Community as a Metaphor for the Church (from an African Socio-Cultural Perspective)
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Abstract
The paper discusses Vatican II Council's conception of Church as a "community of faith". Assuming much of present day apathy towards the Church to be closely tied to the problem of understanding; it hypothesizes that clarification of terms would be an important key to resolving this problem and to enhancing discipleship in the Church today. Affirmative of the correlation between the Gospel and culture, the paper concludes that the African worldview on community is the appropriate model for interpreting the above Conciliar definition of Church, and proposes the adoption of the same perspective of community for catechesis on the Church. The method is hermeneutic. Library and internet materials are used as sources of data.

Keywords: C*hurch, community, culture, ecclesiology, family, inculuration, metaphor*

1. Introduction

Language builds bridges of understanding. As an effective tool for communication of cultural reality (see Rabiah, 2012; and Lakoff, 2010). Its power of communicating meaning, understanding and facilitating unity among members of any society is widely acclaimed. Yet, human experience and the history of civilization are full of instances where language had been the precipice of conflicts and division. One needs not get surprised therefore to observe innumerable instances of the power of language in building either walls of division or bridges of unity in human society. A Biblical prototype of this power of language in fostering disunity is found in the case of the Tower of Babel, in Genesis chapter 11: 6-9. With their language confounded, humankind scattered (Gen 11: 9). Christianity experienced this when grievances over the insertion of the "*filioque"* clause into the Creed festered into the Schism of 1054 AD. These two examples, the Babel experience and the Schism of 1054 AD represent the pervasive power of language even on purely spiritual matters like religion, hence the discussion here in the paper. The problem of language has had telling consequence on the Christianity to the point that the overall picture of Christianity today is one of a religion in asunder, a Church that does not reflect the message it propagates, a kingdom divided against itself.

The above scenario gives vent to Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of language in which says that "the world is the totality of facts, not things" and that these facts are structured in a logical way (Wittgenstein, 1961). This rude reality does not only reflect on age-long sad pages in the Church's historical trajectory, it is pivotal to numerous new challenges confronting the Church and her mission in the more recent times. This picture theory of language offers one every justifiable grounds for the reposition of language whose estrangement remains the truest cause of the misrepresentations of reality. The awakening of consciousness over this could have been felt early enough in the 20th century formation of the ecumenical movement among Protestant

bodies, beginning with the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Edinburgh (1910). The accentuation could have been more in the Catholic fold as to precipitate the convocation of an Ecumenical Council (Vatican II Council, 1962-1965). John XXIII explained the urgency of reassessing the Church's self-understanding and a re-definition of her own identity as his principal motif for convoking the Council. This urgency could have been called up by the awareness that the once "seamless robe of Christ" is now in unmedable shreds. Under what guise then does this same body present itsself to the world as othe harbinger of truth and value?

To meet with new exigency the demands and relevance of its mission in the present age, it has become expedient to reassess, nearly 60 years after the Council, the import of concept of the Church by the Council. Many experts though have devoted much energy and attention to the schemas and dogmatic elements of this Conciliar ecclesiology of the Council. This paper turns to the language of the ecclesiology of the Council. Of particular interest here are the novel metaphors the Council employed to explain the Church. The paper assumes that when the Council defines the Church as "a community of faith, hope and love" (LG, 8), the Council Fathers had employed this metaphor to describe in ways and manners that make the Church more understood by her different children in their respective contexts and milieux. This is a veritable window of opportunity for the incarnation of the Gospel message within the bosom of the cultures. This leaves one at liberty to make out sense of faith out of that definition of Church that remains true and consistent with the tradition of the Apostles and revelation. Of course, this task reconfirms the theological truism in which theology is seen, not as a new enterprise, but as a new way of interpreting the same perennial truths of God. Since the Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilized the resources of different cultures (cf., Vatican II Council, GS., 58), it would be logical to claim that a good knowledge of one's environment elicits better understanding and cooperation/participation. So is it also with the Church. Thus, by means of a *lectio continua*, this paper has set to explain this Conciliar definition of Church from an African cultural perspective.

The paper considers the word "community" as a metaphor; perhaps as one of the numerous metaphors the Council employed for the Church. It interprets this metaphor in the light of systematic and inculturation theologies on the assumption that a truth of salvation cannot accomplish its mission without incarnating into a culture (see, John 12: 24; cf. Mark 4: 8; Matthew 13: 23; Luke 8:15; Odoemene, 2005). Underscored here in the paper therefore is the importance of metaphors in theology. The employment and interpretation of this metaphor kick-starts that task of self-redefinition and re-assessment for which the Council was convoked. The paper concludes with the note that this metaphor can become pivotal in initiating new dialogue between the teaching Church and discipleship, and between faith and culture. It is hoped to promote the ecclesiology of Vatican II and motivate discipleship and participation in the Church. The African model of community would be considered as a guiding light to interpreting the Church as a community of faith. However, it is necessary to take the first look at the concept of Church the Vatican II Council adopted.

2. The Church as a Community of Faith

It was a big surprise when, on 25 January 1959, barely three months into his papacy, Pope John XXIII shocked the entire Christian world with the announcement of his plan to convoke an Ecumenical Council. Much of the surprise came from the fact that no one knew of any major threat neither to the Church's unity nor to its doctrines. At the heart of the Pope instead was the spiritual renewal of the Church as conveyed in the metaphors the Pope had employed in his opening address to the Council: "Throw open the windows of the Church and let fresh air of the Spirit blow through". Thus, against the usual practice of fighting against adversaries as the previous Councils did, the Vatican II Council, the 20th Ecumenical Council of the Church (1962-1965), had two mission statements: *aggionamento* (adaptation or update) of the Church to enable it to meet the world that is undergoing great transformation, and return to unity among Christians.

Prior to the Council, the Council of Trent, under the influence of Robert Bellarmine's definition, conceived the Church as the "*Christiana respublica*" (Christian society). Despite the enriching imports of this appellation, Avery Dulles criticizes it for giving the Church an impression of a static society with over-stressed emphases on *right relationship with* the Pope and the Bishops, "to the neglect of the spirit and of service". Though Demeuse disagrees so much with Dulles' criticism (see *Eric J. Demeuse, 2016),* observable evidence shows how this institutional juridical model permeated post-Tridentine theology, liturgy, ecclesiology, pastoral administration, and particularly Christian architecture. Nevertheless, the Vatican II Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), set the stage for clarifying the Church's self-understanding in readiness for encounter with the modern world in the course of its evangelizing mission. The Council had before itself concern for the twofold vitality of the Church – "the Church's vitality *ad intra,* relating to the internal structure of the Church …" and "the church's vitality *ad extra,* relating to the situations outside itself…." (*Wiltgen,* 1985). LG addresses the *ad intra* aspects. This document is considered the most significant landmark in the life of the Church since the Council of Trent. Its objective was to unfold "more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission" (LG, 1), understanding this document is essential to interpreting the Council's subsequent documents, especially *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Gaudium et spes.*

LG contains an important synthesis of Biblical, Patristic, Medieval and Tridentine ecclesiology, combined with orthodox elements of the new theological movement (Castellano, 2012). The Councils of Trent and Vatican I, and Pope Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis,* had emphasized the Church's institutional model. Beyond these magisterial documents, *Lumen Gentium* avers that beyond that model, the Church is the "Kingdom of Christ" now present in mystery, the Mystical Body of Christ present in history, "a visible assembly" and "a spiritual community" (LG, 8), hence the definition of the Church as the "community of faith, hope and communion". The sense conveyed in these metaphoric expressions underlines the special character of the Church as an assembly or community of persons as captured in the title of the second chapter of the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, the "People of God". This reflects the Council Fathers' attempt to utilize biblical terms rather than juridical categories to describe the Church.

The use of *community* in the description of the Church received a due place in ecclesiology, and Christian theology in general, in the Vatican II Council. Already defined as "a 'people' brought into unity by the unity of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG, 4), the document devotes much time to elaborations of the nature (of this community) and mission of this "People" (see, *LG*, 9). For the most part of the document, these elaborations are expressed so much in metaphoric terminologies. In addressing the Church, for instance, as the "Body" of Christ, "Bride" of Christ, and "People" of God (cf., *Mirus*, 2010), and Mother (*Gomez*, 2015), the Council defines the Church as a "visible assembly and a spiritual community" (*LG*, 8) established to be "a sign and instrument of unity in the world" (LG, 1). These images or metaphors which were employed in both the Scripture and by the Fathers were however elaborated by the theological tradition. The Council Fathers employed the *community metaphor* in the bid to explain the distinctive nature of the Church.

3. Metaphors and Meanings

Metaphors make writings and speeches more precise, though the meanings they convey are not literal. To capture in a précis, the meaning of metaphor, one recalls the description given by John Pellowe. Pellowe calls them "… mental pictures that capture complex ideas in a memorable snapshot" (Pellowe, 2015). Affirming that language and culture are connected in a myriad of ways, Zoltan Kovecses (2004) regards them as "webs of significance" that people both create and understand. In a later publication, *"Metaphor, Language, and Culture" (2010)*, this author opines that this relationship is necessitated by a people's effort to make sense of their experiences – linguistic or otherwise (Kövecses, 2010).

The school of cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor adds that metaphorical thoughts are relevant to understanding of culture and society. Furthermore, Johnson (1987) and Lakoff (1987) identify "elementary human experiences" to be the origination of this meaning making. So, metaphors come

> not only in the sense of producing and understanding language but also in the sense of correctly identifying things, finding behavior acceptable or unacceptable, being able to follow a conversation, being able to generate meaningful objects and behaviour for others in the group, and so forth ....", while "...people who can successfully participate in this kind of meaning making can be said to belong to the same culture (Kovecses, 2010).

This finds support in Basso. He has it thus:

> …it is in metaphor, perhaps more dramatically than in any other form of symbolic expression, that language and culture come together and display their fundamental inseparability. A theory of one that excludes the other will inevitably do damage to both (Basso, 1976).

To members of this school of thought, like Lakoff (1996), Turner (2001) and Kovecses (2005), everyday culture has metaphorical aspects while, in addition, metaphor is one of the tools

language uses in making meaning of culture (Kovecses, 2010). The said meanings reflect cultural models, despite the existence of universal or near-universal metaphors, like "Mother", "Community" or "Family". In conclusion, despite their symbiotic relationship, metaphors communicate meanings, meanings that are often culturally nuanced.

4. Metaphoric Language in Secular Thought and Religious Literatures

Metaphoric languages/imageries depict personages, events and scenes. Jesus called Simon "Rock" (Matt 16:18). With the help of this metaphor, Jesus compared Simon Bar Jonah to rock. He probably means that Peter possesses some personal qualities and distinguishing characteristics that are similar to what obtains in a piece of rock. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe compares Okonkwo to the 'flaming fire', and calls Amalinze the 'Cat". William Shakespeare used extended metaphors in conveying meanings and significance as seen, for instance, in Act 2, scene 2, lines 2-3 of his *Romeo and Juliet*. This practice is not strange in theological and religious circles. The contemporary dialogue between science and theology/religion, for example, is often presented in terms of a comparison between the "Book of Scripture" and the "Book of Nature". Thus the metaphor of the "two books" is used in reference to "the comparison between the knowledge of nature achieved by science and the one achieved from the Judeo-Christian Revelation, that reads and understands nature as creation ... and the locus of divine presence and revelation" (Tanzella-Nitti, 2019). Taking cue from the Book of Wisdom 15:5 which reads "From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of the Creator", Christian thinkers and members of the magisterium have continually furthered this view by interpreting nature as a marvelous book which can lead to knowledge of the Creator (cf. John Paul II, 1998. *Fides et Ratio*). This metaphor is found in Dante (in *Paradiso XXXIII, 82)*, Francis Bacon (in *The Advancement of Learning, VI, 6*), Raymond Sabunde (Sabunde spoke of *"theologia naturalissive liber creaturarum"* in *Theologia Naturalis*, 1436. 35-36), and in John Calvin (Institutes, 1.6.1). These referenced works indicate that the use of metaphors in theological discourse is common in scholarly works in the Christian tradition across the different epochs.

Being a tool of language employed for communication of meaning and significance, metaphors serve a great deal in Christian theology. It is a perennial practice in Christian theology, especially in ecclesiology, though this practice predates Christianity. Instances abound in the OT references to God as the "Rock" (Deut 32: 4; 2 Sam 22:2; Psalm 18:2; etc), "Potter", Israel as "Vineyard", and the gathered Israelites at the Sinai, for instance, as the "People of God". It was already commonplace in the inter-testamental, and extra-biblical times and literatures. The fact that Jesus made use of metaphors emphasizes the place metaphors in the NT. He called Simon "Cephas" (Rock, Matt 16: 18), and Herod "Fox" (Gk "alepou", Lat. Vulgate "vulpes", Koine Gk "snake" or "worm", Aramaic, "skunk" – Luke 13: 32), and himself the "Bread of Life" (John 6: 35).

The use of theological analogies or various 'similitudes' characterized the approach of the Patristics in their explanations and elucidations of the mysteries of the Christian religion. The Christologies of Justin the Martyr and Gregory Nazienzen, for instance describe Christ as "*Lumen de Luminem"* (Gregory Nazienzus, *Oration* 31,3). Irenaeus' A*dversus Haereusus*

regards Christ and the Holy Spirit as "the Two Hands of the Father (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* V,6.1). These are just two out of the countless examples. This practice has continued in official Church documents and in works of individual theologians. While underlining the relevance of this usage in theological traditions, it is interesting to note that this practice has received special attention in ecclesiology.

5. Metaphors for the Church: Theological Foundations

The position that metaphor elicits meanings by offering new ways of looking at things (Yuanqiong, 2009) is as enriching in linguistics as it is in theology. This is particularly relevant in contextual systematic theology and Christian spirituality, since the way a person understands the Church helps in shaping the person's understanding of, relationship to, and being in, the Church. In this respect, metaphors help in making the Church to be seen from the prism of new cultural models and concepts that deepen our understanding and relationship with God and with one another as members of the Church.

The practice of using of metaphors in the description of the Church is deeply rooted in the sources of the Christian faith. With remote foundations in the OT, it is prevalent throughout the New Testament, and runs through the history of the Church, starting from her nascent years. Both Testaments of the Christian Bible are wont to using many metaphors and models in describing the Church and liturgical assemblies. John Brunt (2014) points out that even the word "Church" (Gk. "*εκκλησια*", Lat. "*ekklesia*") itself, is a metaphor. He shows its roots in antiquity, where the Greco-Roman society used it in reference to any group of people gathered together for some purpose. Luke preserved this secular use in the New Testament (Luke in Acts 19), first in reference to the rioting crowd, and secondly for the legal assembly that will be required to resolve the problem (19:32, 41). Thus:

> Even though the term 'Church' has become a designation for us, obviously its semantic domain was both more diverse and more pictorial within the New Testament. We, for example, would never use the term to refer to a group of rioters on the street, and New Testament readers would never have thought of *ekklesia* as a building or a complex organizational structure. The translation "Church" therefore hardly conveys what New Testament readers would have pictured by the term. Perhaps "congregation" or even "gathering" would be a translation closer to the original (Brunt, 2014).

Scholars are not agreed on the number of metaphoric depictions of the Church in the NT. Paul Minear's 1960 monograph suggests that the list swells to over 100 if each Greek word is counted separately (Minear, 2004). His taxonomy treats 96 out of these images. McVay (2006) arranges these into six clusters, comprising of the corporal (The Church as Body), architectural (the Church as Building/Temple), agricultural (the Church as Plant/Field/Vine), martial (the Church as Army), and familial and marital (the Church as Family and as Bride).

To justify its depictions of the Church in metaphors and imageries, the Fathers of Vatican II Council averred:

> In the Old Testament the revelation of the Kingdom is often conveyed by means of metaphors. In the same way the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in different images taken either from tending sheep or cultivating the land, from building or even from family life and betrothals, the images receive preparatory shaping in the books of the Prophets (LG, 6).

These depictions shed light on the meaning and understanding of the mystery that is the Church. Though a mystery, the Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the Vine, being as it were the Mystical Body of Christ present in history and a spiritual community (see LG, 8), the Church possesses such outstanding features of a human community. These characteristic traits of the human community highlight the nature and structure of the Church and shed light on its mission in the world. Highlighted here is the Church's nature as a very complex reality (LG, 8) composed of people with vast cultural, racial, linguistic, and geographic diversities. Christ calls them together and makes them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit (LG, 9). They are bound together in faith and sustained in communion by their sacramental bonds and union with Christ. Altogether, this emphasizes unity in diversity but diversity is an enriching gift and endowment. The idea of the Church as a community of persons therefore highlights the dynamism and diversity of the charismatic endowments of her numerous members which ordinarily would be considered as a gift and a rich treasure to the Church. This understanding is at the same time central for the ecclesiology of Vatican II and relevance to ecumenical dialogue. This image of unity and diversity provides the basis for many other metaphorical conceptions of the Church in both the New Testament and the teachings of the Fathers and the Magisterium. It becomes simpler to understand when one studies this community metaphor from the perspective of African cultural model of community.

Many of these metaphors have been underlined in subsequent official magisterial documents like *Lumen Gentium* (LG, 5-6) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (henceforth, CCC). While those OT images are variations on a profound theme – the People of God, these find a new centre with Christ as the head of this "People", his Body. The CCC (particularly in 753-757) explains those scriptural images and figures as ways in which revelation speaks of the inexhaustible mystery of the Church. "Around this centre are grouped images taken 'from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage'" (CCC, 753). Pellowe adds that these biblical metaphors, like metaphors in general, help in shaping the strategy and behaviour of the Church (Pellowe, 2015).

6. Cultural Models for Understanding the Council's "Community" Metaphor

Altogether, Scripture and Tradition give the impression that the Church is "a worshiping community of believers committed to each other, to God, and to God's kingdom" (see Brunt, 2014). Though "community" has several shades of meaning and applications, each expresses an idea of commonality, solidarity, mutual dependence, mutual responsibility and often shared identity with others.

More technically speaking, community would refer to a kind of society. It is "a social unit whose members are permanently bound together by the common possession of vitally significant values or ends and by forms of love and responsibility leased upon these" (J. Messner, 1981). This co-operative instinct ensures mutual survival as humans detest any atavistic tendencies that have the potential to atrophy or destroy the camaraderie feeling that individuals mutually express are detested (Christopher Agulanna, 2010). Hence, Aristotle would say that the person is either a god or an animal that is able to survive outside of society/polis. Rousseau and Hegel may have stressed this still in their theories of the 'General Will' and the 'State'.

Africans, and Westerners alike, emphasize this ineluctable culture of solidarity and interdependence. Nevertheless, the way a people understands the world shapes the way they relate with it. Thus, despite being one of the universal cognitive metaphors, "community" is not always understood the same way, neither does it have the same meaning for the various peoples across the globe. Yuanqiong grounds this difference on the use of people's cognitive capacities. According to him, distinct peoples, say Africans, Europeans, Asians or Americans, do not use this in the same way (Yuanqiong, 2009). Where the West conceives the universe, for instance, as a cosmos housing all things – atomic, sub-atomic, organic and inorganic, human and sub-human, earth, moon, sun, stars, galaxies, Africans find it an amazing order and relationality that can best be described as a web (see Ogbonnaya, 1998).

The notion of the community is thus more germane in Africa where the universe is perceived as an interactive web. This model is somewhat strange to the Western philosophical mindset where (membership, a distinguishing element of community, creates boundaries that define and establish identity) man is "the measure of all things", and human life is described as solitary, short, brutish, and nasty (Nwachukwu, 2018). On the other hand, two European anthropologists, J. V. Taylor (1963) and G.T. Basden (1966), note that an individual is never cut off from the community in Africa. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, ostracism is perhaps the worst punishment anyone could suffer. Basden used the Igbo as sample case. He says:

> The Igbo community denotes first and foremost ontological quality of human relations. It is ontological in so far as all members of the community are believed to descent from a common ancestor. Every man is linked to his parent on the natured level. His parents in turn are bound to their grand-parents, etc. This link which binds all members of the same family by propagation is broadened to include all members of the community or clan who are believed to be descendants of the same ancestor. Everyone considers himself as member of a definite community and as part of the whole (George T. Basden, 1966).

The following words from Maurice Merleau-Ponty capture this picture of the community: "our path to the truth is through others. Either we attain it with them, or what we attain is not the truth" (Merleau-Ponty in Agulanna, 2010). Illustrations of this African worldview abound in the vast galaxy of African literary (see Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart) and artistic works (see Onwubiko, 1999), cosmogonies and such linguistic forms as metaphors, idioms, concepts and adages (see Nwachukwu, 2018). Onwubiko (1999) points out that the African world is

characterized by the "we-consciousness" (Onwubiko, 1999); for Opoku, citing Mbiti (1969) for whom "the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately", "A man is a man because of others, and life is when you are together, alone you are an animal" (Adom Opoku, 1978,). This is just to cite only a few. Evidently, therefore, this "We-ness" is the bedrock of African thought, culture and life. It impacts the African vision of reality in general and relationship, even with the non-human world. While reality is perceived as a chain or web of interactions, interrelations and solidarity, Africans employ terms and concepts that reflect this experience in order to explain the reality around them.

7. The African Model and the Conciliar Concept of Church as Community

"Community" captures at once this African worldview of solidarity, togetherness, familyhood (Ujamaa) and commonality. Unity and solidarity in communion and service are the hallmarks of the good life in African societies. In these societies, "community" evokes a sense of identity, bonding, unity, solidarity and co-responsibility. This extends to all facets of African life, economic, political, recreational, etc. Connected are individuals and their social groups i.e. clans, families, the departed and the unborn (Mbiti, 1994), and the non-human world since Africans hold nature to be "sacred" (Tarus and Lowery, 2017). This feature is sustained by blood and marital kinships, land, tribal affiliation, clan roots, ritual celebrations, rites of passage and death, and shared oppression and suffering (Mbiti, 1994). Thus, "community" is associated with "otherness" in solidarity, co-responsibility and communion. Considered therefore as a plane where the various claims of interpersonal and other forms of relationships are lived out, the African community is characterized by "ordered relationships" (Ekennia), "shared existence" (Iweh) and "unalienated existence"; in sum, life is meaningless without the community (Ede) as individuals depend on their kin groups and communities (V.C. Uchendu, 1965). Belongingness or unalienatedness is the key to existence, hence the aphorism: "I belong therefore I am": One remains "united with the rest of his community, both the living and the dead, and humanly speaking nothing can separate him (the person) from this corporate society" (Mbiti, 1969; Nwachukwu, 2007).

This community metaphor, emphasizing the elements of unity, diversity and solidarity, is not strange to the Christian tradition. Biblical evidences, magisterial clarifications and theological reflections about this notion of the Church abound. The Pauline letters, for example, stress the unity of the baptized. While walls between Jew and Gentile are broken down (Gal 3:28), the Pauline "Body" metaphor expresses a somewhat functionalist description of the Church. Functionalism looks at society as a piece of machine with several different parts (cf., 1Cor. 12).

This lens enriches the Christian concept of the Church as a community of faith. It deepens this Conciliar understanding of the Church. The Christian experience shows that the nascent Church thrived in communion (koinonia). Bound by faith and subject to the teaching of the apostles, the Church became a community where members bore witness to their new life in Christ through a distinct fellowship of service and love (koinonia). Communion became the distinctive feature of that community in which everything was shared together, including property. This practice contributed to the daily growth in number of Church membership (Linda Peacore, 2010. *"Church as Community: What Does It Mean to Say the Church is a Community?"* in

https://www.fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/classes/cf565/church-as-community/). This is a point of convergence between culture and Gospel, where each exists largely to enrich the other.

The correlation between the two – church and community in the African context – is so obvious that it would therefore not be strange for a people who trace their common origins, mainly by bloodlines, live in communities, and run homogeneous societies, to understand how the Church could be a "community" of faith. On the other hand, this cultural model offers Christians a deep insight into the mystery of their incorporation into Christ through the sacrament of Baptism in the Church. Though much different from a typical African community, the Church as community illustrates on the one hand the Church's enriching endowments as a visible society, but more importantly, it enhances those quality of Christian life which have been extolled in the scriptures and illustrated in the heroic witnesses of the early Christians.

Little wonder then why African scholars see no conflicts between the two. They go as far as addressing the ecclesiological question from this cultural perspective. Vincent Mulago (see Tarus and Lowery, 2017) and Waliggo (1998), for example, call the Church "clan", Oduyoye (1991), Onwubiko (2001), Chukwu (2011), Nwachukwu (2016), "family", while Mbiti, Omenyo (2000), Nwachukwu (2011, 2018, and 2019) use "community". These metaphors are coined from the African worldview of connectedness, to those of unity and solidarity. They portray the Church as one reality with multivalent components, but with one destiny as the mystical Body of Christ and God's pilgrim people. As the "One Body of Christ" and an ecclesial community, the Church's many component parts or members (1Cor. 12:12, 14) come from different tribes and tongues and peoples and nations (Apoc.7:9). Bound to a common faith in Christ, these constitute parts of the one Mystical Body of Christ, fellow-citizens and members of the one family of God's people. These parts function in concert (1 Cor. 12:12) in the common mission of making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Thus, beyond the institutional features of a visible community, the "community metaphor" emphasizes a special character of the Church and the Christian life - communion. As the soul of love and the bond that binds hearts to one another and to God, communion sheds more light on the intricate relationship between unity and diversity among the human elements of the Church. This altogether emphasizes a quality of the Christian life that reflects, in turn, the inner life of the Triune God, the Church's Trinitarian foundations (see Nwachukwu, 2007; cf., Kloppenburg, 1974; see also, CCC, 758-759). Drawn from the unity and communion of the Divine Community, the Church exists in the world as a community, a sacrament (LG, LG, 1; cf. CCC, 775; Gaillardetz, 2007), and an icon of the Trinity in the world ((LG, 4; citing St Cyprian, De Oratione, 23; Forte, 2008; and Nwachukwu, 2018; Stacy Geere, 2019). Its members who are being called into communion with the Divine life (CCC, 777; LG., 1) and to unity with all humankind (LG., 1), journey together in the world as a Pilgrim People who are progressively marching towards their final destiny. This destiny, and by extension the destiny of all creation and "goal of all things" (CCC, 760), has already been realized only in an imperfect form as the Community of the elect; the full realization of the unity (CCC, 775) would be perfected in the parousia. Thus, when the Council employed this metaphor for the Church, it underpins the importance of solidarity and communion among the members, which, fortunately, was the

uniquely distinguishing feature of Christian life in the early Church (Acts 1:14, 2: 44; 4:32). The nascent Church opened a new page in the annals of salvation history and distinguished itself from all other forms of human associations and societies as the "assembly of those whom God's Word 'convokes', i.e. gathers together to form the People of God…" (CCC, 777).

Since it belongs to the character of love to bind hearts together, the Church becomes therefore a school of communion and the brooding ground for unity, fellowship, and human and spiritual solidarity. Having acknowledged its Trinitarian foundations – "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit" (LG, 4) – the Council makes bold to initiate a shift away from the usual legalistic view toward an understanding of the Church in the light of salvation history and the mystery of faith (jenuswine.tripod.com). As prophesied by Daniel (Dan 5:9), the New People of God constitutes a community of people from different tongues and nations (Apoc. 7:9). These became the New People of God (the New Israel and the Church) established for the purpose of accomplishing the eternal will of God – the restoration - the gathering of the just – from Abel the just one to the last of the elect (LG, 2). Its ultimate destiny is therefore the reconciliation/recapitulation of all things in God at the end of time (cf., Col. 1:20, Nwachukwu, 2018).

8. Summary

This "community metaphor" highlights both the OT and NT notions of the "People of God" and "Body of Christ". But the meaning comes out most when this metaphor is interpreted with an eye on the African community model. On a more practical note, Christian life cannot be accomplished outside the dynamics of communion, fellowship and solidarity as a member of the pilgrim people. This paper has established that a look at this metaphor from a milieu where the dynamics of community life have had strong roots helps Christians to gain a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Church and how to live as Christians. Community evokes already that sense of unity, cohesion, co-responsibility and solidarity prevalent in human cultures. This was already visible in the Church of the Apostolic age where the Pauline image of Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27, Rom 12:4), for instance, implies mutual belonging and serves as a powerful stimulant for healthy community. In such communities, each part senses belonging and seeks to embrace other different parts as well. The Church as community therefore submits these characteristics to the new orbital course guided by the light of Christ. Basically, one recalls to contemporary minds the Church in the apostolic era whose characteristic commonality (Acts 2:47) distinguished from the rest of the society. This commonality endeared them to one another, influenced conversion and strengthened their resolve to give ascent to the gospel message. This character brought hearts together, fostered fellowship, necessitated a life of sharing even of material possessions and reawakened the memorial of the Last Supper Church where the Apostles sat around the Master, as one family, a community, a liturgical assembly and a gathering of God's "first-born sons" (Hebrew 12:23). This experienced may be re-lived each day around the Eucharistic table, and above all in the parousia when, after all had been reconciled to the Father through Christ in the Spirit (cf., 2 Cor. 5:18), all will be admitted to the glorious celebration of all who are in Christ at the marriage feast of the Lamb (cf., Apoc. 19:9).

This paper has set a theological case for the importance of community in the life and mission of the Church. It submits that the community metaphor, like metaphors in general, shades a light of understanding on the Church and shapes the strategy and behaviour of the Church (Pellowe, 2015). The sense of oneness it conveys was already a visible characteristic that distinguished the early Church from other human societies. Would it that the Church could be manifestly seen as a community in the present age, it would have remained a veritable sign and instrument of unity in the world (LG, 1), a mark of identification with the Lord (cf., John 13: 34, 35), school of love and communion in the world, and a model of life and community to humankind and a passport/vista to divine communion in the life to come (Nwachukwu, 2018). However, by blending the biblical and theological "Sense of Community" with a cultural model, the paper has helped the Church to underline a stronger sense of community in the present age. The blending of this metaphor with the African cultural community matrix furnishes one with a deeper understanding of the being, nature and mission of the Church. This cultural matrix enriches one's understanding of that new community (see, Lakoff and Johnson, 1987) founded by Christ, to which he bequeathed the task of his saving mission in the world. While it opens a new vista for deepened theological insights into the Church and invitation to a new vision of discipleship in the Church, it returns the Church to its former position of the trail blazer of culture and society and a model community for emulation. Thus, it would be providing a guiding light to a world community that is enmeshed in countless cases of human brokenness and conflicts.

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