue of faith is being discussed to be careful of vacillating between its substantive aspect and that of its dynamic status. In this study, while recognizing the importance of the substantive aspect, we are interested more in the dynamic sense, that is, that aspect, which makes man have a believing attitude in religious concerns.

¹² St Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologiae 11 (QU.4.5),” in *Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas* 2, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 5.

¹³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 11, ed. Alexander C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 416.

¹⁴ William James, *The Will to Believe and other Essays* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1886), 1.

¹⁵ Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith we Defend* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 1-384. See Heb. 11:1.

Reason

Like faith, reason is also ambiguous as it is sometimes confused with common sense by the uninitiated minds. Unlike faith that relies on the strong belief, trust or confidence in the doctrines of religion based on spiritual conviction, reason seeks for clarity of thought based on certain logical principles. In this sense, reason can be described as the power of the mind to understand, articulate and form judgments logically. Now since religious beliefs or revelation as the case may be are products of the fruits of faith, those that are persuaded by the emphasis on conceptual clarity for example, the logical positivists, argue that all metaphysical language fails to meet a standard of logical coherence and hence meaningless. They argue that since metaphysical claims are not only in principle falsifiable and their claims neither true nor false, they can be said to make no verifiable reference to the world. Religious language shares these features with metaphysical language. As reported by Anthony Flew (1971), because it is difficult for religious believers to state the condition under which they would give up their faith since their claims are unfalsifiable, they cannot be objects for rational evaluation.

It is true to say that this attack on religious claims by logical positivists might appear deep at first sight, since they can be considered meaningless because they cannot be verified empirically so to say, they are nevertheless imperative in providing believers with moral motivation, self-understanding and a clear compass for navigating through life for better social engineering and human survival. Although R. M Hare and Anthony Flew are in agreement in their admittance that religious faith consists of a set of unfalsifiable assumptions, which the former called “blik,” Hare is of the opinion that our practical dealings with everyday world involve several of such “blik.” Even though we are aware that some of these principles might be faulty, we cannot but have some in order to live a comfortable life in the world otherwise we will be living a life of robots.

Compatibility Thesis

The above response by Hare and Flew to the logical positivists’ denial of religious beliefs is a subtle attempt at raising concerns of the compatibility of faith and reason. The question to ask at this juncture is: whether faith and reason are compatible as averred in the report of R. M. Hare? Before this, let us quickly look at the different senses of compatibility following Herman Tavani

(2008). Apart from the loose sense in which compatibility is commonly used, Tavani identified three senses of compatibility, which are; weak compatibility, moderate compatibility and strong compatibility. In the loose sense, we ordinarily speak of close friends as being compatible with one another when they share certain sets of values, such as supporting each other in terms of needs and interests and the mutual pursuit of common ideals of moral decency. We also sometimes use the word “compatible” when we speak of two institutions as being compatible even though those institutions are operating with two vastly diverse ideologies and are not in total disharmony with each other. Or to put it mildly, when a husband and wife are living peacefully with one another, we say both of them are compatible with one another. These, according to Tavani, are instances of what may be called non-logical compatibility, which can be contrasted with logical compatibility.¹⁶ Logical compatibility strictly speaking in philosophical parlance means the agreement of two or more propositions. Thus, when it is said that two or more propositions are compatible, we mean that the propositions or statements under review are coherent and consistent. Otherwise stated, they are incompatible. As Tavani puts it: The criterion used in determining whether propositions are logically compatible is based on logical consistency. If two propositions are such that their conjunction is logically consistent, the propositions are said to be compatible. On the contrary, if two propositions are logically inconsistent – i.e., their conjunction results in a logical contradiction of the form P and not $\neg P$ it would follow that the two propositions are logically incompatible.¹⁷

This meaning of logical compatibility discussed above can be seen as a formal sense of compatibility since it addresses ordinarily the formal conditions of logical rules necessary for two or more propositions to be logically compatible. Here, compatibility seems to me to be an elastic concept. Within this formal sense of logical compatibility we can also identify strength of compatibility, which is different ways that we can say a proposition is compatible. That is, weak compatibility, moderate compatibility and strong compatibility. Since this study is not design around strict compatibility thesis, we will not bother ourselves so much on this. With the preceding discussion in mind – that is discussions of faith,

¹⁶ Herman Tavani, “The Classic Debate on the Relationship between Faith and Reason: Some Challenges from the Perspective of Relativism and Postmodernism,” *Insight: Rivier Academic Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

reason and compatibility, we can now recast our original question of whether faith and reason are indeed harmoniously compatible. Or to put it differently, the question will now be, whether faith and reason are good sources of knowledge that complement each other in the sense of responding to the challenges of human existence and nature.

Recall that we have earlier differentiated between faith as act and faith as content, logical reasoning, compatibility and incompatibility, it is imperative for us to now return to our original question and ask if faith in all its senses can be said to be compatible with reason. Let us now recast our original question as: Is the act of faith (i.e., believe in existence of God) compatible with logical reason? It is important to note here that acts alone are neither logically compatible nor logically incompatible, since acts are not propositional, statements or assertions as noted by Tavani. What the above question seems to suggest from the face value is not question about logical compatibility *per se* but about whether there are justifications for believing in the existence of God or whether there are reasonable arguments/justifications for religious beliefs. The question is: what will now count as a reasonable justification or argument for our religious claims, convictions or commitments?

Apart from the fact that the claims that scientific knowledge is necessary for the resolution of human existential problems is wrongheaded, even though we know that it is not sufficient, scholars have advanced arguments to show why it is reasonable to believe in the existence of God. A classic example in this direction is that advanced by Blaise Pascal in the Seventeenth century, popularly known as *Pascal's wager*. For him, people can choose to believe in God or can choose not to believe in God, and that God either exists or he does not. Under this condition, if a person believes in God and He exists, he will win eternal happiness and infinite gain. If God does not exist, he will suffer minor inconvenience. If he does not believe in God, and He exists, he will lose eternal bliss and suffer infinite loss. If he does not believe in God, and God does not exist, he will gain a finite amount of pleasure. As Pascal avers, let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God exists. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. It is imperative then to wager that He exists without hesitation. In this view, whether the claims of religious beliefs are true or not or make sense or not is not that important as those questions may not be resolvable. What is important to us here is whether there are reasons or rational justifications for a person to be a believer.

However, as attractive as Pascal's position might appear, it has been argued that it is inadequate to provide sufficient justification for religious beliefs. In his *The Ethics of Belief*, William Clifford (1886) argues that we must be careful about holding beliefs without sufficient evidence. He claims that beliefs based on insufficient justifications are always wrong. Believing in something just because its outcome may be beneficial in the long run is not genuine belief. To push his argument forward, Clifford gives an example of a ship owner who sees that his ship is old and in need of repairs. The ship owner, however, convinced himself that the ship has made so many voyages and had always returned safely, and believes that this trip will not be different from previous ones even when it is clear that evidence before him suggests the contrary. The ship owner had faith and allowed the ship to sail. Clifford says that if the ship sinks, the owner will be directly responsible for the deaths that occur as a result of his negligence. He says further that even if the ship manages to make the voyage, the owner is still guilty, he just would not be found out, as the question has to do with the foundation for his belief rather than the outcome. This is because as he puts it, the ship owner "had no right to believe on such evidence that was before him. He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation or evaluation, but by stifling his doubts."¹⁸ Clifford says that it is not so much the belief that should be judged but the action following the belief. Even though the ship owner believed the sea worthiness of his ship, he could have taken precaution of having it examined before putting the lives of other people on the line. Yet, Clifford argues further that when acting in a way that is opposite of one's belief, it seems to condemn the belief. For example, if the ship owner truly believed that his ship was good, he would have no reason to have it examined. Indeed, the examination would suggest that the owner actually had some doubts. He therefore argues that it is one's duty to look carefully at both sides of an issue, and when one holds a belief that is not based upon evidence he loses his objectivity and is unable to perform that duty. Furthermore, Clifford points out that belief are all incredibly important, as they lay the foundation for accepting or rejecting all other beliefs and provide the framework for future action. Since one's beliefs are not private it shows that they can be passed on within one's society and to future generations. Beliefs, which are based upon evidence and have been carefully examined, allow humanity to have mastery of the world,

¹⁸ K. William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Contemporary Review*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Fredrick Pollock (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 1.

but when those beliefs are unfounded and contrary to evidence, the mastery resulting is wrong-headed. Science and technological innovations that rely on evidence will not be encouraged and people's knowledge will now be rooted in a weak foundation. This is part of the reasons that beliefs that are unfounded are deceptive, as they make humans feel stronger and more knowledgeable when the reverse is the case. Hence Clifford, like Michael Scriven, argues that holding beliefs based upon insufficient evidence can lead to the downfall of a society. And that even when this belief is discovered to be true, the society still suffers, as people are likely to stop investigating issues with an open mind.¹⁹ As Clifford puts this: "... If I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere believe; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong towards Man that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into slavery."²⁰

The implication of this, for Clifford, will be the absence of the spirit of inquiry required for the validation of our beliefs. As a result, they will become gullible and susceptible to fraud, thereby hastening the downfall of civilization. Thus, holding these unfounded beliefs and suppressing doubts in the words of Clifford is a sin to humanity and completely worthless as method for explanation of our realities and guidance of our lives in the eyes of Michael Scriven.

Reacting to Clifford's evidentialist position above, William James avers in his *The Will to Believe* (1886) that we may be rational in holding a belief even if we do not have sufficient evidence for it; and that life would be severely deprived of its vitality if we acted only on completely well founded beliefs. Clearly, this is permissible from a theistic dimension. He says that there are two ways of viewing humanity's duty in terms of opinion and belief, and that we are commanded to know the truth and avoid error. However, knowing the truth and avoiding errors are not one commandment stated in two ways. Rather, they are separable, and stressing one over the other will provide different results. He, therefore, argues that those, like Clifford, who place the avoidance of error above knowing the truth, are keeping their minds in a

¹⁹ Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185-86.

constant state of suspense out of fear of being duped. He explains this with an analogy reminiscence of a military general telling his soldiers to avoid battles so that they do not suffer injuries or casualties. Victories over neither foes nor nature are won by not taking action. Thus, James says, he is willing to face the occasional falsehood or dupe in order to eventually arrive at a true belief. He does take into account that there are times when we can postpone making a decision until more sufficient evidence is provided. However, we can only postpone our minds if the option is not a crucial one with dire consequences. Often, the need to act is not so critical and urgent that we must risk acting upon a false belief than on no belief at all.

On the reliance on religious beliefs, James argues that the skeptic may say that he is waiting for more evidence before making his decision, it should be noted, however, that he has in clear terms already decided. The skeptic has decided that it is better and wiser to dismiss the belief for fear of being duped than it is to believe and hope that they are true. Clearly, by choosing to wait, the skeptic on this showing has joined the side of the unbeliever. Since we know that no one is absolutely sure of the existence of God, one must make a decision whether to believe or not or wait for more proof. Perhaps, this is part of the reasons James concludes that “faith is something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible” and that choosing to wait is not considered inactive; it is just as much an act as that of believing. In other words, whether one believes or not, it is an individual affair and it should be tolerated no matter what.

Faith and Reason: Point of Convergence

Recall that the journey thus far has been how to provide answer to the question: Is the act of faith compatible with logical reason? We have said that to answer this question as it is, might be problematic because it sounds like using Aristotelian logic (i.e., uniquely human cognitive capacity that comprehends deductive truths and logical necessity) to understand religious matters- the result of which will be wrong-headed. Consequently, we recast the question to whether there are justifications for believing in the existence of God or whether there are reasonable justifications/arguments for religious beliefs. The attempts to address this question led to the debate between Clifford and James at least as highlighted in this study on the report of Blaise Pascal as we have seen above on the concerns of the provision of sufficient evidence for the justification of religious claims, beliefs or

commitments. I want to say at least as we have it here that what the quest for evidence or logical justification on matters relating to religious beliefs suggest is the application of scientific paradigm unsuitable for the evaluation of religious concerns to determine its truth value, a kind of putting a square peg in a round hole, which makes the evidentialist claims fallacious, and consequently committing what Gilbert Ryle calls category mistake.

When Clifford says that to believe something “because its outcome may be beneficial in the long run is not a genuine belief,” one may want to ask if life itself is not designed in such a way. When we sleep at night, for example, what is the guarantee that we will wake up the next day? We ordinarily want to believe that because we woke up yesterday, it is most likely that we will definitely wake up tomorrow. Of course, many people who slept in the past believing that they will wake up the next day and never did, did not obliterate the fact of the reasonableness in believing in waking up. What will happen if most of us believe the contrary that we are not likely to wake up because of the fear of not waking the next day? This will be dangerous- as many people will avoid sleeping and consequently look sickly, feeble and docile. It means further that many of us will be living a life of fear and doubt, which invariably in relation to human beings, will destroys social capital; that is, the fruit of the foundation of relationship building. To trust, or believe therefore, from the foregoing is a reasonable thing. The absence of trust in any society destroys social interactions and promotes distrust in the sense that a person cannot rely on others to respect their opinions and values. Without the affirmation of trust, therefore, it is not only very easy for a person’s confidence to nose – dive and be disorderly, risk taking and the promotion and expression of creativity and innovation will also be in flight. So why not believe? This question is imperative because life itself will be miserable without this act of faith. To believe, therefore, is a fact of life. To deny this as Clifford and Scriven did is to rule the concept of faith, in this case *trust* out of court. To believe that we will wake up the next day is to trust with some sense of confidence that because it has always been the case then it is highly probable and reasonable that we will wake up. It is true that we may not have sufficient evidence to say that we will wake up tomorrow as averred by James; it is, however, difficult to deny that it is not a reasonable act to believe in. To put this differently, it is reasonably necessary to believe in it- without which the society will be dysfunctional and chaotic. This act, that is, the act of believing, promotes self-confidence, self-esteem and mutual trust. Someone who lacks self-confidence, however, is less likely to feel that they can achieve their goals, and tends to have a negative

perspective about themselves and what they hope to gain in life. No wonder William James makes this epistemological point in his reaction against the agnostic that says that we should withhold belief whenever the evidence is insufficient that; “a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.”²¹

It is also imperative to note in line with the above, that trust plays a pervasive role in the sustainability and development of social capital, even sustaining acts of cooperation with strangers who have no control over each other's actions. Placing trust in a person, therefore, can be seen as a strategic act, a moral response or even an expression of social solidarity. It is at the core of everything that is crucial in our life. In fact, Faith is a natural and inescapable part of life without it there cannot be genuine relationship.

From the above, it is obvious that the evidentialist misses something in social intercourse, where we generally count it a virtue to trust others without some kind of calculation. Such openness we may say can broadly be termed rational. However, given our long shared experiences that willingness to trust others does elicit trustworthy behaviour: accordingly, though I may have little or no direct evidence that this person will prove trustworthy if I turn to him in a sudden predicament, I may have good evidence for the general reliability of others in my community. Otherwise stated, there will be total annihilation of social wealth in our society.

Thus far, our discussion has been about human faith; the faith that human beings naturally and ordinarily have on each other's testimony. But what is the implication of the discussion so far on Christian faith? From the earliest days Christians saw a kind of comparison or analogy between natural and ordinary faith and the supernatural faith in God. For example, it says in the First Letter of John “If we believe the word of men, how much greater is the word of God” (1John: 9). In other words, if it is a reasonable thing as we have highlighted above for human beings to have faith in the word of merely human witness even when we know that they are fallible and are often mistaken in their judgments or decisions, how much more reasonable is it for us to have faith in the word of God who is infallible and makes no mistake and cannot deceive and be deceived. Similarly, St Paul says in the First Letter to the

²¹ William James, *The Will to Believe and other Essays* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1886), 28.

Thessalonians that: And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe (1Th. 2:13).

The above passages show how conscious Christians were of believing not only human testimony but also divine testimony in the word of God. It also stands to reason that we should believe in the word of God because what we believe by faith is not clearly human testimony but the word of the living God. Apostle Paul echoes this when he said: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (Rom.1:16-17).

There are many signs to confirm that it is the word of God. The signs are accessible to reason, for example, the miracles of Christ which many people witnessed or the enduring reality of the church and the consistency of her teaching, which had perdured for over two millennial in history. Even though, faith mysteries in themselves are hidden from us and our minds are unable to comprehend them, yet it is reasonable to believe them and they are believable and the science of credibility confirms their truths. Beyond this, we know that the truth of faith, for example, the divinity of church and the reality of the Holy Trinity cannot be proven by natural reason; rather, by the force of the supernatural light of faith as the believers embrace them without hesitation, without reservations and affirms that they are true because God bears witness to us about them. Hence, faith is seen as a gift of God born from the spirit of truth that works within our souls and illuminates everything. It is, however, important to note that this 'spirit of truth' is not analogous to those of Aristotelian logic, otherwise, they will as James argues above, be an irrational one.

It could be argued that the reasonableness of human faith as expressed above is not in doubt, but the bone of contention is that religious matters lack justifiable evidence and can be misleading and unreliable. While we may agree with this position that the arrow shot by critics hit the body of the bull, it is clear that it missed the heart of the bull because of the historical conflation and mis-interpretation of Hebraic and Hellenistic thoughts. Recall that we have argued that when we ask for justifiable evidence in religious concerns as the logical positivists are wont to argue, we have said that the question as presented is wrongly posed and thus misleading because it is tantamount to assigning to something a quality or action which can only be assigned things of another

category (e.g., treating abstract concepts as though they had a physical location).

At this juncture, let me begin to unearth this category mistake as presented in the bible by looking at Mathew 16: 1-4:

1. And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.
2. He answered them, “when it is evening, you say, ‘it will be fair weather, for the sky is red’.
3. And in the morning, ‘it will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening’. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.
4. An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah”. So he left them and departed.

Here, it is important to make a distinction between Hellenistic thought and Hebraic thought. Whereas the former deals with the world around us in a manner similar to Aristotelian logic, which has the syllogism at its foundation as follows:

Premise 1: All bachelors are unmarried men;

Premise 2: Femi is a bachelor;

Therefore: Femi is an unmarried man.

The above deductive proposition is valid because the conclusion is a product of the premises, and the argument is sound because the truthfulness of the premises and the conclusion are not in doubt. The reason for this distinction between Hebraic and Hellenistic thoughts is to show that while the latter seems to be logical in its operations, the former deals with philosophy developed within the Bible. Hence, it is a gross mistake if one uses Aristotelian logic to understand and interpret bible. This is because it does not have its foundation in linear and Aristotelian logic but in relational and experiential knowledge.

Let us see what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and the Sadducees in verse 2 above? According to Him, “When it is evening, you say, ‘it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.” What is the meaning of this? It means that this Hebraic Pharisees and Sadducees are thinking in Aristotelian syllogisms thus:

Premise 1: Red skies in the evening suggest fair weather;

Premise 2: This evening the skies are red;

Therefore: What follows from premise 1 and 2 is: The weather will be fair. Similarly, in verse 3a: He says “And in the morning, it will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.” This also suggests that they are thinking in an Aristotelian logic as follows:

Premise 1: Red skies in the morning suggest stormy weather;

Premise 2: This morning the skies are red;

Therefore: From premise 1 and 2 The weather will be stormy.

Jesus responded to the application of observation and reasoning in verse 3b: “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky.” That is, you know how to use your eyes and your minds to draw right conclusions when it comes to the natural world. In other words, he approves of their use of empirical observation and rational deliberation. In fact, it is precisely this approval that makes the following disapproval valid. He says in verse 3c, “But you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” When He says, “You cannot,” He is not saying that they do not have the sensory and rational capacities to do what needs to be done. He just showed them that they do in fact have the sensory and rational capacities to do what needs to be done because they are skilled in observation and deliberation when it comes to worldly matters. Yet, they cannot use such skills to interpret the signs of the times. This is because in verse 4, he said their inability to apply their skills to interpret the “signs of the times” are a function of their evil and adulterous minds. But what does being adulterous and evil have to do with their inability to use their eyes to interpret the signs? Elsewhere, He has metaphorically represented himself as the husband that has come into the world to look for his bride- his chosen people (cf. Matt.9:15; 25:1-13). Yet, they were unwilling to accept him as their husband because their hearts went after other gods and treasures (cf. Luke 16:14; Matt. 6:5). This is the reason they were asking for a sign when the sign was steering at them. They are asking for a sign to give the impression that they do not have sufficient evidence to accept Jesus as the Messiah. This skepticism is not lack of evidence or lack of rational power to decipher “the truth of the times,” as unbelievers, their hardened hearts disorder their rational powers and make them morally incapable of reasoning rightly about the truth. The search for truth, therefore, in religious matters does not lie in deductive propositions as stated above; otherwise, it will amount to the misapplication of categories. Rather, it is by faith - where faith as expressed by John Locke: ... is nothing but a firm Assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our Duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason; and so cannot be

opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due his Maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error.²²

What the preceding discussion shows is that faith should not be seen as a fragile structure without foundation. As Mooreland and Craig point out, “in scripture, faith involves placing trust in what you have reason to believe is true. It is not a blind, irrational leap into the dark. So, faith and reason cooperate on a biblical view of faith. They are not intrinsically hostile;”²³ and such we can conveniently say they are complementary and harmoniously related.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have argued that in spite of the seemingly differences of faith and reason as diverse sources of epistemic claims, they are complementary and harmoniously related. In doing this, I have argued that faith is not irrational or unreasonable and that it is also not oppose to reason as some skeptics are wont to believe. Rather, to have faith in something or someone is to trust or believe in that thing or person. It is true at times that we may not have sufficient evidence to believe in something but that does not obliterate the fact of believing because not doing so in any society will destroy social capital, risk-taking, activate distrust and the promotion and expression of creativity and innovation will be in flight. Hence, it is argued that faith does not only promote self-confidence, it is central to human existence. To lack self-confidence, therefore, is for someone to feel that he cannot achieve his goals, and tends to have a negative perspective about himself and what he hopes to gain in life. And because of this, it is argued that it is reasonable to believe - an act of faith - failing which will make society dysfunctional and chaotic. This is so, following William James that; ... “a rule that prevents me from acknowledging certain kinds of truths, if those kinds of truths were really there, would be an irrational one.”²⁴ The quest for truth, therefore, in religious matters does not lie in deductive propositions as we have stated

²² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV 17, 24.

²³ James Porter Moreland, and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), 20.

²⁴ James, “The Sentiment of Rationality,” *Mind* 4, no. 15 (July, 1879): 330.

above, otherwise, it will amount to what we have called mis-application of categories.

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A Christianisation Approach to the Understanding and Application of Cicero's Classical Idea of Formation

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Abstract: Administration and formation are two hinges on which the prospects and fortunes of any organization hangs. The administrative structure ensures that the structure and functionality of formation will uphold the ideals and values, while the formative structure serves the organization by preparing leaders who will protect and take responsibility for its goal. The complementary roles play by these two, define the present condition of the organization and indicate what the future holds. This study considers the basis for the application of the Ciceronian ideals of formation to the Church. This will be done by examining within the realities and experiences of the Church, the similarities of contexts, contents, structures, practices and means that she shares with the Ciceronian Roman Republic. In the face of such similarities, it will address if it is permissible to liken the Ciceronian orator to a mature Christian. And taking into consideration the contemporary experiences of the Church, the extent the classical values as espoused by Cicero will be examined in complementing the quest for efficient formation in the Church.

Keywords: Christianity, Catholic Church, Values, De Oratore, Roman Society

Introduction/Acceptance and Adaptation of Cicero in the Church Fathers

It will not be out of place to acknowledge and examine, before going deeper into the Christianization of Cicero's classical idea of formation, similar practice among Church Fathers and early Christians, in order to give a further basis to what we are proposing in this study. The adoption of Cicero's style and form of expression can be seen in the Church as early as the period of the apologists,

especially in the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix.¹ Lactantius, who was famously referred to as the “Christian Cicero,”² did not only emulate and choose Cicero as a model, he also affirms an anticipation of Christian doctrines in the works and thoughts of Cicero.³

St. Ambrose also recognized the depth of resources that the Church can tap from Cicero. In fact, his book *De Officiis Ministrorum*, which was “for a long time the chief Christian manual of ethics, was practically a rendering of Cicero’s *Duties* into Christian language, in which Ambrose solved the difficulties he met with the use of allegory. He acknowledges his indebtedness to the orator at the beginning of his book in the words, *sicut Tullius ad erudiendum filium, ita ego ad vos informandos filios*.”⁴ More than this, a Christian application of Cicero in St. Ambrose’s homilies has been argued through a comparison of Ambrose’s sermon at the burial of his brother and Cicero’s letter from exile to his brother.⁵

As at the time of Tertullian, there were divergent views on whether pagan views, Cicero inclusive, should be welcomed into Christianity or not. It is on record that Tertullian, with reference to this, not only exclaimed: “what has Jerusalem to do with Athens?”⁶ He also warned that Christians should “beware of those who have devised a Stoic, a Platonic, or a dialectical Christianity.”⁷ In contrast to the view of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria “compares the opponents of the pagan literature to the sailors of Ulysses, foolishly stopping their ears to the Siren music.”⁸ Where does this lead us? Despite Tertullian’s opposition to the adoption of pagan tools for Christianity, elements of Ciceronian influence can be seen in his works, and many other prominent Church Fathers after him still drew influences from Cicero. This shows that his objection had a specific undertone, an elaboration of which is beyond the scope of this work.

Other prominent Fathers like St. Cyprian and St. Jerome also adapted elements from Cicero. The latter was in fact, described as having had a dream in which he was described as more of a

¹ John Rolfe, *Cicero and His Influence* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1923), 114.

² Rolfe, *Cicero and His Influence*, 115.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Like Tullius [wrote] in order to educate his son, so also I, in order to instruct you, my sons,” (Rolfe, 115).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ M. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, trans. Gino Mazzoni (Siena: Cantagali, 1929), 7.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rolfe, *Cicero and His Influence*, 116.

Ciceronian than a Christian.⁹ While it may sound an exaggeration to say that St. Augustine, to some extent, owed his conversion to Cicero's influence, it is necessary to consider where a Christian adaption of Cicero's view on formation may lead us, using Augustine as a case study. His personal testimony of the effects of Cicero on his life and faith goes thus: "In the ordinary course of study, I fell upon a certain book of Cicero, whose speech almost all admire... This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and is called *Hortensius*. But this book altered my affections, turned my prayers to Thyself, O Lord; and made me have other purposes and desires. Every vain hope at once became worthless to me; and I longed with an incredibly burning desire for an immortality of wisdom, and began now to arise, that I might return to Thee."¹⁰

On the kind of presence that Cicero had during the Medieval Period, we can point at a letter written by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, in 1444 affirming that "it is true there have been among the English some who have cultivated the eloquence of Cicero, among whom common consent would place the admirable Bede."¹¹ In the midst of the extreme Ciceronianism which became popular with the works of the humanists, the voice of Desiderius Erasmus reechoed in 1528 when he wrote a dialogue titled *Ciceronianus*, where he argued for a mild Ciceronianism, adducing that recourse can and should be made to Cicero, but it would be absurd to reduce everything to Ciceronianism.¹² Thus, any adaptation of Cicero's view becomes not a 'return' to him as a *condicio sine qua non*, but a 'recourse' to him in search of a methodology suitable for the challenges of the present situation.

Terminologies and Practices in Christianity and Classical Roman Society

While the state is described by Cicero as "concilia coetusque hominum iure sociati,"¹³ the Church is an assembly of people, convoked by God for a mission.¹⁴ Just as the state has a unifying

⁹ Ibid., 116-17.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 4 (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1924), 109 – 110.

¹¹ Rolfe, *Cicero and His Influence*, 121-22.

¹² Ibid., 137.

¹³ "A collection or body of people (cives) united by law." M. Cicero, *De Re Republica*, VI, 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 264.

¹⁴ Kenneth Adesina, *Active Participation of the Laity in the Mission of the Church: A Pastoral Analysis of Christifideles Laiciviv-a-vis Lay Apostolate*

factor, the Church is united by her divine vocation as a family that shares in the mission and life of Jesus. Consequently, it can be said without doubt that the Church also needs her citizens, that is, the members, who will do all within their power to defend her ideals and maintain her identity.

Every institution has a goal, the pursuance of which necessitates a systematic formation. The defence of the Republican goals and values made Cicero to affirm the need for the formation of orators, citizens whose main pre-occupation is the salvation and well-being of the state; who do all within their power to ensure the safety and welfare of citizens.¹⁵ This defence occasionally called for even warfare and opportunities for heroic offerings.¹⁶ Even if the kingdom that the Church has to defend is not necessarily territorial, there is the need also in the Church to maintain ecclesiastical integrity in the areas of faith, morality, pastoral care, social welfare and doctrinal understanding.

Christian Values: Cicero adduces a specific form of formation that not only ensures the acquisition of classical values like *pietas*, *dignitas*, *fides* and *auctoritas*, but also creates a system in which their absence rings a bell in those who do not stand for these values. Christianity does not in any way reject these values, but raises them to a higher level, where grace complements their acquisition and prepares a solid basis for the formation of a mature Christian.

Cursus Honorum: As it was the case in Ancient Rome when every citizen looked forward to completing the *cursus honorum* and contributing to the well-being of the state, there is also the need in the Church to create a working mentality in the members, a mentality that both understands the Christian missionary injunction to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28: 19-20); and is ready to commit all available and sane resources to the well-functioning of every aspect of the Church's life and mission.

Custom and Law: Going back to the admiration expressed by Polybius and the basis on which the achievements of Ancient Rome was built, the roles and place of both the *mores maiorum* and the laws are inestimable. Like Rome, the Church is established and nurtured on the teachings of Jesus - both in written form as

Activities in Osogbo Diocesis (An unpublished B.Th. submitted to the Department of Theology, Ekpoma, 2003), 1-3.

¹⁵ M. Cicero, *De Oratore*, I, 34 (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1948), 27.

¹⁶ The heroic offering involves giving something for the benefit of the state and citizens, examples include Scaevola's burning of his hand to prove the resilience and resoluteness of Romans in the face of adversity; and Cicero's voluntary exile from Rome at a time and his refusal to run away from the hangmen.

Scriptures and in the form of customs and tradition handed down by forebears in the faith. If making recourse to the faith and deeds of the ancients help in solidifying the living, how much more will a celebration and a return to the heroic deeds of the Christian ancestors sustain the faith and commitment of the contemporary Christians?

Leadership Structure: Based on the teachings of Christ, the leadership structure of the Church is such that whoever aspires to be relevant as a leader has to do so through humble services to the community. The idea of martyrdom entails heroic offering, which is not alien to the ancient Romans. The legendary and heroic act of Gaius Mucius Scaevola¹⁷ calls not only for admiration, but the more, a reflection on how he got to that level of faith in the Republic.

Idea of the Family: In the contemporary image of the Church as a family, the idea of communion of life is further stressed and the inter-connectivity of individual members is emphasized. The idea of the individual families as 'domestic Church' also gives an indication of a sort of structure that helps in achieving a better supervised and more effective formation. In this practice, we can identify the position, roles, and responsibilities of the families, more especially in line with idea of the *paterfamilias* of Ancient Rome. How then can the Church build a consciousness in the mold of the *paterfamilias*, such that the familial structure can equally be used efficaciously in the perfect integration of the young members of the family into the ecclesiastical challenges they have to grapple with?

Aspects of Formation: In the encyclical *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, four areas of formation are underlined for the future priest, namely: human, spiritual, social and academic.¹⁸ While one is of the opinion that all these should also be included and emphasized in the formation of every young Christian by virtue of their participation in the common priesthood, it could be deduced that Cicero proposes a similar frame for the young orator. If there is a difference in the

¹⁷ Gaius Mucius was given the the name Scaevola after he lost his right hand in a great display of will power and dedication to Rome. He had tried to assassinate the commander of the Etruscan army who were encamped around Rome, the attempt failed and he was captured. In the presence of the commander and his army, he thrust his right hand into the fire and left it until it was completely burnt, showing them that every Roman citizen was ready to defend the city, with their lives. The Etruscans left Rome in peace because they could not withstand the assault of 'citizens' like Mucius, who felt no pain in the defense of their city.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *A Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Pastores Dabo Vobis - On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), 43-59.

effect they achieve, it might not be unconnected with the emphasis one lays on the different aspects and the opportunities given to those under formation.

Movement from Theory to Practice: The major difference between the Romans and the Greeks lay in the former's emphasis on praxis and tangible application of theories. The goodness of the Ciceronian orator lies not just in what he knows or the wideness of his knowledge but most importantly in the application of this to the wellbeing of the state through the acts of instruction, persuasion and appeal to emotion.¹⁹ This emphasis of the Ciceronian formation on actions that lead to tangible result is also at the centre of the quest for a 'sacramentalization' of the Christian belief.²⁰

Structure of Formation: There is the presence of a structure of formation in both the Republican Rome and the Church. Starting from the family, every agent of formation has significant roles to play in safe-guarding the state and the Church. However, it is left to be said that in the contemporary era, where the duties and rights of some of these agents of formation are being reduced by secularization and subjectivity through a relativized value-system, within available and legal means, there is the need to adapt roles according to the exigencies.

Spiritualization of Roles: Rome was presented to citizens not just as a divine project in which the combined spiritual effects of the deities and ancestors were at work, but more of a place where every citizen who played his role well and contributed in some way to the glory of Rome was actually walking tall with the ancestors and the gods of Rome. The Church does not just offer her members the full benefits of the communion of saints, but gives them the chance to work with Jesus for the salvation of the whole world. So, every effort that is put into the mission of the Church becomes a salvific opportunity and a foretaste of eternal communion.

The Ciceronian Orator and a Matured Young Christian

As a 'citizen' of God's Kingdom and in the manner of the Ciceronian orator, the young Christian must embrace "the practice

¹⁹ Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, 310 (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1948), 434.

²⁰ By sacramentalization, we mean: giving a physical expression to the entire content of our faith and practices as Catholics, in a sort of 'incarnation'; whereby people can almost touch, experience and perceive the ideals and values of the Catholic faith through the examples of our lives. Cf. B. Spinks, "Sacramentology," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Catholic Theology*, ed. I. McFarland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 452-54.

of spectacular virtue in the course of an active life in the setting of a political community – which... Cicero treats as the natural end of human existence.”²¹ So, since the identity of the Church goes beyond a mere political community, we can infer that Christianizing the values of the orator will bring an added responsibility to the matured Christian in the practice of spectacular virtue within the course of an active life in the setting of a spiritual, pastoral, human and moral community – which is the natural end of his Christian identity.

A young Christian is incorporated into the Church-fold through the sacraments of initiation. By means of Baptism, he becomes a child of God, member of the Church, and a citizen of God’s Kingdom.²² Through Confirmation, “a sacrament in which the Holy Spirit is given to those already baptized in order to make them strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ,”²³ he takes up a more challenging leadership role in the community, using all his abilities and capabilities to sustain and defend the Kingdom of God on earth. In the Eucharist, he has the opportunity of living in a loving union with Jesus Christ,²⁴ receiving an increase of sanctifying grace in his soul,²⁵ and foretasting the glorious resurrection and eternal happiness promised by Jesus.²⁶

In these sacraments of initiation, especially through baptism, the young Christian makes an affirmative response to the divine call to participate in the prophetic, kingly and priestly mission of Christ. As a result of this call-response interaction, he becomes an integral part of the Church’s mission, taking responsibility for the defence and propagation of Christ’s Kingdom on earth like the Ciceronian orator for Rome. In union with the Church, he disposes himself favorably to the divine assistance of the

²¹ J. Connolly, *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 267.

²² P. De Clerck, “Baptism,” in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. J. Lacoste (New York: Routledge, 2005), 154-56.

²³ T. Scannell, “Confirmation,” *New Advent*, April 20, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04215b.htm>.

²⁴ John 6:57; St. Cyril of Alexandria (Hom. in Joan., IV, xvii) beautifully represents this mystical union as the fusion of our being into that of the God-man, as “when melted wax is fused with other wax.” J. Pohle, “The Blessed Eucharist as a Sacrament,” *New Advent*, April 20, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05584a.htm>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John 6: 54, “Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood has everlasting life and I will raise him up on the last day.” See Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 20; Irenæus, *Against Heresies* IV.18.4, and Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 8.

Holy Spirit, so as to “preach the Goodnews to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4: 18-19). Consequently, his vocation is such that, whether he proceeds to the sacrament of Holy Orders or not, he already has enough basis for active participation in the mission; he should be conscious of the obligation to offer the example of his way of life as a testimony for his status as a citizen of God’s Kingdom, and should grow in the desire to make the prayer of the psalmist his own: “Lord, do not let those who place their hope in you be put to shame through me” (Psalm 69: 9).

It is pertinent to say at this point that, like the Ciceronian orator, the young Christian has to be brought up in a way to realize his identity, the rights, responsibilities and obligations that come to him as result of this identity, and then the inevitability of working assiduously for the Kingdom of God, so as not to lose his claim to eternal salvation. However, some important questions should come to mind here: what is the possibility of the young Christian doing this if he does not understand his very identity? How can he make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28: 19), if he does not have real and adequate knowledge of his faith and the reality of those he wants to convert to God? How does he hope to achieve any success without a methodic approach? How will his effort make impact on others if he is not a man of good character, moral probity and Christian virtues?

Following from the questions raised and for efficient Christian formation, we are proposing five important aspects that are evident in the Ciceronian model for the formation of the orator: *Civic or Ecclesiological Formation*.²⁷ The civic or ecclesiological formation gives the young Christian the real idea of the Church, his own identity as a member of the Church community and the expectations that come to him as a result of his membership of the faith community. This formation integrates him into both the functionality of the universal Church and the activities of the local Church community. Learning the unavailability of incarnating the Christian values²⁸ into concrete actions that are felt in the

²⁷ The usage of civic or ecclesiology is with a specific reference to focus and intentionality. Cicero’s focus was on the terrestrial city of Rome, with the intention of forming statesmen who will uphold the ideal of a civic state; so, adapting the same model to the Church brings in a nuance that supersedes the civic realm. Ecclesiology becomes a more suitable means of capturing the new realm into which we are situating the narrower concept of civic formation.

²⁸ As “admirable or praiseworthy trait of character,” virtues are commonly identified by different societies and linked to specific roles. For the specific

community, he discovers the necessity of taking up ministerial, devotional and social activities in his local faith community. In addition, he gets to appreciate the Church as a common patrimony that should be defended and sustained in the different areas of: spirituality, doctrine, liturgy, tradition, morality and social status within the society.

Spiritual Formation: It goes beyond doubt that one of the motivations for the heroic offerings and sacrifices recorded in the history of Rome is the notion of Roman divinity. The young Christian needs to be brought up in a way to appreciate the Holiness of the One, Catholic and Apostolic Church, understand his own identity as a call to participate in the divinity of God, and embrace the different forms in which the divine presence is experienced and related to in the community. Within the context of the Church's history and experience, the responses of our forebears in the faith and saints should be made clear to the young Christians, so that from that tender age, they can choose a model of spirituality to follow and strive after heroic offering that will grant them a place among the saints. Consequently, it is pertinent to emphasize activities like personal and communal prayers, devotions and whatever will call their attention to the spirituality of their vocation, duty and challenges as Christians.

Human Formation: In view of the demands of his vocation and challenges, this aspect of formation looks into helping the Christian attain a pleasing personality and some level of "affective maturity."²⁹ It goes beyond mere acquisition of some moral values to the acquisition of character that invokes respect, honour and dignity from others. The importance of human formation is such that it is the fulcrum on which others rotate, it gives credence to others. No matter how vast one is in other areas of formation, if his character or his very person does not stand the test of character, his efforts are pointless.

role of the orator, Cicero specifically put the four classical cardinal virtues into a specific context and role; in Christianity, especially in the writing of St. Paul, the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love are attached to the identity of a Christian. While the superior and divinely instilled theological virtues are necessary conditions for the Christian state, the 'cultivation' of the cardinal virtues is necessary to give open and heroic expression to the practice of the theological virtues.

Cf. 1Cor. 13:13; Cf. J. Porter, "Virtues," in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* 1, ed. J. Lacoste (Michigan: Routledge, 2005), 1681-684.

²⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 44.

Intellectual or Academic Formation: Since *nemo dat quod non habet*,³⁰ the young Christian needs a basis for proper understanding of the contents of his beliefs and a platform that gives him an insight into the inter-connectedness of these to other realities around him. Intellectual formation is “deeply connected with, and indeed can be seen as a necessary expression of, both human and spiritual formation. It is a fundamental demand of the human intelligence by which one ‘participates in the light of God's mind’ and seeks to acquire a wisdom, which in turn opens to and is directed toward knowing and adhering to God.”³¹ Apart from helping to acquire wisdom, which in turn opens to, and is directed towards knowing and adhering to God, an intellectual formation that is integrated with a spirituality marked by a personal experience of God³² affords the Christian the opportunity to possess the knowledge of many things and the ability to argue from the different sides of an argument.

Formation in Rhetoric or Evangelization: The role of the Christian can be likened to the Samaritan woman, who after having encountered Jesus, went into the village to tell others about Christ and brought them to him.³³ For the Christian, how will he do this if he is not vast in the art of convincing people? The contents of faith and our Christian mission are admittedly rich, soothing and salvific, but how do we present these to others if we do not develop the technicality of presentation and the intricacies of persuasion? If evangelization can be simply defined as having Christ and making him known to others, there is the need not just to cultivate the appropriate style, mode, means and atmosphere for evangelization in the same way that rhetoric teaches the orator both the style and the whole mechanism of working upon the *pathos* of the audience; but also to facilitate a contact between them and the Saviour through the faith community. Thus, for effective formation, it is necessary to create an atmosphere that is conducive, in the frame of the Ciceronian *negotium sine periculo* and *otium cum dignitate*. This is important because the Ciceronian model of formation extols the full and free co-operation of the pupil under formation in an environment that is not menacing.³⁴ By and large, it should be

³⁰ “Nobody can give what he does not have.” Cf. J. Stone, *The Routledge Dictionary of Latin Quotations: The Illiterati's Guide to Latin Maxims, Mottoes, Proverbs and Sayings* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 68.

³¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 51.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Cf. John 4: 1-42.

³⁴ By this Cicero means that formation is better done when there is a full cooperation from the person to be formed; coercion may at best bring

affirmed that adopting the Ciceronian model of formation for the Christian places great emphasis on the centrality of the human person in communication.

So, to communicate and present Christ to others as an active participant in the mission of Christ, the first three aspects of formation adapted from Cicero, that is, civic or ecclesiological, spiritual and human aspects of formation, must give the right identity, necessary zeal, just motivation and the Christian conscience that will ensure that he makes good use of the tools offered by the intellectual and rhetorical/evangelizational formation. Otherwise, the effect of oratory and wide knowledge would have a devastating consequence on the society if they are not accompanied by proper human formation and high sense of ecclesiological and spiritual responsibility.³⁵

Catechesis and the Methodological Enrichment of Ciceronian Formational Ideals: A Re-Appraisal

The word ‘catechesis’ is derived from the Greek verb *κατηχεω*, which means ‘to resound.’³⁶ In its noun form, *κατηχησις* means an oral instruction or teaching.³⁷ Thus, the word ‘catechesis’ in its original usage in Greek, in the work of Cicero³⁸ and in the New Testament connotes the idea of oral teaching.³⁹ It can be said in fact that “since Christian initiation required knowing both Christian dogma and moral, the history of catechesis is also that of teaching lay Christians, especially children, the essential elements of Christianity.”⁴⁰

Going by the famous dictum of Tertullian that “Christians *are* made, not born,”⁴¹ we can deduce that catechesis has been a practice in the Church right from the beginning of her existence. In

satisfaction to the agent of formation, but it is never a guaranteed means of achieving the goal of formation.

³⁵ Cf. M. Cicero, *De Oratore*, I, 30 (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1948), 23.

³⁶ J. Lacoste, ed., *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 265.

³⁷ F. Montanari, *Vocabolario della Lingua Greca* (Torino: Loescher Editore, 2004), 1121.

³⁸ Cf. M. Cicero, *Ad Atticum*, XV, 12.2, ed. T. Page, *et al* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1961), 328.

³⁹ Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 265.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Fiunt non nascuntur Christiani.” Cf. Tertullian, *Apologia*, ed. G. Goold (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1977), 90-1.

history, however, there have been different modifications to its nature, focus and methodology. Apart from the various instances of instruction in the New Testament, “the earliest catechesis of which we have details is given in the *Didache*, in which a text called ‘The Two Ways’ ... presents the duties of the convert to the ‘Way of Life’ (honesty, chastity, humility, and charity), which separates him from the world and from the Way of Death.”⁴²

At the very early period, we can infer the nature of catechesis from the work of the Church fathers, who at various times described the nature of instruction and formation given to the neophytes. Justin the Martyr writes that “the enlightenment of initiation is for those who have been taught the Gospel and pledge to live accordingly.”⁴³ By late second century, there are indications of the presence of groups under instruction, being taught the rudiments of the faith and its moral obligation before baptism.⁴⁴ In fact, by the end of the third century, “the catechumenate involved scrutiny of motives, lifestyle, and employment; ... the whole process marked a dramatic journey from worldly society to sacred communion.”⁴⁵ All these show the vantage attention given to the person of the Christians as a testimony to their faith in Christ.

The challenges of the fourth century brought about an increase in the doctrinal and theological content of catechesis, and by the fifth century, infant baptism gradually became the norm, “baptismal instruction declined ... [and] enrolment, exorcism, renunciation, and profession were compressed into a series of rapid steps at the start of the baptismal service.”⁴⁶ From this point, the doctrinal enrichment of catechesis did not carry along with it a commensurable attention to the human and character formation of the Christians. The situation was so serious that “numerous injunctions from local councils and bishops in the period 800 – 1500 show the efforts made to ensure that the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Ave Maria were known and understood by all.”⁴⁷ The emphasis on doctrinal instructions continued in the medieval ‘Question and Answer’ catechesis, and the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent.

⁴² Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 265. Similar description of the early catechesis is also given in the Shepherd of Hermas, 2.

⁴³ I. McFarland, David A. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, Iain R. Torrance, eds., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Catholic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 86.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-7.

⁴⁷ Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 265.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* of the late twentieth (20th) Century is an enrichment of the Catechism of the Council of Trent in a manner that captures the spirit of the Vatican II Council. It is in fact a good response to “the desire for a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine, both on faith and on morals that could serve as a reference for the catechism written in various countries.”⁴⁸ However, the simplistic attitude of many Christians to this compendium shows that something is still amiss. How is it that many countries and cultural groups have not been able to make the proposed adaptation requested by *Fidei Depositum*?⁴⁹ What basis have we put in place for the free acceptance of the contents and challenges of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*?

At this juncture, it should be known from the outset that the contents of formation adduced by the Church have no defect. The main challenges now border on the practicality of formational structure and approach, the suitability of style for contemporary exigencies, and an appraisal of the factors responsible for the contemporary diminution of interest in matters that relate to the Church. It is actually in these regards that the Ciceronian model of formation becomes very handy. If truly ‘Christians are made and not born,’ the Christian formation has to start from infancy. The immediate family has to take responsibility for bringing up their infant member in the faith, teaching him the basic tenets of the faith and making him participate actively in the life of the local community. Assisted by the mechanism of the local faith community, the young Christian is provided with the avenues to practice his faith, taking responsibility for the good of the Church in his own little way.

In a permissive society that has no yard-stick to measure and reward good deeds, there is always the risk of redundancy. So, the adaptation and subsidies that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls for should be developed in such a way that the contents of faith and morals therein presented will be put into teaching curriculum that gives equal importance to all the five aspects of formation treated. Cicero proposes a formation that is on-going, giving an ideal that the orator has to strive to attain. So, the effort of the orator to improve himself and the quality of life in the community is not a once-and-for-all struggle. Formation in the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 266.

⁴⁹ *Fidei Depositum* is the document for the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and it calls for an inculturation of the teachings therein presented into the different cultures, languages and reality of the members of the Church.

Church, using catechesis as a source of contents, should go beyond mere preparation for the sacraments.

More importantly, in the model of Cicero's orator, formation in the Church (even if we are looking at it as catechesis), should be seen and treated as a complement to Church governance. By so doing, a good formation given to the young will ensure the presence of young and dedicated Christians, who are ready not just to take up roles of responsibility for the Church, but also to use all just and available means in expanding the frontiers of Christianity. The implication of all these proposed methodic adaptations of the classical values in *De Oratore* is that: formation in the contemporary Church should be more person-centred and practical; it should not be limited to the reception of the sacraments; every member of the community should have active roles to play in formation; and the Christian values should be celebrated and extolled in the communities.

The Future of Formation: Enriching Christian Formation with Classical Values

The goal of formation in the Church is the making of every member of the Church, Christians like the apostles – who at the risk of their lives and comfort took responsibility for and carry on the mission of Christ; Christians like the members of the early community of Antioch – whose *ethos* and exemplary lives of charity and holiness gave all of us the name 'Christians' (Acts 11: 26); Christians, like the Samaritan woman, whose encounter with Jesus at the well prompted her to go into the village, narrated her experience of the Saviour, and brought the whole village to him.

In the reality of our present experience, where men are apt to adopt whatever is *in vogue* irrespective of its morality and negative effects, formation in the Church will achieve its goals if the tested classical values are maintained and the contents of formation are never compromised. Taking a cue from Cicero's preference for Romans' practical application instead of Greeks' celebration of theoretical knowledge, the entire structure of formation in the Church should make a practical and concrete response to the view expressed by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that "the modern world does not want teachers, but witnesses. If it does listen to teachers, it is only because they are first of all witnesses."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Nuntiandi – Evangelisation in the Modern World* (New York: Pauline Books & Media, 1975).

In order to produce witnesses and not just academics who are not in touch with the reality of the Christian mission, formation should make use of various incentives that will attract young men to the Church and encourage them to willingly embrace formation. They should be challenged to show their worth and capability under the guidance of the various agents of formation. In order to encourage others, those who are doing well should be celebrated in the community. At the same time, those who are not pulling their weight should be encouraged; a possible way of doing this is to encourage youths to minister to their peers. So, the future of formation lies in an uncompromising insistence on classical Christian values that are inculcated in the young ones. Such uncompromising approach will aim at forming their character, so that, mindful of their identity as members of God's family and the challenges associated with such identity, they are positioned to make good use of whatever tools are available to them for their good, for the good of the community, and above all, to the glory of God, in whom they live, move and have their being.

Following from the above, it is clear that the Church already has the contents, the structure and the agents of formation. While it is undisputable that the contents of the Church's formational programme are adequate, it should be stated that the Church, at every level of her existence, should modify the structure or mechanism of formation and prepare the various agents of formation in such a way that the recipients of the contents will be so prepared to incarnate fruitfully the ideals therein contained and move the Church closer to her goals of establishing the Kingdom of God in every human heart. The question that arises is: how can this be done?

First and foremost, under the guidance and support of the local ordinary and the relevant organs of the universal Church, every local community should put in place mechanisms that check and evaluate the parish community in the five aspects of formation examined above. In addition to using the roles of individual members in community activities, their characters and comportments in the larger society should also be considered as measures of their levels of formation. And wherever there is a lack, supplementary programme of formation should be organized.

The adequate preparation for the sacraments and homilies constitutes the main avenues for formation in the contemporary Church. This calls for two important responses. The first is the need to form an aggregation of people with similar challenges in the local community, so that training or formation programme can be organized for them in order to position them better for the

challenges of their state of life.⁵¹ Then, there is the need to break down the anonymity of the crowd we have in the Church. By this, we mean that formation should target individuals and solicit their personal commitment to Church projects. This becomes important if we consider that the crowd that listened to Jesus, despite the fact that they benefited from his miracles and were moved by his preaching, not only abandoned him when his words were no longer conducive to their hearing (John 6: 59-66), they shouted in his presence: "crucify him!" (Luke 23:23). It was only among those he called by name that he heard the pronouncement: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the word of eternal life" (John 6: 68). The contemporary craze for subjective individualism and uncharitable privacy, coupled with rave of scandalous acts should not in any way make the Church forget the values of inter-personal relationship in formation.

Conclusion

The future of the Church's missionary endeavour depends to some extent on the link between the sacraments and her mission of evangelization. This realization calls for a re-appraisal of the curriculum we are using for the preparation of young Christians for the sacraments, especially for the sacrament of Confirmation, which makes them not only perfect Christians, but more importantly, 'soldiers of Christ.' Imbuing the curriculum with Ciceronian values and practices like: moral probity, *dignitas*, *virtus*, *tirocinium* and practice, will entail that the suitability for the sacrament is judged not just by theoretical knowledge or mere attendance at catechism classes, but more importantly by character, moral probity, affective maturity and readiness to co-operate with the sacramental grace in the practical mission of evangelization. There should also be the need to include in the curriculum, training in the art of preaching the Gospel to others and practical experience of this, just as Jesus sent out the disciples (Luke 10: 1-23), before they eventually received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Cicero stresses the need for constant practice in formation. The future of the Church depends so much on the opportunity given to young people to establish their relevance in the Church, in the same way that the forum and regular disputation afforded the young orator growth opportunity in Ancient Rome. Beyond this, we

⁵¹ Such groups may include youth, young couples, married men, married women, health workers, etc.

should be weary of referring to youths ordinarily as future leaders. The kind of influence they wield through the social media and other means of communication shows they are already leaders. The Church must as a matter of great urgency invest in their human, spiritual and ecclesiological formation, so that equipped with a strong Christian character, they will seize and use the contemporary means to propagate the Christian doctrine, minister to their errant peers and change the world for good. Considering the direct effects that quality formation has on the leadership and future of any organization, it is clear that the future of the Church will be guaranteed by co-operating with her divine spouse in instilling in the hearts and conscience of her children, the abiding human and Christian values that are necessary for the attainment of the Christian goals of universal salvation.

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