GOD'S LIFE IN COMMUNION:

J MOLTMANN'S SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM FOR A POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN THEOLOGY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby handed in for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at/in another University/faculty.

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DEDICATION

This doctoral research project is dedicated to my wife Remedy and our children (Joyce, Chisomo, Tehillah, Victor), my sister Falesy Zulu, my mother Tiyankhenji Phiri, for giving me enough space to study and to show unusual understanding when I was engaged in this study project. I will always be grateful for the many years we have spent together trying to discover the concept of God's life in communion.

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ABSTRACT

Suffering is an ever-present challenge for every single aspect of life on Earth. It deeply challenges and shapes the way we see the world and relate to it. It poses a challenge for all religions, demanding that they account for why evil and suffering exist. In his study, Kern (2013:1) says that the reality of suffering permeates our whole world: each nation, social class, community of people and the life of any single individual. None can say that they are unaffected by suffering.

Many African countries find themselves in this situation of suffering. There is general poverty in some of the countries. There is not enough basic industry or economic development to provide jobs for a large number of people. In some African countries over half the population is without job. The result of this situation is a growing crisis in the cities. In many cities, there are thousands of homeless people, street children, destitute, thieves and women who have turned to sex-work to survive (O'Donovan 2006:57).

Furthermore, the church in Africa is finding itself in the middle of social, economic and political issues. There are a number of social issues that the church needs to take note of. These issues are contributing to the fragmentation of the moral fiber of our societies. Health issues are also part of the social struggles that the Africa church is facing. HIV/AIDS features here as probably one of the biggest factors, which is not only a social issue, but also leads to political and economic questions.

The question 'Where is God?' when suffering knocks at the door cannot be avoided. While some use it as a way of denying the existence of God, for Christians it is an honest cry and at the same time a hunger for God's presence. Another important dimension is that even today many Christians still think God punishes people with suffering because of their wrongdoing. In addition, others still think God is not directly involved in everyday human activities because God is transcendent and remote from the physical world. However, Yancey (1990:225) argues that every religion must somehow address the problem of suffering and pain. 'Where is God?' is a question that every suffering person eventually asks. Yancey (1990:226) says that all our questions about God and suffering should be filtered through what we know about God.

On the other hand, Moltmann's social Trinitarian theology provides a biblical understanding to the problem of suffering. For Moltmann, it is from the Trinity that all things derive and exist. For him, the only answer to questions of suffering and the redemption of suffering is to be found within the actions of the Trinitarian God who redeems dehumanized humanity by entering into the suffering of humanity.

God's life in communion is the major focus of this research project. This theme provides a biblical and relevant response to the misconception of the remoteness of God in traditional African worldview. The doctrine of Trinity affirms that God's life is in communion. The understanding of God's life in communion may arguably influence African believers to live as the true ambassadors of Christ in their private and public lives. This is because it challenges the African concept of God, which views God's presence detached from the suffering of his people. This study is based on Moltmann's conviction that the Bible shows God's life in communion. The triune God is not detached from the suffering of his people; God is not remote, far or distant, God himself suffers at the human history of injustice and oppression. The triune God of the Christian faith does not remain aloof from human suffering, God joins in the human suffering through Jesus Christ.

KEYWORDS

African Theology

African Tradition and Religion (ATR)

African Trinitarianism

Communion and Relationality

Contemporary African Horizon

Hope in Suffering

Hospitality

Perichoretic unity of the Trinity

Post-Colonial African Theology

Post-colonial Africa

Poverty and suffering

Social Trinitarianism

Theology of hope

The Crucified God

Transcendent and Immanent

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this research project is *God's life in communion: J Moltmann's social Trinitarianism for a post-colonial African Theology.* The purpose of this research project is to explore the concept of *God's life in communion*, as articulated by Jürgen Moltmann for post-colonial African Theology. This research project aims to provide practical help for people who are struggling to make sense of the suffering in the world, more especially the continent of Africa. Although Africa is today a home to many religious and non-religious organizations and many people have viewed this as a positive development in the continent, the situation is quite different. The entire continent is bleeding from the pain of tribal animosity, ethnic tension, hatred, violence, poverty, political instability, a break-down of family relationships and injustices.

Traditionally, Africa had a good cultural and religious system that significantly developed, nurtured and shaped the aspirations and lives of its peoples. Today the situation has changed and the African life is not the same. Africa has been invaded by a number of challenges which have changed the lives of the people. We shall discuss this in detail in chapter 1, but it is vital to say here that this is a serious issue that requires our theological reflection as the author does in this research project. The Christian faith in this respect faces the foremost challenge - it needs to reconcile its view of an all-powerful, all-loving and all-knowing God with instances of evil and suffering. If there is a single question that sums up the reaction of every single person in the face of suffering it is, 'Why?' and 'Where is God?'

The result of these questions is a general misconception about the concept of God. The most striking aspect in this dimension is the way people think about God in the context of suffering. Yancey (1990:207) refers to the fact that this feeling of doubt and betrayal in the face of suffering especially comes to those who believe in a world that is ruled by a powerful and loving God. Surely the displeasure suffering brings is not avoidable, it deeply challenges people and it makes them challenge the concept of God and his goodness. Kern (2013:54) says that suffering casts doubt on God's nature, character and attributes. In the context in which suffering and human oppression have become commonplace, the idea of God who is all-powerful and all-loving may become too remote, too technical and impractical for anyone else. In this respect, the aim of this research project is to contribution to an idea of God who is in communion with his people even in the context of suffering. The concept of *God's life in communion* can indeed help the people in Africa. This study is based on

the theology of the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann. His concern for the poor, the marginalised and exploited and human suffering in general is rooted in his individual biography. Moltmann's personal experiences of the Second World War played a critical role towards both his conversion and his subsequent theological career. Moltmann's notion of the social Trinitarianism, the theology of hope and the crucified God can be used as resources for empowering the church to engage with the African context of poverty. He attempts to handle the problem of suffering through the elaboration of a theology of Hope and the Crucified God. In these two books, *Theology of Hope and The Crucified God*, Moltmann speaks about God who is relational. He speaks about a concrete-human God and God as a fellow sufferer. The underlying motivation for Moltmann is that, by deducing the concept of God from an understanding of the *perichoretical* communion of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, it can help to overcome the post-modern challenges.

Moltmann (1981:139) asserts that Western Christianity has developed largely a defective soteriology because it has defective pneumatology. The root cause of this problem is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of God. Ever since the development of the concept of the Trinity, the Western tradition has implicitly been monarchical in its view of God; it had focused more on the Father of the Son, giving rise more to a duality rather than a Trinity. Furthermore, (Moltmann (1981:140) argues that the Holy Spirit has for all practical purposes taken on the role of a force or power than a distinct person of his own. For Moltmann, God is not a distant monarch who stands over above the world in a dominating and threatening way. Rather, what is perceived through the history which God has with Israel and finally in Jesus of Nazareth is a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What constitutes the unity of God is not substance or modes of being, but the relational, *perichoretic* indwelling of the three Persons. This divine process is what constitutes their fellowship and perfects them in a unity of love. In this way, the pitfall of subordinationism, individualism, selfishness is eliminated and a monarchical model is avoided. The significance of Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity is that he takes this *perichoretic* model and deepens its meaning and application for our contemporary world. He shows that we must think of the Trinitarian persons as equals; each possesses will and understanding; each person speaks to each other; each person turns to each other in love and communion (Wood 2000:55). One of the social implications of the *perichoretic* concept of the Trinity is mutuality, reciprocity, communion and equality among the persons of the Trinity, so likewise this becomes a model for the world. To perceive the concept of God as an everlasting communion rather than an unmoveable, unchangeable substance or nature has become the crucial point for doing

Trinitarian theology. To put it in a nutshell: Moltmann's social Trinitarian theology with its emphasis on the concept of communion has become for many theologians a framework of doing theology. By doing this it becomes clear in all these realms of investigation that human life can only be adequately understood in Trinitarian terms.

1. BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

In this research project, the notion of *post-colonial Africa* is an attempt to describe a diverse spectrum of political regimes, economic conditions and social realities in Africa. To speak of post-colonialism is also an attempt to describe the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism. According to Settles (1996:3), the imposition of colonialism on Africa altered its history forever. He argues that African modes of thought, patterns of cultural development and ways of life were forever impacted by the change in political structure brought about by colonialism. Again, he indicates that prior to the 'Scramble for Africa', or the official partition of Africa by the major European nations, African economies were advancing in every area, particularly in the area of trade. However, colonialism came to exploit the physical human nature and the economic resources of many countries in Africa.

Settles (1996:4) shows that the development of colonialism and the partitioning of Africa by the European colonial powers arrested the natural development of the African economic system. This pattern of unbalanced trade continued into the period of colonialism and remains today. Furthermore, it has been argued that colonialism was not just about economic subjugation, but about the ability to wrest control of the local economy from African rulers. Taking this power away under the guise of colonial development made traditional rulers in Africa weaker because their power base was destroyed. Since Africans were not allowed to improve their methods or to market their goods freely, they were forced into the colonial system (Settles (1996:8).

In a nutshell, colonialism and its economic demands irrevocably altered the social structure of many African societies and set the stage for later problems in African social, economic and political development. Gordon (2007:1) admits that the colonial experience clearly played a significant role in shaping the framework for political activity in Africa. He confirms that African politics in the post-colonial era has been marred by authoritarianism, corruption, military intervention and leadership

failures amidst a broader socio-economic crisis characterized by poverty. The effects of colonialism on Africa's past and present are visible all over the continent.

For analytical purposes, this research project uses the term *post-colonial Africa* to describe the present challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. This is another type of colonialism which has affected almost every sector of public and private life. Most African nations suffer from military dictatorships, corruption, civil unrest, war, underdevelopment and deep poverty. Most people in sub-Saharan Africa are victims of human-made poverty. Generally, there is materialism, pride, lust, greed and selfishness instead of the gentle and supportive community. O'Donovan (2006:8) shows that poverty is one of the greatest problems in Africa today. He says that many cities have large shanty town areas filled with wretchedly poor people who lack many of the basic essentials of human life. He indicates that urban areas are overcrowded with homeless and displaced people, war refugees, handicapped people, beggars and abandoned street children.

Pre-colonial Africans lived a communal lifestyle. That is to say, there was interconnectedness among members of a community. There was communal assistance in form of mutual self-help during farming season. It could be in form of bush clearing for farming, cultivation, harvesting among others (Oni & Segun 2014:9). Apart from this, pre-colonial Africa was also noted for helping one another. In fact, they shared virtually everything. Indeed, community was an extension of the family system. In sharp contrast to the African value of community, people can hardly do such a thing in post-colonial Africa, they are only interested in helping mostly their immediate family members. Post-colonialism has brought about individualism. It is now me and my family, hence the distinction between distant and close relations. In essence, the social effect of post-colonialism is the glorification of individualism of families and fragmentation of family and social relations.

In addition, the African church is situated in the middle of social, economic and political issues. Coertze (2005:75) says that a sick church suffering from poverty, oppression, prejudice, discrimination injustice cannot enjoy peace and happiness until the people confess their sin and repent. The African church has a vital role to play in this regard and cannot afford to keep quiet in the midst of the social concerns. The problem of suffering is one of the biggest issues that the African church will have to focus its attention on.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTION

Despite all the new and helpful conceptions which so many theologians over the past years have elaborated in giving the concept of God their full attention, one is still left uneasy when searching for the promising and challenging implications for Christian life. In the context of suffering and pain there still seems to be a gap between God and those who suffer. Other people think God is completely detached from everyday human activities because God is remote from the physical world. This African worldview of the remoteness of God has an important implication for the life of believers. It is a fact that a good number of African Christians feel more secure in African Tradition religions than in Jesus Christ. The greatest threat confronting Christianity in Africa is its failure to sufficiently address the spiritual fears of the African Christians. It is this dissatisfaction with Christianity that compels most Africans to augment their security needs with the elements of African Tradition Religion.

Much of the confusion in post-colonial Africa today seems to come from a failure to understand the concept of God. Kombo (2000:205) confirms that Africa has to address the problem of the hiddenness of God. He says that there is an inability to see God clearly, but there is also the hiddenness of God. In many African cosmologies, the transcendent God of Christianity must have been a very foreign concept to the first hearers of Christianity in Africa. An immanent God will be naturally more appealing than the notion of separated, transcendent God. In light of the above it seems that African Theology should affirm with great boldness that God is present and that God's solidarity with humanity and its suffering is not an intellectual one. The concept of God in Africa will be meaningful and empowering only when it can be translated in Trinitarian terms. What does it mean to tell an African that God was made flesh and dwelt among Africans in the midst of evil forces that frustrate progress, create misfortunes such as infertility, crop failure, family discord and even death?

Apart from the problem of the hiddenness of God, the current situation in post-colonial Africa has raised many questions on the interplay between God and society. The question is: 'Who is God in the context of suffering?' African theologians are acutely conscious of the urgent need for a theology relevant to the African continent. From the very onset, African theologians have contributed immensely in defining the major theological paradigms in contemporary Africa, including *Liberation, Inculturation and Reconstruction Theology.* Liberation as a theological paradigm in Africa is a

hermeneutic procedure that seeks to understand the African reality and to interpret this reality in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to bring transformation of the oppressive status quo. Inculturation Theology recognizes the oppressive and ant-life components in both culture and the Bible which are then challenged, critiqued and transformed. Reconstruction in Africa therefore refers to actions taken in all the different dimensions of societal life and not just in one particular sector of human existence. However, despite all these approaches, Africa is still trapped in poverty. It is such situations prevailing on the continent that compel both ecclesial and theological communities in Africa to share the common vision and pledge to formulate a liberative theology.

After analysing the trends in African Theology, Kombo (2006:3) argues that the doctrine of God in African Theology is built upon a cultural identity paradigm, which in principle is responsible in this context for the emphasis on the African concepts of God rather than on the Christian view of God and has had no conceptual framework to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity to the African audience. Kombo (2006:3) suggests that Africa needs a theology which can explain clearly the picture of a Trinitarian God. On the other hand, he admits that African Theology has not been involved in Trinitarian discourse even though the discussions have been going on for about two decades. Furthermore, he believes that Western theology has failed to meet the African aspirations. The doctrine of the Trinity has been articulated using the Western concepts that are very difficult to be understood by the Africans.

As far as Moltmann is concerned the social Trinity is the applicable framework that can help to explain the position of God in the context of suffering. The main emphasis of his message is primarily the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In light of what has been said, the crucial question of this research is: *What interpretation of God do we need now in post-colonial Africa? Would a social understanding of the Christian doctrine of God, that is the Trinity, and as has been articulated by Moltmann, help us to do responsible theology in Africa now?*

African scholars such as Ogbonnaya, Nyamiti and Kombo proposes three areas: the *African community, family* and *names* as a basis to the interpretation of the Trinity. However, the African interpretation of the Trinity as a divine community and family may sound attractive, but it may not mean anything in the context of suffering and where God seems to be absent. Therefore, one cannot do

this work without asking the following question: *What would be a revisioned social Trinitarianism look like in the post-colonial Africa?*

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore Jürgen Moltmann's contribution on the social understanding of the Trinity in dialogue with the contemporary Africa challenges. The research will be conducted by means of studying Moltmann's written work and the works of other theologians who have critically evaluated, critiqued and appropriated Moltmann's insights. Since Moltmann hopes to find in the doctrine of the Trinity a theological response to contemporary social questions of freedom, equality, dignity and community, then a good way to understand his Trinitarian theology is to examine it in light of this goal. This research project is primarily a literature study. The researcher has used data collected from books, journals, articles, reports and some official documents.

The option for Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian theology is mainly motivated by the nature of his vision of God who is communal and relational. However, reliance on the theological framework of Jürgen Moltman presents its own peculiar limitations. The very fact that Moltmann's theology sprung up from a European context, with a Western worldview, it raises a challenge about using his theology in the African context, which has a different worldview. The difficulties associated with his work are not sufficient to disqualify a critical consideration of Moltmann's thought. He has made worthy theological and ethical contributions that must not be ignored, especially for the challenges of post-colonial Africa. Moltmann's Trinitarian theology has been studied in several ways. First, there are simple presentations of his Trinitarian thought. Second, there are comparative studies that articulate his thought by comparing him with another (Trinitarian) theologian. Further, there are thematic studies that examine his Trinitarian ideas in terms of one theme or subject. This study undertakes a constructive and hermeneutical theology. It is constructive theology to the extent that it opens our view for alternatives which he has provided in his theology, but which need to be nurtured and developed further. Again, it is a systematic re-reading of the hermeneutical theology of Moltmann within the contemporary economic, social and political context. As indicated above, Moltmann is not satisfied with a mere rearrangement of the doctrine of the Trinity, but has continually pursued the meaning and applicability of Christian truth for the social, economic and political transformation of the world. This study project therefore will elaborate Moltmann's Trinitarian theology in relation to the fundamental social questions of Africa. Since this is the case, this study is sensitive to the African context and also to the ethical use

of literature sources. In this research project, a review of the literature is going to involve quoting, paraphrasing and citing the work of Moltmann and other books appropriate to this field of study.

4. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The research project intends to show that Jürgen Moltmann's contributions provide valuable options that can help us to do a responsible theology in post-colonial Africa. Moltmann's understanding of God's life in communion challenges the church to become concerned about the vulnerability of the poor. Of great significance, the concept of God's life in communion opposes all oppressive structures that stand in the way of the poor to experience life. Again, the concept of God's life in communion is very rich in different concepts which match well with the African concepts of relationships, fellowships and participation. This means that, in terms of relationships, Africans totally support and agree with this concept of God. Furthermore, the concept of God's life in communion can help the socio-political and economic structures of Africa that deny humans their wellbeing and dignity. Hence, the purpose of the research is to make a contribution to the following areas: (a) the sub-Saharan African community since the research focuses on the challenges of post-colonial Africa; (b) the Christian community of faith since the research addresses one of the key doctrine of the church which is not properly articulated; (c) the scholarly world and theological academic institutions since the research is aimed at exploring and proposing a new hermeneutical approach to the social understanding of the Trinity from the African context.

5. RESEARCH LAY-OUT

This research project consists of six major chapters, addressing the concept of *God's life in communion,* articulated by Moltmann, that can help the church to do responsible theology in post-colonial Africa. Chapter 1 begins the investigation of the contemporary post-colonial African horizon. The chapter investigates the challenges of social, economic and political aspects of Africa. The research shows that African Christians are either disillusioned or frustrated with the changes that are taking place in the continent. This examination shows that Africa is caught up in political power struggles, war, poverty, overcrowding, pollution, sickness, crime, unemployment and the breakdown of traditional family. Consequently, most Africans do not know what to do with these changes, therefore they question the presence of God in this world. Furthermore, the chapter highlights challenges relating

to the church and the need for a relevant theology that can be responsible to address problems affecting the continent of Africa. The implications of the issues raised in this investigation for the concept of God in post-colonial Africa are also highlighted in this chapter. The question of the interplay between God and society remains on the agenda of this investigation. The African continent is desperately in need for a theology that can explain clearly the position of God in the context of suffering.

In chapter 2 the focus is on the concept of God in African Religion and Missionary Christianity. This study shows that the concepts of God in Africa are not merely descriptions of God but they reveal the true nature of God. Furthermore, this investigation hightlights the strength and weakness of the concept of God in African Religion and Missionary Christianity. This examination shows that God is thought to be present in peoples' everyday life, but at the same time God seems to be remote and far. God is perceived as the Creator and Supreme Being, but is very rarely the object of direct and regular worship. The implication of this understanding is well elaborated in this chapter. The chapter also shows that studying theology in the African context is not an easy task. Its complexity lies in the presence of plurality in many fields. This examination suggest that African Theology needs to continue addressing questions raised on the concept of God in the post-colonial Africa. A credible theology in Africa is one that can address the African's struggle for life. Indeed, until God is seen to be interested in the African's contemporarity, God remains foreign and insufficient in Africa. In such a God, Africans remain insecure. Therefore, the chapter concludes with a proposal to engage Moltmann's theology of God as a viable response to all these questions on the problem of suffering.

Chapter 3 examines the development of Moltmann's social Trinitarian theology, in order to understand his response to the problem of suffering. The inquiry begins with a brief biographical introduction of Moltmann's life history and a discussion of his theological context and methodology, before proceeding to an examination of his thoughts presented in *The Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God* and The Trinity and the Kingdom of God. The primary concern in this chapter is to understand Moltmann's Trinitarianism, developed from the theology of hope and the crucified God. The ultimate aim is to help African Christians not to see the concept of God in abstract terms. The overarching aim of this work is to develop an African Trinitarian theology that is more attentive to human experience. This account would lead to the history and development the social understanding of Trinity.

Chapter 4 aims at establishing an understanding of the history and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The most important stages are mentioned and special attention is given to the contributions

of the Cappadocian Fathers, Tertullian, Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, who have laid the foundation of the social understanding of the Trinity. Within this renewal of Trinitarian theology, the chapter affirms Moltmann's theology as one of the most important contributors because his social understanding of the Trinity provides a viable option for interpreting the unity of the triune God and God's relationship to the world. The main focus of this study is Moltmann's Trinitarian theology. In the *Trinity and the Kingdom of God,* Moltmann continues to describe more clearly his view of the relations of the Trinity which he started with his earlier discussions on a Trinitarian theology of the cross. It is his conviction that the New Testament speaks of God by narrative proclamation of the communitarian relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that are open to the world. He puts more importance on a union of love and fellowship. Moltmann's understanding of God's life in communion has abundant social implications for post-colonial Africa. However, as in many mainline churches, it appears that the doctrine of the Trinity is mainly viewed as confessional and abstract theological discourse and practice in Africa. Though African theologians have recently expressed the need for an articulation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, more attention has been given to other aspects of African theology. As a point of departure, the conclusion of this chapter is a proposal to examine the African interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. As noted by a number of theologians, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery to the people of Africa. The issue of the Holy Spirit, his nature and divinity is not discussed much in Africa. The chapter concludes with the need for an African approach to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter 5 examines the African scholarship on Trinitarianism in dialogue with Moltmann. The main and relevant issue in this investigation is the social understanding of the Trinity. The African theologians cited in this chapter clearly set their theological agenda to focus on the African community, family and names, as a basis to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity. The general observation of this analysis is that the interpretation of the Trinity in the African context has been a relevant attempt in the African theology that focuses on relationships or relatedness, common responsibility, participation and fellowship. This demonstrates the urgent need to articulate a Trinitarian theology applicable to the local African context. This concept, if properly understood, can help African countries that are faced with the challenge of human relations. However, the African interpretation of the Trinity as a divine community may sound attractive but it may not mean anything in the context of suffering. A theology that is only centred on social relations without any link to the contemporary issues of suffering, hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS pandemic, ethnic wars and death, would bypass the true needs of the African and would be built on sand. This chapter engages Moltmann's view of the social understanding of the Trinity. His

views on the doctrine of the Trinity is recognized as being relevant to modern life, as well as the African context because it acknowledges the creative and interfering presence of God in all aspects of life and the world. It is the interpretation that demands a sensitive awareness of God's presence in ordinary activities.

The focus of chapter 6, is a proposed approach towards a re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism in Africa. The essential point in this discussion is to provide an interpretation which focuses on the God's nearness, God who participates in our human suffering, God who is in communion and who stands in solidarity with his people.

The conclusion summarizes and sorts out some important key points raised in the above stated chapters. In this section, it is affirmed that Moltmann's Trinitarian theology, which understands God as a community of persons in perichoretic union offers a desirable communal model that is desperately required for our post-colonial time in Africa. God's life in communion challenges the church in Africa to be a community that is life-promoting and offers life-creating human relationships.

CHAPTER 1. THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN HORIZON AND THE QUEST FOR AN ADEQUATE AFRICAN THEOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research applies the term 'Africa' to describe the second largest continent after Asia, covering about one-fifth of the total land surface of the Earth. The continent is bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, on the north by the Mediterranean Sea, on the east by the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and on the south by the mingling waters of the Atlantic and Indian oceans. According to Fourie (2015:1), the term 'Africa' refers to the persons, groups, institutions and structures found on the continent. Furthermore, he argues that there are numerous concepts of the term 'Africa'. He explains that Africa can be conceived of as a *place, a commodity, a condition* and an *ideal*. First, he says that the political, economic and socio-cultural developments that were taking place within the continent of Africa played a nominal role in the birth of the concept of Africa as a place (Fourie 2015:3).

Second, he indicates that Africa is considered to be *a commodity* because of the imperialist phase of the colonial era. For him, Africa and its constitutive societies became commodities that created political value in Europe by producing national prestige and closed markets in the international arena through conquest. Third, he argues that Africa is described as *a condition* that needs to be improved. He shows that most of the early Missionaries and scholars described the people of Africa as uncivilized, savages and barbarians. Fourth, Fourie (2015:7) applies the term 'Africa' as *ideal* because it can be understood as a reclamation and reinterpretation of African socio-cultural resources. Basically, he shows that the four concepts of Africa describe the geographic, political, economic, historical and socio-cultural elements shared by people on the continent of Africa in a constructive and authentic manner.

The concept of post-colonial Africa describes the extraordinarily diverse spectrum of political regimes, economic conditions and social realities in Africa. On the other hand, colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another. One of the difficulties in defining colonialism is that it is hard to distinguish it from imperialism. Frequently the two concepts are treated as synonyms. Like colonialism, imperialism also involves political and economic control over a dependent territory. According to Kohn (2010:1), the term colony comes from the Latin word *colonus,* meaning farmer. This root reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political

allegiance to their country of origin. Imperialism, on the other hand, comes from the Latin term *imperium,* meaning to command. Thus, the term imperialism draws attention to the way that one country exercise power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty, or indirect mechanisms of control.

Africa had experienced brutal, exploitative and oppressive form of colonialism. It is also obvious that colonialism has left negatively impacting legacy on the African continent. This chapter, therefore, tries to reveal the impact of colonialism in the post-colonial (contemporary) Africa. More importantly, this study examines the social, economic and political impact of colonialism in the contemporary Africa. Bayeh (2015:89) says that Africa had had democratic culture in the pre-colonial era which later dismantled through the influence of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. It is also noted that the contemporary state in Africa is a remnant of a colonially imposed system. He argues that the Colonialists neither interested to flourish democratic system in Africa nor prepared African states to administer themselves effectively in the post-independence era. Hence, what African states inherited from their colonizers is their undemocratic and authoritarian rule. Moreover, Bayeh (2015:89) indicates that African rulers are also known to be highly corrupted, which could be traced back to the legacy of colonialism. Colonial powers' evil socio-political culture produced the habit of corruption in public service of the contemporary Africa. The economic sphere is not also an exception. Colonial powers effectively exploited resources of the continent.

Nonetheless, despite its deep rooted negative impact in the continent the researcher strongly believe that Africans shall no more blame the Colonizers for their failures as colonialism is not the only cause for current Africa problems. Rather, they should also attribute their failure to themselves and be committed and vigorously strive to bring changes in political, economic, and social development of the continent. They should not externalize all their weaknesses to colonialism. Colonialism shall no longer be the reason to their failures.

1.2 THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN HORIZON

From the beginning of the twenty–first century Africa has been in the media. Almost every day network and cable news programs feature some event or dilemma somewhere on the continent. Many of the problems that were present in Africa twenty years ago remain or have intensified. Population

increases continue at a more rapid rate than job creation. The underlying concern is that civil wars in countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and Sudan continue to plague the region. It is clearly depicted by O'Donovan (2006:3) that the problems of modern Africa are great, but they are not new. He contends that the history of mankind is a tragic story of problems caused by human beings and human sin. Furthermore, he says that Christians are faced with the social and structural sin of oppression and injustice under which great numbers of people are suffering. This is the sin that affects all institutions and structures of society, inclining individuals and groups to behaviour contrary to God's purpose.

According to Coertze (2005:1), for decades, Africa has tried to rid itself of the most often oppressive powers that have dominated the continent. Instead, over a number of years, these issues have surfaced, if not, largely to a greater extent. On the other side, it is widely recognized by political scientists and international organizations that African civil societies have tried their level best to address the continent's problems. By contrast, the challenging issues facing the African countries have not disappeared. In his article, Bojang (2017:42) gives a picture that international development donors have invested a lot of resources in Africa's development and yet there is little improvement that has been seen. For many years, voices have been heard and articles have been written, speaking against issues relating to the challenges of Africa. In sharp contrast, the African governments are caught up in political power struggles, war, poverty, corruption, sickness, unemployment and crime.

These issues are contributing to the fragmentation of the moral fibre of the African societies. One of the most common responses to these challenges is the question: What image of God emerges from the struggles of poverty in Africa? Could it be true that sometimes there is a feeling of being deserted by God? The feeling is always intensified when the discussion includes the reality of God in Africa, for if God is the creator of all things and described as loving and good, why are there such instances of evil in the continent of Africa?

Kern (2013:4) says that the most common expression in the midst of suffering is the contempt for God. He argues that people who are disadvantaged and humiliated feel that they have been abandoned by God or God has hidden his face and is far from them. Indeed, in the context of suffering, people lose their confidence in human beings, as well as in God. They do not see God's involvement and presence in their daily misfortunes, illness and other concrete problems. African Christians seem more aware of the proximity of the Devil than that of God. To them, God is either, absent or indifferent to their plight

or insufficient to deal with their African problems. How then should this theological problem be solved? Perhaps the most significant question that needs to be answered is the relationship between God and his people in the context of suffering. Despite long tradition and millennia of discussion on the problem of suffering, an adequate answer to the question still remains and needs to be presented. This reality of suffering deeply shapes the way people live their lives, the way they see the world and how they relate to God. In this case, it is extremely urgent to develop a doctrine of God relevant to instil confidence in the African Christians.

For Palm (2012:1), the common Christian view to the question of suffering is that hope in God is the best response to the problem. However, Kern (2013:2) argues that Christianity has been challenged to show and provide good reasons why people have to choose the Christian God in the context of suffering. Every single person will need at some point to deal with the questions suffering raises. In this situation, the Christian faith faces the challenge, since it needs to reconcile its view of an all-powerful, all-loving and all-knowing God, the creator with instances of evil and suffering in the created world. Basically, this is not a challenge that only Christianity needs to address, but one that every single person will face sooner or later, of how to understand the reality of suffering in the face of daily life. The assurance that God is sufficiently able to protect them, their families, their livestock, fields and all their investments will empower the Africans to face life and to adventure as far as they can in their pursuit for peace and prosperity.

Another area of concern is the position of the church in Africa. From the above, it is clear that the church in Africa is finding itself in the middle of ancestral worship, ritual killings, prostitution, cultism, manipulation and rigging of votes, ethnic and religious violence, cohabitation, trial marriages, Satanism, suicide, rape and gang-rape, incest and divorce. Today the African church is at a crossroads and the path has forked. In terms of everyday conduct for individuals and communities there is uncertainty, disillusionment and even despair. Pagan and unchristian practices have resurfaced with a deadly vengeance. There are many questions and issues that concern the Christian and the church in Africa. Coertze (2005:56) suggests that the African church cannot divorce itself from political issues, or leave all political issues to government to take care of. He encourages the church to give a theological answer to these issues. Furthermore, Coertze (2005:3) argues that the church in Africa cannot afford to wait for the church of the West to address the continent's issues. Living in the situation, the church needs to provide theological insight. The church needs to realize that it cannot

only focus on the message of life after death, as is seemly often the case, but it should take serious note of the conditions of life before death. On the same issue, Mashau & Frederiks (2008:122) suggests that for African theologians to design and come up with a theology that would impact the African and the global societies positively, they should move beyond the colonial period and beyond the cultural approach and become true to the issues affecting the church today.

In summary, the purpose of this chapter is to critically explore and evaluate the contemporary African horizon and to highlight some of the challenges affecting the continent. The goal is to identify these issues and to determine what the African leaders are saying about these issues. The problems to be highlighted will include challenges relating to social, economic and political issues. Furthermore, this chapter questions how people can speak meaningfully about God in the context of these broken realities in Africa. One area that seems to be in contention is the quest for an adequate African Theology. If the church in Africa is going to continue to be truly African and be able to address these issues, it will have to continue to liberate itself from the yoke of post-colonial challenges.

This quest can be traced back to the earliest notions of Inculturation, Liberation and Reconstruction Theology. One of the key issues that the African church needs to continually grapple with in its effort to establish an adequate African Theology is the interplay between God and the modern society (Coertze 2005:30). Therefore, special attention will be given to this area of concern and to determine the emerging paradigms in African Theology that should be taken note of. It is primal to grasp that in Africa, a God who is only concerned about good morality and life in heaven will remain foreign and thus irrelevant and insufficient to Africans. A study of God which is removed from the reality of life or just mere academics does no good for Africa.

1.2.1 Challenges relating to social, economic and political issues

According to the report presented by Kachikwu (2016:1) on World Poverty, the majority of the world's poorest countries today are in Africa. In this report, he argues that the post-independent African states have undergone several political and economic reforms yet there is little development that has been put on record. Of course, some African countries like South Africa are not quite as poor as others such as Ethiopia. Following the same argument, Bojang (2017:42) states that Africa is one of the richest continents endowed with natural and mineral resources, but amongst the poorest in the world. He

contends that Africa faces a lot of development hurdles which are real and many but could be met via vibrant civil society and strong political commitment.

In giving an overview of the major challenges of Africa, Afegbua & Adejuwon (2012:141) points out that this could be attributed to frequent leadership change through military intervention, unclear ideology and weakened political institution. In this context, he declares that a call for a focus on leadership and governance is timely in Africa. He argues that many African leaders assume a leadership position without prior knowledge of it. This is the trend in most African countries and as such seriously hinders the socio-economic development of many states.

Another vital issue that has affected the continent of Africa is corruption. It appears to many political leaders in Africa that corruption is a way of life and this bizarre situation has further worsened the woes in Africa. Bojang (2017:47) says that corruption in Africa siphons off 20 to 30 percent of funding from basic service provision. Moreover, he complains that many African leaders extract billions of dollars every year from their economically strapped countries but they appear not to have been taken to task. Basically, corruption is a multi-faceted phenomenon and the concept contains too many connotations and is thus difficult to define. In a bid to define corruption, one could say that it is the concept of wealth-seeking behaviour of someone who represents the state and the public authority, or as the misuse of public goods by public officials for private ends. Amundsen (1999:2) holds the view that political corruption is one of the issues that African governments are facing and it has retarded growth in many African nations. For him, corruption is injustice and a threat to sustainable development. Corruption is a failure of governance and is also an instrument used by African tyrants and dictators to enrich themselves and over-stay in power. In short, it can be stated that corruption is a disease that has affected many countries in Africa. There have been reports of substantial cases of embezzlement of public funds and capital flight by some African presidents and politicians alike and these leaders step out of power as if nothing had happened.

Generally, Kachikwu (2016:2) highlights several causes of the problem of poverty in Africa. Firstly, he argues that ‘land’ is becoming a controversial issue in post-colonial Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has a history of land dispossession and contestation which has resulted in various types of inequalities and a skewed distribution of land resources. Land in Sub-Saharan Africa has been subjected to conflict, conquest, expropriation and exploitation thus resulting in the many discrepancies that exist today. In

addition, Bob (2010:1) says that land related issues have greatly influenced the socio-economic and political positions of different groups of people. For him this situation has resulted in numerous land conflicts and in most Sub-Saharan countries the land question and past inequalities remain unresolved. Given its importance, he claims that access to and availability of land resources are critical to ensuring real and long-lasting improvement in social, economic and political well-being, especially in vulnerable societies that are prone to instability and conflicts. On this issue Odgaard (2006:5) indicates that the amount and type of land in Sub-Saharan Africa available to households and communities are critical to food production and stability.

Unfortunately, ownership and control of land is often associated with influence in decision making and power to affect the outcomes. Those who do not have power, money and influence are being displaced. This often results in conflicts as some people feel that they are disadvantaged and do not benefit from the land reform processes. Bob (2010:1) indicates clearly that there are several resettlement failures associated with land reform throughout the continent which have resulted in conflicts and, as is the case in Zimbabwe, undermined national security.

The above discussion is just a summary of the key land conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the conclusion is that land scarcity and unfair distribution practices exacerbate land-related conflicts. As a result, it has contributed to the high level of poverty in the continent. The effective management of land conflicts in Africa is required to ensure that long-term, sustainable solutions are found and that the equality of life of those most affected by these ongoing disputes is improved.

Secondly, Kachikwu (2016:3) speaks compellingly about international 'financial aid' going to African countries. He argues that in order to eradicate poverty, African leaders need to consider the promotion of human rights, a concern for the minorities and to uphold integrity in all government institutions. Furthermore, he complains that this ideal financial aid has promoted the economic dependency syndrome. For him, eradication of poverty involves the need to rebuild the lives of the broken people. On this issue Kachikwu (2016:4) argues that much of the aid given to African countries still comes tied to the donor's agenda. Foreign countries give without much thought as to what would really benefit the majority of the recipient's population. He believes, poverty is not fought by aid but people can fight poverty with health, education and jobs and this is where most of the African countries have failed. In

this case, he claims that Africa does not need aid; Africa needs to get rid of this dependency syndrome on aid.

Thirdly, Kachikwu (2016:4) talks about the issue concerning trade. In this report, he says that the richer countries often tend to exploit poor countries and give unfairly low prices for their exports of commodities such as tea, coffee, bananas and other export products. In addition, he explains that foreign businesses operating in Africa do not help the local economy as much as they could easily help. On the same issue, Manenji (1998:1) gives a report of a Zambian situation, of which the foreign investors have taken over the major revenue enterprises of the country. In this report, he says that the Zambian market has become the dumping ground for all kinds of second class goods from developed countries. Currently the country's largest trading partner is China. He complains that the Zambian resources China imports are varied, covering everything from oil to iron ore, timber, cotton, tobacco and copper. In exchange for broad access to resources, China exports cheap manufactured goods back to Zambia and loans out billions of dollars.

Furthermore Manero (2017:1) gives another provoking report that China's policies in Zambia paint a picture of trade imbalances that are handicapping the country, while grossly advantaging China at the expense of the Zambian people. Manero (2017:1) states that Chinese people seek to establish themselves as a new colonial power. Infrastructure programs funded by the Chinese government, for example, are often carried out by Chinese workers. Instead of giving local companies and citizens a vital opportunity to gain experience and capital, these contracts overwhelmingly benefit Chinese corporations and bring in massive profits.

To give a summary of the current situation of Africa, several challenges can be highlighted and discussed but, for the sake of this study, the common challenges that are likely in communal areas of Africa can be listed as follows: education, medicine, drinking water, diseases like AIDS, malaria and cholera and a shortage of food. Many of the issues that are highlighted here stem from previously mentioned obstacles. Government interventions have been minimal and have not engaged communities. Indeed, Africa continues to suffer under the yoke of the unjust world order, unbalanced global trade, reduced prices for the primary products that Africa relies on for international trade and a rising debt burden.

On the other hand, Chileshe (2010:5) supports the view that some of the poorest countries in Africa really need substantial prolonged aid to fund direct universal welfare benefit systems to help them climb out of poverty. He declares that for ordinary Africans, development is seen in personal terms. It means additional money for children's school books, usable roads that allow farmers to get their produce to market, electric lights in the village, affordable rice and flour, or a health clinic within walking distance. Manero (2017:2) expresses the same idea that development in Africa is measured by access to land, jobs and better housing. In response to the debate of African development, he argues that most Africans experience little real economic progress in the post-colonial period. This requires effective leadership which is lacking in some African countries.

1.2.2 Challenges relating to communion/relationality and hospitality in Africa

Communion, relationality and hospitality are considered to be the basic cell of the African society. All social and cultural practices find their connection with a notion of family, either supporting or distorting it. Communion plays a crucial role in Africa. Mbiti (1975:175) says that each person in African traditional life lives in or as a part of the family. The members of the extended family could live together in a traditional compound consisting of several houses, live close to one another or be separated by some distance. In case of geographic separation, they would gather together to make important decisions concerning the family. Usually the members of the wider family would belong exclusively either to a paternal or maternal descent. Mbiti says that an individual exists in connection with a larger group, including his or her wider family. He or she acquires his identity from that group. He or she depends on that group for physical and social survival. A meal is perhaps the most basic and most ancient symbol of communion, relationality, hospitality, friendship, love and unity. Food and drink are taken in communion as a sign that life is shared. In Africa, it is rare for people to eat alone because meals are communal activities.

In African society, people generally rely on their family for support in times of financial and economic setbacks. Similarly, in Africa, as in many other developing regions communion is a long established belief which provides its members with sophisticated security system, an economic support to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and clothing. African hospitality is also grounded on the fact that no one is an island on himself or herself; rather, each and every one is part of the whole community. Gathogo (2012:276) indicates that African hospitality emphasises the importance of interdependence.

Moreover, he says that African hospitality is manifested in the economic life and this involves communal willingness to assist each other. From ancient times, Africans have displayed their hospitality by co-operating in works such as agricultural work, the building and repair of houses, land cultivation and clearance of bushy areas, hunting and fishing among others. In Africa, one cannot be mean with services. For a hospitable person is one who is generous in providing food and shelter for the needy and services for whoever needs help.

However, one of the most pervasive global phenomena that has affected human social life all over the world is the impact of modernity. Bitrus (2017:1) indicates that modernity influences not only the intimate and personal aspects of human lives, but also impacts social, cultural and religious traditions around the world. Communion and relationality are not immune from globalizing impact of modernity. The globalizing effects of modernity on Africa's social, cultural and religious life are real and far-reaching. According Bitrus (2017:2), the globalizing of modernity has altered the family institutions in Africa. Individualism, selfishness and segregation is increasing in Africa. Even families in rural areas like to operate in isolation. The conjugal family is becoming more independent. The loss of communal networks and the development of individualism have resulted in increased occurrences of suicide, loneliness, drug abuse and mental illness. The communal system is breaking down. More than ever, some Africans tend to care for their immediate family members than their extended relatives. In a nut shell, the effect of modernity is also felt in the area of communion, relationality and hospitality. The partners remain friends as long as they can meet each other's financial needs. In married relationships, whenever the couple falls short of this expectation, they either divorced or are compelled to keep the relationship for the sake of their Christian faith and their children (if any) (Bitrus 2017:5). The rich and powerful, because of their financial resources, coupled with the abject poverty in the country, are more often objects of friendship than the poor. The poor are more often lonely, despised and alienated, for no one ordinarily wants to befriend them. In such a context, many cities in Africa are overcrowded because people have gone and are still going to any length to acquire money and power at all costs to remain relevant and friend-worthy.

The finding of this study is that Africa has entered the 21st century with huge unresolved issues. The effects of these issues have resulted in the suppression of human freedoms, the violation of human rights and dignity of the peoples of the continent, as well as the looting of human, natural and intellectual resources. To many people, the situation in Africa seems beyond the power of God to

change. War, famine, starvation, disease, poverty, tribalism, corruption and many other evils seem to be hopeless problems to solve.

These issues can lead to feelings of powerlessness and anxiety. Loss of hope in the context of suffering has proved to lead to depression and growing levels of anxiety-related medical illnesses across the world. Palm (2012:16) indicates that the dwindling sense of social hope may also lead to individualism, egocentric tendencies, feeling of rejection and being abandoned by God. The hopelessness described in this chapter could be equated to the absence of God in Africa. A society which is saturated with violence, ritual killings, rape, is a society in crisis. As a result, many people may retreat into merely individual hopes for their private lives because they are fed up with life. Basically, it is not only the government or economic structures that can find solutions to the problems of Africa. The church with its message of hope has an essential and vital role to play in addressing these issues. It is worthwhile at this point to look at the position of the church in Africa. Whereas we are able to see the numbers and rapid religious change, the question must be asked if indeed Christianity and, in particular, the Christian message about God has permeated African thinking and altered the worldview of African community. Above all, what would it take to make African church authentic and relevant?

1.2.3 Challenges relating to the Church in Africa

The church in Africa has experienced a miraculous growth during the twentieth century. The explosion of Christianity in Africa in recent decades is phenomenal, both in relative and absolute numbers. Clearly, Africa has made a major contribution to the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the Global South taking place in the recent years. However, Hunt (2015:132) indicates that alongside this numerical growth there has been a proliferation of many different churches, movements and denominations. This increasing diversity has led some scholars to speak of African Christianity in the plural, to emphasize that different strands or traditions may not be compatible one with another. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the type of Christianity that the Missionaries introduced many years ago has changed drastically. Believing the Bible in the Global South, makes it abundantly clear that this paradigm shift has taken place. A paradigm shift usually means a radical shift and change in the way things have been done. Failure to understand and accept this paradigm shift will smother and hinder authentic African Christianity. Johnson (2009:12-16) claims that Christianity has increasingly taken on a diversity of forms in the course of the century. The *Atlas of Global Christianity* took a fully ecumenical approach in mapping and describing the worldwide Christian faith. Through its maps,

tables, graphs and charts, supported by fifty-two interpretative essays, the Atlas traced the story of the spread of Christianity in every part of the world in the years since 1910. Nevertheless, Ross (2017:107-120) gives a picture that the explosion of Christianity in Africa has brought a number of challenges that cannot be ignored in the studies of African Christianity.

According to Ross (2017:107-120) the church in Africa is beset by many political, social, economic, moral and religious problems. The church in Africa is surrounded by political power struggles, war, poverty, overcrowding, pollution, sickness, crime, unemployment and the breakdown of traditional family life. Indeed, the Christian churches in Africa have a pandemic in their midst, meaning that they are far from and unaffected by the realities of HIV and AIDS that since the 1980s have had such a devastating impact on African societies. He contends that although disease is certainly not new in Africa, the HIV epidemic has posed profound challenges to churches because of the large-scale suffering and death especially among the young adult population and the subsequent effects on families and communities. As a solution, most governments are recommending the use of condoms with sexual partners. However, as medical professionals know, condoms are not completely safe. In plain language, teaching people to use condoms is not going to stop the AIDS epidemic. O'Donovan (2006:101) proposes that for every evil in this world there is a way out, but that it is God's way, not man's way. The only way the AIDS epidemic will be stopped is through a radical change of behaviour. People must return to God's standard of virgin sexual purity before marriage and complete faithfulness after marriage, along with taking precautions about blood and syringes. Unfortunately, the African theologians and churches are still struggling how to respond appropriately and biblically to the issue of HIV/AIDS among Christians. Of all the various theological positions adopted by scholars, it is the marginalization that becomes problematic in the conveyance of the gospel in Africa. Those that are tested positive are being marginalized, rejected and treated as the worst sinners.

For Daniel (2012:36-42) the HIV/AIDS pandemic presents a major challenge in the society and the church in Africa as a whole, and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, as it does to the rest of the world. It is a threat to integral human development as well as to the mission of the church as the entire family of God. Moreover, he says that the church in Africa has to maximize its efforts to promote awareness about the disease. These efforts generally can range from the provision of facts about HIV/AIDS, its modes of transmission, various types of high-risk behaviour that increase its transmission, education for responsible and positive living, mainly focusing on human sexuality and related issues. In addition

to this, he says that the church in Africa has to insist on solidarity and attention to the common good of those who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the church is not just a place of worship but also a refuge of healing and of friendship. The church therefore strongly recommends that each Christian community, each community of faith, each congregation, has a responsibility of sharing the burden of those with AIDS by being available, supported and accompanied by giving care and hope. We are our brothers and sisters' keeper.

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Another area of concern that has affected the church in Africa is child abuse. Child abuse is probably one of the most senseless and damaging activities plaguing the moral fibre of many countries in Africa. When some cases are exposed and propagated by the media, such as the senseless gang raping of a baby, it calls for a general outcry by society. Unfortunately, the anger and hurt felt by the multitude of victims, however, normally go unnoticed. Coertze (2005:60) complains that child abuse by people in authority and those who are supposed to uphold and help build the moral fibre of society, such as teachers, when exposed, also generally leads to an outcry by society. For example, the Catholic Church, in its recent history, has been plagued by revelations of sexual abuse committed by some of its clergy. On the other hand, such children grow up with image of a society that tolerates abuse and may end up becoming abusers as well.

Furthermore, sexism is a form of discrimination which has become so common in the community and the church. Sexism is often expressed in the form of violence against women or men. Sexism quite literally turns men and women into each other's enemies instead of each other's equals. Tutu (2004:48) puts it clearly that sexism creates artificial divisions everywhere that tear apart God's family. The place of power that men occupy in relation to women can be seen as the focal point in the discussion of violence against women. The battle of the abused, in cases of domestic violence, is often not only against the abuser but a host of others who have been brought into the framework of the abuse (Coertze 2005: 64). This is often true in the home situation where men will beat their wives. Wife beating also has something to do with culture and the expectations of a culture. For this reason, the evil practice is even carried out by some Christian husbands in Africa. The challenge that lies before the church is to devise cultural and theological insights that can help to unmask this heretical nature of injustice. On other hand, the church is not vocal enough in opposing these vicious injustices, while some Christians even encourage injustices against women. The moral integrity of the church is also questioned when the impression is created that it covers up its shortcomings.

The other recent challenge of the church is the issues of lesbianism, gay, bisexual and transgender. While in most of the twentieth century homosexuality was hardly a major problem for Christian churches or political leaders anywhere in Africa, in the past one or two decades, this has changed dramatically. Hunt (2015:144) indicates that many different African countries from Nigeria to Zimbabwe and from Uganda to Cameroon, church leaders have publicly spoken out against the acceptance of LGBTQ (meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights. Biblical texts and arguments dominate the societal and political debates, illustrating that in contemporary Africa the Bible has become a site of struggle where the debate on homosexuality is being fought. Basically, there has been a growing and very successful effort to gain not just acceptance but approval for homosexuality in many areas, including the church, the media, business and education. On the other hand, the issue of homosexuality has divided the global church. This is a challenge that the church in Africa cannot afford to ignore. Basically, such disagreements destroy the unity of God's family. The maturity of the church will be judged by how well they are able to agree or disagree and yet continue to love one another, to care for one another and cherish one another and seek the greater good of the other.[1]

In summary, there are many questions that concern the Christian church in Africa. There is a real need for life changes and for spiritual and physical transformation to occur. Thus, the church is called to proclaim the Gospel of God's kingdom with uncompromising determination by reaching the unreached people and by taking into account various challenges currently preventing positive transformation in Africa.The issues that the African church is grappling with are not merely foreign issues to which they are trying to find answers. When Christians discuss poverty and the cry for the poor in Africa they are not merely discussing events, processes and ideologies that take shape outside of the church and of Christianity. They are part and parcel of the issues. The African church has a vital role to play in this regard, and cannot merely leave it to government and similar institutions to address these challenges. Coertze (2005:56) declares that the African church cannot divorce itself from political issues or leave all political issues to government to take care of. The church should rather acknowledge the interplay of various issues that are at stake.

[1] Bentley, W 2012. A decade of the same-sex debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (2001-2011), in: *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 8 (1):205-220.

The church by its nature must remain a beacon of hope for those who are struggling from the underside and marginal society. Coertze (2005:57) affirms that Jesus, in his public ministry, was actively involved in the reconstruction of individuals and their communities. He mobilized his disciples to get involved in social transformation. There are actions that the church can take to change the situation. A theology that will merit the confidence of the Africans must adequately respond to the contemporary questions on the concept of God. To put it another way, how should we relate the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ to the presence and activity of God throughout his creation? How can we articulate such a relationship today? For God to be present within his creation, God must relate to creatures who exist in both space and time. What is it about God that enables him to do so? This incarnational characteristic of God's presence in his world, sets African spirituality apart from the notions of a purely transcendent God.

In this discussion, we have looked at a number challenges effecting the church in Africa. Perhaps, the major challenge facing the post-colonial church in Africa is to produce *a theology which would tell what difference it makes to talk about God in the context of suffering*. As it has been discussed, the situation in Africa may seem beyond the power of God to change. In some cases, the Christian message of hope in God is being challenged by those who suffer. In such an unstable and changing environment the Christian faith is also being challenged. Maimela (1987:12) states clearly that the church in African needs a fresh view of who God is and what God has done in history. The post-colonial church needs to see what God is still doing through his people today.

Another challenge of the church in Africa, is the struggle for an identity which dominates the scene in post-colonial African Christianity. According to Crafford (1993:165) the origin of the identity crisis in Africa goes back to the colonial period. Christianity was introduced to Africa in the modern era by Westerners. The message did not come alone but came through the mouth, hands, tastes, feelings, etc of another person. Ultimately, what came out of the messenger also relayed and still relays the tastes, worldview and total package of the carrier. This received worldview though it came from Christians was not perfect. The message from the messenger had cultural wrappings. The messenger passed the message with the wrappings as if they were one and the same. What happened was that the wrappings of the message were always misunderstood by the receiver. There was a deliberate effort to dislodge and replace African worldviews with a Western mind set. Some of these wrappings include

interpretation/reading of Scripture, the scientific reading of Scripture, philosophical method of dealing with problems, proof-texting and denominationalism (Kunhiyop 2008:68).

In many cases, the Western Missionaries did not only reject elements of culture that contradicted the biblical principles alone, but African culture in totality. In practice it meant that Africans, when becoming Christians, had to adhere to Western culture. Western colonial rule was experienced by many Africans as a form of aggression which denied them their cultural inheritance. No wonder that when independence dawned for Africa in the sixties, a strong feeling of African consciousness originated (Crafford (1993:165). The catch phrases of the time were 'African personality', 'negritude' and 'black is beautiful'. There was a strong revival of pride in African cultures.

In addition, Crafford (1993:165) says that the result of this was a more positive evaluation of Traditional African Religions. Among Christians, the search for more authentic African expressions in practice and theology was stimulated. In this case, the interaction in faith between the Gospel and culture produced a particular brand of Christianity. The African identity played a major role in the understanding and acceptance of the African Independent churches. In the recent years, African Independent churches are the fastest growing Christian body in Africa today. The reasons given for the growth are that these churches' goal is to bring Africans to Christ via media that is understandable to Africans and more relevant messages that meet their needs. Hence, they have extensive outreach through healing ministries. In their effort to indigenize Christianity, the Independent churches have developed their own church structures, liturgical forms, healing methods and ways of pastoral care (Crafford 1993:171).

Olowola (1981:23) indicates that these churches have grown so fast because of cultural, economic/political, sociological and ethical factors. According to his research, these churches emphasize the active presence of the Spirit in the church. They have gone a long way towards meeting physical, emotional and spiritual needs, offering a solution to all of life's problems and a way to cope in a threating world. They believe in the reality of witchcraft and evil spirits but at the same time confront them very effectively. They proclaim that the same God who saves the soul also heals the body and that in addition God provides answers to the fears and insecurities inherent in the African worldview. Moreover, Anderson (2003:179) says that the (AICs) holds the belief that the God who forgives sin is also concerned about poverty, oppression and liberation from afflictions. It is this

message that makes this form of African church attractive. The Spirits manifests his presence and power personally in these churches, making a dynamic relationship between God and his people possible.

Ross (2017:79) gives us a picture that Charismatic piety is in high demand among the poor people and it gives convincing answers to the deep quests for power, wealth and health. Furthermore, he says that Charismatic ministries address issues such as witchcraft and spirit possession while simultaneously responding to modern issues, with street children ministries, electronic music or entrepreneurial seminars. With many people living with HIV/AIDS and malaria and dysfunctional health care systems, the need for healing has taken the centre stage of African Independent churches. Ross (2017:79) observes that their hunger for this type of ministry is aggravated by poverty in which many people find themselves. Consequently, the Charismatic practice of deliverance from evil spirits, curses, sickness and poverty finds an audience ready to receive a solution.

In the light of the above, the overall message of the African Independent churches is that God is fully present in the context of suffering. In Africa, especially in Zambia, religion is premised on the realm of the supernatural. Religion is set apart mainly for responding to situations beyond human capabilities. It is in situations of death, incurable diseases, bad luck and spiritual challenges where people turn to God for answers. This applies to the elite and illiterate, urban and rural, old and young. Religion is the key to what humans cannot unlock. The future of Christianity therefore lies in its ability to respond to socio-economic and healing needs of Africans.

Moltmann (1967:11) acknowledges the fact that the church should be involved in socially-uplifting practices, but adds that this should be done as the mission of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, he proposes that the role of the church is significantly different to that of politics. Where politics is concerned with power, authority and popularity, it is the church's role to promote the rule of Christ. This is not by promoting theocracies or by adopting a pious response to poverty and need. It is the outright declaration that issues like poverty, hunger and peace are at the heart of the Kingdom of God. For Moltmann (1981:32) God is present where God's Kingdom is needed most: among the suffering. If the Kingdom of God is centered on relationship and community, then we cannot assume that it only includes the transcendental relationship between deity and the created. God longs for a relationship with all and will therefore not ignore those who find it the most difficult to be in relationship with God.

However, the question that needs to be addressed in the next discussion is: *"What has been the role of the church in addressing the African challenges and the questions on the concept of God?"* It is in the context of injustice and oppression that makes people feel as if God is absent. Within the African worldview life is seen in its totality rather than in segments. People are at peace when their relationship with God, the spirits, other people and the rest of creation is good. Churches which practice faith healing therefore become attractive to people with diverse needs. The Africans want to be certain that God is watching over them and that they are part of his community. Many average Christians do not really see Christianity as a way of life, but rather see it as a set of rules to be obeyed.

1.3 THE QUEST FOR AN ADEQUATE AFRICAN THEOLOGY

African Theology was born out of the quest for an adequate response to various needs of the African people. This is the recognition that theology must articulate and reflect on the concrete situation in which religious experience is being perpetuated. However, a number of theologians have confessed that the task to describe and assess African Theology and its quest for authenticity is a difficult and complex one. Since it has not been easy to define African Theology, different theologians, both Africans and non-Africans, have seen and defined it in their own ways. For example, Mbiti (1978:72) defines African Theology as "theological reflection and expression by African Christians". He regards the traditional religions of Africa as a preparation for the gospel and sees Christianity as a fulfilment of African religions. Nyamiti (1996:23) clarifies African Theology as "the understanding and expression of the Christian faith in accordance with African needs". Fashole-Luke (1975:385-414) says that the essence of African Theology is "to translate the one faith of Jesus Christ to suit the tongue, style, genius, character and culture of African people". He has proposed what is probably one of the shortest characterizations of African Theology, saying that it is a theology bearing the imprint 'made in Africa', meaning to lose its foreignness and become relevant, indigenous and deeply involved in the affairs of our continent as a participant, not as a spectator.

Turaki (1999:16) claims that African Theology is the outcome, result and product of the religious and theological work of African theologians and scholars. He has also suggested that African Theology has the task to interpret essential Christian faith in authentic African language in the flux and turmoil of our time so that there may be genuine dialogue between the Christian faith and continuously changing African cultures.

From the above glance through the definitions of African Theology we can conclude that, whilst it is impossible to provide a generally acceptable definition, it is possible to discern major characteristics. Basically, there are four general characteristics of the term African Theology, namely: it is done in Africa; it arises out of the identity of African people; it draws on African categories of thought; and it speaks to the historical situation of African people (Bujo 1992:5).

Issues of heritage, culture, colour and poverty are therefore crucial concerns in the quest for a theology in the African soil (Mashau & Fredericks 2008:114). In such a variety of definitions, they all attempt to bring the African culture and traditional religiosity or African situations to bear on African Theology in order to make the Christian gospel and theology relevant and meaningful to African people. Therefore, the principal concern of African Theology is clearly to communicate the biblical concept of God to the African people in the African culture and tradition. According to Ukpong (1984:19) the aim of African Theology is to help Africans 'feel at home' in the Christian faith. The theology that African theologians have sought to produce is 'a theology cooked in an African pot', that is truly African and authentically Christian.

Phiri (2009:136) says that the theological reflection and articulation of African Theology by Africans in Southern Africa is based on the context of Western missionary Christianity and European colonialism. Western Missionaries marginalized virtually everything that had to do with the traditional African worldview. Phiri (2009:136) argues that the Western Missionaries changed African names to so-called 'Christian' names. They succeeded in convincing Africans to dress, talk, walk and even eat like themselves. However, she complains that they failed to make Africans realize that Christianity is comprehensive and that it seeks to address life in totality. Indeed, African religious experiences and culture were driven to the periphery, because everything of African origin was considered 'pagan'. By so doing, Western Missionaries failed to grasp the essence and dynamics of African culture. Consequently, the deepest core of African culture remained untouched.

In the quest to address the injustices of the past various trends have developed among African academics. For some theologians, it has meant to discard the Bible as a source of revelation for Africa. These theologians look at Christianity as a Western phenomenon and the Bible as a Western book (Mashau & Frederiks 2008:116). Many others have opted to grapple with this ambiguous past, struggling to fashion the Christian message in a manner so that it becomes African and meaningful to

ordinary life in Africa. For over fifty years, African thinkers, theologians and non-theologians alike, have articulated their own brands of African Theology. Recently a more incarnational approach has been propagated which not only appreciates African traditional cultures but sees them as indispensable for a proper contextualization of the Gospel in Africa. A famous though contested design of such a contextualization has been the use of the ancestor concept by theologians like Nyamiti (1984) to elucidate Christology in an African setting.

From the era of colonialism, the journey has affected all socio-cultural landscapes. African Theology takes seriously the deplorable social conditions prevalent in post-colonial Africa such as the delinquent state, military and civilian dictatorships, intimidation and brutality reflecting the age of slavery and colonialism.

1.3.1 Trends in African Theology

Inspired by the great quest which has been described above, various features of African Theology started to emerge. Today, however, there are three main trends of African Theology, namely, (1) Inculturation, (2) Liberation and (3) Reconstruction theology (Martey 1993:67). Basically, these three trends have raised a number of questions giving way to other paradigm shifts in Africa Theology. In view of this discussion, we will describe the major focus of these trends and how they have been used to challenge the African situation.

Firstly, African *Theology of Inculturation* appears to be the popular pattern of theology in the continent of Africa. This theology uses African cultural images to attempt to understand the concept of God through respective African cultures. The basic argument of the theologians is that just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became incarnate in a human culture, in the Jewish milieu, the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be allowed to be inculturated (or incarnated) in an African culture and context (Oborji 2005:9). In short, the principal concern of Inculturation is clearly to communicate the Gospel to the African people in a manner suitable to African conditions and background (Han 2013:10). In Mbiti's view God is to be articulated in keeping with the African's mentality and needs, with special reference to their tradition, culture, religion, history and current life experience (Mbiti 1969:1). Moreover, he says that Christians who convert from (ATR) can understand the Christian teaching about God with the help of their traditional knowledge of God because religion permeates all departments of life.

However, the theology of Inculturation is not free of limitations. Many theologians have shared their displeasure of using culture as a framework upon which to understand the gospel. Ela (1988:171) argues that African people face real problems and preaching that God loves African culture may perhaps not be helpful. Ela warns that the African culture has been used by the elites to continue to oppress the masses while money circulates around them. Indeed, this presents an opportunity for Inculturation Theology to understand its present context and thus find ways of growing beyond its cocoon.

Secondly, *African Liberation Theology* has a broader perspective and exhibits a variety of methods. Various definitions are given by scholars as to what Liberation Theology is. For our subject matter, it will suffice to present the insights of Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff. Boff &Boff (1986:8) defines Liberation Theology as theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, free and more humane. According to this understanding, Liberation Theology does not stop with reflecting on the word of God, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the word is open, in the protest against trampled human dignity. Furthermore, Boff & Boff (1986:9) gives a more significant definition as follows:

> The Liberation Theology is nothing other than the theological moment of the experience of Christian faith, when it undertakes to consciously transform a world situation of dependence on the basis of the gospel.

Oborji (2005:3) says that Liberation Theology endeavours to integrate the theme of liberation in the rest of the African cultural background and socio-political and economic spheres. It discusses the oppressive socio-cultural structures inherited from traditional society, the colonial and neo-colonial, socio-political and economic systems, and emancipation from other forms of oppression such as disease, poverty, hunger, ignorance and the subjugation of women. It is valid to infer that Liberation Theology is the same all over the world. The verification of this assertion emerges from the fact that Liberation from wherever has the same point of departure and the same goal. In other words, any Liberation is triggered from a situation of oppression/deprivation and has for its finality a situation of freedom. Christian Liberation shows that the following themes are of great concern: (a) God's preferential option for the poor; (b) A critical questioning of the prevailing interpretation of the Bible

i.e. hermeneutics; (c) Conviction and appreciation of the fact that it is people who have to liberate themselves, since they are capable of emancipating themselves for themselves and for others (Oborji 2005:5).

Based on the observations of many scholars, the following can be identified as the common trends of Liberation Theology in Africa: African Women's Liberation Theology, South African Black Theology, Public and Prophetic Theology. The focus of this theology is the poor socio-economic conditions in Africa and the struggle for better social conditions. African Theology of Liberation takes seriously the oppression on all levels head on. It is a prophetic theology. It has thrown a healthy challenge to the theological enterprise in modern Africa.

In summary, Liberation Theology puts on the agenda for discussion questions that concern all human beings, whatever their ideological bent or religious adherence. Liberation Theology forces theologians to think in terms of specific actions, of the real problems of life and of the community of faith, instead of the classic themes established by theological tradition (Boff & Boff 1986:89). The major focus is on the concept of God who is able to liberate people from all kinds of oppressions. However, many liberation theologians have been critiqued for putting too much of their focus on political or physical liberation, allowing liberation from sin to become secondary or even ignored. According to Ela (1988:174), Liberation Theology divides people in such a way as to group them and put them against each other. He says that in these times of political turmoil it is becoming increasingly more important to keep the unity and to avoid the pitfalls of divisions and animosities when it comes to our political opinions.

Thirdly, *Reconstruction Theology* in Africa has been the latest theological project coming out of Africa. Beginning in 1990 it has gradually established itself and from 2003 a number of publications have come out on the subject. Mugambi is well known for his Reconstruction Theology of which he is the pioneer and the key proponent. In his post-Cold–War theological discourses, which can also be regarded as his post-liberation works, Mugambi (1995:36) suggest that the 21st century will have to preoccupy itself with the agenda of reconstruction as the new priority for Africa. The basic thesis of Mugambi's Reconstruction Theology is that the biblical narrative of Nehemiah's reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem provides the theological paradigm for the reconstruction and the social transformation of Africa after colonialism, apartheid and the end of the Cold War (Mugambi 1995:37).

Beyond a mere celebration of the defeat of these ills, Reconstruction Theology challenges the church in Africa to actively promote human rights, social justice, peace and reconciliation in the midst of the atrocities affecting the African continent.

Mugambi (1995:52) observes that though Inculturation Theology incarnated the Christian faith, it was, nonetheless, a 'one-way' theology because the faith being incarnated reflected the foreign (missionary) culture rather than the receiver's culture. He therefore proposes four levels of reconstruction: (1) Personal reconstruction which states that a person must continually reconstruct oneself in readiness for the tasks and challenges ahead; (2) The cumulative production of people's activities in all aspects of life in their endeavour to cope with their social and natural environment; (3) Ecclesial reconstruction which provides the presupposed world-view and the basic principles for the organization of society; (4) Socio-economic reconstruction, which challenges the church in Africa to discern the causes and contexts which generate the socio-economic challenges (Mugambi 1995:60). In summary, Mugambi emphasizes the necessity of reconstructing African identities and cultures on a Christian basis. This raises the question of how Christian identity in Africa can both draw upon its past and adapt as it moves into the future and towards its eschatological goal.

All these theologies described above have given birth to other trends in Africa such as: Feminist theology (handling the problem of gender) and Evangelical theology (seeking to refocus the African Christian thought on the biblical faith). Together these trends form the body of African Theology and a sound and critical interaction between these different strands of theology is required (Mashau & Frederiks 2008:109-123).

1.3.2 Challenges of African Theology in a post-colonial Africa

As been noted, African Theology is a theology that addresses African contexts. Since these contexts are perennially changing, new issues keep on cropping up. The aim of this discussion is to highlight some of the concerns and topics which are high on the agenda in the communities of Africa today. How does one theologize in the context of poverty and inequality (locally and globally), high infant mortality rates and the consistent exclusion of certain groups from further education, issues of leadership, power struggles and corruption, civil war and ethnic cleansing, reconciliation and peace, HIV/AIDS pandemic (reality and effects thereof), neo-colonialism and globalization, gender issues (women in African churches and society), religious pluralism and the challenge of Islam and the ecological crisis? The

issues mentioned at random are many and the list could have been even longer, for so many things are changing on the African continent. Yet, amidst all the questions, it presents a challenge to all African theologians to contribute something towards this paradigm shift. The vitality of African Theology and its ability to theologize about hope and life amidst crises and life threatening diseases, is urgently needed in post-colonial African church. One of the challenges for the church in Africa is a discourse on *how to speak about God in Africa* in the hope of finding relevant answers to people's problems. In other words, how can one speak about God in order to have a meaningful impact in our contemporary world?

From this investigation, it becomes evident that African Theology is only striving to grapple with the current issues of post-colonial Africa which have surfaced in various forms. Apart from the above-mentioned trends of African Theology, gender portrayal is another sensitive issue, especially in African societies today. Feminism is a movement advancing the liberation of women based on their sex and role they play. According to Oduyoye (1991:79) African religions and culture have influenced the shape of women's 'communal identity' and 'sense of belonging', while at the same time these have been manipulated and employed as a tool of control and oppression of women. For Oduyoye, the existence of God cannot be proved by the rhetoric of loving and caring words; rather the existence of God must be demonstrated in doing what God commands us to do; loving and caring for other people (Oduyoye 1997:503). In this case, she exposes the economical exploitation and political alienation against women and dehumanization of women in traditional and contemporary African society. Furthermore, she contends that theology aims to transform power and the oppressive systems and to become itself a transforming power for change of the whole human community. Oduyoye (1997:504) attempts to establish the nature of the reality of God in African cosmology and culture through the dialogue between the gospel and African culture. She believes that God is constantly involved in the affairs of human beings. In her view, God is depicted as the one who holds together the universe in unity, God is caring and compassionate and has the power to punish injustices.

Han (2013:209) indicates that Oduyoye criticizes the male-centered context of African culture and Christianity because it produces an assumption that God is male. The androcentrism and the male image of God are tied up. The assumption of the androcentric thought about a monotheistic male God rationalizes the marginalization of women. This implies that only males can represent God as leaders in the church and society. Therefore, Oduyoye articulates the understanding of God from women's

experiences in the Africa religio-cultural context that partly causes the 'objectification and marginalization of women' and partly enhances women's true identity as being in the image of God (Han 2013:210).

On the basis of the above mentioned understanding, Oduyoye and other African women theologians have rejected the exclusive connection between God and maleness and the use of male language about God. They seek possibilities of conceptualizing God as female, aiming to deepen the truth of God's love and care. Han (2013:17) records that although African women need to be liberated from patriarchal dominance in both church and society, Oduyoye does not perceive men as the enemy of women; rather liberation must be viewed as men and women walking together. Basically, we can go on and on, highlighting the issues affecting the women today, but at the centre of Feminist Theology is a critical point of departure in which women work in co-operation with men as colleagues upholding the dignity of the human person. Han (2013:17) claims that for Oduyoye, God should not be viewed as a monad but as a centre of relations, in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit act and interact without subsuming or subordinating any of the persons.

1.4 TRAJECTORIES IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN THEOLOGY

One of the challenges facing African scholarship today concerns the need to think differently about Africa. There is a feeling among scholars that old ideas about solving the challenges of the continent have failed. Kenzo (2002:323) says that African Theology has experienced a paradigm shift and has embarked on a journey of self-discovery in order to find the answers to the challenges affecting the society and the African church.

Bosch (1991:11) uses the idea of paradigm shifts to explain the manner in which African Theology has changed over the centuries. He claims that from the early stage, African Theology engaged in battle to fight against theological imperialism. The early African theologians mainly questioned Western theological imperialism. They were preoccupied with searching for a way to give Christianity an African colour. However, African Theology has, in the recent years, been challenged by many issues. In this case, Bosch (1991:12) suggests that in order for African Theology to grow and affect meaningful paradigm shifts, a careful note of the ground already captured must be made. He argues that the issues that are being addressed by the aforementioned trends of African Theology are far from

finished. In this case, African Theology needs to continue addressing these issues by reassessing their objectives and redefining their agendas. Dickson (1984:8) makes the same point that the present condition of African Theology may be accounted for by building upon the insights which have already been gained in the history of African Theology. Taking the above-mentioned aspects into consideration, it becomes important to highlight a few proposals that have been presented in recent years that can help to address the challenges of Africa.

The first proposal concerns the concept of Reconciliation. Reconciliation literally means repairing the damaged or broken bonds of unity and friendship between God and humanity and between human beings and their fellow beings on a personal and on a communal level (Gathogo 2012:74). In the words of Villa-Vicencio (1992:2) reconciliation involve forgiveness and the word 'forgiveness' implies the healing of the psychological and spiritual scars of the past suffering.

Certainly, a historical survey will ascertain the fact that reconciliation has been attempted through diverse approaches. For instance, an African approach to reconciliation is seen as taking place among individuals between God and human beings or even between the various neighbouring ethnic groupings who at times could be under tension or war. Again, it is expressed through African philosophies (Ubuntu), eating together sessions, ceremonial rituals and sacrifices, community dance, proverbs, riddles, oral narratives and through songs (Gathogo 2012:75). Reconciliation not only has deep Christian roots but, like all successful theology, it speaks to the current context. Politically, Reconciliation Theology has had great influence, most famously in South Africa's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) but also in post-conflict resolution efforts in countries ranging from Sierra Leone to Rwanda to Mozambique.

However, Maluleke (1997:18-31) argues that the whole philosophy behind the TRC was not original to South Africa as it had been tried elsewhere, especially in Latin America, and it is not the best option to sort out issues of violence, corruption, xenophobia, genocide and political challenges, more especially in the situation of South Africa. In analysing the theology based on the paradigm of Reconciliation, Soyinka (1999:23) has highlighted the theme of forgiveness in his African studies. For the whole of Africa, Soyinka sees genuine reparation as a tool which can be considered in the process of reconciliation. Soyinka (1999:86) advocates 'an equilibrium of reparation and forgiveness theology'. This means that the offenders should make restitution to the oppressed community who then have the

choice to decide whether it gives ~~a~~ sufficient closure of the offence thereby let go the full demands of retributive justice.

In seeking to explore a model of reconciliation it is imperative to appreciate that forgiveness in Africa is not just an individual affair. Rather, it is inherently a communal quality that has a bearing on individuals and groups. The ancient African society had clear procedures through which conflicts were resolved, a phenomenon that is not intact in some parts of Africa today. In particular, there were selected individuals and groups within the society who were designated as the mediators and restorers of peace whenever conflicts got out of hand (Kamwaria & Katola 2015:81-90). Among the Ngoni and Chewa tribes of Zambia there is always the council of elders who are responsible for bringing peace in the community *(Meso ya Nkhosi-the eyes of the Chief)*. The council is made up of the most respected elders. The council is tasked with the role of ensuring a peaceful co-existence in the society and thereby promoting an ideal society. In this case, reconciliation, as a paradigm, is a crucial theme in African context. Mosala (1996:25) claims that reconciliation is a divine requirement. The strength of reconciliation, as a paradigm, is further seen in the concept of 'Ubuntu.' Ubuntu is the South African perception that recognizes the humanity of a person through a person's relationship with other persons. Drawing from his Christian faith, Tutu theologizes Ubuntu by a model of forgiveness in which human dignity and identity are drawn from the image of the triune God.

This concept has been defined as a transformative spirit that connects individuals with others and motivates them to serve a common good. It inspires people to stand firmly against marginalization and discrimination. It seeks the redemption of the whole earth, resists life-destroying values and inspires people to discover innovative alternatives that promote life in all its forms. Matale (2015:273-276) declares that Ubuntu is a spirituality that provides the means to discover the grace to be satisfied with what we have while sharing with any who are in need. It gives human beings their dignity and humanity. It speaks the language of people. It is a quality of generosity in recognizing that we owe to each other humanity and well-being. According to Tutu (1999:23) there is no room for selfishness in the theology of Ubuntu; he recognizes that greed pushes people to think that poor people are tools or objects or property to be used to satisfy their appetites.

For Tutu, Ubuntu Theology is a response to the poverty that has existed on the continent of Africa. As stated earlier, Africa continues to be challenged on the issue of sustainable livelihoods. The

phenomenon of climate change makes Africa's survival even more difficult. This is worsened by the fact that there are no mechanisms for adaptation or mitigation. The already disadvantaged now have to deal with a double tragedy of the lack of financial resources and the lack of access to the life-serving facilities of education, health and wealth - despite Africa's generous mineral and natural resources. Furthermore, Tutu (1999:26) suggests that Ubuntu Theology can provide the African people an opportunity to reflect on who they are and who they have been from the beginning. In this way, they can interrogate this theology/philosophy and determine whether it offers anything that can help the present and future generations to refocus their vision, minds, and actions toward a system that promotes the economy of life holistically.

Another paradigm shift that has confronted the African church today is the 'Prosperity Theology.' This kind of theology is a major African 'Christian' Theology that is usually neglected in the academic textbooks (Ehioghae 2015:69). The roots of modern expressions of prosperity gospel may be traced to the emergence of Pentecostalism. One of the major continents of the world where the influence of Pentecostalism with its message of prosperity is widespread is Africa. Furthermore, Ehioghae (2015:69) notes that the 'health and prosperity gospel' is one of the fastest growing religious movements on a global scale. Often this approach is joined together with African evangelicalism. Since Prosperity Theology is so dominant in Africa it needs to be treated as a separate African Christian Theology. It is defined as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings (Ehioghae 2015:70). As a paradigm for theological reflection in African Prosperity Theology, it has several faults. It assumes that every Christian has a right to be prosperous; it assumes that God will make every Christian prosperous if the believer does the right things. Prosperity Theology assumes that a faithful Christian will be rich and that poverty is an indication of the lack of faith. However, this type of theology has been criticized because it focuses on one's own prosperity instead of the prosperity of the other person. Prosperity Theology is a syncretistic form of Christianity. It is a deviation from African evangelicalism. Usually it is a non-formal theology but since it is so prominent in Africa, it should be included as a distinct type of African Christian Theology. Ehioghae (2015:71) says that this theology tends to be individualistic because it focuses on prosperity and the well-being of the present life.

From the above analysis, we can conclude that African Theology faces a number of great shifts more

especially in the 21st century. This is evident both from a reading of the history of African Theology and from the wide variety of current understandings of its nature and task. Some theologians today contend that the task of an African theologian is to provide a clear and comprehensive description of the African Christian faith. Mashau & Frederiks (2008:121-122) emphasize the importance of translating faith into terms that are compatible with the African cultures. He says that African Theology must be defined as thinking about important issues from the perspective of the faith of African Christians. At the same time he insist that theology must be a reflection on the praxis of Christian faith within an oppressed community. It seems urgent for African Christians today to 'own' their theological reflection, rather than borrow it from others.

1.5 NEED FOR A POST-COLONIAL APPROACH

There has been a fundamental shift in theological models for understanding ultimate reality and religious diversity in the post-modern age. This paradigm shift has profound implications for the way in which religious diversity is to be understood in the post-modern era. As we have seen from the previous discussion, theology, as an academic discipline, has undergone major changes in response to a shift from a modern to a post-colonial view of ultimate reality.

African theologies and those who hear the voice of God are beginning to engage with post-colonial theory and theology. According to Metogo (2010:92) post-colonial theology appeared in the wake of post-colonial studies that had developed in Australian, British and North American universities since 1990. Moreover, he claims that post-colonial studies are also linked to social movements that serve as vehicles of expression for oppressed groups such as women, homosexuals, transgendered people and ethnic minorities. Although post-colonial theology is not mentioned in Africa, much effort has been made to decolonize Christian Theology in the current trends of adaptation, indigenization, inculturation, liberation, reconstruction, feminist theology, and so on (Metogo 2010:94). The focus of the post-colonial approach is that Africans must express their relationship with God in a language that is not alien to their culture. Post-colonial Theology seeks to deconstruct the oppressive nature of the 'ivory tower' which often ignores the plight of the oppressed and therefore negatively influences society. Metogo (2010:96) argues that it is neither a question of separating Jesus Christ and his church nor of rejecting the venerable tradition of the fathers, doctors and reformers. Africans simply want to direct their own religious affairs and look for God in their own way. Therefore, theologians have

looked at post-colonial thought as a form of liberation/communal theology that serves as a catalyst to destroy the inequalities of class, race, gender and other deplorable acts.

Furthermore, the contemporary global context has generated a growing interest towards a theology of decolonization. Given this situation, it seems especially worthwhile to understand the actual meaning of this term. 'Decolonization' is the process of ending colonialism and the liberation of the colonized and includes many different intersecting struggles. Metogo (2010:99) indicates that decolonization is the integration and transformation by human beings of the physical, economic and social conditions of their existence. Venter (2018:2) contends that Decolonization Theology is a multi-layered and a holistic project which includes all institutional practices. In this context, he argues that decolonizing theology should be placed within the state of scholarship of a variety of discourses. For Venter, a critique of hegemony manifested in the history of theology at universities is an inevitable task to complete. Following the same argument, Venter (2018:2) questions the Reformed tradition and white male theologians so dominant at the theological faculties in South Africa. He says that this is not just an incidental occurrence but is the result of historical, geo-political and cultural dynamics.

Despite the many-fold development that has occurred in the field of theology, Venter (2018:2) says that African-oriented churches are under-represented in terms of students; the lecturer and leadership profiles remain grossly unbalanced. Basically, he cites a number of areas that need to be considered in order to rethink the position of theology under present conditions. He proposes an interdisciplinary engagement between theology and post-colonial theory. The most obvious fact about decolonization is the need to determine the deep underlying metaphysics of theology, the impact of modernity and hidden prejudices. In short, Venter (2018:4) proposes that decolonization should not be an artificial add-on but the orientating compass to navigate a new direction. This means that attention should be given to the large number of articles published by African theologians on theological education and to engage African Studies and prominent African intellectuals.

From this discussion, it is arguably true there is an urgent need for the articulation of a new way of studying theology in post-colonial Africa. Indeed, the old way of studying theology is being challenged by a number of issues confronting the continent of Africa. A decolonized Christian theology in Africa and elsewhere will probably develop effectively only if this universal experience is taken seriously. The whole purpose of decolonization is to propose a theology that pays attention to issues of social

transformation of Africa as it grapples with the question of faith in God in the context of social, economic and political challenges. Today African theologians are urged to minimize the conflict that has existed between the proponents of the three dominant trends: Inculturation, Liberation and Reconstruction. Instead, theologians are motivated to meet, talk to one another and look for real solutions to their problems and look for God in their own way.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The implications of the issues raised in this chapter for the concept God in post-colonial Africa are many. As already noted, Africa is indeed at a crossroads and the path has forked. In terms of everyday conduct for individuals and communities there is uncertainty, disillusionment and even despair. It is not difficult to conclude that people lament and grumble because of political power struggles and leadership while poverty, overcrowding, pollution, sickness, crime and unemployment destroy the very core of existence of the people. In every shape and form, the church in Africa finds itself in the midst of a culture whose moral fabric is rotting and whose spirit is troubled. In every shape and form, the church is facing real social, political, economic and ecclesial issues that must be addressed quickly. The church in Africa was planted largely by Western missionaries and took upon itself a distinctively Western flavour. However, during the last two decades of the twentieth century that has started to change. As reflected above, the church in Africa has a perception that the Western theologies have failed to address the burning issues facing the local people.

It must be noted that African Theology emerged in the form of the three major trends, namely Inculturation, Liberation and Reconstruction, as a quest for a relevant theology to enrich and enhance Christian life and thought. These three trends emerged as a new perspective that could transform the social life and to initiate a discipleship of equals and the eradication of mass poverty that can help Christians to build an open society which meets the needs of people and restores their human dignity. These efforts have been successful but, at the same time, they have resulted in failure. Given this background, African Theology is being challenged by new theological questions. Inculturation, Liberation and Reconstruction Theologies are being criticized by a number of scholars because they are no longer relevant for the African church and society of the present age. Alternatives are proposed and advocated as new methods to answer some of the current questions of Africa. Recently, African Christian thinkers, theologians, and non-theologians alike have articulated their own brands of theologies. This has been made possible by the forceful irruption of issues of poverty, gender, civil war,

neo-colonialism and dominancy. The question of the interplay between God and society remains on the agenda in post-colonial Africa.

Moreover, the perceived foreignness of Christ in African Christianity is an going challenge that is captured in various pieces of African theological literature. Many African Christian thinkers and writers are responding to the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity by treating Christ under the traditional African ancestral category. However, it is our contention that the designation of the ancestral category to Christ has a tendency of diminishing the actuality of Christ as God incarnate and encouraging syncretism in African Christianity. This results in perceived 'inadequacy of Christ in protecting African Christian from traditional religious spiritual threats such as witchcraft and angry ancestral spirits. According to Magezi & Magezi (2017:1), in traditional African religion, protection from spiritual threats of this kind is obtained from charms, ancestors and traditional medical practitioners. In an attempt to grapple with the problem of the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity, many African theologians have attempted to translate the gospel into various traditional African categories and concepts which are familiar to African Christians. Some of the approaches which have been employed by African theologians in making Jesus Christ familiar and relevant to Africans include the treatment of "Jesus as the liberator, the ancestor, the healer, the African king and the African chief (Magezi & Magezi 2017:2). African Christians should understand the relevance of Christ in meeting all their African contextual needs by perceiving Jesus Christ in his vicarious humanity as the true representative of all humankind. Thus, God, in and through Jesus Christ in the incarnation, has once and for all moved into the bounds of space and time in order to identify with all humankind for the sake of our redemption

Viewed from this perspective, the role of the church today is to provide a theology that pays attention to all these issues and that they have to be ready to answer the questions concerning the concept of God in the current society. A number of African theologians have made it clear that the era of beautiful and intelligible theoretical elaboration in theology without any practical application to the concrete situation of the people of Africa is dismissed. For this reason, African theologians are invited to design and come up with a theology that would impact the African and the global societies positively, they are being challenged to move beyond the colonial period and beyond the cultural approach and become true to the African context. In a continent plagued with mass poverty, bad governance and leadership crisis, the Church as the family of God remains the anchor of hope. It ought to give the children of

Africa, its women and men, a genuine message of hope in God. As we have already observed, African Theology should be biblical, holistic, relevant and it should give an answer to the questions and issues of the current situation.

Finally, African Theology must speak of a God who is relational, who relates to real people in a real world and a God who understands the human condition. However, it has been established that although Africans are notoriously religious in all that they do in life, being religious does not reveal much about God. It is indicated in the next chapter that Africans are aware of the Supreme Being, yet God is too remote. So many writers, especially the armchair scholars from the West, argue that God in the African concept is so far removed that they see Him as an 'Absentee Landlord' or 'Withdrawn God' who, after creating the world, has withdrawn to the vault of heaven. They erroneously conclude by saying that Africans have a faint knowledge of God because God is far removed from them and so they go to idols to seek for help.

In sharp contrast, other theologians confirm the view that Africans have a clear knowledge of God. They do not see the Supreme Being as One who will one day cease to be or one who will eventually die. They rather see God as the eternal and immortal One who lives forever to satisfy the human soul. Furthermore, Africans see God as very present within the natural world to help protect and deliver his creation although, at the same time, God transcends the natural realm. Indeed, if one wishes African Christians to bring positive change in their societies, a creative engagement must answer to this misconception of God's transcendence and immanence in African Tradition Worldview. In light of the two concepts, the best way to begin addressing this challenge is to have a sound knowledge of the African worldview.

CHAPTER 2. GOD IN AFRICAN RELIGION AND MISSIONARY CHRISTIANITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The greatest threat confronting the African church today is its failure to sufficiently address the concept of God in the midst of African challenges. It has been acknowledged that a large number of Christians expect God to be interested in their daily misfortunes, illness, practical problems, poverty and all their concrete social problems. As we discussed in chapter 1 the challenges of life have a strong effect on people's faith. Indeed, in such an unstable and changing environment, people tend to question the reality of God in this world. According to Muzorewa (1985:10), one of the most important tasks of African Theology is to be able to articulate God's relationship to humanity. In this regard, he says that the traditional belief that God is both transcendent and immanent provides a framework for understanding how the African views God. Furthermore, he argues that African Theology needs to develop this concept that confirms God's nearness in every situation of their lives. In this case, he suggest that the task of African theologians is to interpret the concept of God that can help African believers to feel a natural closeness to the one God, the only Supreme Being known in African Traditional Religion.

In light of this view Oduyoye (2001:44) declares that African Christians expect their religion to be utilizable in conquering and gaining advantage over life's hazards. She contends that in the worldview of Africans, religion is neither a hobby nor an additive; rather it is the essence of life. Africans approach life from the premise that says religion is the answer to all their concrete social problems, spiritual as well as material struggles. Therefore, she concludes that to all Africans religion is both functional and a source of hope.

In view of this argument Oduyoye (2001:45) gives the following insights about the concept of God in Africa:

> In this scheme the image of God is that of the unique source to which we are bound as humans and to whom we owe the responsibility to account for the state of the environment in which we have been placed. In African religion we find God who is caring and compassionate but God does have the power to punish injustice. We threaten bullies and exploiters with 'God will pay you back'. We believe that God has the power to enable us to overcome the difficulties that we meet in life and that the ultimate outcome of all belongs to God.

The general picture of this understanding is that most Africans are not attracted to a religion that fails to meet their physical, spiritual and emotional needs. It is this dissatisfaction that compels most of them to augment their security needs with a religion that promises prosperity and a peaceful life. In the African religious worldview or consciousness nothing is thought impossible because religion and religiousness permeates all aspects of life.

Awolalu (1975:272) expresses the same point that the ultimate goal of the African people is to live in the sacred well-being of life. Therefore the reason why many African Christians embrace both Christianity and other religions is because they perceive other religions to be viable and practical, meeting the real needs in this present world, while Christianity merely concerns itself with the messages of life after death. According to him, the African continent is desperate for God who is sufficient to address the day to day challenges of the people. In this situation he suggest that African Theology needs to explicate the doctrine of God in such a way that believers may feel the tangibleness of the benefits of knowing God

In view of the arguments presented above it is necessary to examine how Africans perceive the presence of God in their lives. Basically, the significance of this study is to re-emphasize the point that in African Worldview the concept of God is well established. Mbiti (1980:817-820) acknowledges that African belief in God existed before the arrival of the Missionaries. He argues that Missionaries did not bring God to Africa; rather it is God who brought the Missionaries to Africa. In this case, this discussion provides an argument that the Supreme Being (God) has a strong place in the African worldview. God is regarded as an uncreated, self-existent, unchanging and reliable Being whose power transcends all powers. In Africa, God is seen as the creator, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent Being who is immortal and directs human affairs. This investigation of the concepts of God will be done in sampled cases, not in an exhaustive survey of all African ethnic groups. In order to avoid an over-generalization of the concepts of God in Africa, specific foundational beliefs in the traditional religion in Africa will be investigated.

Particular attention is given to the key terms: *transcendence and immanence of God in Africa*. The two concepts are essential to the research problem of this study. African theologians and scholars speak about the transcendence of God and claim that the space between God and human beings is filled with

a hierarchy of gods, divinities and spirits who are sometimes called the intermediaries of God. This understanding appears to be springing from the African traditional belief that God cannot be approached directly. However, the Africans' perception of God as a transcendent Supreme Being, who interacts with humankind through various spiritual intermediaries, seems to diminish the immanence of God in traditional African worldview. This misconception could be taken as a challenge for post-colonial Africa. The problem for Africans today is to understand the idea of God who is directly present or involved within his creation. Some African Christians may not be conscious of the reality of God's transcendence and immanence in a way which influences their Christian life.

This chapter seeks to lay a foundation that God's life is in communion. This understanding has an important implication for the continent of Africa. For an African who traditionally understands God merely as hidden and remote and who could not access God even through the intermediaries, this type of theology can be a good news. Basically, the discussion in this section will be very brief, acknowledging the fact that a lot of work has already been done by a number of African scholars on the concepts of God in Africa. However, regardless of how African theologians may explain the idea of the Supreme Being, divinities and spirits, it is the responsibility of the Christian faith in the African context to tell the African Christians who God is in the midst of challenges.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN AFRICAN RELIGION

In this post-colonial period, it has come to be established that there is what we may call African Traditional Religion (ATR). The term 'African Traditional Religion' is interpreted as the 'Indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans'. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans and which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians (Awolalu 1975:273). Again, the term 'African Traditional Religion' is used in two complementary senses. Loosely it encompasses all African beliefs and practices that are considered religious but are neither Christian nor Islamic. The expression is also used almost as a technical term for a particular reading of such beliefs and practices, one that purports to show that they constitute a systematic whole, a religion comparable to Christianity or any other world religion.

According to Awolalu (1975:273) this concept was new and radical when it was introduced by Parrinder in 1954 and later developed by Idowu and Mbiti. The intention of these scholars was to

protest against a long history of derogatory evaluations of Africans and their culture by outsiders and to replace words such as 'heathenism' and 'paganism'.

In this case 'African Traditional Religion' and 'African Indigenous Religion' are common terms used to discuss the faiths found within the continent of Africa. According to Beyers (2010:8) each term is debated among scholars and some challenge the word 'tradition' and prefer 'indigenous' since tradition means the religion is outmoded. Awolalu (1975:276) prefers to use the singular form of the term because it is a basic world-view which is fundamentally the same over wide areas of the continent, although there is a religious and cultural heterogeneity in Africa. For Parrinder (1968:11) African societies are very homogeneous and the resemblances in the religious sphere are far more important than the differences. He argues that this great comparative homogeneity of African society is apparent in the religious sphere. He does acknowledge that in religious beliefs there are great similarity between many parts of the continent over the centuries.

Idowu (1973:103-104) argues that 'African Traditional Religion' in the singular form can be used because there is "a common Africaness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices of Africa" and the concept of God that is represented is similar throughout the continent. Mbiti (1969:3-4) chooses to speak of the religion in the plural form because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes) and each has its own religious system. This is a religion that is based mainly on oral transmission. It is not written on paper but in peoples' hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions. In support of Mbiti, Kato (1975:24) says that African Traditional Religions are the most comprehensive title for the religions of Africa. The religions are distinctively African, though similarities are traceable in the Carribean Islands and other Latin American countries. Therefore, he argues that African Traditional Religions must be spoken of in plural because of the numerious types of religious practices among different tribes. Furthermore to justify this argument Kato (1975:24) says:

> We speak of African Traditional Religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African people (tribes) and each has its own religious system. Other terms such as animism and idolatry may be used provided that the limitation of these terms is recognised. But African Traditional Religions give the fullest meaning and it is the most comprehensible. Therefore, it is the most appropriate term to use.

Scholars who uphold the singular term, African Traditional Religion, put their emphasis on the underlying similarities or a great homogeneity among the various religious systems of the African

peoples, even though they recognize the religio-cultural varieties on the continent. To scholars who warn against the generalization of the diversified religions of Africa, the imposition of a unitary framework on all Traditional Religions in Africa is highly problematical (Han 2013:74).

At this point it must be acknowledged that the word 'traditional' means the indigenous, that which is original, foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and is practiced by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past treated, not as a thing of the past, but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. Beyers (2010:9) defines 'traditional' as an indigenous life of the African people. It deals with their cosmology, ritual practices, symbols, arts and society. The adjective 'traditional' does not imply that the religions of Africa are either dead or dying religions, nor does it mean that the beliefs are either 'past' or believed by 'non-modern' Africans. It signifies that the indigenous religions of Africans have existed since time immemorial and have been handed down from the ancestors, through all generations, to the present African peoples.

In this study the word 'religion' is used in the singular to indicate the fact that, in spite of all these differences, there are many basic similarities in the religious systems. Everywhere there is the concept of God (called by different names); there is also the concept of divinities or spirits as well as beliefs in the ancestral cult. Turaki (1999:1) identifies four foundational religious beliefs in Traditional Religions in African: (1) the belief in impersonal mystical powers; (2) the belief in spirit beings; (3) the belief in divinities/gods and (4) the belief in the Supreme Being.

These foundational religious beliefs are essential to our theological interpretation and analysis of the traditional religions. Any meaningful and effective Christian approach to the traditional religions must begin from here. Idowu (1962:137-202) talks about the five elements he called the structures of African Traditional Religion such as: the belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in the ancestors and belief in the practice of magic and medicine.

To sum up the discussion, it can be argued that 'African Traditional Religion' (hereafter referred to as (ATR) in the singular form is used in this research to designate the indigenous religious beliefs and practices that have permeated the entire life of African people. However, it does not mean that certain differences of religious beliefs and practices are unimportant or negligible.

Before the foreign investigators came to Africa to give the world an idea of what the religious beliefs looked like, there were theorists who had never been in Africa but who regarded it as the 'Dark

Continent' where people had no idea of God (Idowu 1973:87). These theorists had fantastic tales to tell about Africa. The study of African Indigenous Religion has shown that the Missionaries and the colonialists who came to Africa originally often portrayed Africans as savages and backward. While some scholars admitted that the whole of Africa could not be a spiritual vacuum, they raised doubts as to whether the God that the Africans believed in was the 'real God' or their own God. Idowu 1973:92) argues that the noticeable fault among the Missionaries was that they were particularly subjective, and they could not see anything good in ATR. The impression they had of it was that it was not worth knowing at all and they expected that the religion would soon perish. Oduyoye (1995:82) rigorously criticizes Western Missionaries' enterprises.

In sharp contrast Oduyoye (1995:82) declares that the mission churches denounced *life-giving aspects of traditional culture* and they rejected the ATRs and African religious practices as 'heathenism' and evil. Again, she says that the Western Missionaries introduced new gods into Africa to be worshipped such as individualism and self-centeredness. Furthermore, Bediako (1992:251) says that 'Missionary Christianity' seemed to all intents and purposes bound to uproot the African from the 'heathen' past in order to give the people of Africa a new identity, constructed on the basis of the new, total package of Christianity and European civilization. As a result Christianity was not integrated into African soil; African Christians were faced with the dilemma of having inherited two different worlds, Western Christianity and traditional African. Tutu (1978:366) maintains that this phenomenon caused African Christians to suffer 'a form of religious schizophrenia'.

Contrary to popular belief, it has been proved that Africa did not know God through European Missionaries (Mbiti 1980:817-820). In other words, Africa and Africans were integral to the emergence and development of Christianity long before the introduction of European Christianity that accompanied the early Portuguese explorations and later, the imperial and colonial experiments. Hastings (1979:175) declares that Africa is the heartland of early as well as contemporary Christianity. Indeed, Africa contains some of the oldest forms of Christianity on earth.

In addition to all these charges Mugambi (1989:35) believes that Western Christianity has failed to meet the African aspirations. He continues to say that the Western message created a serious vacuum in the lives of the African people. Again, he claims that Western Christianity has taken from Africans a religion which was functional and useful in their lives. In line with the above Mugambi (1989:36) reports that the earliest written accounts about African Religion were written by European explorers or

travellers and Missionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries. These were mostly based on unreliable and inadequate sources and distorted views much colored by the prevailing cultural-racial prejudices. The writers were influenced to a great extent by the popular stories and beliefs already circulating in their own home countries about those they derogatorily designated as 'primitive' or 'savage' races, contrasting them sharply with themselves, that is, the 'civilized' races.

Bediako (1992:251) contends that a number of investigators came to the continent of Africa who were interested in finding out the truth about the existence of religion in Africa. He argues that not all of them took the trouble to make a thorough investigation. Some of them did their research part-time, e.g. the colonial civil servants, the Missionaries and the explorers. Others were anthropologists and trained researchers. Several of them did their investigations as best as they could among the peoples whose languages most of them did not understand. Even when interpreters were used one could not be sure that the interpretation would be accurate.

The Western scholars making the investigation wanted to distinguish between their society (which is regarded as civilized) and the other society which is not civilized but old-fashioned, just because such a society does not have or has not adopted the same norm as that of the investigator. Adamo (2011:285) says that many scholars have come to admit that ATR is dynamic; there is the element of continuity as well as discontinuity. Since it is a religion practiced by living persons today, changes are to be expected.

Whatever weakness and faults may be noticeable in the works of these foreign investigators and writers, Africans have to give credit to them for their ability to work under hard conditions and to express their thoughts in writings which the present generation of Africans can read, examine and improve upon. Missionary societies, wherever they worked, left a lot of social, political and economic effects. All of them were imbedded in positive and negative categories as explained above. Adamo (2011:285) argues that the Missionary activities are sometimes described as cultural imperialism, viewed as negatively as the economic and social colonial oppressions. He claims that activities of the Missionaries in Africa were a crucial catalyst initiating the development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, newspapers, voluntary organizations and colonial reforms, thereby creating the conditions that made stable democracy more likely.

The influence of conversion for populations was significant. Woodberry (2012:1) explains that Missionaries tended to have a positive influence beyond evangelism. He proves this point by stating the

fact that the Missionaries improved the conditions of indigenous people. They taught people how to read and write, they taught new skills like carpentry and advanced agricultural techniques, they built schools, they introduced new crops to countries which gave indigenous people opportunities to engage in trade with products that were desirable in Europe (Woodberry 2012:1).

Indeed, Missionaries deserve a message of good will because they lived a life of sacrifice. It was believed that without effective and active communication it was impossible to pursue the conversion of the Africans. Missionaries were requested to overcome language difficulties by devoting their spare time to the study of local African languages and by approaching Africans in their own language to minimize cultural misunderstandings and distinctions between themselves and their potential converts.

Our conclusion in this discussion is that the primary motive of the Missionaries who brought the Christian faith to Africa was to bring the good news, the message of salvation. However, their message of salvation appears to have been focused on Western concepts of understanding God rather than on the African concepts of God. As a result, this created a serious vacuum between the Biblical concept of God and that of the African. This implies that in the heart of an African there is a traditional belief in the Supreme Being (God) which cannot be separated from daily life. Automatically this belief shapes the life of all peoples of Africa. So many writers, especially the armchair scholars from the West, argue that God in the African context is far removed from the world. They conclude that Africans have a faint knowledge of God. However, a careful look at this investigation will show that God is real to Africans. God is seen as the creator and beyond human understanding. *Who is God in African Traditional Religion? When the African say 'God' what does it mean?*

2.3 GOD, DIVINITIES AND SPIRITS IN AFRICA

All African theologians understand that the idea of God is the most important component in African Traditional Religion. Idowu (1973:140) says that there is no place, age, or generation which did not receive at some point in its history some form of revelation of the existence of God. Parrinder (1968:25) portrays African religious beliefs in the spiritual universe with a triangle: at the apex is the Supreme power, on one side of the triangle are the gods or natural forces, on the other side of the triangle are the ancestors, while the earth is at its base. Smith (1950:16) classifies African beliefs in three categories: theism, spiritism and dynamism. It should, however, be kept in mind that there is a

great variety of beliefs of the ATRs. For example, Idowu (1973:139) says that the West African peoples have many gods or divinities and they usually recognize five categories of spiritual beings among the ATRs: (1) the Supreme Being; (2) the divinities; (3) spiritual forces; (4) ancestors; and (5) magical powers.

The Traditional Africans respond to these spirit beings according to their place of hierarchy, power, influence and role. Religious values, activities, practices, morality and ethics are accorded to each divine being in proportion of authority, power, influence, territoriality and legitimacy.

2.3.1 Belief in God or the Supreme Being

Most African scholars agree with Mbiti's assertion (1970:45) that the belief in God is at the centre of African Religion and dominates all its other beliefs. Although some of the people have a vague concept of God, Africans claim to have a belief in one God who is commonly perceived as the creator of all things (Mbiti 1970:39-41). Traditionally, African peoples believe in a Supreme Being who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent and God who is manifested in nature and natural phenomena. They are aware of their spirituality, the relationship between themselves and this almighty Supreme Being (God) pervades all aspects of their existence. According to Mbiti (1970:40) the African view of the world is nourished by a cosmology that is founded on the Supreme God and other divine beings that are associated with God. As God is the foundation of life, nothing happens without his power. God lives, God does not die and so indeed humans do not die. Even when they do not occupy a touchable body, they still live on.

The way the Africans experience God's presence is portrayed in the language they use, especially the names by which God is known. Early researchers into ATR like Parrinder, Idow and Mbiti have depicted several African names of God, of which it is not necessary to rehearse at this stage. Mbiti (1970:42) says that all these names are still current and that more names which describe people's experience of God are available in proverbs, songs and prayers. These names are not mere labels but they are descriptive of character and depict people's experience of God. The African people believe that all the good and well-being they enjoy come from God and that if one is not yet enjoying well-being it is because one's time has not yet come. African Tradition Religion holds that the world and nature are good gifts that God entrusted to human beings. They believe that the Supreme Being provides nourishment for life, security and home for people's bodies.

Mbiti (1975:28) explains that though the knowledge of God as Supreme Being is not yet documented in any sacred book, it is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. This means that for one to understand the concept of God, the Supreme Being in Africa, one has to carefully study the entirety of the culture of the people. Again, Mbiti argues that in African peoples and in traditional life there are no atheists. Basically it has been asserted that there are seemingly no people, nor tribe in Africa, which does not believe in a Supreme Being with one or more names to describe God either in terms of his activities or his place of abode. Uka (1991:22) declares that all African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of ATR and dominates all its other beliefs. The implication of this understanding is that all living beings are interconnected through this life force.

This connectedness is emphasized in the discussion on communal life that will be handled later. Beyers (2010:3) states that humans live through the connectedness with the life force that God, the Supreme Being, provides. The effects of this communal solidarity with God is far-reaching and the sanctity of this community stretches across the borders of life and death. Every generation and every individual is merely a part of a never-ending chain that stretches back into the past and forward into the future. According to Mokhoathi (2018:4) this view has its basis on the fact that Africans do not perceive of God as an abstract entity whose existence is in the mind. God is seen and perceived as a real personal entity whose help is sought in times of trouble and God is believed to be the protector of the people in the community.

2.3.2 Attributes of God or the Supreme Being

Attributes of God refer to words or phrases ascribing traits, properties, qualities or characteristics of the Supreme Being. This is because any religion that strips the Supreme Being of anthropomorphic phenomena will eventually end up as an abstract religion that does not have human feelings and is not fully realizable in the world. Anthropomorphism entails the ascription of human character to God. Some names refer to the Supreme Being as Creator, maker of souls, founder of the universe, controller of nature and giver of rain, and so on. Idowu (1973:78) claims that in African religion God is also seen as being self-existent, the first and the last, invisible, incomprehensible, mysterious and immutable. Other attributes are: pity, kindness, love, comfort, faithfulness, goodness, anger, will, justice and holiness. Furthermore, Idowu (1973:79) explains that African peoples believe in God's providence.

They believe that it is God who provides sunshine, moonshine, rain, fertility and health. God is not only the provider, God also protects, guards, controls and saves his people. In short, the people of Africa see God as king, ruler, lord and master of the world. In addition to these attributes, African peoples believe that God is incomparable. The fact of God's uniqueness implies his transcendence. The conception of God as king with absolute supremacy emphasizes his uniqueness.

2.3.2.1 God is real to Africans

The various names given to God in Africa attest to this. The fact that God is real to Africans is enshrined in the meaning of the names they call him. According Idowu (1973:80) the Yoruba of Nigeria call God *Olodumare or Edumere* meaning "The King who holds the scepter, who has authority and has the quality which is superlative in worth and God is at the same time permanent, unchanging and reliable.'' In addition Idowu (1973: 81) says that the Igbo of Nigeria call God by the name *Chukwu* meaning 'Source of Being' which connotes 'the Great One from whom beings originate'. The Ewe and Fon people of Dahomey call God *Nana Buluku* which means 'the great ancient Deity'. Among the Akon and Ga people of Ghana God is known by *Odamankoma* meaning 'God who is uninterruptedly, infinitely and exclusively full of grace' or 'God who alone is full of abundance or completeness' or 'God who in His grace has completed everything in heaven and on earth'. For Ekeke (2010:16) these names were not created by Africans after the colonial era but show how real God is to Africans.

2.3.2.2 God is unique in African religious ontology

The word 'unique' is used in reference to the attributes of God in Africa describing God as having no equal or no one like God. From what has been explained, the Yoruba people of Nigeria refer to God as *Olodumare* meaning "The king or chief is unique because God holds the scepter, wields authority and has the quality which is worthy and at the same time permanent, unchanging and reliable.'' According to Ekeke (2010:17), this description shows the uniqueness of God in Africa. Not only is God seen as being unique, but God is also seen as permanent, unchanging and reliable. This is why in Africa there are no images attributed to the Supreme Being. In most cases, there are no temples except in few places dedicated to the Supreme Being. Nobody in Africa has produced any picture of the Supreme Being because the concept of God is embedded deeply in their ontology that the Supreme Being is unique and nothing is comparable with God. Werner (1983:44) describes *Leza* (name used by the Baila, Botanga and other tribes of Northern Zambia) as the 'High God', the One who does what no other can do. In

writing about the Ruandan people, Werner describes their Supreme Being (*Imana*) in a proverb which means, 'There is none to equal *Imana*'. These descriptions show the uniqueness of the Supreme Being in African religious ontology.

2.3.2.3 God is transcendent and immanent

These two words 'transcendent' and 'immanent' could be seen as two sides of the same coin. They are fundamental attributes of God that are closely linked together. According to Magezi (2016:1), the word 'transcendent' affirms God as the one who transcends space and time because God is the sole creator of everything. On the other hand, the concept of 'immanent' asserts God's ongoing presence within his creation while God remains distinct from it. Ekeke (2010:212) says that when Africans see God as transcendent, it means that: (1) God is not limited to a particular place and time as human beings are. (2) It means that God lives outside the natural world in which human beings live. (3) It also means that human beings can never fully comprehend the will or thoughts of the Supreme Being. God is beyond their understanding. (4) It further means that God is always there first: God is the creator of all things and the initiator of all events. (5) Finally, it means that human beings are in awe when they remember the presence of God. God is good and trustworthy in a way that they are not.

However, Brown (1975:3) says that the concept of God in African Religion is questionable. He argues that although a common Supreme Being is identified, known by different names in different cultures, and, although God is perceived personally, contact with this God is only possible through mediators or counsellors. God is seen as absent and rarely able to assist or advise followers. On the same issue Mbiti (1970:171) records that many traditions in Africa stories relate to the origin of the separation between God and humanity. He claims that most traditions in Africa relate to how humanity disobeyed the commands given by God. As punishment God withdrew from humanity. God may be recognized as creator (currently transcendent) and sustainer (immanently involved with his followers) but God is not seen as the focus of all attention, as the mediators attract more attention. Mbiti (1970:12) refutes the assumption that God is only absent and transcendental by indication that God can simultaneously be far (transcendental) and near (immanent). For Africans Mbiti argues that God seems remote from their daily affairs, but they know that God is immanent.

According to Ekeke (2010:18) the word 'immanent' means that Africans see God, whose presence is felt by people within the natural world. This means that they feel God's presence in their surroundings

and through what happens to them and their families. Africans see God as very present within the natural world to help protect and deliver his creation although, at the same time, God transcends the natural realm.

Magezi (2016:6) supports this view because the fundamental beliefs in ATR reveal that the kind of God that is worshipped in African Tradition communities is a transcendent one. In other words, he says that traditional African communities do not actively worship or direct their prayers directly to this Supreme Being, but instead direct them to the ancestors and divinities. These are the direct objects of their regular sacrifices, offerings and prayers.

The reason for doing this lies in what is believed to be the varying degree of the presence of the mystical power in different beings or objects. The higher the being is in the hierarchy of beings, the stronger is the mysterious power or the vital force the being is believed to have. For this reason Magezi (2016:7) claims that going too close to a being that is believed to be endowed with a massive vital force is considered fatal. One has to keep a safe distance in order not to be crushed by the superimposing power of a higher being. This means that there is no urgent need to call upon God or the Supreme Being for traditional Africans as long as they have their ancestors or divinities around. For many Africans Magezi (2016:7) argues that God is remote while ancestors or divinities remain generally very immanent.

Han (2013:78) argues that this is a big error. He contends that one cannot emphasize God's remoteness to Africans to the exclusion of God's nearness. He argues that although sacrifies are rarely offered to God, but frequently to the divinities, God is commonly believed to be the ultimate recipient of sacrifies offered to the divinities, who may be explicitly referred to as intermediaries between God and human beings. On the same issue Magesa (1997:73) says that ATR is based on maintaining the balance between the two spheres of the universe (the visible and invisible worlds). The maintenance of this balance and harmony is humanity's greatest ethical obligation and determines the quality of life. Humans live through the connectedness with the life force that God, the Supreme Being, provides.

Awolalu (1975:51) shows that to the Africans the transcendence and immanence of God are two divine attributes that are paradoxically complementary. He gives an example of the *Nupe* song which depicts the nature of God: 'God is far away, God is in front and God is at the back.' For him this *Nupe* song, means that though God is not on earth, yet God is very present, always, and everywhere. Again, he argues that to show the immanence of God among the Yoruba of Nigeria they ask "What can you do in

concealment that God's eyes do not reach?" Moreover, they also add another statement: "He who steals under concealment, even though the eyes of the earthly ruler do not see him, those of the King of Heaven is looking at him (Awolalu 1975:51)."

According to Han (2013:98), the African people are uneasy not only about the all-power of the high God but also about God's purity. God, whose attribute is all-purity imposes a sense of guilt on the African people. The all-purity of God makes people fear to approach God and then people put God at a distance in order to avoid the sense of the guilt that God imposes on their shameful affairs. Consequently, God becomes a withdrawal God and the African people develop the idea of the other gods. Han (2013:98) contends that the other gods, who are more clearly comprehended in the symbols of their personalities and powers and lay less stress on moral demands, become the intermediaries between God and humanity. In this case, he asserts that God is seldom worshipped directly because his moral demands based on his all-purity are unbearable to the sense of impurity of human beings. In addition, Han (2013:105) argues that among the African peoples, the interactions with God are directed more toward explanation, prediction and control over everyday affairs than on communion with God as an ultimate purpose.

The above presentation has made it clear that the notions of transcendence and immanence in the traditional concept of God is a complex one that cannot easily be explained. In order to understand it one has to take all the variables into consideration. Most scholars tend to look at one variable and emphasize it, more often than not at the expense of a more comprehensive understanding of what the real situation is. In summary, the African Traditional worldview is continually confronted by the fact that God does not engage with humankind directly but through various intermediaries. Therefore African Theology cannot avoid giving an explanation to the questions of transcendence and immanence of God, more especially in post-colonial Africa, where many people are in the midst of suffering and are questioning the presence of God. In contrast to the African idea of God who has been portrayed mainly as the Creator, it is necessary to stress the point that God is in communion with the people. The only God whom African Traditional worldview reveals and confess is the God who exists only as Father, One Supreme Being who is responsible for the existence of all things. However, the concept of the divine Trinity in which God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are One is not clearly articulated. Although African people know the existence of God and have a notion of God as the Supreme Being, the idea of God as a Trinity is an absolutely new concept to the African people (Kombo 2000:221). In this theological situation in Africa, therefore, the most important task in

addressing the concept of God is to identify the God of the Bible who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

2.3.2.4 God is eternal and immortal

The Africans do not see the Supreme Being as One who will one day cease to be or one who will eventually die. They rather see God as the eternal and immortal One who lives forever to satisfy the human soul. This is why they hold that the Supreme Deity is the Ever-living Reality Whose Being stretches to eternity (Awolalu 1975:52). A Yoruba epithet of praise describes this eternal and immortal attribute of the Supreme Being in Africa: *Oyigiyi Ota Aiku* – "The mighty, immovable, hard, ancient, durable Rock that never dies.'' Awolalu (1975:52) states that the *Kono* people of Sierra Leone call God by the name *Yataa* which means that 'God is the One you meet everywhere'. They also call God by another name, *Meketa,* implying 'the Everlasting One'. 'The One who remains and does not die' shows that people of many generations experience God as living.

2.3.2.5 Hierarchy and the Spiritual Being

The African Traditional religious worldview perceive God and all spiritual beings in their hierarchical order. The Supreme Being is the highest and the greatest. The lesser beings, such as divinities occupy a lesser position but higher than the humans do. The authority, power, influence and legitimacy of divine beings depend upon their position within the ontological order of beings (Turaki 2000:5). This theological concept has a great influence as Traditional Africans define the role and functions of the Supreme Being, lesser beings, divinities and ancestors in an African community. The implication of this understanding is that the Supreme Being is the ultimate peak of the pyramid and inaccessible to play a role in the practical life of Africans. According to Magezi (2016:6) the problem emanating from this view is that God deligates all his duties to the divinities.

In summary, there are so many other great attributes of God in African religious ontology which we cannot consider in this chapter, such as: God is the absolute controller of the universe; God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient; God is good, merciful, and Holy. Awolalu (1975:61) declares that the attributes as enumerated by many scholars in Africa are not the product of missionary activities or the colonial era. They are part and parcel of Africans. Every child born into African culture grows

with these concepts of God and does not need to learn them because they are imbued in their folklores, myths, short stories, short sayings, proverbs, ceremonies and everything around them. These attributes show the place of the Supreme Being in the ATR ontology. No one under any guise should say that Africans did not know God before the colonial era or before the coming of the Missionaries. The knowledge of God as the Supreme Being in Africa has been part of their culture from time immemorial. However, at the heart of this knowledge of God in Africa lies *a fundamental question*: How can we explain the relationship between God and human beings? This is a hard question. As an African Christian thinker it is futile to deny a natural knowledge of God in Africa. Since it is impossible for human beings everywhere to ever come to a true knowledge of God by themselves, the final outcome of the knowledge of God in Africa should lead the people to the praise of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ our savior.

Kombo (2000:185) says that for the African people to view God as savior of mankind is to present them with an overwhelming truth. This is because the Savior such as we see in Christ is in the African cultural milieu. This is the message for the African peoples just as it is for the other peoples of the world. Kombo (2000:186) also declares that nowhere is this captured more truthfully than in the doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore, the study claims that African Theology should theologize the doctrine of God within a Trinitarian context, even though the idea of God as Trinity is an absolutely new concept to African people.

2.4 DIVINITIES IN AFRICAN RELIGIOUS ONTOLOGY

The African religions partly recognize a group of beings popularly known as 'divinities'. These beings have been given various names by different writers such as 'gods', 'demigods', 'nature spirits', 'divinities', and the like. Mbiti (1975:117) explains that the term covers personification of God's activities and manifestations, the so-called 'nature spirits', deified heroes and mythological figures. This belief in divinities is a common phenomenon especially in West Africa while in other parts of Africa the concept is not succinctly expressed. Njoku (2002:125) declares that the belief in divinities is not everywhere prominent in Africa. He identifies three categories in the spirit world of ATR, namely, the spirits of ancestors, nature of spirits and deities.

In West Africa where the concept is clearly expressed, there are very many of such divinities. In Yoruba pantheon, for example, Idowu (1973:89) explains that there are as many as 201, 401, 600, or

even 1700 divinities. In Edo of Nigeria, Mbiti (1975:123) narrates that there are as many divinities as there are human needs, activities and experiences.

Divinities have been put into two major groups, namely, the principal divinities and minor divinities. Principal divinities are regarded as part of the original order of things. Njoku (2002:126) sees these as belonging to the coming into being of the cosmos. They include such divinities as *Sango* or *Amadioha,* thunder divinities for Yoruba and Igbo; *Ani* or *Ala* – earth divinity among the Igbo, *Aje* in Idoma land and other solar divinities. The *Dinka* people of Sudan recognize *Deng* divinity associated with rain, fertility and others, *Abak* with mother's role, *Garang* - perfect picture of father/son relationship. They also recognize *Macardt* - a divinity associated with death (Njoku 2002:127).

2.4.1 Nature of Divinities

There are two major schools of thought as regards the origin of divinities in African religious ontology. The first school of thought is led by Mbiti. For Mbiti (1969:79) these divinities are created by the Supreme Being. He explains that divinities have been created by God in the ontological category of the spirits. They are associated with Him and often stand for His activities or manifestation either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature. In his view Mbiti (1969:79) contends that divinities are under the Supreme Being in the order of things. They can also be seen as manifestations of the characteristics or attributes of the Supreme Being.

The second school of thought, championed by Idowu, argues that divinities were not created but were brought into being. In his words, Idowu (1973:169) makes the following observation:

> From the point of view of the theology of African Traditional Religion, it is not correct to say that the divinities were created. It will, however, be correct to say that they were brought into being, or that they came into being in the nature of things with regard to the divine ordering of the universe.

This view of Idowu may correspond with the Christian Theology about the divinity of Christ. Christians believe that Christ was not created but came out (brought forth - 'begotten') from the Father and so shares almost all the attributes of the Father. This is why he is called the Son of God. In the same way Idowu applies the same theology to the divinities. He explains that *Orisanla* (the arch-divinity among the Yoruba) is definitely a derivation partaking of the very nature and metaphysical

attributes of *Olodumare* (Idowu 1973:169). This is why the Yoruba people call him 'Deity's son and deputy vested with the power and authority of royal sonship'. In Benin of Nigeria, *Olokun* the arch-divinity is regarded as the son of *Osanobwa*, which means a son vested with power and majesty by his father. Among the *Akan* people of Ghana all their divinities are regarded as sons of *Onyame*. Idowu therefore argues that "it is in consequence of this derivative relationship that these divine 'beings' are entitled to be called divinities or deities." Ushe (2017:4) makes a summary of this debate and says that a careful look at these two schools of thought will show that Idowu was applying the Christian Theological principle to ATR by declaring that the divinities were not created just as Christians believe that Jesus Christ was not created.

Basically there is an agreement among scholars that divinities are divided into two groups. One group being spirits and the other group being human beings of the distant past who, by their heroic activities where deified. The argument here is that if all divinities were not created it means that those heroic human beings of the distant past who were deified were not created. This will run contrary to the general belief of Africans concerning the Supreme Being who alone has no beginning and no end in African religious theology (Ushe 2017:6). From the facts given above Ushe (2017:8) argues that if God is unique then every other creature must be different from Him. They are regarded as divinities. They are being called divinities because they are sometimes the personification of the natural forces or the manifestation of the Supreme Being.

2.4.2 Relationship between Divinities and the Supreme Being

They are created 'beings'. As created beings, they are subordinate to the Supreme Being. They are derivations from Deity. According to Brown (1975:25) the divinities do not have independent existence or absolute existence but derive their being from the Supreme Being. This means that since divinities derive their being from the Supreme Being their powers and authorities are meaningless apart from God. Parrinder (1968:21) follows the idea of Idowu (1973) by declaring that the divinities were not created but were brought into being to serve the Supreme Being. Mbiti (1975:89) says that divinities are given functions to perform. They do not perform duties against the will of the Supreme Being, but rather they are obedient to the command of the Supreme Being. Various communities of Africa who believe in divinities have their local names for each divinity depending on the function the divinity performs. In Yoruba *Jakuta*, the divinity responsible for wrath, 'one who hurls or fights with stones', is

known in *Nupe* as *Sokogba,* God's axe. Among the Igbo *Ala* or *Ani,* Earth, is the arch-divinity responsible for the fertility of the soil.

Another important relationship between the divinities and Supreme Being in Africa is that the divinities serve as 'functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe' (Idowu 1973:170). This means that the various divinities have been apportioned various duties to perform in accordance with the will of the Supreme Being. This is clearly shown by Idowu in his book *Olodumare* (1973) where he explains that in Dahomey *Mawu-Lisa* is regarded as an arch-divinity who apportioned the kingdoms of the sky, the sea and the earth to six of his off-spring. He made his seventh child, *Legba,* the divine messenger and inspector-general in African pantheon. This also means that the divinities are ministers with different definite portfolios in the monarchial government of the Supreme Being. They therefore serve as administrative heads of various departments (Idowu 1973:170).

Divinities are intermediaries between humanity and the Supreme Being. They have therefore become channels through which sacrifices, prayers and offerings are presented to the Supreme Being. In Africa there are no images of the Supreme Being but the divinities are represented with images, temples or shrines. Idowu (1973:170) explains that the divinities do not prevent Africans from knowing or worshiping the Supreme Being directly, as some erroneously claim, but constitute only a half-way house which is not meant to be a permanent resting place for man's soul. While humanit may find the divinities 'sufficient' for certain needs something continues to warn him that 'sufficiency' is only in Deity [Supreme Being]. The divinities are only a means to an end and not an end in themselves (Ushe 2017:8).

In African religious ontology, especially among the West African people, the concept of divinity is well established. Divinities are so many that their number seems not to be known. This concept has led many scholars to believe that African religion is either pantheistic or polytheistic. Those who believe that African religion is pantheistic are of the view that Africans see spirits in everything including wood, trees, fire and others (Ekeke 2010:215). Though this may be true, Africans do not see these spirits as deserving worship.

The basic issue here is to understand the implication of this concept of the divinities in Africa. The question is about the status of the divinities and the ancestral spirits: Are the divinities thought of as free and responsible beings or mere channels between God and humanity? Kombo (2000:209) says that the African idea of the mediators is a direct result of the belief among the African peoples that God is

hidden. In other words, he contends that the idea of the divinities and intermediaries is the African version of the tower of Babel. Mbiti (1975:63) argues that the idea of the intermediaries is a necessary element of the African cosmology. He says that the idea of the intermediaries fits well with the African view of the universe which holds that the invisible world has its own life and population. The life of this invisible world is in some way higher than that of man but God is higher still. Furthermore, he says that in order to reach God effectively it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person (Mbiti 1975:63).

Regardless of how African thought may explain the idea of the intermediaries the fact that it presents the Christian theology with difficulty and refuses to go away. Kombo (2000:2010) acknowledges that African Christian thought has not paid sufficient attention to the problem of the intermediaries. He argues that in the past, they have been discussed in the context of the doctrine of God. The problem with this approach is that scholars do not get to adequately isolate them and deal with them for what they are. A proper understanding of the divinities in African Theology is helpful in laying the foundation for the articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in Africa.

The overall picture of this discussion centers on the argument that the belief in the existence of God is fundamental in Africa. All these concrete examples mentioned above show how African people perceive God who is regarded as an un-created, self-existent, unchanging and reliable Being whose power transcends all powers. God is seen as the creator, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent Being who is immortal and directs human affairs. This Supreme Being, according to African ontology, has many deputies who work with Him in the unitary theocratic governance of the universe. These deputies are regarded as divinities. They are functionaries and ministers whose duties are to carry out the full instructions of the Supreme Being.

If this is the case the point of departure of this discussion is to examine the concept of God in ATR and the Missionary Christianity. As mentioned earlier many of the first Missionaries held the opinion that the God of the Bible and the God of Africans could not be the same and that there should be no mixing of Christianity and heathenism. On the other hand, African theologians have argued that the God, whom African religion acknowledges is the same God which the Bible represents. This debate, however, has been well articulated by a number of African scholars. The basic question here is: *How do the African concepts of God relate to the God of the Bible?*

2.5 GOD IN MISSIONARY CHRISTIANITY

Christianity and Missionary presence in Africa predates the colonial occupation of the continent by nearly a century. Han (2013:11) acknowledges that the Missionaries who came to Africa shared the European ethnocentric presupposition of Africans as savages and the uncivilized. In consequence, the Missionaries tended to consider themselves as envoys of God as well as representatives of a higher civilization to transform the 'dark continent'. The main challenge in this issue is the Christianization of the African concepts of God. The issue of Christianization of the African God language has been criticized not just by African scholars but by Western scholars as well. The African scholars think that the Christianization of the African God language amounts to 'intellectual smuggling' (Kombo 2000:218). Christianization of the African concepts of God meant that the Africans were prepared to fill the African God names with Christian names. The implication of this is that African names like: *Nyame, Leza, Modimo, Mulungu*, were no longer what they meant in their respective native contexts.

Basically Setiloane engaged and challenged the Western Theological discourse on the structure and function of divinity. According to Setiloane (1986:32) the unique contribution of African Theology lies in its insistence that Divinity-Modimo is *Force Vitale*. He argues that African Theology contributes to a sense of the presence, the 'hereness' of God, in spite of God's supremacy and otherness because the God with whom the Africans have associated with missionary teaching has to compete with numerous concepts of deities and divinities from the traditional African background (Setiloane 1986:32). Consequently, when African theologians themselves began to make the comparison they emerged with a conviction that Western Christian concepts of Divinity are not adequate but a diminution and devaluation of their inherited African concepts. Behind the African beliefs and actions, explains Setiloane (1986:4), lie a fundamental experience, a feeling of the existence of 'something' or 'somebody' beyond oneself, a mysterious "power which cannot be seen and is not fully understood but which is at work in the world.''

Last but not the least, Setiloane says that various African regional names for God exist for this phenomenon. They all agree in the fact that they describe the same experience and reality. It is these names which, in the different places, the translators employed to denote the Biblical concept of God. He argues that while the names for God may differ from group to group, the qualities or attributes of

this Supreme Deity overlap all over the continent. They ascribe to God the attributes of almighty and omnipresent; they believe God created the universe. God is therefore known as "Creator, owner of breath and spirit, benefactor, merciful, living, Lord of glory, silent, but active, judge (the idea of retribution), King of the heavens whose origins cannot be determined" (Setiloane 1976:389).

For Nyamiti (1996:62) African Theology does not mean a 'new religious doctrine', a kind of 'syncretism' between Christian doctrine and African beliefs, but the very same doctrine expressed and presented in accordance with the African mentality and needs. Nyamiti seeks to open up the dialogue between the Christian and African concepts of God by drawing a comparison between the common elements in both religions. He tries to discover the African connotation of the employed symbols and evaluate them critically, correcting, purifying and drawing on their philosophical implication to expound the Christian teaching on God (Nyamiti 1996:63).

In the African worldview God is almighty because God is the fullness of life (Nyamiti 1996:64) and life is essentially connected with power in solidarity, totality and communion. For the Africans, therefore, God is not only 'life itself' and the ultimate source of vital energy, but also 'living power itself'. Basically, Nyamiti (1996:65) admits that the African teachings on God have positive aspects such as a rich symbolism, the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God. He does however acknowledge that the Christian doctrine of God is far deeper, purer and nobler than that of African Traditional Religion that is mixed up with idols, magic and superstition (Nyamiti 1996:67). He argues that the Christian teaching of God is the fulfilment of the African teaching of God and all legitimate African needs and aspirations will be accomplished in the Christian teaching.

Recently a more incarnational approach has been propagated which not only appreciates African Traditional Religion but sees African Theology as a quest to re-address the injustices of colonialism. Muzorewa (1990:168) emphasizes that such a theology must address the needs of people who are struggling to recuperate from a colonial mentality, from foreign economic, legal and political systems. The concept of God in African Theology must be able to speak for the oppressed and marginalized but also to the soul of African people by making use of concepts of a traditional world view.

To sum up this discussion it can be stated that many African scholars such as Idowu, Mbiti, Bediako and others have posed a question about the inter-relationship between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Some scholars tend to exalt ATR at the expense of the biblical meaning of salvation as well as undermining the value ATR and Christianity. The question that has been posed is about the

relationship between the concept of God in African religions and Christianity. This question is an emotive one. On the one hand, it borders on diminishing the value of African Traditional Religion whilst, on the other hand, it challenges one to consider the implication of concept of God in African Religion. As we have noted above, many scholars have attempted to draw a relationship between the two. For example, Mbiti and other theologians have tended to celebrate African culture whereas Oduyoye, an African woman theologian, regards African culture as yet another area of the struggle to understand the concept of God.

It seems that the debate between continuity and discontinuity should be considered seriously. The question is: If Africans accept Christianity does it not automatically mean a radical break with nearly every element of traditional culture? This is the question with which many African theologians are struggling. Some feel that Traditional Religion should be regarded as a valid source for African Theology. They accept continuity between Traditional Religion and Christianity. They see ATR as a preparation for the Gospel. By identifying the Christian God with the African God Mbiti (1987:69) does not cast off the religion of his ancestors. He maintains that the God of the Bible is the same God who has been worshipped through the oral culture of traditional religions. On the other side, many Western Protestant theologians emphasize a discontinuity between ATR and the Gospel. For them the acceptance of the Gospel implies a total break with African Traditional Religion and therefore also with traditional culture (Crafford 1993:166).

Crafford (1993:167) argues that the most acceptable position will perhaps be the acceptance of continuity and discontinuity. This means that there are elements in traditional culture that will be judged and rejected by the Gospel but that there are also areas of convergence which make the acceptance of the Gospel even easier for Africans. Elements in traditional culture which are incompatible with the Gospel are: the reign of terror of certain chiefs; cruelty during initiation ceremonies; low estimation of women; indifferent attitude towards people of other tribes; belief in sorcery, witches and magic and the role of the ancestors as mediators and protectors of the clan.

According to Mbiti (1987:30) there are other religious elements that are more compatible with the Bible. Such elements make it easier for Africans to understand the biblical message. The belief in a Supreme Being who is creator and preserver of the universe, immanent and transcendent, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent are not very far from the biblical view of God.

In view of this discussion it is important to consider the concerns and issues raised by Walls (2002) in his study on African Christianity in the history of religion. According to Walls (2002:116) African Christianity appears in two capacities. First, as a new period in the history of African religion, continuing the story begun in the 'primal' or 'traditional' religions. Second, as a new period in the history in which the Christian tradition is being expressed in intellectual, social and religious milieu, it has not previously entered. In this context, Walls argues that both aspects, the African and the Christian, are essential to the Christian identity of the contemporary time. Therefore, it does not make sense to separate the two because African Christianity is a new development, shaped by the parameters of pre-Christian African religion (Walls 2002:116).

With regard to the significance of religious change over the past century Walls (2002:119) claims that the ATR has not died out, nor has it been reduced. He argues that the principal evidence of the ongoing life of ATR lies within African Christianity. In this case, he sees a continuity of African religious history and pre-Christian, with no sharp break in African understanding of relationship with the transcendent world. In addressing the questions about God Walls (2002:120) recognizes the continuity between the African God and the Christian God. He contends that there was little in European experience to look for the divine name in the pre-Christian past. Therefore, the relationship between African's old religion and its new one is cemented in the conventions of speech. The Christian God is known by vernacular names of pre-Christian past, hence the God of Israel and the Scriptures belong conceptually to the African past (Walls 2001:21).

In reflecting on the current development of Christianity Walls (2002:123) acknowledges the deep-rooted changes that have affected the African Worldview. In response to these changes, he proposes the reordering of worldview and the introduction of new symbols and sources. Walls (2002:123) identifies four component entities in the understanding of the transcendent: (1) God, (2) divinities (i.e., ruling powers, either of a locality or a dimension of life), (3) ancestors, and (4) objects of power.

In this context, he argues that the Traditional African religious systems vary as to which component dominates. However, he explains that the principal feature of cosmological change induced by Christianity in Africa has been the magnification of the God. This component does not mean that the other components have altogether disappeared. They are elements in a process of re-thinking and re-evaluation in the light of the impact of the biblical tradition. The process may continue for some time and lead Christian theology into new paths (Walls 2002:129).

With regard to the new elements in African Religion Walls (2002:129) comments the new religious systems of Africa are distinctively Christian in that they not only magnify the God component that has always been present in Africa religion, but also identifies that component with the God of Israel and with the Lord Jesus Christ. Walls (2002:129) adds that this new element has led to another crucial development of the God component in African religion: the Christian impact has greatly intensified the sense of the immediacy of the presence of God, particularly in the figure of Christ. According to Walls (2002:130) the new component has led to a belief that God speaks directly to people and not through intermediaries. This is the conviction of innumerable Christian prophets, healers, holiness leaders and reformers that they have heard the voice of God. Yet, in African Traditional Religion, it is rarely God's own voice that is heard in ecstatic utterance but of the spirits or some other lower spiritual power.

The second new category which has been identified is the usage of 'Scripture'. It seems that the Scripture and specifically the vernacular Scriptures, have led to innumerable new effects in African religion. Walls (2002:130) further acknowledges that the coming of the Scriptures has led to the Christian reaffirmation of some ancient aspects of African religion that were not part of Missionary Christianity at all. Wider and wider access to the Bible has given a new justification, a new setting, to various elements in re-interpretation in Christian terms by rooting them in Christ and Scripture. Moreover, the accessibility of the Scripture has led to the development of new models of the church. Many of the spiritual and prophet-healing independent churches are the product of African readings of Scripture (Walls 2002:131).

So far the evidence suggests that the features that have marked earlier phases of Christian history are all represented in contemporary African Christianity. Africans worship the God of Israel; they attribute ultimate significance to Jesus Christ; they acknowledge the activity of God among his people; they recognize their participation in a community that transcends time and space; they read the same Scriptures and are distinguished by the special use of bread, wine and water. However, it has to be acknowledged that the experiences, traditions and agendas of Africa are re-shaping Christianity. The continent has seen immense theological activity over a long period and the activity seems likely to intensify. Walls (2002:133) makes the assurance that the task of African Theology is to explore and articulate the forms and formulations of Christianity already made in thousands of congregations over several generations. It is clear that diverse trends are already discernible.

With Christianity thriving on African soil the question of the concept of God in post-colonial Africa becomes relevant. The theological question of African Christianity and theology in post-colonial Africa cannot be avoided. Who is God in post-colonial Africa? Different participants in this debate have brought into discussion different responses and underlying assumptions about the nature of post-colonial African Theology. It is because of these different responses and underlying assumptions that the concept of God in post-colonial African Theology has been defined and classified in different ways. As the lives of peoples in Africa continue changing, such historical paradigms create a firm grounding for theological models that will develop further understanding of the presence of God through the Christian communities in Africa.

Over the past decades, theologians and exegetes have cautiously started to explore avenues of contextual interpretation of the Bible. These avenues included post-structural theory and post-modern theory. In pursuit of biblical understanding in contexts locked into socio-political and economic upheavals, post-colonial theory is taking the lead. In academic and research institutions this field of study is increasingly attracting greater interest from feminist readings. These women contend that the foreign hermeneutics are incapable of explaining the harsh realities of inequality, oppression and exploitation that are often experienced by the poor people. They argue that as long as the hermeneutical readings of the Bible remains foreign, God will remain unknown.

2.6 THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

The experiences of pain, the long walk to freedom and rich cultural diversity in post-colonial Africa has raised many questions on the concept of God. The work of Liberation Theology is a noble achievement as it stages campaigns against poverty and socio-political injustices in Africa. Post-colonial Theology builds on these very campaigns to enlarge the scope of justice and freedom, whereby the marginal persons recover their dignity. According to Ukpong (1984:38) post-colonial reading of the Bible is a war against sin: colonialism, neo-colonialism, dictactorship, corruption and social injustices in every aspect of society, regardless of their agent. Furthermore, he argues that post-colonialism is not a discourse of historical accusations but a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed.

However, the major issue has to do with the question of the interpretation of God in post-colonial Africa. *What is the concept of God in post-colonial Africa?* This is a crucial question for all African

theologians as they move into the twenty-first century. As discussed above, the Christian churches in Africa have a pandemic in their midst. Although poverty is certainly not new in Africa, the reality of it has caused a devastating impact on African societies and the church. It seems to me that there is need to redefine the concept of God beyond the African Traditional Religion. If anything, the growing plural situation in Africa demands an even broader and more rigorous inter-religious approach. African Christian theologians and their churches have to learn new ways of interpreting the concepts of God in post-colonial Africa. Ukpong (1984:38) points out that if exegesis is to be truly explored, African theologians must engage in serious and innovative research that will open up new vistas in biblical scholarship.

Post-colonial Theology seeks to deconstruct the oppressive nature of the 'ivory tower' which often ignores the plight of the oppressed and therefore negatively influences society. Much Christian discourse and practice has been complicit in oppression. As the world becomes ever immersed in acts of violence fueled by unchecked biases there must be a discourse that does not simply study the nature of such but that speaks to issues with hope and transformative results. Judkins (2013:1) points out clearly that the post-modern world is full of continous changes and diverging ideals which are the norm even within faith communities. A theology that speaks to the diverse voices and changes in the post-modern world is critical, especially as they pertain to oppressive actions by the world's power brokers. He therefore suggests that faith communities can use perspectives shaped by Post-colonial Theology to disrupt oppressive flows within and without their own quarters. For it to be true to itself, the Christian church must be emancipatory.

As alluded to earlier on, the African continent has a history that is largely tragic. Bad governance and manipulation of ethnic and religious differences have resulted in misery for the people. Many Christians have fallen for lies and have been misled, leaving the church confused, discouraged and betrayed. False dogma, end-time spiritual deception and strange techniques in supernatural engagement are holding the church hostage. For example, in the recent past the church has suffered a storm of deceptions including the prosperity gospel, corruption and hatred. Muzorewa (1985:96-97) contends that a relevant theology is needed to develop a new understanding of the concept of God in order to address the complex issues and the demands of the African people. He says that the imported theologies do not sufficiently touch the hearts of African believers because they are couched in a language that is foreign to them (Muzorewa 1985:96-97). Thus, in this argument, the interplay between God and society should be articulated in a manner that can touch the hearts of Africans. Since the

contextualization of Christianity in Africa has mainly focused on the integration of positive aspects of the African cultural heritage into the Christian faith, it appears to have overlooked the day to day challenges of the Africans.

When people are overwhelmed by crises, they are compelled to consult traditional healers, prophets or seers. These people promise immediate returns. In that manner, the Christian principles of faith and hope in God are often abandoned for traditional interventions. This is a process which seems to suggest that pressing matters need immediate interventions, since African converts look for quick answers from traditional healers. Due to the lack of clarity on how the concept of God can best be expressed within the post-colonial African context, scholars are divided in their understanding of this matter. Based on this appeal, the duty of the Church is to explain clearly *the position of God in the context of injustice, oppression and suffering*. Thus, the Church in Africa is specially called to intervene positively to bring the message of hope in God to those who suffer. With political conflicts endlessly ravaging Africa, hampering social development in the process, the African theologians have to go beyond academic theological debates and then begin to reflect on the faith of the people and to examine their views on the doctrine of God in the context of suffering.

According to Onyinah (2007:314) this current Christianity requires that theology must be transformational and empowering; it must produce a visible effect in the lives of believers, such as the extinction of poverty, injustice and oppression of the poor. In addition, he says that Christianity must necessarily include the healing of sickness and deliverance from the demonic powers. When a Christian's life is devoid of sin and demonic presence, the Christian is expected to be fruitful and prosperous. However, the question remains, of course, whether this form of theology will over time continue to meet the needs of African people and how it will relate to their contemporary challenges.

In light of the above discussion it is futile to deny the African people a natural knowledge of the God who is relational. We noted in the previous discussion that God occupies an important place in the African cosmology. God, in the thought of Africans, is number one, as is clearly indicated in the African cosmology. The African people have always known him as *the 'Great Muntu' but never as a relational being* (Setiloane 1976:411). As we discussed previously this misconception could persist among Africans, especially in context of suffering. This understanding of God has an important implication for the life of the believer more especially in post-colonial Africa. Magezi (2016:7) says that believers are not left on their own as far as their relationship with God is concerned; neither are

they left on their own to slug it out in the trenches, as it were, with regard to the Christian life. Life in the present is empowered by the God who dwells among the people. As the personal presence of God, the Spirit is not merely some 'force' or 'influence' the living God is a God of power and by his Spirit the power of the living God is present with and for the people.

Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian Theology is a good example of this recent search for a more relevant and practical understanding of God. His experience as a prisoner of war had a powerful impact on his understanding of God. Moltmann asks what does it mean for the doctrine of God and the problem of human suffering? He attempts to answer these questions through the eleboration of a theology of the cross that is at once throughly incarnational and Trinitarian (Stringer 2002:1).

2.7 CONCLUSION

As reflected above, it is clear that Africans do not perceive God as an abstract entity whose existence is in the mind. God is seen and perceived as a real personal entity whose help is sought in times of trouble and God is believed to be the protector of the people. Furthermore, the study has shown that the concepts of God in Africa are not merely descriptions of God but they reveal the true nature of God. The impression formed by this research is that God was and is already known by African peoples. African people know God according to their languages. They are not empty names and they are names of One and the same God, the creator of the world, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have seen in this study that God has revealed Himself in Africa in many different ways and human beings in particular, have always felt His presence and responded to Him in worship. This manifestation or revelation of God has brought about a living relationship between God and Man leading to what we now call religion. Indeed, the attributes as enumerated above are not the product of Missionary activities or colonial era. They are part and parcel of Africans. Every child born into African culture grows with these concepts of God and he or she does not need to learn them because they are imbued in their folklores, myths, short stories, short sayings, proverbs, ceremonies and everything around them. The knowledge of God as the Supreme Being in Africa has been part of the culture from time immemorial.

Nevertheless, it has been indicated in this chapter that God is thought to be present in peoples' everyday life, but at the same time, God appears to the Africans as a God who is far remote from the people. Indeed, African Theology must create an Christian engagement to provide an answer to this

misconception of God's transcendence and immanence in Africa. Again, the coming of Christianity and its relation with African Tradition Religion is a contemporary challenge that has been raised in this chapter. What this discussion has revealed is that the church in Africa has been heavily influenced by a number of social diversities. This new trend in the post-colonial African context demands that we have to listen to various voices concerning the questions about God. The African church cannot ignore the contemporary questions on the concept of God.

The above exposition has tried to demonstrate that studying theology in the African context is no easy task. Its complexity lies in the presence of plurality in many fields: religious, ethnic and language, socio-economic, political etc. African Theology needs to continue addressing these issues in post-colonial Africa. Since this research project is concerned with an analysis of Moltmann's theology of God and God's relationship to human suffering, it is helpful to engage Moltmann in this discussion. For him, the triune God of the Scripture is the God who is relational and in communion. The question of God's relationship with the suffering of this world will continue to be an unshakable theme in our lives.

CHAPTER 3. MOLTMANN'S PROJECT AND EARLY THEOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore Moltmann's theology on the concept of God who is relational and in communion. This Christian understanding of God has an important implication for the believers, more especially in post-colonial Africa. As reflected in chapter 1, the impact of suffering deeply shapes the way people live their lives, the way they see the world and how they relate to God. Most often God is portrayed as the direct cause of suffering. Cone (1997:150) says that individuals in crisis under the weight of suffering challenges Christian theology because it fails to offer hope during the time of hopelessness. Cone (1997:151) argues that whatever else may be said about biblical faith, it may be very difficult to talk about the liberating God while facing the reality of human suffering. Yancey (1990:88) contends that the questions almost everyone asks in great pain and suffering are the same as Job's questions, even with a sense of betrayal. He reveals that fear and hopelessness is the universal primal response to suffering. People in suffering, whether from physical or spiritual, often feel an oppressive sense of being abandoned by God and others.

Moltmann attempts to answer these questions on the concept of God and the problem of human suffering through the elaboration of the *Theology of hope* and the *Crucified God*. It is Moltmann's conviction that the Bible shows God who is relational and God who suffers with the people. The result is a Trinitarian theology of the cross which, in its exposition of the nature of the relationship between divine suffering and the suffering of the world, is judged to be an innovative and substantive contribution to theological discussion on the problem of theodicy, involving God's relationship to the suffering of humanity and creation.

The first part of the chapter begins with a concise survey of the development of Moltmann's life experience, as well as the concept of his theology of hope and suffering. The discussion on his life experience lays the foundation for understanding the concept of God who lovingly knows and suffers along with His children because of God's experience on the cross. Next, the chapter discusses Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and *Crucified God*, giving a summary of his theology. Moltmann's two books: are very useful in this chapter. In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann proposes that Christian hope should be the central motivating factor in the life and thought of the church and of each Christian (Woodbridge 2014:108). For Moltmann, the whole of creation longs for the renewal by the 'God of hope'. Empowered by this hope, the Christian's response should include the mission of the church to

all nations, the hunger for righteousness in the world and the love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. In the 'Crucified God' Moltmann depicts the concept of God who suffered on the cross. According to Moltmann (1974:243), the ultimate goal of God's suffering is for the purpose of suffering with the people. God cares for humanity to the point of voluntary suffering on behalf of humanity in order to foster relationship.

Park (2000:7) shows that Moltmann's theology is constituted in large part as a Christian answer to contemporary social questions of human freedom, equality and communal life. He says that Motmann's theology depicts a picture of God who unceasingly desires the freedom of his creation. The doctrine of God, is therefore, the doctrine of freedom and equality that provides genuine human dignity. Furthermore Park (2000:8) says that Moltmann's theological motivation and contributions are profoundly linked to the question of how it is possible to talk about God in a world of suffering and pain.

As we have already noted in the previous chapters everyone who has ever lived, or whoever will live, must deal with the problem of suffering some time in life. It is the universal experience of the human race. Either directly or indirectly we all come into contact with suffering or pain many times during the course of our brief lives. Suffering can be very difficult to handle at times. It leaves us perplexed and confused, often wondering why it had to be or even why God could allow such misery to touch us or anyone else. The question of why man suffers in life is certainly not a new one. People have been asking that question from the beginning of human record. The answer to that question can be so difficult that it has led more than one person to abandon the belief in a loving God.

Since Moltmann hopes to find in the doctrine of God a theological response to contemporary social questions, then a good way to understand his theology is to examine it in the light of his life history and his personal experiences as a prisoner of war in German. These experiences are foundational for Moltmann, because his theology is born out of the desolation of spiritual, cultural and political upheaval (Jaeger 1998:1). The central claim of this chapter is that God' life is in communion with those who suffer. God provides hope to those who may become hopeless.

3.2 LIFE EXPERIENCES

The source for much of this discussion on Moltmann's life and experiences is recorded in his book which is entitled: *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (2008). In this book, it is indicated that Moltmann was born in Hamburg, Germany, on April 8, 1926. He was raised in a rather 'enlightened secular' home; he therefore underwent no profound Christian socialization but grew up with poets and philosophers of German Idealism. He was, for the time being, far from Christianity, the church and the Bible (Moltmann 2008:10). On this account, he had always thought that he must discover, learn and comprehend for himself everything that others had already learned from an early age. Thus, theology has remained to him, even until today, an incredible adventure. As a boy, he wanted to study science and mathematics. However, in 1944 his secular education was interrupted when he was drafted by the German army. As a young man of barely nineteen years of age, he found himself caught up in the midst of World War II (Moltmann 2008:17). Moltmann was confined as a prisoner of war and moved from camp to camp. His experience as a prisoner of war had a powerful impact on his life, as it was in the camps that he had time to reflect upon the devastating nature of World War II, developing a great sense of remorse. He makes reference to these events in the first chapter of his book which is entitled: *The Source of life: The Holy Spirit and Theology of life* (1997).

Each of those events had a deep impact upon him and have exerted far-reaching influence on his subsequent life and work. While reflecting on the war Moltmann recalls the ravaging death of his friend and the immensity of the suffering prompted him to cry out to God for the first time in his life. That incident was to prove nothing less than a point of complete and absolute desolation for the young German soldier. Moltmann (2008:19-26) says that the friend standing next to him at the firing predictor was torn to pieces by the bomb that left him unscathed. That night Moltmann cried out to God and questioned the presence of God in the situation. It was probably on that night that his theological journey began, for he came from a secular family and knew nothing of faith (Williams 1995:76). Moltmann (2008:19-26) says that he questioned his deliverance from death and the destruction of his friend. He looked at the senseless death and suffering around him and wondered where was God in the midst of all of the suffering.

After the destruction of Hamburg and troubled by the abject poverty and his personal experience with misery Moltmann surrendered to a British officer and spent a three-year period as a prisoner of war who suffered behind a barbed wire fence. While there Moltmann sought for answers to the two

questions, as well as a reply to the question: "Does God share in our suffering?" However, as he was searching for these answers, he was given a Bible and read the New Testament and the book of Psalms (Moltmann 2008:29-30). Moltmann (2008:29-30) recalls the impact of the Gospel of Mark's recording of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and the theological understanding it gave him about the brotherhood that existed between himself and his Redeemer as a 'fellow sufferer who carries (him) in his suffering'.

Müller-Fahrenholz (2000:23) acknowledges that Moltmann's faith and theology have grown out of an awareness of this verse's significance. When he was shifted to Camp Norton in the autumn of 1946 Moltmann was given an opportunity to study theology and, in 1947, some of those prisoners of war students were invited to attend the inaugural International Student Christian Movement conference. Moltmann (2008:5) claims that this event turned his life upside down. He maintains that even though the experiences of the war camp initially caused a disintegration of the certainties in his life, in the midst of such uncertainty he found hope through Christianity. Moltmann (2008:6) gives a reflection that it was this hope that rescued him from spiritual and psychological despair, ensuring that he survived the temptation simply to give up. Thus, in the end he started searching for truth and meaning of his experiences.

When the war was over, Moltmann returned to his home in Hamburg. As a result of his reading the Bible and theological texts in the POW camps and attending the Student Christian Movement conference with a group of POWs, Moltmann decided to pursue theological training. He received his doctorate from the University of Göttingen, under the direction of Otto Weber. From there, he was the Pastor of the Evangelical Church of Bremen Wasserhost. Later on, Moltmann became a theological teacher at an academy in Wuppertal that was operated by the Confessing Church and in 1963 he joined the theological faculty of Bonn University. He was appointed professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen and remained there until his retirement. From this period, Moltmann was a member of the Faith and Order Committee of the World Council of Churches. Again, he was also the Robert W. Woodruff Distinguished Visiting Professor of Systematic Theology at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Moltmann won the 2000 Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion for his book *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. He married the feminist theologian Elisabeth Wendel and they have four daughters (Moltmann 2008:321).

Basically, Moltmann's personal experience with suffering, loss and the urging of the Holy Spirit planted the seeds of an eschatology of hope that has changed the theological construct of many decades. Moltmann presents a personally applicable view of Christianity and the hope embodied in the suffering of Christ, as well as how God relates to that suffering in a way that is unprecedented. Gerald (Park 2000:10) says that Moltmann delivers a Christology of suffering that engenders the presence of God, during the suffering of humanity, be it political, social or psychological. Furthermore, he contends that Moltmann's theology of hope, offered through the suffering, crucified and resurrected Christ opens the door to hope regardless of the level of suffering and knowledge that God understands, participates in and embraces the individual's suffering.

Moreover Meeks (1973: xiii) says that Moltmann's theology has opened up a new era of theological reflection and has pointed the way to new options in the practice of Christian faith. In addition, he contends that Moltmann understands theology as a science which assists Christians in dwelling in the particular memories and promises of the past as they focus on what God has promised in his future in order to transform the present in correspondence to that future (Meeks 1973: xiii). At this stage, it is important to take a survey of the phases of Moltmann's theology and contributions to the field of theology.

3.3 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PHASES OF MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY

The following overview serves as an introduction to the extent to which Moltmann, as a young man, experienced various important life-changing events after as a prisoner of war. Each of these phases had a profound impact upon him and had exerted a broad influence on his succeeding life and work. According to Kjølsvik (2013:162) Moltmann's theology is characterized by various phases which can be summarized as follows:

3.3.1 The early phase

The first work of Moltmann's early phase was his doctoral dissertation on 'Predestination and History of Revelation' written in 1952. This work has never been published but a short version appeared as an article in the *Journal of Church History* in 1954. Kjølsvik (2013:162) says that everything Moltmann wrote in his early phase has a historical orientation with a clear Evangelical-Reformed character and a clear systematic-theological potential. The most works in this early phase are: *The Church in the*

Horizon of the Lordship of Christ (1959), Predestination and Perseverance (1961) and Beginnings of Dialectical Theology I-II (1962-1963). Furthermore, Kjølsvik (2013:162) indicates that the early phase is marked by a great admiration of Karl Barth and Otto Weber, but later on Moltmann writes independently, as a dogmatic theologian with new ideas.

In this early phase, Moltmann is described as the 'Younger Moltmann'. The publication of his work on eschatology, the *Theology of Hope* in 1964, made him to become famous of which he rounded off this principal phase in his theological production of eschatology with the publication on *The Coming of God*. In addition to the above stated works, Moltmann published other books on *The Crucified God* and the *The Church in the Spirit*. The most important controlling theological idea in Moltmann's early phase and work is his dialectical interpretation of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, which is then subsumed into the particular form of Trinitarianism that becomes the overarching theological principle of his later work (Kjølsvik 2013:162).

3.3.2 The transitional phase

The younger Moltmann can be located in the years between 1964-75. During this phase, he wrote on a number of issues but there was little that is creative in theological terms. Moltmann gives the impression of not being content and at peace with himself (Kjølsvik 2013:163). Another important event in this period was the encounter with the Rumanian Orthodox Professor Dumitru Staniloae. Their conversations provided the impetus for the development of Trinitarian doctrine. The most important books in the transitional phase are: *A Christian Declaration on Human Rights (1977), The Future of Creation (1977) and Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine (1979).*

Kjølsvik (2013:163) observes that one expression of the transition from the younger to the older Moltmann is a change in methodology. He clarifies that the methodology of the younger Moltmann had a dialectical character and looked at the whole of theology from one focal point: first the resurrection and revelation, then the cross and the suffering and finally the Spirit and the church (Kjølsvik 2013:163) while the intermediary phase is unclear and vague, without any specific methodology. However, it was in 1980 that something new happened to Moltmann. He developed new Trinitarian metaphors and ways of thinking. In this period, he published the work entitled: *The Trinity and the Kingdom (1981), God in Creation (1985), The way of Jesus Christ (1989), The Spirit of life (1991).*

(Kjølsvik (2013:163) says that it is extremely difficult to overlook his contribution when Trinitarian theology, eco-theology and eschatological issues are discussed.

3.3.3 The retirement phase

In the retirement phase, Moltmann published a number of books which are entitled: *Experiences in Theology* in 1999*, In the End - the Beginnings* (2003*), Hope in God* (2005)*, A Broad place - An Autobiography* (2008), *Sun of Righteousness* (2010), *Ethics of Hope* (2011) and *Then come, that we see Open Spaces* (2011) (Kjølsvik 2013:164). Indeed, these are the fruits of a long theological life, expressed in a shorter and more easily understood form than in earlier books. In a nutshell Kjølsvik (2013:164) confirms that the pastoral voice is clearer in these books and they display a maturity everywhere, very different from the transitional period.

According to Bauckham (2005:149), there are three key methodological principles of Moltmann's theology. First, is that his theology is always 'public theology', or 'theology for the Kingdom of God', addressing not only the church but also the world beyond the church and carried on in a pluralistic context of common concern for and dialogue about the world. Second, is the orientation of theology both to praxis and to doxology. Bauckham (2005:149) points out that Moltmann became dissatisfied with seeing theology purely 'a theory of no practice' and began to inject elements of contemplation, celebration and doxology. Third, Moltmann's theology is characterized by its openness to dialogue. He resists the idea of creating a theological system which is dormant and he stresses to contribute to the continuing discussion within an ecumenical community of theologians, which itself must be in touch with the wider life and thinking of the churches, the sufferings and hopes of the world (Bauckham 2005:149). His theology is open to dialogue with other academic disciplines, including especially the sciences. In biographical terms, this openness to dialogue has made Moltmann's theological development a journey into unknown and often surprising territory.

As is well known, many labels have been applied to Moltmann's theology such as: 'theology of hope', 'eschatology', 'dialectical theology', 'theology of the cross', 'political theology', 'liberation theology', 'Trinitarian theology', 'eco-theology', 'Reformed theology and ecumenical theology'. Furthermore Kjølsvik (2013:165) says that Moltmann's theology expresses words of hope that the human person and the work of creation will be recreated in the future, a hope that is based on God's promises and on the resurrection from the dead of the crucified Jesus Christ.

On the same view Bauckham (2005:151) concludes that Moltmann's theology of hope opens the church to the world as well as to the future. The reality of this understanding is that the future is always new and contains something that we do not guess beforehand, something that changes us. It opens us to the reality that both society and every individual will be something other than we are now. This is a Jewish and Christian idea and derives from God's promise to Abraham that he would become the father of a large people and that the people would receive a holy land.

Bearing in mind that the primary interest of this chapter is to examine the concept of God in the context of suffering, the key focus will be on Moltmann's two major books: the *Theology of hope* (1967) and *The Crucified God* (1974). The two books are generally regarded as the most significant and influential works of Moltmann because they lay a good foundation of the idea of a suffering God and God who is in communion. This assessment will be chiefly concerned with studying the way in which Moltmann argues that the crucifixion of Jesus was a Trinitarian event in which all three persons of the Godhead participate in their bearing toward the suffering of the world. Thus, this discussion will demonstrate that what Moltmann contributes to the theological discussion in the contentious area of divine suffering is connected with the human suffering in Africa. The limitation of this study is that its focus is confined to the notion of the suffering God and its implication to the understanding of human suffering in Africa. In short, it is Moltmann's conviction that the Bible shows God to be the God of hope, calling his people to live in anticipation of the fulfilment of his covenant promises (Moltmann, 1967:105). At the same time, Moltmann shows that the God of hope also suffers with his people.

3.4 MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE

Moltmann's theology of hope originated from an observation that the world in turmoil as it was during that time could not be deemed 'very good'. Like many intellectuals of his era, Moltmann's understanding of the brokenness and suffering in the world was not merely theoretical. From his personal experiences of imprisonment, humiliation and exploitation as a POW during the Second World War, he developed a sense of solidarity with the oppressed and the suffering that shared their hope for freedom. According to Kjølsvik (2013:159) Moltmann saw prisoners who collapsed because they had no hope. He himself was given a Bible and he found that it gave him hope and supplied words for his own experiences. Although Moltmann was in conversation with many of the politically

revolutionary movements of his day and later with the emerging liberationist theologies, his work should not be confused with the limited utopianisms of those political movements.

Bauckham (2005:152) attributes Moltmann's initial source of theology to his initial experience of God's grace as a prisoner of war. The encounter marked the beginning of his understanding of God's saving hope as God was made visible in his life through this experience. Out of this experience Moltmann experienced God as the power and source of hope during suffering. Furthermore, Bauckham (1995:31) says that Moltmann's theology of hope was deliberately engaging critically with the modern world. He wished to show how the modern experience of history as a process of constant and radical change, in hopeful search of a new future.

3.4.1 Historical and social context

According to Moltmann hope is built from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul alludes to this idea in Colossians (1:27) when he says that 'Christ is our hope'. Moltmann (1967:18) explains that the resurrection of Christ is the first indication that all things were made possible through him and he is the only one who can transform the thoughts of humanity. Moltmann claims that the resurrection of the dead was a way forward expressing belief in the righteousness of God which cannot be limited even by death. This is because a person's hope, longing and desires, once awakened by specific promises, stretch further than any kind of physical fulfilment that can be experienced. At the time of writing the theology of hope in the mid-1960s, Moltmann (1967:15) contends that hope had departed the church and was moved and inspired to conceptualize a theory that would reignite hope within the church.

For Meeks (1973:4) the historical and social context of the theology of hope is an important key to understanding Moltmann's new emphasis on the eschatological mode of theology. Like many other repatriated Germans returning after 1945 from war theatres and prisoner of war camps into the 'zero point' of German history, Moltmann found, despite the shambles of post-war Germany, hope for creating new forms of social, economic and political justice in a transformed society. Such hope was soon mixed with varying degrees of disappointment and despair as the process of new creation assumed the characteristics of the restoration of the old forms. Moltmann (1967:23) points out that despair is the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God. He argues that the pain of despair surely lies in the fact that hope is there, but no one opens up towards its

fulfilment. With the currency reform of 1948, the whole nation seemed to enter into a new cooperation of 'catching up' after three decades of disaster. Meeks (1973:4) indicates that the prevailing mood was marked by suspicion of all ideologies and utopias, out of which arose an ideology of maintenance and a utopia of the status quo and everywhere a penetrating sense of apathy for the future. Furthermore, he says that the prevailing theologies of the late forties and fifties, served the concentration of energy and concern in the present, but they were peculiarly ineffective in showing the 'unseasonable' critical nature of the Christian message for present culture. Nor were they able to show that Christian faith is related to the real determination of human history (Meeks 1973:5).

In this social and ecclesiastical context, the younger generation of theologians began to feel uneasy with the old theological polarities of academic theology which had survived the war. It was in this context that Moltmann provided a genuinely new theological conceptuality on the basis of which the church and theology could enter into a relevant dialogue with these future-oriented movements. For Moltmann (1974:7) Christian theology is compelled to reveal its own unique identity, for relevance is actual only on the grounds of experienced and believed identity.

Motmann (1974:7) himself says:

> We may want to make Christian theology reveal that it is Christian but this cannot be done in abstract and timeless terms or from the mere desire for self-assertion. It has a definable and circumscribed place amongst modern problems. The Christian life of theologians, churches and human beings is faced more than ever today with a double crisis: the crisis of relevance and the crisis of identity.

In an officially optimistic society theology will have to create a critical theory if it wants to relate the God of whom it speaks for the sake of Jesus Christ to present reality. It was against this background of the ineffectiveness of prevailing theologies to speak of God on the basis of Christian origins and to speak to the modern historical nature of a society that is more and more made captive to its own products and progress that Moltmann appropriated the biblical-systematic and philosophical materials for a new theology as eschatology (Meeks 1973:13). Moltmann argues that "we need to rethink the place and prominence of eschatology in Christian theology." Far from being a 'loosely attached appendix' of 'obscure irrelevancies' that concludes a systematic presentation of theology, eschatology is of vital importance for the whole of Christian existence (Moltmann 1967:15-16). This is because eschatology concerns 'the doctrine of the Christian hope', a hope that is firmly grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In *The Theology of Hope* Moltmann discusses different ways in which eschatology and revelation have been conceived by theologians.

3.4.2 Eschatology and revelation

The theme of eschatology is by no means unique to Moltmann's theology. Hope, eschatology, promise, the future, the resurrection, the cross - from any particular perspective, any one of these subjects might be considered the comprehensive designation of or undeniable key to the theology of hope (Meeks 1973:2). After crediting Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer with the discovery of the central significance of eschatology for the message and existence of Jesus and early Christianity, Moltmann (1967:37-40) proceeds to discuss some ways in which this discovery has taken some wrong turns. One of the primary ways in which the study of eschatology has got off track is by adhering too closely to the thought forms of Greek minds, which sees in the logos the epiphany of the eternal presence of being and finds the truth in that. In Moltmann's view, this is entirely contrary to the real language of Christian eschatology, which rather consists "in the hope-giving word of promise" (Moltmann 1967:41). Indeed, Moltmann thinks it was the adoption and adaptation of an Aristotelian conception of reason and nature which made theological talk of revelation increasingly irrelevant for humanity's knowledge of reality (Moltmann 1967:44).

In this discussion Moltmann uses the term 'transcendental eschatology' to refer to those who have embraced such (in one way or another). These include Immanuel Kant, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann (Moltmann 1967:45-69). Kant essentially viewed eschatological knowledge as impossible since the objects of such knowledge lie wholly beyond his field of vision. In the case of Barth, his super-temporal view of God led him to embrace a concept of both the *eschaton* and of revelation that was more of an 'epiphany of the eternal present' than an '*apocalypse* of the promised future' (Moltmann 1967:57). Finally, Moltmann says that Bultmann, like Kant, could not conceive of eschatology as a doctrine of the last things in the world process. Instead, the *logos* of the *eschaton* becomes the means of liberating us from understanding ourselves on the basis of the world and of works (Moltmann 1967:62).

Moltmann discusses some of the weaknesses with what he terms 'progressive revelation' and the eschatology of salvation history, as well as the idea of 'history' as an indirect self-revelation of God (Moltmann 1967:69-84). The latter notion, based on the work of Pannenberg and others, Moltmann views as promising but ultimately still too wedded to concepts derived from an unbiblical Greek cosmic theology. In the final section of this chapter, therefore, Moltmann (1967:84-94) discloses his

own approach to the eschatology of revelation. Rejecting the notion of revelation as an 'epiphany of the eternal present' Moltmann argues that the revelation of the risen Christ necessitates a view of revelation as apocalypse of the promised future of the truth. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus reveal to us the 'promise of his still future glory and lordship' (Moltmann 1967:85). In other words, Moltmann relates eschatology and revelation by means of the notion of promise. Moltmann thus presents us with a much more dynamic (as opposed to static) conception of God, revelation, time, history and future for which we can confidently hope, because it is grounded in the promises of God.

3.4.3 Promise and history

In this book, *'The Theology of hope',* Moltmann attempts to understand and elaborate upon the concept of promise and its relation to history, especially as this can be discerned in the theology of the Old Testament. Moltmann (1967:100) argues that the revelational appearances of God in the Old Testament are properly understood in terms of the promises he makes and the future to which they point. These promises, says Moltmann, may receive numerous fulfilments throughout the history of God's people. Far from the initial fulfilment being the end of the matter, it is actually understood as a confirmation and expansion of the original promise (Moltmann 1967:105).

It is the judgement of Moltmann that God and history must be conceived in dialectical relation. According to Moltmann if Christian theology is to have a proper concept of God it must think historically since for Israel there was a dialectical interplay between God and history. Hence, Moltmann (1967:107) says, "The experience of reality as history was made possible for Israel by the fact that God was revealed to Israel in his promises and that Israel saw the revealing of God again and again in the uttering of his promises.'' The promise of God opened up history for Israel and controlled all its experiences. Hence, it is because of this understanding that history is a peculiarly Hebrew phenomenon.

Basically, there is a deep connection that exists between history, the promises of God and eschatology when looking at Moltmann's theology of hope. The promises of God disclose the horizons of history, whereas the key theological concepts which define the future are the notion of divine promise, the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus as promised and the understanding of history as a mission (Moltmann 1967:107). In Moltmann's theology history plays an important role, but he also radically reframes and deconstructs history. In other words, Moltmann reframes hope through key historical

events. Historically, the experience of reality for Israel was revealed in God's promises (Moltmann 1967:107). Although history deals with texts, witnesses, fragments it keeps the hoping person focused on the possibilities latent in the future. In this regard Moltmann suggests that since biblical history contains the promises of God it is through these promises that people hope in God (Moltmann 1967:110).

The history that is suggested by Moltmann is symbolic and mythical in that the stories are more important than facts and in this case the stories will then force the hopeless people to consider new possibilities, which can be interpreted as hope (Moltmann 1967:119). The stories referred to in this case are the stories of the Old and New Testament of Yahweh and Jesus Christ fulfilling these promises. For Moltmann knowing God entails recognizing him in his historic faithfulness towards the promises he made to all people (Moltmann 1967:103-105). It is, however, in both the Old and New Testament that God is recognized as the God who promises and whose faithfulness guarantees the fulfilment of what has been promised in history (Moltmann 1967:167). The resurrection of Christ is then not to be viewed as a historical event, but as a history-making event in which all other historical events are called in question and through the resurrection people hope for the future. Within all experiences of history, the important events for Christian eschatology and the future are the experiences of persecution, false accusation, suffering and martyrdom which help to strengthen our hope in Christ since Christ has already experienced all these ills (Moltmann 1967:181). To Moltmann's credit his *Theology of Hope* took the realistic view of hope as core to history. It is important to note that Moltmann views the resurrection of Jesus as the anchor of hope in history and there is a bridge between universal expectations and personal hope.

Perhaps from this point of view the same principles and ideas of Moltmann on history and hope could be applied to the situation in Africa. It appears that Christian hope does not allow humans to resign themselves to despair in the face of unchangeable situations and brute facts, instead hope points people ahead to the horizons of new possibilities (Moltmann 1967:209). He suggests that hope is to be embraced with the happiness of the present, as hope pronounces the poor blessed and relieves the weary and heavy-laden (Moltmann 1967:17). Following these ideas, it can be said that expectation makes life bearable and good, for in expectation a person can accept his/her whole present and can find joy in the pain, because in the promises of God hope can see future (Moltmann 1967:18).

3.4.4 Resurrection and the future of Jesus Christ

In this topic, Moltmann moves to a consideration of promise and its relation to history, as it is presented in the New Testament. As the chapter title of his book indicates, he is particularly keen to discern the historical and eschatological significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how it relates to God's promise of the future. Concerning this subject, Moltmann (1967:163) writes that the resurrection of Jesus has set in motion an eschatologically determined process of history, whose goal is the annihilation of death in the victory of the life of the resurrection and which ends in that righteousness in which God receives in all things his due and the creature thereby finds its salvation. It is an extraordinary vision of the future and one that fuels the church's passion for accomplishing its mission to the nations (Moltmann 1967:166). On the other side, it also raises the question of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Is it even possible for such an event to be proven by means of the historical method? Moltmann (1967:224-29) concludes this lengthy discussion with a brief summary and review of some of his key points. Here he reminds the church that Christian eschatology is really all about the person and work of Christ and the promises of God in him.

According to Moltmann, a promise is a declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist. Thus, promise sets man's heart on a future history in which the fulfilling of the promise is to be expected. Divine promise refers to the promises made by the God of Israel to the people of the Old Testament. In those days, there were two cultures. First, there was the sedentary agrarian people whose livelihood depended on favourable weather and the perennial pattern of seasons. Second, there were the nomadic people who tended their livestock and moved from place to place. The agrarian people worshipped many deities to stave off bad weather and to protect their crops. God chose to reveal himself to the nomadic people and make promises to them. In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham abundant land, blessings and many descendants. The fact that the God of Israel chose to reveal himself to the people and respond to the needs of the people indicates that God acted in history and changed history (Moltmann 1967:224).

God's promises were nearly all fulfilled in the Old Testament: Abraham had many descendants; God stayed with them during their forty-year wandering in the desert and they entered the promised land. The story of Jesus is also one of divine revelation and divine promise, of working in history and responding to the needs of the people in a manner similar to the God of Israel. In particular, the resurrection of Jesus is central to Moltmann's theology of hope.

What is implied by this focus on the future does not mean Christians must withdraw from the world in the hope that a better world will somehow evolve, but rather it is a call to active participation in the world in order to assist in creating that better world. McIntyre (2010:5) argues that most theologians would not agree with this concept of active participation, since some Reformed theologians would go with Karl Barth's understanding of God as Sovereign and hence possessing power over everything. Christ's resurrection creates a history and future where death no longer has the final claim on human life. In 1 Corinthians 15:19 Paul views Christ's resurrection as the source of true hope which is different to life as it is presently experienced.

The resurrection of Christ, when viewed as a promise, directs the believer towards an eschatological future in which God is believed to be creating a better life for those in Christ (McIntyre 2010:5). According to Moltmann (1967:106) the person who gives a promise has a large bearing on the hope to attain the promises since the reality of the fulfilment of the promises lie in the credibility of the one giving the promise. In Moltmann's theology of hope it is God who gives promises and develops hope through Jesus Christ as shown in history. However, the Old Testament shows a different picture since many of the prophet's words about the future, especially political predictions, did not come to pass in the way they were originally meant (Moltmann 1967:97). God's raising of the crucified Christ remains a central Christian symbol of hope in the midst of suffering and oppression throughout history. Christian communities have found sustenance and strength in the memory of God's act. The reason why hope is so important and should be in the very center of Christianity is because Christian faith is based on the raising of the crucified Christ and basically lives from it. This, on the other hand, points to the promises of the universal future of Christ. Together with the understanding of hope, Moltmann shifts eschatology back to the heart of Christianity where the future is part of the promises of God and should be left open for Christ to fulfil everything (Moltmann 1967:16).

3.4.5 Eschatology and history

One of the key frames of reference used by Moltmann in his work to describe hope is eschatology, in which Moltmann calls for the realization of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of mankind and the socializing of humanity in which the church would exercise its healing responsibly in the modern society (Moltmann 1967:329). According to him (1967:12) eschatology starts with the resurrection of Christ where God opened the future for everyone through the crucifixion. In Moltmann's rationalization (1967:210), Christian eschatology speaks of Christ and understands history

as the reality instituted by the promises of God. In light of this, the as yet unrealized future God has promised stands in contradiction with the present reality. All these ideas point to the fact that what happened in the past plays a role in the present and the future, further emphasizing the importance of history.

From the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Moltmann views God to be present in suffering and this becomes his departure point in anticipating the future. Eschatology therefore is not to be understood as 'vertical' infringement of eternity into time, but it has to do rather with 'horizontal' horizon of God's future, the world's present and the way that future impact the present (Moltmann 1967:192). In this case eschatology defines the promises of God to all creation, a promise that is the measure of all that would claim the name Christianity. Moltmann (1967:16) further writes:

> Eschatology is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah. Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation of every Christian existence and of the whole church.

Moltmann proceeds to demonstrate how eschatology serves to define all Christian life and thought by offering an eschatological interpretation of revelation with history as core to the present and future. History is essential in eschatology as it shows how God's embracing promises have been fulfilled through time.

According to Moltmann (1967:234) new hope is formulated through historical experiences and the promises of the expected future, which he referred to as creation out of nothing, whereby Christ's resurrection opened the future to new promises of Christ's presence in His people's lives. In this case, the creation out of nothing means creation of new life from the death of Christ. The future and what to expect in the future will be based on the new creation through the resurrection of Christ (Moltmann1967:18). Hope in the true Sovereign God and the history of humanity constitutes the central subject of the Bible, with the reality of pain, amazement, death and life.

Eschatology, as an orientation of theological perspective, can only hold together Christ's victory as the promissory ground of both the Christian faith and its future consummation and as Moltmann (1967:18) puts it:

> Christ's future is not one single point in an absolute remoteness for which we are to wait, a mere coming event. This is hardly thinkable, for we would probably all go to sleep over it. Christ's future is now, or it is not at all... The Saviour is coming. He is not sitting on some celestial throne, resting somewhere in eternity, waiting for some particular time before he acts or a certain moment when he will suddenly plunge in. The coming of the Saviour runs like a thread throughout history, through God's working in the world (Matt. 28:20).

Therefore, the notion of Christ being continually presented as the coming one is a complex eschatological truth in which Christ's life, death and resurrection, among other aspects, lead to the restoration of all things. As stated before, Christian communities have historically found sustenance and strength in the memory of God's act of love during Calvary. With all these facts, God's raising of the crucified Christ remains a central Christian symbol of hope in the midst of suffering and oppression which has been expressed as hopelessness in the case the African post-colonial context.

In order to understand Moltmann's eschatology it makes sense to begin with personal hope, and move to historical hope and finally to the hope of the world (Moltmann 1967:189). Moltmann places Christian eschatology at the center of his theology of hope and in so doing makes explicit connections between politics and Christian theology. For Moltmann the object of theology is God, people exist because of God and we cannot speak of ourselves without God (Moltmann 1985:79). Moltmann's theology of hope seeks a transformation of the present as he sees this transformation of the present as social and holistic in nature because it is framed in terms of the kingdom of God.

3.4.6 Exodus Church

If the Christian community is a society characterized by a future hope which is based on the resurrection of Jesus, then how should this community conduct itself in the world? This is the question which Moltmann attempts to answer in the final chapter of his book. The title 'Exodus Church' is meant to focus attention on the reality of Christianity as that of the 'pilgrim people of God' as described in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Moltmann 1967:304). Moltmann begins by noting that, unlike classical and premodern societies, modern society has been almost entirely emancipated from any religious center. Men are thus related to one another primarily as producers and consumers of economic goods and services (Moltmann 1967:308). He (1967:311) points out that religion (including Christianity) is privatized with the result that Christianity is dismissed from the integrating center of

modern society and relieved of its duty of having to represent the highest goal of society.

Moltmann (1967:311-16) considers three ways in which Christianity has been influenced and shaped by these circumstances: 'the cult of the new subjectivity', 'the cult of co-humanity' and 'the cult of the institution'. Although something good can be said about each of these reactions, Moltmann ultimately rejects all of them as socially inadequate. He contends that these forms of Christianity simply do not impact society in the radical way that it ought.

So, what does Moltmann envision as the true vocation and calling of the church in the world? In this view Moltmann (1967:338) suggests that it is primarily Christians that are supposed to expend themselves unrestrainedly and unreservedly in love and in the work of the reconciliation of the world with God and his future. Whatever their calling or station in life they are to be creatively involved and engaged in this mission that is, not only intended to transform the lives of individuals, but of institutions, communities and the world as well. In conclusion, Moltmann states that this is an age of diaspora, of sowing in hope, of self-surrender and sacrifice, for it is an age which stands within the horizon of a new future. Thus, self-expenditure in this world, day to day love in hope, becomes possible and becomes human within that horizon of expectation which transcends this world.

3.5 RELEVANCE OF MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE FOR THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

The hopelessness described in chapter 1 concerning the challenges in Africa could be equated to the situation and experience of Moltmann. This section, in particular, reflects on whether Moltmann's theology of hope can provide a motivation for social transformation in post-colonial Africa. As it was indicated in the first chapter, the continent of Africa faces a number of challenges and this research project suggests that Moltmann's theology of hope is a necessary ingredient in the efforts towards a social transformation in Africa. Katongole (2017:12) makes the assertion that there is no more urgent theological task today than to provide an account of hope in Africa, given its endless cycles of violence, war, poverty and displacement.

According to Palm (2012:8) we live in an age of despair and hopelessness because of suffering and pain. Furthermore, he argues that the church cannot ignore the impact of distress and suffering. The church cannot remain deaf to the cries of the people especially of the humble and the poor. There is a massive breakdown of morality in the villages and cities. The streets are filled with homeless and handicapped people. There is widespread prostitution because of poverty. When people hear about bad

news on TVs and newspapers they become discouraged and depressed because bad news has a negative effect on the emotions and the state of mind. They feel overwhelmed and lose hope. They lose the will to keep on doing good or even to keep on praying. They may lose their faith that God is at work in the world (O'Donovan 2006:3). For example, the recent stories of ritual killings reported in Lusaka (Zambia) by the Minister of Home Affairs (Mr. Steven Kampyongo) between 21st October, 2017 and 24th February 2018 bring the problem of crime in the city into harsh focus. The Minister's report revealed that all the victims in the seven cases had been males aged between twenty-five and forty years old. Worse enough, all the victims in the suspected ritual killings had been found with chests ripped open and some internal body parts missing. In the same development, Zambia Police recovered suspected cooked human hearts, livers and other uncooked body parts reported on 1st March, 2018 (Kampyongo 2018: 1).

We have already discussed in the first chapter that most of the cities in Africa are crowded, dirty, dangerous, impersonal and unfriendly. There is trash, disease, crime and a general lack of concern by people on the street for the welfare of one another. There are helpless handicapped people begging to survive and homeless people hoping for a hand-out. There is materialism, pride, lust, greed and selfish indifference instead of the gentle, supportive community the young person knew at home. There is hypocrisy, dishonesty, deception, corruption and tribalism at the workplace (O'Donovan 2006:4).

Palm (2012:10) points out that many of the organizations that have come to Africa have been accused of promoting a form of 'cheap hope' that ends merely in disappointment and an inability to cope with the depths of the despair people face. In the areas of social, economic and political issues Africa is probably hurting the most.

In assessing the foundation of Moltmann's theology of hope for those who suffer, his work shows that God is depicted as the God of hope. As indicated above, the message of hope was proclaimed by Moltmann in a time when hope was still in the air, a time of hopelessness and despair. From its genesis Moltmann's theology of hope had the bold ambitions of restoring hope to the church (Moltmann 1967:15). It was Moltmann's conviction that the Bible shows God to be the God of hope. For Moltmann, the whole of creation longs for the renewal by the God of hope. Empowered by this hope, the Christian's response should include the mission of the church to all nations, the hunger for righteousness in the world and love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. The

church should therefore be seen as the people of hope, who continually experience the God who is present in his promises. The coming kingdom provides the church with a much broader view of reality than merely a private vision of personal salvation. The coming kingdom also creates a confronting and transforming vision of the mission of the church as the people of God.

In Moltmann's mind one of the first senses in which this happens is in the missionary proclamation of the gospel, that no corner of this world should remain without God's promise of new creation through the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Moltmann 1967:328). Again, it is depicted by Moltmann (1967:327) that the Christian church which follows Christ's mission to the world is engaged also in following Christ's service to the world. Its existence is completely bound to the fulfilling of its service. For this reason, Moltmann says that the church is nothing in itself, but all that it is, is in existing for others (Moltmann 1967:327). It is in this context that the church has a socio-economic scope because it must act in practical solidarity with the poor. A close analysis of the signs of hope depicted by Moltmann show how the governments, the church and non-governmental organizations should work towards helping the people in Africa to soldier on regardless of the hopeless situations.

For Africa, Moltmann's concepts of hope could provide a powerful impulse with which the people can joyfully and confidently anticipate a future with Christ at the centre of all experiences. This would imply a change of focus as people would no longer base their trust in political leaders but in Christ to bring hope, reconciliation and unity amongst his people. For example, rather than reconciliation becoming an agent of political hope in Africa, it could become an agent of true hope which works at uniting political leaders, church leaders and other bodies for the benefit of the poor. Whilst Moltmann (1974:202) seems to suggest that God's love finds fulfilment through suffering, it is as if he views suffering as a value in itself. However, Moltmann (1974:45) argues that suffering is a means for hoping towards a good ending. In other words, hope can emerge from suffering and for Moltmann it was through his encounter with God's love at a point in his life when the Second World War devastated him. In the dark moments, God is identified personally with people suffering from injustice or people dying without ever having had hope of a better life in this world.

In a continent caught up in pain and suffering, full of broken relationships that yearn for peace, dignity, equality, love and reconciliation, people need a message of hope. For Christians especially, to talk about a God who created the world requires that one addresses the problem of suffering. The history of

many African countries today shows a similar situation to Moltmann's experience of suffering. The poor are easily attracted and fooled by the promises of the governments because in the midst of suffering people are always desperately seeking for solutions. By relying on earthly agents of hope, people participate in a history which ends in despair because the process itself delivers no lasting victories. Now, how are we to regard the connection between Moltmann's theology of hope and the African context of suffering?

3.5.1 Stirring political engagement in Africa

Whilst Moltmann in his theology of hope does not directly address a political phenomenon, it is important to note that he is addressing aspects of suffering directly related to political, social and economic factors. His theology is unashamedly political as evidenced in the claim that the God of the poor, the peasant and the slave has always been the poor, suffering, unprotected Christ (Moltmann 1974:45). The powerful are those who can distance themselves from the harshest realities that the world has to offer while the poor have no recourse to the power and resources of the world, particularly the world of modern technological society. Moltmann is well aware that 'the mysticism of suffering' can be easily perverted into a justification of suffering itself. Nevertheless Moltmann (1974:48) argues that Christ's suffering and rejection experienced on the cross gives the poor a message of hope. Moltmann (1974:252) maintains that God's redeeming love has ensured that the bitterness of all human loneliness and rejection has been taken into God's being through the experience of the crucified Christ. In the cross of the crucified Son, God is 'vulnerable'; he takes suffering and death upon himself in order to heal, to liberate and to impart his eternal life. The task for the church as Moltmann conceives it in his political theology is to enter the social realm but not to lose its identity as the Christian church (Moltmann 1999:136-137).

In Moltmann's perspective a passion for life stirs political engagement. This perspective is motivated by the fact that Jesus' salvation mission did not just end with the confrontation of spiritual evil forces but also what enslaved the poor socio-economically and politically. According to Banda (2016:108), the great concern is that the church in Africa is afraid to confront these destructive forces that have affected the poor, the powerless and the marginalized. Furthermore, Banda says that the poor and powerless succumb to agents of death such as starvation and crime because there is no one to speak on their behalf. According to Moltmann (1978:20) when the church becomes insensitive to the pain and hurt of the poor, the marginalized and the powerless it ultimately neglects its own life. The continent of

Africa is in crisis and the church must take a leading role in the provision of the needed solace. For Moltmann (1967:327) the Christian church has not been called to serve humanity in order that this world may remain what it is, or may be preserved in the state in which it is, but in order that it may transform itself and become what it is promised to be.

Furthermore Moltmann (1967:329) says that unnerving as it may be, the threats to life usefully provide the church an opportunity to review itself and find its life-loving and life-promoting messianic bearings. This means that the message of hope in Africa can help to empower the church with resources for prevailing over the insecurities it encounters in this world. As we have already noted, the bearing that empowers the church to respond meaningfully to the crises that barrage it is one that takes into account the message of the crucified God. This hope and expectation also sets its stamp on life, action and suffering in the history of society. The message of hope in the crucified God has a polemic and liberating relation not only to the religions and ideologies of men, but still more to the factual, practical life of men and to the relationships in which this life is lived (Moltmann 1967:330).

For this reason, the church in Africa must not just be concerned about its own life but also to address the conditions that affect God's people to suffer. This requires that the church as a community of hope be passionate about life. In Moltmann's terms, eschatological hope is not escapist but an engagement of the world in order to transform it. Moltmann (1967:191) declares that the resurrection hope of Christ encourages us to commit ourselves to a love for life everywhere and at all times because it allows us to look for the universal victory of life beyond death. To this he adds that the love for life against death here is a wonderful resonance of the future of eternal life there (Moltmann 1967:191). In other words, the hope for eternal life in the continent of Africa must translate into a culture of loving life in the here and now life, protecting it from all destructive forces and doing everything to ensure that the poor are liberated and empowered to experience abundant life.

Moltmann (1967:20-22) says that to believe means to cross in hope and anticipation the bounds that have been penetrated by the raising of the crucified. Moltmann understands Christian faith as essentially hope for the future of man and this earth promised by the God of the exodus and the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. The coming God of the biblical tradition is identified as the power at the 'front' of history rather than 'above' it. The promise of God is the propelling force of history, awakening hope, which keeps men unreconciled to present experience, sets them in contradiction to

current natural and social powers, makes the church a constant disturbance in human society (Woodbridge 2009:108). By keeping history in eschatological process, God's all-embracing promise, far from robbing man of freedom and his historical initiative, makes possible creative discipleship in an incomplete world. A hermeneutic of hope in God's promise must necessarily be a political hermeneutic. It does not have to focus merely on the proclamation of the word or in a new self-understanding, but also on the hermeneutic of Christian mission (Moltmann 1967:272).

3.5.2 Calling for a communal vision in African society

In Africa, the issues of governance, provisions, respect, dignity, caring and sharing are considered critical values that build African communities. The fundamentals of sharing are prevalent in African communities. In this way, in order for a person to be identified as a true African, community and communality are substantive prerequisites. Communalism and collectivism are essential to the spirit of the African beliefs. Traditionally African societies tend to be cohesive and productive, working together as one family in their social grouping. However, the present situation partly reflects the great difference between the core values of traditional Africa and the core values of post-colonial Africa adopted in many cities. O'Donovan (2006:57) points out clearly that in this post-colonial Africa core values of individualism and privacy have little regard for the welfare and needs of people living right next door. He has indicated that life in the city is often just the opposite. If a person is not part of an extended community of his or her own people in the city, a person can feel cut off from everything. Isolation, loneliness, despair, insecurity and instability are evidences that there has been a serious loss of things that really matter. The effects of these changes can be deadly in individual lives. The result of this situation is a growing crisis of poverty in the cities. Modernity and the acceptance of Western culture have brought serious problems to many people in Africa. However, a social vision of hope offers an alternative to our communal life in Africa.

It is generally recognized today that the New Testament regards the church as the 'community' of eschatological salvation and accordingly speaks of the gathering in and sending out of the community in terms of a horizon of eschatological expectation. Moltmann (1967:325) reminds the church that the risen Christ calls, sends, justifies and sanctifies men and women, in so doing God gathers, calls and sends them into his eschatological future for the world. Furthermore, he says that the whole body of Christians should be engaged in the apostolate of hope for the world. With the resurrection of Christ, it has to help the church enter into realization that all Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, bond and

free, should come to the obedience of faith and thereby attain to eschatological freedom and human dignity (Moltmann 1967:329).

Tesija (2014:65) says that Moltmann calls all Christians to demonstrate Gods redemptive commitment to the world incarnated in Jesus to anticipate the wider redemptive future which is yet to come. Moltmann's communal vision of hope in God seeks to integrate the individual with the surrounding environment. Since Moltmann suggests that hope can emerge from suffering, hoping in Christ does not mean neglecting the issues of poverty and massive corruption in the society. Moltmann (1967:84) insists on the involvement of Christianity in social life in general because it does not matter who rules; what matters is our responsibility in relation to power and those having no power. Regardless of the type of governance, by setting up Christ on the first place, Christians are called to reject loyalty to authorities and to point persistently to those without rights. If the church identifies with government or, even more, with a particular party and its ideology, then it actually replaces the reign of God with the reign of humans, creation and idols. In these circumstances, the church loses its saltiness and becomes irrelevant in the fight against systems which degrade human values (Tesija 2014:16). On the contrary, the Christian church and Christian theology become relevant in tackling the social problems of the modern world. Moltmann (1967:84) expresses the communal implications of his theology of hope as follows:

> The point is not simply to interpret to the world, history and human relations differently but to change them in the expectation of God's transformation.

In short, Moltmann's call for the realization of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of humanity, the socializing of humanity, peace for all creation is concrete evidence that he is providing something more than a mere rhetoric of change to the church in its effort to exercise its hope responsibly in modern society and in its confrontation with particular issues (Moltmann 1967:329). Basically, his theology was harshly critiqued by the liberation theologians, when he visited South Africa in the 1980's and vowed never to return back, but he did return in 2017 when he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria, and appreciated that there has been a change in how liberation theologians interpreted his work in recent times.

3.6 MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF THE SUFFERING GOD

As discussed above, the events which brought together the converging influences and concerns in Moltmann's theology arises from social, political, economic and diplomatic crises in Western Europe which ultimately led to the two World Wars. The tragic loss of human dignity which took place during the time of war provided the impetus for some Christian theologians to undertake a re-evaluation of the doctrine of God in relation to the violence and suffering of the world. Their work was prompted by the pressing realization that the magnitude of the violence and horror associated with the war and other events provided enough evidence that all was not well with human nature. Moltmann (1974:8) testifies that the struggle for a renewal of theology and the churches began with the realization, which has become widespread and irrefutable, that Christianity faced a growing crisis of relevance and credibility. He states that after a certain period in the post-war years in Western society, the churches and theology faced a crisis of losing contact with the social and political reality of the world around it and in many respects the church had already lost it.

Goetz (1986:385) comments that the talk about God during this time was for many simply inconceivable. "How could God be love and then allow people to get wounded on the battlefields of France?" He argues that the majority of Christians continue to affirm the reality of God. By contrast, God so rarely seems to accomplish his will in the world. So often God's purpose, if it can be discerned, seems to be defeated. Furthermore, he says that actual redemptive presence of God in the world is discerned less in God's taking the sovereign lead in events and more in God's picking up the pieces after history has misfired. Therefore, Goetz (1986:385) contends that without being able to point to clear evidence of the progress of God's holy purpose in human history, the notion that God rules the world through his mighty acts becomes somewhat vacuous.

The brutalities of World War II gave further cause for rethinking the doctrine of God. For Goetz (1986:388), it appeared that humanity could be more brutal than the beasts, that human moral progress was a mockery and that evil and suffering were a fundamental part of human existence. Only a God who suffered with the victims of the war could speak to the disillusionments created by the war.

For many centuries philosophers and theologians have been struggling to find an answer to these questions about God. In the aftermath of the atrocities of the two world wars in particular, the awful

reality of the presence of evil led to a conclusion that evil had triumphed and the good side of human life had been defeated (Stringer 2002:17). The realization by some theologians that Christian theology had not adequately addressed the problem of the existence of evil continued to prompt theological reflection upon the possibility of divine suffering and the relevance it might hold for suffering of the world.

In *The Crucified God* Moltmann observes that this lack of contact and blindness to reality made theologians and churches increasingly obsolete. Many abandon the study of theology or their ministry as Priests and Pastors, their religious orders or work amongst the wretched of that society, because they felt that in that way they could contribute more to solving the conflicts of that fragmented society. In this situation Moltmann (1967:9) writes: "For them, their total questioning of the church and theology arose from their apprehension of the 'cross of the present time' in the situation of those who in this society live in the shadow of the cross and from the wish to take this cross of reality upon themselves and to live in solidarity with and for these others".

In short, this exodus from a blinded society which had psychologically and socially repressed its pain at the suffering in the world and pushed people who suffer to the fringes of society, consequently led to an exodus from the church which did not dissociate itself with sufficient determination from these inner and outward defence-mechanisms of its social environment, but enjoyed the religious tolerance of a frigid society (Moltmann 1967:9). Eventually, all attempts to reform the church into a more credible form of life came to a halt at the point where the intimate links between this kind of church and this kind of society could not be perceived. For Moltmann the critics of the church became social critics and saw the churches as no more than fragments, offering no hope of a society divided and in conflict. The question of the sources of the renewal of the world in society and its churches then took a new form.

Under the pressure to give a public demonstration of the relevance of theology to the problem of society and of individuals in it and to manifest in a new form its relationship to a changed world, a long series of theological structures of great integrity were created. Moltmann (1967:10) points out that the theological structures provided Christian theology with the characteristics of a relationship to the surrounding world which was to make it relevant. There was existentialist theology, hermeneutic, ontological, cultural, social, indigenous, religious and political theology. In summary, these biographical, historical and contextual issues have not only influenced Moltmann's theological

motivation but, as what this chapter will examine, have led him to the formulation of the core theological insight articulated in *The Crucified God*, that is, the immediate presence of the Father in the Son's experience of godforsakeness on Calvary.

3.6.1 The divine suffering of God

In *The Crucified God* (1974) Moltmann begins from the essential passion of God because he believes that the passion of Christ is at the centre of the Christian faith. Moltmann addresses the question about God from the perspective of Christ, especially in his dying cry: 'My God, why has thou forsaken me?' Jesus' cry of dereliction is a focal point to Moltmann's understanding of the suffering God. This cry of abandonment is either the end of a truly Christian theology and every religion, according to Moltmann, or it is the beginning of a truly Christian theology and that means a liberation theology (Moltmann 1974:x). In this book Moltmann depicts a God who literally suffers on the cross, thereby identifying with the suffering of the whole world. Moltmann (1974:38) is convinced that faith in the cross distinguishes Christian faith from the world of religions and from secular ideologies and utopias in-so-far as they seek to replace these religions or to inherit their legacy and bring them to realization. Again, he contends that faith in the cross also distinguishes Christian faith from its own superstitious manifestations. The recollection of the crucified Christ obliges Christian faith permanently to distinguish itself from its own religious and secular forms.

For Moltmann the cross in the church is not just what Christian customs would have imagined. The cross in the church symbolizes the contradiction which comes into the church from the God who was crucified 'outside' (Moltmann 1974:40). The symbol of the cross in the church points to the God who was crucified, not between two candles on an altar but between two thieves in the place of the skull, where the outcasts belong outside the city gates. Moltmann argues that the cross does not invite thought but a change of mind. It is a symbol which therefore leads out of the church and out of religious longing into the fellowship of the oppressed and abandoned. On the other hand, it is a symbol which calls the oppressed and godless into the church and through the church into the fellowship of the crucified God (Moltmann 1974:40). He holds that to endure this contradiction is to take leave of one's religious traditions; to be free of one's religious needs; to abandon one's previous identity as known to others and to gain the identity of Christ in faith; to become anonymous and unknown in one's environment and obtain citizenship in the new creation of God. On the other hand, Moltmann indicates that the religions and humanist world which surrounded Christianity from the very first despised the

cross because this dehumanized Christ represented a contradiction to all ideas of God and of man as divine. Furthermore, he shows that even in historic Christianity the bitterness of the cross was not maintained in the recollection of believers or in the reality presented by the church (Moltmann 1974:40).

In historic Christianity, the cross has also been understood and relived in the sense of the mysticism of suffering. Here the crucified Christ was seen less as the sacrifice which God creates to reconcile the world to himself and more as the exemplary path trodden by a righteous man suffering unjustly, leading to salvation. For Moltmann (1974:45), the fellowship with God is not attained by outward sacrifice and presence in the church's cult; the way to glory leads through personal suffering. Thus, by meditation and adoration people have drawn closer to the sufferings of Christ, participated in them and felt them as their own sufferings. In this way Moltmann shows that this type of faith brought an assurance of salvation and of glorification. One did not achieve fellowship with Christ by sacrifice and good works but by mystical suffering and resignation. In fellowship with the suffering of Christ one received, in a very personal way, a more inward fellowship with Christ in belonging to the organized church and in taking part in the Christian cult. Moltmann (1974:45) strongly emphasize that it is impossible to overlook how much this passion mysticism was and is the devotion of the laity in Christianity. It is demonstrably the devotion of the poor and sick, the oppressed and crushed. The 'God' of the poor, the peasant and the slave has always been the poor, suffering, unprotected Christ, whereas the God of empires and rulers has usually been the King, Christ enthroned in heaven.

However, these suggestions of Moltmann must be taken further. Why and in what way did the suffering crucified God become the God of the poor and abandoned? What is the significance of the mysticism of the cross in popular devotion? According to Moltmann (1974:47), the people in their wretchedness clearly understand God better because of their own concrete situation than the rich and their masters. They understand God better, because they rightly had the impression that God understand them better than their masters. Moltmann found that what is manifested in the cross is God's suffering, a passionate love for his lost creatures, a suffering prepared to sacrifice. When the poor and oppressed look upon the poor and humiliated Christ they do not only see their own poverty and humiliation repeated in another human being. God shows them their misery in someone who is different from them. God therefore basically shows them a different misery and a different suffering (Moltmann 1974:50).

The clash with the Greek concept of God is most apparent when Moltmann represents the Greek concept of God's inability to suffer as a deficiency rather than, as it was for Greek philosophy, a perfection. Moltmann (1974:222) argues:

> God who cannot suffer is a deficient God. He says that for a God who is incapable of suffering is a being that cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him and because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So, he is also a loveless being.

3.6.2 The passion of Christ

According to Moltmann (1993:19), meaningless, unremitting, endless suffering leads people to cry out for God and to despair of God. He says that both faith in God and atheism have their deepest roots in such suffering. Furthermore, he argues that some people have the impression that God is an unfeeling, blind power that rules destiny and cares for no one. God does not care about the death of children in Iraq and in Latin American slums. Moltmann (1993:19) contends that people get this impression of God when they themselves are in danger of becoming that way: unaffected, cold, and indifferent in the face of suffering. Moltmann (1993:20) indicates that at the center of the Christian faith we find a story: *The story of the passion of Jesus Christ.* This must be interpreted literally, that is to say taking into account both meanings of the word 'passion': *The story of Christ is the story of a great passion, of a passionate love; for that very reason, it is also a story about deadly anguish.* In addition, Moltmann (1993:20) shows that at the center of Christian faith we find the suffering of a passionate Christ. Thus, the story of the Passion has both an active and a passive side. In the past Christ's passionate side, which leads him to suffer, was often overlooked. The man of suffering was turned into a prototype for silent acquiescence to a sad destiny. Today, the suffering that is part and parcel of every great passion is all too often overlooked. People want to be painlessly happy and repress suffering (Moltmann 1993:20). By doing so they anesthetize pain and rob themselves of their feelings. Moltmann feels that life without passion is a poor life indeed. In this way, Moltmann gives a summary of what Christ passed through in Gethsemane.

Moltmann (1993:20) argues that the story of the Passion does not begin with Christ's capture and torture by the Roman soldiers. It starts much earlier. Indeed, it begins in the province of Galilee, the moment Christ decides to go with his disciples to Jerusalem, to the centre of power, of injustice, and of

Roman violence. His passion for the kingdom of God, for healing the sick, for liberating the oppressed, for giving sin, is bound to run up in Jerusalem against its bitterest enemies: the collaborationists amongst his own people and the forces of Roman occupation. For Moltmann, what Christ feared, what he struggled with in Gethsemane, about which he beseeched the Father, did not pass him by, but rather occurred on the cross: Christ bears the godforsakenness in which no one can take another's place, in which each person is alone, which no one can endure (Moltmann 1993:21).

Moltmann (1993:21) says that the passionately loving Christ, the persecuted Christ, the lonely Christ, the tortured Christ, the Christ who suffered at the silence of God, this Christ is our Brother, the Friend which can be trusted with everything, because he knows and has suffered everything that may come our way. Christ died with the cry: "My God, why have you forsaken me?'' Therefore, any theology calling itself Christian must attempt to find an answer to Christ's question. Moltmann (1993:25) proclaims that the suffering of Christ are not exclusively his suffering, but rather are inclusively sufferings and the sufferings of this time. His cross stands in a brotherly way amongst our crosses, as a sign that God himself participates in our sufferings and God himself bears our pains. The suffering Son of Man has become so very much one of us that the countless, nameless tortured and forsaken people in the world are his brothers and sisters. Christ entered into this humiliation and forsakenness in order to become the Brother or those who are humiliated and forsaken, and to bring them the kingdom of God. He does not help them through supernatural miracles, but rather by virtue of his suffering through his wounds. Therefore no suffering can separate us from our fellowship with the God who suffers with us. The God of Jesus Christ is the God of solidarity with those who are victimized and those who suffer (Moltmann 1993:25).

Bauckham (1995:48) says that Moltmann addresses the question about God from the perspective of Christ. To realize the full force of this argument he contends that the Christian faith cannot understand Christ's passion as being the revelation of God if he did not suffer. Bauckham (1995:48) says that within the Christian message of the cross of Christ, something new and strange has entered the metaphysical world. For this faith must understand the deity of God from the event of the suffering and death of the Son of God and thus bring about a fundamental change in the orders of being of metaphysical thought and the value tables of religious feeling.

In this way Moltmann (1974:215) confirms that Christianity cannot be represented as a 'monotheistic form of belief'. Christian faith is not 'radical monotheism'. As a theology of the cross, Christian theology is the criticism of and liberation from philosophical and political monotheism. According to Moltmann (1974:2016) theism says that God cannot suffer, God cannot die in order to bring suffering. On the other side, the theology of the cross says that God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ, so that people might live and rise again in his future.

3.6.3 The nature of love

According to Bauckham (1995:49) metaphysical theism has eliminated the notion of God's love for the world. Theism says that God cannot be affected by the objects of his love. Suffering, along with all feeling, cannot belong to God's love Moltmann's approach is quite different: God's love is his 'passion' in the double sense of passionate concern. Love is not just activity on others but involvement with others in which one is moved and affected. Bauckham (1995:49) argues that the vulnerability to suffering is essential to it. He says that there are two important points which need to be made about this argument from the nature of love. First, it is evident that Moltmann is not simply saying that God's love must be like human love in every respect. Rather he claims that being affected by the beloved and therefore vulnerable to suffering is essential to what is best and most valuable in human love. Secondly, it is not strictly accurate to regard this argument as an argument from the nature of human love to the nature of God. In that case, it would be just another kind of natural theology, independent of the cross. To say that God is love is to refer to the cross (Moltmann 1974:82-83). Thus, the nature of love is valid only in strict relation to the cross. Moltmann's point is that the only concept of God's love which can do justice to the cross is that of passionate concern which suffers from, with and for those it loves.

3.6.4 The problem of human suffering

From the dawn of the Patristic period Christian theology has held an idea that God is impassible, that is, God does not undergo emotional changes of state, and so God does not suffer. Toward the end of the 19th century a sea change began to occur within Christian theology such that at present many, if not most, Christian theologians hold an idea that God is passible, that God does undergo emotional changes of state, and so does suffer. Weinandy (2002:1) says that are basically three factors that have

contributed to this change: the prevailing social and cultural milieu, modern interpretation of biblical revelation, and contemporary philosophy. Human suffering became the catalyst for espousing a passible and so suffering God. Surely, God must suffer in solidarity with those who suffer. This was first expressed within the context of the social ills of industrial Britain of the late 19th century.

This contemporary experience of human suffering, which seemed to demand a passible God, found a ready ally and firm warrant, it appeared, within the biblical revelation of God. Weinandy (2002:2) shows that the Old Testament seems to give ample proof that God not only is passible but that God also indeed suffers. God revealed himself to be a personal, loving and compassionate God who has freely engaged himself in, and so ensconced himself within, human history. God mercifully heard the cry of his enslaved people in Egypt and determined to rescue them. Moreover, God revealed himself, especially in the prophets, to be a God who grieved over the sins of his people. God was distressed by their unfaithfulness, and suffered over their sinful plight. So disheartened was God by their hard-heartedness that God actually became angry (Weinandy 2002:3).

In *The Crucified God* there is no discovery of the suffering God apart from the cross (Moltmann 1974:227). Moltmann understands the soteriological significance of the cross more broadly than it has usually been understood in the tradition, as including both the question of human guilt and humanity's liberation from it and also the question of human suffering and man's redemption from it (Moltmann 1974:134). In summary, the three elements highlighted in this discussion are very closely connected: the cross reveals God to be love which suffers with and for those who suffer. Since God is love God is for himself what God is for us in the event of his suffering love (Bauckham 1995:52). The three elements are probably the three major reasons why many other Christian theologians since the mid-nineteenth century have questioned the doctrine of divine impassibility.

3.7 RELEVANCE OF MOLTMANN'S CRUCIFIED GOD FOR THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

It is mentioned earlier that God's response toward suffering is the most important consideration in determining our own response to pain and suffering in Africa. The premise is that we come to know the identification of God with the crucified Christ and the downtrodden only in the midst of experiencing pains and hurt in the world. Moltmann (1974:277) explains that the pain of God is revealed when God of the cross cannot be embraced. In other words, human beings can meet the suffering God of the cross

through God's suffering in the world. Indeed, God needs the partnership of human beings if God's salvific history, initiated with creation, is to be fulfilled towards others. Logdat (2017:79) says that the 'God' whom Job's friends defended was not the same as the 'God' Job trusted. This does not suggest that there were two Gods in the Old Testament story, but indicates that there can exist two different ideas of the same God**.**

In a nutshell, thinking and speaking about a suffering God is directly connected to the question of how a suffering God relates to the suffering of the world. Lodgat (2017:79) says that our identification with a suffering God is directly connected to the question of how we relate to each other's suffering. Moreover, he argues that the suffering for the believer always leads to the theodicy problem: If God is all-powerful and all-loving how can God permit suffering? The basic issue of theodicy is the defence of the existence of a loving and all-powerful God in the midst of all our suffering. As a result of this thought, the calling then is to remain with the oppressed and the disadvantaged. We should put ourselves beside others and bear others' pain with them and embrace them. We need to shift our attention always from heaven to those who are suffering here. In affirming the above-mentioned focus on the suffering God, African Christians have to hold onto Christ even when they are on hard times. This is possible by remembering that the incarnate God is present and can be experienced in the humanity of every man and in full human corporeality. Moltmann (1974:277) says that no one need dissemble and appear other than he is to perceive the fellowship of the human God with him. Rather, he can lay aside all dissembling and sham and become what he truly is in this human God. Furthermore, Moltmann says that the crucified God is near to him in the forsakenness of every man. There is no loneliness and no rejection which he has not taken to himself and assumed in the cross of Jesus.

However, in the context of African Christians' suffering and trials, Moltmann reminds them that God is still a loving and caring God. This is because Jesus Christ is the very God who truly identifies himself with African Christians, who took upon himself death on the cross. Magezi (2016:2) says that the metaphor of Christ as a suffering servant who truly identifies with Christians in their contextual suffering is both healing and empowering for believers in Africa. In view of the theology of suffering God, he strongly support the view that God in Christ has a complete identification with African people in their suffering. However, in order to oppose the misconception of God's discontinuous identification with African Christians owing to Christ's ascension, he argues for God's ongoing solidarity with believers in their suffering through the Holy Spirit (Magezi 2016:2). Indeed, God's continuous solidarity with African Christians in their suffering through the Holy Spirit is an encouraging and

comforting aspect for believers to cope with suffering. In view of this, Moltmann (1974:277) puts it clearly that life in communion with Christ is full life in the Trinitarian situation of God.

The human God who encounters man in the crucified Christ thus involves man in a realistic divinization. Therefore, Moltmann shows that in communion with Christ it can truly be said that men live in God and from God, that they live, move and have their being in him (Acts 17:28). In saying this, we maintain that God not only has complete solidarity with African Christians in suffering but also the possibility of taking care of them. In this case, Christians in Africa are encouraged to view their moments of suffering from God's perspective. Viewed in this way, suffering is a way of developing Christian maturity in Christ. In the context of suffering Christians' response should be shaped by the theology of suffering God, taking Jesus Christ as an ultimate model of how believers ought to respond to their suffering. Under the dominant model of Christ's endurance of suffering for sinful humanity, enables Christians in Africa not to grow weary or lose heart in their multifaceted difficult times (Magezi 2016:3).

3.7.1 The *Crucified God* and the challenges of relationality in Africa

Reflecting on the revelation of the crucified God leads us to the most profound, beautiful and important mystery of the triune God. The Christian church has confessed that God is one being in three persons. As we have discussed, the doctrine of the Trinity is understood out of the cross of Jesus Christ. As we have already seen, Moltmann begins with the cross of Christ; for him the cross is not only the event that effects human reconciliation with God, but also constitutes God's self within history as the Triune God. Moltmann uses the image of 'perichoresis' to describe the divine unity, referring to the intimate indwelling and complete interpenetration of the persons in one another.

For Moltmann, all interpretations of the Trinity that reduce the three persons to modes of a single subjectivity inevitably set God over against the world and imply a hierarchical, monarchical relation between them. Moltmann's critique of classical monotheism and his social doctrine of the Trinity are therefore not simply abstract theory, but have implications for human social and political interaction. He sees traditional monotheism as being used to justify political and ecclesiastical totalitarianism and so is critical of hierarchical power structures. The practical application of his social Trinity finds its expression in human fellowship, equality and interdependence. The doctrine of the Trinity is

accordingly a critical principle for theology in its mission of transforming the world. Moltmann urges a rediscovery of what he considers the biblical concept of God's triunity as the community and fellowship among the three equal persons, rather than a monarchy of one person over the others and the world. Only by focusing on the distinct subjectivities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit can a doctrine of God be developed that is characterized by mutuality rather than lordship. For Moltmann, the eschatological kingdom cannot be a universal monarchy of the Lord of creation, but rather a harmonious fellowship of liberated nature and humans with God.

The renewed emphasis upon the personal character of God in relationship to us, God's intimate engagement with humanity and the world through God the Son incarnate in the flesh, is highly commendable in the Africa context, in contrast to any speculative, abstract efforts to define God apart from our human experience. African Theology today must speak of a God who is indeed relational, who relates to real people in a real world, a God who understands our human condition from the inside. Postmodern theorists believes that the society has entered a new era and that all modern ideas in African society are outdated. Before the advent of colonialism and Western civilization and culture to Africa, the sense of brotherhood and hospitality were some of the cardinal values of an indigenous African man. As we have discussed in chapter 1, the African man's idea of security and its value depended on personal identification with and within the community.

To this Onyedinma (2013:62) says that for the Africans, to be human is to be in a community, participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community that gives them sense of belonging. The autonomy and rights of the individual person are enjoyed in relationship. She also indicates that the community is the custodian of the individual, the African must go to the community centre or village square which is a social, political, judicial and religious centre. Living together and the sense of community of brothers and sisters are the basis of, and the expression of the extended family system in Africa. Unfortunately, these values have completely changed. There are contrasts between the cultural patterns of the West and the cultural patterns of Africa that are causing problems in Africa today. The materialism and secularism of the West is capturing the hearts and minds of many city dwellers (O'Donovan 2006:14). Some of the best community values of African culture are often corrupted by attitudes of tribalism, prejudice, political oppression, financial corruption and other evils because of the sinful nature of all human beings.

However, Moltmann claims that the *perichoretic* Trinitarian fellowship not only describes divine community but also prescribes the nature of true human community. He contends that true human fellowship is to correspond to the triune God. True human fellowship will participate in the inner life of the triune God. Therefore, the social doctrine of the Trinity summarizes his understanding of the Trinity as a model of both church and society. Christian believers in post-colonial African are, therefore, challenged to practice such a principle of Trinitarian fellowship. By his particular use of the concept of *perichoresis*, Moltmann provides the African society with a social Trinitarian model of human relationships. It signifies the social unity that is constituted by the reciprocal self-giving love among the Father, Son and the Spirit in Freedom (Moltmann 1981:129-50).

In summary, the question of human suffering posed at the beginning of this chapter is answered by Moltmann's assertion that the one who follows Jesus has identity with the crucified Christ because of the intensity of Christ's suffering on his or her behalf (Moltmann 1974:277). This is so because the crucified Christ has experienced the godforsakennes inherent in the experience of anyone who perceives that God has abandoned them. From Moltmann's understanding that the crucifixion of Jesus is a Trinitarian event in which all persons of the one Godhead participate, *The Crucified God* provides a present-day response to the pressing theological-pastoral problem, which Moltmann himself says, poses the most profound challenge to Christianity's identity and relevance: the presence of suffering in the world which apparently contradicts Christian theology's traditional assertion that God is omnipotent. In response to the question of the problem of suffering Moltmann's reply is to employ a dialectical theological method which provides a foundation from which to argue that the cross of Jesus Christ has profound relevance for a suffering world. Through the crucifixion of the Son of God, suffering was not only experienced by God, but suffering and death have been taken into God. Therefore, human suffering, according to Moltmann, has been beaten and redeemed through the willed, active suffering of a God who does not run away from the sufferings of human beings and creation but embraces history's myriad acts of inhumanity and suffering in the event of the cross (Moltmann 1974:277). Indeed, this theology is an encouraging and comforting message for believers in Africa.

3.8 CONCLUSION

We have discussed in this chapter, the life history, phases and the development of Jürgen Moltmann's theology. Moltmann's personal experience with suffering and loss and the urging of the Holy Spirit

planted the seeds of an eschatology of hope that has changed the theological construct of many decades. Indeed, Moltmann presents a personally applicable view of Christianity and the hope embodied in the suffering of Christ, as well as how God relates to that suffering in a way that is unprecedented. He offers a new approach to the theology of hope and has injected new life into the reflection on various aspects of Christian existence. Among other things, it helps us to overcome the association between faith and fear of the future which Moltmann considers characteristic of many Christians. As indicated in this Chapter, Moltmann's theology emerged in a time when hope was in the air. Moltmann's theology of hope constitutes a ground-breaking work in theology. Clearly, Moltmann's theology of hope has earned itself a prominent position among the greatest work of theology in the twentieth century. For Moltmann, Christian hope is firmly grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such hope is directed towards what is not yet visible, creating in those who experience it a deep dissatisfaction with the present state of the world. At the same time, says Moltmann, such hope is also the happiness of the present. So, important is this hope to the essence of Christian faith that despair, or hopelessness, is the greatest of sins.

Hope is characteristically oriented towards the future. The God who calls his people into fellowship with himself is a God with future as his essential nature, a God of promise and of leaving the present to face the future, a God whose freedom is the source of new things that are to come. It is these new things that are to come, things grounded in the promises of God, that give the believer reasons for hope. There is no doubt that Moltmann's theology of the hope can be relevant to the hopeless situation in Africa. The hopelessness described in chapter 1 concerning the challenges in Africa could be equated to the situation and experience of Moltmann. Moltmann's theology of hope can help the church in Africa to stir political engagement, to call for a communal vision, relationality and hospitality.

Again, this chapter sought to explore Moltmann's concept of the 'Suffering God', a monumental work that has been described as one of the most important contributions to contemporary Christian theology. Specifically, the Chapter sought to examine what Moltmann had to say concerning the bearing of a suffering God to the understanding of suffering in Africa. Moltmann began from the essential passion of God because he believes that the passion of Christ is at the center of the Christian faith. Moltmann addresses the question about God from the perspective of Christ's suffering. Moltmann is convinced that a truly Christian theology has to make Jesus' experience of God on the cross the center of all ideas about God. Moltmann contends that a theology of the cross gives a new identity to Christian theology,

one that includes the crucified Christ as well as an identity with those who suffer. Moltmann found that what is manifested in the cross is God's suffering, a passionate love for his lost creatures. This sacrifice must be interpreted in Trinitarian terms, as an event concerned with a relationship between persons in which these persons constitute themselves in their relationship with each other. Moltmann then strongly emphasizes the necessity of the Trinitarian understanding of God as the proper way to understand the significance of the death of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the people of Africa can meet the suffering God of the cross through God's suffering in the world. To accept the suffering of Jesus means sharing in God's suffering with all of God's creatures. This means that Moltmann's theology of 'The Crucified God' is chiefly concerned with providing a theological response to the problem of suffering in Africa. In Moltmann's view God's redeeming love has ensured so that the bitterness of all human loneliness and rejection has been taken into God's being through the experience of the crucified Christ.

From what has been said, the concept of God's relationship to the world remains a controversial topic of contemporary theology. This is the subject of much debate; essentially, Moltmann challenges the principle of the impassibility of God, i.e. that God does not change, God cannot suffer and God cannot have fellowship with man. A number of theologians agree with Moltmann saying it shows God's compassion and complete identification with the suffering of humans. Others say God cannot suffer because God is absolute, perfect and holy. Moltmann has attempted to answer these questions through his Trinitarian theology. Moltmann (1974:235) argues that the crucifixion of Jesus was first and foremost a Trinitarian event in which all three persons of the Godhead participate in Christ's identification with and redemption of the suffering of the world. While it may be acknowledged that the crucifixion of the Son of God is an event that is interpreted from a Trinitarian perspective, it remains to be shown precisely how Moltmann proceeds to argue that God embraces suffering in the event of the crucifixion of Jesus. What are the implications of making such claims in the light of the fact that the Christian theological tradition has largely failed to acknowledge the possibility of divine suffering? What are the implications of this understanding for the church in Africa?

Since this present study is concerned with an analysis of Moltmann's theology of God's relationship to human suffering, it remains to be shown how he developed his understanding of the Trinitarian theology. For Moltmann (1974:226) a God who is foreign to suffering and who sits enthroned in heaven in a glory that no one can share is unacceptable. This statement by Moltmann brings our discussion to the history of the doctrine of the Trinitarian God, as well as Moltmann's social

Trinitarianism. At this point, the next discussion will examine how the concept of God has been understood by the Church Fathers and Moltmann himself.

CHAPTER 4. THE TRINITARIAN RENAISSANCE AND MOLTMANN'S SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As outlined and discussed in the previous chapter, Moltmann as a young man, found himself caught up in the midst of World War II. He experienced various important life-changing events during battle and later as a prisoner of war in British and European camps. In *The Crucified God* Moltmann depicts a God who suffers the death of his Son. God gave him over for us and God did it out of love for us. So Christ entered into his humiliation and forsakenness in order to become the Brother of those who are humiliated and forsaken, and to bring them the kingdom of God.

It is in the theology of the crucified God that Moltmann connects the suffering of the cross with the concept of the Trinity. According to Moltmann (1974:241) the material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ. In the same way, he says that the material principle of knowledge of the cross is the doctrine of the Trinity. He argues that to understand what happened between Jesus and his Father on the cross it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms (Moltmann 1974:243). In so doing, Moltmann does not see one person of the Trinity suffer in the event of the cross, as though the Trinity were already present in itself, but in the divine nature. For Moltmann (1974:246) the Father suffered in his love the grief of the death of the Son. In his view, then, the crucifixion of Christ is a God-event which took place between the abandoned Son and the abandoning Father so that the possibility might exist for all those who experience abandonment to be reconciled to God (Stringer 2002:43).

The task that we have in this chapter is to show precisely how Moltmann proceeds to argue that the three persons in the Trinity embraced suffering in the event of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This brings our discussion to the very heart of the matter under consideration to examine the historical debate concerning the concept of God in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity. Since this study is basically an examination of Moltmann's social Trinitarian theology regarding the nature of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in suffering on the cross, it is necessary to start this inquiry by attending to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity which goes back to the time of the church fathers.

During the time of Moltmann, the cross had become the sign which distinguished the churches from other religions and modes of belief. At the same time Moltmann (1974:235) acknowledges that the doctrine of the Trinity was the doctrine which showed how Christianity differs from polytheism, pantheism and monotheism. Moltmann (1974:236) however argues that the doctrine of the Trinity enjoyed no special significance in the history of Western Theology. It seemed to have been hard enough to speak of 'God' at all in the life of the churches and in the understanding of believers with any degree of honesty. Furthermore, he shows that it is common to see liturgies of the churches begin with the traditional formula *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* and the Apostles Creed which claim to speak of God the Creator, the Reconciler and the Redeemer but, in practice, the religious conceptions of many Christians prove to be no more than a weekly Christianized monotheism (Moltmann 1974:236). He contends that from the time of Melanchthon and, particularly since Schleiermacher and the moral theology of the nineteenth century, the doctrine of the Trinity seemed to have been regarded in Protestantism as no more than a theological speculation with no relevance to life - a kind of higher theological mystery (Moltmann 1974:237).

Based upon the argument raised by Moltmann it is important to find out why the doctrine of the Trinity became isolated speculation and a mere decoration for Dogmatics after the Middle Ages. In Christian tradition, the word 'God' has generally referred to the *One Supreme Holy Being*. The common understanding is that God created the entire universe, rules over it and will bring it to its final redemption. Especially from the time of the late medieval period, Moltmann (1974:25) contends that God was perceived as *omnipotent, perfection, self-existent, eternal, immutable and incorporeal*. In relationship to the world God has been understood mainly through symbols of *lord, king and father*. Since this is so, many theologians have attempted to counter and overcome this theistic concept of God in various ways. An especially important movement of doing this was to return to the doctrine of the Trinity and to find there a resource to refute the theistic conception of God.

In this examination, it is also important to consider the pioneers of the recovery of the understanding of the doctrine of Trinity, such as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. However, the primary concern is to analyse Moltmann's social Trinitarian theology and its significance for the key question of the precise relationship between God and human suffering, more especially for the situation in Africa. Many Christians in Africa would agree that the most difficult theological issue they ever face is the presence of God in pain and suffering. Although other theological topics occasionally capture their attention to

this issue there is only one question which really matters: “where is God in the presence of pain and suffering?”

Nevertheless, this study does not attempt to discuss Moltmann’s theology as a whole, nor even his whole theology of the Trinity. Rather it will focus upon his distinct contributions to major Trinitarian issues and their relevance to contemporary social questions. These Trinitarian issues have been selected because they are widely discussed among many theologians; they reflect Moltmann’s own theological priorities and have a central place in his theology and, at the same time, they are relevant to the issues affecting the continent of Africa.

4.2 PERSPECTIVES ON THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

4.2.1 Neglect and dilemma

First and foremost, I must confess that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult and mysterious Christian doctrines. For one thing, the word ‘Trinity’ is not found in the Bible. Although the New Testament many times refers to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit together as a group, nowhere can we find the word ‘Trinity’ to describe their relations. ‘Trinity’ is a technical term coined in a later era. Shimmyo (1998:18) says that Theophilus of Antioch in the second century was the first to use the word *trias* in Greek and Tertullian in the beginning of the third century used the word *trinitas* in Latin.

Since the doctrine of the Trinity is a central doctrine in Christianity, it is theologically acknowledged to make a concession and accept this non-biblical term as authoritative. However, there is yet a second difficulty even more complicated than the first, for the word contains a numerical contradiction. The contradiction is evident when the word intends to say that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each God and also at the same time that there is only one God. The three are equal to the one. Hillar (2012:272) points out that this is beyond intellectual comprehension and he has acknowledged that the doctrine of the Trinity has been considered to be mysterious.

Clearly and acknowledged by many scholars, the doctrine of the Trinity is truly difficult to comprehend. Hill (1982:9) says that among the doctrines and symbols of Christianity perhaps none has been subjected to theological neglect as that of the Trinity and this is due to its received status as a mystery. Gunton (1991:2) explains that one widespread reaction to the doctrine of the Trinity today is

'hostility, dismissal or indifference' because this inherited dogma is of no interest or relevance to the modern mind. For Thompson (1991:349), even to the present time, the Trinity has often been stigmatized in so many ways because it is very difficult to be understood by a common member of the church.

Another reason for the neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity lies at the door of preachers**,** namely, their failure to read in depth and open up adequately the riches of the Word for their congregations. This is clearly a generalization but sadly it is widely true of pastors/preachers. My personal observation is that the level of reading of many pastors is extremely basic and restricted, often limited to devotional/historical/biographical books with the occasional Bible study of the doctrine. Even the Bible commentaries often used are only basic for sermon preparation. There are very few sermons preached on the Trinity and only occasional references are made to the Trinity in weekly sermons. For example, I have asked Christians over the past couple of years when was the last time they heard a sermon on the Trinity and none of them could remember hearing such a sermon in the past 2-3 years, or even longer. A further example confirms my own suspicions: Another Zambian pastor conducted extensive research in the Reformed Church in Zambia as to how frequently the Trinity is preached and then as to the content of what is preached about the Trinity. The researcher checked all references to the sermons on the Trinity or to Trinity Sunday and to 15 biblical texts usually associated with the Trinity. It was a fairly thorough piece of research. Only twenty sermons on the Trinity were found, with three preachers represented by two sermons each. A few sermons were found which made a passing reference to the Trinity or that occasionally had a Trinitarian structure. However, the content of these few sermons on the Trinity was also disappointing. Even a sermon on the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 did not include an exposition and was not particularly Trinitarian in its message. Other sermons on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 even failed to draw attention to the Trinity, although the three Persons are mentioned there. As a consequence, congregations may well be justified in thinking of the Holy Trinity like the way we regard our appendix – it is there, but not essential.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the complex history and precise terminology one can find the doctrine of the Trinity as an exciting doctrine of God which would renew faith and preaching. Sanders (2012:21) claims that it has even become common to talk about the doctrine of the Trinity as having made a comeback from a long period of neglect. He acknowledges that there has unquestionably been a spike in the number of publications, conferences and general excitement about the doctrine in the second half of the twentieth century.

4.2.2 Early Church approach to the doctrine of the Trinity

Our generation is not the first to attempt to find a way to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. The church has been attempting to understand the nature of the Godhead since its inception. How did the early church understand the doctrine of the Trinity? Where did the doctrine of the Trinity come from? This discussion will address these questions. In the following I will briefly summarize the development of the Trinity in order to understand the current debate of the social understanding and its implication for the church in Africa. This will be accomplished by examining the ways in which the Godhead was explained in the various generations leading up to the present generation. What is the relationship of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? How are we to understand the Scriptural teaching of monotheism and yet confess the divinity of the Father, Son and Spirit? How are we to maintain monotheism and still maintain the Scriptural distinctions spoken of as existing between the Father, Son and Spirit? These are some of the questions that the early church discussed in the development of the Trinity. Berkhof (1932:82) acknowledges that the doctrine of the Trinity has always bristled with difficulties, and therefore it is no wonder that the church in its attempt to formulate it was repeatedly tempted to rationalize it and to give a consideration of it which failed to do justice to the Scripture date. Oort (2011:1) argues that one cannot speak about an Early Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit without mentioning the various and developing doctrines of the Trinity.

According to Dulle (2017:1-7) the development of the Trinity goes back to Post-Apostolic age (AD 90-140). During this period, the concept of the Godhead was allied to the common first-century understanding of the Godhead as taught by the apostles. The Post-Apostolic Fathers maintained that there was one God and that Jesus Christ was God. They did distinguish between the Father and Son, using language much like that of the New Testament. The Spirit did not receive much attention but when they spoke about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit was spoken of as being God's Spirit, revealed to humanity through the person of Jesus Christ. Dulle (2017:1-7) argues that there is no distinctively Trinitarian language or concepts conveyed in the writings at this point in time. In fact, he says that some of the teachings such as equating the Holy Spirit with the Son existed as the plan or wisdom of God before the incarnation and not as a separate person.

After the Post-Apostolic age, the Greek Apologists came a long, writing studies that gave the name to the Age as the Greek Apologists from AD 130-180. The Greek Apologists age (AD 130-180) also contributed to the development of the Trinity. This age is so called because it was characterized by

Greek teachers/philosophers who wrote literary works to be read by pagans, in order to defend and explain the Christian faith to unbelievers. It was an attempt to demonstrate that Christianity was good philosophy so that it would be accepted by the pagan contemporaries. It was during this period that the doctrine of the Logos was propagated and developed. The idea of the Logos was already popular in the Hellenistic culture and philosophy. The apologists adopted this philosophy tailoring it, where necessary, in order to make the gospel acceptable to the general population who saw Christianity as foolishness.

The main issue debated during this period is the idea of God's logos being divine, and yet not the Father himself. Dulle (2017:1-7) explains that Greek philosophers believed that Logos was the second person next to the Father and was subordinate to the Father. In fact, the Logos was the first creation of God. Furthermore, he observes that in this type of understanding, the Spirit was not mentioned much but Holy Spirit seems to be equated with the Logos. In short, the Apologists' doctrine was anything but orthodox Trinitarianism. The Biblical doctrine of the Logos was explained in terms of Greek philosophical thought, rather than that of Scripture, which lead to a false understanding of Christ and His relationship to the Father. The Son was seen to be the divine reason which existed in the mind of God without personal existence, until He emanated from God as the first creation of the Father for the specific purpose of creation (Dulle 2017:1-7). Basically, the Apologists spoke of Jesus as ontologically subordinate to the Father. They did not believe that the Father and Son were co-eternal, co-substantial and co-equal.

The Old Catholic age (AD 170-325) enjoyed the greatest amount of theological growth. Much of the terminology and theological concepts of this period were adopted at the Nicene and Constantinoplian Councils, being used to define orthodox Trinitarianism. This growth was spawned on by theologians such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian (Dulle 2017:1-7). In contrast to the Apologists who taught that the Logos was created in time, these theologians contended and the Holy Spirit was equated with the Father. In this discussion, I will briefly explore the views of Tertullian who seem to be the father of the social understanding of the Trinity.

4.2.3 Tertullian's understanding of the Trinity

According to Macharg (2017:3) Tertullian was the first to speak of God as a Trinity and as three persons in one substance. According to Macharg (2017:3), Tertullian believed that God is the 'Trinity' which consists of 'three persons' and God is 'only one substance' in three coherent and inseparable

Persons. Therefore, the Father and the Son are two separate Persons; two different Beings and distinct but not separate. The Son is 'another' from the Father on the ground of Personality, not of Substance in the way of distinction, not of division (Macharg 2017:4). Tertullian was so insistent on the distinction between the persons that he even ranked them according to order that he spoke of the three Persons as parts of the whole Godhead. The Father is the substance but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole. The Father is greater than the Son. Although he continually denied that the three Persons are separate, he consistently spoke of them in such a manner and even called them separate (Dulle 2017:1-7). Moreover, his subordinationistic terminology when speaking of the Godhead cannot be ignored. The Son is clearly subject to the Father and the Holy Spirit is subject to the Son. In regard to the Spirit, Tertullian seemed to connect Him with the Logos. He explained the Holy Spirit as proceeding from no other source than from the Father through the Son.

Again, on the issue of 'monotheism', Tertullian argued that although the above process results in two more who can be called 'God' it does not introduce two more gods, not gods in the sense that Yahweh is a god (Tuggy 2016:23). Thus, monotheism was upheld by Tertullian because he strongly emphasized that the three are undivided in the sense that the Father, in sharing some of his matter, never loses any; rather, that matter comes to simultaneously compose more than one being. Macharg (2017:5) contends that despite facing a number of controversies, Tertullian is now hailed by Trinitarians for his use of the term 'Trinity' (Latin: *trinitas*) and his view that it consists of three persons with a common or shared 'substance'.

In summary, the major contributions to the theology of the trinity from this time were the idea of one God in three persons, the coinage of the word 'trinity' and the idea of personalities in the Godhead, coming from Tertullian, the eternal generation of the Son coming from Origen in the Eastern church. Both men saw the Logos and the Spirit as being subordinate to the Father ontologically and not functionally to the incarnation. The doctrine of co-equality, although spoken of by Origen, was limited to the Son and the Father. The Spirit was the first creation of the Father through the Son. Up to this point, the church did not have a definitive doctrine of the co-equality, or co-eternal nature of the three Persons. Instead they had trithestic language which was being used to explain the relationship between the one God and the three Persons of which He consists. What was agreed upon was that the Persons of the trinity were con-substantial.

4.2.4 Developments after Tertullian

After the years of Tertullian, the debate on the doctrine of Trinity went on and on, more especially because of Arius' teaching which caused dissension among the churches. This dissension led to the road to the Nicea council and the council's contribution to the development of the Trinitarian doctrine is very important. According to Tuggy (2016:1) the council firmly rejected the idea of Arius that the Logos was created and non-eternal with the Father and established that the Logos was of the same substance with the Father. This latter affirmation, however, caused division once again in the ensuing years. Even at the council many bishops were hesitant about the inclusion of *homoousios* because it lent itself to modalism. At this stage Dulle (2017:1-7) says that the council's decision could not be referred to as Trinitarian, since it did not deal with the Holy Spirit. The major issue at this council was the relationship of the Logos to the Father, not to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. After the Council of Nicea adjourned the bishops went back to their respective churches and many continued to teach the way they had before the Nicene Creed was adopted. Later on, the political milieu that developed between the Council of Nicea in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 had much to do with the development and acceptance of Trinitarian orthodoxy.

The main debate during this period was concerning the acceptance of the term *homoousios* (meaning same substance, to speak of the relationship of the Son to the Father), terminology because it lent itself toward modalism. This debate continued to exist until up to the time of the Cappadocian Fathers who said that the Godhead existed as one *ousia* but in three individual *hupostases*. In Latin, it was termed one *substantia* and three *personae* (Tuggy 2016:2). The Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa), who were instrumental in the decision of the Council of Constantinople, made a distinction between the two Greek words of *ousia* and *hypostasis*, having them mean substance and person, respectively. They made their distinction in accordance with the thought of Tertullian because they wanted to maintain that God has only one *ousia* (substance) but three *hypostases* (persons). In summary, the Cappadocian taught that the one God-head subsists in three co-equals, co-eternal, co-essential persons and this truth is an incomprehensible mystery. There is communion of substance but distinction of personhood. This trinity is a perfect, inseparable, indivisible union and the persons work together in all things. The unique distinguishing characteristics of the persons are as follows: The Father is unbegotten (generated) and the Holy Spirit is proceeding (spirated). The generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit are mysteries (Macharg

2017:6). It is the Cappadocian Fathers who made a very important contribution to the social understanding of the Trinity.

4.2.5 Attempts to address the unity of the Trinity

Since the time of the Cappadocian Fathers many people have made various statements about the Trinity but the fundamental Trinitarian teaching about one substance and three persons has never altered (Macharg 2017:7). In the following years, the doctrine of the Trinity was, with few exceptions, generally accepted by Christendom. The deliberations over the doctrine of the Trinity had, however, not been concluded. Particularly under the influence of the Church, Father Augustine (AD 354-430), the Western Church later emphasized that the Holy Spirit emanates equally from both the Father and the Son. In contrast, the Eastern Church maintained an older version of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople which states that the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father through the Son. According to Eastern theology, the Father binds together all three persons or the *hypostaseis* as one God. Thus, the Father is God 'simpliciter', the Son is God from God, proceeding out of God by eternal generation and the Spirit is God from God, proceeding out of God by eternal spiration (Kombo 2000:74). This is also the way the East distinguished the Persons of the Trinity. As far as Eastern theology is concerned, theology can talk of the three *hypostaseis*, namely, the Father as the Divine 'simpliciter' or Divine 'fountain', the Son as eternally generating from the Father and the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father by eternal spiration. Kombo (2000:74) clearly explains that the East could argue that there is one God because there is only One Father, the Divine simpliciter.

Berkhof (1932:96-97) says that the early Trinitarian controversies let to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit, as well as the Son, is of the same essence as the Father, and is therefore con-substantial with Him. The long drawn dispute about the question, whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone or also from the Son, was finally settled by the Synod of Toledo in 589 by adding the word *Filioque* to the Latin version of the Constantinopolitan Creed. This procession of the Holy Spirit, briefly called spiration, is his personal property. Berkhof (1932:97) says that much of what was said respecting the generation of the Son also applies to the spiration of the Holy Spirit, and need not be repeated.

Before the *Filioque* debate, patristic theology generally understood the oneness of God in terms of God the Father. The argument of this group was that there is one God because there is one Father. For the Eastern theologians, this statement did not mean that the Son and the Spirit are any less divine than the

Father. Rather, the statement meant that the Father is the 'fountain of the deity' and the Father possesses the divine essence in and from himself alone, whereas the Son and the Holy Spirit possess it from the Father (Kombo 2000:75). It was further argued that the being of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is truly divine; however, it is the Father's being communicated to them by the eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal spiration of the Spirit.

As far as Augustine, who was from the Western church, was concerned, the doctrine of the *Filioque* meant that the Holy Spirit could not be regarded as another Son. The Eastern theologians saw in this something of a 'double fountain' of the Father and the Son rather than what was known as the Father being the 'fountain of deity'. For Augustine, there was no inconsistency here because for him the unity of God is not in the person of the Father, rather it is the divine essence (Kombo 2000:76). In summary, O'Collins (1999:13) clearly states that the doctrine of the Trinity has helped to divide Eastern from Western Christianity. He has also observed that nowadays within the West itself a further divisive issue has arisen: the naming of the three persons. More questions are being raised whether it is correct to name the three persons; 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. The current proposals for renaming the Godhead include: 'Source, Word, and Spirit'; 'Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier'; 'Creator, Liberator, and Comforter'; 'Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer'; 'God, Christ, and Spirit'; 'Parent, Child and Paraclete'; and 'Mother, Daughter, and Spirit'(O'Collins 1999:13).

4.2.6 Towards a Trinitarian settlement

Since Athanasius' concept of the *homoousios* could not adequately distinguish the Father from the Son there was need for another theological model to highlight this distinction. It was the Cappadocian theologians who gave the needed distinction between the Father and the Son that could address the issue of tritheism (polytheism) and Sabellian modalism with new impetus (Kombo 2000:77). According to Kärkkäinen (2007:37) the terminological confusion was a major challenge among Christians, not only between the Christian East and West, but also in the same language domain there was uncertainty about the exact meaning of the terms used. The key term was *hypostasis*. For Eastern theologians, the suggestion of one *ousia* with three 'for Latin speakers meant tritheism. Therefore, it was natural for the Eastern theologians to take the three *hypostases*, rather than the one divine substance as their starting point. Kärkkäinen (2007:39) explains that, while the formula for the Eastern theologians which focused on the one 'ousia' in three *hypostaseis*, their emphasis often seems to be on the latter term, connoting the separate subsistence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rather than on the

former, which stood for the one indivisible Godhead common to them. At the same time, both Athanasius and the Cappadocians were also strong defenders of the *homoousion* formula of Nicaea Council. Furthermore, Kärkkäinen (2009:13) indicates that it was the Nicene Creed produced by the Council of Constantinople in 381 that is highly significant because it represents the shared consensus and helped to settle the disputes between the two groups.

For Letham (2004:176) the Trinitarian settlement resulted in a number issues. The idea that God is one being (essence) consists eternally of three distinct persons is a matter that the Fathers considered to be essential to salvation. He argues that creation and salvation are presented in the Bible as works of God. Since the Son and the Holy Spirit are, together with the Father, direct and distinct personal actors in both realms, it follows that all three have the status of deity. Furthermore, Letham (2004:176) clarifies that when the church says that the Son or the Holy Spirit is fully God, it means that the whole being of God, without remainder, is in each person. All that is God, all that can ever be said to be God, without dilution or subtraction, constitutes the person of the Son and in turn the person of the Spirit, just as it is with the person of the Father. The implication of this understanding is that each person of the Trinity, when considered in itself, is, absolutely one hundred percent God and, at the same time, one hundred percent of God is in each person. As a result, the whole God is in each person, and each person is the whole God.

The other implication of this understanding is that all three persons are of one substance *(consubstantial).* All three are of the identical being *(homoousios*). There is only one essence or being of God, which all three persons share completely (Letham 2004:177). This idea suggests that there is only one essence or God, which all three persons share completely. Furthermore, each person is God in himself. In addition, since all three persons are fully God and the whole God is in each of the three, it follows that the three mutually contain one another. The precise word of the full mutual indwelling of the three persons in the one being of God is called *Perichoresis*. Athanasius and the Cappadocians, in particular, had brought to the forefront this concept of the full mutual indwelling. In terms of the order of the Persons, Letham (2007:179) says that there is a clear order: from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. These relations cannot be reversed. The Son does not beget the Father, nor does the Father proceed from the Holy Spirit. However, Letham contends that the three persons are not identical to another. They are eternal and distinct. Thus, the Father is the Father of the Son, and the Son is the Son of the Father. The Father begets the Son, and Son is begotten by the Father (Letham 2007:179).

To summarize this discussion, by the fourth century, the 'Father, Son and the Holy Spirit' was used as the primary name for God in Christian worship (Kombo 2000:75). Therefore, the 'Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' had by the end of the fourth century became the primary name of God and not merely a series of metaphors that named the one God. Christians of the time did not see a separation between what God is and what he reveals of himself. Contemporary theologians seem to agree that the reason God is revealed as Triune is because his essential being is Triune in the first place. According to Kombo (2000:80) the relevance of the doctrinal statements of the early church for the modern theological situation and, for the African context in particular, are not merely highlights of the Christian heritage that must be recited every time the church assembles. Rather, the doctrinal statements of the early church are an important heritage and they need to be applied to our situation. In this regard, Kombo (2000:80) argues that the African church does not have to formulate afresh the doctrine of the Trinity, as if the church in whose tradition it stands never did anything to that effect. What we need to do in the African context is not ignore the Creeds but to see them as an important heritage and to reinterpret them for the African context.

The inevitable question confronting us now is: 'In what manner may we reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity' for the African situation where ~~is~~ there is too much suffering? The key to reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity is a proper understanding of the current situation in Africa. As we have seen, the doctrine of the Trinity went through definite stages before it became what it is today. For Kombo (2000:81) the issues that the Christian orthodoxy sought to clarify, were: (1) the Christian faith worships one God; (2) that God has made himself known in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, thus the three persons are not to be confused and neither may we divide the one Divine Being; and finally (3) that the Father is from Himself, the Son is eternally begotten the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father (and the Son). The question that we must pose here is: *What are the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for the church in Africa*?

The main thrust of this discussion, therefore, is to link the doctrine of the Trinity more creatively with human experience and to develop an understanding of how and who the triune God is in relation to human life as it is lived and experienced by human beings. As discussed above, many theological works have emerged and many discussions have taken place on the academic level to re-conceive and re-consider the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for our understanding of God and, as many

theologians have pointed out, to shed new light on Christian understanding of personhood, community and human life. To perceive the being of God as an everlasting communion rather than an immovable, unchangeable substance or nature has become the crucial point for studying Trinitarian theology. To put it in a nutshell: Trinitarian theology with its emphasis on the concept of communion has become for many theologians a framework for studying theology. A good example is Moltmann who believes that the triune God of the Christian faith does not remain aloof from the human suffering but that God joins in the human suffering (Park 2000:67-68). The discussion that follows is an investigation of the renaissance of Trinitarian theology and to understand a number of factors and motives that had contributed to the increased interest in the doctrine of the Trinity.

4.3 NEW INTEREST IN THE TRINITY

It is very easy to understand that the traditional doctrine of the Trinity had always occupied a central part of Christian dogma. However, with all its obscurity and mystery, it has long been neglected because of its difficulties to be understood within the church. According to Thompson (1997:37-38) the doctrine of the Trinity has enjoyed a long and distinguished but also history. He feels that this premier doctrine has also fallen on hard times. He also says that the doctrine of the Trinity has no practical relevance at all, even if we think we understand it and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts. Furthermore, O'Collins (1999:2) observes that the claim that in many churches the faithful are emphasizing the practical irrelevance of the Trinitarian faith may be exaggerated. However, he admits the fact that in many churches the faithful hear sermons on the Trinity only once a year, on Trinity Sunday. He shows that, even then, they may be hearing poor sermons on this central belief. Even the Reformers of the sixteenth century were not particularly interested in the doctrine of the Trinity. They simply accepted the past Trinitarian tradition. They had little new to comment on it from the viewpoint of the Bible that they so adored. To that degree, the doctrine of the Trinity had not been a matter of much concern.

This changed with the twentieth century, as new departures in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity emerged from European theologians such as Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltmann. These thinkers re-emphasized the economic Trinity as they sought to overcome the failure of the traditional Trinitarian doctrine to be thoroughly economic. From the viewpoint of the settled position, their theologies moved in a healthy direction, helpful for addressing the mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity. This new direction in the twentieth century thought about the Trinity helped to revive people's interest in the doctrine. Since the time of Karl Barth there has been much serious theology written on

the Trinity and many books and articles on the Trinity were published. It seems that today people throughout the Christian world more and more recognize the importance of the doctrine. The Western mind-set is driven by ever new inventions and discoveries. Trinitarian theology has, indeed, advanced quite a lot during the past several decades. It is no exaggeration to refer to the 'Renaissance or Rebirth of Trinitarian theology' (Kärkkäinen, 2009:7). In the beginning of the new millennium we are in a place to take stock of some of these exciting trends and turns. According to Grenz (2004:72) in the move to revelation, Barth was by no means a voice crying in the wilderness. Karl Rahner joined the refrain and later on a variety of theologians took up the theme of the Trinity.

According to Schwöbel (2014:10) there are a number of factors and motives that had contributed to the increased interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. The first of these factors mentioned is the encounter of Western theology with the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy in ecumenical conversations. Apart from the *Filioque* debate that once led the division between the West and the East church, there is also the issue of the personhood of the Holy Spirit, which Eastern theology raised as a problematic aspect of Western traditions. Schwöbel (2014:10) explains that it is in this context that the question of the differences and similarities between both traditions arise.

The second factor that he has pointed out for the new interest in Trinitarian theology draws attention to the charge that the doctrine of the Trinity has been marginalized. Furthermore, the third group of factors he has raised refers to the relationship between philosophical theism and its modern twin, philosophical atheism and a Trinitarian doctrine of God (Schwöbel 2014:11). It is noted that the philosophical debate on the existence of God and the coherence of theism have, sometimes, ignored the Christian confession that God is triune. Again, it had been observed that Trinitarian theologies have ignored the thorny questions of how confessing God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit shapes the views of divine essence and existence of the divine attributes and their relationship with divine agency.

Finally, the fourth group of factors points to the connections between the understanding of God and the understanding of human persons and human society, especially in the way both come together in the understanding of the church. Schwöbel (2014:11) argues that in spite of various criticisms of personal particularity and social attachment to the image of God, it is acknowledged that the question of the relationship of our images of the divine and our view of social relationships has to be analysed. Basically, many more factors influencing this development would have been taken into account and the story is told more fully by Grenz (2004:73-88).

According to Schwöbel (2014:17), the question of the identity of God is central to the Christian faith. He argues that the doctrine of the Trinity is to be understood as the way in which the Christian church could make sense of her experience of God. The doctrine of the Trinity allows Christians to explain what it means when they respond to the question 'Who is God?' by professing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Schwöbel (2014:19-20) says that starting with the question 'Who is God?' has a number of implications. This question leads immediately to the issue of God's identification and identity. Schwöbel indicates that the question of God's identity must take priority as we discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the African context many people ask a number of questions about God. What image of God emerges from the struggles of the oppressed for their liberation? What language of God do the poor give to the world? The importance attached to the question of the identity of God who is addressed in Christian worship mirrors the significance that is given to God's identity in the biblical witnesses. For Schwöbel (2014:19) the doctrine of the Trinity is to be understood as the way in which the Christian church could explain the identity of God. This, however, requires that one can say something about the way in which the triune God relates to creation on the basis of the relationship that God is as Father, Son and Spirit.

If one surveys the development in the field of Trinitarian theology in the last past years one has the impression of a lively flourishing of approaches and investigations focused on the doctrine of the Trinity, its foundations, developments and constructive expositions in all theological disciplines. It is acknowledged that the rapidly intensifying encounter between the religions in a globalizing world has also led to the new interest in the doctrine of the Trinity as that which is perceived by other religions as distinctively and problematically Christian (Schwöbel 2014:36). In short, it is possible to discern several stages in the recent development of Trinitarian thought. The first phase is a 'problematic phase' trying to establish Trinitarian theology as a field of theological reflection in the churches and in academic theology. This phase, according to Schwöbel (2014:36) focused on the 'forgotten Trinity' as discussed above. The second phase is an 'explorative phase', a focus to explore the new theological possibilities that had been opened up by the Trinitarian reorientation. The One, the Three and the Many are typical of this phase, focusing not so much on the exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity but on the view of the 'culture of modernity' that was opened up by viewing from a Trinitarian perspective. The next phase is called the 'critical ressourcement' the impetus spread to exegetical studies and especially to historical investigations (Schwöbel (2014:36). The historical resources has led to many revisions of earlier assessments and reappraisals of the sources. This means that this phase has given a way of developing new conceptual resources for the reflection of Trinitarian doctrine.

The recent debate on Trinitarian theology which has inspired significant historical and systematic research are issues to do with ecclesial, social and cultural contexts. Schwöbel (2014:36) indicates that these are the areas where the renaissance of Trinitarian theology has produced its most immediate effects. He contends that theology always has social effects because it concerns the fundamental orientations of human beings for their being in the world. The understanding of God that informs the beliefs and practices of the church is therefore one of the decisive factors of the social shape of faith in the church and through the church in society at large. The particular Trinitarian identity of the Christian God as Trinity has pushed a number of questions specifically connected to a Trinitarian understanding.

According to Grenz (2004:72) the consensus of historians is that Karl Barth had set the tone for the twentieth-century renaissance of Trinitarian theology but later on Karl Rahner joined the paradigm of formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. These two theologians are associated with the position of 'God as an absolute subject'. Kombo (2000:104) argues that although both Barth and Rahner are not widely used within the African theological circles, their notion of 'God as an absolute subject' could be very significant to the traditional Africa which already understands God as a being that is both 'Supreme' and 'Personal'. The work of the two Karls injected the interplay of the themes of revelation and salvation history into the understanding Trinitarian theology. During this period theologians took up the challenge of characterizing the connection between God in revelation or God in salvation (the economic Trinity) and God in eternity (the immanent Trinity).

Grenz (2004:72) explains that the views of the two theologians (Barth and Rahner) were objected to by some of the theologians by conceptualizing the distinction between revelation and eternity in spatial terms, that is, by suggesting that revelation with its Trinitarian structure discloses a divine reality that transcends the historical realm and comes to it, as it were, from 'above'. As an alternative, these theologians raised the possibility of an alternative manner of understanding the relationship: by appealing to a temporal rather than a spatial metaphor (Grenz 2004:73). They proposed that the interconnection of the Trinitarian persons in salvation and hence in revelation be understood as the dynamic of the triune God who dwells in an eternity located at the end of, rather than above, time. In their estimation history is the story of the three Trinitarian persons and as a consequence the triune God emerges as the God of history. Later on, a variety of theologians took up the theme of God as the fullness of (divine) history, including Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg and other Protestant thinkers. Although they differ on the details, these theologians share the desire to conceptualize the doctrine of the Trinity by looking at the work of the three Trinitarian persons in history.

For the purpose of this study, our goal is to engage in a critical dialogue with the three theologians: Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Moltmann and to examine their understanding of God's divine activity in salvation and the implications they draw.

4.3.1 Karl Barth's understanding of the Trinity

According to Barth (1936:301) the concrete and decisive question for him, which becomes the foundation of his understanding of the Trinity, is the revelation of God. From scripture, we learn that God is the self-revealing God. This understanding that God, through himself, reveals himself which means that he is subject, act and effect in a unity of revelation. Since God occurs at all three stages, as subject, act, and effect, we are led to the triune God as the controlling factor in revelation. 'Who is God?" Barth (1936:301) gives a summary of this question:

> The important question is not whether God exists, or what God is, or how we know God. Even to attempt to answer those questions would already be to go in a wrong direction. Instead, there is one question, one question posed by revelation, one question alone to which we are bound and with which we have to deal: Who is God? There continue to be many today who would rather start at different places, follow other questions and thereby pursue alien answers. But is not this the question of our lives, the question of our work and the question of the church? Who is God?

According to Barth (1936:301) the doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian. The God who reveals Himself according to Scripture is One in three distinctive modes of being subsisting in their mutual relations: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In this way, the doctrine of the triunity of God is an interpretation of biblical revelation regarding the question of: 'Who is God?' Furthermore, Barth (1936:348) indicated that the doctrine of the Trinity is not and does not seek to be anything but an explanatory confirmation of this name. This is the name of a single being of the one and only who the Bible calls God.

Talking about the Trinity in unity Barth (1936:354-359) says that the unity of God confirmed in this doctrine is not to be confused with singularity or isolation. The statement that God is One in three ways of being, Father, Son and Holy Spirit means, therefore, that the one God, i.e. the one Lord, the one personal God, is what He is not just in one mode but in the mode of the Father, in the mode of the Son and in the mode of the Holy Spirit.

The implication of this understanding is that doctrine of the Trinity answers the question about the revelation of God. One may sum up the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity briefly and simply by saying that God is the One who reveals Himself. If this meaning is to be fully understood one must also reverse the emphasis and say that God is the One who reveals Himself (Barth 1936:380). Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity means on the one hand a rejection of Subordinationism and also a rejection of Modalism, the express declaration that three moments are not alien to God's being as God (Barth 1936:382).

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is understood by Barth simply as 'participation' of the Father and the Son, 'the common factor between the mode of existence of God the Father and the Son'. The Holy Spirit in Barth's theology is merely a correlation between the Father and the Son, the correlation being love (Kombo 2000:111). Barth borrows strongly from Augustine of Hippo who proposed that the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. From this position, Barth was able to argue that the Holy Spirit is love itself and therefore the basis of the theological statement is that 'God is love and love is God'. On the debate concerning the word 'Person' as equivalent to the three mode of existence of God, Kombo (2000:111) clearly shows that Barth refuses to use the concept 'Persons' as used in the Church doctrine of the Trinity because it bears no direct relation to personality. Instead, Barth assigns 'Personality' to the unity of God. Again, he abandoned the word 'Person' because the term suggests that God has three centers of consciousness.

Sanders (2012: 41) indicates that Barth was against the use of this term 'person' because it has always been a source of confusion when understanding the Trinity. Consequently, he prefers the term 'mode' or 'way of being' as replacement. Furthermore, Sanders says that Barth proposed the Trinitarian formula of "One God in three persons" to be updated to "One God in three modes of being (or "…. ways of being"). The reason for the change is that Barth believed that the word 'person' has substantially changed in meaning to include an 'attribute of self-consciousness', especially in the Post-Reformation era.

It can be summarized that Barth tried to restore the doctrine to its original place in the structure of Christian faith. Sanders (2012:41) points out that three major contributions of Barth's understanding of the Trinity are: (1) closing the revelation gap, (2) unfolding the doctrine of the Trinity from the concept of revelation and (3) using the Trinity as hermeneutical key.

He further acknowledges that the first and last have been widely influential and have set the tone of the ensuing conversation. Fewer people have been able to follow Barth in treating the doctrine as an immediate implication of the fact of revelation. However, he admits that the most important legacy of Karl Barth for modern Trinitarianism is the confidence and consistency with which Barth carried out the remarkable act of retrieval.

According to Thompson (1997:17) the most essential area of Barth's contribution is that within the inner divine being there is relationship; God is not alone, but rather in the simplicity of His essence He is threefold - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; mutually related, loving one another eternally. This immanent Trinitarian relationality is then reflected in the community of God and man in Jesus Christ, in the believing community of faith, in the co-partnership of people in society and as male and female. Thus, the understanding of the Trinity as relational illuminates our human relationships which are created by God to reflect His own being, the *imago Dei.* Again, Thompson (1997:17) says that it was Barth who began within Protestantism the current reconstruction taking place today, more especially the social understanding of the Trinity. Karl Barth's work is considered to be one of the two most influential forces in the rise of our current wave of social Trinitarian theology.

4.3.2 Karl Rahner's understanding of the Trinity

Karl Rahner is the other major modern theologian credited with bringing the doctrine of the Trinity to the fore once again, in a new and relevant fashion. Like Barth, he had difficulty with the traditional language which, in his view, has an effect on our understanding of the content of the doctrine. Park (2000:97) indicates that Rahner laments the ignorance of this doctrine in the recent history of Christian thought. In his observation, this doctrine has been treated apart from other theological themes, such as incarnation, grace and creation. Furthermore, it has been studied in isolation from concrete Christian life and piety. It is because of this isolation of the doctrine of the Trinity, as Rahner observes, most Christians have become mere 'monotheists' in their practical life. According to Park (2000:97) Rahner is also critical of using the term 'person' in an individualistic, modern sense. He follows kerygmatic and salvation history in seeing the persons of the Trinity as three distinct manners of subsisting. Subsistence in his view involves distinction, particularity, concreteness and relationship. He wishes to make clear that each manner of subsisting within the Trinity has a distinctive character while at the same time the three manners reveal to us the true being of God.

Kombo (2000:112) says that Rahner's idealist interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity is deeply motivated by his commitment to the position that there can never be a distinction between God as Godself (the immanent Trinity) and God as he relates to us (economic Trinity). It is because of this understanding that Rahner is perhaps best known for his formula: "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity", often referred to as the Rahner's Rule (Sanders 2012:38). Applying this rule consistently, Rahner was led to insist that the person of the Trinity who became incarnate was not only the eternal Son, but was necessarily the Son. No other person of the Trinity could have become incarnate. This was not just because, as voices in the tradition have long argued, it is appropriate to the Son's character to be sent and to become incarnate. Sanders (2012:38) argues that Rahner's use of his own rule pulls together the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity but also pulls together the modern emphasis on history and experience.

He works with a salvation-historical approach to theology and seeks to articulate his theology over against the Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism in which he was trained but which, in his view, rendered the doctrine of the Trinity irrelevant to Christian faith and contemporary theology. In fact, some theologians since Barth and Rahner have taken their insights in the direction of reconceiving the relationship of time and eternity, so that what happens in the history of salvation becomes epistemologically and even ontologically constitutive of the content of eternal life. Park (2000:97) says that Rahner recaptures the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian theology and life by identifying God's salvific activity in the world as the proper focus of this doctrine. Furthermore, he explains that for Rahner there is no genuine doctrine of God apart from the mystery of salvation. The identity of God is known only in salvation history, culminating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Thus, a Trinitarian theology, properly understood, has to be a discourse of God's salvific activity in the world.

Park (2000:98) has observed that this connection of Rahner is grounded upon his understanding of grace as God's self-communication. God's grace is not something that comes from God, but in God's self. Based on this understanding, we can support the idea of Rahner that there is no qualitative difference between God in God's self in eternity and God in God's activity in salvation history. Therefore, it can be contended that a Triniarian theology must be rooted in and start with God's activity in the world. It must be primarily the description of God's salvific offer to God's created world.

In summary, it has been noted that Rahner's thesis that identifies the economic Trinity and the Immanent Trinity has been widely accepted by many theologians across many traditions. It now enjoys

a broad consensus among the theologians of the various churches. Sanders (2012:39) has admitted that the most important criticism of Rahner's work is that this virtual identification of the 'two trinities' leads to an uncritical compromise of God's ontological transcendence and freedom over creation. In other words, Sanders thinks that if the immanent Trinity is the same as the economic Trinity, God is reduced to God's activity in the world and God's transcendence is lost. In addition, some theologians argue that the economic Trinity may be identical with the immanent Trinity, but that the reverse is not true. For them, the doctrine of the Trinity must be rooted in and start with God's salvific activity in the world. However, this does not justify the total identification of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity.

A number of theologians have debated upon this issue but what is important is to take note of the two sides: Karl Barth and Eberhard Jüngel as representatives supporting the weak identity between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, who have argued strongly that the immanent Trinity cannot be simply identified, or synthesized with the economic Trinity. Rather, the former has to remain as the indispensable promise of the latter. On the other hand, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Catherine LaCugna and Ted Peters, as representatives of the strong identity, have contended that the relationship between the two is conceived in eschatological terms (Park 2000:98). For this group, there cannot be any presupposed immanent Trinity which exists apart from the works of the Father, Son and Spirit in the world. Rather, the immanent Trinity is an eschatological reality which exists as the fulfilment and consummation of the present process of the economic history of God.

In the above discussion, we have examined Karl Barth and Karl Rahner's understanding of the Trinity. As we have seen, Barth develops his Trinitarian theology out of the concept of God's self-revelation. God revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. The implication of this understanding is that God alone is the absolute Subject of God's own revelation to humanity. What this means for Barth is that God remains always the Lord and Ruler in God's relation to creation, even in God's revelation. On the other hand, Karl Rahner's understanding of the Trinity remind us that we are called to share in the life of God, both now in the life of the grace of the Spirit and the liberating truth of the Incarnate Word and in the future, when we shall see Him as He really is. Rahner's main project is to revive the doctrine of the Trinity as relevant and practical doctrine for Christian life by understanding it as the description of God's salvific activity in the world. For him the doctrine of the Trinity is precisely the discourse of God's activity in the world.

We have seen two different approaches in understanding the question of the unity of God. Now we will turn to Moltmann's handling of this question. Moltmann develops his understanding of the unity of God largely in dialogue with Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. Bearing in mind that the primary interest of this research project is the issue of 'God's life in communion', Moltmann has been selected for this discussion because his Trinitarian theology is a good example for a more relevant and practical Trinity, which is applicable for the social, economic and political transformation of the world (Park 2000:7). For him, the triune God of the scripture is the God who unceasingly desires to be united with his people. The doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine of freedom and equality that provides genuine human dignity. Since Moltmann hopes to find in the doctrine of the Trinity a theological response to contemporary social questions, then a good way to understand his Trinitarian theology is to examine it in light of this goal.

4.4 JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRINITY

4.4.1 Moltmann's understanding of the unity of God

Moltmann (1981:140) asserts that Western Christianity has developed largely a defective soteriology because it has a defective pneumatology. The root cause of this problem is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of God. He acknowledges that ever since the development of the concept of the Trinity in the Western tradition, beginning with Tertullian coining of the word 'trinitas' and Augustine's more systematic development of 'una substantia', the unity of God has usurped the role which rightly belongs to the three Persons of the Godhead. Consequently, Western Christianity has implicitly been monarchical in its view of God; it has focused more on the Father of the Son, giving rise more to a duality rather than a Trinity. He argues that the Holy Spirit has for all practical purposes taken on the role of a force or power rather than a distinct person of his own (Moltmann 1981:140).

Moltmann (1981:141) believes that this monarchical tendency was exacerbated further by the 'unofficial' introduction of the so-called 'filioque' clause into the Nicence Creed in the West which finally led to the schism between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in 1054. As we discussed previously, the Nicene Creed affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, but the Western church added that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and Son. The Eastern theologians argued that this downgraded the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit by subordinating the Holy Spirit to the Son, as if the Spirit is a mere power or effect of Christ. To say that the Son is the origin of the Spirit confuses the Trinitarian relationships and makes the Holy Spirit less

than divine in comparison with the Son. To say that the Son is also the origin of the Spirit is unintentionally turning the Son into a second Father (Moltmann 1981:38). The Father alone is the source of all reality; the Son is the mediator of reality; and the Holy Spirit is the agent of God in reality. So, the Father creates through his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. In terms of constitution, Moltmann (1981:176) insists that the Father is the eternal origin of the Son and the Spirit. So he (1981:27) acknowledges the 'monarchy' of the Father in the eternal sense of the constitution of the Trinitarian persons, but in terms of the actual movement of the divine persons they are totally equal without any degree of subordination. Moltmann calls this movement 'the circulation of the divine life'.

We have observed from the above discussion that, beginning with the Cappadocian Fathers, the Trinitarian relationships were defined in terms of reciprocity and mutual interpenetration. However, Moltmann argues in favor of the Eastern church's understanding because the Western idea of divine substance minimizes the personal differences which exists among the three Persons of the Trinity (Woodbridge 2014:55). Likewise, Moltmann rejects the modalism of Barth who defines God as Absolute Subject with three eternal modes of being. What constitutes the unity of God is not substance or modes of being but the relational, perichoretic indwelling of the three Persons. Moltmann (1981:178) says that this divine process is what constitutes their fellowship and perfects them in a unity of love. In this way, the pitfall of subordinationism is eliminated and a monarchical model is avoided. The significance of Moltmann's understanding of the Trinity is that he takes this perichoretic model and deepens its meaning and application for our contemporary world. He shows that we must think of the Trinitarian persons as equals; each possesses will and understanding; each speaks to each other; each turn to each other in love and communion (Woodbridge 2014:55). As we have seen, Moltmann refuses to locate the unity of God in the one Absolute Subject or in the Father as the origin of all divinity. Instead, he finds the divine in the perichoretic union of three divine Persons.

How is this perichoretic unity of the Trinity to be arrived at theologically? Moltmann's answer is that through salvation history we come to see that God has revealed Godself in this fashion. What this history of salvation reveals is that God is not a distant monarch who stands against the world and above the world in a dominating and threatening way. Rather, what is perceived through the history which God has with Israel and finally in Jesus of Nazareth is a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to Bauckham (1995:175) Moltmann proposes the Trinitarian fellowship of the three divine Persons as a model for true human community which is both to reflect and to participate in God's own Trinitarian life. This triune God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy

Spirit. God is Father, not only because God is the source of all reality, but because God is the Father of Jesus Christ. It is God's relationship with his Son which bestows upon God a sense of Fatherhood. Likewise, the Son's relationship with the Father is what bestows upon him his sense of Sonship. In this case Bauckham (2005:56) declares that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit which enables the Father and the Son to be related and at the same time for the Father and Son to be in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit to be in the Father and Son. For Moltmann (1981:178) the point of creation, reconciliation and glorification is that men and women and all of creation become a part of the 'circulation' of the triune God.

One of the social implications of the perichoretic concept of the Trinity is the mutuality, reciprocity and equality among the persons of the Trinity - so likewise is this a model for the world. The point of departure for Moltmann is to develop a social doctrine of the Trinity, according to which "God is a community of Father, Son and Spirit," whose unity is constituted by mutual indwelling and reciprocal interpenetration (Moltmann 1981:178). He shows that the unity of Trinity must be understood in a 'real Trinitarian sense of communitarian fellowship' and not like that of indivisible, impenetrable monadic organism. He cites the Eastern Orthodox Church Fathers use of the imagery of family as an appropriate analogy for the unity of triunity: 'three Persons - one family' He believes that this will overcome the deficiency of the monarchical or the modalistic tendencies in the 'substance' or 'subject' oriented Trinitarian doctrine of the Western church. He also states that the disappearance of the Eastern Orthodox Church's reflections of the social doctrine of the Trinity has promulgated the advance of 'possessive individualism' within the Western Church and the world. For him, the New Testament narrative plainly indicates that there are three distinct divine persons in God. Especially if the doctrine of the Trinity is understood because of the cross - Jesus Christ - the Christian understanding of God identifies God as three distinct persons in a unique community.

Indeed, God is the relational community of the fellowship of the Father, Son and the Spirit. Following this understanding of Moltmann it can be argued that, if the doctrine of the Trinity is to be faithful to the Gospel narrative, the church must begin with the knowledge of these three distinct subjects and their particular cooperation in history and, only after that, it has to treat the question of their unity. Park (2000:178) says that the real issue is not the 'threeness' but the 'oneness' of the divine persons. In order to support his argument that the divine unity has to be found in the perichoretic union of three divine persons, Moltmann offers an analysis of three related terms which, together, constitute the communal nature of God: relationship, personhood and perichoretic union (Moltmann 1981:149).

4.4.2 Moltmann's understanding of 'Person'

The concept of *person* emerged as a result of the church's attempt to define how Jesus could be called God and man at the same time in the fourth and fifth centuries. The Greek word for person *prosopon* means 'mask' which actors in the ancient Greek theatre wore on their face as they confronted the audience representing a particular character (Moltmann 1981:171). In Latin theology, the term person, was first used in reference to Sabellian modalism - one God with three masks or roles *prosopon*. In Greek theology, the Greek term 'hypostasis' (a parallel term to *prosopon* was used in developing the doctrine of the Trinity. This denotes the individual existence of a particular nature. Whereas *hypostasis* was eventually the word Greek theology chose for the Trinity, the Latin term *persona* was developed in Western theology and was deepened in its meaning to describe one's particular unique and individual permanent existence (Moltmann 1981:171). By the sixth century Boethius formulated the definitive classical definition of personhood which stated that a person is an individual substance of a rational nature (Moltmann 1981:171). Using Boethius definition of personhood, Moltmann shows that the three persons of the Trinity are not modes of being. They are not simply three masks which God wears in God's revelation to humanity. They are not mere roles or expressions of the one God. Rather, the three persons of the Trinity are individual, unique, non-interchangeable subjects of the one, common divine substance, with consciousness and will (Moltmann 1981:171). Each of the Persons possesses the divine nature in a non-interchangeable way; each presents it in his own way. Accordingly, there is both the divine nature which the three persons have in common, but there is also the nature which the three persons uniquely possess for themselves each in its own way.

The particular nature of each divine person is shaped by their relationship one with another. Moltmann (1981:171) shows that for the decisive characteristic of each person is not simply an abstract oneness which binds them together; rather, what gives each person their own unique nature as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the relationship which they share together in their common bond. Being a person thus involves more than just being a unique individual possessing relationality, but it also includes the social element of being in relationship with others. Furthermore, Moltmann (1981:171) indicates that 'relations' and 'substantial individuality' are essential ingredients for understanding the Trinity today. He regrets the Western understanding of Trinity-defined 'person' as 'relation' as if a person is a relation. God, as Father, means more than just God is related as Father. It means that the Father has concrete existence as a person with being, not just a mode of being. The Father has his fatherhood by relation to the Son, but this relation is not the concrete existence of the Father, but rather this relationship presupposes his actual, distinct existence. Moltmann (1981:172-73) argues that the

'relations' of the three persons must be taken seriously in the sense that they are mutually and reciprocally bonded together in fellowship and love. This mutual reciprocity and interdependence of the triune God is the social model for understanding the meaning of the whole of human life and creation. Moltmann (1981:218) finds in this personal model for God as Trinity the basis for social reconstruction and change in the world. Hence his concern is for human liberation, ecological concerns and the many troublesome aspects of social life. Particularly he finds consolation and hope in spite of the experience of widespread suffering in the world today because the God of Jesus is revealed as one who suffers with us. Without God's capacity for pathos and emotional involvement with his creation, God would not be the God of hope. Therefore, he contends that only in Trinitarian thinking does it makes sense to talk about the love of God and his emotional capacity to feel with us (Moltmann 1981:173).

In a nutshell, Moltmann's theology is developed and constituted in large part as a Christian answer to contemporary social questions of human freedom, equality and of communal life. Moreover, it has been widely accepted by some of the scholars that perhaps it is Moltmann who presents the most widely accepted and influential form of social Trinitarianism. Yet his social doctrine of the Trinity also has provoked criticisms and objections. The first and most important objection raised against Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity is that it is *tritheistic* (Park 2000:185). At the same time Moltmann's response is that there are no serious tritheists in Christian history and *tritheism* has been and still is no real danger to Christian faith (Moltmann 1981:243). Again, he argues that the genuine threat to Christian faith has been modalism and non-Trinitarian monarchianism. Moltmann (1981:243) explains that if the divine persons were considered to exist in themselves and subsequently to enter into relations with one another, this would be *tritheism*. However, if the divine persons and their relations are genetically connected and come into being always at the same time, as the Trinitarian theology maintains, no reason for the charge of *tritheism* exists. The final conclusion of this issue is that there are many areas that can be considered in this discussion supporting Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity.

All in all, it can be summarized that Moltmann presents an insightful concept of social Trinity, which understands the one God as a living and dynamic communion characterized by mutual love and fellowship. The important strength of his social doctrine of the Trinity is that it is faithful to Scripture which presents God as the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their co-working for the creation, redemption and finally the liberation of creation. This mutual reciprocity and interdependence

of the triune God is the social model for understanding the meaning of the whole of human life and creation. Indeed, Moltmann is right to call attention to the centrality of the divine persons for a genuine Christian theological understanding of the one God. With a prophetic zeal, he has argued for a Trinitarian concept of God as the basis for resolving the personal, social, political and ecological problems in the world today. Truthfully speaking it can be clearly stated that Trinitarian thinking opposes 'domination' and 'exploitation' which is so common in the continent of Africa and I think it might be the key to the meaning of freedom and love.

Now, if this is the case, how then can we reclaim Moltmann's message in the continent of Africa? Personal experience has alerted us to the need for post-colonial reflection on the situation of Africa. As we have indicated in this discussion, the main thrust of this project is to link Moltmann's social Trinity more creatively with human experience on the continent of Africa. In view of this, the main focus of the next discussion is to understand the significance of Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity for the continent of Africa.

4.4.3 The significance of Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity

Despite all the new and helpful conceptions which so many theologians over the past years have elaborated in giving the doctrine of the Trinity their full attention, one is still left uneasy when searching for the promising and challenging implications for Christian life in Africa. As we have discussed above, Moltmann uses the image of 'perichoresis' to describe the divine unity, referring to the intimate indwelling and complete interpenetration of the persons in one another. In contrast to the pastristic approach which begins with impersonal philosophical terms, he argues that the Bible reveals three persons at work, not one. Hence an understanding of the Trinity must begin with the fellowship of a plurality of persons, understood as three centers of conscious activity and only then progress to the question of their unity (Metzler 2003:278). Moltmann's critique of classical monotheism and his social doctrine of the Trinity are therefore not simply abstract theory but have implications for human social and political interaction. Therefore, the practical application of his social Trinity finds its expression in community life, equality and interdependence. So, how can we attempt to bring Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity back into the context of Africa? What relevance does this picture of God have for the lives of the African people?

4.4.3.1 Moltmann's Trinitarian Theology promotes communal life

Communion is the expression of relationships, participation and inclusiveness among the members of one community. It signifies how the triune God works and exists. It is also explained in the sense of the one and only, where each of the persons is God; the correct expression of the three in one is in relation to their work (Vähäkangas 2000:37). It is in the principle of inclusion rather separation which accounts for the life-together in community because community is based on a common means of existence in a community which, in turn, includes a sharing of common life.

Based on this understanding of communion, to confess that God is triune is to affirm that the eternal life of God is a personal life in relationship. The God of the biblical witness is not impersonal but personal and enters into living relationships with creatures. Thus, the confession of the triune God radically calls in question all totalitarianism that denies the communal life among the people. Africa is grappling with several challenges that have affected the spirit of communion. Africa has been a theatre of conflict and political crisis. The entire continent is bleeding from the pain of tribal animosity, ethnic tension, hatred, violence, poverty, political instability, and injustices. Religions are basically meant to help people in their tribulation but religious pluralism in Africa has brought conflict, tension and confusion in families and communities. According to Kagema (2015:1) religions in Africa have not been able to bring forth justice, reconciliation and peace. On the contrary, Africans believe that it is only in the community where the life of the individual acquires true meaning. In other words, it is not in living as an isolated being but in mutually interacting with other members of community that the individual can ever hope to realize his/her social aspirations in life.

The New Testament presents the church as a communal body. Within such a context of eternal and endless exchange of love there is no room for superior or inferior. Once someone empties himself or herself for the sake of the other out of love and is ready to put aside all of his or her concerns, ideas and conceptions to be fully present, to listen to and to help the other, hierarchical aloofness disappears and the person who loves acquires a primary of love and service, not of authority (Makhoul 2011:92). Trinitarian relationships are characterized by continuous mutual love, reciprocal help and edification. It was noted in the first chapter that post-colonial Africa is filled with fearsome and unpredictable occurrences demanding a Christian answer. The post-colonial condition has brought some truly horrible problems that has caused the break down of family relations, communion and hospitality in Africa. Attempts at industrialization and urbanization, with their accompanying detribalization have, to a large extent, disintegrated African family relations and social life. The effects are now being seen in

Africa in the enormous increase of selfishness, individualism, materialism and tribalism. Indeed the challenge for reexamining the meaning of communion, relationality and solidarity in post-colonial Africa must be courageously faced.

So, in this sense, trying to live with Trinitarian relationships is about building up and promoting persons in relationships of love and not just isolated individuals who are indifferent to one another. Makhoul (2011:96) says that it is a Christianity that reflects the very life of the Triune God, an endless exchange of love that helps us to grow in our spiritual and community life, while working together towards that 'they may all be one' (John 17:21). According to Moltmann (1981:90-96) the reason Jesus Christ came to the world, died on the cross and was resurrected, is ultimately for the glorification of God the Father and not for himself. Therefore, when we think about the Trinitarian life from this perspective, it criticizes and counters every human attempt to justify individualism tendencies in our society.

4.4.3.2 Moltmann's social Trinity promotes social freedom, equality and human dignity

In the Kingdom of the Father, in which God is Creator and Lord of his creation, people experience the freedom of being God's servants which liberate them from subjection to anything other than the sole lordship of the triune God (Moltmann 1981:219). However, the notion of a divine monarchy in heaven and on earth generally provides the justification for earthly domination (religious, moral, patriarchal or political) and makes it a hierarchy, a holy rule. Specifically, Moltmann distinguishes two forms of monotheism that have to be firmly opposed: political monotheism and clerical monotheism. Park (2000:204) indicates that by political monotheism it means a hierarchical world order whose apex is the divinely ordered monarchy. Christian theology has taken an absolutist political model for God according to which God has legitimized the emergence of various forms of political absolutism. Traditional Trinitarian thought, which finds God's unity in the one divine essence or one divine subject, did not really challenge the notion of a universal monarch, rather, it legitimized this understanding and thus strengthened various hierarchical systems and social oppression (Park 2000:204). It simply endorsed the scheme of one God, one political ruler and one nation. By clerical monotheism, Moltmann (1981:191) implies the counterpart to the divine monarchy in the church's hierarch, especially the monarchical episcopate and the papacy. The sequence of one God, one Christ, one pope (or one bishop), one church functions to legitimize a hierarchical church structure of clerical supremacy and lay obedience as well as male domination and female subjugation.

In this way, Moltmann contends a properly understood Trinitarian theology has two tasks. Negatively, it has to disclose the ideological aspect of monotheism by showing the relationship between monotheism and political monarchianism. It is only when the doctrine of the Trinity vanquishes the monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven and his divine patriarchs in the world - the earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants - cease to find any justifying religious archetype any more (Moltmann 1981:201). Positively, it has to provide a model for a healthy and desirable human society. Here he finds in the notion of the perichoretic unity of God a desirable model for human society. Thus, our political system and social structure must correspond with the eternal love of the Trinity by providing equality, freedom and egalitarian relationships. In several countries, incumbent long serving political leaders have found ways to manipulate the electoral process. Aside from increasing term limits, the methodical undermining of the opposition parties and leaders along with civil societies is widespread across the nations.

The challenge for current governments, regardless of systems used, is the creation and implantation of policies which reflect the immediate and future needs of the people (Lepapa 2017:1). Again, it is well captured in chapter one, that corruption is endemic to the way of life in much of Africa. It has permeated all life facets from simple things like access to medical care, schools and jobs, to the grand scale like awarding of contracts and use of public resources. The effect has been great inequalities both in access of services from government offices as well as opportunities for investment with local and foreign firms being discouraged and forced to close business. Lepapa (2017:1) argues in his report that the misappropriation of public funds and biased awarding of contracts compromises the equality service available to the members of the public. As a result, the huge gap between the classes is further enhanced. While strides are being made by respective governments, the perceptions of corruption and level of trust to the government and the organs show the situation is still far from ideal. Corruption affects key sectors like healthcare, education and infrastructure which result in poor living conditions.

Insecurity is also rampant across Africa hindering progress at national and regional levels. From the urban crime to terrorist groups like Al-Shaabab and Boko-Haram, to civil wars in South Sudan and political instability in Libya and Somalia, the examples are unending. Lepapa (2017:1) explains that the insecurities affect all factors of production, cause massive displacement of people, loss of investments, lives and also scare away direct foreign investment.

As already discussed, Moltmann's understanding of God as perichoretic has abundant social implications for our time. It fits our post-colonial consciousness that increasingly emphasizes the importance of social freedom, equality and human dignity in all reality. The ultimate foundation of Christians' commitment to liberation can be found in the Trinity - understood as mystery of communion among distinct persons. The fact that the Trinity is a communion of persons has huge implications for impoverished people. Christian community is created to be in the image of the Trinity, especially as it engages in colonial discourse. God in Trinity works continually to reshape the church into a community defined by freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity and post-colonial discourse deconstructs oppression and domination by providing freedom and equality. Fellowship with God is the beginning and the end of human liberation. This vertical dimension of faith is the essential response to the gospel and is thus the heart of the social doctrine of the Trinity. The reality of suffering and evil challenges the affirmation that God is liberating the oppressed from human captivity. Yet what is important to note is that in the theology of Moltmann the perichoretic union of God and the life and death of Jesus Christ are inseparably interconnected with each other. As we have seen, the doctrine of the Trinity arises for Moltmann from the specific event of the cross. This God is the one who identifies with the poor and the oppressed and thus brings liberation to all creation.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the history and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. It has been noted that one of the most important developments in the last few decades is the renewal of the doctrine of the Trinity. Within this renewal of Trinitarian theology Jürgen Moltmann stands as one of the most important contributors because his social understanding of the Trinity provides a viable option for interpreting the unity of the triune God, especially for the continent of Africa. We have discussed that Moltmann adopts the widespread current belief stressing the importance of salvation history for the doctrine of the Trinity. He understands this doctrine particularly from the cross of Jesus Christ. For him, the material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is a quite practical doctrine that enables us to respond to the reality of pain and human suffering and answer the question of genuine human freedom. On the other hand, it encourages us to see the human-nature relationship as one of love and respect, thus inspiring us to appreciate the natural world as it is. Moltmann's social approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is deeply grounded in his concern for liberation, political injustice and the experience of suffering.

We have indicated in this chapter that Moltmann refuses to assign the unity of God to one absolute subject or in the Father as the origin of all divinity. Instead, he finds the divine unity in the *perichoretic* unity of the three divine persons. The implication of this understanding is that God's unity is not only for God but also for the creation. The union of the divine Trinity is open for the uniting of the whole of creation with itself and itself. Moltmann's Trinitarian theology, which understands God as a community of persons in *perichoretic* union, may indeed inspire a desirable model for human community in Africa. The concept of the triune God can help to disclose the false ideology behind a hierarchical and oppressive tendency in society. Especially his Trinitarian theology of God as a *perichorectic* community of relationship, friendship and equality offers a desirable communal model that is desperately required for our post-colonial time in Africa. It is widely pointed out that modernity, which sees reality as objective, mechanistic, hierarchical and individualistic has greatly wounded human life in Africa. It has failed to satisfy the deepest desires of the human heart, while resulting in fragmentation of human society. People urgently seek healthy and genuine community that provides unconditional acceptance and respect and thereby helps them to grow as healthy and mature human persons. Since this is so Moltmann's understanding of God as a *perichoretic* unified community of love and freedom has abundant social implications for our time.

To perceive the being of God as an everlasting communion rather than an unmovable, unchangeable substance or nature has become the crucial point for studying Trinitarian theology. Therefore, the social doctrine of Trinity at once provides the model and the means for the kingdom of God. Moltmann is correct in addressing the problem of oppressive authoritarian structures. However, the bottom line is that the abuse of authoritarianism comes from the failure to recognize two distinctions between divine and human communities, namely, perfect love and eternity. The perfect love of the Father, Son, and Spirit creates the context under which authority is not abusive, even an authority that would send the Son to suffer and die. This love is selfless both within the Trinity and from the Trinity to the rest of creation. Perfect love enables each person to fulfil his/her role and to allow others to do the same. Moltmann' social understanding of the Trinity provides an important model for the African church and society by beginning with the revelation of the crucified God. His emphasis on Christian hope is also important in helping the African church understand its prophetic, redeeming role in society and in empowering the oppressed to find freedom. At the center of it all is the cross of Jesus Christ and the obedience of offered to his Father.

As a point of departure, the focus of our next chapter is an examination of the African understanding of

the doctrine of the Trinity. We have contended in this chapter that Moltmann presents an insightful concept of social Trinity that deserves a welcoming assent in the continent of Africa. His social doctrine of the Trinity, which understands the one God as a living and dynamic community characterized by mutual love and fellowship, may work as a theological as a viable and practical relevant doctrine of God. Yet what is important to note is that doctrine of the Trinity has not gained much attention among African academic theologians. It is essential for this research to establish how Africans are likely to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity. As noted by a number of theologians, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery to the people of Africa. The issue of the Holy Spirit, his nature and divinity is not discussed much in Africa.

Mwoleka (1975:203) expresses the same concern who says that many people in Africa find it very difficult to understand what this mystery is all about. He contends that a number of Christians do not know what to do with it except that it must be believed. On the other hand, Erickson (2006:347) believes that the doctrine of the Trinity is what defines the Christian faith. Among the religions of the world the Christian faith is one and yet there are three who are God. So, the crucial question is: 'Is it possible to apply Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity in the African context, understanding that Africans worship one Supreme Being and venerate ancestors as intermediaries to the one Supreme Being, without clear roles being ascribed to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit?'

The need for an African approach to the doctrine on Trinity is pressing despite the difficult or the feeling of inadequacy towards an indigenous African reflection on the issue. The next chapter enquires whether Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity can be relevant in the African context.

CHAPTER 5. AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP ON TRINITARIANISM IN DIALOGUE WITH MOLTMANN

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity, as we have seen from the previous chapter, has experienced a powerful re-emergence in modern theology in contrast to its relative neglect in earlier periods. Today it is clear that the rise of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity is particularly significant because of its chief expression in the social model of the Trinity. This trend towards a social model of the Trinity has brought together some very diverse theological schools, such as feminist and liberationist theology and evangelicals. It has helped process theologians all of whom in their own way deem the social Trinity as the best way of understanding God.

As already noted, within this renewal of Trinitarian theology, Moltmann stands as one of the most important contributors. His Trinitarian theology is developed and constituted in large part as a Christian answer to contemporary social questions of human freedom, equality and of communal life (Park 2000:10). For him, the triune God of the Scriptures is the God who unceasingly desires the freedom of his creation. This doctrine is for him nothing other than a short version of the passion narrative of Christ in its significance for the eschatological freedom of faith and the life of the oppressed. The practical application of his theology finds expression in human fellowship and interdependence. Metzler (2003:278) says that Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity is a critical model for theology in its mission of transforming the world. He contends that Moltmann's theology of the Trinity rests on the hope of a Triune God that breaks into human hopeless situations.

Despite the controversies which have swirled around his theology of the Trinity, Moltmann is indisputably one of the most influential theologians of the latter half of the 20th century. Without doubt we can suggest that his theology of the Trinity may provide pathways for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity in Africa.

Following these observations, what this chapter seeks to explore is the African interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity in dialogue with Moltmann's theology. Since our focus here hopes to find in the doctrine of the Trinity a theological response to contemporary social questions of freedom, equality, dignity and unity in the African context, perhaps the best place to begin this task is to examine a

number of African scholars on this subject. We know that the idea of a triune God has been very difficult to be understood in Africa. Some writers have argued that African theology has not been involved in Trinitarian discourses even though the discussions have been going on for about two decades.

Perhaps the questions that should get us going in this chapter are: What has made the doctrine of the Trinity not to be understood in the African context? How do the African peoples speak of God? How do they speak of Jesus? How do they speak of the Holy Spirit? How we answer these questions is important, as the search for the answers force us to go back to the basics of African understanding of God. From what has been said, it is important to examine and evaluate some of the misconceptions of the doctrine of the Trinity in Africa and to understand how they have influenced the interpretation of the triune God. This is done on the grounds that the Western vocabulary of the Trinity has been rejected by a number of African scholars. Vähäkangas (2000:34) argues that Western patterns of understanding the Trinity, however indigenous that might be, are not always felt to be adequate in Africa. This feeling of inadequacy is another path toward an indigenous African interpretation on the Trinity.

Furthermore, Kombo (2000:256) raises the concern that the doctrine of the Trinity is a problem to the African mind in at least three ways: In the first place, the doctrine comes to Africans clothed in either Neo-Platonism or Idealism. The models that have been used to interpret the Trinity are very difficult to be understood by Africans. Another theological problem is raised by the three persons. The African cosmology does not allow thinking in Trinitarian terms because, for Africans, God is one and no one else shares the divine category with God. So, the challenge is how do we instil in the mind of the African people the view that God has made himself known through the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit? The third challenge is to find terms that can convey the deep theological issues encapsulated in the traditional Trinitarian formula. Kombo (2000:257) clearly explains that the Trinity can be expressed for Africans by using African metaphysics, but the African theologians have to be willing to search and locate the necessary intellectual tools and symbols for this task within the conceptual framework.

5.2 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IN AFRICA

As we discussed earlier, the subject of the doctrine of the Trinity has faced a number of misconceptions in Africa. Even though the missionaries of the nineteenth century were well trained, equipped for all

eventualities on the mission field, they did not prepare the Africans to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. Kombo (2000:23) feels that the Western missions did not only understand the African milieu sufficiently but they failed to articulate the biblical concept of God adequately so that the Africans could apply it in their Christian life. Consequently, the Africans lacked the necessary biblical tools to understand the concept of God. Unfortunately, instead of helping the Africans to understand the Triune God, the Western missionaries went ahead and criticized, labelled, stigmatized and misconstrued Africa as a 'Dark Continent' devoid of the full knowledge of God.

Taking this discussion onto another level, Kombo (2000:23) states that what African Christians need today is a clear picture of the Trinitarian God. He has identified a number of gaps which have contributed to the Christian misunderstanding of the concept of God in Africa. He feels that the mistake of understanding the Christian view of God superficially leads to a situation in which the African Christian does not know what to do with the African traditional past, the environment, the community and other religions on the scene. Mwoleka (1975:203) gives an impression that many people in Africa find it very difficult to understand what this mystery of the Trinity is all about. He contends that many Christians do not know what to do with it except that it must be believed.

There is a perception that the Trinity has been misunderstood by African Christians because, traditionally, Africans would never confuse spirits with God; the spirits were always described as part of creation. In the African ontology Mbiti (1969:16) distinguishes five categories: God, spirits, men, animals and plants and the objects without biological life. For African people, God created the divinities and the spirits who are divine and have God's powers. However, they, as intermediaries, are under the control of God. Ekeke (2010:20) explains that the divinities do not have independent existence or absolute existence, but derive their being from the Supreme Being, their powers and authorities are meaningless apart from Him. The African concepts of God have no notion of God revealing himself in a Son. Neither do they know that God's Spirit is a distinct hypostasis but of an equal divinity with God.

Another controversial issue in this discussion is the position of Jesus Christ in the Trinity. In response to this Kombo (2000:220) says that the notions of Christ as mediator can be quite confusing to an African. For Africans the term mediator, when used in the context of the ontological difference between God and man, conveys the idea of an intermediate being between God and man. This is the

role played by divinities, spirits, the living dead and in some cases chiefs. The mediatorship of Christ, however, is different. Christ is not a being between God and man, he is the Logos who became flesh. In other words, He is both God and man. Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Kombo argues that it is easily confused with the spirits, the power that God uses and this equation of the Holy Spirit with power or force is easily observable in the independent churches and the modern charismatic movement (Kombo 2000:221).

Based on the above observations, it is evident that the understanding of the Trinity in Africa remains a challenge. Of course, it is an accepted position, as we have discussed above, that the African people believe in One Supreme Being who is responsible for the existence of spirits, men, animals, plants and the objects without biological life such as stones. This God is regarded as the God of creation and the God who sustains the universe, both visible and invisible, and all forms of life (Mbiti 1969:16). However, we must not forget to mention that the concept of the divine Trinity in which God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are One is not clearly articulated in Africa even up to the present time. The idea of a triune God is perhaps still difficult for Africans because the vocabulary to express this teaching is borrowed from the Western perspective. Equally overlooked in African theology is the role of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual and the community of faith.

The main challenge in the African interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity has been the problem of the transcendence and immanence of God. It has been a struggle to explain the hiddenness of God. Most African peoples believe that there is no relationship from God to man. The African Traditional World view in many respects believes that transcendent God whose immanence is mediated by lesser spiritual intermediary powers. So far the evidence suggests that Africans have a closer relationship with the ancestors than with God. Again, Africans perceive a distance between them and God and the problem emanating from the African Traditional World view is that God is not directly involved in everyday human activities, because God is transcendent and remote from the physical world (Mangezi 2016:2).

Kombo (2000:206) argues that all Africans seems to agree that God is basically unapproachable and aloof. So, he believes that the African idea of the mediators is a direct result of the belief among the African peoples that God is hidden. For Kombo, the theology that will be at the cutting edge is that which seeks to explain to the African believers what it means that God has revealed himself in the Son

and the Holy Spirit. For an African who traditionally understood God merely as hidden and transcendent and who could not access God even through an elaborate doctrine of the intermediaries, nothing can be more revolutionary than the teaching that God has revealed himself in the Son and the Holy Spirit. Kombo (2000:211) explains that African Christian thought has not paid sufficient attention to the problem of the intermediaries. In the past, they have been discussed in the context of the doctrine of God. The problem with this approach is that African theologians did not get to adequately isolate them and deal with the intermediaries for what they are, more especially in the context of the Trinity.

5.3 SCHOLARSHIP ON THE DOCTRINE OF TRINITY IN AFRICA

Considering all these arguments and observations, it gives an African theologian a challenge to explain clearly the Trinitarian understanding of God in the African context. As we have discussed, it is the responsibility of the Christian faith in the African context to tell the African Christians about the doctrine of the Trinity. How does African theology interpret the Trinitarian understanding of God which may be relevant to the issues affecting the African church today? In response to these observations, African theologians have proposed a number of approaches that can help to re-interpret the doctrine of the Trinity, which can be a response to the needs of the African people. In this regard, this study will turn to a brief investigation of the African theologians, namely Ogbonnaya, Nyamiti, Kombo and Kunhiyop

5.3.1 The Trinity as a Communitarian Divinity

The first approach focuses on communitarian divinity proposed by Ogbonnaya (1994) whose book is titled *On communitarian divinity: An African interpretation of the Trinity.* In this book, Ogbonnaya applies his mind to the community which is the basis of relationships for Africans and he makes some links with the plurality of God within the Trinity. Ogbonnaya has come up with the interpretation of the Trinity in an African world view; a reflection that has moved from Divine Trinity to Divine Community or Communitarian Divinity which is also named Divine communality. This reflection is totally influenced by one of Tertullian's works on Trinity stressing communality within the Godhead (ILunga 2008:44).

According to Ogbonnaya (1994:1) "communality, relationality and fundamental interconnection underlie the African mode of seeing and being in the world." Ogbonnaya approaches the Trinity from the position of 'many', as in 'community'. The challenge he faces is what kind of community to focus

on. He picks up the concept of relationship from interacting with other scholars. Ogbonnaya (1994:2) speaks of 'rural communities where personal relationships are characterized, explained and guided by traditional rules. There are face-to-face relations that are spontaneous. There are also some who view community as events that join people together, not social groups. Individuals may be connected by the spirit. Furthermore, Ogbonnaya (1994:4) says that there is no community without the past and the future. Historical events are shared by the community that anticipates a common goal for the future, paying attention to an African-centered perspective on community and interpretation.

Monotheism has been defined as the belief in the existence of only one God that created the world. Mbiti (1969:36) asserts that every African person recognizes God as One. There is only One Creator of the Universe. According to Mbiti (1969:37) the most common name for God in Africa is 'Creator'. He explains that all African peoples attribute creation to God and many have 'Creator' as their name for God in their own language. It is because of this perception that he feels there cannot be two or more separate divine Creators of the same creation. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, in many African languages the name of God or the word for God is used in singular form. Mbiti (1969:37) argues that this phenomenon demonstrates that the African Traditional Religion is a deeply monotheistic religion. On the other hand, besides the one God, other divinities and spiritual beings are but mediators between man and God, or are manifestations of God or generally the personification of God's activities (Han 2013:160).

Ogbonnaya (1994:13) in his discussion of African divinity presents a debate about the understanding of 'the one' and 'the many'. On the nature of the African concept of God the question is: 'How can an African understand the Trinitarian God based on a concept that says there is One God, One Creator of the Universe? Ogbonnaya (1994:13) contends that there is no monotheistic radicalism in African Tradition Religion. He regards any African who holds the monotheistic position as being influenced by the West. He believes that those scholars with Western influence accept the concept of God as absolutely personalistic and they continue to speak of the high or great God (Manganyi & Buitendag 2013:6). Therefore, he considers the term monotheism to be foreign to ATR. He is dismayed with many African scholars who try to present the existence of an absolute monotheism of a singular personalistic deity in ATR.

According to Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:6) Ogbannaya attacks the idea of the Supreme Being because it has a reference to one Superior Person. The use of the name Supreme Being can be used for

any other being based on experience and it does not reveal the character of God. Furthermore, Manganyi & Buitendag explains that Ogbonnaya believes that the greatness of any particular God depends on the experience of the individual addressing that God. He reflects on names like Supreme God, Most High God, Father of all and Great Ancestor, that are employed as a means to prove monotheism.

Again, it is acknowledged that the idea of a Supreme God has a negative influence on the worship and recognition of other gods. For Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:6) names like Supreme God can convey an idea of a God who is incapable of having children or incapable of being in close familiar relationships, such a one cannot be truly God and this what is expressed by Ogbonnaya (1994:20). In this context Ogbonnaya says that a god incapable of working within a community of beings of similar substance would be highly suspect. From the African perspective to be alone is not accepted and is always considered to be curse. It is because of this understanding that Ogbonnaya (1994:20) believes, in the African context, God cannot be alone or singular because he has to have a community. Therefore, in trying to avoid the word 'polytheism' Ogbonnaya (1994:20) uses the term 'plurality of gods'. However, this term may also raise a number of questions because the recognition of the worship of other gods can be described as polytheism. In trying to defend his position Ogbonnaya (1994:21) says that 'polytheism' is that which separates the divine nature into many disparate parts. He also suggests that the term polytheism is a Western concept. He further explains that 'divine communalism' is the position that the divine is a community of gods who are fundamentally related to one another and are ontologically equal.

In summary Ogbonnaya (1994:8) acknowledges that "in the context of African people they are surrounded not by things but by beings with which the metaphysical world is loaded." The implication is that all of humans' activity and realities of life are connected with spiritual beings. In the African context, the relationships go beyond the material world. There is recognition of the extended family and the community but the relationships transcend geographical boundaries. African life is lived in daily recognition of the ancestors. These relationships between human beings and their ancestors are recognized as openness to the divine. Ogbonnaya (1994:9) explains that the community is not just a state but a process of being in the world, a process that includes the past, the present and the future. He says that it is within the context of the community that revelation takes place.

From this description of God, conceived as a community of Divine Beings, emphasizes the commonality among the divine beings rather than their differences. According to Ogbonnaya (1994:38) the Divine Communalism is a more adequate way of conceding and explaining the concept of Divinity in African contexts. He (1994:38) insists that if God the Father is a Divine person as such, he is not the whole Divinity. He says that this personification is not one but many and the 'many' here does not oppose 'oneness'; it is inclusive of all the Divine Beings. So, for an African, to hear the name of God the Father and of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit, signifies a fellowship within the Godhead in the African context. In Africa, every person is related one to another. Their relationship by blood, by marriage or by mere association is dearly cherished. Therefore, the concepts of relationships, fellowships and participation constitute the main ground for the African interpretation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

5.3.2 The Trinity from the concept of ancestors

The dimension from which African theologies seem to connect Jesus Christ with ancestral philosophies regards the tracing of Jesus' family membership to the first human being - Adam. Nyamiti (1996:28) employs this dimension to argue that Jesus' descent may be traced back to Adam, where his ancestorship as Brother Ancestor may be qualified on the basis of the Christian belief in the common origin of all humanity. According to Nyamiti (1996:28) traces the Africans' consanguineous relationship to Christ through the biblical understanding of common origins in Adam. Nyamiti (1996:28) expresses this idea in the following manner:

> Considered as man Jesus is our natural Brother in Adam, like anyone of us is. It is obvious that when seen from this purely human perspective Christ was like all men a descendant of Adam and had natural family, clanic and tribal relationships. After His death, He became again like all men, a Brother, Ancestor in Adam. This Brother Ancestorship is purely natural. It is Christian in origin of all men in Adam. In this case, however, Jesus became the natural Brother-Ancestor only of those who lived on earth after His death.

According to Nyamiti (1996:27-28) Jesus' ancestorship may be qualified and expanded to all human races through Adam. He uses this example focusing on the Bantu concept of ancestorship and it is because of this understanding that all members of the African Christian community are perceived as descendants of a common ancestor, who is Jesus Christ. Nyamiti (1996:29) argues that Jesus became the natural Brother-Ancestor only of those who lived on earth after His death. Thus, all those who are

excluded do not qualify to form part of this African Christian community. Their exclusion rests upon the fact that many had died before Jesus came to the world and therefore, could not be adopted into the Christian brotherhood-descent of Jesus Christ. The second restriction pertains to the adoption of members by Christ into the community. In this proviso, it is imperative that one is first adopted, through the habitual grace of God, into becoming the brother of the logos (Jesus Christ).

With this understanding Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:6) explains that Nyamiti is of the view that the concept of ancestors conveys the understanding that the worth of any human or religious value transcends time and place. Manganyi & Buitendag contends that Africans live their lives linked and connected to one another beyond the limitation of time and space.

Understood in this manner, Nyamiti appears to focus more on the family and culture. In his view, every member of the family is born within a relationship and, since there is communication amongst individuals within the family, Nyamiti (1996:48) argues the same for the divine family, namely that the communication being through begetting, the only form of mutual contact between these two persons, is that which takes place through the Holy Spirit. For Nyamiti (1996:48), both the Father and the Son begets Him (i.e. the Holy Spirit) through (spiration). Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:6) states that applying the category of the relationship between the living relatives and the ancestors Nyamiti further explores the relationships within the Trinity. In his interpretation, his statement clearly reflects that the Father and the Son communicate the Holy Spirit to each other with ancestral gifts and oblations as a token of their mutual love, homage and gratitude. He shows that God the Father is, analogically speaking, the ancestor and ancestress of his Son and the latter is his true descendant.

It is evident that through these arguments Nyamiti is attempting to demonstrate the way in which African veneration of ancestors parallels the social understanding of the Trinity. One of the most outstanding and important feature of Nyimiti's theology of the ancestors is the relationship and communication amongst individuals within the family. The African communities are known for being hospitable, sharing both material items and communal activities in their day to day social process. This can be linked to Christ's hospitality towards downtrodden of his own society, as he ate and interacted with sinners (Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:29-32) and fed the hungry who gathered around him. This means that the Church as Christ's ancestral organ must carry out hospitality to refugees, strangers and the unfortunate of society.

The implication of Nyamiti's theology of family relations can lead to a deeper union and intimacy in the Christian life; an intimacy with God and with each other. In the African context, this implies that communion and communication is outwardly maintained and expressed by the eating, drinking and working together. As such, we become co-heirs and even co-redemptors alongside Christ and we are all able to commune in the mystery of the Trinity (Akijar 2000:55). As ancestors are never far removed from their living kin, so Nyamiti explicates the nearness of the mystery of the Trinity with the church, as the Christian community communes with the Trinity. Failure to recognize the concept of family relations, communion and communication leads to a number of social challenges described in chapter 1. The African should always depend on the risen Christ for authentic human existence for he is the true God.

5.3.3 The Trinity expressed through African names

A third approach is the reflection done by Kombo (2009:133) who starts his article by investigating the true significance of African names. According to Kombo (2009:134) he argues that the African intellectual culture can be used to explain the triune God to African audiences. This means that the Trinity must emerge from the local names such as *Nzambi, Nyambe, Ndyambi, Dzambi, Tsambi, Yambe, Sambi, Zam, Monzam and Nyasaye*. Kombo explains that some of these names are used by African Christians to express the concept of God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. However, he suggests that this process involves re-identification and inculturation of monotheism, as well as reconceptualization of both the Son and the Holy Spirit so that the Trinity may be understood in the African context (Kombo 2009:134).

Furthermore, Kombo (2009:134) makes a call for all African Christians to be proud of their own identity. In this task, he says that African Christians are to separate themselves from the Greco-Roman influence that came with missionary Christianity, distinguish themselves from the expanding Muslim population and critically draw from African religious consciousness without reverting to African traditional religions. Kombo concludes that when Africans use African names for God, its Trinitarian character is accepted and in this way the African God is Christianized and the African religious heritage obtains a Christian meaning.

Just like Nyamiti, Kombo recognizes monotheism in Africa. He notices that pre-Christian Africa had a form of monotheism that has been called primitive monotheism or diffused monotheism. But he denies the concept of polytheism. Kombo (2009:136) maintains that "pre-Christian African religious

consciousness had no place for polytheism, meaning that there was no worship of many gods". His argument is based on the fact that no temple was ever built for an idol or image worshipped in Africa. He adds that spirits are spirits of the people who have died, not of gods.

Kombo (2009:136) proposes "a modified monotheism where Christ and the Holy Spirit shall be situated in the center of primitive monotheism". Kombo's standpoint is similar to the Western evangelical position. He does not adopt too much terminology and categories from African Traditional Religion such as ancestors and other divinities, but recognizes the role and position of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Africans in their worship of God continue to experience God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In summary Kombo (2009:141) raises a number of pneumatological questions concerning the pre-Christian African understanding of God as a spiritual being and not having a material body. In the African World, as we discussed in chapter 2, God is always perceived as the Great Spirit, the Fathomless Spirit, the Ever-Present Spirit or the God of Wind and Breath. For Kombo, these terms simply denote that God is a spiritual being. On the other hand, he acknowledges that the spirits have a special category (Kombo 2009:141). He also contends that the first translators of the Bible into the African language had a challenge because they needed to separate the Holy Spirit from God, on the one hand, and the Holy Spirit from the other spiritual beings, on the other hand. Kombo (2000:142) argues that the theology that will adequately distinguish the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, will seek to proceed as follows: (1) distinguish the spirits in African cosmology from the Holy Spirit; (2) relate the Holy Spirit to Christ; and (3) relate the Holy Spirit to the Father.

5.3.4 The Trinity in church life and practice

On the same issue of the Trinity in Africa, Kunhiyop (2015:55) raises the idea that God and the idea of the Trinity are no strange beliefs in Africa. He says that the Supreme Being (God) is a commonly held belief among all African peoples, predating Christianity and Islam. Moreover, he contends that Africa also played a formative role in the development of the concept of the Trinity. Tertullian, an African theologian, is credited with being the first theologian to coin the word 'Trinity'. In addition, it is indicated that the Ethiopian Orthodox church is the only church in Africa that traces its Trinitarian beliefs and practice to the fourth century.

In his article Kunhiyop (2015: 55) gives a picture that the belief in the triune God is not just an abstract theological postulation by sophisticated theologians but has serious meaning and implications for Christian spirituality and practice. Therefore, he argues that biblical Christianity cannot exist without Trinitarian theology but sadly he has noted that Christianity as practiced in most of contemporary African churches ignores, disregards, or simply does not appreciate its meaning and significance. Kunhiyop (2015:56) explains that in some Christian circles preachers make pronouncement such as "Do not expect to understand it, just believe or accept it". The problem is that this statement is half true and half false. He argues that it is true people cannot understand the Trinity fully but this does not mean that they are unable to understand anything. It is true that the concept of the Trinity is a mystery - but it does not mean that God has not revealed anything about this concept and that people cannot say anything intellectually rational about it.

In order to explain the position of the Trinity in Africa, Kunhiyop (2015:61) exposes the distortions of the Trinity in contemporary African Christianity. Firstly, he talks about the heresy which holds to the belief in God and nothing more. African Christians are susceptible to this error due to their cultural worldview which does not have a clear understanding of the triune God. In this case Kunhiyop (2015:61) shows that the triune God easily loses its uniqueness in a general and ambiguous belief in God. The major concern is that believers feel comfortable just referring to God as the supernatural or the supreme God. Secondly, it is the heresy concerning modalism, the belief that God is one but has manifested himself in three modes at various historical moments; i.e. that God revealed himself as the Father in the Old Testament period, as Jesus in the New Testament and as the Holy Spirit in the church age. Thirdly, it is the heresy of Unitarianism of the Spirit which put so much emphasis on the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Modern African Christianity, particularly Pentecostal and charismatic movements, revolve around the experience of the Holy Spirits. The prayers by ministers and evangelists of certain Christian groups and individuals are a clear indication that there is a move towards a Unitarianism of the Spirit. Fourthly, is the distortion of the use and name of Jesus in Christian worship. Kunhiyop (2015:62) indicates that there has been a development in recent years in using the name of Jesus as a magical means of getting answers to prayer. In a functional Trinity view, the triune God is used in some instances as a means of achieving personal needs. In prayers and worship, one often has the feeling that the names of God,

especially the Son and the Holy Spirit, are used as a magical means to acquire personal needs such as guidance, protection and judgement against perceived or even real enemies.

However, Kunhiyop (2015:64) suggests that the only true source of knowledge about God is his personal revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and the recording of that revelation is recorded in the inspired, inerrant and infallible Holy Scriptures. For this reason, he contends that there is no need to explore the proof of the existence of God; what is important, more especially for the African church, is to seek to understand more about God. Therefore, he makes an appeal for the contemporary church in Africa not to lose touch or interest in the history or tradition of her past. There are several advantages in looking back at the history and the traditions of the church. Among other issues Kunhiyop (2015:64) makes a reference to the historic creeds that affirms the Trinitarian theology, which should be the universal teaching of the Christian church. The church in Africa must also be seen as affirming, teaching and upholding these creeds.

When it comes to the concept of the triune God in spirituality Kunhiyop (2015:65) states that the very essence of Christianity is Trinitarian and every aspect of the Christian life and experience is and must be rooted in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, he shows that salvation cannot be understood without it. To explain this point, Kunhiyop (2015:65) adds to the discussion that God the Father loves us, Jesus died for us and the Holy Spirit lives and enables us to understand the Word and live life in accordance with the will of God. For him, a living relationship with God requires that each of the persons be honored and adored in the context of their revealed relationship with each other. The clear teaching of Scripture is that we pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ and by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. However, he expresses a concern that these days this order is no longer observed, as believers often confuse it or ignore it in prayer. For example, it quite common to hear worshippers pray to the Holy Spirit to inflict vengeance on their enemies.

On the concept of the triune God in worship Kunhiyop (2015:65) insists that prayer, worship and communion with God are by definition Trinitarian. As the Father has made himself known through the Son for the people and their salvation in or by the Spirit, so they are all caught up in this reverse movement. They live, move and have their being in a pervasively Trinitarian atmosphere.

In a nutshell, Kunhiyop (2015:66-67) points out a number of practical issues that can help the African church to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. Firstly, he says that the African church must recover its past, its history and its traditions. The Church in Africa does not stand in isolation from the church Christ has been building over the centuries. Though the primary and fundamental source of the Christian life is Holy Scripture, the church must not forget that from the Old Testament to the New Testament to the early church and succeeding generations, Christ has been at the work in his church. Secondly, he argues that the church in Africa must consciously and deliberately evolve ways of reintroducing and retrenching the belief in and practice of the Trinity as an essential part of the church. Kunhiyop (2015:67) suggests that some of these methods may include recitation of the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds every Sunday. Thirdly, he indicates that the pulpit should take the lead on the exposition of the theology of the Trinity. He thinks that many believers are not able to remember when their pastor preached on the Trinity except when saying the benediction, wedding blessings, or launching or dedicating a church building, musical instrument, or a home. The pulpit must take center stage in helping the congregation to know what the church has believed over the years and what the Bible clearly teaches. Lastly, but not the least, he contends that materials and manuals about the Trinity should be made available to all the believers. Those who become full members should be conversant with the essentials of the church which must include teaching on the Trinity. Believers need to be conversant with the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. Ultimately grasping God's truinity is about God, not about believers or even ourselves.

5.3.5 The strength and weakness of African interpretations of the Trinity

As we conclude this part, the above investigations concerning the African scholarship on the doctrine of the Trinity have yielded the understanding that this doctrine must be well understood and taught by Africans as they continue to nurture members of their respective congregations. The African hermeneutics is very important because it will help them not only to believe, but also to understand what they believe. Indeed, the Trinitarian doctrine of God in Christianity, which was brought to Africa by white missionaries, has to be re-interpreted in terms of traditional African vocabulary. The whole argument of these scholars is to present a picture that the African theological situation needs a Trinitarian perspective that is both biblical and relevant to issues and challenges of Africa. In reflecting critically upon the above current Trinitarian scene in Africa, we must first acknowledge the value and strengths of these modern insights into the doctrine of the Trinity.

Beginning with Ogbonnaya one realizes that he is strong on the matter of the relationship within the community. According to him, communion is the expression of relationships, participation and inclusiveness among the members of one community. It signifies how the triune God works and exists (Manganyi & Buitendag 2013:8). The approach to understand God through communion, acknowledges God's engagement with humanity and the world. On this point, Ogbonnaya argues that we cannot know and experience the triune God in Africa except through communality, relationality and fundamental interconnection (Ogbonnaya 1994:1). The major challenge that Ogbonnaya faces in this interpretation of the Trinity is the term 'dispositio', for he considers it closer to the African concept of inter-generative interconnection based on a never-ceasing belonging with the community that fosters a continual and unbroken communication. Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:8) have argued that Ogbonnaya regards 'dispositio' as a reference to the internal relation between the various dimensions of a person-body, soul and spirit, which are in continuous interaction with one another. The explanation of the word 'dispositio' suggests the incarnation rather than the Trinity, because it is the internal relation between the various dimensions of a person: the body, soul and spirit. Besides this weakness, Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:8) have noted that Ogbonnaya does not use Jesus as a means towards the doctrine of the Trinity.

Using African categories Nyamiti regards the Father as an ancestor who begets a Son, thus calling him a descendant and the Holy Spirit as a gift from the Father to the Son. Applying the category of the relationship between the living relatives and the ancestors, Nyamiti further explores the relationships within the Trinity. Nyamiti (1996:49) says that the Father and the Son communicate the Holy Spirit to each other with ancestral gifts and oblations as a token of their mutual love, homage and gratitude. He says that God the Father is, analogically speaking, the ancestor and ancestress of his Son and the latter is his true Descendant. According to Vähäkangas (2000:44), Nyamiti points out that this model would be better understood by Africans if expressed through ancestral terminology. The weakness of this understanding is that if God the Father is regarded as an ancestor, he had to die first. In reality it is the Son who died and so this approach is a contradiction to the Trinitarian theology (Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:8). In addition, the relationship of a descendant and the ancestor suggests a form of hierarchy which was the position of the heretics in the early church. During the time of the church fathers when the Holy Spirit was regarded as a gift or an oblation, as an expression of the love between

Father and Son, it made the Spirit just a property or an object to be used. Then both the Son and the Holy Spirit lose their position of equality with the Father, which the Cappadocian Father advanced.

Furthermore, Kombo proposes the use of African names in order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. For him, when Africans use African names for God, its Trinitarian character is accepted and in this way the African God is Christianized and the African Religious heritage obtains a Christian meaning. However, it has been observed that this approach of using the names to interpret the Trinity comes along with a number of problems. ILunga (2008:77) states that the proposed name for God may be used for other beings and it may also change in accordance with the circumstances or experiences. He argues that names might not reveal the true God and the truth on Him, but can reveal what scholars think God should be. (Manganyi & Buitendag (2013:7) explains that even though Kombo explores the African names employed for the divine in African languages and claims that in those names the Trinity is implied, he has also avoided to use Jesus as a means towards the doctrine of the Trinity.

All these scholars have interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity from an African perspective in an African way. Therefore, despite a number of criticism that have been raised by theologians towards these approaches, the concepts of communion, family, fellowships, participation and the principle of inclusion rather separation match well with the theology of Moltmann on the social understanding of the Trinity. The African Interpretation of the Trinity stands on the fact that the way people experience unity, equality, communion and relationships is similar to that of the three persons in the divine Trinity. These aspects are important factors in the interpretation and understanding of the concept of God in Africa. Much of the present discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity in the African context listens to God as community in unity. However, the challenge may be in the way to explain how God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate to each other. This may also be the reason why Ogbannaya says that the concepts of monotheism and polytheism are inappropriate in the African context. To approach the oneness of God as a unity in plurality may be fitting, but the question will still be the nature of the members who form that plurality. With this in mind, it is important to engage Moltmann into this discussion.

5.4 TRINITARIANISM IN AFRICA IN DIALOGUE WITH MOLTMANN

Based on the argument that the Trinity is a true reflection of an African community, Moltmann's contention on the social understanding of the Trinity is compelling. There is not much difference

between the approaches cited above and the theology of Moltmann. As highlighted above, the African interpretation of the Trinity stands on the principle of inclusion rather than a principle of separation. Communion is the pivot of the African understanding of the Trinity, a system that brings more than one person to work together and to belong to a certain community.

For an African, communion is the expression of relationships, participation and inclusiveness among the members of one community. Furthermore, communion embraces the concept of mutuality which is a state of two or more people or groups feeling the same emotions, or doing the same things to or for each other. It is this type of bond of union where people have the same intentions and work for the common good. It is this bond that connects the African community to ancestral relations suggested by Charles Nyamiti as a theological departure to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. In this regard, African Trinitarianism is said to be relational.

Relationships are central among African human beings. As an African, I have grown up in this kind of environment of eating, drinking and working together. Back then, I used to see women pounding maize together and men drinking beer in groups as a symbol of unity and communion. In sharp contrast to the African value of community and relationships, the person in post-colonial Africa often seeks his/her own freedom, privacy and individual recognition without reference to any community. In post-colonial Africa people often purposely avoid the influence of others when making their plans and decisions. Except among teenagers and in certain ethnic communities, most people in this era cherish their individuality, uniqueness and differences from others. A popular saying in post-colonial Africa says that each person should 'do his or her own thing'. In this statement is the assumption that the person will not be influenced or controlled by the desires or will of others.

O'Donovan (2006:11) argues that the demand for personal freedom without regard for the community is not based on something godly. It is the result of the pride, selfishness and the personal nature of man. These are some of the most destructive forces in the world to peaceful human relationships. Furthermore, he says that these demands do not tend to build a healthy cooperative community. When African people begin to embrace western culture and values they find that these values have a bad effect on the unity of their own people. Western values tend to divide and separate the community instead of producing unity and cooperation.

Another important result of the core values of individualism, freedom and privacy is that people do not have a collective sense of responsibility for what happens to others in their society. The rule of the current situation in post-colonial Africa is, 'everyone for himself'. The results of this attitude are frightening. It is happening with increasing frequency in some of the cities in Africa where a person will be attacked by a criminal on the street in plain view of other people while others just look on as if they are watching a football match. Sometimes they will just turn away and completely ignore the situation. This kind of behaviour is rapidly spreading in African cities and villages. People do not know one another and so they do not feel a sense of responsibility for one another. In the Africa that we used to know there was no person who would be ignored or uncared for within the ability of the community to care for that person. Unfortunately, in the picture of African cities that we have today there are thousands of homeless, destitute people lying on the streets, uncared for and unnoticed by those who pass by. Another concern that has been noticed is a syndrome of closed neighbourhood. It is becoming a common trend that neighbours often do not know each other. A good example is the neighbourhood close to our church in Kabulonga, Lusaka-Zambia. Many families in this neighbourhood do not know each other and everyone fends for himself.

From what has been said, it is clear that post-colonial Africa is in great need of this life in communion which is provided by triune God. In other words, if God is in communion, the human life too is intended by God to be life in communion. Confession of the Trinity, properly understood, radically calls in question all totalitarianisms that deny the freedom and rights of all people and resists all idolatrous individualisms that subvert the common welfare. This view is significant, not only for social and political life, but also for the life of the world as a whole. This view of the Trinity reaches out to the whole universe. On this point, therefore, our task is to engage Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity and its implication for the continent of Africa. By stressing the relational and communal nature of the Trinity, Moltmann discusses the movement of the triune God in salvation history establishing their unity in their fellowship or mutual *perichoresis.* To what extent can Moltmann's understanding of the perichoresis benefit the church in Africa?

5.4.1 The perichoretic communion as basis for an African interpretation of the Trinity

For Moltmann (1981:150) God's life in communion must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the triune God. As we discussed in the previous topic, this Latin term *perichoresis* describes the mutual

indwelling of the triune God. Moltmann (1981:149) says that the unity of the Father, the Son and the Spirit must be understood as a communicable unity and as an open, inviting unity, capable of integration. The unity of the Trinitarian Persons therefore lies in the circulation of the divine life which they fulfil in their relations with one another. Again, Moltmann (1981:175) argues that if the divine life is understood perichoretically, then it cannot be consummated merely by one subject. It is bound to consist of the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related one to another and exist in one another. So, their unity does not lie in the one lordship of God; it is to be found in the unity of their tri-unity. For Moltmann, through the concept of *perichoresis*, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided. It is true that the Trinity is constituted with the Father as starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as being 'the origin of the Godhead'. However, this 'monarchy of the Father' as Moltmann puts it, only applies to the constitution of the Trinity. It has no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life, and none in the *perichoretic* unity of the Trinity. In this unity, the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.

This understanding of the *perichoretic* unity has many implications for post-colonial Africa. The argument presented in this discussion is that the concept of communion or community in Africa Interpretation of the Trinity cannot be realistic, unless it is basically founded on the *perichoretic* unity of the triune God. As much as we can appreciate the approaches to the understanding of the Trinity in Africa, presented by Ogbonnaya, Nyamiti, Kombo and others, the perichoretic unity of the divine Persons can add a lot of value in post-colonial Africa. The African interpretation of the Trinity is relevant, but there is a great need to deepen some areas like 'one in each other' or 'being in one'. The concept of *perichoretic* unity of the triune God should not be avoided because it might help the African Christians to get the meaning of what the Trinity is all about.

There is comfort in the knowledge that God shares in human life and that humanity shares in God's life. The call for communion, relationships, unity and support for one another, may sound attractive but it may not mean anything without a proper understanding of the *perichoretic* unity of the triune God. So, why is this so important for the people of Africa and what are the implications for experiencing this divine life?

Moltmann (1981:176) rejects a prior ontological unity of God based upon one divine essence or one divine subjectivity. For him, the unity of the triune God is no longer found in a homogeneous divine

nature, nor in one divine subject, but in the eternal *perichoresis* of Father, Son and Spirit. In other words, the triune God is a single communion or fellowship that is formed by the three divine persons themselves. Thus, God's unity is an integrative unity, a unification of dynamic mutuality and relationality. Since this is so, 'communion' in agape love is the very nature and characteristic of the triune God.

Based on this argument Motlmann (1981:176) contends that it is the triune God in *perichoretic* unity who issues an invitation to his people and makes himself the model for a just and liveable community in the world of nature and human beings. As an image of the Trinity, we human beings are called to realize the fellowship found in the divine *perichoresis*. The continuous notion of hierarchical structure in African societal life and suppression of other people are further aggravated by traditions, cultural beliefs and religions. For example, women are not supposed to challenge the status quo as this will be met with vehement reprisal. Injustices and subordination perpetrated by men must be accepted and not challenged since they are considered older than society itself. Any challenge to these phenomena is an affront on customs, traditions and religions (Nyanta & Ankrah 2017:11). Thus, our family system and social structure must correspond with the eternal love of the Trinity by providing *equality, freedom, and egalitarian relationships*. This understanding makes the Trinity a non-hierarchical community which opposes the hierarchical structures of this world. This implies that for 'communion' to have a full meaning in Africa it must be shared in the community through *perichoretic* unity of the Trinity. In contrast to monotheism Moltmann says that the triune God, who is one in the *perichoretic* union of three divine persons, can be the foundation for all genuine human freedom. God understood in this way is the God who loves and serves in eternal mutuality and equality. The task of Christian community is therefore to help bring a human community that faithfully reflects the love and fellowship of divine persons who dwell in eternal *perichoretic* unity.

5.4.2 The perichoretic communion as a circulation of divine life through the Trinity

The other point that strengthens the understanding of the *perichoretic* unity of the Trinity is the circulation of the divine life through the Trinitarian Persons in their relations. Moltmann (1981:176) claims that the Trinitarian Persons do not merely exist and live in one another, they also bring one another mutually to manifestation in the divine glory. The eternal divine glory is for its part displayed through the Trinitarian manifestation of the Persons. From all eternity, the Father is 'the Father of glory', the eternal Word is 'the reflection of glory' and the Holy Spirit is 'the spirit of glory'.

According to Moltmann (1981:176) the Persons of the Trinity make one another shine through that glory, mutually and together. They grow into perfect form through one another and awake to perfected beauty in one another. Moltmann explains that in all eternity the Holy Spirit allows the Son to shine in the Father and transfigures the Father in the Son. He is the eternal light in which the Father knows the Son and the Son the Father. In the Holy Spirit the eternal divine life arrives at consciousness of itself, therein reflecting its perfect form. In the Holy Spirit the divine life becomes conscious of its eternal beauty. Through the Holy Spirit the eternal divine life becomes the sacred feast of the Trinity (Moltmann (1981:176).

This remarkable concept of the Trinity challenges the egocentric tendencies that are so common in African communities. According to Cherry (2017:1) egocentrism is a tendency that focuses on personal identity and autonomy. For example, workers in an individualist culture are more likely to value their own well-being over the good of the group. There is a rich literature on the nature of egocentric tendencies. Of course, opinions on the consequences of individualism and egocentric tendencies differ widely. A positive view holds that people thrive well in autonomy. It also assumes that concurrent choice of self-seeking individuals will produce good outcomes for everybody (Veenhoven 1999:157-186). The negative view is that egocentricity entails unscrupulous competition and atomistic self-containment. As such, individualization would result in alienation from society and ultimately from oneself. This view has a long tradition in conservative thought. The underlying view of human nature is reserved, if not negative, and man is seen as basically dependent.

However, Moltmann (1981:197) says that if we see the Almighty in Trinitarian terms he is not the archetype, the champion or the mighty one of this world. He is the Father of the Christ who was crucified and raised for us. As the Father of Jesus Christ, he is almighty because he exposes himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness and death. The glory of the triune God is reflected, not in the crowns of kings and the triumphs of victors, but in the face of the crucified Jesus and in the faces of the oppressed whose brother he became. Furthermore, Moltmann (1981:198) believes that the glory of the triune God is also reflected in the community of Christ: in the fellowship of believers and of the poor. Seen in Trinitarian terms, the life-giving Spirit, who confers on all believers the future and hope, does not proceed from any accumulation of power or from the absolutist practice of lordship; he proceeds from the Father of Jesus Christ and from the resurrection of the Son. From this perspective, Moltmann provides a viable resource for understanding the true meaning of the Trinitarian communion.

It is therefore up to Christians in Africa to live out their lives in such a way that they expose and reject the godless attitudes of a sick society which promotes egocentric tendencies, hunger for power, self-centeredness, lordship and an attitude of despising people who are low in status.

5.4.3 The perichoretic communion of love through the Trinity

Another complementary and inseparable element of *perichoretic* unity of the Trinity is the aspect of love. Moltmann (1981:173) says that the doctrine of the Trinity is bonded by the power of love. The concept of love within the Holy Trinity means that the three Persons of the Trinity are always involved in the history of the world in different ways. In other words, 'the triune God' is a God in community, rich in inner and outward relationships. The bond of this relationship is the bond of love and it is only of him that we can say 'God is love'. Furthermore, if one confesses that God is one, he implies that He is a personal reality that enters into a living relationship with creatures. God lives and loves as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moltmann (1981:57) puts it clearly that the theology of the divine passion is founded on the biblical tenet 'God is love' (1 John 4:16). It is the power of good to go out of itself, to enter into other beings, to participate in other beings and to give itself for other beings. Moltmann also shows that love opens up the freedom to live. That is why love is the self-communication of the good without self-renunciation and the self-giving of the good without self-dissolution. The unselfishness of love lies in the loving person's communication of himself, not in his self-destruction (Moltmann 1981:57). For him, God's love is ultimately suffering love because it is only through suffering that it acts creatively and redemptively for the freedom of the beloved. In addition, he contends that freedom can only be made possible by suffering love. The suffering of God with the world, the suffering of God from the world and the suffering of God for the world are the highest forms of his creative love which desire free fellowship with the world and free responses in the world.

The strongest and most intimate relationship between human beings is love. Love makes life worth living - it is the source of new life, it is as strong as death. Even when we refer to the African context, life decreases in a community where members do not love each other and/or live in perpetual conflict. The principle of love pushes people to unite and share what they have because property is the enrichment of the individual and of the community as well (ILunga 2008:54). Moreover, the concept of love makes human beings humans, for human life is sustained by love. Africa cannot therefore experience genuine communion without the bond of love offered by the triune God. In a continent caught up in pain and suffering, full of broken relationships that yearn for peace, people are always in

need of a community where they can experience true love. For Christians especially, to talk about a God who created the world requires that one address not only the pain present in that world but how one can experience the love of God. Although it is popular to talk about love it can be difficult to experience the kind of love that desires freedom, liberation, deliverance and redemption. It appears that Africa's failure could be largely attributed to lack of genuine love among the people and government leaders.

Bojang (2017:47) indicates clearly that contemporary African leaders appear to be associated with military and dictatorial rule, undemocratic and massive bureaucratic corruption. Therefore, he argues that for any meaningful development in Africa, political institutions need a massive reform that can promote democratic principles such as rule of law, freedom of speech, human rights and fair elections. Through communion in Christ believers can affirm that love is not something merely for the epilogue of the faith, but is at work 'revolutionizing and transforming the present challenges'. To be in communion with the triune God is for Moltmann to accept this kind of love without attempting to avoid either its difficult or liberating aspects.

Last, but not the least, Moltmann (1980:218) states that the fellowship or community can exist not merely between people who are alike or similar, but also between those who are not alike and are quite dissimilar. The implication of this understanding is that true fellowship with the triune God is the fellowship that opens the door for all the people that may differ with us in terms of colour, culture, educational background, status, language, country, poor, rich, women and men, etc. This is what it means to live in fellowship with the triune God. Boff & Boff (1986:52) says that this mystery provides the prototype for what society should be according to the plan of the triune God by affirming and respecting personal individuality. It should enable persons to live in such a communion and collaboration with each other as to constitute a unified society of equals and fellow citizens. Indeed, it is sad that the society we commonly find today in post-colonial Africa, is full of divisions, antagonisms and discriminations and does not offer an environment in which people can experience the mystery of the Holy Trinity. It has to be transformed if it is to become the image and likeness of the communion of the divine persons.

5.4.4 The perichoretic communion of the triune God makes space for creation

Moltmann (1992:218) brings out another aspect of communion where the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the triune God himself, is an open, inviting fellowship in which creation finds room. For Moltmann, the words: 'The fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (2 Cor.13:21) is not merely an external bond joining human nature with the divine essence. It comes from the essential inward community of the triune God, in all the richness of its relationships; it throws open this community for human beings in such a way that it gathers into itself these men and women and all other created things, so that they find eternal life. It follows from this that 'the true communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit' has to be understood in Trinitarian terms as a community of human beings and God's other creatures.

Moltmann (1992:219) says that the experience of sociality is the experience of life, for all life consists in the reciprocal exchange of foodstuffs and energy and in mutual participation. There is no life without its specific social relationships. Isolated life without relation - that is, life that is literally individual and indivisible - is a contradiction in itself. It is incapable of living and dies. Furthermore Moltmann (1992:219) argues that the Spirit works to build fellowship within all creation, human and non-human, in the present day. All creatures are aligned towards community and are created in the form of communities. To form community is the life principle of created beings. Again, he says that creation is not made up of individual elementary particles. These are merely the end-product of the divisions which human beings introduce into nature. Creation itself lives in the complexity of ever-richer communal relationships (Moltmann 1992:219). The Trinitarian relation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is so wide that the whole creation can find space, time and freedom in it.

According to Vosloo (2004:71), one of the challenges facing us today is the issue of isolation and individualism and stifling homogeneity. He argues that a Christian ethic of hospitality challenges the notion of an enclosed identity in which people want to protect their identity by insulating themselves from what is different to them. Vosloo indicates that the twentieth century can be seen as a dreadful monument to the dangers of such a mind-set of enclosed identity. He says that hospitality is the welcoming of the other in his or her otherness. Moreover, Vosloo (2004:72) contends that if we describe hospitality as the openness to, or welcoming of the other and otherness, then the Trinitarian discourse can offer rich possibilities for a creative rethinking of an ethic of hospitality. This is an ethic

which celebrates otherness without forfeiting identity. Given the limitations of certain constructions of the notion of imitation and imagination for providing a link between the Triune life and the Christian moral life, Vosloo (2004:84) says that the notion of *participation* in the life of the triune God can be more adequate for our situation today. Vosloo (2004:86) further acknowledges that the doctrine of *perichoresis* helps us to formulate the concrete unity of the being of God in that we think of the modes of God as meeting one another in unrestricted participation. This suggests that God is not an eternal solitude, but God's life is in communion. What makes this notion of *perichoresis* attractive for an ethic of hospitality is, as argued, its potential to link identity and otherness in such a way that identity does not dissolve or otherness get excluded. Vosloo (2004:88) adds points out that:

> We see giving and receiving relationships within the interpersonal life of the triune God. The notion furthermore implies a dynamic movement within God, a movement that has an outward reach towards the whole of creation. This notion of *perichoresis* can certainly be overburdened, but it helps us to ground an ethic of hospitality in the character or identity of God.

This key concept of participation is an important part of Moltmann's theology that heightens responsibility for the believer. For the community of God is never as far as Moltmann is concerned, a community united merely by its vision or knowledge of God; it is the community united with and even in God, and with God's creation. According to Dare (2012:175) the rejection by humans of the relationship shared by nature and humanity is one of the problems at the root of the environmental crisis. In order to escape this crisis, thoughts of self-liberation from nature and its control must be laid aside in favour of co-operative existence. Indeed, humanity has made its relationship with the rest of creation hostile and uncaring. In Africa, the trend of cutting down of trees, unselfish killing of animals and air pollution has brought a number of challenges to the people. By ignoring or misunderstanding the importance of this relationship, humanity has, for Moltmann, lowered the quality of life of all things and restricted possible recovery and growth. Moltmann wishes to try and repair damage caused by traditional views that allowed humanity to become more privileged than nature, or caused humanity to neglect the fate of the of non-human, apparently inferior, remainder of creation.

Moltmann's work on God's inner relationships has constructive implications for humanity's correspondence with the Divine in the area of environment care. There is a challenge here for the continent of Africa to renew the community between people and nature to reflect God's love. There is a further lesson useful to an ecological reformation which the divine unity in relationships brings. It can

be difficult for humanity to acknowledge a strong unity with nature because the two are so different. Yet God's unity, in Moltmann's theology, is one where relationships of love are more important than similarity between persons. This meant that God is open to what is not divine. A similar approach to nature and humanity opens up the latter to see unification with the world as a real possibility (Dare 2012:212).

Basically, Moltmann's description of the eschatological future for all creation means that his theology is universal in the fullest sense and can contribute the benefits of this universalism to the new theological architecture. The concerns of this thesis have moved this chapter's discussion away from the debate surrounding universal human salvation and towards the cosmic framework of his thought. For him, this future is also one where God's openness towards creation comes to fruition. The relationship between God and creation becomes the consummated *perichoresis* which reflects, as far as is possible, the Divine/non-divine relationship and the Trinitarian relationship itself. A major contribution of Moltmann in this discussion is that creation matters in the *perichoretic* communion of the triune God. God's continuing care of creation into eternity adds again to the depths to which Moltmann understands God loves for creation and gives it value. The implications of this attitude towards the environment are serious. The meaning of existence now points to the need to find the right relationship with the whole of creation. It is not sufficient simply to treat nature well enough to survive. The need to share a healthy relationship with the environment will never stop, not even in eternity. Nature and humanity share a common existence, a common journey and a common future. This is one of the legacies for ecological thought from Moltmann's eschatology.

At the same, I discern some challenges, weaknesses and limitations in Moltmann's approach regarding the African context. In scrutinising the question as to how the Christian gospel could be proclaimed authentically and effectively to the African people in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them, Moltmann's social understanding of the triune God may be received with a number of limitations. Apart from the obvious differences, for example, the divine communion is eternal, the human is not; the divine communion may embody a full *perichoresis*, humans cannot. There is also the issue of the incapacity of a fallen, fragile, broken humanity to reflect the perfection of the Triune God. Another factor that may pose a challenge to Moltmann's approach is the African perspective of the Trinity, which is formulated without a clearly defined role, especially the position of Jesus Christ. May be this is the reason that not many African theologians attempt to discuss the triune God. To approach the

oneness of God as a unity in plurality may be fitting, but the question will still be the nature of the members who form that plurality. In view of the inconsistences and incoherence between Christian doctrine and the African Christian experience or practices there is a need to revisit the sources of these inconsistencies for the African Church to benefit from the *perichoresis* communion of the triune God.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this study, we have examined the African scholarship on Trinitarianism in dialogue with Moltmann. In the area of African Theology, it has been noted that the majority of African theologians have written on different topics, especially on Christology, but not much attention has been paid to the doctrine of Trinity; this topic has remained peripheral. According to the information so far given, most of Christians do not know what to do with the doctrine except that it must be believed. Perhaps the topic which has been written most of the times is Christology and ecclesiology. The doctrine of the Trinity has not gained much attention among African academic theologians. This is done on the grounds that the vocabulary of the doctrine of the Trinity is based on Hellenistic metaphysical thinking and that the entire idea of three persons in one God is totally incomprehensible according to African patterns of thought.

The main and relevant issue in the African interpretation of the Trinity has been the problem of the 'One' and of the 'Many'. The debate on the African concept of God deals with the need to know whether the African Traditional Religion perceives the Divine as absolute singular, personalistic God (monotheism) or whether God is perceived in (polythesitc) terms. In this investigation, it has been discovered that the debate on the African concept of God hinges on the two positions which are considered: monotheism and polytheism. The strand of Monotheism is common among the African. African scholars oppose Western theologians on the ground that Westerners insisted on God as an absolute, universal and of personalistic principles. Hence, African scholars have reacted strongly that there is no such monotheistic radicalism in African Traditional Religion.

In the discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity in Africa, scholars such as Ogbonnaya, Nyamiti, Kombo, applies their mind to the African community, family and names, as a basis to understand the Trinity. Ogbonnaya suggests that communality, relationality and fundamental interconnection underlie the African mode of seeing and being in the world. The implication of this understanding is that the principle of common participation, of oneness which enables people to live together and work, manifest the same will for the sake of their common good. Communion is a principle that protects the Divine

Persons from being separated from the rest of the community. Nyamiti reinforces the category of ancestors as a theological departure to understand the Trinity. He recognizes God as the ancestor who has an ancestral relationship with his Son, whilst Kombo explores the African names employed for the divine in African languages and claims that in those names the Trinity is implied. Kunhiyop affirms the need to apply the teaching of Trinity in the life of the church. He says that materials and manuals about the Trinity should be made available to all the believers. Ultimately, grasping God's triunity is about God - not about believers or even people.

The general observation of this analysis is that the most common starting points for African theologies of the Trinity have been social analogies based on different aspects of family relations. For Africans, family always traditionally means the extended family, or clan. However, as Vähäkangas (2000:37) puts it, the African concepts of family, communion, relations, are not lifted up as the standard criterion of a proper understanding of the Trinity. Rather, the Trinitarian model is left free both to influence African models of family and also to be interpreted through them. The primary influence then, is that the African family should reflect the Trinitarian communion. This conclusion is based on the theology of Moltmann who introduces the idea of the *perichoresis* unity of the Trinity. According to him, the unity of the triunity lies in the eternal *perichoresis* of the Trinitarian persons. Interpreted perichoretically, the Trinitarian persons form their own unity in the circulation of the divine life. As indicated above, Moltmann hopes to find in the doctrine of the Trinity a theological response to contemporary social questions, freedom, equality, dignity and community.

The concept of the *perichoretic* unity of God provides a viable option for interpreting the unity/trinity relationship in God, which is, significant for human liberation and social equality. Once again it has been indicated in this chapter that the *perichoretic* unity of God is a communion of love. What has been said above leads to certain conclusions about the extent to which *perichoresis* communion overflows the confines of the people in Africa, where enemies, sinners and offenders are not given room to be part of the community. Moltmann (1992:262) says that true love unfolds only in the fragile and vulnerable sphere of freedom. It is love itself which in the personal sense opens up freedom in the free spaces of life. Sometimes love for the poor can become so intense that individuals give up their own station in life to share in the suffering of the poor, even to the point of sharing their premature death. As we have said, the triune God reveals himself as love in the fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. His freedom is his vulnerable love, his openness, the encountering kindness through which he suffers with the human beings he loves and becomes their advocate, thereby throwing open their future to

them.

Once more the *perichoretic* unity of God lies in the circulation of divine life. Moltmann says that this fellowship is bound to consist of the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related to one another and exist in one another. Therefore, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided. The Christian church has the task of struggling against not only the religious alienation of man but also his political, social and racial alienation in order to serve the liberation of man. It must stand for social critical freedom in institutions and as such, it must uncover not only religious idolatry but political idolatry as well. Following this God who is in p*erichoretic* unity, human beings are freed from the dominance and power of a given system and able to work for the liberation of the poor, the oppressed and the social outcast.

In a nutshell, the interpretation of the Trinity in the African context has been a relevant attempt in the African theology on the point that it focuses on relationships or relatedness, common responsibility, participation and fellowship. This concept, if properly understood, can help African countries that are faced with the challenge of human relations. From what has been said, many problems in African cities are already out of control. We have examined some of these problems in chapter 1. There is a breakdown of justice, law and order in many places today. Innocent people are abused, tortured, raped and murdered every day and the offenders are not punished. How do we encourage one another? The African Interpretation of the Trinity as a divine community may sound attractive but it may not mean anything in the context of suffering.

Having come to the end of our exposition of the African interpretation of the Trinity, it seems appropriate to come up with a proposed social Trinitarianism for post-colonial Africa. The basic question confronting us now is: In what manner may we reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity for the African situation today? What would an African social Trinitarianism look like? The key to reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity is a proper understanding of Moltmann's theology. From what has pointed out, our participation in the life of the triune God would surely involve some relief from life's struggles. In spite of conflicts, wars, disease, hunger, poverty and the cruelty of socio-political systems, the African people can be sure that God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in an ever-present reality.

CHAPTER 6. TOWARDS A REVISIONED POST-COLONIAL SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the previous chapter the concept of *communion* is a very strong motif among the Africans. It is well understood by each and every one, illiterate and literate, Christians and non-Christians. An African knows that communion is based on several concepts like *relationships, unity, relatedness, participation, hospitality, equality, eternity and interdependence*. Communion is made of people who share the past, the present and the future together in Spirit which serves as an integrative principle. Furthermore, if communion exists, then the individual exists. The individual exists; therefore, they collectively exist. For an African the concept of *God's life in communion* who exist simultaneously and eternally as *mutual indwelling of the three persons* - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - would not pose a problem. This means that in terms of 'communion, relationality and participation' Africans automatically support and agree with the social interpretation of the Trinity envisioned by Moltmann.

In the previous chapters, we discussed the social interpretation of the Trinity and its implications for spiritual, social and political life of the church. God's life in communion, as an interpretation of the Trinity, is so central in the theology of Moltmann and it matches well with the African way of life. By his particular use of the concept of *perichoresis,* Moltmann (1981:176) describes God's unity as a *perichoretic (*mutually indwelling) unity of the fellowship of the three persons in the history of salvation.

Since this is the case, one could say that Moltmann's social interpretation of the Trinity can provide a model for communion, relationality and participation in Africa. If the political system and social structures in Africa can be understood in Trinitarian terms, that is, in terms of communion, then all subordinationism which makes the poor people suffer can be avoided. Likewise, the Christian Church can correspond with the reality of God as communal relationship. In a nutshell, Moltmann's understanding of God as a *perichoretic,* unified community of love and freedom has abundant social implications for Africa. It fits the post-colonial African context that refuses the importance of relationality in all reality.

When these perspectives are borne in mind, it then becomes clear that Africa is in need of a social

understanding of the Christian doctrine of God. Narum (1982:43) says that we cannot be able to think of the Trinity without reference to human experience. He argues further that Christian interpretation of the Trinity has always been from the psychological analogy perspective and it had nothing to do with a human experience. Most African theologians agree that a church can only be regarded as truly incarnated in Africa if it has practices, doctrines and symbols comprehensible to African people. As discussed in the previous chapters, in the history of Christian theology, especially in the time of the Church Fathers, this doctrine has been understood largely as a speculative exposition of God's inner life: that is, the self-relatedness of Father, Son and Spirit. Kombo (2000:134) indicates that the Western theologies have generally influenced the African church to reinterpret the Trinity by using the infrastructure of the philosophical system of the Western mind. The question then is: What would a re-visioned social Trinitarianism look like in post-colonial Africa?

6.2 A REVISIONED POST-COLONIAL SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM IN AFRICA

Many theological works have emerged and many discussions have taken place on the academic level to re-conceive and re-consider the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for our understanding of God. Furthermore, many theologians have expressed their views to shed new light on the doctrine of the Trinity. In the area of African Theology the majority of African academic theologians have written on different topics on the doctrine of the Trinity, but in this research project much of our attention has been paid to critically discuss the doctrine of the Trinity which is attentive to post-colonial challenges.

As we discussed in the previous chapters, the continent of Africa faces the challenge of understanding the concept of God who is transcendent and immanent. The first chapter has set out the context of the times within which this research project is situated, pointing first to the concept of God in contemporary African horizon. The challenges described in Chapter 1 have contributed to a number of questions concerning the concept of God in the context of suffering. One area that seems to be in contention is the quest for an adequate African Theology that can explain clearly the interplay between God and society. Some people feel there is so much suffering in Africa and it is a sign that God is not present in this continent. We have also discussed in chapter 2 the concept of God in African Tradition Religion. God may be recognized as creator (currently transcendent) and sustainer (immanently involved with his followers), but God is not seen as the focus of all attention, as the mediators attract more attention. God is seen as absent and rarely able to assist or advise followers. Therefore, African Theology cannot avoid giving an explanation to the questions of transcendence and immanence of God,

more especially in post-colonial Africa, where many people feel God is not involved in the midst of suffering. Given this situation of the concept of God in post-colonial Africa, it can be argued that the notion of the nearness of God can be more adequate for making the link between God and society. The proposed post-colonial social Trinitarianism in Africa may focus on the following issues: a theology of God's nearness, a theology of the suffering God and a theology of God's life in communion and relationality.

6.2.1 An African Trinitarian theology of God's nearness

The notion of the *perichoresis* is significant in Moltmann's articulation of the communal relationship within the Trinity. By holding to perichoretic view of the Trinity, Moltmann (1981:177) disputes the view of God as a transcendental absolute being that is uninvolved in the suffering of this world. As Grenz (2004:75) points out, "for Moltmann, God's triunity is integrally connected to the divine engagement with the world, which forms a history centring on Jesus Christ.'' Moltmann's doctrine of *perichoresis* is expressed not only to show how God interrelates within his Trinitarian ontology, but also to indicate how God relates to his creation. It can be said that Moltmann's outstanding contribution to the renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in modern theology is his dynamic *perichoretic* view of the Trinity that informs his social Trinity. Arguing perichoretically Moltmann combines the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity into his social Trinity making it the central doctrine, not just serving the integration of the other loci but also constituting the cutting edge that opened up Christian engagement with the modern world.

Trinitarian theology of God's nearness is therefore no less than the explanation of the salvation history of God, which is culminated in the person narrative of Jesus Christ. It is the theological interpretation of God who is with us through the history of Jesus Christ and the Spirit (Moltmann 1974:246). The New Testament records that God sent his only Son (John 1:14-18) so that those who believe in him might not suffer the consequences of their sinfulness but might inherit eternal life (John 3:16). According to Bauckham (1995:27), the uniqueness of incarnation as a form of divine presence is perhaps most simply stated thus: *in incarnation God is not present merely with or in one or more of his creatures, but as the particular human Jesus of Nazareth.* To say that God is present in this way, as one of his creatures, would in any other instance be idolatry. He argues that the incarnation means that Jesus is the human presence of the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity. This is the meaning of the hypostatic union, which, in the mainstream theological tradition of churches loyal to Chalcedon,

has served to characterize the incarnation as unique.

For Moltmann, incarnation involves a more radical particularization of God as well as a step from idenfying with a worldly reality (Israel) to identifying as a worldly reality (Jesus). God gives himself the identity of the human Jesus and thereby also the Trinitarian identity entailed in being the God of Jesus: God is the Father of Jesus Christ, the Son incarnate as Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. God gives himself a new name-Father, Son and Holy Spirit by which God may be known (Moltmann 1981:121). However, this particularization of God has universal relevance. God becomes incarnate as one human in order to be known to all humans. Bauckham (1995:33) says that God's presence in incarnation is salvific because in this way God is with all people. As God incarnate, Jesus is 'God with us'(Immanuel), a phrase that has rich resonances from occasions throughout the Hebrew Bible when God promises to be with his people (Exodus 3:12; 33:14; Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 41:10). The incarnation makes God present for all people in the most radically self-involving way: as a human being with other human beings.

Jesus, as fully human, enjoys genetic continuity with the whole human race and shares all sorts of features of the common life of humanity. Moltmann 1981:123) observes that the incarnation is more than that; it is the personal and intentional presence of God. It is God's unique act of loving solidarity with all people. He contends that the category of loving identification with others is very useful at this point. He says that this kind of love that is not only benevolent toward the other but enters empathetically into the other's experience and may even share the material circumstances of the other. It is the most radical kind of being with. Not only is God's act of incarnation itself an expression of this kind of love, but also it is essential feature of incarnation that Jesus practices this kind of love for others throughout his life and ministry up to and including the cross. Bauckham (1995:34) points out that from Jesus' baptism to the cross, there is a process of self-identification with humanity not merely as such, but in the concrete varieties of the human condition, especially in the most needy of conditions, and finally in the extreme degradation and abandonment of death on a Roman cross. This practice of self-identifying love is the way Jesus brings the love of God into the lives of others, including even the most godless and the most godforsaken.

In endeavouring to describe the social Trinitarian theology, Moltmann understands the Holy Spirit primarily as the divine source of life: 'the eternal Spirit is the divine wellspring of life-the source of life created, life preserved and life daily renewed, and finally the source of eternal life of all created beings (Moltmann 1992:82). The Spirit is the source of the whole of life in body and community. Life in the

Spirit is not a life of withdrawal from the world into God, but the vitality of a creative life of God, which is characterized by love of life and affirmation of all life. Moltmann (1992:83) contends that the notion of the Spirit as divine source of all highlights both the continuity of God's life and the life of his creation, such that the creatures are not distant from God but live out of life, and also the continuity of creation and salvation, in that the Spirit is the source both of the transient life which ends in death and of the eternal life of the new creation. The Spirit gives life to all things, sustains all things in life, and brings all things to rebirth beyond death and beyond the reach of death. This continuity of creation and new creation is not to be understood as excluding the eschatological dualism which has always been a key to Moltmann's thought. Creation is subject to the powers of death and destruction, and the Spirit is the power of the liberating struggle of life against death, the source of life renewed out of death (Moltmann 1992:85).

In Moltmann's understanding, the Holy Spirit is more than merely God's revelation to human beings, and more than simply the finding of faith in the heart through the proclaimed word. He insists that the Holy Spirit actually causes men and women to experience new life through their fellowship with Christ, meaning that the Holy Spirit is the experiential presence of God, both inwardly and outwardly, in the community of their church, experienced as love poured out in their hearts (Moltmann 1992:3-4). Moltmann's interpretation of the experience of God's Spirit is more than subjective. It is much deeper than what is usually understood by this concept of experience. Firstly, he expounds the experience of the Spirit as the personal awareness of God in, with, and beneath the experience of life, which assures us of God's fellowship, friendship and love (Moltmann 1992:17).

Second, Moltmann suggests that to experience God or his Spirit in all things, we need to carry the experience of the world into the experience of God. Life should embrace a holistic view in all aspects, and we need to integrate these experiences into God's experiences. Reverence for life should be absorbed into reverence for God, and the veneration of nature becomes part of the adoration of God (Moltmann 1992:21). Through this, we sense that in everything God is waiting for us, so that we experience his presence in everything. To realize this Moltmann cautions that unless the perception of elevating the soul above nature and the body, which has caused human beings to exert their power over nature and progressively destroyed it and is transformed. In other words, Moltmann talks about communal life, which embraces all creatures as well as the creation, whose source of such a pneumatology resonates well with the African view of life, which is centred on community. What impact does the incarnation of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit have on daily life of the

African people?

When discussing the two important theological subjects, we must realize that the greatest fear of any African is religious vacuum. In other words, God in most mainline churches in Africa is foreign and detached from the Africans. To this extent, many African Christians often find themselves in a religious vacuum. They do not see God's involvement and presence in their daily misfortunes, illness and other concrete problems. African Christians seem more aware of the proximity of the Devil than that of God. To them, God is either, absent or indifferent to their plight or insufficient to deal with their African problems. Banda (2005:7) says that because the religious vacuum, African Christians often find themselves worshiping idols. In this case, he argues that in order to address the vulnerability of the African Christians the gap between them and God must be tightly closed. Therefore, it is extremely urgent to develop a doctrine of God relevant to instil confidence in the African Christians. Again, it is evident from the previous discussion that there is a clear dilemma among African Christians to live a life in which a holistic Trinitarian theology has not been well articulated.

In this section, we want to discuss the positive benefits of the Trinitarian theology of God's nearness to the continent of Africa. The Trinitarian theology of God's nearness is necessary to empower the African Christians to break away from relying on African Tradition Religion. They are driven into syncretism because, to them, God seems to be either detached from them or insufficient to address their immediate African problems. Banda (2005:8) confirms that Africans continue to retain a firm hand on African Traditional Religions, because they see them as meeting real need by procuring salvation from social ills, the evil spirits and witchcraft, which they experience as real.

The Trinitarian theology of God's nearness may be meaningful and empowering only when it is translated into the contextual situation of daily life. What does it mean to tell an African that God was made flesh and dwelt among Africans in the midst of hunger, oppression, loss of dignity, suffering and pain? Indeed, what does it mean to tell an African that God was made flesh and dwelt among Africans in the midst of daily misfortunes, barrenness, the failure to secure a marriage, poverty, practical problems of evil and witchcraft among many concrete social dilemmas? When the African Christians hear the message that it is God was made flesh and dwelt among them, it can provide sufficient security against the spiritual threats of life. The African people may find the courage to abandon trusting elements of traditional religions for their security.

Any understanding of God and salvation work of Jesus Christ that is only preoccupied with the

salvation of the soul from hell is insufficient to invoke the loyalty of the African people. Indeed, God who remains a foreign white man at a remote distance can never be Lord and Saviour in the African church.

It is this type of desire for God that has caused a serious challenge in the African church. According to Deke (2015:10) people generally want to hear the voice of God in their challenges. The same applies to those who claim to speak on behalf of God. Generally, he argues that the 21st century African church and ministry at large is searching for answers from God. Any voice that confirms their misery or good fortunes is respected. This vacuum has seen prophets modestly and gradually contextualizing the gospel to meet the needs of the African hearers. African people have been socialized into a theology of prophecy and visions (Deke 2015:10). From my personal observation, in many cities in Zambia (this may be true in other African cities as well), a large number of people still seek help from traditional medicine men and women who display their herbs and traditional medicine on pavements along streets, some even advertise in public media. They do this when faced with challenges. Christians are frequently caught up in the temptation to seek help from medicine men and women, either to cure a physical illness, to get medicine to prevent things from going wrong, to bring good fortune, success, favour, and obtain a promotion or pass an exam (Mbiti 1969:171). This brings us to another question on the impact of Christianity in Africa societies: "Why do many Africans, though claiming to be Christians, still seek traditional help in these trying moments?''

The articulation of Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity in post-colonial Africa demands a clear grasp of God's nearness, with particular attention to the incarnation of Jesus Christ and God's presence through the Holy Spirit. In response to this misunderstanding of the remoteness of God, it is important to re-emphasize the through the life of Jesus Christ, God dwells among the people of Africa. Moltmann (1981:197) argues that if we see the Almighty God in Trinitarian terms, God is not the archetype of the mighty ones of this world. God is the Father of the Christ who was crucified and raised for us. As the Father of Jesus Christ, God is Almighty because God exposes himself to the experience of human life, suffering, pain, helplessness and death. For Moltmann (1981:192), in the Kingdom of the Father, God is the Creator and the Lord of those God has created. Men and women are his created beings and are his property as well. In their naked existence human beings are completely and utterly dependent on their Creator and Preserver (Moltmann (1981:219). They can contribute nothing to what God creates for they owe everything they are to God's creative activity. The means by which the Trinitarian God extends an invitation to human beings into communion and fellowship is in the person of Jesus Christ.

What this means to the people of Africa is that the doctrine of the Trinity of God has an important significance by highlighting God's openness to the continent of Africa, which is reflected through his Son Jesus Christ. According to Nausner (2007:91) the incarnation story of Jesus Christ has two fold significance. First, it acknowledges the process of human experience to which God accommodated himself in the Son and the Spirit. Second, it shows that God himself assumes the human condition and therefore reveals to human beings his presence. He shows that Bible speaks of the living God, the God who liberates the people of Israel, who is actively involved in the human search for justice and abundant life. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus not only calls himself the bread of life but equates himself with life. In order to make a real impact and to influence people's lives Jesus had to make their issues his issue and took part in their problems (Nausner 2007:91).

In regard to the concept of God's nearness, this also implies the importance of retelling or rereading the biblical narratives to the people of Africa in order for them to understand the truth of how and who God is in Jesus Christ. To push the implication a little further, the people in African need to understand that God encounters human beings in the human person Jesus and does so by simultaneously accommodating himself in the Spirit. This Trinitarian understanding expresses the fundamental belief that the God in whom Africans believe as the source of all things is also the God who is near. To put matters in a nutshell, if the concept of God's nearness is seen in this light, then it enables the African people not to live in fear. The presence of God to the African community ultimately means that Christ's victory and reign have been established within their lives and affairs. This presence is not a silent presence but an active one. The awareness that God is present will motivate them to yield more to God and to sup the benefits of God's presence.

From the framework described above, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is a living communion with the life-giving Spirit; it has implication for our daily lives. It is not a theoretical and abstract expression, it is experiential. What impact does the Christian experience of being in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit have on daily life, the community, and voluntary groups concerned with people brought together by the world's problems? For the fellowship of the Holy Spirit brings new life. In other words, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit endows the community of believers to manifest God's nature once they are sent from the congregation into society, going beyond the confines of the church, for the Holy Spirit is God himself in person, no less than God the Father and the Son (Moltmann 1992:235). In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit the African people can perceive God in a much more intimate and mutual relationship than the relationship between the creator and creature. It is the intimate fellowship of mutual in

dwelling: God is in us a divine way, and we are in God in a human way. In this way, God is no longer an aloof counterpart in heaven (transcendent), but the triune God is active and help us to become sensitive to the whole scope of his activity and to be engaged in the world.

The theology of God's nearness also challenges the human conditions that promotes autocratic human hierarchies that distances God from the history of the world. As already pointed out above, to Moltmann, monotheism leads to monarchism by functioning as a monotheistic basis of promoting patriarchal authoritarianism and political autocracy. He says that the notion of a divine monarchy in heaven and on earth generally provides the justification for earthly domination, religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination and makes it a hierarchy, a holy rule (Moltmann 1981:192). The notion of one God in heaven translates into one central government on earth. The idea of the almighty ruler of the universe legitimates a corresponding hierarchical power structure that oppresses human society. Thus, a *perichoretic* understanding of the Trinity for Moltmann, can translate to egalitarian socio-political structures that enhance human flourishing.

The Trinitarian theology of God's nearness also functions in Moltmann to affirm God's loving relationship with his people and his created world. Moltmann (1981:69) states that creation is a part of the eternal love affair between the Father and the Son. It springs from the Father's love for the Son and is redeemed by the answering love of the Son for the Father. The triune God is essentially united with his creation and shares in its suffering. Moltmann finds that the emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God resulted in the dichotomous view of the relationship between God and his creation that has stripped God of relationship with the world resulting in the secularization of material reality. In other words, God is now understood as unconcerned with material and temporal issues and only concerned with spiritual issues deemed holy and eternal.

In view of the above one can argue that the evident rate of poverty, corruption, social and political problems in Africa reflects lack of a proper understanding of the concept of God. A misconception of the concept of God is a challenge because people conduct themselves differently in their private and public spaces. Magezi (2016:7) points out that even though we can put human structures in place to influence people to act responsibly, the misconception of triune God may remain a challenge because structures cannot change the mind set of people. He contends that structures do not address people's consciences. This makes it imperative for African Theology to construct theologies that arouse a sense of accountability and responsibility for individuals to conduct their various duties and obligations in a responsible, accountable and trustworthy manner in public or private spaces. A worldview that is

informed and shaped by the Trinitarian theology of God's nearness must replace the African worldview which is shaped by human power, control, oppression and dominion. The African Christian's worldview must be shaped, influenced and directed by God's love.

The above-mentioned Christian understanding of the nearness of God has also an important implication for the ethics of believers. Magezi (2016:8) acknowledges that the ethical implication arises from the fact that God sees all that humankind is doing, as well as God knows all that people are thinking, because there is no part of his creation outside of God's reach and knowledge. That is to say, God is omnipresent; therefore, God sees directly everything people do as part of his creation. In this way God's nearness challenges the Christian church in Africa to be concerned with the promotion of abundant life and the liberation of the poor and powerless. In saying this, we call African Christians not to live lives which are influenced by non-Christian believers who do not fear and respect the reverence of God. They should conduct themselves in a way worthy of their new life in Christ because they respect the triune God who is directly present in every place and sees everything they do. A worldview that is centered on God and that is alert to God's everyday active presence in one's world will induce the Christian to transfer all the trust placed on human power to God alone.

The underlying reality is that we are not left on our own as far as our relationship with God is concerned; neither are we left on our own to suffer our own challenges with regard to the Christian life. Life in the present is empowered by the God who dwells among us and in us. According to Moltmann (1985:17) the fact that God-world relation is understood as mutual love and respect means that the relationships in the whole of creation must show the same character. In other words, the God-world relationship as such provides the pattern for God's creation.

In Africa the story of human governments and government leaders has been a weary story of power, pride, politics and problems for a prolonged period of time. Many government leaders use their positions of power for their own personal gain. Unfortunately some also live lives of gross moral evil (O'Donovan 2006:9). It is a fact that much of the suffering, poverty, injustice, war and oppression endured by African Christians today is directly or indirectly caused by evil governments or corrupt government officials. If God lives eternally in relationships of love and fellowship, then this encourages the people of Africa to think of the human relationship also as that of mutual love and respect. If this is so, Moltmann's Trinitarian theology affirms God's nearness and communal relationship that provides peace and love.

6.2.2 An African Trinitarian theology of a suffering God

In the light of Moltmann's view, God must be understood in his activity in the world centred on the cross of Jesus Christ. The *Crucified God*'s most significant claim is that the cross is a Trinitarian event in which all three persons of the Godhead suffer. What this means is that the triune God is not simply the God who is immanent. Rather, the triune God is the suffering God who identifies himself with the human suffering on the cross. Feske (2015:3) says that the triune God is the one who opens himself and makes room for true human freedom, dignity and transformation of the unjust world.

At the centre of this statement, is that human suffering demands Christian theology to talk about God not in abstract terms but in relation to the experience of suffering. In other words, true Christian theology must account for how God relates to the problem of human suffering rather than merely the perfections of God. Moltmann complains that traditional Christian theology has always considered the cross and the resurrection of Jesus within the horizon of soteriology (Moltmann 1974:201). Moltmann accepts that it is indeed true that Jesus saves sinners. However, to just leave his work at the redemptive level undermines the full significance of the death of Jesus on the cross, namely, God's suffering. To consider the cross and the resurrection of Jesus soteriologically fails to realise that Christ's death takes place in the innermost nature of God himself. This means that suffering cannot be isolated from the doctrine of God.

Moltmann (1974:7) affirms the primacy of the cross by declaring that in Christianity the cross alone and nothing else is the test of everything which deserves to be called Christian. This means that Moltmann regards the cross as not one distinct theme in Christian theology, but the basis and the criterion of Christian theology. By disputing the impassability and immutability of God as affirmed in traditional Christian theology, Moltmann provides a framework of the God of hope that in turn provides theological resources of responding to the problem of suffering. Plainly stated, Moltmann is saying that when God's people suffer, God enters their pain and suffers it too. As a companion in suffering God gives comfort where there is nothing to hope for.

This understanding of God has an important implication for the life of believers in Africa. The underlying reality is that the crucified God is present in the context of suffering. It is very important for church leaders in Africa to make this message clear to the people to know what it means to believe in

God who is present through Jesus Christ. The crucified God is in fact a stateless and classless God. God is the God of the poor, the oppressed and the humiliated (Moltmann 1974:329). In this statement Moltmann expresses a political significance of the God of hope by calling on those who worship this God to desist from sacralising political structures, particularly the oppressive and exploitative structures. Moltmann's turn to the cross brought with it the requirement of a political praxis of solidarity with the victims. The doctrine of the crucified God in Moltmann has a political significance as it models how human beings ought to relate to each other in order for justice and peace to prevail. On the Christological debate Maluleke (1994:57) says that, in Africa, Jesus Christ is described as the healer, ancestor, mediator and elder brother, but he does not explain further how the role of Jesus in the liberating process. The basic question here is whether the professional African theologians have helped the African Christian population to articulate the concept of the crucified God.

We ask "who is Jesus Christ for the continent of Africa today?" because we believe that the story of his life and death is the answer to the human story of oppression and suffering in Africa. If the existence of people was not at stake, if they are not experiencing the pain and the contradictions of life, then the Christological question would be no more than an intellectual exercise for professional theologians. Cone (1997:100) says that for Christians who have experienced the extreme absurdities of life, the Christological question is not primarily theoretical but practical. It arises from the context of pain and suffering.

As already stated, Africa is in need of a theology which can explain clearly the concept of God in the context of suffering. A proper understanding of the triune God as revealed in the Son and the Holy Spirit is helpful in laying the foundation for understanding the challenges of Africa. As Kombo (2000:215) puts it some Africans have suffered, some have been tortured and others killed, not because of their belief in idols, but for the sake of Jesus Christ and his message of love, salvation, justice, hope and peace. The Christ these Christians have suffered for is the Christ who suffered on the cross. For Moltmann (1981:69), the triune God is essentially united with his people and shares in their suffering.

6.2.2.1 The theology of the crucified God as the ground of human liberation in Africa

According to Moltmann (1981:212-213) the kingdom of God is determined by the liberation of men and women through Jesus Christ. For Moltmann the triune God of the Scripture does not inhibit or reject freedom. Rather, the crucified God makes room for genuine human freedom and dignity. In fact, for him, only in the crucified God can we secure the true basis for human freedom. He supports this claim by demonstrating that the triune God of the Bible is not the God of monotheism but the God of

eternal loving fellowship among divine persons, who established the true basis of human freedom.

Moltmann (1981:218) says that the Trinitarian understanding of God need not to be in conflict with human freedom. Rather it can offer a solid foundation for the human freedom and dignity that many humanistic atheists strive to achieve throughout their lives. *The doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine of freedom*. The crucified God of the Scripture is the God who unceasingly desires the freedom of his creation (Moltmann 1981:218). Moltmann's view on the crucified God provides a useful resource for the African people to fight for their freedom and justice because God who is their future is also a God of liberation. It does not matter what oppressors say or do or what they try to make the people believe. The African people should know that they have a freedom not made by human hands. It is this faith that may define their personality and thus enables them to sing when the world says that they have nothing to sing about, to pray when prayer seems useless to philosophers, and to preach when the world will not listen.

6.2.3 An African Trinitarian theology of God's life in communion

The third approach towards a revisioned social interpretation of the Trinity in Africa may focus on God's life in communion and relationality. Our interest in this part is not merely to promote the social understanding of the Trinity that usually tends to focus on traditional family relations. We feel the current African situation needs more than an interpretation of family relations. The post-colonial African context needs a Trinitarian perspective that is both biblical and relevant to the African challenges. In the previous chapters we have indicated in clear terms the challenges of post-colonial Africa. A serious challenge in post-colonial Africa is the breakdown of communion and relationality.

In sharp contrast to the African value of communion, the important question in post-colonial Africa is usually, "What is good for me?'' The person in post-colonial Africa seeks his or her own freedom, privacy and individual recognition without reference to any community. Furthermore, people often purposely avoid the influence of others when making their plans and decisions. They cherish their individuality, uniqueness and differences from others. Today, people do not want to be bound by the traditions or opinions of others. A popular saying in the post-colonial world says that each person should, "do his or her own thing". In this statement the assumption is that the person will not be influenced or controlled by the desires or will of others. The demand for personal freedom without regard for the community in the modern world is not based on something godly. It is the result of the pride, selfishness and personal rebellion of the sin nature of man (O'Donovan 2006:11). These are some of the most destructive forces in the world to peaceful human relationships. These demands do

not tend to build a healthy cooperative community. The modern values tend to divide and separate the community instead of producing unity and cooperation. Some people feel that no one has the right to tell them what they can do or not do. There is no sense of accountability to a community to which people feel they must conform.

However, it has been stated clearly that the triune God is communion of three persons. Since the triune God is a perfect communion of love, human beings are created for communion with one another, not just with God. Volf & Welker (2006:11) says that Christ came not just to live in us, or even just to live through us. He came to make us into one body, his body, the church. Each member of the body is endowed with what the apostle Paul called 'spiritual gifts'.

The implication of this understanding of God's communion is that the followers of Christ must also follow this option regarding the poor and needy and the first and foremost way of expressing their faith in Christ in the context of widespread poverty in the continent of Africa today. The gospel of Jesus is quite clear on this point. The triune God stands by the side of anyone who is oppressed, seen as sister and brother of Jesus (Matthew 25:40). For Boff & Boff (1986:45) it is only those who commune in his history with the poor and needy, who are Christ's sacraments, will commune definitively with Christ.

From its earliest days the church showed concern for the poor. The apostles and their followers held all things in common so that there would be no poor among them (Acts 2 and 4). In proclaiming the Gospel the one thing they emphasized was that the poor should not be ignored. As we have said in chapter 1, there are various forms of poverty brought about by socio-economic circumstances in Africa which, in addition embody specific oppressions and therefore require specific forms of liberation. There are those who are discriminated against by reason of their race, by reason of their culture, or by reason of their sex. The poorest of the poor are often to be found among such groups, for they incur the whole burden of oppressions and discriminations. (Boff & Boff 1986:4) narrates a story of a woman who described herself as oppressed and impoverished on six counts: as a woman, as a prostitute, as a single parent, as poor, as a black, and because of her tribe of origin. Faced with such conditions, what can the church do to help this woman from such a set of social iniquities? Boff & Boff (1986:47) says that the church has to tell poor persons like her that God loves them in a special way, whatever moral or personal situation they find themselves in. God in Jesus established solidarity with the poor, especially in his passion and death. For this reason alone the poor merit preferential attention, whatever their moral or personal situation may be in which they find themselves.

In the continent in which death from hunger and repression have become commonplace, it is important to bring out those characteristics of the Christian God who desires communion, relationality, participation and hospitality. Indeed, Moltmann's theology of the 'Crucified God' is quite inspiring on this matter. This new route taken by the people of God with the new message of God's life in communion and relationality could say to the poor that when Jesus was nailed to the cross, Jesus suffered and died and identified himself with those who suffer (Moltmann 1974:48). Jesus is their identity with God in a world which has taken all hope from them and which has destroyed their human identity until it is unrecognizable.

Theological reflection on God's life in communion with those who suffer, as explained above, may help to lead the churches in Africa to develop their concern for the defence and promotion of human rights. The struggle for promotion of human dignity and defence of threatened rights must begin with the right concept of God. Moltmann (1981:218-219) has helped us to see that *the rights of the poor are the rights of God*. In the doctrine of the Trinity only the passionate God, the God who suffers by virtue of his passion for people, calls for the freedom of men and women. The people of Africa can be on the side of the poor only when they struggle alongside them and speak against the poverty that has been unjustly created and forced on them. Service in solidarity with the oppressed also implies an act of love, oneness, communion and fellowship. The question is: What is the action that will effectively enable the Africans stand in communion with the oppressed? Many years of reflection and practice has demonstrated that it has to go beyond two approaches that have already been tried: Aid and reformism.

According to (Boff & Boff 1986:4) aid is help offered by individuals moved by the spectacle of widespread destitution. Many organizations in Africa have formed agencies and organize projects in order to help those who suffer. However, aid may remain a strategy for helping the poor, but it may not help them to become subjects of their own liberation. The poor are seen simply as those who have nothing. There is failure to see that the poor are oppressed and made poor by others. It is contended that Aid increases the dependence of the poor, making them reliant on others, to decisions made by others and thereby not enabling them to become their own liberators.

Reformism seeks to improve the situation of the poor but always within existing social relationships and the basic structuring of society. Boff &Boff (1986:5) argues that Reformism can lead to great feats of development in the poorer nations, but this development is nearly always at the expense of the oppressed poor and very rarely in their favour. In this case, it is contended that the poor can break out of their situation of oppression only by working out a strategy that can enable them to change the social

conditions.

Since the God in whose image we are created is in communion with his people, Christians in particular are summoned to embody a new community with a message of solidarity; namely a fair sharing of the earth's resources and where relationships of power and domination are replaced by relationships of honor and mutual respect among equals. Thus, the Christian confession of the Holy Trinity challenges the inequality of totalitarianism, where individual freedom and rights are suppressed, as well as individualism, where the self-interest of the individual undermines the interests of the wider community. In this case, the social understanding of the Trinity challenges all forms of social inequality, whether elitism, racism, sexism, classism or tribalism.

6.2.3.1 God's life in communion challenges the socio-political situation in Africa

Directly related to deep-rooted African poverty is the problem of African political independence without human liberation. By 1980, when South Africa and Namibia were the only two African countries which had not yet achieved majority rule, Banda (2016:209) argues that political independence in Africa had not translated to development of African human power. Evidence for this tragedy was the failure of the new African governments to successfully maintain and grow the viable economies and institutions inherited from the colonialists. He says that political independence without human liberation in Africa is a result of the predominant tendency of regarding political independence as a destination and not a process of building an independent state (Banda 2016:211). In the Zambian context and elsewhere in Africa political independence seems to be only understood as attaining political power, reclaiming from the white people everything expropriated from the black people and enjoy it all now as rewards and benefits for a hard-won independence. This scope of thinking fails to realize that political independence is a responsibility to govern a state, build infrastructure and take the state into the future. Banda (2016:211) says that there is need to shift from perceiving political liberation as inheriting white settlers' achievements to an understanding of the responsibility to govern in the state in a manner that promotes socio-economic and political viability and sustainability. The tendency to occupy power simply for selfish reasons can also be seen among church leaders, who use their churches to amass personal wealth. For Banda (2016:11) political liberation with human development means a commitment to move forward.

According to Moltmann (1974:317) the freedom of faith is lived out in political freedom. The freedom of faith therefore urges men towards liberating actions, because it makes them painfully aware of

suffering in situations of exploitation, oppression, alienation and captivity. The situation of the crucified God makes it clear that the human situation where there is no freedom are vicious cycles which must be broken because they can only be broken through in God. Likewise, in the African context of politics, the African leaders stand challenged to overcome all elements of domination and exploitation. Moltmann's view on the concept of *perichoresis* provides the African political leaders with a social Trinitarian model of human relationships. It signifies the social unit' that is constituted by the reciprocal self-giving love among the Father, Son, and the Spirit in freedom. Moltmann (1981:218) insists that the freedom in which the divine persons of the Trinity exercise their *perichoretic* fellowship is in contrast to the enlightenment ideal of freedom and autonomy which leads to the potential domination of others. Such a model of human freedom, Moltmann (1981:220) points out, at its worst, leads to the subjugation of the weak by the dominant and the dissolution of all true bonds of community. Freedom as domination or lordship over other people is possible only at the expense of someone else. This model of human freedom has the potential to wilfully crush the weak. For Moltmann (1978:198) the three Persons have everything in common, except for their personal characteristics. The Trinity therefore corresponds with a community in which people are defined though their relationship one with another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.

In contrast to the definition of freedom as autonomy which leads to the potential domination of others, the social Trinitarian model of Christian fellowship promotes a freedom in reciprocal giving and receiving, mutual recognition, and acceptance. This 'communicative freedom' according to Moltmann (1981:19) promotes a freedom for and with another person. He says that it is only in love that human freedom arrives at its truth. In mutual participation in life, Moltmann contends that individual people become free beyond the limits of their individuality and discover the common room for living which their freedom offers. That is the social life of freedom. In this case, this type of life is called love and solidarity and in it people experience the uniting of isolated individuals. In this life people experience the uniting of things that have been forcibly divided (Moltmann 1981:216). Accordingly, a society mirroring the social Trinitarian model of human relationships is neither a collective society where individuals' potentials and differences are suppressed, nor an individualistic society where fierce competition is engendered among individuals to subjugate others for their own benefit. Rather, it is the society where individuals are free to realize their potential and to serve one another by using their various gifts in love and trust.

As an image of the Trinity the political leaders in Africa are called to realize the fellowship found in the divine *perichoresis*. Thus, the political system and social structure must correspond to the eternal love of the Trinity by providing equality, freedom and egalitarian relationships. The relationship of authority and obedience in the African political leadership must be replaced by dialogue, consensus and harmony. As Moltmann (1981:191) contends, there is certainly a connection between the understanding of God and socio-political order. Our concept of God influences our understanding of reality, including socio-political reality. In this sense Moltmann's basic thesis that Trinity is our social program deserves due respect, especially for the situation in Africa. His Trinitarian theology, which understands God as a community of persons in *perichoretic* union, may indeed inspire a desirable model for African politics while disclosing the false ideology behind a hierarchical and oppressive society brought about by the concept of globalization.

It is widely pointed out that modernity and globalization, which sees reality as objective, mechanistic, hierarchical and individualistic, has greatly wounded human life by causing many people to suffer. It has failed to satisfy the deepest desires of the human heart while resulting in fragmentation and depersonalization of those who suffer (Park 2000:207). In depersonalized and fragmented modern culture, contemporary people in Africa urgently seek a healthy and genuine community that provides unconditional acceptance and respect and thereby helps them to grow as healthy and mature human persons.

In Zambia, we have a post-colonial political concept of 'One Zambia, One Nation' which was intended to help the people to stand in solidarity with those who are poor. This concept is well articulated by all political leaders. It runs through the veins of all Zambian people, is embodied in the repeated slogan: 'One Zambia, One Nation'. This slogan, though politically motivated, reveals a world view that the people of Zambia owe their selfhood to others, that they are first and foremost social beings, no man or woman is an island, or as the Chewa people of Zambia would have it, *Cala cimodzi sicitswa sabwe* (One finger cannot kill a lice). To the observer 'One Zambia, One Nation' can be seen and felt in the spirit of willing participation, unquestioning cooperation, warmth, openness, and personal dignity demonstrated by all groups of people. The equality, interdependence, cooperation, sharing and mutual self-giving and receiving among the people of Zambia signifies the concept of solidarity.

On the other hand Phiri (2017:6) argues that Zambia has for most part of its post-colonial period, struggled with the political slogan of 'One Zambia One Nation' as a check against its fragile national

unity in a background of defined ethnic boundaries highlighted as much in words as on paper during the colonial period. She says that the slogan was/has been questioned as to how could different peoples become one nation? Banda (2018:1) complains that there is too much hatred in Zambia. In an interview, Banda said Dr Kaunda and his ministers preached the 'One Zambia, One Nation' slogan to bring the people together irrespective of their religion or tribe. However, he argues that even though some politicians use this slogan of 'One Zambia, One Nation', what they are doing is the opposite. They imprison people for no reason at all. He wondered why politicians preach 'One Zambia, One Nation' before elections but abandon it afterwards. This clearly shows that in the context of poverty where the poor and powerless Zambian people are both economically marginalized and socio-economically oppressed, the 'One Zambia, One Nation' slogan may be viewed as a mockery by those who suffer.

Ubuntu, a South African slogan is another post-colonial notion, that positions the individual in relation to the community in which he or she lives and underscores the values of intense humanness, caring, and sharing. The term refers to a form of solidarity but also a philosophy that believes human beings are, by nature, self-developing creatures. According to Tutu (2004:6), Ubuntu is a belief that a person is a person through other persons. Indeed, the concept of Ubuntu is post-colonial notion which has strongly produced communities and corporations where humans behave with respect toward one another, to bind and link them together to result in a better community nationally and hence, given time, a better globe. Furthermore, Tutu says that humans need Ubuntu because it is a significant part of human existence. Additionally, she has indicated that all cultures have a form of Ubuntu that establishes laws, beliefs and values among its people to maintain human treatment.

Generally speaking, *Ubuntu* means 'humanity' and is related to *muntu,* which is the category of intelligent human being. Tutu (2004:6) has defined *Ubuntu* as the person who is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, affirming of others, and who does not feel threatened that others are able and good; this person has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing they belong to a greater whole, are diminished when another is humiliated, diminished, tortured, oppressed, and threatened as if they were less than they are. Basically, *Ubuntu* is seen as an important value of African culture that can form the basis of a management truly congruent with the peoples of Africa.

However, Louw 2001:3) says that *Ubuntu* cannot adequately solve the challenges of Africa. According to Nyathi (2017:1) the usage of *Ubuntu* has been within a conservative setting, not to offer transformative possibilities but to affirm a status quo. At other times, it has been applied in ways that

are not addressing the needs of African people. In this case, he argues against the limited view of *Ubuntu* and stresses that notions of justice, fairness, equality and solidarity should be associated with *Ubuntu*. He also says that *Ubuntu* has failed to address the concerns of the African women as men distort this way of life as a cover up for patriarchy when there are culture or traditions to disempower women- precisely by excluding them from the position of leadership.

In a nutshell all these two post-colonial notions express the general idea of communality, the concept of African family which can be taken as the natural point of departure for African Trinitarian speculation. According to Vähäkangas (2000:38) these concepts cannot be lifted up as the standard criterion of a proper understanding of the Trinity. Rather, the Trinitarian model is left free both to influence African models of family, relations, communality, oneness and also to be interpreted through them. The primary view, however, is that the concept of One Zambia, One Nation, *Ubuntu* should reflect the Trinitarian communion. Since this is the case, Moltmann presents an insightful concept of social Trinity that deserves a welcoming assent in Africa. His social doctrine of the Trinity which understands the one God as a living and dynamic community characterized by mutual love and fellowship, can be relevant to the African community.

The church in the African context of poverty is challenged towards a communality that protects and empowers the poor to respond meaningfully to their poverty. The perspective constructed in Moltmann's thinking that emphasizes socio-political and economic structures that affirm and preserve the human dignity of all human beings can enable the church to construct a framework of poverty alleviation that has a measure of sustainability. According to Banda (2016:183) an important step in moving towards an ecclesiological ethic of poverty eradication is the understanding of the communality of the church as an essential resource for the human capacitation of the poor. The African community is commanded to be a place where there is fellowship and service to one another and reaching out to the needy.

The divine embrace between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit tells a story in which relationships come first. As we discussed, the divine persons exercise caring and loving relationships and express a oneness of love. Again, the divine communion is enduring and everlasting. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exercise a lasting communion, celebrate a feast of life, therefore expressing a oneness of absolute meaning and abundance. In God there is no scarcity and fragmentation. Human life is never complete, therefore fragmented and open to meaninglessness and hopelessness. To reflect the divine embrace in Africa means to make a space for the other and walk together, look into each other's eyes, to face problems

with each other rather than to turn away and walk against each other.

6.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the focus of this chapter was to provide a proposed approach towards a re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism in Africa. The essential point is that the people of Africa should not view God as an absent land lord, but that God's life is in communion. In this way, the first re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism is an interpretation that focuses on God's nearness and can provide hope for those who suffer. So, if we start with this fundamental belief, it provides a basis for God's people in Africa to trust him in faith as he leads them towards the fulfilment of his covenant. The doctrine of the perichoresis also functions in Moltmann to affirm God's loving relationship with his people and his created world. The triune God is essentially united with his creation and shares in its suffering.

We have discussed in this chapter that the re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism should focus on the crucified God. According to Moltmann, a God who cannot suffer is also one who cannot love because love presupposes relational involvement. For Moltmann, a God who is foreign to suffering and who sits enthroned in heaven in a glory that no one can share is unacceptable. Moltmann sees the suffering of Christ as God's way of participating in our human despair. Carrying the concept of God suffering even further Moltmann appears to be declaring that God suffers as humanity suffers. This statement gives suffering persons a reason to pause and contemplate on the extent of God's love for them. The hope engendered in this statement offers consolation to the people of Africa. Moltmann defines poor as 'the hungry, the unemployed, the sick, the discouraged and the sad and suffering, the poor are the subjected, oppressed and humiliated people'. Within the body of Christ, a Christian experiences current and future hope in that any present suffering encountered in the flesh is not foreign to the God of love as He embraces them and their suffering through the cross of Jesus Christ.

The third approach toward towards a re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism should focus on God's communion and relationality. In Moltmann, God's communion and relationality with his people provides a basis to address the challenge of broken relationships in Africa. The doctrine of the perichoresis is significant in Moltmann's articulation of the communal relationship within the Trinity. The doctrine of perichoresis in Moltmann has a social and political significance as it models how human beings ought to relate to each other in order for justice and peace to prevail. The point he seeks to make is that the Kingdom of God challenges apathy. It reminds God's people to stand on the side of those who are poor and powerless. Drawing from this understanding of the triune God, it can be

suggested that the true church of Jesus Christ in Africa, should be a church for the poor, which in turn means that the church should challenge the socio-economic and political structures that marginalize and impoverish the powerless. This places pressure on the church in Africa to confront on behalf of the poor structures that hinder their material wellbeing. For Moltmann, the kingdom of God is life-giving. Its work of giving life opposes all oppressive structures that stand in the way of the poor to experience life.

In other words, the anticipation of God's promise to his people of a future kingdom where all human beings will experience the glory of God in equality with other human beings must motivate the church in the here-and-now to seek to transform the socio-political and economic structures that deny humans their wellbeing and dignity. In so doing, the church will be an agent of life in the midst of death. The significance of the community is a major tenet in Moltmann's eschatological thought that emphasizes the equality of believers. Most people rely on their relatives as support system. If the relatives fail to assist them at their time of greatest need, they often have nowhere else to turn. If the church is a united institution, oneness in Christ should be exercised by sharing one another's burdens and by seeking to correct injustices that deny access to health care or food security for the poor.

CONCLUSION

The concept of *God's life in communion* affirms the quality that God enters into a relationship with the world. The main purpose of this research project is to contribute to the idea that God's life is in communion. At the center of this statement, is that human suffering does not demand a theology that talks about God in abstract terms, but a theology which can explain clearly the concept of God in Trinitarian terms, God who relates to people and creation. In other words, true African Theology must account for how God relates to the problem of human suffering rather than merely the perfections of God. The task of elaborating a Trinitarian theology of God's life in communion led me to an investigation of the concepts of human experience in post-colonial Africa.

As already pointed out in chapter 1, the entire continent of Africa is bleeding from the pain of social, economic and political challenges. African Governments are caught up in political power struggles, poverty, overcrowding and the breakdown of traditional family life. The winds of change are affecting almost every sector of public and private life. The African cosmology is basically religious, but today there is no value of religious life in Africa. Many problems in African cities are already out of control and we have examined some of these problems in this research study. For decades, African has tried to get rid of the most oppressive powers that have dominated the continent but, on the other hand, the society in Africa is becoming dangerously fragmented and isolated. The streets are filled with homeless and handicapped people. There is widespread despair, depression and hopelessness. When people hear bad news, they become discouraged and depressed. They feel overwhelmed and lose hope in God. They lose the will of doing good or even to keep on praying. Even worse the church, which is supposed to be the anchor of hope, is finding itself in the middle of social, economic and political issues.

The implications of the issues raised in this research project for the concept of God in post-colonial Africa are many. As already noted, if God is the creator of all things and described as loving and good, why are there such instances of evil in the continent of Africa? In response to these challenges, alternatives are being proposed and advocated to answer some of the current questions of Africa. Recently, African Christian thinkers, theologians, and non-theologians alike, have articulated their own brands of theologies. This has been made possible by the forceful irruption of issues of poverty, gender, civil war, neo-colonialism and dominancy. The question of the interplay between God and society remains on the agenda in post-colonial Africa. Viewed from this perspective, the role of the church today is to provide a theology that pays attention to issues of social transformation and that can answer

the questions concerning the concept of God in the current society. In a continent plagued with mass poverty, bad governance and leadership crisis, the Church as the family of God remains the anchor of hope. It ought to give the children of Africa, the men and women, a genuine message of hope in God who is relational and who is able to understand the human condition of suffering.

Also discussed in this study project is the concept of God in African Religion and Missionary Christianity. This study has demonstrated that throughout Africa there is, to a certain extent, a wide spread belief in the Supreme Being (God), the spiritual world and mystical powers. Nevertheless, this study has revealed that God is thought to be present in peoples' everyday life, but the general picture in Africa is that there are no regular prayers or specific forms of worship that are usually directed to God. God is thought as not actively involved with their life because God is outside the world. There is a widespread belief that God once used to dwell on earth, but God retired to the sky because of human faults. The most prevailing remark on the concept of God in Africa is that God is far away. Instead, the divinities and ancestral spirits are the objects of prayers and are thought of as more responsible for everyday life. Consequently, God becomes a withdrawal God and the African people develop the idea of the other gods. Therefore, in order to address this misconception, it has been established in this research project that the doctrine of the Trinity reveals God's nearness.

According to Moltmann, the history of Jesus through his birth, life, death, and resurrection reveals the fellowship of the divine persons characterized by an infinite self-giving and reciprocal sacrifice of love. This Trinitarian self-giving, according to Moltmann, is both an outward movement toward the world and a reciprocal inward movement among the divine relations. Moltmann rightly asserts that God became flesh and came down to dwell among the people. The incarnation of God in Christ is the starting point for our theological interpretations of the God's nearness in Africa. To confess that God is fully incarnate in the world is to claim that the divine and human come together fully in the person of Jesus.The powerful truth that can be taught to the people of Africa is that God became incarnate not only in creation, but also in human flesh. This narrative of incarnation, revealed in the doctrine of the Trinity, is the proper place from which to interpret the theology of God's nearness.

We have also indicated in this study project that a careful consideration of Moltmann's work on *Theology of Hope* and the *Crucified God,* forms an essential motivation to the problem of suffering in Africa. It is Moltmann's conviction that the Bible shows God to be the God of hope. For Moltmann, the whole of creation longs for the renewal by the God of Hope. Empowered by this hope, the Christian's

response should include the mission of the church to all nations, the hunger for righteousness in the world, and love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. In *Theology of Hope* Moltmann understands Christian faith as essentially hope for the future of man and this earth promised by the God of the exodus and the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Moltmann emphasises that the death and resurrection of Christ essentially constitute a single event that dialectically means both the death of God and the future of God. God's resurrection of Christ from death showed the creative power of God who is able to bring reality into life out of nothingness and in absolute hopelessness. Moltmann understands the resurrection as affirming God as the God of future open possibilities. We can speak of the future of God because of the fact of the resurrection Christ. In its basic form the notion of the God of hope is a political theology that engages a sociopolitical context.

As we have discussed, the unseakable horrific scenes of human suffering pose a challenge to both the belief in the existence of a good God and the denial of the existence of a good God. Moltmann expresses the socio-political implications of his theology of hope as follows: the point is not simply to interpret the world, history, and human relations differently but to change them in the expectation of God's transformation. The God of hope is not detached from the suffering of his people; God is neither detached above them, rather God remains the one who is their future and present ground of struggle for liberation and abundant life. The outcome of the notion of the theology of hope in Moltmann is a political church concerned with promotion of abundant life and the liberation of the poor and powerless in Africa. To behold message of the God of hope and his glorious promises as well as his relationship with the world, motivates the church in Africa to challenge all present occurrences of pain and suffering.

Moltmann further shows the theology of the God of hope by a theology of the cross that affirms the suffering of God. Moltmann is convinced that a truly Christian theology has to make Jesus' experience of God on the cross the center of all ideas about God. He contends that a theology of the cross gives a new identity to Christian theology, one that includes the crucified Christ as well as an identity with those who suffer. Moltmann strongly emphasizes the necessity of the Trinitarian understanding of God as the proper way to understand the significance of the death of Jesus Christ. Moltmann's doctrine of the Trinity remains grounded in Christology. According to Moltmann (1981:61-96), the history of the Son to this Christological centre of the Trinity, cannot be grasped except as part of the history of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Thus Moltmann subscribes to a Trinitarian Christology in which the cross stands at the heart of the Trinitarian being of God. As indicated above, the doctrine of the

perichoresis is significant in Moltmann's articulation of the communal relationship within the Trinity. For Moltmann the 'triune God is a God in sociality, rich in inner and outward relationships. According to Moltmann, the God the Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. In the perichoresis, the very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together. In this regard, Moltmann opposes the concepts of *homousios, ousia* and *substantia* because in these terms the assumption is that the unity of God is established by their sharing of a single substance, as sameness of divine identity. At the heart of this perichoretic argument is Moltmann's desire to dispute the monarchy of the Father and plead for the equality of the Son and the Spirit.

For Moltmann, the doctrine of the perichoresis of God has socioeconomic significance by highlighing God's openess to his world. The Trinitarian God who relates to himself perichoretically also relates to his people and his creation perichoretically. The doctrine of perichoresis in Moltmann is relevant for the people in Africa because it models how human beings ought to relate to each other in order for justice and peace to prevail. It cascades down to human sociopolitical conditions and it affirms God's loving relationship with his people and his created world. Above all, the expression of the Trinitarian fellowship, for Moltmann, is intended to enforce the awareness of God's presence through his Spirit among his creation. This awarness is the state of being sensitive to the ever-presence of God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian fellowship guides, empower, motivate and inspire believers to live for God in the world. The believers of Africa, the community of Christ, endowed with the Trinitarian power, is a community of free and equal people, who in the charismatic diversity of their gifts and vocations, live with one another, and for one another, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit together serve the kingdom of God in the world.

Moltmann's Trinitarian theology, which understands God as a community of persons in perichoretic union, may indeed inspire a desirable model for human community in Africa. The concept of the triune God can help to disclose the false ideology behind a hierarchical and oppressive tendency in society. Especially his Trinitarian theology of God as a perichorectic community of relationship, friendship and equality offers a desirable communal model that is desperately required for our post-colonial time in Africa. It is contended in Chapter 4 that Moltmann presents an insightful concept of social Trinity that deserves a welcoming assent in the continent of Africa. His social doctrine of the Trinity, which

understands the one God as a living and dynamic community characterized by mutual love and fellowship, may work as a viable and practical relevant doctrine of God.

We have also examined the African scholarship on Trinitarianism in dialogue with Moltmann. The general observation of this analysis is that the most common starting points for African theologies of the Trinity have been social analogies based on different aspects of family relations. However, it has been pointed out that the interpretation of the Trinity in the African context has been a relevant attempt in the African theology, such that it focuses on relationships or relatedness, common responsibility, participation, fellowship and it matches well with Moltmann's social understanding of the Trinity. This concept, if properly understood, can help African countries that are faced with the challenge of human relations. However, the problem that emerges is that the African interpretation of the Trinity based on family relations may sound attractive but it may not mean anything in the context of suffering. A theology that is only centered on social relations without any link with the fundamental challenges of life such as suffering, hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS pandemic, ethnic wars and death, would bypass the true needs of the African and would be built on sand. In a context of poverty, what is needed is a theology that challenges the socioeconomic and political structures that marginalize and impoverish the powerless. This places pressure on the church to confront structures that hinder their material being on behalf of the poor.

It is proposed in this research project that a re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism in Africa should focus on the interpretation that teaches about God's nearness. The African traditional worldview in many respects believes in a transcendent God whose immanence is mediated by lesser spiritual intermediary powers. It is from this perspective that African Christians are encouraged to live lives conscious of the infinite-immanent God who sees both their private and public lives. The private and public life of believers should resemble God's character and behavior demonstrated by Jesus Christ. This approach contributes to shifting Africans from being passive in the context of unethical behaviors to being active agents who influence the public. As such, it contributes to public, practical theology and public ethics. This approach can also provide hope for those who suffer. This belief may become a basis for God's people in Africa to trust God's presence in the context of suffering. This may become possible if the African Christians can believe that God is present through Jesus Christ

We have discussed in this thesis that the re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism should focus on the crucified God. For Moltmann, a God who is foreign to suffering and who sits enthroned in heaven

in a glory that no one can share is unacceptable. Moltmann sees the suffering of Christ as God's way of participating in our human despair. Moltmann's theology in *The Crucified God* is primarily concerned to provide a theological response to the problem of suffering. It presents a theology of God's action at the cross, which is nothing other than a demonstration of God's solidarity with his people. Plainly stated, Moltmann is saying that when his people suffer, God enters their pain and suffer it too. As a companion in suffering God gives comfort where there is no hope. In short, the crucified God is not detached from the suffering of his people; God is involved in their struggle. From this perspective, all those who are unprotected and downtrodden find their guarantor and advocate in God. The crucified God takes on the defense of those who have no one to plead for them. Moltmann's theology of the crucified God challenges the church in Africa to a have a socioeconomic scope because it must act in practical solidarity with the poor. Moltmann is saying that the God of hope who is witnessed in the promissory history of the Bible inspires and empowers responsibility to address the socio-political and economic problems of present earthly existence. Therefore, hoping in his life promised in the future calls the church to be agents of life in this present world. In other words, the church's engagement of the world now in order to change it, amounts to an anticipation of the future for in 'the promises, the hidden future already announces itself and exerts its influence on the present through the hope it awakens.

Finally, a re-visioned post-colonial social Trinitarianism should focus on God's life communion with his people. The concept of the perichoresis is significant in Moltmann's articulation of the communal relationship within the Trinity. It can be said that Moltmann's outstanding contribution to the renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in modern theology is his dynamic perichoretic view of the trinity that informs his social Trinity. For Moltmann, the triune God is a God in sociality, rich in inner and outward relationships. The concept of the perichoresis of God has socioeconomic significance by highlighting God's openness to his world. The Trinitarian God who relates to himself perichoretically also relates to his people and his creation perichoretically. Again, the concept of the perichoresis in Moltmann has a political significance as it models how human beings ought to relate to one another in order for justice and peace to prevail. This idea also functions in Moltmann to affirm God's loving relationship with his people and his created world.

The concept of the perichoresis in Moltmann has a social and political significance in Africa as it models how human beings ought to relate to each other in order for justice and peace to prevail. It reminds God's people to stand on the side of those who are poor and powerless. God's life in

communion challenges the church in Africa to be a community that is life-promoting and offers life-creating human relationships. It is should be a community that brings freedom and liberation. In other words, in failing to act in solidarity with the poor, the church denies not only its very essence but also the lordship of Christ over it.

Furthermore, the concept of God's life in communion challenges the people of Africa against clericalism and individualism. It also challenges the idolization of the prophets and pastors who are manupulating people. For Moltmann the priesthood of all believers and the giving of the charismata to all believers affirms the Trinitarian character of the church of mutual interpenetration and interdependence. Much of the confusion in the secular world today and even in the church seems to come from a failure to understand the Trinitarian character of God. There is a break down of family relations, justice and law order in many places today. There is materialism, pride, lust, greed and selfish indifference instead of the gentle, supportive community. However, the understanding of God's life in communion can provide an empowering community of sharing since it owes its existence to a God who shared his life with humanity in Jesus Christ. It is a community in which all members ought to be keepers of one another. Christians are more than an extended family; they are a universal family of God through Christ.

In conclusion then it must be maintained that the interpretation of God that must be underscored and be higly appreciated in post-colonial Africa is the Trinitarian theology of *God's nearnes, revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, God of hope and who participates in human suffering and God whose life is in communion.* This is particularly important with respect to practical implications for human life. The Trinitarian interpretation of God's life in communion articulated in this resarch project can help the church to do responsible theology in post-colonial Africa.

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