AFRICAN WORLD VIEW VERSUS CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGICAL EXPECTATION

Falres Ilomo

AFRICAN WORLD VIEW VERSUS CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGICAL EXPECTATION

Falres Ilomo

Senior Lecturer: University of Iringa- Tanzania

falresilomo25@gmail.com

Abstract

The research presents views of some prominent African theologians, namely, John Mbiti, Ephraim Mosothoane, Bènèzet Bujo, Aaron Urio, John B. Ambe, and how they relate the eschatological issue to an African world view. The African Theologians convey eschatological reflections, relevant to the African social and religious context. In order to bridge the gap between the traditional and Christian understanding, the theologians have re-defined various terms to give relevant eschatological meanings. The term *Communio Sanctorum* has been re-defined from the former meaning as "holy baptized members", to mean a community including both baptized and unbaptized members. They have given grounds for this inclusiveness on Christ's descent into Hell, which enabled dialogue with the unbaptized. Moreover, these African theologians redefined the term "holy", which was understood by the missionary Church as "perfect person", and gave a new meaning for it, underlining that God is the only one who is holy. A person is said to be holy only as a forgiven sinner. Given that all are sinners, these theologians propose Holy Communion, which marks communal practice and gives eschatological hope, should be regarded as a uniting practice and not one dividing between sinners and holy members. The theologians also propose that the Church should adapt the African practice of communal meals. These meals have a social function. They unite all members of the community and also have an eschatological function of giving hope of prosperity. This adaptation could help the Church to take the opportunity to enrich the Holy Communion and strengthen eschatological anticipation among its members.

Keywords: *African World View, Eschatology, Communio Sanctorum, Communal Meal, Holy*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

When we discuss about African world view it is about African cultural practices and religious beliefs. These two aspects were disrupted during European colonial era and foreign religions, Islam and Christianity that came to African continent from 13th Century. The two agents after coming to Africa were not friendly to African cultural practices and regarded them as evil practice. Furthermore, the African beliefs were taken as idolatry. In order to clarify about African world view in comparison to Christian eschatology, the contribution from four African scholars shall be of vital contribution as discussed bellow.

1.1. Concepts and Practices Related to Eschatological Anticipation by African Theologians

The present predominant missionary legacy in African Church and the colonial one can be improved if the contribution of African theologians will be taken into consideration. For the last four decades, a number of African theologians have rewritten missionary theology. They have introduced an African Theology, which is an attempt to reconsider different ways of using the Bible from those employed by missionaries by doing mission and contextual theology in the modern African context. The contribution of such African theologians is still inadequate because they do not discuss all the contentious eschatological issues in the African Church. However, I acknowledge their contribution to this field and I find it helpful to this study.

Under this topic, various eschatological themes written by African theologians shall be considered. It is my intention to study eschatological themes which are written by African theologians who still maintain their culture. Therefore, it is not the interest of this study to look into the works written by the African theologians who are fanatics.[1]

1.1.1. Communio Sanctorum

A general definition of the *terminus, Communio Sanctorum,* can be found in the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, which states that it is the sharing of life and love across the barrier of death which exists between all who are in Christ and in the Spirit. These members are at one with the saints in heaven, and the saints are at one with those who are in Christ.[2] For the first time, the term became part of the Apostles' Creed in A.D.377 in the Antiochian Church. However, the Antiochian authors' intentions in writing this part of the creed are not known.

---

[1] S.T. Kgatla, „The Perspectives of Undersiders and Topsiders on African Religions." MISSIONALIA vol. 25, No. 4 December 1997, p. 635. Ggatla agrees with Westerlund (1991: 17) who underlines that in the study of a religion, a convert from a religion can describe his/her former religion better than outsiders unless he/she has become cynical and extremely hostile towards his/her former belief. The presentation by African scholars of their former religion, even though their perspective has been influenced by Western Christianity, will differ essentially from the presentation of Western scholars, particularly conservative Western scholars whose work is characterised by a reductionist view of religion.

[2] Allchin, A.M., Community of Saints, in: Nicholas Lossky, Jose' Miguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, Pauline (eds.), Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 1991, p.209.

There is much discussion among researchers about authorial intention. Many people have come up with a different translation of the term *Communio sanctorum*. For example, some define the phrase as the relation of the earthly Church through veneration with the Church Saints who were martyred; some translate the term Saints as old Patriarchs and Prophets, the holy people of all time and angels. All these Saints are believed to be united with the believers in the Church.[3]

1.1.2. Communio Sanctorum--Ephraim Mosothoane

If the term is used within African perspective, it is worth beginning with the term "community". The African understanding of community is wider than the Christian understanding. The African community consists of both the living as well as departed members. This communion is maintained through the ancestor-cult.[4] Mosothoane stresses that this cult has been maintained by Africans despite the joint efforts by the Church leaders in some parts of Africa to exterminate it. The Church views the ancestor-cults as incompatible with Christian belief and not to be tolerated. This tendency has compelled Church members to practice ancestor veneration secretly.[5]

Despite the fight against ancestor veneration by the Church, Mosothoane has the hope that this cult will enrich Christian theology, especially after the idea of *Communio sanctorum* has been re-discovered by Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians. Mosothoane believes that this enrichment will be a step forward which can help preaching and pastoral counseling in Africa. He combines the two concepts, ancestor-cult and the teaching concerning *Communio sanctorum*, by saying that theologically both concepts have to say something about death.[6]

Mosothoane is skeptical about the idea that the communion of saints consists of the living and those who have died as Christians, arguing that the idea has proved not to bring amazing joy among Africans. He further emphasizes that the expression *Communio sanctorum* in the Apostles' Creed, which is also witnessed in the New Testament, is still meaningful to the Church. In the New Testament, the term *hagios* (saint) does not refer to any person who is perfect. Essentially, the Church consists of women and men, *kle'toi hagioi,* who are called to be holy (Rom.1:7; I Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 3:12, 1 Pet. 1:16). He underlines that the only source of holiness is God, His Son Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. Therefore, only those

---

[3]   Swarat, Uwe, Communio Sanctorum, in: Burkhardt, Helmut, Swarat, Uwe, Brockhaus, R. (eds.), Evangelisches Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde, 1992, pp.388-389.

[4]   Compare Mosothoane, Ephraim K., Communio Sanctorum in Africa, in: Sundermeier, Theo (ed.), Zwischen Kultur und Politik, 1978, pp.73-74. Mosothoane refers to the opening statement given during the Congress of the South African Missiologists Organisation by M.J.D. Carmichael, (The source of ancestor cult is the deep personal belief in the communion between elders and the family members which exists even after the member dies. In the former times, members respected and still respect this relationship until today This communion serves also prayers to God through ancestors).

[5]   Mosothoane, Ephraim K. 1978, p. 62.

[6]   Ibid. 1978, pp. 62-63.

who are in Christ (incarnated in Christ and the Holy Spirit, Rom.15:16) are holy ones.[7]

Furthermore, Mosothoane writes, according to the New Testament (and underlined by A. Richardson) a holy person is not a perfect person. Instead, he/she is a sinner who is forgiven. Here, the determining factor is only God's act of salvation in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It should be remembered that, in the New Testament, the term "church" does not imply an individualistic concept. For example, the metaphors for the church, like "the Body of Christ", "temple," "vineyard," etc., have a corporate meaning. Therefore, the Church in the New Testament is understood as *koinonia,* or community.[8]

When suggesting a meeting point between African and Christian concepts of *Communio sanctorum,* Mosothoane stresses that the Christian faith understands the communion of saints as a faith in communion with Christ, which is bridged through his death. At the same time, in ancestor belief the Africans see a bridge, which is created through the deaths of their members. In Holy Communion, there is a communion not only between the believers and the resurrected Lord, but also between the living and the departed members of Christian community.[9]

From Mosothoane's work, I can conclude that he has attempted to incorporate the African concept of family hood, which extends even after death, and the Christian concept of community of saints. He has discussed how inadequate the Christian concept is when it lacks enrichment from African perspective. Finally, Mosothoane has given suggestions of how Holy Communion should be conducted in order to make Africans feel themselves to be active participants in worship.

1.1.3. Communio Sanctorum -Aaron Urio

Aaron Urio, who writes about the Chagga people in Northern Tanzania, discusses the *Communio sanctorum* issue in a different way to Mosothoane and Mbiti. For him, the African communal meal is a point of departure towards the Lord's Supper. He reports that among the Chagga, the communal meal constituted a very important way in which the living-dead were remembered. Feasting, *sherehe za matanga,* followed the funeral rites mainly to console the bereaved and to bring life back to normal again. Also, death was regarded as having the power to unite even those members of the family who had lived in separation and enmity for a long time. As a result, communal feasts were and remain an outward sign of this unity and life together.[10]

Due to the vital role the communal meal brings to the community, Urio suggests that the Lord's Supper is important in bridging the gap that exists between Christianity and its encounter with the Chagga traditional religion, especially in relation to the Chagga after-death memorial meals. The Chagga belief and practices are full of symbols, which help to concretize the faith and hope in their life. They have also tried to communicate with both the living and the living-dead

---

[7]   Ibid. 1978, p. 70.

[8]   Ibid. 1978, p. 71.

[9]   Ibid. 1978, p. 74.

[10]   Urio, Aaron, The Concept of Memory in the Chagga Life, 1990, p.120.

through the language of symbols, tangible elements like food, milk and beer, which they consider have the power to transcend the physical to the spiritual world. Consequently, Urio suggests that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which carries with it symbols or tangible elements, would be especially appropriate and would speak much more meaningfully to the Chagga people in times of crises like death, sickness and other moments of passage.[11]

After relating communal meals to the Lord's Supper, which unifies the living and the dead, Urio underlines that the remaining problem in his Church is that Christianity has not emphasized the place of Communion of Saints as much as it has other Christian doctrines. As a result, the Chagga people are wrestling with the problem of their living-dead being judged by the church as idolatrous or un-Christian. As a solution to this problem, Urio suggests that the Eucharist, taken in an eschatological sense, which incorporates the Communion of Saints, could be a substitute for what the Chagga are trying to overcome in their after-death memorial meals. This being the case, it would be important for the Chagga people, struggling with normalization of their life after death, to see the Lord's Supper as an indispensable assurance of their normal life now and after life.[12]

1.1.4. *Communio Sanctorum*-- Mbiti

Mbiti discusses the idea of *Communio sanctorum* in a different way. He reverses the terminus to *Sanctorum communio* and states that one of the possible interpretations is "communion in Holy things", that is, the Sacraments. He underlines that this meaning does not contradict the stronger and earlier interpretation of fellowship among the living and the "departed saints".[13] Mbiti defines the term "departed saints" as these who died as Christians *and* those who died as non-Christians. He gives reasons why the non-Christians should be included in the communion of saints. First, he argues that the non-Christians are also God's people; therefore, even when they die, He will still be their God. On this platform also stand those "other sheep", which are brought into the one flock with one shepherd (John 10:16). Secondly, Mbiti refers his argument to 1 Peter 3 in which the Gospel is preached to the spirit of the departed.[14] Finally, Mbiti suggests that since the community of saints involves fellowship between the living and the departed in Christ, the African background could be a reference point.[15]

---

[11]   Ibid. 1990, pp. 182-183.

[12]   Urio, 1990, pp. 195-196.

[13]   Mbiti, John, New Testament Eschatology in an African Background, 1971, p.150.

[14]   With this regard to the hallowing of Hell, Mbiti does not discuss if it is only for those who had no opportunity to accept Christ in this life, or is it also for those who heard of Him, but rejected.

[15]   Mbiti, 1971, p. 154. See also Ambrose Moyo, A Time for an African Lutheran Theology, in: Pero, Albert, and Moyo, Ambrose (eds.), Theology and the Black Experience, 1988, pp.82-83. Moyo underlines that an African community without the living dead, is deprived of life in the present, in the future, and of a life with God. Ancestors are guardians and living-dead members of the family.. Within most of the Lutheran Eucharistic liturgies the believers join with all the angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven in praising the name of God. Here, Moyo argues that the "company of heaven" is popularly understood to include the saints who have gone ahead of us and, in this context of the communion service, can be described as the living-dead.

According to Mbiti, these above interpretations do, in fact, complement each other. For him the terminus is closely related to the two Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. As a matter of fact, during the Sacraments, the whole Church experiences the most intimate form of fellowship. He underlines that at Baptism, the new member enters into the circle of that fellowship, and his/her experience of fellowship is renewed and heightened at the Eucharist. The Sacraments are the points of contact between the two worlds. Here, the faithful are immersed in the fellowship with God, with one another on earth, with the departed saints and the heavenly society. For those who are in this life, communion in Holy things is in anticipation and hope, but for those who have departed, it is in waiting till all should be incorporated and made perfect in Christ.[16]

2.0 Sin--Its Effects on Community--John Ambe

Before discussing sin and how it affects the community, it is important first to define the term, "community" according to African understanding. A definition of the term can be found in John Ambe's work. Ambe is a Roman Catholic Priest who has done research on the Bafut community in Cameroon and made an attempt to relate it to the Christian Church community. He defines community sociologically as "…a pioneer settlement such as a village, a city, a tribe or a nation. Whenever members of any group, small or large, live together in such a way that they share particular interests and the basic conditions of common life, that group is called a community". Also Ambe underlines that the basic manifestation of any community is that there must be social relationships within it. Ambe emphasizes that, besides the above, for people to be truly a community, they must have a community sense. Residents of a ward, district or large city, for instance, may lack sufficient contacts or common interests to instill conscious identification with the area in which they live. Such a neighbourhood is not considered a community-- not because it does not possess a feeling of belonging together, but because it lacks community sentiment. Therefore, the type of community which Ambe wants to correlate with that of the Church is this type of community in which there is a sense of an area of common living, and an awareness of sharing a way of life as well as the common earth.[17]

From the sociological stand point, Ambe gives a concrete example in which he correlates community with the African communal life. He underlines that the sense of community and solidarity in many African societies is so strong that a person regards himself/herself as truly a human being when he/she is in communion with the others. This sense of community goes beyond the temporal into the spiritual-- the life beyond. It influences the members so much that, when any of them detracts from the soundness of the community, he/she is looked upon with disfavour and remedial efforts to reverse the evil consequences of his/her actions are immediately taken.[18]

Within Ambe's social understanding of sin, he recognizes the danger of understanding sin in a

---

16   Mbiti, New Testament Eschatology, 1971, pp. 150-151.

17   Ambe, John B, Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Africa, 1992, pp. 1-2.

18   Ibid. 1992, p. 3.

purely communal sense and not as consequence of personal actions that call for personal responsibility. The answer is, even though the social aspect of a moral offence is stressed, it would be wrong to generalize that sin in the African context is purely communal. He underlines that the social aspect of a moral offence is understood against the background that the individual is a member of the community. Even if he/she sins, he/she still remains an integral part of that community. Therefore, the disintegration of the individual through sin is seen as the beginning of the destruction of the whole community. Since the sin of the individual affects the community in this way, the latter is bound to do something to prevent the impending mass destruction of the whole community.[19]

From such an African understanding of sin and its effects on the entire community, where morality is God-centered, Ambe turns to the Christian community. He writes that the African understanding of sin could be very useful in Christian theology and would naturally lead to a better understanding and appreciation of the ecclesial dimension of the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*.[20] In this case, one who is guilty of a mortal sin sees himself as not only having severed the loving relationship between himself and God, but with the Christian community. This member seriously wounds the entire Church community with his/her grave sin, no matter how private they may be because he/she is united with others in the loving mystery of God's Saving Plan.[21]

After discussing the importance of relating sin to the entire Christian community, Ambe challenges the African Church's understanding, which overemphasizes the effects of sin on relationship with God while diminishing the effects of sin on the community. When giving this argument, he simultaneously recognizes the danger of going to the other extreme, in which the whole reality of sin and conversion is seen only in terms of peoples' relationships with one another. Ambe suggests that the two aspects (personal and social dimension) are equally important and intimately related because they complement each other.[22]

2.1. Reconciliation

When writing about African values that can enrich the Christian understanding of "reconciliation",[23] Ambe mentions the meal aspect of reconciliation ceremonies. He writes that,

---

[19]   Ibid. 1992, p. 39.

[20]   According to the Roman Catholic Church, reconciliation is one of the seven Sacraments. In Lutheran or Protestant Churches, reconciliation is not one of the Church Sacraments. In the Protestant Churches the process is known as ‚Absolution‘, or ‚Confession of sins‘.

[21]   Ambe, Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, 1992, p. 40.

[22]   Ambe, 1992, pp. 65-66.

[23]   I will take the term ‘reconciliation,‘ as Ambe uses. Otherwise, I understand that the proper terms for church use are ‘confession‘or ‚absolution‘. I assume that Ambe opts the term‘reconciliation‘ because he discusses also the traditional African process. Therefore, by using the term ‘reconciliation‘he can easily relate between the two aspects (African traditional and Christian aspects). Otherwise, he uses the term because since the Vatican II it is been used as an official church term.

at all levels of the reconciliation process, the conclusion includes a fellowship meal in which all those present share. The reconciled parties eat together from one dish as a sign of further strengthening the restored peace and love that comes with reconciliation. Ambe compares the link between the reconciliation and fellowship meal with the connection between the "Confession of Sins and the Eucharist in the church".[24]

2.1.1. Restoration of Relationship

When showing the importance of reconciliation, Ambe also points out that another important value is that the traditional concept of offence in Bafut, as in most African societies, is more concerned with "restoring"[25] a damaged relationship than with paying back or making satisfaction. People want reconciliation first and foremost because they want to restore the severed relationship between the individual and other members of the family, the village, the tribe and the ancestors. Ambe sees the African idea of restoration of relationship as very close to the Biblical idea of sin and redemption, in which the saving work of Christ is seen primarily as a restoration of the broken relationship between God and humanity severed through the sin of Adam.[26]

After exploring how rich African communal celebrations of reconciliation are, Ambe challenges the Western idea of personal guilt and the responsibility of the individual. First of all, he agrees that there is no harm in this, because a personal conscience and a personal responsibility are essential to Christian life. Then he points out that this attitude of personal guilt may be pushed too far, to a point of a complete neglect of the collective conscience and the collective responsibility of the Christian community. On the other side, Ambe sees that the involvement of the whole community in an African traditional society when correcting or punishing its offending members helps to keep the sense of sin in the society alive. This condition is necessary for the renewal of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.[27]

After exploring how practical African reconciliation is, Ambe sees a need to change the present system of reconciliation practices in the Roman Catholic Church. He writes that, in the present system, in which the private form of reconciliation is predominant, only the penitent, the priest and God are involved. He underlines that it is important to have community celebrations of reconciliation in Christian communities. Ambe also suggests the form of such Communal Penance Services: the word of God should be read from the scriptures, prayers should be shared and members should be encouraged to relate to one another in love and trust. In these occasions, a well-planned Communal Service should always include a time and place for private confession

---

[24]   Ambe, 1992, pp. 37-38.

[25]   Compare the other use of the similar term by Tutu in: Reconciliation. The *Ubuntu* Theology of Desmond Tutu. Michael Battle, 1997, p. 95. Tutu applies the term 'healing' as a synonym for 'restoration'. He states, "Our people say Ubuntu. Ubuntu is something you say when someone has wronged you. What you long for is not revenge. What you long for is a healing of relationship."

[26]   Ambe, Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Africa, 1992, p. 38.

[27]   Ambe, 1992, pp. 62-63.

as well as counseling, if needed.[28]

Ambe gives theological as well as psychological reasons why reconciliation process should be done communally in the Church. From the theological point of view, he states that Communal Penitential Services offer opportunities to consider the ecclesial aspect of reconciliation and give the liturgical form of this Sacrament more dignity. The psychological dimension is that people have the courage to take on personal responsibilities, and since they are not alone, they are more willing to assume greater commitments. The group offers support to the individual and reduces his/her sense of loneliness and bewilderment. Since people are generally conscious of their back-sliding and limitations, the sense of belonging to a group and responsibility of identifying with one or more of its members helps to relieve the sense of one's own weakness and gives strength to persevere. This identification can also alleviate the sense of contempt, which is so difficult to bear and which makes people afraid to face the guilt of the past.[29]

As a summary, one can say that Ambe is aware of the crisis of the "Sacrament of Reconciliation" in his Church throughout the world. However, when giving a solution to the prevailing problem, he focuses on the African situation. He recommends that the Church should consider accepting the African values of a deep sense of community and solidarity, the perspective of sin and the community's reaction to it, as well as the involvement of the whole community, in the process of reconciliation (for a Catholic Church) and encourage communal penitential services wherever possible.

3.0. Eschatology Enriched from Western Scholarship

Despite the contribution of African theologians given in chapters one and two, there are some eschatological issues that are still missing yet crucial, not only to the missionary church in Africa but also to the understanding of Christian eschatology. Theologians have not gone deeper when analyzing Biblical as well as systematic basis for their arguments. This issue is especially contentious among church members, not only in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, but also African Church at large. For this purpose, Moltmann's discussion shall be representing renoun systematician scholars from the West thereafter reflected to the African context as stipulated in the following sections bellow.

3.1. Reconciliation: Alternative of "the Day of Judgment"

In this chapter, the attempt will be to re-discover the proper terminology for the Day of Judgment and the relevant eschatology for the African context today. For this purpose, the Kinga term "*vusajani,*" (reconciliation) will be related to the relevant Christian eschatology for the African context today after presenting the Christian eschatology according to Jürgen Moltmann.

3.2. Moltmann's Contribution

When discussing the Day of Judgment, Moltmann identifies various elements that are crucial in

---

[28]   Ambe, 1992, p. 59.

[29]   Ambe, 1992, p. 5 9.

church life and makes a proposal as to what the Day of Judgment should be called. He starts with predominant eschatological issues, such as universal salvation and the double outcome of judgment, which are both well attested biblically. He refers to pro-universalism in the following Biblical texts: Eph. 1:10, "…to unite all things in Christ, things in Heaven and things on earth"; Col. 1:20, "… to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross; if Christ is made Pantacrator, nothing in his kingdom can be lost, all his enemies will be put under his feet" (I Cor. 15:25), "…so that he can hand over to God the rule now consummated as his kingdom". Paul builds up his Adam-Christ typology on the same pattern: "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor.15:22); "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may be merciful upon all people" (Rom. 11:32).[30]

Moltmann states that there are also Biblical passages that talk about double outcome of Judgment. Matt. 7:13 distinguishes the way that leads to life from the one that leads to destruction. Matt. 12:32 says that the sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. In Mark 16:16 it says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. Matt. 25: 31-46 is about the great judgment of the Son of man. To those on his left, the Son of man as a judge of the world says, "Depart from me you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. To those on his right he says, " Come, o blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom …" The gospel of John identifies faith with eternal life and disbelief with damnation: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life, he who does not belief in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (John 3:36). Moltmann states that there are also Biblical passages that talk about a double outcome of judgment. Matt. 7:13f distinguishes the way that leads to life from the one that leads to destruction; Matt. 12:32 says that the sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.[31]

Furthermore, Moltmann underlines that, due to the fact that the two issues are rooted in the Bible, the decision for the one or the other cannot be made on the grounds of Scripture. In order to find the truth other than that from the biblical stories, Moltmann poses the question as to whether damnation is eternal or not eternal. He then proceeds by defining the Greek term *aionios*, which like the Hebrew word *olama*, means time without a fixed end, a long time, but not time that is eternal in the absolute, timeless sense of Greek metaphysics. Consequently, there are plurals *olamim* or *aiones*, which there cannot be for timeless eternity, because timeless eternity exists only in the singular.[32]

Moltmann furthermore emphasizes that if damnation and the torments of hell are eternal, they are then *aeonic,* long-lasting, or end-time states. However, only God himself is eternal in the absolute sense. According to Mark 9:49, hell-fire is a purifying fire, a corrective punishment. Salvation and damnation are a-symmetrical, according to Matthew 25: for the blessed, the kingdom has been prepared from the foundation of the world; but fire has not been prepared for

---

[30] Moltmann, 1996, pp. 240-241.

[31] Ibid. Moltmann

[32] Moltmann, The Coming of God, 1996, pp. 241-242.

the damned from the foundation of the world, so it does not have to last until the end of the world either. Paul and John talk about "being lost" only in the present tense, never in the future. So unbelievers are given up for lost temporally and for the end-time, but not to all eternity. From this Biblical point of view in regard to universal salvation, Moltmann sees that the ultimate, the last thing is: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev.21:5). In the new creation of heaven and earth there will be no more death, neither natural death nor death of sin nor everlasting death. Moltmann emphasizes that however strong or weak the testimony to universalism may be, it is the sole information which Scripture offers us about the ultimate goal of God's salvific plan.[33]

When challenging the double outcome, Moltmann maintains that what speaks against punishing sinners is the experience that God's grace is more powerful than human sin: "But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). "For God is angered by human sin, he judges the sins of the world so as to save the world" (I Sam 2:6). "It is not His anger which is everlasting; it is His grace. His anger is but for a moment, and his favour is for a lifetime" (Ps.30:5). God's judgment separates the sin from the person, condemns the sin and gives the person a free pardon. God's last judgment has no double outcome, but serves the universal establishment of the divine righteousness and justice, for the new creation of all things. On the other hand, Moltmann sees the greater importance of God's grace over his anger, which is experienced in faith, meaning that judgment and the reconciliation of the universe are not antitheses.[34]

3.2.1. Double Outcome

Moltmann notes also that the debate about universalism or the double outcome of judgment raises the question of the relationship between divine and human decision. The doctrine of universal salvation is an expression of boundless confidence in God: what God wants to do, he can do, and will do. If he wants all human beings to be helped, he will ultimately help all of them. However, Moltmann is cautious about the doctrine of the double outcome of judgment, stressing that it is the expression of tremendous self-confidence on the part of human beings. In this case, if the decision of faith or disbelief has eternal significance, then eternal destiny, salvation or damnation, lies in the hands of human beings. What will happen to people if eternity really depends on their own behaviour? God's function is reduced and Christ becomes a person's saviour only when that person has accepted him in faith. So it is the acceptance in faith, which makes Christ the saviour of that person. If salvation is considered to be only a matter of faith, Moltmann asks concerning children who die young or the severely handicapped, if one can decide for faith,.[35]

3.2.2. Universal Salvation

When defending his stand on universal salvation, Moltmann emphasizes that it is God who

---

[33] Ibid. 1996, p. 242.

[34] Ibid. 1996, p. 243.

[35] Ibid. 1996, pp. 244-245.

makes the decision about the salvation of lost human beings. It is not just a few of the elect who have been reconciled with God, but the whole cosmos (2 Cor. 5:19). It is not just believers whom God loves, but the world (John 3:16). Moltmann concludes that the great turning point from disaster to salvation took place on Golgotha; it does not just happen for the first time at the hour when we decide for faith or are converted. For him, faith means experiencing and receiving this turning point personally, but faith is not the turning-point itself. It is not my faith that creates salvation for me; salvation creates faith for me. Moreover, Moltmann emphasizes, "If salvation and damnation were results of human faith or unbelief, God would be dispensable."[36]

When correlating the status of Christ and eschatology, Moltmann affirms that, in the crucified Christ, we recognize the judge of the final judgment, who himself has become the one condemned, for the accused, in their stead and for their benefit. So at the last judgment we expect on the judgment seat the one who was crucified for the reconciliation of the world, and no other judge. This means that the eschatological last judgment is not a prototype for the courts of kingdoms or empires. Moltmann emphasizes that this judgment has to do with God and his creative justice and is quite different from forms of earthly justice. What we call last judgment is nothing other than the universal revelation of Jesus Christ, and the *Consummation* of his redemptive work. Judgment at the end is not the end at all; it is the beginning. Its goal is restoration of all things for the building up of God's eternal kingdom.[37]

3.3. Reflection of Moltman's Discussion to the African Context

The discussion of the Christian eschatology by Moltmann can be reflected to the African situation. He has first given a new name for the term "Day of Judgment." He has differentiated the role of the Day of Judgment from the role of earthly judges. Moreover, he has associated the work of Jesus on the cross with the Day of Judgment as the fulfillment and that all mankind will be saved. As Moltmann has reformed the word eschatology, it is important also for the African situation to reform the Kinga term *vuhigi,* which means an earthly legal prosecution. Therefore the term diminishes the weight of the event, since it has no social and religious association in the African context. In order to have a proper term for the Day of Judgment, it is necessary to integrate the term that plays a great role in the most famous practice of reconciliation. Among the Kinga people, this practice has a social as well as eschatological function.

When we discuss the Day of Judgment within an African context, the Kinga term *vusajani* can give a positive image of Christian eschatology. The term *vusajani* has no direct English translation. It is similar to the term "reconciliation." The term comes from the root *saja*, meaning "bless" or "pray". The term *sajana*, means "to bless each other" or "to pray for each other" after healing the broken relationship. A person who enables the two parties to resume their broken relationship is known as *unsajani*, which means "reconciler". According to the Kinga language, the term *saja* is normally used in two contexts: one has to do with prayer for community prosperity, and the other has to do with healing a broken relationship. In this study, the

---

[36] Ibid. 1996, p. 245.

[37] Ibid. 1996, pp. 250-251.

reconciliation between the two parties provides a context for discussing the alternative term for the Day of Judgment.

With regard to the Christian eschatological expectation, the term *vusajani*", which is close to the term reconciliation, can replace the predominant Kinga term *vuhigi* or the Swahili term *hukumu* (refer to chapter two), both terms meaning a legal prosecution. The terms *vuhigi* or *hukumu* allude to a human Western legal system and imply that the Day of Judgment is a day of terror. However, the proposed term *vusajani*, which is related to the term reconciliation, is a more appropriate one, because it has a social and religious connotation in an eschatological perspective.

In other words, one can say that if Christian eschatology has to do with reconciliation, it is a joyous and not a fearful moment. If the Day of Judgment will now be known as *vusajani*, reconciliation, Jesus Christ who is the leader of that day can be known by the term *unsajani*, similar to the term "reconciler". The application of the term *unsajani* will help people to see Christ as the one who revives the broken relationship between God and them. If, according to Moltmann, the cross is the turning-point, we can also contend that the Day of Judgment is a day of fulfillment of God's reconciliation, which began at the cross. Therefore, the whole idea of eschatological anticipation can be understood as universal salvation and not a double outcome of judgment.

Despite suggesting the alternative term for the Day of Judgment, *vusajani*, and the new title for Christ, reconciler, *unsajani*, I suggest that Christology in the African context be a future area of study so that it can integrate Christian eschatology to the African world view.

Conclusion

In this article, African World view versus Christian eschatological expectation, I have discussed a kind of eschatology that considers both African cultural heritage and belief which include their cosmological and ontological view, and the Christian eschatological aspect. My discussion is based on systematic theology and church practices.

Another aspect that can enrich Christian eschatology is the reforming of the terms "Day of Judgment", *litsuva lya vuhigi* or "the Day of Destruction", *litsuva lya lwongometso*. The terms convey a message of terror rather than a message of hope. Moltmann is also concerned with reforms of the eschatological term "God's judgment" by adding three other terms: "reconciliation", "revelation", and "restoration". These three terms do not only convey a message of hope, they are pro universal salvation rather than for a double outcome of judgment. In this respect Moltmann's emphasis on a message of hope (that sinners will be forgiven) is based on the experience of God's powerful grace rather than on human sin. In this regard he also sees the emphasis on a two-fold eschatology as raising the danger of human self-confidence and reducing the position of God. In this case it shows that through his ability, a human being can avoid damnation instead of depending on God's grace.

In the African situation, one can bring positive reforms of the eschatological term by applying the Kinga language term *litsuva lya vusajani, "*The Day of Reconciliation". This term can give effectiveness among African Christians instead of the common terms "a Day of Judgment", or "a

Day of Destruction". The two terms imply an earthly legal prosecution. But the suggested Kinga term originates from the prominent traditional practice of reconciliation (restorative justice) in the African context. During this practice the aim is not to find an offender so that they can punish him/her. The intention is to enable both parties to reconcile and create welfare for both, including the community in the other world (forebears and God). The term "reconciliation", *vusajani,* carries more weight if it is used eschatological because it has a social as well as an ontological impact among the Africans.

References

Abraham, K.C., Globalization: A Gospel and Culture Perspective, in: International Review of Mission Vol.LXXXV, January-October 1996, pp.85-92.

Allchin, A.M., Community of Saints, in: Lossky, Nicholas, Josè, Pobee, John, Stransky, Tom, Geofrey, Wainwright, Pauline (eds.), Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement (WCC), WCC Publications, Geneva 1991, p.209.

Alviar, Josè J., Anthropological Foundation of African Christology, in: African Christian Studies Vol.13 No.1 March 1997, pp.19-27

Ambe, John B., Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Africa, Eldoret 1992.

Anderson, N., Christianity and World Religions. The Challenge of Pluralism, London, 1986.

Assmann, Jan und Sundermeier, Theo (eds.), Schuld, Gewissen und Person, Gütersloh 1997.

Barclay, William, At the Last Trumpet: Jesus Christ and the End of Time, Louisville 1998.

Battle, Michael, Reconciliation. The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu, Ohio 1997.

Baumann, Zygmunt, Culture as Praxis, London 1999.

Beyerhaus, Peter, Der Name Gottes in der afrikanischen Sprachen und das Problem der missionarischen Übersetzung, in: Stietencron, Heinrich von (ed.), Der Name Gottes, Düsseldorf 1975, pp.191-208.

Boos, Eric, Evangelization through Dialogue and Inculturation, in: African Ecclesial Review (AFER) Vol.40, No.2 April 1998, pp.66-84.

Brown, Michael H., After Life: What it is like in Heaven, Hell and Pugatory, Milford 1997.

Bujo, Benezet, African Theology in Its Social Context, Maryknoll 1992.

Cope, T.H., Conversion, in: Njinya-Mujinya, Leuben (ed.), The African Mind. A Journal of Religion and Philosophy in Africa, Vol.1, No.1 1989, pp.191-198.

Cummings, Owen F., Coming to Christ: A Study in Christian Eschatology, Lanham - New York - Oxford 1998.

Daneel, L. Marthinus, Shona Independent Churches and Ancestor Worship, in: Barrett, David B. (ed.), African initiatives in Religion. Studies from Eastern and Central Africa, Nairobi 1971, pp.160-170.

Deusdedit, Nkurunziza, R.K., Bantu Philosophy of life in the light of the Christian Message. A basis for an African Vitalistic Theology, Frankfurt 1989.

Eister, Alan W., Religion as a Subject for Social scientific Enquiry, in: Barrett, David (ed.), African Initiatives in Religion. Studies from Eastern and Central Africa, Nairobi 1971, pp.xii-xviii.

Eitner, M., Berliner Mission im Nyassalande in Deutsch-Ostafrika, Berlin 1897.

Ela, Jean-Marc, African Cry, Maryknoll 1986.

----, My Faith as an African, Maryknoll 1988.

----, Patterns in Comparative Religion, New York 1958.

Fiedler, Klaus, Christentum und afrikanische Kultur. Konservative deutsche Missionare in Tanzania 1900-1940, Bonn 1993.

Gittins, Anthony J., Conversion, in: Müller, Karl, Sundermeier, Theo, Bevans, B. Stephen, Bliese, H. Richard (eds.), Dictionary of Mission, Ohio 1998, pp.87-89.

Hillmann, Eugene, Polygamy Reconsidered. African plural Marriage and the Christian Churches, Maryknoll 1975.

Igwegbe, Okwudili O. Isidore, Sacramental Theological Thinking in the African Symbolic Universe, Frankfurt am Main 1995.

Ilomo, Falres, Christianity: A Secondary Religious Experience among people of Livingstone Mountains, Vuga Press, 2011.

Ikenga-Metuh, Emefie, Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions, Enugu 1999.

Kagwa, D., A Christian Interpretation of the Customs of the Baganda relating to Death and Inheritance, in: Njinya- Mujinya, Leuben (ed), The African Mind. A Journal of Religion and Philosophy in Africa, Vol. I, No. 1, 1989, pp.108-135.

Kaiser John Parratt, Theologiegeschichte der Dritten Welt Afrika, München 1991.

Kenneth, Cracknell, Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of other faith, London 1986.

Kohl, Karl-Heinz, Ethnologie- die Wissenschaft vom Kulturell Fremden. Eine Einführung, München 1993.

Koizumi, Mari, Meaning of Conversion: Cosmology, Politics and Moral Discourse among the Kinga of South Western Tanzania (a Dissertation in Yale University) November 1995.

Kraft, Charles H., Christianity in Culture: A study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective, Maryknoll 1979.

Mbiti, John S., Concepts of God in Africa, London 1970.

Moltmann, Jürgen, The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology, Minneapolis 1996.

Mosothoane, Ephraim K, Communio Sanctorum in Afrika, in: Sundermeier, Theo (ed.), Zwischen Kultur und Politik, Hamburg 1978, pp. 73-74.

Okot p'Bitek, African Religion in Western Scholarship, East African Literature Bureau: Kampala – Nairobi - Dar es Salaam 1970.

Rutebuka, James, Death and the Hereafter in the Kitagwenda Religion, Toro, Uganda, in: Njinya-Mujinya, Leuben (ed.), The African Mind. A Journal of Religion and Philosophy in Africa, Vol.1, No.1 1989, pp.164-190.

Sanneh, Lamin., Translating the Message. The Missionary Impact on Culture, Maryknoll 1989.

Schwarz, Hans, The Search for God, Augsburg 1975.

----, On the Way to the Future. A Christian View of Eschatology in the Light of current Trends in Religion, Philosophy and Science, Augsburg 1979.

Swarat, Uwe, *Communio Sanctorum*, in: Burkhardt, Helmut, Swarat, Uwe, Brockhaus, R. (eds.), Evangelisches Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde, Wuppertal und Zürich 1992, pp.388-389.

Triebel, Johanes Gottesglaube und Heroenkult in Afrika. Untersuchungen zum Lwembe-Kult der Wakinga in Südtanzania, Erlangen 1993.

Urio, Aaron, The Concept of Memory in the Chagga Life Cycle in Relation to

Waldenfels, Hans, Contextual Theology, in: Müller, Karl, Sundermeier, Theo, Bevans, Stephen, Bliese, H. Richard (eds.), Dictionary of Mission, Maryknoll 1998, pp.86-87.

Westerlund, David, African Religion in African Scholarship: A Preliminary Study of the Wilson, Monica, Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa, Oxford 1959.