



Eschatology in African Traditional Religion and African Christianity: Implications for Biblical and Theological Scholarship in Africa

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ABSTRACT

African traditional religion has many concepts that present alternative and a variety of contexts for Christianity, theology and biblical scholarship in Africa which can also provide appropriate answers to the many questions of African Christians. One of such concepts is eschatology. Eschatology in African traditional religions present deep insight into the philosophies of Africa's indigenous cosmology and perspectives about life, death, and the hereafter. This article attempts to examine the concept of eschatology in Christian theology and explain the same within the African traditional and religious hermeneutical framework to decipher what implications can be derived for Christianity, theology and biblical scholarship in Africa and beyond. To achieve this the article reviewed various literature on the concept of eschatology within Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). In this way, the article was able to compare the theology of eschatology in Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The article looked at concepts such as time, death, end time, judgement, etc in both Christianity and ATR to discover their similarities and differences. The study revealed that the quintessential essence of African spirituality and cosmology is summed up in the concept of life as a cycle (unending); a person is born, grows to become a full member of the family, dies and gets admitted into the world of the ancestors. Even in death, life does not end, it continues actively and vibrantly in the world of the ancestors. This ideology evokes a kind of consciousness of life as a spiritual journey.

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INTRODUCTION

The place of Africa in the development of relevant theological and Christological praxis that strengthens theology, Christology and biblical scholarship in Africa, using the tools and resources of the African context since the turn of the 21st century and the seismic southward shift in the centre of gravity of global Christianity has engendered lots of implications.¹ Scholars like Mbiti, Olupona, Ukpong, Nyamiti, Bolaji, Nyang, Gyekye, and Dickson and others like Bediako, Mugambi, Mulago, Gutiérrez and, Wa Thiong'o have extensively explained its relevance. Hitherto, its legitimacy and validity had been rejected by the dominant Western hegemonic paradigm, subjected to polemical

¹ Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage* (Nairobi: Acton Publications, 2005), 516–42.

censures and prejudicial scrutiny.² It is a great marvel that in the 21st century, Africa is no longer considered peripheral, and her contribution to normative Christian theology and nomenclatures for biblical scholarship is a subcategory. Recent developments in the history of Christianity have given the hegemonic Western context no option that has placed Africa in an indispensable and critical position.³ As Christianity undergoes what scholars like Barrett, Maxwell, Isichei, Hastings and Baur describe as dramatic, a total change in the centre of gravity so that the heartland global is no longer in Europe, but the south (Africa, Asia and Latin America), the context of Africa represented in its traditional and indigenous cosmological worldview cannot be trivialised.⁴ It presents a fascinating, challenging and great depth of interpretive resource for Christian theology, christology, and biblical scholarship in Africa.

Barrett has observed that a great number of Christians in the world today are now in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Besides this pulsating growth, its diversity is striking.⁵ There is enormous diversity and vibrancy with a sense of ecclesial democracy and a variety of theological resources. According to Gifford, this development has created some demographic trajectories, a demand, and an unusual task, that is (a) to re-read theology and biblical hermeneutics in Africa in the anticipation that it will make available the African context to bring home the truths of the gospel to African Christians; (b) to appraise the context and content of Christianity in Africa, to ensure continuity and relevance in the socio-cultural, traditional and cosmological context of its new host.⁶ Walls contends that it requires a critical reassessment of normative Western theology, christology and nomenclatures of biblical scholarship.⁷ According to him, the kind of theology, therefore, that matters in the 21st century and beyond is that which originates from the context of where a majority of Christians will be. It is important to note however, that if what Walls argues has any merit, then, it implies that what happens within the African Church in the next generation will have great implications on what will define the shape of Church history, theology and biblical scholarship for the many centuries to follow.⁸

Eschatology in Christian Theology and Biblical Scholarship

Theology is the general rubric under which eschatology is conceptualised. In its distinction, according to Badham, it is the study of the nature(s) of the divine and, more broadly, of religious constructs (belief) derived from Greek *theologia* (θεολογία), a combination of *theos* (Θεός, 'god') and *logia* (λογία).⁹ According to Davies, it concerns itself with three things (a) what is taught by God, (b) what teaches about God and (c) what leads to God.¹⁰ Theology, therefore, is the pursuit of the mind of God as it is revealed in scripture. Theology is important because what a person believes about God transforms the mind, shapes the heart, informs the will, changes behaviour, and fuels worship. Eschatology involves the study of/about “end times/things” derives from the Greek roots *ἔσχατος* (last) and *λογία* (study).¹¹ For Webster et.al and Landes, eschatology comprises the ‘four last things’ that

² Kwame Bediako, “Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension,” *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000): 303–23.

³ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

⁴ David B Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900-2000* (Nairobi; Oxford University Press, 1982), 4; David Maxwell, “New Perspectives on the History of African Christianity,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): 141–48; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: SPCK, 1995); Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950* (Clarendon Press, 1995); John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, an African History* (Nairobi: Pauline Press, 1994), 560.

⁵ David B Barrett, “AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa,” *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 233 (1970): 39–54, 39.

⁶ Paul Gifford, “Trajectories in African Christianity,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8, no. 4 (November 2008): 275–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742250802347935>.

⁷ Andrew Finlay Walls, *Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History*, 1976, 180-189.

⁸ Walls, *Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History*, 180-189.

⁹ Paul Badham, “What Is Theology?,” *Theology* 99, no. 788 (1996): 101–6.

¹⁰ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Clarendon Press, 1992).

¹¹ Christopher Rowland, “Part I: Historical Eschatology – The Eschatology of the New Testament Church,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 56-73.

Christianity anticipates will be human destiny at the end of time: resurrection, judgement, heaven, and hell.¹² According to Rahner, eschatology gives expression to human beings as beings who exist from out of their present “now” towards their future.¹³ Moltmann also adds that it originates from the paschal mystery, grounded on the proclamation of God’s Kingdom.¹⁴ According to Knott, eschatology in Christian theology is the doctrine about the return of Christ to the Earth and issues concerning that return, i.e., the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, the beginning of the eternal Kingdom of God, and events and phenomena one can expect to precede the return or after.¹⁵ This falls under one of three broad areas, messianic, millennial, or apocalyptic.

Old Testament and New Testament eschatology are quite different. According to Knight and van der Ploeg the Jewish messianic hope gave the OT a completely “different” view of life and the universe.¹⁶ Jewish eschatology reflected more on their political circumstance; persecuted and oppressed, out of their homeland. Since the New Testament is dominantly within the Greek philosophical context, according to Talmon and Popkin it had serious difficulty to think of as the Old Testament.¹⁷ According to Schwarz, while Old Testament eschatology is towards the coming of the Messiah, the promised king, to save the Jewish people and establish earthly Israel and its religion.¹⁸ Davies and Dodd contend that New Testament eschatology is towards the second coming of the crucified Christ; to condemn sin, reward righteousness and establish a new heaven and earth.¹⁹ According to Moltmann, this eschatology is futuristic, looking forward to a time in history when there would be a cosmic cataclysmic event.²⁰ In Bauckham's opinion, while OT eschatology does not look at the total end of the universe, the NT does.²¹ While the OT looks the at the restoration of the theocratic rule of God where the Hebrews will be favoured above every nation, the NT looks at a nation made up of all tribes and kindred, from every language and people united by the returned messiah.

One dominant context within which New Testament eschatology is expressed is the Pauline theology. In Paul’s theology, the *παρουσία* 'parousia' or apocalyptic future is central to his eschatological vocabulary. According to Wood, Paul's theology, his hopes and motives in life, and the passion and urgency of his religion are all centred on his conception of the future which was grounded in eschatology.²² His theology which represents a dominant theology of the New Testament, according to Van Kooten et.al.²³ resonates with themes from the wider Hellenistic world with an underlying argument that no doubt expounds biblical and second-temple theme; the victory of the creator God over every power including death itself similar to the Johannine. They continue to argue that within the wider Hellenistic culture, *parousia* had more specific meanings (a) the arrival or presence of Caesar or some other high official, and (b) the appearance or manifestation of a deity. But for Paul, both meanings was implied. According to Mounce, Paul’s concept of judgment is perhaps inserted in

¹² John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford Handbooks, 2007), 56-73; Richard Landes, “Eschatology,” *Britannica*, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/eschatology>.

¹³ Karl Rahner, “Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity,” *Religious Studies Review* 5, no. 3 (1979): 190–99.

¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, “The Final Judgment: Sunrise of Christ’s Liberating Justice,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 4 (2007), 565.

¹⁵ Jason E Knott, “The Eschatology of the Apostle Paul” (Texas A&M University, 2001).

¹⁶ George A F Knight, “Eschatology in the Old Testament,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 (1951): 355–62; Johannes P M van der Ploeg, “Eschatology in the Old Testament,” in *The Witness of Tradition* (Brill, 1972), 89–99.

¹⁷ Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Concepts of Masiah and Messianism in Early Judaism,” *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, 1992, 79–115; Richard Popkin, “Jewish-Christian Relations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Conception of the Messiah,” *Jewish History*, 1992, 163–77.

¹⁸ Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000).

¹⁹ William Davies and Charles Harold Dodd, *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (CUP Archive, 1956).

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Fortress Press, 2004).

²¹ Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

²² Irving F Wood, “Paul’s Eschatology,” *The Biblical World* 38, no. 2 (1911): 79–91.

²³ George Van Kooten, Oda Wischmeyer, and Nicholas T Wright, “How Greek Was Paul’s Eschatology?,” *New Testament Studies* 61, no. 2 (2015): 239–53.

‘parousia’ because by practice the ‘parousia,’ appearance of Caesar or deity demands accountability of stewardship as was observed in the hellenistic Greek world.²⁴ Basically, Paul’s concept of eschatology is the judgement of God that will come after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to reward righteousness and punish sin. This eschatology is futuristic and not focused on the here and now.

Eschatology in African Traditional Religion and Theology

Amevenku and Boaheng argued that African eschatology must therefore be informed by existential realities in the African continent. Eschatology in African traditional religion and theology is conceptualised and anchored within the context of Africa’s traditions, culture, and cosmological worldviews.²⁵ Gyekye, Mbiti and Idowu acknowledge the extreme difficulty in referring to particular religious beliefs or practices as ‘African.’²⁶ They maintain that there exists a complexity in that regard, however, they recognise similarities in certain worldviews and ritual processes which make such a definition plausible.²⁷ Kanu adds that despite a plurality of cultures when a ‘thought’ or ‘tradition’ is predicated on ‘Africa’ it does not mean homogeneity but the idea of multiple common themes.²⁸ Idowu, therefore, defines African traditional religion as the autochthonous religion of Africa; it is the framework and basis within which Africa’s universe takes form and shape.²⁹ Because in Africa, religion is considered more than just an abstract thing, it is also about the society as they affect the worldviews of the African people. Ushe adds they are dynamic and includes belief in impersonal (mystical) power(s), spirit beings, divinities/gods or deities and a Supreme Being.³⁰ Mbiti argues that belief in ‘impersonal (mystical) power’ is both foremost and pervasive in the thoughts of African traditional religions.³¹

Ikenga-Metuh adds that this “impersonal power” consumes the whole of nature.³² Smith calls it ‘mysterium tremendum.’³³ Otto according to Sarbacker calls it ‘*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*’, that is, a mystery before whom humanity both trembles and is fascinated.³⁴ According to Smith, in African traditional religion, ‘God’ is not an ‘abstract entity’ or ‘spirit’.³⁵ He is real, unique, the source of every power, every authority. This is often reflected in the many anthropomorphic accolades and appellations i.e., *onyankopon* (Akan) *sogbolisa* (Ewe) etc ascribed to him.³⁶ Eschatology in African traditional religion originates in Africa’s perception of life and belief in divine justice, and judgement. It is the act of God himself or through his lesser spirits (deities) to reward good deeds and punish wrongdoings or gross insubordination. Unlike the OT, and NT which situate eschatology at the end of the individual’s human and cosmic voyage, the African concept of eschatology is anticipated within present cosmic life.³⁷ According to Chukwuedo, African traditional religions do not have a belief in a future resurrection of the body, they rather have a belief in (a) reincarnation (b) life in the ‘village of

²⁴ Robert H Mounce, “Pauline Eschatology and the Apocalypse,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1974): 164–66.

²⁵ Frederick Mawusi Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, “Introducing Eschatology in the African Context Vol. I,” 2021.

²⁶ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Legon: Sankofa Publication, 2002), 22-104; John S Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Heinemann, 1990); E B Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Orbis Books, 1973).

²⁷ Oliver Alozie Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture, Enugu: Snaap Press* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1991).

²⁸ Ikehukwu Anthony Kanu, “The Dimensions of African Cosmology,” *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 2, no. 2 (2013): 533–55.

²⁹ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, (1973).

³⁰ Ushe Michael Nginan, *Fundamental Of African Religion* (Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013), <https://www.perlego.com/book/3317288/fundamental-of-african-religion-pdf>.

³¹ John S Mbiti, *Concepts of God in African*. (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

³² Emezie Ikenga Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions* (IMICO Publ., 1992).

³³ Edwin W. Smith, *The Christian Mission* (London: The International Missionary Council, 1926), https://gospelstudies.org.uk/missiology/pdf/e-books/smith-e-w/christian-mission-in-africa_smith.pdf.

³⁴ Stuart Sarbacker, “Rudolf Otto and the Concept of the Numinous,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.88>.

³⁵ Smith, *The Christian Mission*.

³⁶ Basilius M Kasera, “African Names for God and the Biblical Concept of YAHWEH,” *Mission Namibia*, 2012, 112.

³⁷ Newell S Booth, “Time and Change in African Traditional Thought,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 7, no. 2 (1975): 81–91.

ancestors' where all who have lived right and died, meet and dwell, enjoying their personal and collective immortality.³⁸

This eschatological construct is not the focus of life, neither is it a suggestion for resurrection beliefs. Nevertheless, it shapes peoples' actions and provides them with a sense of meaning and hope in living a life characterized by good virtue, cosmic harmony, clan solidarity and ancestral wisdom. Death in African traditional religion is not an "inevitable end of a person," rather it is a "rite of passage" between the world of the living (physical) and the world of the spirits (spiritual). It is a journey which is necessarily taken in order to complete a cycle of life and reach the land beyond, the realm of the sacred ancestors and be reincarnated (if necessary). This is the basis for the idea of proper mourning rituals for the deceased. According to de Souza and de Souza, if an individual is not given a befitting morning or burial rites they may be denied entry into the invincible universe of sacred ancestors.³⁹ So, there is such a high regard for the burial and final funeral rites. Mbiti suggests that in African traditional religion, human life follows an ontological rhythm of nature that nothing can destroy.⁴⁰ This personal immortality is externalized in the continuance of the individual progeny that carries in themselves the traits of their ancestors. This places the individual in African society in a place where he/she is not only responsible for himself but for the whole of the family, clan and community (that includes the dead and the unborn). This concept of the communal nature of individual life according to Shutte is what is expressed in the popular Xhosa (Zulu) humanist African concept "*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*" which is translated into English as 'a person is a person through/because of (other) people,' you are who you are because of how you relate to others around you.⁴¹

Eschatology in African Christianity and Theology

According to Bediako Africa's indigenous religions and cultural practices have had such an impact on African Christianity and theology to an extent that, it has emerged as another form different from the Western type with theology and orthodoxy, that seeks to be relevant and provide sufficient answers to the cosmological and existential questions of indigenous African spiritual cosmology and worldviews, which the Christianity of missionary church is said to have failed to address.⁴² Ndemanu suggests that given that African religion is distinctively linked to culture, indigenous religion and beliefs exerted tremendous influence on the thought processes, beliefs, and worldviews of Africans.⁴³ To Mbiti it was notoriously incurable (and) permeates every department so much so that it is isolatable.⁴⁴ It is such that, even though Christianity in Africa appears to have made great progress, and established a strong presence, there still are serious connections with indigenous belief systems and traditional/cultural worldviews. Sanneh identifies a distinctive characteristic feature of African Christianity; that is, to him, it was not a pretentious exotic, inquisitive spectacle in an incomprehensible universe but uniquely built into the cosmology of the African universe of active spirituality.⁴⁵ There is a deep conviction

³⁸ Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo, "A Comparative Study of the Resurrection of the Body in Christianity and African Tradition Religion," *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 11, no. 1 (2019): 70–82.

³⁹ Christiane Pantoja de Souza and Airle Miranda de Souza, "Funeral Rituals in The Process of Mourning: Meaning and Functions/Rituais Funebres No Processo'do Luto: Significados e Funcoes.," *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa* 35 (2019). See also Gordon, Richard, Wolfgang Spickermann, and Katharina Waldner. *Burial rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the roman Empire*. Franz Steiner, 2016.

⁴⁰ John S. Mbiti, . *African Philosophy and Religions*. (1990 edition). London: Heinemann (1969).

⁴¹ Augustine Shutte, "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu: An African Conception of Humanity," *Philosophy and Theology* 5, no. 1 (1990): 39–54.

⁴² Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (OCMS, 1992).

⁴³ Michael T Ndemanu, "Traditional African Religions and Their Influences on the Worldviews of Bangwa People of Cameroon: Expanding the Cultural Horizons of Study Abroad Students and Professionals.," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 30, no. 1 (2018): 70–84.

⁴⁴ John S Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1.

⁴⁵ Bediako, "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension"; Jacob K Olupona, *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions* (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 483.

today in African Christians that they can effectively reflect and theologise in terms that are indigenously relevant to their context and cosmology.⁴⁶

African Christians have therefore indigenized and recontextualised great parts of the theology, christology and biblical scholarship of Western Christianity to make them relevant to their cultural and cosmological context.⁴⁷ According to Shorter, this indigenisation has become the framework of African theology, christology and biblical scholarship.⁴⁸ An African Christian theology can therefore be a representation of the contextualization of Christianity as Muzorewa puts it, “a response to a demand to construct a biblically-based and appropriate theology that provides answers to the questions and spiritual needs of the African people as well as present relevant lessons for the rest of Christendom.”⁴⁹ Eschatology in African Christianity is therefore reflective of the repositories of religious and theological paradigms from Africa’s indigenous cultures and spiritual cosmology and Western Christian theology, christology and biblical scholarship.⁵⁰ In African traditional religion, however, the concept of punishment (judgment) and reward is an immediate occurrence due to the tenets of cultural belief in the principle that people must be responsible for their actions. A general assumption underlying the concept of judgment in African traditional religion is the need to punish prohibited action while rewarding socially sanctioned actions to ensure sanity in society as well as avert the possibility of incurring the anger and wrath of the *nananom* (ancestors) gods (*deities*) who are the custodians and watchers of the living.

The eschatology in African Christianity as Mayemba put it, ‘is not only about the future (the not-yet-there), it is also about the present (the already-there) and the past, it encompasses at each point in time (from birth, death and the hereafter).’⁵¹ The act of God in rewarding or punishing a person at every point and stage of life, is considered a continuum or a cycle that evokes in people a sense of fear, and awe. One does not have to wait for the end of time or life to be rewarded or punished but at every phase of life, God's responses to people's actions (good or bad) can be meted out. For this reason, Mbiti suggests that in African traditional religions and cultural beliefs, God is believed to have set in place a moral law through which people come to understand what is good from what is bad (evil) so that they might live in peaceful coexistence and harmony with one another as they safeguard the sanctity of the life of each other.⁵² It is because of the existence of this order that different communities have worked out a code of conduct. This order, according to Mbiti, is knowable to humans, by nature. One is not taught to know it, it is something that humans are born with.

Relevance for Theological and Biblical Scholarship in African Christianity

There is an inestimable significance of the concept and theology of eschatology in African traditional religion and African Christianity to the modern African Christian theological discourse of eschatology which cannot be overestimated. In both ATR and African Christianity, the concept of eschatology is pervading and timeless. It forms and informs various aspects of individual and communal life. According to Mbiti ‘Africans view the universe religiously’, interconnected with other parts (physical and spiritual) with dimensions of order (moral and religious) and power.⁵³ This order, established by God, guides the functioning of the universe, preventing it from falling into disorder; and it ensures the

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009); Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006); John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

⁴⁷ John S Mbiti, “New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts,” 1971.

⁴⁸ Aylward Shorter, “Inculturation of African Traditional Religious Values in Christianity-How Far,” *African Traditional Religion*, 2015.

⁴⁹ H Muzorewa Gwinyai, “The Origins and Development of African Theology” (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1985).

⁵⁰ M. A. Masoga and A. Nicolaides, “Christianity and Indigenisation in Africa,” *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (August 8, 2021): 18–30, <https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2021.1.4.33>.

⁵¹ Bienvenu Mayemba, “The Notion of Eschatology in African Ancestral Religions: A Category of Deliverance, Promise and Remembrance,” *Theology Dept., Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA*, 2009, 9.

⁵² Mbiti, “Concepts of God in Africa.”

⁵³ John Mbiti, “The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion,” *Christian Century* 97, no. 27 (1980): 817–20.

continuance of life and the universe itself. Thus, everything is not completely unpredictable and chaotic. Apart from belief in the moral and religious order, there is also belief in an invisible universe, that consists of divinities, spirits, and the ancestors (the living dead) who act as God's associates, custodians, and mediators, and are directly involved in human affairs. This mindset presents the African Christian with a certain kind of approach that influences active participation and responds to the practice of Christianity. Another important element in African traditional religion that presents a relevant eschatological typology for modern African Christian theological discourse is the awareness of the presence of active spiritual cosmology.

African cosmology according to Kanu and Klaitis, is the way Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate the universe. In other words, it is the lens through which Africans come to terms with reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations.⁵⁴ This concept of African cosmology is anchored on a complex but strong connection between God (the creator), lesser deities, ancestors (the living-dead) and living members of the family and community. Two concepts are particularly significant (a) the cosmogony of an active spiritual universe and (b) the cosmogony of integrated spirituality. The active spiritual universe involves the presence of benevolent and malevolent spirits. Africa is a continent with a plethora of spiritualities which can be described or understood from the angle of beliefs, practices, ceremonies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and norms. Adofo outlines six components that underpin African spirituality, (a) the nature of existence; (b) order and balance; (c) the interconnectedness of things; (d) social and spiritual hierarchy; (e) cyclical existence; and (f) the Spirit of Being.⁵⁵ According to Marumo and Chakale, African spirituality has a belief that all things have a quintessential essence (Spirit) of the Creator within them, which consequently supposes that the human body and the rest of Creation hold the spirit and consciousness of the Creator in them.⁵⁶ This ideology evokes a kind of consciousness of the fact that the individual is part of a spiritual journey with others. His way of life and devotion, therefore, is important to maintain balance and equilibrium in both the physical and spiritual realms. Integrated spirituality is a spirituality in which who people are, and what they do are intimately related (Ubuntu), which Sapir refers to as 'Spiritual Centrifugality.'⁵⁷

The concept of Ubuntu connects to the idea of ancestorship to form the way of life and living that respects other people, as well as the community.⁵⁸ In other words, in an African community, a person is expected to be in a relationship with other people. In the words of Mbiti, an individual in African culture does not exist alone except corporately.⁵⁹ The individual life is lived in a community with others. According to Donker, the individual is not just a physical being, but a spiritual and divine individual, who lives with other human beings in an active spiritual universe.⁶⁰ As represented in the Nguni proverb, "*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" which has already been talked about earlier, the individual life is connected to the community and the life of the spiritual universe with both benevolent and malevolent spirits that are in a constant desire to affect the destiny of people and cause harm.⁶¹ The African spirituality that connects to the spirit of Ubuntu, therefore, leads to team building, which helps form new values that shape a generation that works to maintain the cycle of integrated and communal living. According to Mageza⁶² as repositories of tradition, right moral value and wealth of wisdom, the elders are bound by a higher spiritual imperative to be accountable to the community and

⁵⁴ Kanu, "The Dimensions of African Cosmology"; Frederick Klaitis, "African Cosmologies Of Evil-Evil In Africa: Encounters with the Everyday," *The Journal of African History* 58, no. 2 (2017): 335–37.

⁵⁵ A Dalian, "Ancestral Voices: Spirit Is Eternal" (UK: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

⁵⁶ Phemelo Olifile Marumo and Mompoti Vincent Chakale, "Understanding African Philosophy and African Spirituality: Challenges and Prospects," *Gender and Behaviour* 16, no. 2 (2018): 11695–704.

⁵⁷ Edward Sapir, *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir* (Univ of California Press, 1968).

⁵⁸ Johann Broodryk, *Ubuntu: Life Lessons from Africa* (Ubuntu School of Philosophy, 2002).

⁵⁹ Mbiti, "Concepts of God in Africa."

⁶⁰ Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1997), 8.

⁶¹ Kgalushi K Koka, "Ubuntu: A Peoples' Humanness," *Midrand: The Afrikan Study Programme/Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy*, 1996.

⁶² Mageza, L 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. New York: Orbis Books

their eternal predecessors by transmitting or guiding the young community members on sound and acceptable moral standards.⁶³ What all this means is that the individual in the community is not an individual, his life and actions are necessarily connected to the immediate community, the world of elders (ancestors) and even the unborn. Therefore, whatever the individual does is a concern of the community since its repercussion is a shared one.

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to discuss how certain religious concepts and philosophies in the African traditional and indigenous traditions and culture particularly that of eschatology have both contributed to the development of very important theological concepts and paradigms in modern African Christianity and theologies. There have been several pieces of literature that proved how the embracing of certain African traditional religious concepts and philosophies during the desperate hours of the development of Christianity in Africa helped it to both grow and expand to the point where it has emerged as another form of Christianity as well as made Africa presently the heartland of Christianity in the world. The veracity of the impact and influence of African traditional religious beliefs and constructs on the theologies of African Christianity is a plain truth in literature, irrespective of the biases and polemics of suspicion and doubts. As scholars have argued, there exists and contains in the traditional religion, cosmology and cosmological worldviews, relevant ideas, philosophies and cultural constructs that can still provide unimaginable lessons for Christianity. It is however, myopic and prejudicial to consider the totality of Africa's traditions, (religious and cultural) to lack what it takes and demands to construct relevant theological constructs and concepts that can rightly serve as a normative philosophy, the theological paradigm for a Christopraxis or nomenclatures. At least, history has enough to show that, the indigenisation and enculturation of selected traditional religious and cultural constructs have exponentially helped Christianity and its enterprises on the African continent.

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⁶³ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Paulines Publications Africa, 1998).

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