

Theological Anthropology as Antidote to Gender Based Violence in Religiocultural Nigeria

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Abstract: We live in an age that is riddled with gender wars in which the female gender is the most vanquished in Nigeria. Most quests for true human hood seem to celebrate the modernist anthropology of power, autonomy and independence as necessary spirituality. Thus this paper adopts a Christian systematic (public) theological approach to present theological anthropology as an antidote. It seeks to present the Church as the primary *locus* for forming, informing and reforming necessary ethical praxis and dispositions for rebuilding a society where everybody is somebody. The paper reflects on human dignity celebration, vulnerability, relationship and dependence as crucial characteristics of such vision for theological anthropology for gender relations in the quest for the ideal society. It presents and concludes with the Church, as the primary *locus* for such vision of anthropology.

Keywords: Theological Anthropology, Gender Relations, Violence, Human Dignity, Vulnerability, Ethics/Ethical Virtue, Relationship, Structuralism

Introduction

This article presents theological anthropology as an antidote for gender based violence especially, against the female gender in Nigeria. Gender violence is a vexation, a structural and culturally rooted social evil, which must come under the prophetic critique of theological witness in this Twenty-first century Nigeria. It humiliates, violates, dehumanizes and restrains them from contributing substantively, towards the growth and development of their national GNP¹, GDP² or capita per income. Gender violence scarcely permits substantive reflections on, nor engages the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings as a theological witness that can form, inform and reform public opinion and practices for the development of a society where everybody including the female gender is somebody.

In many Nigerian cultures, it violates, degrades and dehumanizes the female gender as property of the male gender, whose professions are also reducible to disposable pawns such as child bearing and housekeeping. In such cultures, the female gender victims are often forced into early marriages, reduced to illiterate house keepers and denied of their freedom of choice on issues of their lifestyles and future. Gender violence represents one out of many of such ugly experiences of the author on what he sees as utter disrespect to the human dignity of the female gender, which is prevalent in many (if not all) other African societies. In the Nigerian experience, it is very oppressive as well. For instance, the CIA World Book puts the total population ratio of male(s) per female(s) as 1.01: 1 as at December 6, 2013⁴, while 'the ratio

of illiteracy of the male gender is 72.1% against the female gender of 50.4%' in Nigeria as at December 6, 2013⁵, yet the female gender in most cases, are reduced to, and often relegated to the background as disposable property of the male gender. Thus, this statistics presents us with a very embarrassing revelation: that the males who are the major perpetrators of gender injustice against the female gender with lesser rate of illiteracy make up the greater percentage of the illiterate population of Nigeria. This statistics also reveals an unethical treatment of the female gender. Female voices, positions and dispositions on public issues are dismissed as 'women matters' which do not demand serious attention of the male gender. Above all, the statistics summarizes and reveal gender based violence against the female gender as an affront against a meaningful realization of the MDGs⁶ as a theological witness in Nigeria.

Other examples of gender based violence in Nigeria include wife (husband?) abuse, oppression of widows (widowers?) and orphans, cultural hostilities towards the female gender in particular, etc. In many cultures, the common understanding is that education of the female gender is summarily an economic and time wastage. Gender violence scarcely permits substantive reflections on, nor engages the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings as (added) a theological witness that can form, inform and reform public opinion and practices for the development of a society where everybody including the female gender is somebody.

In an article entitled *Theological Anthropology and Gender Relations* published in a South African academic journal called *Scriptura*, NicoKoopman presents theological anthropology as one that takes the Triune God seriously. Unlike the modernistic anthropology of power, autonomy and independence, theological anthropology is characterized by vulnerability, relationship and dependence. It is offered as a pathway towards building a male and female relationship, which is predominantly evidenced by harmony and joy. From his perspective, this anthropology is based on the doctrine of (economic) Trinity.

Theological anthropology speaks about a study of the human person in conversation with the doctrinal framework of theological traditions. It is by no means a new discipline albeit, it has fallen from favour and a regular, or easily recognisable, place on theological curricula over the last four decades,

¹This means the Gross National Product (GNP), which is the value of all the goods and services produced in an economy, plus the value of the goods and services imported, less the goods and services exported. GNP is used to measure a country's economic performance, or what its citizens produced (i.e. goods and services) and whether they produced these items within its borders.

despite the efforts of scholars such as Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar in the 1960s. The need to investigate the human person precisely as a being open to transcendence is undiminished, however, in a new century which already looks set to challenge for its predecessor's mantle of our worst yet. In addition, the endemic problems of natural disaster and 'structuralism' in our age demand a theology of the human person which can remain credible in the face of immense and apparently arbitrary suffering, and our collective vulnerability. Theological anthropology also takes seriously the religious and cultural pluralism which has always characterised the human family, but which – in our ever-shrinking world – is an inescapable reality for more members of that family than ever before.

In other words, theological anthropology from Christian perspective is the point of convergence of the major doctrines of the Christian faith: the triune God, the incarnation, the church and eschatology. It stresses that while our creation as persons-in-relation, as creatures in the image of God, is an eschatological gift of grace, it is nonetheless visible and a matter of experience in an anticipatory way in the community of the church. Theological anthropology envisions and approaches the issue of maleness and femaleness of persons from perspectives which are reminiscent of the biblical Trinitarian revelation. It reflects on, and engages the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings from theological positions. This is very crucial for our reflections in this essay.

Christian Mostert has argued that the notion of 'person' brings together anthropology, Christology, Trinitarian theology, ecclesiology and eschatology. For him, 'Central in a theological anthropology is the concept of 'person'. Christian theology has been working with this notion from patristic times. Not only was God to be understood as personal, but the doctrines of the person of Christ and the Trinity have the concept of 'person' at their centre. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three Persons, who are what they are by their relations to each other. The Holy Trinity is a communion of Persons-in-relation. When, as part of the doctrine of creation, we assert that God has created humankind, we affirm that God has created us to be 'persons', persons-in-relation. God relates to us and deals with us as persons, gives us our identity in relation to God, and sets us in communities in which we learn to be persons. The church is the community in which, it is to be hoped, people have a rich experience of 'being as communion', of personhood-in-relation. Mostert's view is crucial for this reflection on theological anthropology as antidote for checking the tides of gender based violence especially, of the females in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, these examples are not ignorant of what Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma have said: that there is a growing realization that most interventions in the field of gender based violence have concentrated on women and children. Discourses on empowerment have focused on the vulnerability of women and children, an approach that must be appreciated as these groups have been more vulnerable to the epidemic. However, they went further to underscore that this concentration on women and children also has an

undesired effect of leaving men totally out of the question. This is crucial because the duo also seek to examine masculinities that are troubling while at the same time, trouble those masculinities which are too settled to be bothered by the cries of women, children and men.

In this reflection on theological anthropology as antidote to gender violence in Nigeria, one major concern is on the question of the celebration of the human dignity of especially, the female gender as a theological proclamation. We do so with a view to transforming every stakeholder in the gender dialogue, into, to use John Leith's expression, not simply a theologian but a responsible theologian who can speak intelligently about the faith. It is the theological anthropology embodying person who also learns to see him/herself as a human being with a vocation that is a gift and blessing to the *Corpus Christi* (Body of Christ). Such *persona grata* ('ambassador' or 'needed person') is willing and available to communicate theological anthropology with others with a view to empower and embolden them to find their places and roles in the collective ministry of the *Corpus Christi*.

Mostert has also shown that in his true humanity, Jesus Christ, the image of God, is the basis for understanding the created destiny of humanity as well as the human contradiction of this destiny and its recreation in Christ. In his reflection, the 'human being as relational being is rooted in the relationship of the triune God to humanity, and this is also the condition of the possibility of adequate relational existence. This relationship of God to humankind is established by the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. In faith, human beings are called to live in conformity with Christ. This is not possible as a human achievement is a matter of God's justifying grace. In this grace human beings are re-located in relation to God and the world and what it means to be human is re-defined. The community of faith in the church is the anticipation of and witness to the perfect fulfilment of the fellowship of the triune God with his creation in the Kingdom of God.'

This makes theological anthropology crucial in the ongoing quest for a more reliable antidote for the negative effects of gender controversies which breed, nurture, enthrone and sustain gender based violence within the social orders of many *religiocultural* Nigerian societies. Theological anthropology challenges its beneficiaries to acquire the character of a vocation, which transforms them into a gift to the community. Its characteristics include human dignity celebration as a spirituality; vulnerability, relationship and dependence as ethical virtues.

Human Dignity Celebration as Spirituality

As earlier said, the concept of human dignity is one of the few philosophical notions that have gained popular currency beyond specialist academic discourse. Appeals to it constitute an important part of ethical, legal and political discourse nowadays. Such appeals appear frequently in national constitutions and UN documents, in newspapers, NGO publications and in human rights discourse. Human dignity is a concept that cannot be easily defined. It attempts to acquire cognitive grip on dignity by trying to define it in terms of the

²This means Gross Domestic Product of a country. The GDP is one the primary indicators used to gauge the health of a country's economy. It represents the total value of all goods and services produced over a specific time period - you can think of it as the size of the economy. Usually, GDP is expressed as a comparison to the previous quarter or year. For example, if the year-to-year GDP is up 3%, this is thought to mean that the economy has grown by 3% over the last year. As one can imagine, economic production and growth, what GDP represents, has a large impact on nearly everyone within that economy. For example, when the economy is healthy, you will typically see low unemployment and wage increases as businesses demand labor to meet the growing economy. A significant change in GDP, whether up or down, usually has a significant effect on the stock market. It's not hard to understand why: a bad economy usually means lower profits for companies, which in turn means lower stock prices. Investors really worry about negative GDP growth, which is one of the factors economists use to determine whether an economy is in a recession.

needs and anxiety of human beings and in terms of the violation of dignity.

Werner Wolbert of the University of Salzburg argued that in its fundamental sense, human dignity means a Sovereign bequest that is given, which cannot be lost. It is a Sovereign grace that must be respected. The human person has dignity simply because she/he is capable of morality as a theological given. In this sense, human dignity is something that should not be acted against. It *inter alia*, includes the health and rights (physical and spiritual) of a person. Human dignity is a sovereign bequest that gives both individual human beings and the human species their existential identities. Thus, Kateb reflects on human dignity as an existential value.

According to him, 'Human dignity is an existential value; value or worthiness is imputed to the identity of the person or the species... when the truth of identity is at stake, existence is at stake; the matter is existential. The idea of human dignity insists on recognizing the proper identity of individual or species; recognizing what a person is in relation to all other persons and what the species is in relation to all other species. The truth of personal identity is at stake when any individual is treated as if he or she is not a human being like any other, and therefore treated as more or less than human. The truth of identity is also at stake when a person is treated as if he or she is just one more human being in a species, and not, instead, a unique individual who is irreplaceable and not exchangeable for another.'

Fundamentally, the issue of human dignity speaks more of a Sovereign and gracious bequest of God imputed to the identity of a person. Thus, Koopman describes such Sovereign and gracious bequest as alien (i.e., innate) dignity which comes from God. And because it comes from God it is inalienable. This dignity is expressed in especially the vulnerable ones in the human family. From his perspective, the notion of alien dignity implies that all human beings are equal, that we are to be treated with justice, so that we live in freedom. This makes it more obvious that this proposition of theological anthropology as an antidote to gender based violence in Nigeria is very necessary.

For instance, it will play significant roles in neutralising some of the poisonous venoms of gender-based violence in Nigeria as forced early marriages of the female gender, wife (husband?) abuse, maltreatment of widows, etc. They are constitutive of the structural and culturally rooted social evil, which must come under the prophetic critique of theological witness in this Twenty-first century Nigeria. In many Nigerian cultures, they violate, degrade and dehumanize the female gender as property of the male gender, which is also reducible to disposable pawns. When as an instance, the female gender victims are forced into early marriages; their ambitions for education as well as their desire to contribute meaningfully in nation building, social transformation and development are often quashed. In most cases, they are reduced to illiterate house keepers and denied of their freedom of choice on issues of their lifestyles and future. We noted these issues earlier.

Such manifestations of violence result from inordinate structuralism in our social orders and they scarcely show

significant respect to these vulnerable members of society whose human dignity are consistently abused with impunity. The structural and culturally rooted social evils also restrain them from contributing substantively, towards the growth and development of their national GNP, GDP or capita per income. Gender violence scarcely permits substantive reflections on, nor engages the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings as a theological witness that can form, inform and reform public opinion and practices for the development of a society where everybody including the female gender is somebody.

Structuralism is also a modernistic ethical concept which usually reduces and banishes its victims to the fringes of society due to its *pseudo*-ideological perspective which often grants people's prevailing circumstances or class the autonomy of determining human status and ability. Evidently, theological anthropology will not permit this pseudo ideological perspective of structuralism. They constitute an affront to a substantive realization of the MDG vision as a theological witness, which hardly permits the female gender to participate meaningfully in improving the GNP, GDP and the capita per income of their societies. Rather than proclaiming the celebration of the human dignity, rights and freedom of the female gender as a theological witness, structuralism breeds, enthrones and sustains the distressing legacies of patriarchy within a given social order.

Structuralism also speaks more about a theoretical paradigm which often rejects the concept of human freedom and choice. It rather concentrates more on how human experience and thus, behaviour, is determined by various structures. Under structuralism, human beings can only do what they are permitted to do by the overall circumstances or structures in which they operate. Until the recent interest in the rediscovery, recovery and celebration of the human dignity of persons especially the female gender, structuralism tends to celebrate Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy which as this author has shown elsewhere, seems to preach sacrifice of the weak for the strong in order to transform human values. It seeks to create a superman to whom success culture is a celebrated approach to life and identity formation within a given social order. In its success culture celebration, even a reminiscent of the African altruistic philosophy, 'I am because you are' seems to be relegated to the background. Self-renunciation is hardly an issue for discussions in the (instead of 'its') anti-religious craze for social relevance of structuralism, hence the need for a theological anthropology as a necessary antidote to neutralize its poisonous venoms in our social orders..

With theological anthropology, there will be more substantive reflections on and engagements with the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings especially, the female gender, as a theological witness. It will inspire the witness of God's people to go public as well in order to contribute meaningfully in forming, informing and reforming public opinions and practices towards the development of a society where everybody including the female gender is somebody. Emphasis will shift from self-centred relevance, showmanship and superman/woman to God's vision of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings especially,

³This represents a measure of the amount of money that is being earned per person in a certain area. Income per capita can apply to the average per-person income for a city, region or country and is used as a means of evaluating the living conditions and quality of life in different areas. It can be calculated for a country by dividing the country's national income by its population. Because per-capita income is the overall income of a population divided by the number of people included in the population, it does not always give an accurate representation of the quality of life due to the function's inability to account for skewed data. For instance, if there is an area where 50 people are making \$1 million per year and 1,000 people making \$100 per year the per capita income is \$47,714.

the female gender in the divine agenda, as a theological witness. Obviously, it will lead to a more pragmatic commitment towards the realization of the redemptive and restorative program of God for the liberation of creation especially the vulnerable members of society from the bondage of decay (cf Rom 8: 19-24) as the core of Christian witness.

The concern will also be on the rediscovery, recovery and promotion of human dignity as a (public) theological witness. In his argument on why and how Christianity goes to the public in distinctive ways, Max Stackhouse reasoned that this religious practice forms a faith that is decidedly relational. It recognizes and celebrates the dignity of each person because it holds that each person is made by God in God's image and likeness. This faith advocates the view that all are God-related whether or not everyone knows it or believes so. It also seeks to recover, reform and inform its adherents to become advocates for and defenders of human rights for persons of whatever race, sex, class or condition of life. Such members of society even if vulnerable ought not to be violated, oppressed, exploited or ignored. Stackhouse thus underscored that to embody this insight is the first step in relating in a new way with the neighbour near or far. He however, admitted that some Christians do not practice this insight hence the need for humble confession of the sins of the violation of the human dignity of others especially, the vulnerable members of our societies.

In another sense, human dignity is something that needs to be promoted, and realized. It means a life – wellbeing – that befits a person. Wolbert has also observed that this implies that because of their dignity, humans have a *prima facie* claim not only on freedom of action, but also on wellbeing. In this context, human dignity is not something given or existing but something to be realized. It implies both the claim of not being harmed as well as that of assistance in times of need. Thus theological anthropology will play a crucial role here particularly, as it affects the embarrassing revelations from the male-female illiteracy ratio in which the CIA World Book puts the illiteracy of the male gender as 72.1% against the female gender of 50.4%⁴ in Nigeria where the total population ratio of male(s) per female(s) as 1.01: 1 as at December 6, 2013. This revelation as we earlier observed is very embarrassing, unethical and an affront against a meaningful realization of the MDGs as a theological witness in Nigeria.

Thus, this vision for theological anthropology will challenge the male gender with greater percentage of illiterates to respect the human dignity of the female gender and the female gender with the lesser percentage of illiterates vice versa. Human beings as we learnt from Kateb earlier, have dignity, a dignity that rests on a human uniqueness that is not only praiseworthy but manifests a break with nature. It will also teach both genders among other things, to embody theological celebration of God's love and mercy for the *laostouTheou* (people of God) in ways in which the blind can see it; the deaf can hear it and the lame can experience it and appropriate the leap of faith to embrace it.

These issues therefore presuppose that for this vision of theological anthropology, celebration of human dignity as a

theological witness must adopt and embody vulnerability as an ethical virtue.

Vulnerability as Ethical Virtue

Theological anthropology teaches that to be human is to learn to embrace vulnerability as a necessary virtue. It also aims at ensuring a life ethos, in which, as Koopman has observed, the *humanitas* that is synonymous with *dignitas*, is this vulnerable, fragile and dependent *humanitas*. The notion of vulnerability reveals that dignity does not reside in the human power, strength, performance, autonomy and merit of whatever kind. The human being who has (human) dignity is a vulnerable, dependent being. Thus, vulnerability as an ethical virtue can provide us with the needed vision for theological anthropology. It will *inter alia*, seek to develop and sustain a habitat where the dignity of all human beings especially the most vulnerable ones also flourish. This is crucial for this reflection on theological anthropology as antidote for gender based violence in Nigeria.

Vulnerability as an ethical virtue in this vision for theological anthropology will help to reform, form and transform the various distressing public opinions and cultural practices which reflects on, relates with and reduces the female gender to disposable property of the male gender in many cultures. With more substantive emphasis on the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings as a theological enterprise, vulnerability as an ethical virtue in theological anthropology will witness against structuralism in Nigeria. As earlier observed structuralism is also a modernistic ethical concept which usually reduces and banishes its victims to the fringes of society due to its *pseudo*-ideological perspective which often grants people's prevailing circumstances or class the autonomy of determining human status and ability.

In other words, vulnerability as an ethical virtue in this vision for theological anthropology can provide us with the needed antidote to dilute the poisonous venoms of the pseudo ideological perspective of structuralism, which also constitutes an affront to female's substantive participation in the realization of the MDGs vision as a theological witness in Nigeria.

It will also create the necessary spaces and platforms for the female gender to participate meaningfully in improving the GNP, GDP and the capita per income of their societies. Unlike the super human being (added) of structuralism which is reminiscent of Nietzsche's, vulnerability as ethical virtue will rather proclaim the celebration of the human dignity, rights and freedom of the female gender as a theological witness within a given social order. It can also challenge and inspire the male gender to create necessary spaces that can enable the female gender to flourish in their God-given potentials.

Vulnerability is also an ethical virtue which stresses that to be vulnerable is to learn to be dependent as well. It will play a significant role in taming the tides of the superman mentality and its associated *pseudo*-ethical reflections and praxis. From it Nigerian males can learn that men must also cry if women and children are to thrive in environments which are littered with pain.⁵ In many Nigerian cultures, men would rather prefer

⁴This entry includes the number of males for each female in five age groups - at birth (1.05 males/female), under 15 years (1.05 males/female), 15-25 years (1.05males/female), 24-54 years (0.97males/female), 55- 64years(0.85males/female), 65 and over (0.85males/female). Available online: http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/sex_ratio.html Accessed 18/6/2014.

⁵This entry includes a definition of literacy and Census Bureau percentages for the total population, males, and females. Unless otherwise specified, all rates are based on the most common definition - the ability to read and write at a specified age. Available Online: <http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/literacy.html> Accessed 18/6/2014.

to die in agonizing silence than to cry in the presence of the female gender or children. In addition, many husbands would rather prefer embarrassments from creditors to receiving financial bailouts from their wives. This makes it obvious that vulnerability as an ethical virtue is indispensable for this vision of theological anthropology as an antidote against gender based violence in Nigeria. It will humble both males and females to also learn to live by receiving from other as well.

Approached from this perspective, it becomes more convincing that vulnerability as an indispensable ethical virtue in adopting theological anthropology as an antidote against gender based violence in Nigeria will also point the way to true humanhood. It will pave a way, breed, nurture, install and sustain a more meaningful coexistence of men, women and children within many Nigerian social orders. What will exist, to use Cyril C. Okorochoa's expression 'is a total way of life characterized by interchangeableness and mutuality in all aspects of life. Communalism or the *onyeaghala-nwanneya* (Igbo) motif will transform into the font of collective life and existence. The whole community is held together by religious values.' Here the vulnerable leans on the invulnerable for the recognition and promotion of their human dignity; while the (acclaimed) invulnerable leans on the vulnerable for the expression of their human dignity.

Thus, vulnerability as an indispensable ethical virtue for this vision of theological anthropology as an antidote against gender based violence is crucial for the reconstruction of a society where everyone is somebody. With it, the question of identity, spirituality and mission of true humanhood is answered: i.e., 'an embodied reflection and practice of grace and graciousness as theological givens.' Embodying vulnerability as an indispensable ethical virtue in this vision for theological anthropology as an antidote against gender based violence involves a change of heart. It also involves an embodiment of a vision of an ethical anthropology of relationship and dependence, which stresses a continuing recovery, restoration, reconstitution and the celebration of the human dignity of the victims of society as a theological mandate.

Relationship and Dependence as Ethical Virtues

Humans are relational beings who relate with God, fellow human beings and the rest of creation. True humanity Koopman argues is not defined by independence and rationality but by the willingness to enter into relationships with others. In this relationship with others one does not always discover a replica of oneself as Aristotle taught. In the interaction with others, in the communion, in the relationship, one finds her/his essence and being. She/he receives her/his being from the others' hands hence one's existence becomes meaningful because there are others who want to share their existence with her/him. As the Archbishop Tutu has pointed out in his book, *God Has A Dream*, as we share God's love with our brothers and sisters, God's other children, there is no tyrant who can resist us, no oppression that cannot be ended, no hunger that cannot be fed, no wound that cannot be healed,

no hatred that cannot be transformed into love, no dream that cannot be fulfilled. True humanhood is rooted in relationship and dependence as ethical virtue.

As we echoed Mostart above, central in a Christian vision for theological anthropology is the concept of person. Not only is God to be understood as personal, but the doctrines of the person of Christ and the Trinity have the concept of 'person' at their centre. When, as part of the doctrine of creation, we assert that God has created humankind, we affirm that God has created us to be 'persons', persons-in-relation. God relates to us and deals with us as persons, gives us our identity in relation to God, and sets us in communities in which we learn to be persons. This is crucial for this reflection on theological anthropology as an antidote to gender violence, given the pervasive influence of the distressing legacies of structuralism in Nigeria.

As already shown, structuralism is also a modernistic ethical concept which usually reduces and banishes its victims to the fringes of society due to its *pseudo*-ideological perspective which often grants people's prevailing circumstances or class the autonomy of determining human status and ability. It concentrates on how human experience and thus, behaviour, is determined by various structures. Central to structuralism is the notion that binary opposition such as male/female, public/private, etc, reveal the unconscious logic of systems. Under structuralism, human beings can only do what they are permitted to do by the overall circumstances or structures in which they operate.

A major concern of theological anthropology is substantive reflections on, and engagements with the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings from theological positions. This makes theological anthropology crucial in the ongoing quest for a more reliable antidote for the negative effects of gender controversies which breed, nurture, enthrone and sustain gender based violence within the social orders of many *religiocultural* Nigerian societies.

This vision for theological anthropology as Koopman taught us above is characterized by vulnerability, relationship and dependence. It is offered as a pathway towards building a male and female relationship, which is predominantly evidenced by harmony and joy.

It speaks about an embodied generous hospitality for which this paper presents the Christian church as its hope and primary locus for the re-presentation of theological anthropology as antidote to dilute the poisonous venoms of (added) most of the patriarchal legacies which breed, enthrone and sustain gender based violence in *religiocultural* Nigeria.

DirkieSmit has argued that the public calling of the Church, including the available forms of doing public theology is predominantly determined by the specific social forms and structures of the church in a particular context. For him, the theology of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian and Reformed churches have also been concerned with the issues of the diverse and complex forms of the Church. As we earlier saw from Stackhouse, Christians

⁶Meaning the Millennium Development Goals. These are a set of eight goals set by 191 United Nations member countries that have the goal of halving world poverty by the year 2015. The goals are: (1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (2) Achieve universal primary education (3) Promote gender equality and empower women (4) Reduce child mortality by two thirds for children under five (5) Improve maternal health (6) Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases (7) Ensure environmental sustainability (8) Develop a global partnership for development. Available online: <https://www.oxfam.org.au/explore/millennium-development-goals/what-are-the-millennium-development-goals/> Accessed, 25/5/14

⁷ *Scriptura*, Vol 86, No 2 (2004): 190

believe in the God who loves each person and who wants us to seek justice for all those near and far. This God's love and mercy are universal, present and accessible to all peoples in all cultures. Christians believe that human beings can see it in Jesus Christ and hope for its fulfilment in a coming Kingdom where all its peoples can bring their gifts and find final healing. All who know this are mandated to go public and be a witness to a possibility that changes souls and civilization, as a theological proclamation.

From Stackhouse's perspective, this faith embodies a missionary religion with a message for the world, which believers are summoned to proclaim as a publicly lived, living and liveable historical reality as well. It is about theological celebration of God's love and mercy for the *laostouTheou* in ways in which the blind can see it; the deaf can hear it and the lame can experience it and appropriate the leap of faith to embrace it. Their (Christian) theology which gives birth to the Church recognizes and celebrates the dignity of persons because each is made by God in God's image and likeness. It seeks to recover, reform and inform its adherents to become advocates for and defenders of human rights for persons of whatever race, sex, class or condition of life. Even if such members of society vulnerable, the Christian theology insists that they are not to be violated, oppressed, exploited or ignored. To embody this insight is the first step in relating in a new way with the neighbour near or far. Since some Christians do not practice this insight, the Church as the primary locus for embodied generous hospitality comes in as a bail out. Its kenotic (self-emptying) praxis also accepts the responsibility and also engages itself in humble confession of the sins of the violation of the human dignity of others especially, the vulnerable members of our societies.

The Church as Primary Locus for Embodied Generous Hospitality

In the concluding statements of the chapter entitled *Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom* in his book *I Have A Dream*, Martin Luther King Jr observed that people of goodwill are indispensable in the search for a society where everybody is somebody. They seek to embody and demonstrate the courage to put an end to suffering by willingly or graciously suffering themselves rather than inflict inordinate suffering on others. People of goodwill envision and work for the actualization of a world of peoplehood, cooperation and peace which rejects oppression, materialism and violence. They are God's people who concern themselves with the realization of the divine will as a historical reality. These unique persons also seek to espouse the true knowledge of God wherever they are found.

They are conscious of the fact that true godliness as John Calvin opined in his book *Truth for All Time*, consists of a pure and true zeal which loves God as a real father and looks up to God as a real Lord. True godliness embraces God's righteousness and detests offending God more than dying. Such unique people of goodwill embody graciousness and altruism (neighbour's concern) as spirituality. They are aware that human progress does not roll on wheels of inevitability but through the efforts of people who cooperate with God in

shaping the destinies of humankind. These uniquely altruistic persons constitute a gracious community vis-à-vis their gracious communication of God's grace with the needy or suffering victims of society. They are thus, indispensable for realizing this vision for theological anthropology as an antidote to gender based violence in Nigeria.

Larry L. Rasmussen describes them as 'a people of the way.' Their common life together with God, on this journey with God, is already the first fruit of the Spirit. They are certain that the Ancient of Days has created them as a people in an act of gracious justice and liberation, and that just and gracious relationships are to define them as a people of the Holy One. The shape of faithfulness to God which they are conscious of in their bones and by their aboriginal calling, is to be incarnated in a way of life of a people who are gathered into covenantal intimacy with that 'one God' who hears 'the cries of the poor and know their suffering.' They also constitute the primary locus for an embodied generous hospitality. We describe them as the Church.

They scatter to actualize the *voluntasrevelata Dei* (revealed will of God) as a historical reality and gather to refresh, reflect and resolve to go out and represent Jesus Christ wherever they are found. These people of goodwill are also aware that God, as John Leith has pointed out is working out His purpose in human history. In pursuit this divine purpose, the sovereign Lord calls the *laovtouthou* to be the instruments for this great assignment which is not reducible to the savedness of the soul. God's purpose includes the establishment and nurturing of a holy community and the glorification of His name through all the earth. The people of God are called to be theologically minded, seeking and working for a society where those who receive God's grace embody and communicate graciousness as identity and spirituality. Central to their concern is an embodied vision for theological anthropology with substantive reflections on, and engagements with the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings as a theological proclamation. This makes their vision for theological anthropology crucial in the ongoing quest for a more reliable antidote to dilute the poisonous venoms of gender controversies which breed, nurture, enthrone and sustain gender based violence within the social orders of many *religiocultural* Nigerian societies.

Called out of the world and redeemed from sinfulness, these unique persons constitute a gracious community of faith. A gracious community of faith speaks about these unique persons of goodwill who are being redeemed and restored to serve as sign, instrument and sacrament for making meaningful the implication of the Christ event a historical reality. Its members' characters and spirituality are formed, reformed and informed to serve also as social change agents. They seek to embody and present an ethical vision for theological practitioners who seek to re-interpret and live out godly ethics to mean serving God and ruling the world as well. They are God's people who gather to do business in God's name, as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, who are called and mandated to declare the praise of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet 2: 9).

⁸ The economic Trinity refers to the acts of the Triune God with respect to the creation, history, salvation, the formation of the Church, the daily lives of believers, etc. and describes how the Trinity operates within history in terms of the roles or functions performed by each Person of the Trinity – God's relationship with creation. The ontological (or essential or immanent) Trinity speaks of the interior life of the Trinity – the reciprocal relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit to each other without reference to God's relationship with creation. This in the opinion of this author is very crucial for a more meaningful discussion on gender identity, gender controversies, etc. in our age.

⁹ Treloar, Richard. 'Introduction' in *Theological Anthropology: A Collection of Papers by Faith and Unity Commissioners of the National Council of Churches in Australia* (2005). Available online: http://www.ncca.org.au/files/Departments/Faith_and_Unity/Anthropology_Study.pdf Accessed 15/6/2014.

These unique persons are aware that the theological call on the Church for adequate social participation in contexts is traceable to the Bible. Our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized its incumbency on the Church in the Sermon on the Mount when He charged his followers in these words: 'You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but it is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world....In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.'" The Church's embodiment of grace presents graciousness as a living proof that God's grace as well as living in a gracious community can help us to survive present day sufferings especially, the biting effects of gender based violence.

This calls for the embodiment and celebration of public theology as an indispensable religiosity and proclamation of the Church. Public theology describes the Church's sustained attempt to address the question of the public implication of the calling and being of the *Laos* of God within a concrete larger society. It seeks to address issues, which affects society as a whole and in this case, an antidote to dilute the poisonous venoms of gender based violence in Nigerian social orders. The issue is predominantly rooted in structuralism which often restrain these *laovtuTheou* from meaningful engagement in contributing substantively, towards the growth and development of their countries' GNP, GDP, capita per income and concrete participation in meaningful realization of the MDGs as historical reality by the Church. As earlier observed, structuralism is also a modernistic ethical concept which usually reduces and banishes its victims to the fringes of society due to its *pseudo*-ideological perspective which often grants people's prevailing circumstances or class the autonomy of determining human status and ability. Central to structuralism is the notion that binary opposition such as male/female, public/private, etc, reveal the unconscious logic of systems. Under structuralism, human beings can only do what they are permitted to do by the overall circumstances or structures in which they operate.

Obviously, this reflection on theological anthropology will bequeath the Church with a vision for public theological witness that can dilute the poisonous venoms of gender based violence in religiocultural Nigeria. Central to the concern of the Church will be an embodied vision for theological anthropology with substantive reflections on, and engagements with the thorny issues of the origin, nature, place and destiny of human beings as a theological proclamation. The Church will seek to engage the issue in significant ways that are also accessible to everyone in the public sphere. Public theology transcends the traditional Christian preoccupation with the preservation of the integrity of the faith and to serve as an apologetic for the truth claims of Christianity. It also represents a renewed kind of language in the Church's critical engagement with the challenges of the larger society and church traditions.

Public theology also describes the ways in which Christian truth claims function in a particular faith community's attempt to address issues that affect the larger society without compromising the historicity and the identity/spirituality of

the faith in the process. Public theology can also bequeath the Church with a renewed kind of language which non-Christian faith practitioners may find as a plausible and feasible speech for corporate public voice in addressing the burning issue of gender-based violence in Nigeria. It will also seek to substantiate the Church's attempts to help persons experience abundant life in Jesus Christ, especially and in our case, the victims of gender inequity in Nigeria.

What is happening in most Nigerian societies mock our pieties, doubts our concerns and questions our commitments to the proclamation of the Good News as God fearing and faith seeking *laoustouTheou*. Hence the Gospel proclamation that is needed in our societies is that which is under mandate to be re-presented to portray *euangelion* as a discernment and embodiment of the divine truth against the perpetrators of gender injustice, in substantive ways. It is that Gospel proclamation of the Church, which must serve as a witness of the *voluntasrevelata Dei* against this ungodliness, as an embodied approach to faith seeking understanding.

This work is concerned with the need for the Church to see its active participation in the perennial quest to address the burning question of gender (in)justice and the increasing awareness on the need for recognition, respect and promotion of the human dignity of persons today as a progress in the journey towards the actualization of the vision of the kingdom of God as a historical reality as well. According to Ignatius Swart, 'the Church is a facilitator, enabler and catalyst of others agendas, a servant of the people's or social movements, the movements of the poor who are the authentic agents for development.'

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¹⁰ Structuralism is a theoretical paradigm that emphasizes that elements of culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger, overarching system or "structure." Alternately, as summarized by philosopher Simon Blackburn, Structuralism is "the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture". Structuralism originated in the early 1900s, in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent Prague, Moscow and Copenhagen schools of linguistics. In its sociological phase, what individuals do may be what they are permitted to do by the overall structures in which they operate. The doctrine holds that the structure of a system or organization is more important than the individual behaviour or position of its members. Rather than interpreting the meaning or value of a work or the agent, the structuralist examines the structures that produce meaning. The intentionality of the agent is thereby disregarded because language and structures instead of the consciousness of an agent or the willed verbal acts that emanate from her/him generates meaning. As a consequence, the subject is dissolved into a series of systems, deprived of its role as a source of meaning, and thereby decentered. In this approach to social analysis, the self is an intersubjective construct, that is, where codes and conventions interact. In addition, the structure is privileged at the expense of the agent. The system is revered as a kind of formless space whose shape is imposed by structured modes of reading, interpreting and appropriating meaning. These structures are the rules, conventions, and restraints upon which human behaviour is based. Structuralism rejected the concept of human freedom and choice and focused instead on the way that human experience and thus, behavior, is determined by various structures. Central to structuralism is the notion that binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, public/private, cooked/raw) reveal the unconscious logic or grammar of a system. See <http://www.answers.com/topic/structuralism#ixzz1t1RMJE5a>, <http://www.answers.com/topic/structuralism#ixzz1t1S7irly>

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¹¹The Human Person in Protestant Theology in *Theological Anthropology: A Collection of Papers by Faith and Unity Commissioners of the National Council of Churches in Australia* (2005). Pg 12. Available online: http://www.ncca.org.au/files/Departments/Faith_and_Unity/Anthropology_Study.pdf Accessed 15/6/2014.

¹²"Introduction" in *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Chitando, Ezra & Chirongoma, Sophia, eds (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012), Pg 2.

¹³In this essay, the concept of human dignity is seen as one of the few philosophical notions that has gained popular currency beyond specialist academic discourse. From the writings of Picodella Mirandola, Immanuel Kant and other philosophers it has found its way into our colloquial vocabulary. Appeals to human dignity are an important part of ethical, legal and political discourse nowadays and appear frequently in national constitutions and UN documents, in newspapers, NGO publications and in human rights discourse. It often means different things to different people and context. Thus, the author appeals to the view of George Kateb which says that the subject of human dignity is the worth of human beings or their high rank, or even their special place in nature. The aim is to defend the idea of human dignity, which has become commonplace, especially since the end of World War II. In the name of human dignity, which now turns out to mean in its most common use the equal dignity of every person, charters of human rights are promulgated, and appeals to it are made when people all over the world struggle to achieve their claimed rights. Human dignity is thus perceived to be the basis for human rights. Human beings have dignity, a dignity that rests on a human uniqueness that is not only praiseworthy but manifests a break with nature. See Kaufmann, Paulus, Kuch, Hannes, Neihauster, Christian, Webster, Elaine, (eds.). *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated*. Heidelberg: Springer Science + Business Media (2011), Pg 1. See also Koteb, George. *Human Dignity*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (2011), Pg ix, x, 1. *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*. (London: Westminster John Knox, 1981), Pg 88.

¹⁵ Image of God in Protestant Theology. Pg 12-13

¹⁶Religioculture as it is used in this work describes a culture which originates from religion, thrives in religion and seeks fulfillment in religion.

¹⁷Human Dignity, Human Rights and Torture. *Scriptura*, Vol. 94, No 2 (2007): 166.

¹⁸ Human Dignity. Pg 10.

¹⁹ Some Theological and Anthropological Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights. *Scriptura* Vol 95 No 2 (2007): Pg 185.

²⁰ *Celebration of Life: Religion, Mission & the Victims of Society* (Nigeria: Preciousgrace Publications, 2011), Pg Xiv, 105.

²¹ Reflections on How and Why We Go Public. *International Journal of Public Theology*, Vol 1 (2007): 425.

²² However, he also lamented that sadly, recent interpretations often reduce human dignity to this second sense. That is, to some commission or commitment, namely, to care for a humane existence of one's fellow human beings. In this sense, one can only violate the dignity of others by not caring for them or by conscious violation of their dignity, but not act against one's own dignity. Wolbert therefore cautioned that a fundamental difficulty faced when referring to human dignity celebration may be easier understood when keeping in mind that the aspect of well being means more than simply alleviating basic needs. He therefore concluded, "Thus, the term human dignity often serves as a place-holder, which has to be made more precise by ethical and legal considerations. These observations have to be kept in mind when speaking of promoting human dignity." See Human Dignity, Human Rights and Torture: 175-176.

²³ Some Theological and Anthropological Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights: Pg 184.

²⁴ "Redemptive Masculinities, HIV, and Religion in Siphwo's Mahala's When a Man Cries" in *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Chitando, Ezra & Chirongoma, Sophia, eds (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012), Pg 249.

²⁵ Okorocho, C. Religious Conversion in Africa: Its Missiological Implications. *Mission Studies*, Vol IX-2, 18: 168-169.

²⁶ Some Theological and Anthropological Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights: Pg 183.

²⁷ *God Has A Dream: A Vision of Hope for our Time*. Johannesburg: Rider Books (2004). Pg 128.

²⁸ Notions of the Public and Doing Theology. *International Journal of Public Theology*, Vol 1 (2007): 439-440.

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³⁰ *Truth For All Time" A Brief Outline Of The Christian Faith* (Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust), Pg 3.

³¹ *Moral Fragments & Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), Pg 138-139.

³² *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1981), Pg 75.

³³ Matt. 5: 13, 15 and 16.

³⁴ Ndukwe, Olo. *Celebration of Life*, Pg 51-52.

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