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**Communion in Ezza Culture: A Theological
Analysis from the Trinitarian Perspective of
the Cappadocian Fathers**

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Abbreviations

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Dublin: Veritas, 1994.

DS Denzinger, Heinrich. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*. 43th revised and enlarged edition. Edited by Helmut Hoping et al. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012.

GFU LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1991.

GS Abbott Walter M. ed. "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*." In *The Documents of Vatican II: All Sixteen Official Texts Promulgated by the Ecumenical Council 1963-1965*. Translated by Joseph Gallagher. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966.

NPNF *Letters and Select Works: A Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Volume II-XX. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968.

ST Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Theologica*. Volume 1, Part 1. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Second revised edition. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920.

Abstract

The doctrine of the Trinity has long been taught and received as a mystery not knowable to human beings. Unfortunately, this central doctrine of Christianity has to a great extent been interpreted and confined to the intellectual sphere without any connection to people's lived experiences. This study departs from this tradition; instead, it uses the relational interpretation of the Trinity by the Cappadocian fathers to study communal relationships in contemporary Ezza culture in Igbo in Eastern Nigeria. The thesis argues that the Trinity is not merely a mystery that has no connection to human experience. Rather, it asserts, for example, that communal relationships in Ezza culture are possible because Ezza people, like other human beings, are created in the image and likeness of God who is Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity captures the fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God especially because of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, there is a continuity and development of the God/human relationship made possible by Jesus Christ who reveals God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ministry of Jesus essentially calls all humanity to participate in the fullness of trinitarian communion. On the basis of all these factors, this study argues that the communion in Ezza culture, although imperfect, resembles trinitarian communion. It proposes that teaching and interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of loving relationship and communion has the potential to deepen the gospel message in Ezza. This is especially the case because when love, the central message of the Christian faith, encounters a culture that practices communal living, people may begin to embrace the positive teaching of the Christian message in their communal lives. In this environment of enhanced genuine Christian commitment, the Christian injunction of love of God and neighbour may take root and flourish.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal, infinite...and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; three persons indeed, but one essence, substance or nature entirely simple.” Lateran Council IV.

“The Christian Family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.” CCC.

The book of Genesis states that human beings are created in the “image and likeness of God” (1: 26-27).¹ This implies that human beings somehow resemble God and leads to questions including -What is the corporal image of God who is invisible? Do human beings exist as the image of God? Since “God is Spirit,” as stated in the Gospel of John (4: 24), and human beings, male and female, are corporal. Many theologians, such as St. Augustine, Jürgen Moltmann Catherine LaCugna, Leonardo Boff and John Zizioulas, to mention but a few, have set on the long road of discerning how human beings are the image of God. The Christian faith defines her God as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.² The three are not three Gods but three divine Persons in the one Godhead.³ The Christian God exists as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴

St. Augustine perceived the image of God in the human mind, and so maintained that the three powers of “Remembering, understanding and love,” in one human mind reflect the image of God.⁵ For Augustine, just as God is one but three divine Persons in the one Godhead, in the same way do the three powers of the mind reside in the one human mind. This interpretation of the image of God as taught by Augustine is called the psychological model.⁶ The psychological model is still one way of explaining how human beings are the image of an invisible God. After all, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* taught that “God has left traces of [God’s] image in [God’s] work of creation and in [God’s] revelation throughout the Old Testament.”⁷ Augustine tried to help Christians to

¹ All Biblical references are from New Revised Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 1994), 233.

³ Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith: In the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th rev, ed. (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1996), 152. See also *DS*, 421.

⁴ CCC, # 233.

⁵ Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1999), Book 9. 3.3.

⁶ Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creating Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 148.

⁷ CCC, # 237.

understand their faith in his teaching around the image of the Trinity. However, Christ came as the second Person of the Trinity. He revealed the Father and the Holy Spirit. He preached that unity and love are central in the Godhead and prayed that such unity and love be replicated in the lives of his followers. He prayed passionately for his followers and believers: “that they may be one, as we are one” (Jn 17: 22). Jesus’ prayer indicates that the Trinity lives in unity and communion and the faithful will reflect the life of the Trinity if they live in love and communion. Human beings are able to live in love and communion because of the way God created them. According to Genesis, God imparted God’s Spirit to human beings at creation (2:7), therefore giving them the capacity to live in love and communion. It is because of the presence of God’s Spirit that every human being and especially Christians who are made aware of that, is created and reflects the image and likeness of God. When Christianity preaches that “God is love” (1Jn 4: 8), it is also teaching that God is not an isolated being but a communal reality.⁸

Reflecting on the Scripture and on the interpretation of the early fathers of the Church, many trinitarian theologians, especially those mentioned above argue that human beings exist as the image of God when they live in communion and not just in their consciousness. The development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century of the Church led the Cappadocian fathers into teaching on the unity and distinction in the Trinity. They all agreed in their interpretation that the Trinity is one “ousia and three hypostases.”⁹ Even Gregory of Nazianzus went as far as to assert that the name of the “Father is the name of relation not of substance.”¹⁰ For him, Father means that there is a Son to be related to and such relationship implies communion, love and sharing which characterises life in the Godhead. This communal interpretation of the Trinity leads to the development of the social model of the Trinity. Since God is a loving communion and human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, our thesis follows the emerging social trinitarian theology, and argues that communion in Ezza culture is an image of trinitarian communion.

⁸ Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 152. See also *DS*. 1331.

⁹ St. Basil, *Against Eunomius* in *Letters and Select Works: A Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of Christian Church Second Series*, vol. VIII, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), xxxvii-xxxviii. See also *Letter*, 214. 4, 254.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations* in *Library of Christian Classics: Christology of the Later Fathers*, vol. III, ed. Edward Rochie Hardy in Collaboration with Cyril C. Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1954), *Oration* 29.16. See also Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 247.

The life of communion is central in God and in human society. This study contends that the life of individualism and lack of peace in the world would surely be overcome with a life of communion. St. Paul declared that the new self of a believer “is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all in all” (Col. 3: 10-11). In other words, to define human beings as created in the image of God is also to say that humanity is created to live in love and communion as Paul described above. In reference to human beings as the image of God, the Church declares that “Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a *person*, who is not just something, but someone...capable of freely giving him/her self and entering into communion with other persons.”¹¹ Hence, a human being is made for love and communion in human society.

The *Catechism* thus refers to the reason for human communion: “Because of its common origin *the human race forms a unity*, for from one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth.”¹² This statement signifies that human beings are brothers and sisters to one another because they have a common origin. It is imperative that they are made to live in love and communion, echoing the idea of Pius XII who declared that humanity is contemplated “in the unity of (its) origin in God.”¹³ If human beings come from God who is love, their loving communion reflects their source. The Church enables believers to realise the implication of human beings as the image of God in her teaching that, “This law of human solidarity and charity, without excluding the rich variety of persons, cultures and peoples, assures us that all men/women are truly brethren.”¹⁴ This means that life of communion and participation is a true pointer to the reality of God in the world. According to John Zizioulas:

Koinonia derives not from sociological experience, nor from ethics, but from *faith*. We are called to *koinonia* not because it is ‘good’ for us and for the Church, but because we believe in a God who is in His very being *koinonia*. If we believe in a God who is primarily an individual who first *is* and then *relates*, we are not far from a sociological understanding of

¹¹ CCC, # 357.

¹² Ibid., #360.

¹³ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical “On the Unity of Human Society,” *Summi Pontificatus* (October 20, 1939): # 38, accessed January 4, 2021, <http://www.vatican.va>. See also Walter Abbott, ed., “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*,” in *The Documents of the Vatican II: All Sixteen Official Texts Promulgated By the Ecumenical Council 1963-1965*, trans. Joseph Gallagher (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), #1.

¹⁴ CCC, # 361.

koinonia...The doctrine of the Trinity acquires in this case a decisive significance: God *is* Trinitarian; He is a relational being by definition.¹⁵

Both the Ezza culture and the Church believe that God is love and communal. Both agree that communion has its roots in God. They also accept that to live in communion is to live the life of God in human society. The hardest punishment in Ezza culture is to be ostracised from the family and community. According to Zizioulas, communion in human society is “no other kind of communion but the very personal communion between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.”¹⁶ Thus, Zizioulas echoes the idea that the communion even in Ezza culture is the image of trinitarian communion in the Godhead. For Zizioulas, “it implies also that [humanity] *is by definition incompatible with individualism*; her fabric is communion and personal relatedness.”¹⁷ He understands that human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God reflect God best in their lives of communion and sharing. Individualism is not consistent with the true definition of human beings. Obviously, the implication for human beings as the image of God who is love lies in the life of love and communion.

Our thesis argues that because God is communion of love, the communion that is obtained in Ezza culture is a resemblance of trinitarian communion. The notion that God is communion challenges an individualistic and selfish mentality. Principally, as Boff writes, this notion of communion in God/human communion in society indicates that human beings are meant to be relational as are the three divine Persons in the one Godhead. Indeed, the notion of communion is a significant basis for the correct understanding of the meaning of human life as it is lived in marriage, family, “community, Church and society.”¹⁸ According to Boff, communal life in human society reflects the life of God. He indicates that life of communion starts with unity expressed in married life, and then it extends to family members, to the wider community and entire society. In fact, communion is the hinge which holds society together, manifested in peaceful and loving existence among human beings, including God and the entire cosmos. Life without communion with God and other people will be hell and is not worth living. Thus, communion is central to human flourishing. He contends that, “Seeing people as

¹⁵ John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church and the World Today*, ed. Fr. Gregory Edwards (California: Sebastian, 2010), 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (London: Burns & Oates, 1988), 148.

image and likeness of the Trinity implies always setting them in open relationship with others; it is only through being with others, understanding themselves as others see them, being through others, that they can build their own identity.”¹⁹

My interest in communion derives from the fact that it is common to both Christianity and Ezza culture. It is at the core of life; call it the *bonum* that is central to authentic human life in the world. Moreover, from the many examples of the manifestation of communion in Ezza culture, such as people relating openly with one another “being with and through others” as expressed by Boff, I perceive that Christianity would bear better witness to God if Christians took the notion of communion seriously, most especially because it is the mark of Christianity. The teaching of John confirms it thus:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love...those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them....We love because [God] first loved us (1Jn 4:7-19).

In this statement, John indicates that love, communion and sharing come from God. Love comes from God because love defines the divine Being. A person who lives in love and communion is participating in the life of God. God dwells in such persons and they in turn dwell in God. The implication of this passage is that communion in human society has its roots in God. Secondly, loving communion is the image of trinitarian communion since the God who is love is not a monad but a Trinity. If it is true that God is love, then the life of communion should be taken seriously as the essential ingredient for human development and fulfilment. Without communion, humanity would wither and die through selfish tendencies which sometimes lead to violence, but with communion, human beings would definitely flourish and endure even to eternity. Jesus taught that it is communion and love among his followers that would convince the world of his reality in the world, and that communion remains a veritable instrument for the conversion of the world. In his prayer to the Father, Jesus says,

that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me...that they may be one, as we are one...that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me (Jn 17: 21-23).

¹⁹ Ibid., 149.

For Jesus, it is not only the prayer of the faithful or their worship of God, nor their preaching about Jesus that would lead to the conversion of the world, but most especially, the love and communion that exist among the faithful that would attract the world to Jesus through the believers. In the same way, it is the life of communion in Ezza culture that will reveal the life of God in society. Boff, in reference to the prayer of Jesus, maintains that,

This trinitarian unity is integrating and inclusive; its end is the glorification of all creation in the triune God, healing what is sick, freeing what is captive, forgiving what offends divine communion. This integration in the Trinity has to make its appearance in history, as raptures in community are healed— between Jews and pagans, Greeks and barbarians, slaves and masters, men and women (Gal. 3: 28; cf Rom. 10:12).²⁰

Boff indicates that trinitarian communion of love appears in human society when people forgive and accept one another. It happens when all peoples live in unity and love without division and enmity. He continues that,

An encounter with the divine Mystery lies at the root of all religious doctrine. This encounter evokes a deep experience embracing all our humanity: emotions, reason, will, desire and heart. The first reaction, an expression of pleasure, is praise, worship and proclamation. After that comes the task of appropriating and translating this experience-encounter, the task of devout reasoning. This is the stage at which doctrines and creeds come into being.²¹

Boff says that it is not enough to have faith in God if belief does not translate into action of loving service. That is, experiencing God as love implies that those who believe in such a God need to make communal living present in the world. He writes:

Faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit...In our experience of the Mystery there is indeed diversity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and at same time unity in this diversity, through the communion of the different Persons by which each is in the others, with the others, through the others and for the others...It is the revelation of God as God is, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternal correlation, interpenetration, love and communion, which make them one sole God. The fact that God is triune means unity in diversity...God is *three*, a Trinity, and being *three* avoids solitude, overcomes separation and surpasses exclusion. The Trinity allows identity (the Father), difference of identity (the Son) and difference of difference (the Holy Spirit)...Trinity is inclusive...Single and multiple, unity and diversity meet in the Trinity as circumscribed and reunited. 'Three' here needs to be understood not so much as an arithmetical number as an

²⁰ Ibid., 148.

²¹ Ibid., 1.

affirmation that the name of God means differences that include, not exclude, each other; that are not opposed to each other, since they are set in communion; a distinction that makes for union. Through being an open reality, this triune God also includes other differences; so the created universe enters into communion with the divine.²²

According to Boff, “unity and diversity” in the Trinity reveals that, when translated into human society, human beings have to accept differences and yet be able to live and accept one another as brothers and sisters in love and communion. People’s differences should not be obstacles to unity rather; they ought to be perceived as gifts to complement the gifts of others. This brings about enrichment of human society. Boff explains how to conceive the loving communion in the Trinity:

How should we think of the unity of the Three?...I propose...starting decisively from the Trinity, from Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed in the scriptures and as apparent from the historical actions of Jesus Christ. They co-exist simultaneously and the Three are co-eternal from the beginning...Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not emerge as separate or juxtaposed, but always mutually implied and related. Where is the unity of the Three found? In the communion between the three divine Persons.²³

According to Boff, communion characterises the unity in the Godhead. This means that the image of the Trinity is perceived in human history when men and women live in harmony, respect and care for one another. News of the destruction of lives and properties in the world owing to wars and violence, highlights human society’s urgent need of communion. Thus, our thesis is interested in communion because it is the remedy for individualism, suicide, war, and anarchy in the world. Communion is the source of peace, tranquillity and love. Boff contends that the three divine Persons are not separated from one another. He writes:

The Holy Spirit is also always together with them because it is the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8: 16), because it reveals the Father to us in prayer (cf Rom. 8:16), because it comes ‘from the Father’ (John 25:26), asked for by the Son (John 14: 16). This choice carries a risk of tritheism, but avoids it through perichoresis and through the eternal communion existing from the beginning between the three Persons. We are not to think that originally the Three existed on their own, separate from the others, coming only later into communion and perichoretic relationship. Such a picture is false and makes their union a later result, an outcome of communion. No, the Persons are intrinsically and from all eternity bound up with each other. They have always co-existed.²⁴

²²Ibid., 3.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 5-6.

Boff signifies that there is unbroken unity in the Trinity. He states that,

This union-communion-perichoresis opens outwards: invites human beings and the whole universe to insert themselves in the divine life: 'May they be one in us...that they may be one as we are one' (*hen*: John 17: 21-2). Because of its perichoresis and communion, everything in the Trinity is triadic: Each Person acts in union with the others, even when we consider actions belonging to one or attributed to one: creation by the Father, the incarnation of the Son, the coming of the Spirit. The Father creates through the Son in the inspiration of the Spirit. The Son, sent by the Father, becomes flesh by virtue of the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit comes upon Mary and fills the life of the just, sent by the Father at the request of the Son. Using the descriptive terminology of tradition, we should say: the Father 'begets' the Son in the bosom of the Spirit (*Filius a Patre Spiritique*), or the Father 'breathes out' the Spirit together with the Son (*Spiritus a Patre Filioque*), or the Spirit reveals the Father through the Son, or the Son loves the Father in the Spirit, or the Son and the Spirit see each other in the Father...In this way we should have a trinitarian equilibrium since all is triadic and perichoretically implied; all is shared...reciprocally received, united through communion.²⁵

Boff explains that the communion of the Trinity calls humanity and indeed the entire creation to live as God lives. That is, to live in communion, in the imitation of God who is loving communion. For him:

The Trinity is mysteries communicated to us for our salvation, so that by penetrating, however little, into divine reality, we should be set free and have a part in eternal life. If we understand the divine nature...as the eternal perichoresis of the Persons of the Trinity, as the love and communion intrinsic to the divine beings, then it will become easier to understand the unity which this nature guarantees: it will always be a trinitarian concept, the union of Persons bound up one with the others in eternal communion. God is one and is never alone. God is always the living-together and co-existence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three existing from the beginning, revealing each other, knowing one another and communicating themselves from the beginning.²⁶

Boff reveals that this life of togetherness marks the life of the Trinity. The Father does not act without the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son also does not do anything independently of the Father and the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit works in unison with the Father and the Son. This image of love is what the Trinity presents to human beings for emulation. It is where human beings are striving to live in communion that it is possible to perceive the image of God in human society. Boff explains why people need to understand the doctrine of the Trinity:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

There are three main motives for studying belief in the Trinity: 1. We need to enquire, reverently, what God is actually like. Those who feel themselves to be God's friends feel the urge to understand the mystery of God. How, being three Persons-in-communion, does God form one sole God? 2. We want to come closer to the two divine self-communications, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We have been visited by the Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit...How do we see our vocations or the meaning of our lives in the framework of such a revelation? 3. Finally, we need to know what type of society accords with God's plan...This is where faith in the Holy Trinity, in the mystery of perichoresis, of the trinitarian communion and divine society, takes on a special resonance, since the Trinity can be seen as a model for any just, egalitarian (while respecting differences) social organization. On the basis of their faith in the triune God, Christians postulate a society that can be the image and likeness of the Trinity. Faith in the Trinity of Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can be seen to offer a response to the great quest for participation, equality and communion that fires the understanding of the oppressed. Both on the lowest levels of society and in the church there is a rejection of exclusive type of society under which we all suffer to a greater or lesser extent.²⁷

Boff indicates that trinitarian communion challenges the life in human society. He contends that the love in the Godhead inspires human beings to strive to live in communion with one another, that is, to close the gap between rich and poor, to accept one another as brothers and sisters in believing communities of Christians. He writes:

the expression in time of full salvation in God, finds practical expression in participation by many, at all levels of social life, in the advancement of human dignity, in creating the maximum of opportunity for everyone. It will be integral and truly human if it furthers communion with God, helps to form an understanding of divine filiation and of being brothers and sisters throughout the world. This understanding takes shape in the church community of those who follow Jesus; from there it opens out to all the values humanity has produced in its encounter with God, or has created through its work, intelligence and skill. A society structured on these lines could be the sacrament of the Trinity.²⁸

Boff implies that the image of God is only perceived in the society whose members live in love. That is especially true when love is manifested in sharing of goods and in loving service of one another. In such a society, people are equal and no one is oppressed in any way. Boff argues that:

A society cannot organize itself on the basis of oppression... nor of domination by its leaders... nor of anarchy and insensitivity...No individual or society can subsist without upward reference and without memory of its origins (the Father); in the same way no one (in personal or

²⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁸ Ibid., 13.

social terms) lives without cultivating sideways relationship and solidarity (the Son); finally there is no person or society that can organize life without respecting the personal dimension and without cultivating the inner regions (the Holy Spirit) where creativity comes from and where the dreams that can transform history are worked out. Individuals need to remain always within a network of relationships, and society needs to be a conjuncture of relationships of communion and participation. Only in this way can both avoid pathologies. The disintegration of trinitarian understanding is due to our losing the memory of the essential perspective of the triune God: the *communion* between the divine Persons. Upwards, outwards and inwards must co-exist and so open the way for us to achieve a right representation of the Christian God. In other words, the Father is always in the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is interiorized in the Father and in the Spirit. The Spirit unites the Father and the Son and is totally united to them. Finally, the whole Trinity contains creation in itself. Communion is the first and last word about the mystery of the Trinity. Translating this truth of the faith into social terms, we can say: ‘the Trinity is our true social programme.’²⁹

Boff sees the life of the Trinity as the “social Programme” of human beings, by which he means that the social life of human beings should draw inspiration from the communal life of the Trinity. Without the emulation of trinitarian love, human beings will not be able to live authentic human life in the world. The loving life in the Trinity is the true model for human beings if they want to be authentic human beings. To exist in another way is to open themselves to suffering that comes from the life of lack of love. Boff continues that the unity of the Trinity

is formed by the essential openness of one Person to another; or more, by the interpenetration of one by the others so that one cannot be separated from the others. This unity opens outwards, embracing the just, sinners seeking forgiveness and the whole universe...Just as transcendence, immanence and transience form the dynamic unity of our existence, so analogously, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are integrally united in full, reciprocal and essential communion. Every human person is an image of the Trinity, sin produces a break in this reality, but without destroying it totally. Human society has been eternally willed by God to be the sacrament of trinitarian communion in history; social or structural sin detracts from this vocation, which still persists, however, as a call to be heeded through the processes of liberation in history which seek to create conditions in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be signified in time.³⁰

Boff teaches that even sin in human society cannot completely eradicate God’s invitation to human beings to imitate the communion of the Trinity. He implies that human beings

²⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

³⁰ Ibid., 23-24.

exist as the image of the Trinity despite being sinners. That is, human beings are capable by the grace of God to live in loving communion with one another as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in communion. He writes that Jesus

speaks time and again of the Kingdom of God. God acts to build and bring about this kingdom. Kingdom does not mean a territory but the way in which God acts...it therefore refers to the exercise of (God)...to bring...a life of sharing, solidarity and justice. This Lordship of God will not resemble the rule of the satraps of ancient times or that of the absolute monarchs of more recent times, alone in their solitary exercise of power; it will be the feast at which all sit together to celebrate, the new city in which all are brothers and sisters, with God in the midst of these sons and daughters, serving them all. So images of communion and sharing describe the form God's rule will take.³¹

Boff uses the notion of "communion and sharing" to explain the type of love that God has for human beings. It is this type of love, he contends that human beings are called to imitate. Whenever human beings are able to love and care for one another, they are revealing the life of God in their lives. The kingdom of God has nothing to do with power but instead, it has everything to do with love and sharing. Boff says that "The Gospels preserve the originality of Jesus' relationship with his God. This is something extremely intimate and unique; thus Jesus describes God with a word drawn from the language of family relationships, *Abba*, a childish expression of affection for a father."³² He describes the love between the Father and the Son with the image of familial communion, teaching that communion in human society has its roots in the Godhead:

The first thing to note here is the presence of all three divine Persons. It is the Spirit who shows us the presence of the Son in the humble figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son, in turn, reveals the Father. It is through praise, not speculation that we come to grasp this mystery. So the content in which this revelation of the blessed Trinity is given to us is a liturgical and doxological one. Here all, including the learned and clever, have to learn how to pray to God as children do, calling God 'Father.' They have to forget that they are learned and clever, because their learning and cleverness cannot grasp the communion of Three without multiplying God. Without devotion, reflection reduces the truth of faith and prevents access to its understanding; only those who make themselves like children can understand revelation.³³

Boff's ideas are relevant to Ezza culture. Ezza people's relationship with God is not written down. Their experience of God is spontaneously expressed in praising, worship,

³¹ Ibid., 28.

³² Ibid., 29.

³³ Ibid., 31.

invoking, and acknowledging at all times and every event of their lives. This way of living is passed on both by examples of the people and oral teaching of the elders. Their knowledge and worship of God is not from books but from their experiences of God in their lives. They are able to form their society according to their relationships with God. Boff acknowledges that loving communion in human society can be the representation of God's love. However, he believes that no human image could fully represent the Godhead. He writes:

As God is incorporeal, it is both foolish and even impious to attempt to represent God in corporeal figures. Yet the whole of creation, human beings and the incarnation of the Son of God open up possibilities of glimpsing images of God reflected in history. In such images, the fourth Lateran Council said, there is more dissimilarity than similarity between Creator and creature...Therefore, all human imagery, from whatever source it's drawn, has its limitations. On the level of intellectual understanding, it cannot shed light on the glowing darkness of the mystery of the Trinity. Nevertheless...there is the whole field of human significance which is better expressed in images than in conceptual categories, which fail to satisfy the demands of the human spirit in its endless quest for an expression of the whole. This whole can be expressed only through symbols...No concepts...can take the place of symbols of the whole with their suggestion of existential significance, unconditional value and unifying of meanings in one final Meaning. This is where symbols of the Trinity have an irreplaceable value. Through them, faith takes on shape, human beings feel themselves to be participants in the life of the Trinity and the Trinity is made present in our daily lives. There is a true perichoresis at work here, whose prototype is the perichoresis of the divine Persons themselves.³⁴

Boff implies that love is the source of communion between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their love overflows to human beings and entire creation. Thus, human beings are enabled to participate in the communion of the Trinity by showing love to others. That is why the communion in Ezza society with its emphasis on relationship with God, fellow human beings and even the entire creation could be seen as the image of trinitarian love. However, no amount of loving communion in Ezza culture could fully represent trinitarian communion. Nevertheless, the communion in Ezza culture, though not as perfect as trinitarian communion somehow bears witness that human beings are created to live in love and communion.

The relationship of love and communion of Ezza people with their God forms the basis of their communal life in their human society. Just as Christians believe that the

³⁴ Ibid., 109-110.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in love and communion within their one Godhead, the Ezza people understand God as the Supreme Being who is love and in communion with human beings and with the entire creation. This author's interest in the notion of communion is aroused by her experience of communion from childhood in the family and the community of birth. I am always surrounded by communal participation in every sphere of life. Being a Christian who partakes on a daily basis in the Eucharist, I reflect on how my culture most resembles God. I suggest that the answer lies in the area of communion. To love and participate in the life of others is central both in God and in Ezza people. Moreover, my experience as an African in a European setting highlights the importance of communion in human life. It is not that there is not communal life in Europe; there is. However, when comparing the expression of communion in the Western world in general and Europe in particular, one discovers that it is not as intimate as the communal life of participation and sharing in Ezza culture. The European lifestyle seems to tilt towards or even favours an individualistic mentality rather than communion.

The two World Wars fought globally with the enormous consequences of the loss of innumerable lives and property confirm my conviction that communion is an outstanding means to achieve world peace and concord. Life is sacred to Ezza culture. It is a taboo to kill a human being. Elochukwu Uzukwu speaks for Ezza people in his description of the sacred covenant between Igbo people and God: "Thus there was a covenant between earth and man...No person should defile the earth by spilling human blood in violence on it. This is the covenant. It must be kept."³⁵ Ezza people are faithful in observing this covenant. Anybody who kills another human being is banished from the village. The family of the killer is ostracised. After about three generations, the elders will be called to cleanse the family with prayer and rituals. This respect for human life fosters love and communion in Ezza culture. In my research I hope to demonstrate that communion in Ezza culture is an image of trinitarian communion. It sustains Ezza people in a life of suffering and pain. It helps them to rise above division and lack of unity. It leads to peace and human flourishing. It leads to their human development, both as an individual and as a community.

Pope Francis recently released a letter to all priests in the world, in which he expresses his wish for the Church to move from the "culture of abuse to the culture of

³⁵Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 25.

pastoral care.”³⁶ This statement suggests that abuse in whatever form, whether sexual, physical, psychological and verbal should never be part of Christian culture. The Pope acknowledges that various forms of abuse have been committed by some members of the Church and its consequences point to the failure to practice communion as spelt out in the life of Christ, in Scripture and in the Blessed Trinity. It is true that not all members of the Church engaged in abuse, however, its occurrence at all in the Church, which should be marked by communion, has unfortunately resulted in the perception of the Church as a community where a culture of oppression exists instead of that of communion. This state of affairs has discredited faith in Christianity in contemporary society. It has given rise to hatred, hurt and a lack of interest in the Christian faith. It has led to the mass exodus of even the baptised Christians who do not want to associate themselves with the Church anymore. Had the notion of communion been practiced in the Church, the result might have been different.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that the axiom of Tertullian would have come true, axioms which made non-Christians wonder at Christians with the exclamation: “See how they loved one another.”³⁷ The Second Vatican Council concurs, writing that the notion of communion would have attracted people to the Christian faith. It would have convinced the world of the reality of God of love. Only communion which is the true language of God would resolve the problems of the contemporary Church both on the ecumenical level as the Church seeks to end the scandal of disunity and also as she strives to bring the reign of God which is the reign of “justice, peace and love” in the world.³⁸ Globally, the idea of communion would overcome the spirit of war and hatred which lead to death and destruction. How could a person believe that God is love but neglect communion and interconnectedness? Both the social trinitarian theology and the communion of Ezza culture bear witness to God because God is communion.³⁹ The life of individualism and selfishness is overcome only by communion and sharing with others as indicated by the teaching of the Church and the parable of the Rich Fool in Luke’s Gospel (12: 16-21).⁴⁰ Our thesis agrees with Michael Duignan who contends that,

³⁶Pope Francis, *Letter to Priests*, on the 160th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars, St. John Vianney, (August 2019), accessed October 8, 2021, <http://www.vatican.va>.

³⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Commentary* (Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 394.

³⁸ Abbott, ed., “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *The Documents of the Vatican II*, #77-78.

³⁹ Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 53.

⁴⁰ *GS*, 78.

theologians have endeavoured to bring about a critical co-relation between human experience and the many articles and doctrines of Christian faith...contemporary theologians emphasise over and over again the need to re-immense the rather sterile and dogmatic trinitarian theology in experience in order to achieve a more existentially engagement of the topic.⁴¹

Thus, the experience of communion in Ezza culture will shed light on the understanding of the Christian God. Duignan further states that a “theology of the Trinity...may find in contemporary cultural, social...discoveries a shaft of inspirational light for its own penetration of the trinitarian mystery and may in turn enlighten such contexts with the depth of trinitarian wisdom.”⁴² This expresses well the reason behind our thesis that communion in Ezza culture, being in dialogue with trinitarian communion is effective in enhancing human life in society. This comes about through what Duignan calls the “category of love” which, he argues, “not only finds a firm biblical basis as an interpretation of the divine reality in the writings of John but has also been turned to throughout history as theologians have striven to make sense of the reality of the triune God...This has many advantages for a theology of the Trinity...with enlightening results.”⁴³ Duignan demonstrates that love is to be understood in reference to Trinity who exists in communion.

1.2 Research Questions, Aims, Rationale, and Delimitation

This thesis seeks to answer the question:

How is the communion that exists in Ezza culture an image of trinitarian communion in the Godhead? In order to do this, it sets out two broad aims:

Aims

- To explore and juxtapose communion in the Blessed Trinity and communion that exists in Ezza culture.

⁴¹Michael Duignan, “The Contemporary Renaissance of Catholic Trinitarian Theology: An Overview,” in *According to Your Word: Proceedings of a Conference at the Pontifical Irish College Rome*, ed. L. Bergin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 158. See also Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of love: A Theology of the Christian God* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989), 215.

⁴²Ibid., 163.

⁴³Ibid., 161.

- To discuss in what ways communion in Ezza culture is a resemblance of trinitarian communion.

Rationale of Research

The researcher is a Nigerian woman who was born at Aguba village, Onunweke Ezzagu in Ezza community and raised a Christian. As a second-generation Christian, I have had first-hand experience growing up in a village where many people still practice the African-tradition religion. Their belief in the supreme God whom they call *Chiukfu* was and still is the cornerstone in their conversion to Christianity.⁴⁴ The missionaries preached faith in *Chiukfu* which resonates with Ezza people and led to the success of the Christian mission in my area in 1885. Both Ezza people and Christians believe that God is benevolence. Ezza people call God *Chiukfu obu oma*, which translates as God of compassion. The Christians believe that their “God is love” (1 Jn 4: 8). God is at the centre of or informs all activities in my Aguba village. The people live in love and communion because they believe that God who is a compassionate Reality looks kindly on a person who loves his or her neighbour.

In Ezza culture, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and profane, secular and religious. God informs every sphere of life. Everything in the world is interconnected because God created all and united them. Every person and thing in the universe exists because God created them. Life without God is foreign to Ezza culture. Jack Finnegan has written that “Dualism is one of the reasons we lost so much of ourselves in 20th century. We lost vital sets of relationships and what in-person relationships have to teach...and lead a partial existence, a half-life in a half world.”⁴⁵ Ezza culture believes that a human person is in unity with God, other people and the entire creation. Communion is central to their lives. They have communion with God and with one another as individuals and as community. They engage in private and communal prayers. They worship God in private and in public and share the communal sacrifice with God and with one another. They commune with other people through giving and receiving in human society. For example, during famine, food is usually scarce in my village. Even during the harvesting period

⁴⁴ Ezza people call God *Chiukfu*. In central Igbo language God is called *Chi-ukwu* which is pronounced *Chukwu*.

⁴⁵ Jack Finnegan, *The Audacity of Spirit: The Meaning and Shaping of Spirituality Today* (Dublin: Veritas, 2008), 230.

when food is generally abundant, many families still may not afford three square meals a day.

However, the people readily share with neighbours, whatever food they have in their family. A cup of rice or a piece of yam is shared to reach everybody in the locality. Care and respect for each other is generally the norm. Indeed, everyone in the village has a propensity to respect everything in creation—animals, trees, rivers, seas and inanimate objects such as stones because they believe that the Spirit of God is in everything. One can say that their lives stem from their faith in God. Because they believe that God is communion, they deal severely with any member of the society who breaks the rule of communion.

My experience as a religious sister in community life with my sisters shows me the importance of communion for human beings. I observe that whenever the sisters live in communion, there is peace and harmony in the community. On the other hand, anarchy and division ensue when the rule of communion is neglected either by an authoritative superior or even by the entire community. Sometimes, this ugly state leads to the loss of excellent vocations and to the untimely removal of leaders, which does not augur well for the life of the community. The experience of living in a religious community also inspires me to raise the questions: Does Christianity forget the central message of Christ which is communion? What do world leaders consider to be the most important reality which could lead to peace and harmony in the society if not communion?

Delimitation of the Research

Trinitarian theology is vast. It deals with different aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity including the historical development of the doctrine. Our thesis could not treat all areas of trinitarian theology. This work is a modest investigation of the Trinity in Ezza culture. Thus, it limits its attention to seeking to understand how the communion that exists in Ezza culture is the image of the trinitarian communion.

1.3 Description of the Theological Focus for Research

St Anselm of Canterbury, with reference to theology, maintained that “I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand...that unless I

believe, I shall not understand.”⁴⁶ He meant that our faith inspires our search to know the God we believe in. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity is both a mystery and a central article of faith which Christians need to understand and apply to their individual lives. The subject matter of this research is inspired by the trinitarian interpretation of the Cappadocian fathers on the unity and plurality in the Trinity. This is what led the author to research the topic of communion in Ezza culture as a resemblance of oneness and unity in the Godhead. For example, when Gregory of Nazianzus contended that “Father is a name of relation in which the Father relates to the Son and the Son to the Father,”⁴⁷ he established the background for a better understanding of what such a relationship entails. It is a relationship that signifies love and communion.

This idea of communion and love in the Godhead inspires the author of this thesis to argue that since God created human beings in God’s image and likeness, it seems plausible to argue that the communion in her Ezza tradition is a resemblance of the trinitarian communion in the Godhead. Every authentic theology must include life or activities in reference to God. Thus, the perception of communion in Ezza culture as an image of trinitarian communion is a worthwhile theological endeavour. Since God is the author of the communion that exists among human communities, the same should be true about communion that exists in Ezza culture. Because theology is “faith seeking understanding,” according to Anselm it is *ad rem* for this thesis to explore both the communion in the Trinity and the communion in Ezza culture in order to explore how the communion in Ezza culture resembles trinitarian communion.⁴⁸

1.4 Methodology

Our thesis will employ the documentary research method which Teresa Whitaker and Marjorie Fitzpatrick describe as follows: “Documentary research...is where documents are the raw data and where the method consists of sampling, collecting, collating,

⁴⁶St. Anselm, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion with A Reply on Behalf of the Fool and by Guanilo and The Author’s Reply to Gaunilo*, trans. with an introduction M.J. Charlesworth (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), #1, p115.

⁴⁷Nazianzus, *Theological Oration*, 16.

⁴⁸ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 115.

analysing, and interpreting relevant documents”⁴⁹ This method will help in analysing and understanding the lives and writings of the Cappadocian fathers on the Trinity and trinitarian communion. It will also analyse documents on Ezza culture and society as they relate to their life of communion with God and with one another. The use of this methodology is appropriate because according to Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, “The beauty of this method is that it does not intrude in people’s lives but can offer deep insights into society, culture, and individual lives.”⁵⁰ To be able to gain such insight, it is crucial to determine the trustworthiness of these documents and to interpret them correctly.

1.5 Research Method

Our thesis will employ Whitaker and Fitzpatrick’s documentary research method, and in particular the analysis of documents citing John Scott’s four rules for determining trustworthiness of any document.⁵¹ Our research also uses a specific type of documentary analysis known as hermeneutics to examine these documents. The theoretical framework of this study is trinitarian theology, specifically trinitarian communion. Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott comment that “Documents need to be evaluated to determine their trustworthiness.... The trustworthiness of documentary research is assessed by four interdependent criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning, which provide useful quality appraisal criteria for all stages of the research.”⁵² Our thesis uses these four rules in investigating the topic.

Discussing “Authenticity,” Whitaker and Fitzpatrick cite Scott who wrote that “A document should be interrogated to see if it is authentic or genuine. For example, it is very easy to fake photographs with new technology. In assessing the authenticity of a document, two factors can be taken into account: soundness and authorship.”⁵³ In relation to soundness, Whitaker and Fitzpatrick again cite Scott who wrote:

The researcher could ask the following questions of the document or artefact: is it sound? Is it an original or is it a fake? Is it a copy of a copy?

⁴⁹Teresa Whitaker and Marjorie Fitzpatrick, *Social Research Methodologies and Methods for Emerging Researchers* (Dublin: Wise Owls, 2021), 280.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 310. See also John Scott, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 19-35.

⁵¹ Scott, *A Matter of Record*, 19-35.

⁵²Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, *Social Research Methodologies*, 295. See also Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 4th ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2013), 221-222.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Is it incomplete? Has it be corrupted in transmission? Are they significant errors in grammar and spelling? If it is an old document: was it written on the parchment, which is appropriate to the time it was written?⁵⁴

For this thesis, the documents relating to interpretation of the Trinity produced by the Cappadocian fathers in the fourth century are authentic materials that have served the Church well in its teaching of trinitarian theology. They are original and reliable documents, written by the Cappadocians in solid books. Modern editions and translations of the original fourth century texts are good without major errors in grammar and spelling.

On the matter of authorship, Whitaker and Fitzpatrick once again reference Scott who asked:

Can a particular name, date, or place which may be inscribed on the document be authenticated? Is it a forgery? Can we get both internal and external evidence about the authenticity of the author? For example, internal evidence is vocabulary and literary style. External evidence could consist of chemical tests carried out on handwritten documents or old parchments.⁵⁵

The writings of the Cappadocian fathers are accepted by the Church as standard and orthodox teaching of trinitarian theology.

(2) Credibility: Whitaker and Fitzpatrick note that “researchers should adopt an attitude of methodological distrust. Many official documents represent the interests of the powerful, so the question could be posed: in whose interests were these documents produced? Are they sincere?”⁵⁶

Sincerity: The questions around sincerity according to Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott are:

Are the documents prejudiced? How can we appraise if a document is distorted? Is the author sincere in his/her point of view? Did the author actually believe what they recorded? If they are official documents, the author may not have any choice in whether to be sincere or not. Be aware that personal documents can be written for many different reasons. How close to the event was the document produced?⁵⁷

The documents used in our thesis are not biased and they are not false materials on

⁵⁴ Ibid., 295-296.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 296

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 296.

trinitarian theology. The authors sincerely interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity in their writings. They conceived their work as orthodox teaching of the Trinity. Their interpretation of the trinitarian theology was accepted by the early Church. The Cappadocians are hailed as the heroes who made a breakthrough in controversy around the interpretation of the Trinity by the early Church and subsequent generations of Christians up to the contemporary trinitarian debates. The documents they wrote were centred on the doctrine of the Trinity. They are not personal documents. Their works were written during the fourth century of Christian faith at the time of trinitarian controversy.

Accuracy: Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott ask: “How accurate is the document? Mostly big inaccuracies will be self-explanatory. It is more likely that primary sources are more accurate than secondary sources or even tertiary...because of the time lapse.”⁵⁸ The Cappadocians produced authoritative documents on the doctrine of the Trinity. Their works are used as the primary sources in our thesis.

(3) Representativeness: Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott write that,

Researchers will need to question whether the documents represent the totality of all the available documents on a particular issue. This comes down to their survival and availability and leads to the following questions: Survival: How have the documents survived over time? Due to their sensitive nature, were documents destroyed? Did some documents disappear because they were misfiled? Official papers are often deposited in archives and may survive and remain unopened for years before they are opened to the public.⁵⁹

In our thesis, the documents used have survived in libraries throughout the world especially theological and the libraries of institutions that study the lives of the Church fathers. Not only were they never destroyed, they have been highly esteemed and constantly consulted by scholars and teachers alike.

Availability: Again, Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott write:

Ideally, the researcher must have some idea about the number and type of documents that might have been produced in the first place and also about their availability. This involves a search for sources by the researcher, and an attempt to understand the principles on which the various archives have been constructed in order to compile a list of the relevant documents and to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 296-297.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 297.

choose a sample from them.⁶⁰

The documents for our thesis are available in scholarly libraries and online. They are not difficult to locate or access.

(4) Meaning: According to Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott,

The overarching reason for examining a document is to understand the meaning of the document and the significance of what it contains...For example, many documents from the 19th century may be written in English that is incomprehensible today, or documents may be in a different language and may require a translator...documents may be read in two levels: the literal and interpretive.⁶¹

The documents generated by the Cappadocian fathers were written in English and where translation to English has been made, this has been to a high standard. These are official standard books for Christian teaching.

Literal: Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott claim that,

The literal meaning of a document relates to its face value, for example, in the 19th century the word ‘whitster’ was used in the English census and described a person who bleaches textiles but the word is no longer in use today. The word doesn’t tell us about the life of a whitster, as this word would require a deeper investigation and interpretation.⁶²

Contemporary English users are able to understand the writings of the Cappadocians that are used in our thesis. They do not contain archaic words. The translators used plain English language.

Interpretative: In the words of Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott, “The interpretative meaning requires the researcher to go beyond surface meanings, to dig deeper, to examine the genre, style...and the cultural context of the document.”⁶³ Our thesis analysed the documents of the Cappadocians around the doctrine of the Trinity from the cultural context of trinitarian theology in the fourth century of Christian faith. As maintained by Scott, cited by Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, “The ultimate interpretation of the meaning of the text will derive from the researcher’s judgment that this interpretation makes sense, given his or her understanding of the author’s situation and intentions.”⁶⁴ It is my understanding that the Cappadocians taught the orthodox trinitarian theology that inspired

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid., 287-298.

⁶³ Ibid., 298.

⁶⁴ Ibid. See also Scott, *A Matter of Record*, 31.

me to use their texts in this thesis. As stated by Whitaker and Fitzpatrick citing Scott,

Texts may have very different meanings. When an author produces a text, they have an intended meaning. However, the audience of a text may apply a different meaning: The most that can be achieved by a researcher is an analysis which shows how the inferred internal meaning of the text opens up some possibilities for interpretation by its audience and closes off others.⁶⁵

Applying this statement to our thesis, it means that the Cappadocians did not set out to develop the social or communal model of the Trinity. This is inferred by the way they interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity in the early Church. As our thesis infers communal model from the interpretation of the Trinity by the Cappadocian fathers, it also ensures that the discourse on the Trinity does not reduce the Trinity and Its communion to the level of human ideology. It must be a theology that recognises analogical discourse as the most pertinent way of speaking about the Trinity in order to accord due respect to the “mystery” aspect of the Trinity. In the words of Declan Marmion and Rik Van Nieuwenhove,

All dogmatic statements are essentially negative in that they do not intend to penetrate the mystery itself. Ultimately, the mystery of the Father, Son, and Spirit reveals itself in worship and the liturgy. It was by silence that one gave honour to the mysteries of the Trinity.⁶⁶

The Trinity is truly a mystery beyond human understanding; however, the incarnation of Jesus, his life and teaching, especially his revelation of the Father and Spirit have shed light on the great mystery. As a result, trinitarian theologians are able to reflect meaningfully on Jesus’ revelation of the Father and the Spirit. Indeed, the interpretation of the Trinity by the Church and her theologians comes from what Jesus has revealed about the Trinity. Any authentic document on the Trinity must show a good representation of the teaching of the Church and her theologians around the Trinity. Finally, it must seek a meaning that establishes clarity of expression of the documents.

This methodology is very useful in the interpreting and attaining a measure of understanding of the Trinity. That understanding, according to John Zizioulas, is “an event of communion.”⁶⁷ According to this model, the researcher will be attentive to the

⁶⁵ Ibid. See also Scott, *A Matter of Record*, 34-35.

⁶⁶ Declan Marmion and Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71.

⁶⁷ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 17.

definition of the Trinity and trinitarian communion as it is recorded in the documents of the early Church. The process of interpretation will be critically examined in order to investigate how and why the early Church and theologians developed their own unique interpretation of the Trinity. It will also show how social trinitarian theologians developed communal understanding of God that inspires the author of this thesis to argue that the communion that exists in Ezza culture is the image of trinitarian communion.

The use of a Hermeneutics (interpretation) has been used to analyse all documents featured in this thesis. According to Nancy Moules et al., hermeneutics is "the practice and theory of interpretation and understanding in human context; the science, art, and philosophy of interpretation."⁶⁸ With time, hermeneutics acquired the "status of an auxiliary discipline with the established disciplines that concerned themselves with interpreting texts or signs."⁶⁹ During the time of the Renaissance three types of hermeneutics were developed as follows: "theological hermeneutics (*hermeneutica sacra*) and a philosophical hermeneutics (*hermeneutica profana*), as well as a juridical hermeneutics (*hermeneutica juris*)."⁷⁰ Thus, hermeneutics has become a very important tool not only in the discipline of theology but also in interpreting the social sciences and humanities.

1.5.1 The Hermeneutic Method of Sandra Schneiders

The hermeneutic method of Sandra Schneiders, described as "Historical consciousness, effective history, effective historical consciousness and Appropriation," is used to understand both the Cappadocians's interpretation of the Trinity and communal life in Ezza culture.⁷¹ Schneiders applied this method in interpreting how the mind relates with the things it knows in history. For her, an individual's history and tradition shapes the way that person knows. She insists that "The language in which we think, the culture in which we participate, the education both formal and informal that shapes our questioning...all the effects of history *on* our intelligence influence the process of

⁶⁸Nancy J. Moules et al., *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: From Philosophy to Practice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 3.

⁶⁹ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷¹Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 159, 160, 169. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975.), 266-274.

knowing.”⁷² She contends that the knower passes through this knowing process which leads to understanding, and so a knower cannot “assume a transcendent, stationary, detached, point of view from which to observe some detached or free-standing object of knowledge.”⁷³

When Schneiders’ method is used to seek knowledge and understanding of the teaching of the Cappadocian fathers on the Trinity and the knowledge of communion in Ezza culture, there should be an “ever-changing involvement of the consciousness of the knower in the flow of history” of Christianity that gave rise to the doctrine of the Trinity and Ezza culture as expressed in their communal life. In other words, our mind is not a blank sheet but an interactive reality that involves itself in the understanding of the topic of our thesis.⁷⁴ For Schneiders,

our historical-consciousness does not encounter a free-standing ‘objective’ knowable, for example, the past ‘as it was,’ because the past is not a detached stationary object. Whatever of the past is known only in the present, therefore as shaped by its passage through history from its initiating occurrence to the present.⁷⁵

The teaching of the Cappadocian fathers on the Trinity is not static; it did not come into being in the fourth century and end in that era. The fathers made a unique contribution to understanding the doctrine of the Trinity that continues to inspire each generation of Christians since. In the same way, communal life in Ezza culture thrives through time and extends from generation to generation. Each generation interprets and reinterprets the meaning of that communion in their lives and society. Hence, both the teaching of the Cappadocians on the Trinity and communion in Ezza culture have generated “effective history” which Schneiders defines as “historical reality not only as initiating event but also as modified and amplified by all that the initiating event has produced.”⁷⁶ It is not only that the Cappadocians interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century but the influence of their teaching continues to shape and reshape the Christian understanding of that doctrine by contemporary Christians that make their contribution important. Thus, the meaning of the teaching of the Cappadocians on the Trinity and communion in Ezza culture is located in the “mutual indwelling of effective history and historical

⁷² Ibid., 159.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 159-160.

consciousness which result in “effective historical consciousness” according to Schneiders.⁷⁷ She implies that a researcher, “in all her or his historical density, is always implicated in the knowing and therefore in the known.”⁷⁸ This means that the author of our thesis cannot be detached from understanding the meaning which is generated in the trinitarian interpretation of communion in Ezza culture. Indeed, as a Christian, she is aware of and participates in the doctrine of the Trinity in the Church and as an Ezza person; she lives out the communion in her culture on a daily basis.

The involvement of the author in investigating the communion of the Trinity and communion in Ezza culture is not merely to gain information; it is also geared toward the transformation of the researcher, her readers and society. There is always a need during interpretation of a text to have what Schneiders calls: “Appropriation: the transformative understanding of the subject matter of the text.”⁷⁹ During the interpretation of a text, a reader is involved in a process that Schneiders calls the “fusion of horizons [by which] the world horizon of the reader fuses with the horizon of the world projected by the text. The reader enters into and is transformed by the world before the text.”⁸⁰ Schneiders contends that dealing with written text is not only about gaining information but also transformation of life. She calls this process “the relation of participation,” which means that this research ought to be a life changing event both for the researcher and for others that will encounter the study.⁸¹ “Truth claims” according to Schneiders “are not merely dogmatic propositions, assertions of fact, or deliverance of information but the presentation of reality that offers itself to us as a way of being.”⁸² Thus, the trinitarian interpretation of the Cappadocians is a true reality which endures and transforms Christian life. The reason that Schneiders gives in favour of appropriating a text instead of getting information is that “the ultimate question is not simply, What does the text say? But, What is the meaning of the text for the believing community?”⁸³ This thesis reads the teaching of the Cappadocian fathers on the Trinity and sees communion as a significant meaning of their trinitarian interpretation. .

⁷⁷ Ibid., 160.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 172. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 273.

⁸¹ Ibid., 173.

⁸² Ibid., 174.

⁸³ Ibid., 177.

1.6 Literature Review

African people love life living in a community. Within this context, their lives, according to John Mbiti, “are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices.”⁸⁴ So, communality and religiosity are two terms often used to define African people. Christopher Ugwu writes that Africans show their religiosity “in a firm belief in God and other pantheons of divinities.”⁸⁵ They express their belief in God in the names they answer such as Chukwudi (God exists), and in a variety of other ways. Our dissertation is a fresh exploration of this subject matter, exploring belief in God (Trinity) and communality in Ezza culture. Many scholars over the years have written about God and communality in the African context. Our research, however, aims to review the literature in order to establish the indispensable place of this research among the many other contributions of scholars.

An African scholar, Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, in his efforts to interpret the Trinity in an African context, argues unconvincingly that since communality is inherent in Africa’s understanding of life, the God of Africa must not be one God but rather a “community of gods.”⁸⁶ In his own words: “The centrality of communality underscores the fundamental and irrevocable belief of the African in relationality. For the Africans, everyone, and in fact everything in the world is related – connected by an all-pervasive force.”⁸⁷ He also believes that the whole cosmos is caught up in that relatedness and the divine cannot be understood in African context except when viewed as community. Therefore, he advocates for an understanding of God in terms of a “community of gods.”⁸⁸ As attractive as Ogbonnaya’s argument may seem, a distinction needs to be made between speaking of a triune God as community and speaking of a community of human beings in the world.

Whereas Ibrahim Bitrus in his book *Community and Trinity in Africa* writes that “Community is the network of human and non-human relationships marred by sin and

⁸⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

⁸⁵ Christopher Okeke Tagbo Ugwu, “The Demise of the African Gods: Fallacy or Reality,” University of Nigerian Nsukka, 84th Inaugural Lecture (September 2015):6, accessed October 18, 2021. <https://www.in.unn.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/84th-Inaugural-Lecture-prof.pdf>.

⁸⁶ A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (New York: Paragon, 1994), 14.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

structural evils, the Trinity is the free, just, and loving communion of three distinct co-equal divine persons, a communion that also embraces both humanity and the world.”⁸⁹ Moreover, when we speak of God as a community of three divine Persons we are referring to a “Holy Trinity, life-giving, consubstantial, and indivisible” according to the teaching of the Church.⁹⁰ For example, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “the work of creation is attributed to the Father in particular; it is equally a truth of faith that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are the one, indivisible principle of creation.”⁹¹ This implies that finally, we do not speak of unity in the human community in the same way as we speak of unity in the Trinity. The unity of the Trinity is so sublime that the Church teaches that “the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.”⁹² We cannot in any way speak of a person in any given community as wholly in another person considering the individuality which characterises human beings.

We agree with Bitrus’ criticism of Ogbonnaya that his attempt to reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity in an African context “has not explored the transformative significance of the doctrine for the African society.”⁹³ Bitrus indicates that it is true that communality and relatedness are fundamental in Africa; however, whenever we compare human community to the divine community of the Trinity, we are speaking only in an analogical sense. This point will constantly be emphasised in our thesis. Hence, when this thesis states that love and communion in Ezza culture resembles trinitarian communion, it is stating so analogically. It is absurd to think about God as copying the social life of human beings; rather, human beings imitated the God who created them. Thus, one of the shortcomings in Ogbonnaya’s interpretation of the Trinity in Africa is that he uses the life of African people as an example of the inner life of God. The Divinity in Ezza culture will be better understood and become more relevant if people try to reflect the life of God instead of God reflecting the life of humanity. In that way, Ezza people have nothing to inspire them to greater love since they are already an inspiration to their Creator. Unlike our thesis Ogbonnaya does not state the implications of the Trinity for

⁸⁹ Ibrahim S. Bitrus, *Community and Trinity in Africa* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 1.

⁹⁰ CCC. #689.

⁹¹ CCC. #316

⁹² CCC. #255. See also Neuner and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 152.

⁹³ Bitrus, *Community and Trinity*, 4

human life; he only describes the inner life of the Trinity in a way that does not do justice to the African concept of God.

Christopher Mwoleka is another African theologian who conceived the Trinity in terms of communion. He maintains that “The three Divine Persons share everything in such a way that they are not three gods but only One.”⁹⁴ For him, the intellectualisation of the mystery of the Trinity is the wrong way to understand the mystery. Therefore, he believes that “The right approach to the Trinity is to *imitate* the Trinity...On believing in this mystery, the first thing we should have done was to imitate God, then we would ask no more questions.”⁹⁵ Mwoleka insists that the mystery is not given in order that we may speculate about it or solve it as a riddle but rather “He is offering us life. He is telling us: ‘This is what it means to live, now begin to live as I do.’”⁹⁶ He concludes that God’s revelation of this mystery to us is to “stress that life is not life at all unless it is shared.”⁹⁷

According to Mwoleka, the Trinity is a life to be lived and not a mystery to be solved. Thus, the true way of understanding the trinitarian life is to share our lives with others and love and serve them. Ogbonnaya, in the words of Mwoleka, approaches the “Trinity from the wrong side” by saying that because Africans live communal life, their God can only be many in community.⁹⁸ Our thesis concurs with Mwoleka in holding that the correct understanding of the Trinity is to imitate the life of love in the Godhead. Mwoleka laments that human beings get it all wrong when they think of the Trinity in abstract terms rather than “in concrete facts of our human earthly life: present the life of the Trinity as shared and lived by us Christians here and now.”⁹⁹ For him, “The reason why we should first have to wait here for a number of years before going to heaven would seem to be that we should practise and acquire some competence in the art of sharing life. Without this practice we are apt to mess up things in heaven.”¹⁰⁰ Mwoleka captures the core of our thesis in his statement that imitating the trinitarian communion is the vocation of human beings on earth. Living in another way or trying to acquire only the rational understanding of the Trinity will achieve nothing for humanity. The reason for studying

94 Christopher Mwoleka, “Trinity and Community,” *African Ecclesiastical Review* 17, no. 4 (July 1975): 203.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 203-204.

98 Ibid., 204.

99 Ibid., 205.

100 Ibid., 205-206.

the doctrine of the Trinity is not to end up in speculative analysis of the Divine but to learn how our God exists so that we can live the life of God.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye in her book *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* argues that the Trinity must be understood in relational terms. For her, the trinitarian communion is an example of loving relationships that should exist between men and women in the world. Furthermore, she uses the Trinity to critique patriarchal relations in Africa. She contends that “Our baptism in the name of the Trinity means that we should stand not for monarchies and hierarchies but rather participation.”¹⁰¹ Her idea implies that to accept faith in the Trinity entails a life of equality lived in the recognition that other people merit our care and concern instead of waiting to be served by them. A person shows that care and concern by sharing houses, food, clothing, land, money and even time with relatives and neighbours. “My house is your house” is how Ezza people express their oneness in ownership of property, which basically means that what I have belongs to you and whatever belongs to you is equally mine.¹⁰² Our thesis is meant to further the efforts of applying the understanding of the Trinity in a similar direction to society and social relations.

Charles Nyamiti is another African theologian who also interprets the doctrine of the Trinity in an African context. He sees the African ancestral relation as the image of the Trinity. He maintains that “God is our ancestor through Christ.”¹⁰³ Applied to Ezza culture, it means that God is the source of humanity and the process of Incarnation links people to the Trinity in a special way. Nyamiti declares that “The Father is the Ancestor of the Son, the Son is the Descendant of the Father and the Holy Spirit is the mutual Oblation between the two.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, he uses the African idea of ancestor to describe the Trinity. This is another way of saying that Christ originates from the Father, that is, Christ is the Son of God while the Holy Spirit plays the part of offering between the Father and the Son. The author of this thesis commends Nyamiti for his efforts in developing an African trinitarian theology; however, his idea is problematic because ancestors in the African context are mere creatures who lived good lives on earth. They are not divine in

¹⁰¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000), 143.

¹⁰² An Ezza Adage.

¹⁰³ Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspectives* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 19-20.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Nyamiti, “The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective,” *African Christian Studies* 12, no. 4 (1996): 55-56.

the way we understand trinitarian Divinity. At best, the ancestors could be compared to the saints in the Christian tradition. Africans revere ancestors “as good examples of proper life” and as people who lived lives of love. They are generally believed to be at peace with God in the spiritual world.¹⁰⁵

It is problematic to interpret the Trinity with the terminology of ancestors. The Persons in the Trinity are divine Beings. Even in the incarnation, Jesus still retains his divine nature with his human nature. Thus, Nyamiti’s idea of the Trinity does not do full justice to the divinity of God.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the idea of interpreting the Trinity with the notion of ancestors seems to be popular among some African theologians such as Kwame Bediako and Benezet Bujo.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, our thesis is about communion in the Trinity and communion in Ezza culture. It argues that loving communion in the Trinity inspires communal life in Ezza culture. Thus, it holds that interpreting the Trinity with the image of communion is the correct way to understand the Trinity in the Ezza context. Indeed, the communal model of the Trinity is the best analogy in Ezza to the Trinity. This is because it captures the life of participation and sharing that is central to Ezzas’ way of life. God cannot accurately be seen as an Ancestor in the African traditional religion (ATR).

James Kombo is another African author who uses African terminology to define the Trinity. He states that “God is the Great *Muntu*, the Supreme Vital Force.”¹⁰⁸ According to him, God as the “Great *Muntu*,”

has oneness of Ntu and activity with the Son and the Holy Spirit: The ‘*genuine Muntu*,’ that the Son has, is the ‘Great *Muntu*,’ and the Holy Spirit is a perfect reflection of the ‘Great *Muntu*,’ and the Father is a perfect reflection of the ‘Great *Muntu*.’¹⁰⁹

In other words, the real Life Force in Jesus is Divinity, both the Father and the Holy Spirit share in the same divinity that is in operative in Jesus. Kombo endeavours to describe the

¹⁰⁵Jaco Beyers & Dora N. Mphahlele, “Jesus Christ as ancestor: An African Christian understanding,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65, no.1 (April 2009)1-5, accessed October 18, 2021, <http://www.hts.org.za/doi:10.4102/hts.v65i1.132>.

¹⁰⁶ See Teddy C. Sakupapa “The Trinity in African Christian Theology: An Overview of Contemporary Approaches,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no.1 (November 2019): 4, accessed October 18, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5460>.

¹⁰⁷ See Kwame Biako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004. Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O’Donohue (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

¹⁰⁸ James Henry Owino Kombo, *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought: The Holy Trinity, Theological Hermeneutics, and the African Intellectual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 243.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

Trinity using African terminology. He shows a metaphysical way of understanding the Trinity in the African context and reveals creativity in his theological development. It is good to employ African ideas to understanding the unity and diversity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, he tends to subordinate the Son to the Father. Moreover, the Trinity as the central doctrine of the Christian faith is not meant to be an intellectual notion alone. It has practical implications for human life in the world. This is the one major area in which our thesis makes a significant contribution. African theologians such as Mwoleka who interpret the Trinity with the image of communion emphasise the Trinity as a model for human life. Those who describe the Trinity with an African idea of relationship with the ancestors such as Nyamiti fail to do justice to the divinity of God and consequently to the African understanding of God. The third category who conceives the Trinity with African concepts such as Kombo deals with only the metaphysical understanding of the Trinity.¹¹⁰

All these African authors fail to see that there is already the image of the Trinity in the world. If the life of the Trinity is best understood as oneness and love among the three divine Persons, then the communal life in Africa is already a pointer analogically to the trinitarian communion, albeit imperfect. Like their predecessors from the West and America who showed an interest in the emergence, development and renaissance of trinitarian theology down the ages, these African trinitarian authors want to develop the doctrine of the Trinity in an African context.¹¹¹ They try to understand the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as it is revealed in Scripture. They examine the link between the three in their efforts to avoid an erroneous interpretation of the Trinity.¹¹² They are to be commended for the efforts they make to bring the notion of the Trinity to African theology. However, some of the images they use, such as ancestors, will be difficult to apply to the divinity of the Godhead. Moreover, their interpretation does not reveal the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for the life of humanity.

Our thesis explores the Cappadocians' teaching on the Trinity as a corrective measure to some of their inadequate conceptions of the Trinity. Specifically, it uses the work of scholars such as Catherine LaCugna, John Zizioulas and Leonardo Boff, to name

¹¹⁰ See Sakupapa, "The Trinity in African Christian Theology," 6.

¹¹¹ See Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 1.

¹¹² Bernard L. Marthalar, *The Creed* (Mystic, Con: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987), 74-86. See also William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 8-17.; Pelikan, *The Emergence of Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 172-190.; Walker, *A History of Christian Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 69-115.

but a few, to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity as the central belief of the Christian faith has implications for believers.¹¹³ These scholars rightly contend, that the doctrine of the Trinity is not only to be understood rationally. They insist that it has to inform the lives of human beings in the world. Some of these theologians focus on reconstruction and development of the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity. They present a communal or social model of the Trinity.¹¹⁴ This is where our thesis belongs. Sakupapa contends that,

One may conclude that most African perspectives to the Trinity adopted the social analogy of the Trinity to draw implications of the doctrine for Christian life and society. The attempt to place the symbol of the Triune God in the public sphere (often on the basis of African communality and relationality) illustrates the importance of the social context in African theological method.¹¹⁵

The social model of trinitarian interpretation is not without its limitations. Sakupapa rightly remarked that communion, which is sometimes emphasised by this method, presents “an understanding of communion without due cognisance of hierarchical relationships in terms of gender, race, class, age and sexual orientation.”¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, all theological thinking about the mystery of God is nothing more than faith seeking to understand God’s revelation to humanity.¹¹⁷ Indeed, use of the image of communion in the interpreting the Trinity in our thesis does not exhaust the meaning of the trinitarian God.

Some contemporary theologians too, such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, try to contextualise theology.¹¹⁸ This approach moves theology from being centred in Europe to become instead a global enterprise that tries to situate theology in different contexts and cultures of the world. As has been mentioned, some African theologians have shown a

¹¹³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988).; Christoph Schwöbel, “The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1-30.; Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

¹¹⁴ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 19-20.

¹¹⁵ Sakupapa, “The Trinity in African Christian Theology,” 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ See St Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1, 115.

¹¹⁸ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). See also *The Modern Theologians Reader*, ed. David F. Ford & Mike Higton with Simeon Zahl (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

similar interest in relation to the development of trinitarian theology.¹¹⁹ Their focus is on the interpretation and understanding of the Trinity in the African context. Some lay more emphasis on a more rationalist conception of the Trinity without expounding the relationship of the Trinity with the people. Our thesis, therefore, argues that communion is central to the understanding of the Trinity in African culture. In the Trinity and in Ezza culture, life is defined or characterised by communion. Thus, to understand that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God means that they are created to live in communion.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.1 African Traditional Religion (ATR)

According to Theophilus Okere,

African traditional religion is the homegrown religion of the (people) in Africa. Since it lacks a scripture, it has developed many variant local features, but the basics seem to be the same. A monotheism in the sense of belief in the one supreme God supported by array of created spirits God's powerful agents, the ancestors or the spirit of dead forebears forms the core of the belief system.¹²⁰

Ezza people exhibit a monotheistic variation in their traditional religion since they believe in one God *Chiukfu*. They also believe, like other African traditional religionists, in other "created spirits" who are the agents of God as described by Okere and the ancestors. They believe in one God but, they do not call God Trinity who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Trinity is a Christian name for God. Nonetheless, Religion looms large in everything they do. Bolaji Idowu defines religion as resulting from

man's (woman's) spontaneous awareness of, and spontaneous reaction to, his (her) immediate awareness of a Living Power, 'Wholly Other' and infinitely greater than himself (or herself): a Power mysterious because unseen, yet a present and urgent Reality, seeking to bring man (woman) into communion with Himself (Herself).¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ogbonnaya, On *Communitarian Divinity*. See also Nyamiti, "The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective,"

¹²⁰ Theophilus Okere, *Okere in His Own Words: The Hermeneutics of Culture, Religion and Society*, vol. 1, ed. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Owerri: Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society, 2015), 180.

¹²¹ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 75. See also Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen, "The Place of Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa," in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon, 1991), 40-41.

It is this idea expressed by Idowu that God seeks to bring human beings into communion and facilitates the communion that exists in their communities that led our thesis to insist that communion that exists in Ezza culture is an image of trinitarian communion. Indeed, religion in Ezza culture is about communion with God and with one another.

1.7.2 Communion

Valerie Pannanen writes that communion comes from the Latin word *communio* and the Greek word *koinonia* which means “sharing”¹²² Catherine Nerney and Hal Taussig suggest that another word which expresses this sharing is community; however, communion and community have a slight difference from each other, whereas community is the “concrete living out of communion” but the “unseen counterpart (communion), always and at the same time be a word about life in God and life in and for one another.”¹²³ According to Oduyoye, “Africans recognize life as life-in-community. We can truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary.”¹²⁴ So, sharing and living in intertwined relationships is very important in African life. Therefore, communion as used in our thesis refers to the intimate relationships that exist among the three divine Persons in the Trinity and communal life that is to be found in Ezza culture. In both the Trinity and Ezza culture, communion denotes life of love and intimate relationship and sharing.

1.7.3 Dialogue

The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage describes dialogue as:

neither necessarily, nor necessarily not, the talk of two persons. It is conversation as opposed to monologue, to preaching, lecturing, speeches, narrative or description...and is ultimately derived from GK διάλογος conversation (διά through, across). It has nothing to do with GK δι-

¹²² Valerie Hutchinson Pannanen, ‘Communion,’ in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, vol. 1&2 A-Z, ed. Helene E. Roberts (Chicago, Ill.: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), 181.

¹²³ Catherine Nerney and Hal Taussig, *Re-Imagining Life Together in America: A New Gospel of Community* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2002), 37.

¹²⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” in *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (University of California: Orbis Books, 1979), 110

twice...Dialogue is now very commonly used as discussions taking place between opposing groups (e.g. trade unions and management) or nations.¹²⁵

Burchfield points out that in this sense dialogue could mean a “conversation” which implies people who engage in an intimate talk. Dialogue could also be seen as a “discussion” among persons or group of people about their welfare or to reach conclusions around issues that concern them. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* indicates that dialogue could be defined as “the recorded conversation of two or more persons. As a literal form it is a carefully organized exposition, by means of invented conversation, of contrasting philosophical positions or intellectual attitudes; or it is an element in drama or fiction.”¹²⁶ Thus, dialogue as it is used in this thesis is that between the Cappadocians’ interpretation of the Trinity and the understanding of communion in Ezza culture. The dialogue is really an interaction between the various written documents on the subject matter. It is not a dialogue that involves any face to face discussion

1.7.4 Theology

Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove in *An Introduction to the Trinity* write that theology comes from “two Greek words: *Theos* (God) and *logos* (word),” which literally means a discourse about God.¹²⁷ G. F. Van Ackeren elaborates that theology is a “discourse about God either from the point of view of what can be known about (God) from created world or by natural power of reason (natural theology) or from the point of view of a revelation given by God and received by (human beings) in faith (sacred theology).”¹²⁸ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, it is also known as “science of God.”¹²⁹ However, the definition of theology that is most apt for our thesis is that which comes from an African scholar and

¹²⁵ R. W. Burchfield, ed., *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 210-211.

¹²⁶ Adam Augustyn et al., eds., *Encyclopedia Britannica: A New Survey of Universal Knowledge*, vol. 7 (Chicago: William Benton, 1967), 358.

¹²⁷ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 5.

¹²⁸ G. F. Van Ackeren, “Theology,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, ed. William J. McDonald et al (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), 39. See also Bernard L. Marthaler, *The Creed* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987), 29.

¹²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd and revised ed. (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920), 3. See also Karl Rahner, “Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1993), 1687. “Theology is the *science* of faith.”

theologian, Theophilus Okere. His words, as an African theologian, are appropriate for our thesis. He maintains that

Theology is the echo of the Gospel. ‘Their sound is gone out into all lands’: That is the gospel itself. But this sound coming into contact with the environment, a culture, reverberates, produces another sound, coming back as an echo. This is theology.¹³⁰

For him, theology is an echo from our “culture, our history...our total experience, our mind labouring on the gospel data and giving its own response to it.”¹³¹ This response is *unique* for every locality, and it involves “deepening the faith by reflection, incarnating it, by getting it articulated in our native idiom, establishing a symbiosis between culture and faith.”¹³²

According to Okere, theology is about reflecting on what we believe in order to let faith inspire our actions. Applied to Ezza culture, theology is enriched when it draws insight from both Christian and African traditional religious beliefs. This will help both Christians and Ezza people to learn from their faith and grow in understanding of their religions. This thesis seeks to understand communion in Ezza culture as an image of trinitarian communion through dialoguing with the teaching of the Cappadocian fathers on the Trinity and communion. Our thesis accepts that in studying theology, one does not seek to understand the inner life of God. In the words of Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, it “is not a question of attaining direct knowledge of God, in the sense of the creature rising above the Creator in act of comprehension. Nor can theology claim insight into God’s inner life apart from God’s self-revelation.”¹³³ In short, God reveals God’s self to humanity, people then reflect on their experience of God and theology attempts to understand this experience.¹³⁴

1.7.5 Trinity

Christianity believes and teaches that God is one and at the same time three persons. The basis of the Christian faith in a triune God derives from Jesus who reveals the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one God. Hence, God is Trinity in Christian faith which means, the

¹³⁰ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 186.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 5.

¹³⁴ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 52.

Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. The Church during the Fourth Lateran Council stated that “We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal, infinite...and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, three persons indeed, but one essence, substance or nature.”¹³⁵ The doctrine of the Trinity differentiates Christianity from other Abrahamic faiths like Judaism and Islam. For example, Judaism and Islam believe in one God but their faith is not trinitarian. Indeed, it is only the Christian faith that is clearly trinitarian. The traditional religion of Ezza people believe in the existence of one God but they also believe in God’s agents endowed with the spirit of God but never in the sense of God as Trinity of persons.¹³⁶

Our thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one establishes the context of the dissertation and literature review. It also defines terms that occur in the thesis. This chapter presents the research methodology and methods used in executing this research project. Chapter two examines the notions of communion in Ezza culture. The goal of chapter three is to investigate the interpretation of the Trinity by the Cappadocian fathers through primary and secondary sources and how their description inspires the perception of the Trinity as communion and love. Chapter four explores communion in Ezza culture in dialogue with trinitarian communion as interpreted by the Cappadocian fathers. Chapter five presents conclusion and recommendations.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined very closely the context of this thesis which argues that the communion that exists among Ezza people image the communion of the Blessed Trinity. It was shown that the basis of this argument is that God who created human beings lives in communion in the Godhead. It also contains the literature review. The research questions and methodology to execute the research, and the appropriateness of using such methods was illustrated. This chapter also includes the divisions of the entire thesis into five chapters, showing the overall layout of the dissertation.

The chapter revealed that St Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity as limited to the human mind is incomplete. It was when the Cappadocian fathers especially

¹³⁵Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 152. See also *DS*, 800; *CCC*, # 232-253.

¹³⁶Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 180.

Gregory Nazianzus, showed that "Relationship" is at the core understanding of the Trinity that the social model of the Trinity was 'founded.' It leads social trinitarian theology to argue that the God who lives in communion created human beings to live in communion. This is what is now being echoed by many social trinitarian theologians. Following this tradition, the rationale for our thesis and why communion is at the core of dealing with individualism and in making the world a better place is suggested.

In the next chapter the concept of communion in the Ezza culture will be examined.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNION IN EZZA CULTURE

“I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am.”

John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

2.1 Introduction

In reference to Ezza culture, Mbiti’s words suggest that the term “Communion” is vast. It means different things to different people and in different situations such as Holy Communion in reference to the Catholic partaking of the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10: 16-17). Communion as presented in our thesis has to be considered in various degrees. There can be three distinct sorts of communion in existence. (a) Communion between God and non-Christians. This is attained based on the nature of the human person. According to CCC, God can be known through natural things that God created, especially, human beings who bear the image of God.¹ Hence, the human person at this level relates to God in his/her own way. Applying this to Ezza culture, the meaning of a human person is “*Madzu*” (derived from two words *maa* meaning spirit and *ndzu* meaning alive), that is, spirit that lives as a human being.

A person also could be known as a human being who is fully incorporated in the society by going through different stages of rituals. When a child is born, it is a full person spiritually as it comes from God but socially his/her full humanity begins by a naming ceremony for example.² This spirit that lives is an ontological foundation; consequently, it is linked to *Chiukfu* (Almighty God), the Creator of *Madzu*. As such we are *Madzu* because God is Almighty. It follows, therefore, that *Madzu* who is coming from *Chiukfu* can only resemble the one from whom he/she emerges. In light of this, the trinitarian concept of the Cappadocian fathers becomes relevant. If the Trinity exists as a relational communion in one *ousia*, three *hypostases*,³ then *Madzu* must and should equally relate and exist as a communion like the Trinity.

(b) Communion between God and Christians and other believers.⁴

¹ CCC, 31-34.

² See Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 70.

³ Basil, *Letter*, 214.

⁴ See Acts of the Apostles, “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers...All who believe were together and had all things in

The Christian attains such a communion with God and with others because of the fact of baptism. Paul Avis maintains that, “Communion was very real for the first Christians. They had an overwhelming sense of sharing in a reality greater themselves.”⁵ This communion in the early Christian community is from the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(c) Communion at a higher level. This is the level of divinisation of the individual. The human person at this point relates with God in a more spiritual state.⁶ However, communion according to our thesis reflects the first interpretation of communion. It denotes the notion of oneness, loving relationship and participation in Ezza culture as the imperfect reflection of trinitarian communion. With regard to trinitarian communion, Boff declares that,

Communion means union with (*Communio*). There can be unity only between persons, because only persons are intrinsically open to others, exist with others and are one for one another. Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in community because of communion between them. Communion is the expression of love and life. Life and love, by their very nature, are dynamic and overflowing. So under the name of God we should always see Tri-unity, Trinity as union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁷

Boff defines what trinitarian communion means. It is the overflowing fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Communion is what brings the three divine Persons together in the Godhead. He continues:

In this way, both the identical unity of the divine nature itself and the oneness of the absolute Spirit itself have a strictly trinitarian meaning: the permanent interpenetration, the eternal co-relatedness, the self-surrender of each Person to the others forms the trinitarian union, the union of Persons. In order to express this union, theology, from the sixth century, embraced the Greek term *perichoresis* (each Person contains the other two, each one penetrates the other and is penetrated by them, one lives in the other and vice-versa), or the Latin *circumincessio* (*cessio* with a ‘c’ meaning the active interpenetration of one with the others) or *circuminsessio* (*cessio* with ‘s’ meaning being statically or ecstatically in one another).⁸

common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking of bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favour with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (2: 42-47).

⁵ Paul Avis, *Christians in Communion* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 14. See also LaCugna, *GfU*, 263.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 4-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Trinitarian communion is so dynamic that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in one another. Boff indicates that theology uses the term ‘perichoresis’ to interpret the interpenetration of the three divine Persons in one another. He further states that,

I propose to keep the term *perichoresis* central to my reflections, using it as the structuring principle of my explication of trinitarian faith, keeping the original Greek word as there is no translation that expresses its meaning as well. In the Trinity, all is perichoretic: union, love, hypostatic relationships. The basic reason for this choice is to be found in John 10:30. The Father and I are one’ (*hen*). Note that Jesus is not saying, ‘The Father and I are numerically one’ (*heis*), but uses a term meaning ‘we are together’ (Greek *hen*, as used in v.38: ‘The Father is in me and I am in the Father’). The union of the Father and Son does not blot out the difference and individuality of each. Union rather supposes differentiation. Through love and through reciprocal communion they are one single thing, the one God-love.⁹

Boff implies that the distinction in the Trinity does not erase the oneness of the three divine Persons. They are differentiated in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but communion is central to their life. He retains the term perichoresis as the notion which describe well the ineffable love and communion in the Godhead. Anne Hunt concurs with Boff by saying that, “Life is the essence of God. And life is communion giving and received. This kind of communion is love. Communion and love are the essence of the Trinity. In the Trinity, each of the divine persons exists in, with and for the others in a communion of life and love.”¹⁰ She argues that “To be in communion is to be in loving and life-giving interpersonal relationships of radical reciprocity and mutuality, of mutual giving and receiving.”¹¹ According to her, the life of communion marks the life in the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit lives in eternal communion.

2.2 Exploring the Etymology and Definition of Communion

C.S. Lewis believed that, “The present is the point at which time touches eternity.”¹² In relation to our thesis, this means that communion in human society reveals the image of the eternal loving God in the world. George Pannikulam tells us that the term communion

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Anne Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 11.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1944), 76.

comes from the Greek word *koinōnia*.¹³ C.T. Onions elaborates—It implies “sharing, participation and fellowship.”¹⁴ To be able to share and participate in other people’s lives on a daily basis indicates a life of love and responsibility. Boff maintains that,

Ex-istent is synonymous with living reasoning. Existence is the property of being that from within (interiority) relates outward (*ex*) to other beings, establishing communion and relationships of giving and receiving. So life comprises communion and participation, synthesis with what is different, unfolding of itself in the direction of another.¹⁵

This means that another person is treasured and included in one’s life. The one who shares with others is not living in isolation. He/she is bridging the gap of individualism and consequently reducing the lack of care and solidarity. For example, what is shared could be material, time, or even spiritual help. Moreover, to participate in another person’s life is to live an intimate relationship with the person, shown by being interested in the welfare and well-being of one’s neighbour. The person who is interested in others will be ready to be called upon to serve and also be able to receive service from others. In essence, the person will not be a loner in society; instead, there exists the life of give and take. Linking the life of communion with the Trinity, Boff asserts that,

It is not enough to state that the Trinity is the distinction between the three Persons. The essential characteristic of each Person is to be *for* others, *through* the others, *with* the others and *in* the others. They do not exist in themselves for themselves: the ‘in themselves’ is ‘for the other.’ The process of self-realization of the Trinity is made up of a dynamism of eternal communion, sharing the life of one with the others, the interpenetration and co-inherence of the Three. So we come back to the traditional formulas: the Father is wholly in the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son is wholly in the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and the Son. All are equally eternal, infinite and loving communion. Diversity-in-communion is the source reality in God, whose unity can only be union of this personal diversity. The divine unity is the actualization of the process of one Person communing with the others, of one Living sharing in the lives of the others.¹⁶

Boff has described the complete communion that can only exist in the perfect Trinity. Comparing this to communion in human society, while it is somehow mirrors trinitarian communion, Boff asserts that, “The life we live is loaded with ambiguities, since it is

13 George Panikulam, *Koinonia in The New Testament: Dynamic Expression of Christian Life* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 1.

14 C.T. Onions, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 196.

¹⁵ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127- 128.

always life against death, a process of upholding life against lethal destructive forces. Human hope is set, basically, on a life no longer threatened by death, on a process of self-realization that is continually renewed in line with the future.”¹⁷ In other words, although, human life comes from the life of the Trinity, it is not perfect as trinitarian life.

Furthermore, a life of fellowship indicates equality and companionship whereby a human person integrates himself/herself with other human beings for the good of society. Hence, there exists in communion an intimate relationship and love. John Ayto interprets communion as: “Something that is *related* to something else, is etymologically carried back to it. The word is based on *relātes*, the past-participle of Latin *referre* ‘carry back, to’ (source of English refer).”¹⁸ To explain relate as ‘carry back to’ suggests that communion when applied to Ezza culture denotes a life of *i buru nnanu* (being one) and *i mekota onu* (being united as one). This identification with others leads to *i mekota onu* which is doing things together with others. For example, *otuko nri* (eating together) which is part of the marriage rite in Ezza enables a new couple to eat together for the first time in intimate communion as husband and wife. When Ezza people are in cordial relationship in their society, their love manifests itself in outward expressions of oneness in sharing material things such as food and kola nuts.¹⁹ Thus, breaking and eating of kola nuts is one expression of promoting life and establishing communion. J.Y. Campbell also states that,

Koinwvός is derived from the root *koin-*, ‘common’ and means accordingly ‘one who has something in common with *someone* else...It should be kept in mind, however, that sometimes the thing which is common is really a person or persons...When two or more persons have the same thing in common...some kind and degree of relationship is necessarily established between them. But the primary idea expressed by *koi-wvός* and its cognates is not that of association with another person or other persons, but that of participation in something in which others also participate.”²⁰

The central element that Ezza people have in common in their society is God (*Chiukfu*), the binding factor of communion in Ezza. The second element is human beings. Ezza people value human beings more than money and wealth, which means in Ezza that (*onye*

¹⁷ Ibid., 126.

¹⁸ John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origin* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), 438. See Also Avis, *Christians in Communion*, 15.

¹⁹ Kola nuts are nuts from kola trees that grow in Nigeria. The nuts are used to welcome visitors and for celebrations and prayers in Ezza culture.

²⁰ J.Y. Campbell, “Koinonia and its Cognates in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51, no.4 (December, 1932):353. See also Avis, *Christians in Communion*, 15.

nweru madzu ka onye nweru ego). This results in the desire to be concerned for the welfare of others. Okere writes that Ezza's notion of wealth is for sharing and not for the enrichment of the individual who possesses them.²¹ The Church has suggested that this common ground also exists in the Trinity where the Godhead is common to the three divine Persons. It developed this in its interrelation of Church documents by explaining that "The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, but they are not three Gods but the three Persons participate in one divinity."²² Analogically, in Ezza culture each person participates in a certain measure in the family, extended family, kindred, village and the community.

Adam Augustyn et al's writing also reveals that this life of participation in Ezza culture differs from "municipal institutions in medieval Western Europe which has been loosely designated as communal."²³ This idea is known as "Commune [which] in its most general sense, is a group of persons acting together for purposes of self-government."²⁴ In contrast, Ezza communal relationship stems from their belief in Almighty God (*Chiukfu*). It embraces all spheres of their lives. This implies that Ezza people live in solidarity with one another, which makes the words of Gerry Nworie in regard to Africa true for Ezza culture, "In Africa...there exists a strong sense of common participation, history and destiny."²⁵ This participation is revealed in sharing the joys and sorrows of fellow human beings. In other words, Ezza people's proper understanding of life in human society includes the knowledge that "The affective bond of union consists in love," according to *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.²⁶ The image of affectivity indicates that the relationship is warm, friendly and active. Ezza people conceive that a human being "fully realizes his/her own dignity as a person only when he/she sees himself/herself in relation to God

²¹ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 456.

²² Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 145,149; 152. See also John Anthony McGuckin, "The Trinity in the Greek Fathers," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 65. See also CCC, # 253.

²³ Augustyn et al, eds., *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 6, 197.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁵ Gerry Ikechukwu Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values: Re-examining the Growth and Future Challenges of Catholic Christianity in Igboland* (Calwell, ACT: Inspiring Publishers, 2018), 109. See also Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity*, 1. "Communitarianism is foundational to the African world view...Communitarianism, relationality, and fundamental interconnectedness underlie the Africans mode of seeing and being in the world." See also Victor Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963) 35; Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 62; Oosthuizen, "The Place of Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa," in *African Traditional Religions*, 45. He states that Africa "emphasis on human relations."

²⁶ McDonald et al, eds., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, 80.

[and other people].”²⁷ The implication of this statement is that the real meaning of life is that it is lived in communion with others in human society. Boff in writing about this life of loving fellowship declares that,

God is communion precisely because God is Trinity of Persons. *Three Persons and a single communion and a single trinitarian community*: this is the best formula to represent the Christian God. Speaking of God must always mean represent the Christian God. Speaking of God must always mean the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the presence of one another, in total reciprocity, in immediacy of loving relationship, being one for another, by another, in another and with another. No divine Person exists alone for its own sake; they are always and eternally in relationship with one another: the Father is Father because he has a Son; the Son is Son only because he has a Father; the Spirit is Spirit only because of the love in which the Father begets the Son and the Son gives back to the Father. In pronouncing the Word (the Son), the Father breathes out the breath that is the Holy Spirit. The fruit of this love, the Spirit, loves the Father and the Son and is loved by them in exchange of giving and communion that comes from eternity and ends in eternity.²⁸

Boff indicates that the life of sharing and participation in human society has its roots in the communion of the Trinity. For him, because the Trinity is united in their Godhead, the three divine Persons are one in their essence. They are not three distinct consciousnesses but one. They only differ in their distinctiveness as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This difference, according to Boff, is maintained in their communion:

The Persons exist as Persons by reason of their eternal relationships with one another. The unity of the Trinity is made up of these relationships; it is unity peculiar to the Trinity, a tri-unity. This unity is indicated by St. John, when he makes Jesus say: ‘Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I in you...that they may be one as we are one...may they be so completely one...’ (17:21-3). The united society that exists in the Trinity is the foundation of human unity; the latter is inserted in the former. Persons are not annulled, but empowered. Unity is composed of actual persons, both in the Trinity and in humanity inasmuch as persons are essentially related. The union obtained between persons and in the human community prefigures the union that exists in the Trinity. Despite all ruptures, the Trinity seeks to see itself reflected in history, through people sharing their goods in common, building up egalitarian and just relationships among all, sharing what they are and what they have.²⁹

Boff maintains that living in unity and love mark the life of the Trinity and human society. He sees human relationality as embedded in the love of the Trinity which is the

²⁷ Ibid., 81.

²⁸ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 133-134.

²⁹ Ibid.

“foundation of human unity.” The communion in human society foreshadows trinitarian communion. He asserts that it is the joy of the Trinity to behold its reflection in human society in spite of human sinfulness. Boff echoes the idea of Billy Swan who in his book, *Love has a Source*, writes that

God who is family, who is love...leads us to become people of family, people of love...God is not solitude. (God) is a communion of persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit whose life is an eternal exchange of love between them. It is into this circle of divinity that we have been absorbed and embraced by the Spirit through faith...And it is within this life of Trinity that we exist and live...As God opened wide the circle of (God's) family to include the whole world, so our faith in (God) expands our horizons to welcome, include and connect with everyone and all things. God's family is rich and diverse.³⁰

Swan indicates that people who imitate trinitarian communion will live in love with others. Just as loving communion unites the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the whole created order should be defined by life of love and sharing. Consequently, Swan comments that,

Since ‘God is love’ (1 John 4: 8), there is within (God's) life a lover, a beloved and the love between them. God is a greater lover who never stops seeking us out and uniting us to (God's) self...If this is true then contemplating the God of love stirs that same love in us. As St. Paul says ‘the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 5:5). This gift of love moves us to explore new and meaningful ways to practice our faith...even the most menial tasks done with love can become opportunities to grow in holiness. If love is willing the good of the other then every day can be filled with the opportunities to go out beyond ourselves in love. Making a phone call, offering encouragement, supporting and nurturing friendship, making a visit, sharing kind words – through these ways we reveal to the world the face of the God whose deepest nature is self-giving love.³¹

Swan implies that it is interesting to note that God pours love in the hearts of all peoples, both Christians and non-believers. Everybody shares in love of God. The difference is that people who are aware that God loves them, whether they are Christians or not, try to imitate God by loving others. Swan enumerates even the simple ways we can show God's love to our fellow human beings. He indicates that other people are gifts to us and also the opportunity to show God's love to them. Richard of St. Victor, according to Boff, best expressed this communing aspect of the Trinity and its incidence on

³⁰ Billy Swan, *Love Has a Source* (Maynooth, Ire: St. Paul's Publishing, 2020), 89-90.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

human life. He saw God as essential love communicating itself and establishing communion. The love of the Father makes the Son rise like fire from the Father's entrails, the Son to whom he gives his whole being. The Son in turn, gives back to the Father all the love he has received. It is an absolute and eternal meeting, but not the love of shut-away lovers; it expands. Father and Son make a mutual gift of themselves; this is the Holy Spirit. So the Christian God is a process of effusion, of meeting, of communion between distinct beings bound together in life and love.³²

Boff demonstrates that the communion in the Trinity has implication for human life. It is the will of the Trinity to see Its communion reflected in human society by people who live the life of sharing and participating in one another's lives. That is why he contends that,

The God of Jesus Christ, recognized by the faith of the apostles and accepted by the Christian community, is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ultimate principle of the world and of history is not a solitary being, then, but God the family—God-communion. From all eternity, Yahweh is a bond of loving relations, an unfathomable Mystery—the unoriginated Origin of all—called 'Father.' This Mother and Father emerges from the depths of the divine mystery in act of self-communication and self-revelation within the Godhead itself, and this emerges in the second person of God: 'God the Son.' Now Parent and Child—'Father and Son' join in an embrace of love in doing so express and give origin to the Holy Spirit, who is the Oneness of the first and second persons. This Trinity has not remained enclosed but has communicated itself, making human life its temple. The Trinity dwells in us and our history, divinizing each of us.³³

Boff compares the intimate love of human family to that of the Trinity. The triune God is the Father who eternally and tenderly loves the Son as a human parent love his/her child. Both the Father and the Son love the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is so full of love of the Father and the Son that the Spirit is described as the love between the Father and the Son. Thus, Boff, describes in a nutshell what the trinitarian communion means for human life. To show that human communion is derived from trinitarian communion, Swan argues that,

love has a source who is God...drawing our attention to the generative effect of God's love as the source of all love. All love flows from its source and gives life but then returns to that source where it is renewed...Only by participating in that love can we imitate that love...God is love...only in (God) can love be renewed in us. In a world

³² Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 134.

³³ *Ibid.*; see also Boff, *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*, trans. Robert R. Bar (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 98.

that seeks love so badly but often in the wrong places, the message that love has a source needs to be proclaimed with new hope as we direct others to that source of love who is God.³⁴

Swan reveals that the communion in human society is only a participation in the trinitarian communion. This is because communion in the Trinity is perfect. Secondly, The Trinity is the source of communion in human society. This thesis is a modest contribution in the area of drawing attention to the fact that communal life everywhere in the world, no matter how small it is in operative in society, comes from the love of God. Aquinas defines love as “willing the good of the other.”³⁵ Thus, whenever human beings extend good will accompanied by loving service to their neighbour, they are making the love of God and communion of the Trinity present in their midst. As Swan remarks that,

One of the caricatures of God attacked by atheists is that of God being up there or out there somewhere at a remove from us as an independent being with an independent will (often at odds with ours). It is intriguing to note how this is not the image of God portrayed in the Bible. God is not an infinite remove from us and (God’s) creation. Rather we partake in (God’s) life and are immersed in the life of the Trinity...Despite the emphasis in the Old Testament on the gulf between divine holiness and human sinfulness...the first seeds of theology of participation in God are found with the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis. God create man/woman as independent and free but with a nature in common with (God). Humanity bears the *imago Dei* and is sustained in existence by God’s life giving Spirit (cf. Gen 1: 27; 2:7).³⁶

Swan points out that the true understanding of God is essential in living the life of communion. If God is perceived as distant and non-relating, it will be difficult to be inspired by God to live the life of love. However, Swan writes that God lives in unity and love in the Trinity. He explains that it is true that God is holy and human beings are sinful, but this does not remove the fact that people share in the life of God through the Holy Spirit. Love is the identity of God. By making it possible for human beings to share in the communion of the Trinity, God shows that humanity has some resemblance to God. Swan declares that,

In the New Testament, this communality with God is deepened with the teaching of Jesus...Jesus describes our share in the divine life in the language of mutual indwelling : ‘Remain in me as I remain in you...the one who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit’ (John 15: 4-5). At the Last Supper, Christ prayed that ‘they also be one in us’ (John 17: 21), that

³⁴ Swan, *Love has a Source*, 16-20.

³⁵ *ST*, 1-II, 26, 4.

³⁶ Swan, *Love has a Source*, 21-22.

is, that we be inserted between the love shared by the Father and the Son...When we call God 'Our Father' we do so not just in obedience to Jesus or imitation of him but with him as people who participate in his Sonship of the Father through love. And since 'God is love' (1 John 4:8), every expression of human love then becomes a participation in God. Loving absorbs us into the God who is love and the source of love. Such is the nature of love that makes the possibility of participating in God, open to all.³⁷

Swan implies that God endows everybody with the capacity of living in loving communion by giving God's Spirit to all, and because love defines God and human beings who are in the image of God. But in Christianity, God openly reveals this love in the Incarnation of Christ. It is as if God says to us in Christ, look at me and live your life according to mine. That is why he contends that,

If all creation is immersed in the Trinity then this is the basis for everything being interconnected...This raises creation to a new dignity which ought to effect the way we see all that God has made and treat it accordingly. Here is also the foundation of human fraternity and communion within the Church. We are immersed in the Trinity with our brothers and sisters who, like us, bear the *imago Dei* and so partake in the divine life.³⁸

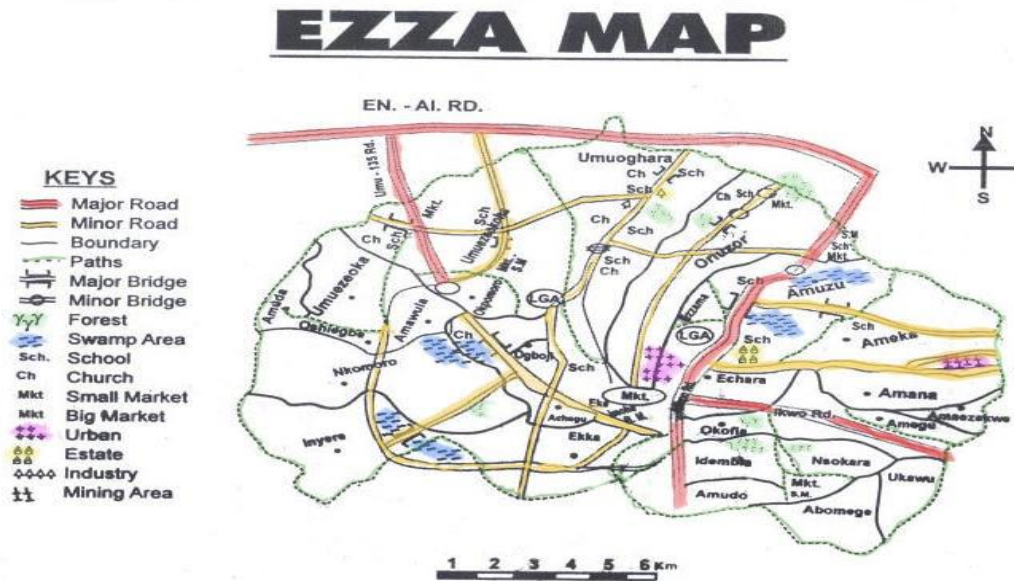
Swan observes that trinitarian communion is the source of loving communion in human society because we are created in the image of God and share in the life of God through the gift of God's Spirit. Communion then does not involve only human beings; the entire creation dwells in webs of relationships. Swan concludes that "A life lived in communion with God's love is transformed to resemble more the love that touches it. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, God is like a divine alchemist who turns all of life into love as it is meant to be."³⁹ Swan indicates that the Holy Spirit is the agent of love. Thus, it is the Holy Spirit that enables human beings to live in communion with one another.

³⁷ Ibid., 22-25.

³⁸ Ibid., 26

³⁹ Ibid., 185.

2.3 Geographical and Cultural context of Ezza People



Communion in Ezza is contextual. It happens in their geographical and cultural milieu where it is learned and imbued into the lives of the people from one generation to the other. Ezza communal relationship is like charity which begins at home. Thus, the context of our dissertation is Ezza culture and its people. Njoku Afoke and Paul Nworie provide the geographical and cultural context of the Ezza people.⁴⁰

They are Ezza, an Igbo sub-klan in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State in South-Eastern Nigeria, one of the sub-ethnic groups in Igboland in Southern Nigeria, West Africa. Ezza has a population of approximately one million to two million people. Geographically, Ezza people belong to the Central District of Ebonyi State in Nigeria. They have their ancestral homestead at Onueke Ezza. They also live in other parts of the state such as Ezza-North, Ishielu, Effium, Ezilo, Umuhuali, Ngbo and Izzi as well as in other states such as Benue, Enugu, Anambra and Imo. Ezza people spread throughout Igbo land and beyond. They speak Ezza dialect and the common Igbo language.⁴¹

Cultural, religion and communality define Ezza people's way of life. Francis Arinze writes about the sacredness of the Igbo. They possess a sense of the sacred around

⁴⁰ Njoku Afoke and Paul Michael Nworie, *Ezza History: Culture and Civilization* (Enugu: Cidjap Press, 2010).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

life.⁴² Okere continues this when he writes that the Igbo people believe in Almighty God whom they call *Chukwu* (Ezza people call *Chiukfu*).⁴³ They also approach God through the *Ali* (land) and *Igwe* (sky) which they believe to be the agents of God.⁴⁴ These to them personify the reality of Heaven and Earth in God's creation. God's spirit works through these agents to make them the meeting points between God and humanity.⁴⁵ Writing about marriage in Ezza, Nworie tells us that the people celebrate marriage as a significant way of expressing their culture and making the couple responsible members of society.⁴⁶ He tells us that an unmarried person is not acceptable to society.⁴⁷ He mentions that there is an adage of Ezza which says "*nwanyi ghatawaa onye nwuru, ajileha onye l'alu*" (Ezza people ask a grown up girl who is her husband and not who is her father).⁴⁸ This proverb demonstrates the importance of marriage to Ezza people.

Peter Schineller writing about inculturation of people in Nigeria suggests that marriage is vital because it is the means of begetting children. It is because it seems a curse to be childless. A woman who does not bear children for her husband would face shame and contempt in her family.⁴⁹ It could lead to her husband marrying another woman. Children are seen as sacred gifts from God. They are cherished and treasured. Most aspects of Ezza culture are not written down, so children are the transmitters of the culture to the coming generations through education (formal and informal). They also look after their parents in their old age.⁵⁰ Writing about the Igbo philosophy, T. Nwala notes that even unborn children are counted as members of the family.⁵¹ Obiora Ike agrees and adds that elderly people are accorded great respect and honour because of their old age and wisdom to guide others in the tenets of peoples' culture which are not

⁴²Francis A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion* (Ibadan: University Press, 1970), 41; see also Olupona, "Introduction," in *African Traditional Religions*, 2; Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religion*, 2nd ed. (Onitsha: IMICO Publishers, 1992), 51.

⁴³ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 340; Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 140; Metuh, *Comparative Studies*, 53.

⁴⁴Ibid, vol. I, 180.

⁴⁵ Ibid, vol. II, 341.

⁴⁶ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 254.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Peter Schnineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 80. See also John S. Mbiti, "Flowers in the Garden: The Role of Women in African Religion," in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, 64.

⁵⁰ Ibid.,

⁵¹ T. Uzodinma Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy* (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1985), 41.

recorded in writing.⁵² Elizabeth Ezenweke and Loius Nwadiolor in their research found that ancestors are not worshiped; they are venerated as part of the family unit that exists in the spiritual world.⁵³

Afoke and Nworie have found that Ezza people also have initiation practices. From birth to death, people are initiated into different age grades such as *Ogbo Iruali*, *Ogbo Ugo*, *Ogbo Okogba*, *Ogbo Amaenyi*, *Ogbo Abaragu*, *Ogbo Uwaoma*. Each stage has the corresponding ritual which ushers the person into the particular state of life.⁵⁴ Writing about Ezza history and culture, Afoke and Nworie observe that the Ezzas live communally in segments of (*Mkpukpu*, *Enya uwahu*, *Ikpfu*, *unwuu nnaji*, *unwu onulo*), which means, immediate family, extended families, tribe, village and community. Ezza people are broadly divided into two clans; Oroke Onuoha (Izzo and Imeoha), Ezechimkuru (kpakpaji and Izzikworo).⁵⁵ The function of these segments within society is that it allows everybody to belong to a group. For instance, when a census is recorded, each person goes to his/her tribe to be counted. Love of life is at the centre of this organisational setting in the Ezza nation. The people say “*onye buru te ibe ya buru*” (live and let live).⁵⁶ This adage signifies the importance attached to communal life by Ezza people. Thus, in the words of Okere, culture means

a people’s way of life...a people’s everything...their history, their arts and crafts, their commerce and industry, their laws and customs, their medical theory and practice, their games, their celebrations, their ruling ideas, their world view including their prejudices, their philosophy, their religion.⁵⁷

⁵² Obiora F. Ike, *A World for Everybody: Communicating Faith in the Diversity of Cultures* (Enugu: Bew IT, 2016), 58.

⁵³ Elizabeth O. Ezenweke and Loius K. Nwadiolor, “Understanding Human Relations in African Traditional Religious Context in the Face of Globalization: Nigeria Perspectives,” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 3, no.2 (February 2013), 63. See also David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11. See also Jele S. Manganyi and Johan Buitendag, “A critical analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 69, no. 1 (July 2013): 3, accessed January 4, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.1934>.

⁵⁴ Afoke and Nworie *Ezza History*, 95.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-39.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 128-144. See also Ticha Akuma Kalu Nkoju, “Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts as Primary Indicators of Igbo Theology and Religion,” in *Interface between Igbo Theology and Christianity*, ed. Akuma-Kalu Njoku and Elochukwu Uzukwu (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 71.

⁵⁷ Okere, *Okere In His Own Words*, vol. 1, 474. See also GS, #53. “It is a fact bearing on the very person of (a human being) that he/she can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of natural goods and values. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are quite intimately connected. The word ‘culture’ in its general sense indicates all those factors by which man/woman refines and unfolds his/her manifold spiritual and bodily qualities. It means his/her effort to bring the world itself under his/her control by his/her knowledge and his/her labour. It includes the fact that by improving customs and institutions he/she renders social life more human both within the family and in the civic community. Finally, it is a feature of culture that throughout the course of time man/woman expresses, communicates, and conserves in his/her works great spiritual experiences and

Ezza people's "way of life" is shown by their participation in the lives of others. It is through loving relationships within the family and the entire community that Ezza people and culture find expression in the actions enumerated in Okere's passage. Thus, culture penetrates into every aspect of people's lives. Okere differentiates culture from nature in these words: "Why we must eat in order to survive, is a question of nature. Why the Igbo fulfil this duty with cassava and okro and the English with tea and bread, is a matter of culture."⁵⁸ Okere's exposition indicates that culture is particular to different societies in the world. Natural life is general for humanity but cultural life has to be lived in the context of people and their environment. Thus, Ezza culture, for instance, differs from European culture despite the fact that both Europeans and Ezza people share the same humanity. Culture is also different from society according to Okere. He contends that culture is not static within human society. Thus,

society can remain when its culture has changed. Culture is specifically human. It is learned and not instinctive. It varies from group to group and from one period of time to another within a single group. Customs, beliefs, social structure, and institutions can change.⁵⁹

Okere's understanding of culture outlined here is borne out in the present situation in Ezza culture. Before the arrival of Christianity, Ezza people only practiced the traditional African religion. However, now some converts to Christianity have been baptised and confirmed in the Christian faith with the result that Christianity is practiced alongside the traditional African religion. The same applies to western models of education. The elders in my village had no experience of attending primary school or of learning to read and write. Although many people, especially girls, still have no opportunity to go to school, there are some who have even attended third level education. Although, all of these new advances are modifying Ezza culture, its core features such as communal feature remains unchanged.

desires, so that these may be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family. Hence, it follows that human culture necessarily has a historical and social aspect and that the word 'culture' often takes on a sociological and ethnological sense."

⁵⁸ Ibid., 444.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

2.4 Communion in Ezza Culture

Nworie recounts a common Ezza adage which says that “a person who stands alone will be eaten up even by harmless flies.”⁶⁰ This idea signifies that Ezza culture values communality and sharing. They believe that life is best lived in communion with fellow human beings and the rest of creation. Communion is central to their understanding of relating with both material and spiritual beings. Ezza people interpret spiritual beings and ultimately God in terms of communion. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen makes an apt assertion with regard to interpreting the Trinity in an African context. He maintains that “It is reasonable to assume some basic orientations are shared by most African cultures which have shaped and been shaped by traditional religion, and in turn have shaped their Christian interpretation of God.”⁶¹ Arinze advises us that one of the “basic orientations” in every ethnic group in Africa is communion. Ezza traditional religion stems from their communion with God.⁶² He continues that for them, God is in communion with all creation, even inanimate objects such as stones and trees.⁶³

They believe that these objects manifest the sacred or possibly that the Spirit of God resides in them all. That is why they perceive everything in existence as sacred. They hold the view that all things in both the material and spiritual world are interconnected. Emmanuel Onwu’s claim that “their cosmology has a deep religious root and their practical life and moral values are interwoven with their religion,” is true of the Ezza people, as an Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.⁶⁴ Rose Uchem writes that for Igbo culture, God looms large in every area of life. That is why murder, for instance, is particularly abominable for them. It is a grave sin against God who owns life and it is also the breaking of sacred communion that exists among human beings. It carries the most

⁶⁰ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 113.

⁶¹ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 349. See also Pope Paul VI, *Letter Africae Terrarum To the Hierarchy and the Peoples of Africa* (October 29, 1967): #1034, accessed July 4, 2021, <http://www.vatican.va>. See also AAS 59. “In fact the doctrine and redemption of Christ fulfils, renews and perfects whatever good is found in all human traditions. Therefore, the African who is consecrated as a Christian is not forced to renounce one’s own self, but assumes the ancient values of one’s people ‘in spirit and truth’ Jn 6: 24.”

⁶² Archbishop Francis Arinze, “Christianity and Igbo Culture,” in *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol. Two, ed. F.C Ogbalu and E. Nolue Emenajo (Ibadan: University Press, 1982), 185.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Emmanuel Nlenanya Onwu, “Uzo Ndu na Eziokwu: Towards an Understanding of Igbo Traditional Religion Life and Philosophy,” being a paper presented during the 2002 Ahiajoku Lecture series in Owerri, accessed January 13, 2020, <http://ahiajoku.igbonet.com/2002>.

severe punishment of ostracisation from the community until proper atonement is made.⁶⁵ Yakubu Otijele concludes that from their experience of God who makes communion among creation possible, they developed their communion with one another. It is communion that shapes their faith and their understanding of God and of human beings.⁶⁶

Ray Ofoegbu writes about the place of culture in relation to Nigerian political culture. Communion is expressed in Ezza culture basically from the family level, which is typically understood in Africa as the extended family, and also in the village and community through the inter-relationships of such groups as unwunna, unwuada, unyom djii, and different age grade systems. Furthermore, it is evident in such celebrations as marriage, initiations, birth, death, burial, and in the veneration of ancestors and other forms of communal worship.⁶⁷ Communion is also expressed during celebration of seasons of planting and harvesting, feast days and months such as the new yam festival and celebrating the lives of the good ancestors (*Okeaku, Eke Okpoto and Onwa Eke*).⁶⁸ Welcoming visitors and showing hospitality to strangers serve as occasions for the expression of communion in Ezza culture.⁶⁹ Discussing the idea of Ezza's communality, Vincent Mulago explains that,

the family, clan or tribe is a whole, of which each member is only a part. The same blood, the same life which is shared by all, which all receive from the first ancestor, the founder of the clan, runs through the veins of all. Every effort must be directed to the preservation of this common treasure. The pitiless elimination of everything which hinders this end, and the encouragement at all costs of everything which furthers it.⁷⁰

Communion in Ezza is inclusive of all. Ezza sees her people as one with one mind. Their relationships come from their faith in God. Laurenti Magesa speaks for Ezza when he writes that:

The realization of sociability or relationships in daily living by the individual and the community is the central moral and ethical imperative

⁶⁵Rose N. Uchem, *Overcoming Women's Subordination in the Igbo African Culture and in the Catholic Church: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology with Reference to Women* (Florida: Universal-Publishers, 2001), 125.

⁶⁶Yakubu P. Otijele, "Understanding the African World view: A Religious Perspective," *Ogbomosh Journal of Theology* 6 (1991): 9.

⁶⁷Ray Ofoegbu, "The Contribution of Culture to Nigeria's Political Culture," in *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol. 2, ed. F. C. Ogbalu and E. N. Emenanjo (Ibadan: University Press, 1982), 219-221.

⁶⁸ New yam festival and the annual remembrance of ancestors in the month of November. See Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 48-50.

⁶⁹ Ofoegbu, "The Contribution of Culture to Nigerians Political Culture," 219-221. See also Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 117-118.

⁷⁰ Vincent Mulago, "Vital Participation," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 140.

of African Religion. Relationships receive the most important attention in adjudication of what is good and bad, what is desirable and undesirable in life. Not only is the view of the universe at the service, so to speak, of the formation and execution of good relationships, but relationships make possible the continuing existence of the universe.⁷¹

In Ezza culture, it is the web of relationships and interconnectedness of people with others that make life meaningful and worth living. The statement of Harvey Sindima is true for Ezza communality: “We cannot understand persons, indeed we cannot have personal identity without reference to other persons...The notion of being-together is intended to emphasize that life is the actuality of living in the present together with people, other creatures, and the earth.”⁷² Sindima implies that it does not mean that a person will cease to exist or that a personality will be swallowed up by the crowd. Rather, it means that a person with his/her individuality identifies him/her-self with the community. Mulago concurs that individual life can only be understood as a shared life because, “The member of the tribe, the clan, the family, knows that he/she does not live to himself/herself, but within the community. He/she knows that apart from the community he/she would no longer have the means of existence.”⁷³ Mulago shows that no person is a loner in Ezza culture. People are nurtured by others as they in turn care for their neighbours.

Sindima captures these relationships in Ezza culture when he states that, “What falls on one, falls on all. In such a relationship, the issue is the re-establishment of community, the re-establishment of the circulation of life, so that life can go on transcending itself, go on being superabundant.”⁷⁴ That is when one suffers in Ezza society the people around him/her suffer with the person. It makes life easier because the burden of the difficulties of life is shared with others. The support and encouragement from family and friends show that life is worth living. As Magesa writes that,

Bondedness is the key...The moral thought of African Religion becomes clear through the understanding of relationships. The refusal to share is wrong. It is in fact, an act of destruction because it does not serve to cement the bonding that is required to form community. Quite the contrary, it is perceived as an element that seeks to weaken and break such

⁷¹Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 64.

⁷²Harvey Sindima, “Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective,” in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, ed. C. Birch et al (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 144, 146.

⁷³ Mulago, “Vital Participation,” 139.

⁷⁴ Sindima, “Community of Life,” 145.

bonds. Nothing that weakens community bonds, or in any way helps to abet such weakening, can be morally wholesome. The unity of the community – equally the living, the living dead...and the yet-to-be-born – a unity that is the community's life in its fullness sense, is the paramount good. The opposite constitutes the paramount destruction.⁷⁵

Communality is central to the Ezza culture. People perceive life as a piece of undivided fabric. Life does not come to an end since at death, people only return to the spiritual world where they join their dead relatives and continue to look after the people they left behind on earth. Magesa maintains that

In the African moral outlook, greed is the antonym of hospitality and sociability or, in a word, good company. It goes beyond simply describing unsocial behaviour in the sense of being outwardly rude or unwelcoming, or unapproachable and unhelpful. It means that, but it means much more than that. Greed constitutes the most grievous wrong. Indeed, if there is one word that describes the demands of the ethics of African Religion, sociability in the sense of hospitality, open hearted sharing, is the word. Hospitality negates greed. It means the readiness and availability to form community. It means that one remembers and honours God and the ancestors and is ready to share with them through sharing of gift and power of life with other members of the family, lineage, or clan. The purpose of hospitality is to enhance life in all its dimensions. Its foundation is in the very structure of existence itself.⁷⁶

Magesa indicates that loving communion is at the heart of African belief. This life of sharing stems from African people's faith in God. Their morality is centred on treating one another with justice and love. This translates itself into the life of service and sharing of goods with one's neighbours.

2.4.1 Ezza Family: A Place of Communion.

The Synod of Bishops II Special Assembly for Africa in 2009 acknowledged that the family is a locus or a setting for expressions of communion and this is true of Ezza culture. Communality marks the whole of African families to the extent that the African bishops chose the image of the family as the model for the Church in Africa. They

⁷⁵ Magesa, *African Religion*, 65.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

interpreted the Church as “a family of God.”⁷⁷ This model was chosen because in Africa, family is a place of nurture for a life of communion, acceptance, support, and sharing of gifts and talents. The Ezza family is always extended beyond husband, wife and children. Indeed, one of the European missionaries who worked in Nigeria observed that African families, unlike European families include “parents of the couple, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins,” ancestors and unborn babies.⁷⁸ In the words of Uzukwu, “This new metaphor adopted by African bishops wishes to introduce into the life of the church the caring and warmth characteristic of the multiple channels or links of kin relationship grouped under the term ‘family’ in Africa.”⁷⁹ Thus, communion in African families proves to be inspirational Christian faith, especially because of the extended nature of the African family structure. Whether it is in the family compound of a nuclear or extended family or the village that makes up several family compounds or the entire community that makes up several villages, there are always some infrastructures that help train children for, and make possible the living out of, the life of communion in Africa. The older people live in such a way that they exemplify the tradition of communion as a legacy which younger generations are to imitate. In Ezza culture, family is like a “domestic Church” within the home, because it is a place of communion with God and with human beings.⁸⁰ Boff supports the idea that communion in the human family reflects the life of God. He contends that

Family symbolism has the advantage of underlining *inter*-subjective relationships and so emphasizing the tri-personal nature of God. The Old Testament saw marriage as a symbol of the relationship of love between the chosen people and their God; the New Testament uses the love of husband and wife as a symbol of the love of Christ for faithful humanity (the church: Eph. 5: 23), an analogy that was taken up in tradition by great Greek theologians such as Gregory Nazianzen...It essential point is the related entities: father, mother, child (Adam-Eve-Set). Together they form a single reality we call family. Father and mother love each other and accept each other. The child is the witness of this love in the eyes of the parents and the outside world. Analogically, relationships of love and knowledge exist in the Trinity: the Holy Spirit is proof that the Father and

⁷⁷ “Synod of Bishops II Special Assembly for Africa: The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace,” *Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City, March 2009): 40, accessed January 4, 2020, <https://www.vatican.va>.

⁷⁸ Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 76.

⁷⁹ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 66. See also Antonio Guido Filipazzi, Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, “Homily preached at the Episcopal ordination and installation of Rt. Rev. Msgr Peter Nworie Chukwu as the Catholic Bishop of Abakaliki Diocese,” Nigeria, August, 19, 2021.

⁸⁰ CCC, # 2204. See also *LG*, 11.

Son love each other, proclaiming and testifying to this love, and therefore called *condiletus* (co-loved). The three together form the family of God, within which everything is bound up in the same circle of life, just as in a human family. This analogy is powerfully evocative, being based on the most natural of human experiences, one that has been raised to a sacrament in the Christian faith: married life. There is no need to introduce sexual differences into the analogy; it is enough to consider the personal differences that made up the plurality in unity of every family.⁸¹

Boff echoes St. Paul's idea that every human family comes from God (Eph. 3: 14-15). Paul evokes the Trinity because he asks that the Father may grant human beings "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love... so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 17-19). Paul demonstrates that only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has the power to bring loving communion in human family and society. Just as the Trinity lives in eternal communion, the Trinity enables human beings to imitate their life of sharing and participation.

2.4.2 Ezza Family Compound: Cradle of Communion

Nworie writes that from cradle to the grave, a typical Ezza person lives within a context that encourages, practises and makes communion possible. A typical traditional Ezza family compound, for example, is built in such a way that there is a hut (*Nguji*) located at the centre of all other houses. The relics and symbols of the founder and other venerated ancestors of the family are kept in that house in the compound. The *Nguji* serves as a place of communion where the family gathers during major cultural festivities or during difficult times to implore the assistance of the ancestors whom they believe are already in union with God (*Chiukfu*). It remains the spiritual centre of the family compound and a visible sign of communion with the ancestors. It is not only the *Nguji* that is the place of communion in the family compound; other houses are built as places of communion. It is common for children to eat together from the same dishes (*ochi/obaa*) with their parents and to drink from one drinking pot (*ite mini*) using a common cup (*okuu*). Children are taught at an early age how to live in communion through inculcating in them the lifestyle of sharing one bed and one room even if there are many beds and rooms in the house; of

⁸¹ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 105-106.

sharing meals with their siblings instead of eating alone; and of sharing the burden of one another through group work and support for each other.⁸²

Nworie writes that in an Ezza family, every event serves for the most part as an avenue for the expression of communion with God, the ancestors and between other members of the community. When a child is born as a result of conjugal union and communion of the parents, the parents also recognise that without God being part of that communion, such birth is not possible. Indeed, children are perceived as gifts from God. Parents show their belief that God is involved in their communion through giving their child names such as *Osinachi* (a child comes from God) or *Chinyere* (God's gift). The birth of a child is a special blessing not only for the family but also for the whole community. Ezza people say that *nwa futaru uwa bu nke oha* (a child that is born into the world belongs to all). Thus, they take the obligation of the communal rearing of children seriously. Child-birth and the subsequent naming ceremony are occasions of great celebration for the community and an avenue of communion.⁸³ Here only names of ancestors who are venerated as saints are given to new born children such names as Agbom Onwe, Nweke Alo, Amadu Elom, Ezekuna and Nworie Ugama to mention but a few are often evoked at such occasions. Other stages of the child's life as he/she grows up to adulthood provide occasions for communion in the family, village and community. A typical Ezza male passes through several stages in life: he would be initiated into an age-grade; marry a wife to begin his own family; pray for a good death and befitting burial; and join the ancestors after a fulfilled life. Let us examine how each of these serves as an occasion for communion for the family, village and community.

2.4.3 Age-grade: Communion with Village Peers.

Patrick Mmuo and Okere set out how age-grades are determined in the Ezza tradition. In Ezza culture, boys are initiated into different age grades or (*otu ogbo*) as they grow through their teens to several stages of adulthood.⁸⁴ Initiation into a particular age grade offers a young man an opportunity for communing with fellow young men outside his

⁸² Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 35-36. See also Njoku, "Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts," 69.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

⁸⁴ Age grade is called "*otu ogbo*" in Ezza language. Cf Patrick Mary Mmuo, *The Treasure of Meaning in Igbo Traditional Culture* (Abakaliki: Citizens' Advocate Press, 2014), 22. See Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 487.

immediate extended family. As a group, for example, they are able to offer each other a helping hand in farm work to the benefit of their parents. When they gather for such work, they eat together from the same bowl. In the evening when they retire to the home of the colleague, they will use one cup to drink the palm wine offered to them. Magesa, writing about the age grade system in Africa notes that “The initiates are...united very closely themselves, forming an age-set or age group...they become truly brothers or sisters, and must be ready to defend one another as brothers and sisters would do. This bond of relationship cannot be easily broken.”⁸⁵ This highlights the unity that is obtained at age-grade communion. It shows according to Magesa that

within the social organization an individual is required to show special loyalty to certain personal or group relations as a way of strengthening the whole society. This applies more particularly to the menfolk of a group, since they remain in the same clan throughout their life, and therefore these relationships are more relevant to them. Women’s group-relations exist in some societies, but they do not hold the same significance. They are normally of short duration, lasting as long as the group of females is unmarried. At marriage...women automatically share the status of their husband’s group.⁸⁶

In Ezza culture, women have their own groups but they are not initiated into age-grade like men because they would marry and leave their families and villages. Magesa asserts that,

The most significant group-relation, established by the very fact of initiation, is the institution of age-sets, sometimes referred to as age-grades, age-classes or age-groups. This ascribed and compulsory relationship is usually formed through social and not strictly biological maturation...The social-religious importance of age-sets is that they are used to manage social complications that could be detrimental to the force of life. Thus, they promote the overall life of society.⁸⁷

As pointed out by Magesa, the purpose of age grades in Ezza culture is to ensure the maintenance of peace and harmony in society. Members of the same age grade share the responsibility of loving and serving one another. Magesa observes that,

the most significant determining factor for an age-set in African Religion is the socio-religious institution of initiation. Initiation is the time when new members are induced into the ethnic group and when a person’s status and responsibility in the clan begin to be clearly determined, delineated, and consciously appropriated. All young people initiated together form an

⁸⁵Magesa, *African Religion*, 101.

⁸⁶Ibid., 104-105.

⁸⁷Ibid., 105.

age-set...such people enjoy a special social and moral bond of 'loyalty and devotion' with one another. Men circumcised at the same time stand in the very closer relationship to each other...When a man of the same age-group injures another it is a serious...offence. They are like blood-brothers; they must not do any wrong to each other. It ranks with an injury done to a member of one's own family.⁸⁸

It is "loyalty and devotion" as expressed by Magesa that mark the lives of the members of the age-grade in Ezza culture. They see one another as belonging to the same family. They maintain communal relationships in their group. According to Magesa,

age-set members have the serious responsibility of looking out for one another and protecting each other's name and property. They are one in a very special way.... As a rule they are called and refer to each other as brothers.... The members of a given age-set consider the parents of each one of them as 'father' and 'mother,' and their female siblings usually as 'sisters,' and accord them appropriate respect... the wife of one of them is, in principle, considered to belong to all of them, not normally in a sexual sense of right of intercourse... but in a social sense.⁸⁹

Age-grade groups have the obligation to care for the family members of their groups in Ezza culture, but Ezza people do not have the practice of sharing wives sexually with age-grades members. It is allowed for the groups to care for the wives of the members, but it is forbidden to enter a sexual relationship with wives of other members of the groups. Magesa, writes that,

family relationships determine the perception and language of relationships between age-sets. The idiom of family and kin relationships – father, mother, brother, and sister – is also used for age-set relationships...A person considers and refers to all members of his own set as brothers. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the relationship in this later case do not exactly correspond to those of blood brothers: with blood brothers there exists a strict hierarchical relationship of seniority and juniority translating to an attitude of almost superiority and inferiority.⁹⁰

Magesa reveals that children from the same parents in Ezza observe seniority. The first born whether a boy or a girl is the senior of the rest of the children, he or she is to be honoured by their juniors. However, the age grade members see themselves as equal members without seniority status. Their intimate connection stems from religious conviction of belonging to the same God and to the same people. In the words of Magesa:

relations within a given age-set are determined and regulated in terms of

⁸⁸ Ibid., 106-107.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the strictest equality, loyalty, group solidarity, and trust. This is one of the most important unifying functions of initiation...It is only this period of circumcision which can turn a disparate group into a coherent whole, a class of persons within which it is incumbent on everyone to show friendship, confidence and assistance in all spheres of social and private life. Age-set relationships do not stand on ceremony with regard to the status of any of the members. Members of an age-set must always be on familiar and friendly terms, no matter what position they hold in society. We may refer to age-sets as levers, and their purpose is to promote social bonding and cohesiveness. Members of a given age-set celebrate together, perform functions together, help one another in all aspects, and even share punishment when inflicted. In a very real sense, the relationship is that of all for one and one for all.⁹¹

According to Magesa, age grades members in Ezza culture teach the youths how to live in communion in society. The members of age grades receive the formation which enables them to practice kindness in action by caring for people starting from their own members. Because there are many age grades in Ezza, their lives of service permeate every aspects of life in society. They relate to society and to other age grades both their junior and senior ones; however, there is an intimate connection within their own particular age grade. Magesa explains that,

Between the different age-sets, relations closely follow the kinship structure, with similar attitudes. Senior age-sets are to be respected as elders whose vital force is consequently much more significant for the life of the community. Junior age-sets must be subordinate in every way to their seniors...The effect of the age-set system is a strong factor in discipline, for it must be obeyed and there is no appeal against it. This system maintains the cohesiveness of the society through the structured relationship of humanity to the ancestors.⁹²

In Ezza culture, for instance, *Ogbo abaragu* is the highest age grade and the members enjoy great respect from other age grades below them. Just as in the family, the senior members are accorded great respect by their juniors. All age grades see to it that there is peace and concord in society. Magesa concludes that,

there is no other purpose to life but fostering life. Here in lies the mystique of life. All rites and rituals from birth to adulthood are meant to solidify this life. All of them connect human beings with other visible elements of creation and with the invisible world of God, the ancestors, and the spirits. All of these forces working together in harmony results in harmony and balance in the world and assure humanity of good conduct. The opposite is also true. When there is disorder, humanity is to blame and must correct

⁹¹ Ibid., 108-109.

⁹² Ibid., 109-110.

itself. In short, the vital force must be preserved and the way to do so among humanity is through procreation.⁹³

Magesa indicates that communion in human society is the result of interconnectedness of human beings with everything in creation, with God and with the spiritual world. When these groups live in harmony, there is peace and concord in the world. Ezza people believe that communion between God, ancestors, human beings and indeed the entire creation must be intact all the time so that people will enjoy blessings from God. They have the notion that greatest gift from God is the blessings of sending children into the world so that human race will continue to live on earth. Any disharmony that occurs in society disrupts the relationships between people and causes serious problems which can affect the bearing of children. For example, the outbreak of war will remove peace and harmony which are essential for raising families.

Afoke and Nworie write that age grade system plays an important role in Ezza life. The major age grades in Ezza in a hierarchical order are *Ogbo akpapi*, *Iruali*, *Ogbo Uwaoma*, *Ogbo Ugo*, *Ogbo Okogba*, *Ogbo Amaenyi*, *Ogbo abaragu* and any “transition from a lower to a higher age grade demands some sacrificial and cultural rites from those seeking to advance to such age.”⁹⁴ *Ogbo Akpapi* is “the uncircumcised young men below twenty years of age;” it is this group who are usually “initiated into *iruali* age grade immediately after circumcision.”⁹⁵ The *Ogbo Uwaoma* age group are chosen from *Ogbo Iruali*, and they ascend accordingly in their age hierarchy.⁹⁶

Afoke and Nworie note that each age grade group performs a specific role in the village. For instance, the *Ogbo akpapi* and *Iruali* clear roads and keep ponds clean.⁹⁷ The *Ogbo Uwaoma* age grades are responsible for safeguarding cultivated crops against destruction by domestic animals like cows, goats and sheep.⁹⁸ Every age grade group is independent and “is allowed to discipline its members through fines as allowed by law;” however, it is customary in Ezza for the young to show respect to the elders.⁹⁹ The communion that exists between members of the age group is profound and extends into the spirit world. Just as it is against Ezza custom for a man to have sexual relations with

⁹³ Ibid., 114

⁹⁴ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 95. See also Patrick Mary Anene Mmuo, *African-Culture Christianity: Inculturation of the Church in Africa via Igbo Culture* (Enugu: Econas, 2014), 64-67.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 94.

someone's wife, it is even more serious where such relation is with the wife of a dead member of one's age grade group (*ujii maa*). If a member commits such an offence, the penalty is death because it is a mortal sin committed against the ancestral spirit, and so the offending member "must surely die."¹⁰⁰ This confirms that the rules that apply in communal relationships in this material world extend also to the spiritual world.

2.4.4 Marriage: Inter-Family Communion

Afoke and Nworie from their research, view marriage as a communal rite in Ezza culture. It involves not only the couple but their families, extended families, villages and community. Okere affirms that, "Even today marriage in Igbo land cannot be regarded as the business of only the man and woman concerned. Each marriage concerns the community, at least the immediate kin of those involved."¹⁰¹ The implication of Okere's idea of marriage as a communal ceremony is that despite the interaction of Igbo culture with new cultures such as Christianity and the Western lifestyle, marriage in Igbo culture stands the test of time and change by remaining at the heart of communion in Igbo society. Marriage in Ezza culture refers to the socially recognised union of man and woman not only for procreation but for livelihood and communal harmony.

Afoke and Nworie relate how the process of getting married begins with a young man informing his parents of his desire to marry a particular girl of his choice. The first step is that the boy tells his parents. The parents then enquire from members of the village and neighbours of the girl's family about her character and the background of her family. This is because it is essentially a union and communion of the two families. When they are satisfied that there is no impediment to the marriage, then, an older married person, who is usually a friend to the suitor, is appointed by the family to act as an intermediary between the boy's family and the family of his fiancée. At this point, the boy is free to buy gifts for the girl and her mother. The first official visit to the girl's family happens when the boy's gifts are accepted by the girl and her mother. The items required for such visits are "a well grounded tobacco in cow horn (*upi enwuru*), and a keg of palm wine."¹⁰² When they arrive at the home of the girl, and after the normal African warm welcome, the friend of the suitor "tells the family that is gathered that his friend saw a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 455. See also Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 104.

¹⁰² Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 82.

daughter of the family and they have therefore come to ask her hand in marriage.”¹⁰³ The girl’s family will deny having a girl of marriageable age. Though their gifts will be taken as a free gift in a friendly spirit, the suitor, his relatives and his friends will make two or more such visits, and this affords the girl’s family the opportunity to conduct enquiries about whether the boy’s family is a worthy home for their daughter.

On the day the family of the girl accepts the family of the boy for such a marriage covenant, the girl shows her consent to marry the suitor by an act of communion with a cup of palm wine; “she is to take a sip and give the would-be husband to finish as a mark of solemn acceptance and unification.”¹⁰⁴ When all of these have been done, the suitor is required to visit some elders of the family in their homes. This is called seeing the elders (*owhu ogrenya*), and these elders could be as many as six depending on the size of the girl’s family. The items required for such visits are similar to those used during the first visit of the girl’s family.

Afoke and Nworie continue their account of Ezza history and culture. The next stage in the marriage process after seeing the elders is payment of the bride price which in Ezza is “two cows and six goats.”¹⁰⁵ The first cow is presented immediately and the second is much later by the children or grandchildren who are the fruits of that union. After the payment of the bride price, a day is set for when the girl is given out in marriage. On that day, two ritual ceremonies are performed as marks of union of the couple: “The most elderly man invokes blessings upon the new couple with the kola nuts and dried meat. Part of these items which are blessed by the elder is taken and divided among the bride and the groom who in turn feeds each other as a mark of communion.”¹⁰⁶ This is called *okoru oji ye l’onu*, and the same is done with the well cooked pounded yam and a delicious soup which is called *otuko nri le nwanyi* (Communion meal).¹⁰⁷ After the communion meal, the women from the groom’s family lead the new bride to her new home with songs amidst jubilations. She is welcomed with a great feast of communion in her husband’s home by the elders.

¹⁰³ Ibid. See also, Mmuo, *The Treasure of Meaning*, 21; Alfred O. Ukaegbu, “The Role of Marriage Habits in Population Growth: The Case of Rural Eastern Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 46, no. 4 (October 1976): 392, accessed January 13, 2021, <https://doi.org/stable/1159301>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 84; *Okoru oji ye l’onu*, literally means putting the kola into the mouth.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Afoke and Nworie contend that marriage brings about deep communion between families in Ezza culture. The two families are one on an extended and enhanced level. Henceforth, they call each other *ogo* which means in-law or *ikenne* to show that the two families are now one in marriage.¹⁰⁸ The bride changes her surname as a result of the marriage. Also, the new couple name their children after each other's parents and other relatives depending on the sex of the child. Indeed, the new family takes care of both parents in good and in bad times. Ike captures the idea of Ezza familial communality arising from marriage well:

Marriage showed in traditional society that love is communal, not individual. Marriage was a union of two families, two clans, two villages and not just a private love relationship between two persons, male and female. The communal dimension strengthened the longevity of marriage and reduces separation and divorce.¹⁰⁹

Thus, in Ezza society, marriage brings families, extended families, clans, villages and the entire community together as the events of communion. The family remains the fertile soil where love, sharing and participation are planted and harvested. What Magesa writes about marriage in Africa is particularly true in Ezza culture:

The initiation process, which turns a youth from a boy or girl into a man or woman, points to marriage as the most basic expression of the desire to maintain life. Without its consummation in marriage, initiation remains incomplete. Whatever else a person has or is, without marriage and children, one is nothing. Indeed, such a person is seen to be damned, a lost soul. Without marriage and children, a person is most likely already rotten in religious terms, that is, completely dead. Thus, marriage and procreation have the greatest importance in the moral thought of African Religion.¹¹⁰

Magesa reveals the significance of marriage in the life of Ezza people. Everything in the life of a person is geared towards marriage and having children. Ezza people call an unmarried and childless person *odonwa* and *onye ikirikpo* (a person who has no body to remember him/her and a person who deserves to be thrown into the bad bush). Magesa states, that,

If the purpose of initiation is to impress upon the initiate the centrality of life in all of the affairs of humanity, and the human person's relationship to the universe, marriage is understood universally in African Religion to

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 82-83. The word *ikenne* translate literally in Ezza as the power of motherhood. See also Mmuo, *The Treasure of Meaning*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Ike, *A World For Everybody*, 54-55. See also Friday M. Mbon, "African Traditional Socio-Religious Ethics and National Development: The Nigerian Case," in *African Religions in Contemporary Society*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Magesa, *African Religion*, 104.

be the institution that makes possible the practical expression of the cherished fecundity. It is the acceptable social structure for transmitting life, the life that preserves the vital force of humans, families, and clans. All forms of marriage and its rituals...are intended to assure that procreation occurs according to the wishes of God and the ancestors, and as abundantly as possible.¹¹¹

According to Magesa, the most important reason to enter marriage in Ezza culture is to get children. A family where there are no children is a sad home. The husband and wife have nobody to carry their lineage to future generation. Magesa writes that marriage plays a central role in communal life in Africa. He explains that,

For African Religion marriage involves not only interpersonal relations but also in the final analysis inter-community relations. In marriage, the communities involved share their very existence; in reality they become one people, one thing, as African themselves would put it...(with regard the couple), through their marriage, their families and clans are also united, so that what is done to one of their members is done to all. The marriage also means that the partners' responsibilities are not limited to themselves alone but have a much wider application. Their own personal identity and identification are equally extended...the bride...should bear in mind...that (she is) married not to (her) husband...but to his family. That means (she has) to identify completely with all his relatives, look after them, care for them, go out of (her) way to make them happy. If (she) does that, (she) will have no cause for regret...the groom...will have to do likewise with (the bride's) relatives. Her people are (his) people vice versa. Both of (them) will notice that old people in the community will tend to visit (them), even for a brief moment...to show their interest in (their) welfare.¹¹²

As Magesa comments, marriage is so central to communion in Ezza culture that everybody in the community is interested in the new couples and helps them to integrate into the life of society by showing them love and concern. He maintains that "In the long run, marriage always establishes very strong bonds between the individuals belonging to different families and clans, particularly when children are born...marriage bonds remain basic to effective relations, which, to various degrees, includes relatives of both sides of the marriage partnership"¹¹³ He speaks for Ezza culture as marriage in Ezza society is meant to unite many families, villages and communities into a communal group that love and care for one another. Magesa says that,

the family created by marriage is the fundamental element and the basic

¹¹¹ Ibid., 115.

¹¹² Ibid., 115-116.

¹¹³ Ibid., 116-117.

sphere of action in African relationships. The family is the person's channel of integration into the clan and the wider society. Consequently, in marrying his wife...[the man] accepted responsibilities towards another family, and she likewise. This social and communitarian character of African marriage means that the two communities are bound so closely together through a marriage that certain conditions, such as a rift between the two communities, can actually nullify a marriage between two persons. Enmity between the clans, notwithstanding any amount of cordiality and love between the two individuals, can not only nullify a marriage, but make it impossible in the first place. The value of marriage is communal, and the couple's consent has validity only in this communitarian social context.¹¹⁴

As Magesa points out, it is difficult in Ezza culture to celebrate marriage in a situation where the families, villages and communities are not living in harmony among themselves. People believe that God and the ancestors are not happy in that type of situation. People make enquiries before marriage to find out if the village or community that wants to marry their children are living in peace. If not the families of the bride and bridegroom will cancel the marriage. According to Magesa,

marriage concerns not only social factors, but of necessity also economic, political, and religious factors, all of which are inextricably intertwined. The logic of strengthening the force of life at all levels demands that investigations prior to marriage stress all of these aspects of life so that the flow of life will not be interrupted. This is also why there is such emphasis on the very serious obligation to marry. Since the traditional family had to be large in order to guarantee the material well being of all its members, of children, of the sick, the disabled and the old...since this required community over time, every person has a moral obligation to marry and contribute to the social reproduction of his kinship group. This most basic value, to beget or bear children, was instilled in all members of the society from early childhood onwards. Nobody is allowed to shirk this duty.¹¹⁵

Magesa gets at the heart of Ezza culture. One of the reasons of giving girls early in marriage is so that they will bear many children for their husbands and his people. Moreover, there is no social welfare from the government in Ezza culture. People depend on one another for their basic needs. Thus, the families, villages and communities take care of the needy and the afflicted. Magesa explains that it is imperative that everybody gets married in African culture in order to fulfil the social obligation of caring for one another. He writes:

It is the responsibility of the whole clan to honor this obligation and to

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 120-121.

help all family and clan members to fulfil it. That is why solidarity within each family and between the families or clans involved in marriage is a basic element of relationships. Solidarity is at the foundation of community. Whereas it may often remain rather dormant, it comes palpably alive and to the fore in sphere of marriage... in marriage the individual family member could count on the moral and material support of his family community whenever he was in need.... It was especially in the vital area of marriage and child-bearing that the family, as a community, exercised its control....These things affected the growth and development of the family and its social relations with other family communities in society as a whole. These most vital elements of community life make possible the transmission of life in both its physical and moral expression.¹¹⁶

The families, villages and communities take the place of democratic government in providing care for their members. Everybody is expected to contribute to the well being of others. With regard to the importance of marriage in the communal life in Africa, Magesa asserts that,

If...the basic of African morality is the promotion of human life, then the existential ethical *duty* of every African person is to see to it that life is transmitted as fully as possible from one generation to another. Fecund marriage is an ethical duty. Certain funerary rites must also be performed because they avail the living the deceased elders' vital power, without which life can only be impoverished. For the same reason, anything that threatens the full transmission of life in interpersonal or social relationships must be fought against.¹¹⁷

Magesa indicates that the communality around marriage in Ezza culture involves both humans and spiritual world. The abundance of children means that the ancestors will have people who will be in communion with them in their families and society. Magesa explains that,

Because of its importance in preserving and transmitting the life-force, proper order is to be maintained every step of the way in marriage preparations and the marriage itself. Proper behavior and procedure are required of the living, but this is even more significant in the relationships between the living and the ancestors.... The ancestors, guardians of the vital power of their descendants, have a special stake in this step of a person's life, and so they are involved in a special way. Whatever is done at marriage ceremony is done in their sight and is, in a sense, dedicated to them. To be abundant, life depends on the ancestors who guard it on behalf of God, wherein lies its origin, and for whom the ancestors are intermediaries. African marriage is ultimately anchored in God, the main

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 159.

sustainer of life and the principal preserver and transmitter of the vital force. For this reason, much of what takes place in marriage has overtly religious characteristics and significance. The living head of the family or clan visibly represents God and the ancestors. The role of the elder is clearly seen in the significant moments of the marriage process. From the first steps leading to betrothal and...well into the marriage itself.¹¹⁸

Magesa captures the belief of Ezza people around marriage. For Ezza culture, marriage is basically a religious ceremony. People cannot separate their lives from God who is the source of life. Therefore, God is the centre of married life. Then the ancestors as the good people of the families who are with God are invoked to take care of the marriage and to ask God to bless the couple with children, good health and with means to look after their family.

Ezza culture has the ritual of adult circumcision (*obu ubvu ogurenya*) which initiates boys and girls to adulthood and religious covenantal life of the society. Afoke and Nworie maintain that

Circumcision in Ezza is an initiation rite into adulthood. It accords an Ezza man/woman a sense of belonging in the community, socially, religiously and politically. It is a compendium of the people's life history, experience, moral values, social sanctions...It is a means of maintaining the tradition and custom of Ezza. It is a school for personality formation into the life of the community.¹¹⁹

This ritual is so significant in Ezza culture that it binds every boy and girl to perform it before settling down as a husband or a wife. Some Christian pastors such as John Odey object that adult circumcision in Ezza is a pagan practice and should be abolished. He argues:

“In Ezza, after the normal physical circumcision which is done in childhood, a person is expected to undergo a ritual circumcision which some people identify as second circumcision or adult circumcision. It is this so called second circumcision that the Church does not approve in the life of Christians.”¹²⁰ However, Afoke and Nworie contend that

Fr. John Odey hurled a lot of attack on Ezza's Rite of Initiation to Adulthood otherwise known as Adult Circumcision. He claimed that it was fundamentally against Christianity. His arguments, much as it has its merits, is not completely acceptable as it does harm to the meaning of that

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 121-122.

¹¹⁹ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 80.

¹²⁰ John Odey, *Ritual Circumcision in Ezza and the Christian Faith* (Ibadan: Claverianum, 1986), 63.

rite which fundamentally is the only way an Ezza person advance culturally to adulthood. If his argument is allowed to stand, what other way must an Ezza person show that he/she has moved on from being a child or teenager to an adult person. That yawning gap must be filled by a cultural rite that would be truly Ezza and truly Christian.¹²¹

It is true that Christianity is goodnews to all cultures and tradition. However, the notion of change does not come easily especially around belief in God. Adult circumcision is one of Ezza's ways of living a covenantal life with God and with people. It is hard for them to disregard it as soon as they accept Christian faith. Missionaries and Igbo pastors need to excersice patience and refrain from propagating Christian belief as a militant enterprise. Jesus has to gradually teach Peter to accept non Jewish people whom they call unclean and uncircumcised (Acts 10: 1-48; 11 1-18). The early believers were not reproached by God. Through the first council meeting in Jerusalem, the Church realised that they did not have to impose Jewish way of life to non-Jewish Christians (Acts 15: 1-35. The same dialogue is needed in Ezza culture so that the beauty of Christian faith will be reflected in the lives of the people. Afoke and Nworie hold that "Catholic Christian community is expected to have some respect for this tradition because it acts as a guide to identity and moral justification and framework."¹²² Thus, Ezza people search for ways of expressing their culture in their Christian life.

2.4.5 Death and Burial: Transition to the Spiritual World

Afoke and Nworie note that the Ezza people's belief that life continues after death. Dead bodies are treated with great respect because the person has joined the spiritual world and is perceived to be more powerful than when he/she was in this world. Some highlights of the burial and funeral ceremonies point to the communion that exists between the living and the dead. For instance, prior to the digging of the grave, "the most elderly man there invokes the spirit of the ancestors to come to their assistance so that the corpse may be buried in peace, that is, to prevent lizards (*ngwere*), black insects called *aghashi* from entering the grave; they could defy the sanctity of the burial."¹²³ The funeral ceremony lasts for four-days in which many different rituals are performed. A ritual that is of particular significance is the one performed on the fourth day which is called "*otu nri*

¹²¹ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 117.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 81.

¹²³ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza history*, 99.

l'ilu.”¹²⁴ The food cooked is placed on the grave of the deceased and “two designated elders feed from the same meal with which the deceased has been fed. This establishes a type of communion between the dead and the living.”¹²⁵

The extended families, *unwunna*, *unwuada* and the community normally contribute money and food items in order to give a fitting burial to dead relatives and friends. Mmuo notes that the family of the deceased is not allowed to carry the burden of expense alone.¹²⁶ It is during such a funeral ceremony that the family is allowed the freedom to harvest “premature kernel (*Akuocha*)” from any palm tree in the whole village as a supplement of what could be eaten by all those who attend the funeral ceremony.¹²⁷ The whole community recognises that all members of the community have come to ritualise the passage of the dead person to the world of God and the ancestors. This ceremony, therefore, calls for much celebration and feasting with large quantities of food and drink. After this, it is believed that the dead person is at peace and will look after the welfare of the people he or she left behind.¹²⁸

2.4.6 Ancestors: As Centre of Communion

The role of ancestors in Ezza is of great importance. Afoke and Nworie note that a truly good person is believed to join the rank of the ancestors after his/her death. From the land of the spirit, the ancestors care for members of their families and community. They are believed to be close to God and are able to intercede for their families who may be involved in wrongdoing or alternatively, attract God’s blessings onto those of good behaviour. These ancestors are deified as saints in Ezza culture. The month of November (*Onwa Eke*) is set aside to honour the ancestors by offering them sacrifice of fowls, goats and cows on their sacred mounds located in the ancestral chapel (*Nguji*). The people seek their intercession and invoke them in time of trouble. For example, the ejaculatory prayer, like *nnam kwaa!* (my father where are you!), is uttered in time of distress, imploring a dead father to rush to the aid of the living. God is also addressed as *Nnam* (my Father) in African culture.¹²⁹ According to Nwala, “In times of difficulties or sickness, you hear an

¹²⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Mmuo, *African-Culture*, 46-52.

¹²⁷ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 103.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ See Magesa, *African Religion*, 45.

Igbo man calling on his dead father and saying *nnanya anyi ekwela* (our father, do not allow this to happen).”¹³⁰ Schineller compares the Ezza people’s understanding of the ancestor to the Christian doctrine of the saints.¹³¹ Just as Christians maintain an ongoing relationship with the saints, the living and dead also have an on-going relationship in Ezza culture.¹³² In the minds of Ezza people, “the final-end and aspiration of all and every human being is to reach the spirit-land of one’s ancestors, to be venerated by his/her descendants as an ancestor.”¹³³ Ezza people uphold the link between the living and the dead. The words of Victor Uchendu are true in the lives of Ezza people:

The Igbo world is a world peopled by the invisible and visible forces, by the living, the dead, and those yet to be born. It is a world in which all these forces interact affecting and modifying behaviour.¹³⁴

In defining African traditional religion, Idowu writes that dead members who lived well while they were in the world are revered as ancestors by their families and their communities. The ancestors live on in the community because “they have always been a part of human family”¹³⁵ As the ancestors return to the spiritual world after their death, unborn babies come into the world from God. Ikenga Metuh remarks that the ancestors “enhance the peace and solidarity,” among the members of their families and communities.¹³⁶

The reverence accorded to the ancestors could be a meeting point between African traditional religion and Christianity. In the Christian faith, saints are venerated as the people who lived holy lives and enjoy the presence of God. Uzukwu describes the ancestors as “very close to God...God’s power and protection [envelop] human life...the ancestors who are close to [God] mediate these powers and benefits to humans.”¹³⁷ Just as Christians believe in the intercessions of saints, so Ezza people uphold the intercessory

¹³⁰ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 172. See also Stephen N. Ezeanya “God, Spirits and the Spirit World,” in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 43-44.

¹³¹ Schineller, *A Hand Book on Inclusion*, 89. See also Nana Osei Bonsu, “African Traditional Religion: An Examination of Terminologies used for Describing the Indigenous Faith of African People, using an Afrocentric Paradigm,” *Africology: The Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 9 (November, 2016): 114.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁴ Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of South East Nigeria* (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 12.

¹³⁵ Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 173.

¹³⁶ Ikenga Metuh, *African Religion in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation: Studies in Igbo Religion* (Bodija: Pastoral Institute, 1985), 16.

¹³⁷ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 19.

role of the ancestors for the living. Schineller sees in the people's reverence for the ancestors an example for the Church. He writes that

Catholicism holds up outstanding men and women as saints, to be venerated and imitated...we can find a perfect instance...in the traditional cultural and religious emphasis of Nigerians on respect for ancestors. A strong sense of solidarity exists in Nigeria between the living and dead. Parents and grandparents who led good lives and died well are honoured and remembered, and their presence is felt in the family, in the lives of those who remain behind. They protect the living and mediate to them the power and love of God.¹³⁸

Ezza people believe in communion with the living, the dead and unborn children. In my village in Nigeria, people commemorate the dead in the month of November just as the Catholic Church remembers those who have died.¹³⁹ The ancestors play a large part in communion in Ezza culture. Magesa captures this idea:

The imperative of community and harmony that determines the ethical agenda of life in African Religion deeply concerns the ancestors. By their character and attributes, they link the individuals in a clan and the visible and invisible worlds. To be a human being, to be a *moral, ethical* person...is not possible to live in isolation...One can only become truly human in community, in the concept of other human beings in the world, and in some sort of relationship to the dead. Kinship is what is in large measure constitutes life itself and its mystique. And kinship is most intensely and most meaningfully realized and expressed in and by the ancestor relationship.¹⁴⁰

Magesa indicates that ancestors are the centre of communal life in Ezza culture. They live with God and close to their relatives in the world. They act as intermediates between God and the people especially in assuring that people live in communion with one another and with God. Magesa notes that,

Ancestorship is an act of communion in remembrance that is also actualization or resurrection. It constitutes making present among us here and now those who are remembered. Ancestors and their descendants on earth are in continuity. In a sense...ancestors are perceived in the same way as the living elders of the society as far as the experience of kinship and communion is concerned...[the ancestors] remain in talking, and almost tangible, terms with their descendants. In no way does the state of ancestorship weaken the bonds of communion. Far from it, it strengthens them. The state of ancestorship can be characterized in African Religion in terms of action. The ancestors and their descendants are in a constant state of exchanging gifts and favors. This is what communion requires; it is

¹³⁸ Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 89.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Magesa, *African Religion*, 77-78.

what remembrance means. This dialectic strengthens the life force of the world for the sake of the living humanity.¹⁴¹

According to Magesa, an intimate relationship exists between the ancestors and Ezza people because they believe that the ancestors are very close to them. They constantly invoke the ancestors in good times and bad times and invite them to be present in all their deliberations. Magesa observes that,

While the living are obliged to seek ancestral communion for the sake of their own well-being, the ancestors are not passive in the exchange. They also desire to be in communion with their living kin, to be remembered and honored. They manifest this desire in several ways, such as by using certain other beings of creation as mediums to visit the living...the sight of a particular snake, caterpillar, or hyena might indicate an ancestral visit, and the appropriate consequences would be drawn from it...The ancestors may also appear through dreams and divination. Finally, and most drastically, the ancestors make their will known by visiting calamities on their descendants, catching their attention, and forcing them to make an appropriate reply. The reply is usually made through prayers and rituals meant to restore human and cosmic solidarity.¹⁴²

As Magesa explains, the purpose which makes the ancestors to seek human attention is always to restore communion. If relationships break down between God, ancestors and people, the ancestors have to remind human beings their obligation to seek unity by prayers and sacrifices to God and to the ancestors. In the words of Magesa,

Ancestors are there to guard life. When they intervene, it is usually to warn human beings. As the most important guides to true morality, they take that responsibility seriously. Calamities are meted out for the sole purpose of reminding the living always to remember to keep their ancestral relationships alive and harmonious, for to strain these relationships is to threaten life at its very core...when the ancestors react as they do in cases of a breach of moral etiquette, it is to benefit the living, to preserve the moral order of love, piety, and respect. What is expected of ancestors is faithfulness to their kin as long as prayers and offerings are made to them. Various means may be used to ensure their faithfulness, including promises and threats. In this drama for universal harmony, God...the ultimate foundation of the vital force, solidarity, and harmony, is always assumed to be present. If the ancestors refuse to listen and the desired effects of prayers and offerings are not forthcoming, the living normally turn to God as the last resort. However, it has always to be kept in mind that in the final analysis the culpability of human beings, rather

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴² Ibid., 78-79.

than the responsibility of the ancestors, is the cause of any moral disorder.¹⁴³

As Magesa indicates, in Ezza culture, God is the source of communion and love in society. Ancestors help God to maintain unity and concord in the world. When human beings misbehave, the ancestors remind them to amend their lives so that they will enjoy the blessings of God...Magesa maintains that,

From the perspective of African Religion...illness, poverty and other calamities point to a moral disorder in relationships, from the most elementary in the family to the most complex in the society. If the family, lineage, and the clan enjoy good health and relative prosperity, particularly when the birth rate is good and the children survive to adulthood, it is believed that there is a good rapport in the network of relationships. The ancestors are happy, the vital force is strong, and there is harmony in the land and in creation. Such abundance of life is clear indication that the population is upright with regard to the ancestors. Abundance of life indicates in clear terms that the norms essential for its preservation have not been disregarded or broken. These norms...were received from the founding ancestors of the clan, lineage, or ethnic group and are handed down from generation to generation. The ancestors observed them and so assured life for their descendants. It is because they observed them that the ancestors also attained their present exalted status. They stand as models or exemplars of ethical living, as no one can attain ancestral status without having led a morally good life.¹⁴⁴

As Magesa explains that, only the people who lived the life of love to a high degree are accorded the status of ancestors in Ezza society after their death. The ancestors are judged by their lives of service and caring for others. Ezza people believe that when peace and harmony prevail in society, God will send blessings and life will be abundant for human beings. The ancestors see to it that unity is maintained so that God will continue to bless human beings.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 81-82.

2.4.7 Village: Communion between Extended Families

Mmuo explains that Ezza village comprises the members of extended families.¹⁴⁵ It is the coming together of these extended families that makes up the village group. E.W. Ardener describes the extended family as “a group of nuclear families living together.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, each family unites with other families in the formation of the village group. In the understanding of S.N.C. Obi, the extended family can be conceived as,

a social institution consisting of all the persons who are descended through the same line from a common ancestor and who still owe allegiance to or recognize the overall authority of one of their members as head and legal successor to the said ancestral founder, together with any person who though not blood descendants of the founder are for some reasons attached or have otherwise been absorbed into the lineage as a whole.¹⁴⁷

Ancestral lineage is central notion in the formation of the extended family in Ezza culture. This description of Obi captures the reality of extended family in Ezza society where everybody who is a blood relation of a grandfather or great-great grandfather perceives his or relatives as brothers and sisters and forms a unit known as the extended family. In this type of setting according to Okere, “everybody is of course related to everybody else. Thus, arises an impressive matrix of relations—brothers, sisters...uncles, cousins, nephews but also an impressive matrix of duties and corresponding rights.”¹⁴⁸ This inter-relatedness of people in this group makes it to be known as the extended family unity. The intimate relationships in the extended family calls for responsibility to care for one another and brings the deserved honour and respect that goes with this type of loving service. If this is related to the Trinity, it brings out the distinction in the Godhead shown by the Father not being the Son or the Holy Spirit yet they live in reciprocal love and communion within the Trinity. Okere captures this idea of relationships as he contends that “All human relationship is reciprocal: if you are my father, then I am your son. If you have the obligation of father towards me, then I have the obligation of Son towards

¹⁴⁵ Mmuo, *The Treasure of Meaning*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ E.W. Ardener, “Lineage and Locality among the Mbaise-Ibo,” *Journal of International African Institute* 29, no. 2 (April, 1959):125.

¹⁴⁷ S.N.C. Obi, *Modern Family Law in Southern Nigeria* (Lagos: African University Press, 1966), See also Betty Yorburg, *Family and Society, Survival or Extinction?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 46.

¹⁴⁸ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 454.

you.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, the relationship in the extended family will determine how each person receives his/her due of respect/honour and the duties that are involved. The extended families are linked with the life of the village as Okere maintains that,

To understand the extended family system one should not see it in isolation, but rather in the wider context of Igbo social organization...‘Blood and soil,’ the same blood, the same home, forms the ideological core of Igbo social organization. A local unit is also a kinship unit. With the exception of a few migrants, everybody in an Igbo village has a traceable blood relationship with everybody else in the same village. And for the Igbos, blood is really much thicker than water...It is this respect for blood which makes the Igbo village into one big or as it is called, extended family.¹⁵⁰

Okere implies that these extended families are made up of *Unwunna* who are the entire number of males from families and extended families. *Unwuada* are all women from their villages that are married to men from other villages whereas *unyom-djii* are the married women of the village. Each group in their own way contributes to a life of communion in the village. They unite together to maintain the welfare of all families. They are the custodians of peace. The *Unwunna* from each extended family act as support for their young men and women during the marriage process. They make decisions regarding any event of significance in the families. They own the land and are responsible for allocating farm lands to members. The *Unwunna* group is a good example of the ever-extending nature of the Ezza family. The group continues to maintain the ancestral home and offer yearly sacrifice to primordial ancestors. Such sacrifice and eating together in communion exemplifies the continuous communion among the extended Ezza family.

Joseph Agbasiere stresses the role of women in the Ezza culture. *Unwuada* act as agents of peace in their respective families of birth. They sometimes sue for peace and settle disputes in their families through such gestures as carrying young palm fronds as a sign of peace.¹⁵¹ Nworie comments that “It is as daughters of the village [*Unwuada*]...that women exercise the highest degree of political and allied influence on their natal lineage.”¹⁵² He writes that they are accorded a great respect by male members of their families. They prevent bad behaviour of married women to their families and caution any erring man. According to Agbasiere, at that the time of their visitation to their families

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, ed. with Forward by Shirely Ardner (London: Routledge Press, 2000), 39.

¹⁵² Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 205.

and at their departure, their recommendations are usually respected by male members of their families.¹⁵³ Writing about law and order in a Nigerian Tribe, C.K. Meek states that it is a serious offence to neglect the order of *unwuada*.¹⁵⁴ The *Unwuada* are great agents of communion in the Ezza family.

Mmuo discusses *Unyom-djii* women who married into families and make up the women group of the village.¹⁵⁵ Their role is described by Mmuo. Although women are perceived in the society as always under the control of their fathers and husbands, they are also honoured by the male group. Agbasiere notes that these women are really the custodians of peace and morality in their homes, villages and community. For example, “the Aba women’s war *Ogu Umunwanyi* in Igbo” and *Okfu Unwanyi* in Ezza which colonial masters called “women’s riot in 1929” showed the power of women and what they could do to avert injustice in their society.¹⁵⁶

They correct wrongdoing by singing a satire about offenders. They also reward nobility by singing the praises of the just person.¹⁵⁷ All these groups of familial units organise themselves and work together in the society in order to maintain familial communion. Farm work and building of houses are done communally. Nworie observes that there are shared roles in the construction of mud houses in the Ezza village. The men use hoes to mix sand while women fetch water from the stream with which the mortar can be prepared for building the house. These tiring tasks are done in spirit of joy shown by continuous singing during the period of work. The house is eventually built without any cost to the owner, except the cost of providing food for the people.¹⁵⁸ Emmanuel Nwabude tells us that the inclusion of these familial units is the reason why a family in Ezza culture is known as “*ezi l’ ulo*.”¹⁵⁹ This means that the family comprises both those inside and outside the immediate family circle.¹⁶⁰ This sense of inclusion and communion

¹⁵³ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 42.

¹⁵⁴ C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), 160.

¹⁵⁵ Mmuo, *The Treasure of Meaning*, 21.

¹⁵⁶ Judith Van Allen, “Aba Riots, or Igbo Women’s War? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, eds. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edina G. Bay (Stanford, Cali: Standford University Press, 1976): 59; Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 39.

¹⁵⁸ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 113-114.

¹⁵⁹ Emmanuel Oguejiofor Nwabude, *Preparation for Marriage and Family Life Among the Igbo People of Nigeria* (Onitsha: Donachuks, 2001), 80-89. See also Anthony Ufearoh, “Ezi-na-Ulo and Umunna: In search of Democratic Ideal in Traditional Igbo Family,” *Ogiris: A New Journal of African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2010): 97, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.ajol.info>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

is taught to children from an early age. Thus, the tradition of living a life of communion becomes entrenched in the Ezza family.

Ike's description of loving relationships in Africa applies to Ezza culture as well. He maintains that "The essence of community, sharing... and togetherness was shown through the large family. The family was a sign of life. Loneliness was unknown. The large extended family offers a possibility for social security and social insurance."¹⁶¹ Thus, the extended families that constitute the village are not only the source of unity and love, they also live in solidarity, supporting one another materially, spiritually, socially and financially. Each village has a central square where villagers meet for various occasions. Such a meeting place in Ezza is called *Ngamgbo*. According to Sabastian Anokwulu, the "square is where their religious life is strengthened, their political strategies are determined and even their wars are declared in times of tribal crisis."¹⁶² In other words, it is a centre of communion for the villagers, a place where relationship with God is fostered through prayer and different rituals that invoke the help of God. Discussion regarding government of the people takes place there. It is also where determined young men take an oath to defend their society from outside interference.

Thus, Ofoegbu writes, each village is ruled by a man who is elected by the members of the village. The leader is selected because of his compassion, justice and prudence.¹⁶³ His chief duty is to bring peace and communion in the village by calling the members to constant dialogue and by settling disputes among the people. He is not paid for his work because it is a selfless service to the village. He is called the father of the village (*Nnaji oha*), and the people accord great respect to him.¹⁶⁴ Boff contends that

Every human society is built, structured and lasts through history on the basis of the dialectical interaction among three basic structures: economic, political and symbolic...The political structure concerns the organization of social relationships and everyone occupies a particular place in the human whole...the basic reality of the Trinity consists precisely in the interpenetration and harmonious co-existence between the three divine Persons; these find a reflection, even if only a pale one, in the interplay between the three structures that support human society.¹⁶⁵

Boff, declares that the communion of the three divine Persons finds some sort of

¹⁶¹ Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 54.

¹⁶² Sebastian Chukwuma Anokwulu, *The Ecumenical Imperative and Formation of Ecumenical Consciousness Among Pastoral Workers* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 79.

¹⁶³ Ofoegbu, *Igbo Language and Culture*, 218-219.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 107-108.

resemblance in human society and the harmony that exists in the basic structures put in place to safeguard peace in human society comes from trinitarian communion.

2.4.8 Community: Inter-Village Communion

Many villages unite to form the community of Ezza. The people say that *emekota onu oburu mkpumkpu* (unity is strength). The loving relationship that exists between villages gives rise to a peaceful existence in the community. Francis Oborji's idea of "life-in-communion ... being in relation," is a reality in Ezza community, a hallmark and essence of their lives.¹⁶⁶ This way of life is seen in my own community which comprises seven villages, namely, Aguba, Agunwenyi, Atucha, Eluoji, Ojiegbe one, Ojiegbe two, and Onungan- gboigwe respectively. These villages come together to participate in the lives of one another. For example, all of the villages take part in celebrating the New Yam Festival (*Okeaku*), to welcome a new wife in the families and to bury their dead members. Wilbur O'Donovan's statement "I am because my community is" captures the life of solidarity and care that exists in Ezza community.¹⁶⁷ Families and extended families neither rejoice nor cry alone. That is why in Ezza culture, celebrations of both joys and sorrows are communal—hence, sharing their responsibilities and privileges together.

O'Donovan continues that the community leader known and referred to as *Ezeogo* (meaning the Cultural Head of all) has responsibility for co-ordinating the cultural rites and peaceful co-existence of everyone in the community, irrespective of sex, status or strength. He is always consulted in any important cultural decision(s) and action(s). He uses dialogue to settle land disputes between the villages. Each village contributes to the welfare of the community by sharing in the clearing and maintaining of roads, markets and public places. Each community has a centre for meetings and celebrations. The community leader together with a number of appointed cabinet members, guides the people.¹⁶⁸ Mmuo discusses serious offences involving adult members of the community. Serious offences such as murder, stealing and adultery involve all adult members of the

¹⁶⁶ Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion: Issues of Interpretation and Mission* (Eldoret: Amecea Gaba Publications, 2005), 75. See also Vincent Mulago, "Vital Participation," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 137-158 at 142.

¹⁶⁷ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 4. See also Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity*, vii.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

villagers. In such cases, every adult assembles in the compound of the Leader/Traditional Ruler (*Ezeogo*) to deliberate on the best way to handle the situation. Depending on what case is being adjudicated, the culprit could pay a fine, be beaten, disgraced or removed from the community.¹⁶⁹ Elechi Amadi reminds us that a person who commits murder could be banished and from the sometimes an entire family could be forced to go into exile.¹⁷⁰ The community takes such extreme action to reinforce the principle that the extermination of another person's life is a grave offence against God and humanity. Ikenga Oraegbunam highlights how Ezza people believe that life is sacred and the spilling of human blood on the earth is an abomination (*nso ali*) before God and the people.¹⁷¹ According to Uzuoku, it is abomination to kill a human being in Ezza culture because of an agreement between the "earth" and human beings.¹⁷² This covenant is entered from creation. For example, the placenta of a new-born is returned to the soil.¹⁷³ This is because humanity is interconnected; to kill anybody is to break the chain of communion that exists in human society from creation with Almighty God (*Chiukfu*) as the sovereign being.

Austin Echema writes that for Igbo people, the earth is more than the ground we walk on, it is God's agent. The Spirit of God works through it. The earth as the agent of God is one of the most respected spiritual realities and is known as "the chief guardian of morality" in Igbo land and Ezza in particular.¹⁷⁴ Nworie writes that any breach in communion with the spirit represented by the earth is viewed seriously. For instance, a person's truthfulness is determined whether he or she is able to repeat the same statement standing barefoot on the soil. The spirit which the earth represents, they believe, punishes any offence against her severely. Therefore, the spilling of human blood on earth desecrates the earth and would need a special sacrifice to atone for human blood. Moreover, murder is a serious breaking of communion among human beings because it is the destruction of human life in the society. It is the gravest offence in Ezza culture.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Patrick Mary Anene Mmuo, *Igbo People & Igbo Culture* (Enugu: Econas, 2013), 54.

¹⁷⁰ Elechi Amadi, *Ethics in Nigerian Culture* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982), 58.

¹⁷¹ Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam, "Crime and Punishment in Igbo Customary Law: The Challenge of Nigeria Criminal Jurisprudence," *New Journal of African Studies* no. 7 (2010): 18, accessed January 1, 2020, www.ajol.info/index.php/og/article/download/57917/46285.

¹⁷² Uzuoku, *A Listening Church*, 25.

¹⁷³ Ezza people bury the placenta of a new born baby in the soil because they believe that is a sign of the covenant pertaining sacredness of life in which it is forbidden to kill a human being.

¹⁷⁴ Austin Echema, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives* (Piscataway, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 17.

¹⁷⁵ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 117.

Godfrey Ozumba and Elijah Okon contend that a thief could be tied and beaten or he/she could be stripped naked and forced to carry the stolen goods around the villages.¹⁷⁶ According to Mmuo, anyone who commits adultery would be required to confess openly to the public. He or she would provide materials for sacrifice in order to restore the communion between the married couple which he has broken.¹⁷⁷ Ofoegbu suggests that all these harsh measures deter people from committing sin in the society. The families of the offenders are disgraced and people normally would not wish to be related to them in marriage. Ezza people are reluctant to marry people from offending families.¹⁷⁸ Because the entire community acts as a watchdog of moral behaviour in the society, people are afraid to engage in wrongdoing in order not to bring disgrace and shame to their families and relatives.¹⁷⁹

In reference to the African community, Ike asserts that

the pure African Society is egalitarian. It is Communalistic. In this society, every member has the right to a home, the right to equal protection before the law and traditions, the right to work, right to care for others and be cared for whenever necessary, the right to protest and the right to rebel (even against the final decision of the community), the right to training, aid and other forms of education, the right to participation and leadership in government, art, religion and philosophy, and the right to inheritance and equitable sharing of all the benefits and undertakings of the community. These facts are part of the most remarkable achievements of the Africans—most remarkable because the African held to these fundamentals, age after age as if clutching to the last threads of life itself.¹⁸⁰

The communality that Ike describes may be seen in Ezza culture where people are free to have homes and property and look after their affairs without interference from others.

Boff concurs with Ike by maintaining that,

the product of relationships of communion is community; this implies living together, valuing the individuality of everyone, accepting differences as the interchange of riches, establishing personal relationships, doing away with formalities. Sociologically speaking, community is a spirit that should inform all forms of human society rather than a specific social grouping. So taking historically, the community spirit implies a utopia: a society that is without conflicts and that consists

¹⁷⁶ Godfrey O. Ozumba and Elijah John Okon, eds., “Times and Thoughts of African Political Thinkers” (July 2017): 276, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.books.google.ie>.

¹⁷⁷ Mmuo, *African Culture*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷⁹ Ofoegbu, *Igbo Language and Culture*, 221.

¹⁸⁰ Ike, *A World For Everybody*, 106-107. See also Ezenweke and Nwadiolor, “Understanding Human Relations in African Traditional Religious Context,” 64.

of interplay of relationships in which the common good is placed above individual good because the members of such a society feel bound up with each other. This utopia, even though never achieved in the conditions of history as we know it, is eminently meaningful in both social and anthropological terms, since it continually unleashes energies directed at bringing about social changes in the direction of more balanced and participatory forms of living together.¹⁸¹

Boff indicates that community comes from loving communion among groups of people. Thus, the importance of Ezza communion is revealed because everybody starting from the family members to the elders and community leaders intent to maintain the loving participation in the society by ensuring that conflicts are resolved quickly. They do this by frequent meetings from family levels to the whole community. Through these meetings, people are listened to in their needs and any signs of wrong-doing is detected and corrected. Dispute between neighbours are also settled. Boff maintains that, “The community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit becomes the prototype of the human community dreamed of by those who wish to improve society and build it in such a way as to make it into the image and likeness of the Trinity.”¹⁸² In other words, human community has to learn to exist in communion because God, the originator of life, dwells in communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Communion in Ezza culture implies community. According to Magesa:

Good company implies community, that is, the establishment and maintenance of harmonious relationships among people (which includes) the exchange of aid and sympathy which spring from personal friendship. It implies urbane manners and a friendliness which expresses itself in eating and drinking together; not merry conversation, but also discussion between equals, which the Nyakyusa regard as the principle form of education [and means to acquire wisdom]. All these—practical sharing, communion, and communication—are essential factors of any African political system...Any leadership that does not actively promote them has doubtful legitimacy in the eyes of the people.¹⁸³

Magesa points to the fact that Ezza community is not only a place of love; it is also a place of teaching and imparting wisdom to the people. The leaders make sure that they are helping people to know the tradition of the society which is passed on orally. The elders and people who have wisdom and ability see that young people are learning

¹⁸¹ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 130.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸³ Magesa, *African Religion*, 259.

properly. The teachers make themselves available for this important work which happens through conversation. The communal aspect of life in Ezza culture also includes the material good in society. Magesa observes that,

In Africa, organizations, whether social or political, presuppose the existence of material resources to sustain them. Decisions about the use of material resources usually depends on the moral values of the community, its expectation for cooperation and sharing ...Property refers to natural or created wealth or sources of wealth. Ownership refers to the acquisition and distribution of, or claim to, property. Such and such a thing is mine or ours, and not yours. I or we have the right to use, deny use, or dispose of it as I or we choose. When this right is granted to an individual or to a specific group of individuals within a given society, it is called private property...if ownership of property belongs, in principle, to the whole society, it is called communal property. Often, communal property may be used by individuals or groups within the society as long as they follow certain rules.¹⁸⁴

According to Magesa, collective ownership of items common in Ezza culture enhances the communal aspect of life. It makes people depend and count on one another for sustenance of life and suppresses selfishness and individualism. Magesa explains that,

African Religion emphasizes the communal nature of property within a given community, and...follows the principle of inclusion. Yet, it does not completely dismiss private or personal ownership...tradition usually indicates the parameters within which personal ownership may be exercised without harming the common good, which, in the end, is always primacy...the right of personal ownership is situated with the context of joint or public right of access to the basic resources necessary for life. Generally, the interplay between an individual's right to own property and his or her expectations with regard to access to communal property assures that the least economic inequality in the community...It is intended to prevent attitudes destructive of relationships, such as arrogance and envy. In the moral perspective of African Religion, disharmony must be constantly guarded against, whether it comes from social or economic inequalities.¹⁸⁵

Ezza people say: *onweru eku chee onu ya* (a wealthy person should guard against pride). This is because an arrogant person sows seeds of discord in society. Ezza people try to minimise this through communal ownership of land or any other property which cause

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 277.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 277-278.

disunity in society. Nobody will be puffed up with pride when things are owned and shared by all. Magesa maintains that,

a scale of priorities is established based on the relationship of the individual to the community. Since in African Religion, the individual can exist as a person only in community, his or her well-being can be assured only the context of the well-being of the community. It is in the interest of each member of community that the corporate body be strong and healthy; at the same time, the health and strength of the corporate body has its primary purpose the assurance of the welfare of each of the members. The ethic of the community, which forms part of its lifestyle of all the members, assures that sharing takes place when necessary.¹⁸⁶

According to Magesa, the individual depends on the community for survival. In reference to Ezza culture, it is the role of the community to see to it that everybody receives help according to his or her needs. This keeps people in peace and harmony in society especially in times of difficulties. Magesa writes that,

African Religion recognizes that human wrong-doing against the ancestors and God will sometimes bring times of adversity and suffering to the family, clan, or community. Individuals at the various levels of community are expected to foresee these occasions and to manage the community's goods and resources so that people are not caught unawares. One of the tasks of leadership is to consult experts in various fields and to advise people what to do to avoid such calamities as floods, droughts, hail, or locusts, and their consequences...leaders are also economic planners, and leadership is an important factor in the production, preservation, and distribution of the community of goods. It is the function of both the religious structure and the consciousness of the community to curb any negative elements that might put individual or community well-being at risk and to maximize those positive elements that enhance it.¹⁸⁷

The aim of life in Ezza culture is to live in harmony with God, ancestors and with people. To achieve this, they have many measures and designated figures in place, such as spiritual and society leaders to identify and fend off harm to society. Spiritual leaders organise prayers and sacrifices, while society leaders look after the people and common property, so that discord does not arise in society.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 279.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 183.

2.4.9 Celebration of the Seasons of planting, harvesting and feast days and months

Emmanuel Obiechina highlights how Ezza people cherish their celebrations of seasons of planting, harvest, feast days and months. They consider such celebrations as events of communion. From the preparations to the many days of the actual celebrations, the people are drawn together in communion with one another. Celebration time is a period when “Music, dance and song become for the community an instrument for creating social, emotional and aesthetic solidarity.”¹⁸⁸ Nworie provides an example. During the communal work of planting and harvesting, people work with great joy as they help their relatives and friends in clearing the farm and preparing the soil for seeds.¹⁸⁹ In most cases, no money is charged for the work; the community is simply helping a member to plant seeds for feeding his/her family.¹⁹⁰

During the planting of yams, the yam heaps are made by men using hoes, while women clear the ground with machetes. People also work together during harvesting time to bring in the crops to barns and houses. Schineller notes that harvesting is also a time of festival in appreciation for the produce of the land. It is a time when large meals are prepared for the people to eat and drink and give thanks to God in prayer for the gifts of food and animals.¹⁹¹ Feast days and months are marked by dancing, merriment and exchange of gifts to one another.¹⁹² Such feasts are truly a time of living in love and communion.

2.4.10 Welcoming Visitors and Hospitality to Strangers

Nworie’s words about Africans in the area of welcoming visitors apply to Ezza people.

He writes:

Africans welcome visitors with or without prior appointment. One needn’t wait for a special invitation to visit his or her distant relation or neighbour. Africans symbolically welcome their visitors through the presentation and breaking of kola nuts and sometimes...traditional gin, coconuts form part of the items used in the ritual of welcome to visitors...Africans show ready

¹⁸⁸Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition, and Society in the West African Novels*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 58, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www./goo.gl/esfRT4>.

¹⁸⁹Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization*, 113.

¹⁹⁰Mmuo, *African Culture*, 85.

¹⁹¹Schineller, *A Hand Book on Inculturation*, 77.

¹⁹²Ibid.

welcome to visitors in the willingness to share food among all persons present at mealtime. In traditional Igbo or African culture, it is bad manners for a person not to share or express the intention to share a meal with those present at meal time. Africans drink from one cup in their homes and also during feasts or community celebrations. Africans consider sharing things with one's neighbours as a social obligation that one must fulfil in order not to be called demeaning names. Indeed, it is a sign of a strained relationship when a person constantly refuses to share with a neighbour.¹⁹³

Ezza people as Nworie notes do not need an invitation to pay visit to one another. People may visit their friends and relatives at any time and any day. Visitors are always welcome and accorded great honour and respect. The host and the visitor eat together as a sign of love and communion. Ezza people in the words of Nworie believe that visitors are sent by God to bring blessings and healing to their hosts, "for the coming of a visitor is sometimes the reason why the family ends their quarrels; the sick person tries to cheer up; the home is peaceful and its life reinvigorated."¹⁹⁴ He explains that strangers are always welcome and, depending on the length of stay, are served with kola nuts, food and drinks. The visitor is be made to feel at home. Sharing food with the stranger is an important way of expressing communion with him/her.¹⁹⁵ He writes that,

Hospitality is an African cultural value with little or no diminishment both in pre-colonial and post colonial times...It is so uniquely African that it is called *African hospitality*. Hospitality is really the least an African person expects from his or relations, and most of the time it is presumed rather than legislated. African hospitality is manifested even in the manner and tome of saying welcome to strangers. The Igbo Greetings *nnoo* (welcome) is often repeated severally by the hosts to their guests as a sign of heartfelt welcome. Africans sometimes welcome strangers and offer them a piece of land to build their homes. Africans believe that people do not abandon permanently their original home; they would most likely return back to it irrespective of the extended time they sojourn elsewhere.¹⁹⁶

Festus Okafor concurs, emphasising that eating together is a very important aspect of communal life in Ezza society. It is un-African not to welcome visitors and eat with them.¹⁹⁷ Receiving strangers with kindness is a mark of communion in Ezza society.

¹⁹³ Nworie, *Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 118.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 118. See also Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1996), 174; Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 78-79

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 117-118.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Festus Chukwudi Okafor, *African at the Crossroads: Philosophical Approach to Education* (New York: Vantage Press, 1974.), 21.

Uzukwu also agrees that hospitality is “a way of being in Africa.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, welcoming people is very common and almost a natural reaction to visitors and strangers, in keeping with Ezza culture.

2.4.11 Women and Communion in Ezza Culture

Nworie highlights how men and women play important roles around communion in Ezza culture. He expresses the view that “Igbo culture is replete with the paradoxes; one such paradox is evident in the status of women in the culture. Women are subordinate to men and also have an outstanding place in their own right...they occupy an exceptional place as mothers and daughters of the lineage.”¹⁹⁹ In other words, Nworie alludes to the fact culture is both patriarchal and materifocal in Igbo society. Agbaisere agrees:

writings on Igbo kinship terminology have not paid sufficient attention to the subtle nature of the extended idiom that the term *nwanne* represents, in contrast to its complement *nwana*. The tendency among these writers to treat the two terms simply as denoting full siblings in opposition to half-siblings is somewhat superficial...the term *nwanne* is used to refer to any relative...that is, brother or sister. To speak of kin as descended from a mother, rather than a father, emphasizes the importance of the mother in the kinship system. It shows that while men often trace their descent line through a man (*nna*), they base their immediate links through a woman (*nne*). Even though people designate themselves in terms of patrilineages (*umunna*), still the idea of relatedness is traced through a matrifocal idiom to the one woman at the apex through whom are descended all the members of patrilineages who regard themselves as *nwanne* (collectively *umunne*).²⁰⁰

This is true of Ezza culture, Ezza people descended from Ezekunan and his Wife Anyigor Ezekuna. Margaret Green also writes about the idea of *umunna* and *umunne*.²⁰¹ She elaborates that “*Umu* denotes children, it once suggests what is so characteristic of Ibo social organisation that the local unity is also a kinship unit.”²⁰² Nwando Achebe, in her book, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* portrays the lady who attained a leadership position as men by becoming the first woman to hold the position of “female

¹⁹⁸ Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu, “Missiology Today: The African Situation,” in *Religion and African Culture: Inculturation-A Nigerian Perspective*, ed. E.E. Uzukwu (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1988), 158.

¹⁹⁹ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization*, 203.

²⁰⁰ Agbaisere, *Women in Igbo Life*, 82.

²⁰¹ Margaret M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs, Chiefly with Reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1964), 16.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, xvii.

headman, female warrant chief and female king.”²⁰³ She writes that before the advent of colonial masters in Nigeria, women share in the political organisation of the village with men. The women also have their own assembly where they decided the concerns of women. She gave an example of “The Aku Women’s Assembly” in Nssukka which “functioned as a powerful political instrument, which was sometimes known to reject the decisions of of the General Assembly. If this were to happen, the decision of the Women’s assembly would take precedence, for their decrees were binding on men.”²⁰⁴ She laments that colonialism and Christianity deprived Igbo women of their “power they had previously held in the precolonial religious order.”²⁰⁵ In Ezza culture women use their own town cry known as *okpo nkereke* and also beating of a gong *ekwe* to conven their assembly. This is done in the evening before the meeting so that the women in the village will know the time and place of their meeting the following day. The designated woman leader *ochiora* or *onyeisi ndu nne* implements this important duty for the women in Ezza community. Men also do the same for their own organisation. Ifi Amadiume explains that before the advent of colonial masters in Nigeria, Igbo women had “traditional power based on control of the subsistence economy and the the marketplace, self-government, and control of their own religion or culture.”²⁰⁶ She maintains that the efforts of these women

resulted in well-developed women’s organizations and women’s movement...The old systems of checks and balances began to disintegrate as a result of our colonial experiences...It was not the colonialists who dealt the final blow to the traditional autonomy and power of African women...but the elites who inherited the colonial machinery of oppression and exploitation...A new system now encroached as the society controlled by the elites began to call the tune with impunity. Illiterate women found themselves bound under a system which needed a kind of expertise that poor villagers lacked. This marked the end of traditional, spontaneous and popular women’s movement in Africa.²⁰⁷

Amadiume continues: “In the political system there was a flexibility in gender classification which allowed the incorporation of certain categories of woman into the male category, giving them positions of authority in the power structure. Daughters...were regarded as males

²⁰³ Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 2.

²⁰⁴ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005). 170.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰⁶ Ifi Amadiume, *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriachy, Religion and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 177.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* See also Nkiru Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture. Suny Series, Feminist Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 23.

in relation to wives.”²⁰⁸ In Ezza culture, a childless woman is allowed to marry a girl and get children. This is not lesbian relationships. The girl gets children from other men for the woman who paid her bride price. Some time the woman husband goes back and lives in her father’s compaound but she is equally free to live in her husband’s home. A widow is also free to get children from other men for her husband after his death. But Ezza people does not have the tradition of keeping a girl in her father’s house to get children for the family if her father has no male children.²⁰⁹ As Amadime maintains “political administration was embedded in the religious structure, we find both patriarchal and matriarchy ideologies juxtaposed in the indigenous political structure” of Igbo people.²¹⁰ In Ezza people a woman can be a diviner if people decerned that the spirit has called her to hold that position.

Van Allen also expresses that

Westernization is not an unmixed blessing. The experience of Igbo women under British colonialism shows that Western influence can sometimes weaken or destroy women’s traditional autonomy and power without providing modern forms of autonomy or power in exchange. Igbo women had a significant role in traditional political life. As individuals, they participated in village meetings with men. But their real political power was based on the solidarity of women, as expressed in their own political institutions – their meetings...their market networks, their kingship groups, and their right to use strikes, boycotts and force to effect their decisions.²¹¹

The colonial masters brought foreign government which was different from the Igbo people’s rule through the elders and of using consensus of the people (*nzuko*) to deal with their affairs. The British brought a situation where political parties were formed and young Western educated men became leaders instead of the wise elders. Van Allen agrees that

Political power in Igbo society was *diffuse*. There was no specialized bodies or offices which legitimate power was vested, and no person, regardless of his status or ritual position, had the authority to issue *commands* which others has an obligation to obey. In line with this diffusion of authority, the right to enforce decision was also diffuse: there was no state that held a monopoly of legitimate force, and the use of force to protect one’s interests or to see that a group decision was carried out was considered legitimate for the individual and groups...the British tried to create specialized political institutions which commanded authority and monopolized force. In doing so they took into account, eventually, Igbo political institutions dominated by men and ignored

²⁰⁸ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), 51.

²⁰⁹ See Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 82-86.

²¹⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughter*, 52.

²¹¹ Judith Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost of Political Institutions of Igbo Women,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies/ La Revue Cannadienne des Etudies Africaines* VI, no. II (1972): 165.

those of the women...women were shut out from political power.²¹²

Women lack education needed to attain to political position in government in Ezza culture. However, they still retain their authority to form their own organisation and to demonstrate their annoyance by protesting and visiting the homes of leaders of communities. According to Van Allen,

The main Igbo political institution seems to have been the village assembly, a gathering of all adults in the village who chose to attend. Any adult who had something to say on the matter under discussion was entitled to speak – as long as he or she said something the others considered worth listening to; as the Igbo say, a case forbids no one.²¹³

This alludes to the fact that both men and women are free to participate and contribute their ideas in the village assembly in Ezza society. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi also concurs with the idea that African society has matrifocal organisation. She writes that “those who assume that men are the measure of all things are confronted with incontrovertible evidence about anafemales who were in positions of power and authority.”²¹⁴ Thus, she explains that both men and women share political powers in Yoruba society. Kamene Okonjo laments that colonial rule brought about the decline of dual-sex institutions in Igbo society. She maintains that “Colonial rule in Nigeria in the first decade of this century marked the beginning of the end of equality of the sexes in village as well as in national politics...What is often overlooked is that under colonialism women in southeastern Nigeria suffered the greatest loss of power.”²¹⁵ According to Okonjo,

Among the Igbo who live on the western side of the Niger, the management of village affairs by sexes was more profound and more visible than it was on the eastern side...All the Igbo of each political unit to the west of the Niger were subject to two local monarchs, both of whom were crowned and acknowledged heads who lived in palaces and ruled from thrones. The two monarchs were the male *obi*, who in theory was the acknowledged head of the whole community but who in practice was concerned more with the male section of the community, and the female *omu*, who in theory was the acknowledged mother of the whole community but who in practice was charged with concern for the female

²¹² Ibid., 166.

²¹³ Ibid., 167.

²¹⁴ Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 107.

²¹⁵ Kamene Okonjo, “The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwest Nigeria,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, eds. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford, Cali: Stanford University Press, 1976), 55.

section.²¹⁶

Ezza people have *unwuada* and *unyomdji* who played important part in the organisation of society but they do not have the tradition of male and female monarchs ruling side by side in society. However, the women's part is so significant that when a child is misbehaving, Ezza people would say: *iphe egude lua nne ghu laru l'iswi* (meaning that the dowries paid during his/her mother's marriage seem to be in vain). It literally means that the marriage of the mother to the family is a failure because her children's bad conducts reveal that they are not receiving good training from her. This indicates the indispensable role that women play in rearing children. Women are the agents of communion, starting from within their families and then outwards to the entire society. If women are removed from Ezza culture, it will crumble. Mothers, for instance, are the heart of the family. They nurture children from conception till death. They care for their husbands and for their extended families. In Ezza culture, as indeed in Africa in general, Nworie's observation applies: Women "help in nurturing and sustaining family values...women nurture the young to adhere to culture but play a special role in the communal sacrifice which is at the core of Igbo [Ezza] religion."²¹⁷ In other words, the role of women penetrates every aspect of life in Ezza society.

Nworie further states that "In Igbo traditional religious settings, women play significant roles in ritual celebrations since it is the wives that bear most of the expenses. They provide such public ritual items like chickens, eggs, and even cooked food for ritual celebration."²¹⁸ This cooking and sharing of food is central to communion in Ezza culture. There is a type of sacrifice that can only be offered by women. For example, only women enter into the *nome* shrine for prayer and for cooking the food that is required for sacrifice. Moreover, both men and women are diviners in Ezza culture. The people believe that the practice of divination can fall on men or women. Women are also central to prayer for fertility. In the words of Agbasiere, "women alone carry out these rites, stark naked, and it is a taboo for men to pass them on the way to or from the shrine."²¹⁹ Women are also the custodians of the property of society. For instance, if cows or other animals are destroying people's crops, women rally themselves and catch the animals and

²¹⁶ Ibid., 47.

²¹⁷ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 201. See also Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 37; Douglas B. Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* (Jackson: University press of Mississippi, 2005), 52.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 202. See Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life*, 42-43.

²¹⁹ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life*, 43.

make sure their owners take care of them.²²⁰ In this way, the women ensure peace and tranquillity among people. Moreover, the women have their own meetings where they deliberate on how to run affairs of their villages. Nworie's statement captures the significance of the role of women in Ezza culture:

One interesting aspect of the women's role of keeping watch on the community's morality is the overtly public nature of their demonstration. These women demonstrate publicly either in the market place or in the house of the individual praised or condemned. The preservation of the integrity of the community is usually the ultimate concern of the women...these women constantly watch out for every individual action that could endanger public peace or compromise public standard. In some cases, they delegate their members to protest to the elders, and if their protest is not heeded, they could take far-reaching actions to make sure there is public order and obedience to the law of the community.²²¹

Nworie explains that at their annual August meeting, contemporary Ezza women preserve "a single-sex structure common in Igbo traditional societies."²²² In such a forum, they organise how to look after the sick and the needy by providing income, food, and clothing and by assigning some women from their group to the task until the next August meeting. Further, the women take care of communal activities such as cleaning the sources of drinking water and sweeping the square. They have special roles around births, marriage and burial ceremonies. In the celebration of the birth of a child, the women sing, dance, feed and serve people. A newly married man chooses an old woman for the *obu uwhu* ceremony.²²³ The man is not married to this old woman but her role as an experienced married woman who has gained the wisdom of married life is to establish the young family in stability and love. Women also bring great warmth in the celebration of marriage. They sing, dance, cook, serve and even dress up to the joy of the couple.

When someone dies, the women do what is called *akporo iphu* in Ezza. It means the family of the deceased is cared for by the women. They visit and console them by their presence. They fetch water and cook food for them. They make sure that the members of the dead person do not grieve alone. Women in Ezza are such agents of

²²⁰ See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958), 12.

²²¹ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 205. See Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life*. She cites the example of Aba Women's war in 1929. See Joseph Akinyele Omoyajowo, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion: And Among the Yoruba," in *African Traditional Religions*, 78.

²²² *Ibid.*, 206, see Victoria Oluomachukwu Ibewuikwe, *African Women and Religious Change: A Study of the Western Igbo of Nigeria: With a Special Focus on Asaba Town* (Uppsala: Department of Theology, Uppsala University, 2016), 216.

²²³ Beginning of a new home.

holiness and peace that they are called *unwuanyi oroke odabike* (women of great strength). This power is not of war but of love. Ezza women are “truly flowers in the garden. They give beauty, scent and seed to life” according to Mbiti.²²⁴ These women are so closely knitted together in their neighbored that they are known as *obutobu* which means from heart to heart in Ezza language. The women are the first teachers of communion in Ezza culture. Ezza people say that *Nne eghu la ata echera nwiya elee ya enya le onu*²²⁵ (if a mother goat chews the cord or bamboo, her kids look at her mouth). In other words, the life of communion starts from infancy where small children copy the good example of their parents. In the family, the mothers teach the children how to respect and honour their seniors.

The women are thus a powerful group who act as sources of peace in Ezza society. Even the male members have to obey them. They settle disputes by carrying palm fronds as sign of peace.²²⁶ Nworie comments that “It is as daughters of the village [Unwuada]...that women exercise the highest degree of political and allied influence on their natal lineage.”²²⁷ Agbasiere elaborates. These groups of women visit their families of birth from time to time in order to consolidate loving relationships and to cut the bad behaviour of their family members. They are accorded great respect by the male members of their families. Their decisions carry weight and are not treated lightly by the male members of their families. Their recommendations are normally followed by the male groups both during the time of their visitation to their families and at their departure.²²⁸ Meek writes that it is a major offence to neglect the order of *unwuada*.²²⁹

2.4.12 The Centrality of Community

According to Amadi, in Ezza life, a person’s insertion into the community through rituals is a necessary form of identification of an individual. These rituals introduce the person into the life of the community. As a result, communal worship is the most suitable context for expressing communion and communality. During such worship, the priest and the people assemble around the village shrine to offer sacrifice to God and to obtain

²²⁴ Mbiti, “Flowers in the Garden, 71.

²²⁵ Ezza African Proverbs. See also Francis A. Arinze, *Africans and Christianity, Book Four*, ed. Lambert Ejiogor (Enugu: Optimal Computer Solutions, 1990), 14.

²²⁶ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 42.

²²⁷ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 205.

²²⁸ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 42.

²²⁹ Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 160.

blessings from God. Anybody who does not live in communion is not allowed to share in the sacrificial meal. For example, people who are excommunicated from the community are not allowed to share in such sacrificial meals until they are reconciled with the community. The reason for this is that people believe that lack of communion in the society also hinders blessings from God.²³⁰ Indeed, communality is central in Ezza culture, from the family to the entire community. Ogbonnaya conveys the essence of the experience of communion in Ezza culture when he states that,

My belief in African community was formed—long before I heard the word theology—by a communal experience of belonging among my people and various African peoples. This sense of community, as my *Chi* (spiritual guide) would have it, included the ancestors, spirits, and other beings within both my immediate cosmos and beyond. I was taught that I was connected with all and the all was connected to me.²³¹

The importance of communion and relationship was taught to Ogbonnaya by the words and example of his people. He was made to know that he is related to both the living and the dead. Because of these close relationships between the ancestors and the living, Fashole-Luke too urges African Christians to incorporate their love of the ancestors into their Christian belief in the doctrine of the saints.²³² Chinedu Chukwu also claims that “The visible world of human society is supported by the world of the ancestors, the living dead, who are the custodians of ethics and morality.”²³³ In other words, just as the saints offer spiritual help to the people, the ancestors assist human beings spiritually. Jele S. Mangany declares that “The practice and the involvement in ancestral rituals should be seen as religiously motivated.”²³⁴ Thus, Ezza people live in communion and venerate their ancestors because they believe that they are helping them from the spiritual world. That is why communion in Ezza culture includes people interacting with each other, creation, dead relatives, spiritual realities and God.²³⁵

Our thesis argues that communion and participation which exists in Ezza culture analogously reflects trinitarian communion. The basis of this argument is the fact that God created human beings in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1: 26-27), and God is love

²³⁰ Amadi, *Ethics in Nigeria Culture*, 58.

²³¹ Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity*, vii; see also Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 117.

²³² E.W. Fashole-Luke, “Ancestor Veneration and the Communion of Saints,” in *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, ed. M.E. Glasswell and E. W. Fashole-Luke (London: SPCK, 1974), 209-221.

²³³ Chinedu P. Chukwu, *Obiora Ike in His Own Words: Thoughts on Culture, Ethics, Society, Religion and Politics* ed. Chinedu P. Chukwu (Enugu: BuildingEwealth, 2016), 16.

²³⁴ Mangany and Buitendag, “A Critical Analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity,” 2.

²³⁵ Otijele, “Understanding the African World View, 10.

(1Jn 4:8). According to Ifemesia Chieka, in Ezza culture, a human person is understood in terms of relationship, participation and communion.²³⁶ No one lives in isolation; people exist in relation to each other. Mbiti describes personhood in Africa as something that can never be understood without reference to other people. One is a person depending on his or her consciousness of obligation, rights and roles that he or she plays with regard to the other people. A person is not sad or happy alone; neither does she or he marry or beget children alone. Anything that happens to an individual person happens to his or her group. Mbiti captures the relationality in Ezza culture in these words: “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am.”²³⁷ This is a cardinal point in understanding the African view of a human person. The inter-dependent living portrayed in Mbiti’s suggests that characterization of an Ezza person is a reflection in some way of trinitarian communion.²³⁸ The three divine Persons exist in inter-relationship with one another. Ezza person’s loving participation and solidarity in their family relationships, extended families, kindreds, age grades, villages and the entire community is truly an image of the type of communion in the Trinity. A person is born into a family but must also relate with those outside the family. As an African ethnic group, Ezza people manifest in their society the expression of Ogbonnaya:

Communality is foundational to the African worldview...Communality, relationality, and fundamental interconnectedness underlie the African mode of seeing and being in the world. The African pulse is continually beating to the communal rhythms and communal fears. Indeed, conscious co-operation in the community are among the highest values in the human being’s existence—not separation, total independence, razor-edged competition and individuality for its own sake.²³⁹

Ogbonna’s overview of communality in Africa depicts the correct interpretation of communion in Ezza culture. It is also true when Emmanuel Nwabude describes the Ezza family as “*ezi l’ ulo*,” which literally means outside (*Ezi*) and inside the house (*Ulo*).²⁴⁰ A

²³⁶ Ifemesia Chieka, *Traditional Human Living among the Igbo* (Enugu: Forth Dimension Publishers, 1979), 2.

²³⁷ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 108.

²³⁸ See LaCugna, *GfU*, 273. “The three divine Persons exist in inter-relationship with one another but they are not collective as human community. See *Lateran Council IV*, which qualifies each divine “person” as “that reality, viz., that divine substance, essence or nature... that they may be one in us as we are one (Jn: 17: 22), the word one as applied to the disciples is to be taken in the sense of a union of charity in grace, but in the case of the divine persons in the sense of a unity of identity in nature...For between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude.” Neuner and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 149-150. Also *DS*. 804, 806.

²³⁹ Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity*, 1.

²⁴⁰ Nwabude, *Preparation for Marriage and Family Life*, 80-89.

person remains an individual but must have ongoing relationships not only with his or her family but also with the community. An Ezza proverb says that: “everyone must dance as he/she likes, but all must dance according to the tune.”²⁴¹ This sheds light on the understanding of a person in the community. It acknowledges that a person is an individual within the context of the community. In some sense when we apply this relationality to the doctrine of the Trinity, it reveals distinction and communion among the three divine Persons. In other words, neither in the Godhead nor in Ezza culture does communion nor unity destroy the individual character of the person. Each person whether in the Godhead or as a human being, participates in the life of others. This is more so because living the communal life in Ezza culture stems from their belief that God is part of the human experience of communality.²⁴²

The way in which the Persons in the Trinity participate in each other is remarkably profound they inhere in one another. This is what is called perichoretic unity. No human being could inhere in another as the three divine Persons do in the Godhead. Yet, Ezza people have a variation of *Perichoretic* life of the Trinity, a life in which parents, relatives or friends may offer to die instead of their relatives or friends. This is called *aswata eswa lwe* which means, choosing to die instead of another. This comes from love between the person who wants to offer himself/herself and the sick person. When a person is very sick and people expect the person to die, love prompts parents, relatives and friends to choose to die instead of their beloved person. In this case, Ezza people perform the ritual of exchange. The person who wants to make the self offering

²⁴¹ From Ezza culture in Nigeria.

²⁴² Both Christianity and African Traditional Religion have God as their centre of belief and worship. They also believe that love is the heart of relationship with God and with one another. The expression of faith is different. Christianity goes to God through Christ while African Traditional Religion worships God through God’s Spirit whom people meet through *enya Ali* (sanctuaries) and through the ancestors who are invoked to intercede with God. In Christianity, a place is set with time and days to worship God. In Ezza culture, people commune with God all the time in their hearts and through ejaculatory prayers such as *Nnam kwaa!* (My Father!), *Nnam Ntanu* (my Father, come to my aid). Christianity speaks of Persons, Father, Son and Spirit. God acts through these Persons, while African Traditional Religion talks of agents who are spirits of God, the messengers of God made present in *Ali* (land) and *Igwe* (heaven). Prayer is communicating with God in both faiths, but Christianity emphasises more of thanksgiving and praise while African Traditional Religion besides these practices divination. (the act of finding the mind of God in regard to human situation). They are intuitive diviners in Ezza culture. They find out people’s problems through their intuition. They enter their spiritual mode by asking those who consult them questions and observing the reactions and answers they receive. See Evan M. Zuesse, “Divination and Deity in African Religions,” *History of Religions* 15, no. 2 (November 1975): 158-182 at 162-163. Both beliefs have moral codes. In Christianity, it is enshrined in The Ten Commandments. In ATR it is within human consciences and community sanctions. For example, to honour one’s parents and not to do evil to a neighbour are upheld by both Christianity and ATR. In ATR, polygamy is practiced because people believe that having many children are blessings from God and it fills the world with vitality through the begetting of a younger generation.

takes a small piece of dry grass (*eswa*) and sways it around the head of the sick person several times at the same time telling God that he/she is offering him/herself for the sick person and then swallows the dry grass. He/she beseeches God to take him/her instead of the person who is sick. Family members and neighbours are present to witness this ritual. It is expected in Ezza culture, that most of the time the person who offers him/herself dies and the sick person recovers.

There is an Ezza proverb which says that *onye evu nwunne ya be evuakwa* (one suffers the same misfortune as one's brother or sister).²⁴³ This means that in Ezza culture, nobody is isolated from his/her brother or sister's experience. This type of intimate relationship with another person is more profound between the first son and his father. The son is taken to represent his father in his family. There is a true story in my village where a teenage son of one of the village elders stole yams from someone's farm. The boy was condemned to death especially because he committed the offence not out of any irresistible need such as hunger. He was not hungry and his action, no doubt tainted the good image of his father who was the elder of the community. His father raised a loud cry and implored the villagers to kill him instead of his son. He maintained that the sinful son was still his child and he preferred to die in his place. The villagers consulted among themselves (*Igbu idzu*)²⁴⁴ and thereafter informed the child's father that they would spare his life; however, they resolved to take away all his belongings except the house he lived in. At the direction of the elders, the young men of the village emptied the man's compound of all his belongings. When the erring son saw that the father was stripped of all his properties, he threw himself at his father's feet and begged to die. The father replied that no wealth could replace a human being. Thus, the father lost all his yams and livestock that year in order to redeem his son.

The CCC states that Ezza people, like all people in the world, are created in the "image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26-27) and so they are oriented towards a life that is spiritual.²⁴⁵ Also, if love defines God as Christians and Ezza people believe, it means that love and communion in human society must reveal trinitarian love and communion. M.W. Pelzel writes that human beings are created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) and

²⁴³ "Ezza Proverb."

²⁴⁴ In Igboland, *Igba Izu* is the traditional method of consultation among a small group on behalf of a larger group in order to take a decision on any thorny difficult issue. See Ofoegbu, *Igbo Language and Culture*, 220.

²⁴⁵ CCC, #355. See also David T. Adamo, "Christianity and the African Traditional Religion (s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no 1 (October 2011): 3.

therefore, loving beings. This is why it is only in “mutuality and reciprocity of giving and receiving of love among the Persons of the Triune God that the full scope of personhood is manifested.”²⁴⁶ In other words, human love and communion reveal the love of God in human society.

In fact, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that,

Indeed when the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, that all may be one...as we are one (Jn 17-21-22) opened up a vistas closed to human reason. For, He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and in the union of God’s [people] in truth and charity.²⁴⁷

In the CCC the Church identifies some resemblance between the communion in the Trinity and the communion that exists in human society. On the basis of being created in the likeness of God, one can safely say that love and communion in human society reflects the love and communion that exists in the Godhead. The Church, therefore, teaches that, “The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God.”²⁴⁸ Human beings reflect the image of God by living in loving communion and never in isolation. *Gaudium et Spes* echoes the idea of the centrality of communion among human beings by stating that,

God did not create [a human person] as solitary. For from the beginning ‘male and female [God] created them’ (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of inter-personal communion. For by his innermost nature [human person] is a social being, and unless he/she relates [him/her self] to others he or she can neither live nor develop his/her potential.²⁴⁹

Since God created them “male and female,” it means that God intended them to share their gifts and socialize with one another.²⁵⁰ God who exists as three Persons in the one Godhead created the first two people to live and share life together. God shows the example of love in the Trinity by establishing human beings in communion. Being created by God to live in communion also reveals that human beings could not reach their full human development and fulfilment in isolation. David Fergusson echoes the idea of

²⁴⁶ M. W. Pelzel, “Christian Anthropology,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard L. Marthaler et al., 2nd ed. (Washington D.C.: Gale, 2003), 531.

²⁴⁷ *GS*, # 24.

²⁴⁸ *CCC*, #1877.

²⁴⁹ *GS*, #12.

²⁵⁰ *CCC*, #355.

Vatican II when he maintains that “The end of human existence is to reflect under creaturely conditions the eternal love that is grounded in the life of the Trinitarian persons.”²⁵¹ And our thesis argues that communion in Ezza culture represents a human image of trinitarian communion. After all, as Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove write, our view of God (Theology) surely will determine our view of human beings (Anthropology). “If we view God primarily in personal and relational categories, then our anthropology [view of human beings] will be relational.”²⁵² Therefore, according to Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, any truly Christian “anthropology (or spirituality) claiming to be trinitarian, will emphasise community rather than individualism.”²⁵³ Thus, they reveal that there is a connection between our understanding of relations in the Godhead and the relations we have as human beings. Since human beings are created by God who is love, there must be a sense in which communion in human society reflects God.

Furthermore, the life of human beings on earth is created to share in the love and participation of the Trinity. Our theology supposed to influence how we live. The perception of the loving relationship among the three divine Persons should inspire loving relationships among human beings. Communion as what comes from God, indicates that human beings reflect trinitarian love however inadequately. This understanding of the Trinity is an improvement on an earlier proposal by Saint Augustine. Although, Augustine’s “psychological analogy” of the Trinity was an important breakthrough in the understanding of the Trinity, it places greater emphasis on the individual self which is ultimately inadequate in explaining the trinitarian communion.²⁵⁴ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove write that,

the image of God is to be found in relationship between male and female, that is, beyond the solitary self. This description of the human person as being-in-relation-to-another is first of all a statement about the triune nature of God – a God whose primary characteristics is that of a communion of love.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ David Fergusson, “Eschatology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 234.

²⁵² Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 18. See also Hans Moscicke, “The Communal and Personal God of African Christianity: God’s Numberedness and Personhood in African Trinitarian Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 157 (March 2017): 100.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity: The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 45, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 277.

²⁵⁵ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 18.

Since human beings are created in God's image, human society resembles God when people live in communion and love. This is in agreement with Saint Augustine when he said that "everything that exists bears the stamp of the source whence it has received its being."²⁵⁶ Our thesis contends that communion is the correct image of God in human society because God is love (1Jn 4:8). Paul confirms this when he said that "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Rom 1: 19-20). Applied to our thesis, it means that communion is the visible sign of God in human society.

Genuine communion in Ezza tradition is a partial reflection of the image of trinitarian communion. Kwame Bediako states that this communion in Africa is all-embracing because it comprises "all sections and generations of community, the present with the past and those yet to be unborn."²⁵⁷ It is a communion that cannot be broken or destroyed by death. Boff echoes the idea that communion is the image of the Trinity in the world when he states that, "the threads of relationships among individuals," are at the core of what makes society and so in some sense, "Human society holds a *vestigium Trinitatis* since the Trinity is the divine society."²⁵⁸ The Trinity lives in a relationship of mutual love and sharing as is possible in human society. The existence of an unbroken communion in Ezza culture serves as a pointer to the trinitarian communion. Ezza people believe that God is in relationship with human beings and makes everything possible. They call God *Chiukfu obu oma* (God of compassion).²⁵⁹

Nworie continues that communion is so central in Ezza culture that a difficult situation is perceived to be easy. Ezza people have a saying that "a prison sentence that a community serves is like a moon-light play."²⁶⁰ This proverb indicates that Ezza people suffer together. When the whole community suffer, the burden of hardship is easier to bear than a person suffering alone. Indeed, they hold this belief that because of communion, there can never be a situation when a person suffers alone. Nworie points out that this is supported by an Igbo saying that "when the nose cries, the eye cries; no

²⁵⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 9.

²⁵⁷ Kwame Bediako, "Jesus in Africa," in *The Modern Theologians Reader*, ed. David F. Ford and Mike Higton with Simeon Zahl (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 296. See also Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religion*, 51.

²⁵⁸ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 119.

²⁵⁹ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 26.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

one should abandon one's brother or sister."²⁶¹ This means that communion so sustains the people that even in their greatest hardships, the loving relationship between them gives them life and lightens their burden. Nyamiti explains that when Ezza people speak of one's brother or sister, they do not mean siblings from the same parents; rather, the entire society is perceived as brothers and sisters. They make this communion a reality by helping one another in times of joy and sorrow.²⁶²

Writing about Christianity and the rites of passage, Charles Onuh remarks how Ezza people also demonstrate their communal life by the names they give to their children, such as "*Igwebuike*" (Unity is strength), "*Ibebuike*" (one's neighbour is his/her strength), "*ubamaduka*" (the greater the crowd the better)."²⁶³ Nworie makes the point that living in communion is vital in Ezza society. Since there is no established welfare programme, the only way the less privileged survive in the society is through the care the community gives to its weaker members. Relatives give the less privileged young men assistance to get married by providing them with the bride price, or by giving them yams to plant to feed their families; sometimes they even build houses for them. Occasionally, the community is involved in contributing money, food and clothes to the less privileged, especially in times of sickness. They also go as far as to offer support in order to have a befitting burial ceremony for poor people whose family cannot afford it.²⁶⁴

An Ancient custom allows a poor hungry person in Ezza culture to harvest yams from a neighbour's farm provided he/she cooks them there and then. He /she is not allowed to carry the raw yams to their home. If the owner of the farm meets such a person, the owner is obliged to give him/her the extra raw yams that he or she will cook at home. In short, Ezza people perceive reality through the lens of communion. In the words of Francis Oborji, life in Ezza culture means "being-in relation."²⁶⁵ The communion that exists in Ezza culture has the potential to deepen the embrace of the message of the Gospel in Ezza society. Without this positive cultural value that reinforces the Christian faith, Christian belief would have been a "fossilized form of a nineteenth

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁶² Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God* (Eldoret: Gaba Publication, 1978), 5-8.

²⁶³ Charles O.K. Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage: The Prospects of Inculturation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 192.

²⁶⁴ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 113. See also Oliver Alozie Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture* (Enugu: Snapp Press, 1991), 24.

²⁶⁵ Oborji, *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion*, 16.

century European Christianity,” according to Oduyoye.²⁶⁶ In other words, communion in Ezza culture makes Christianity meaningful even in the contemporary life of the people. Boff notes the centrality of communion both in the Trinity and in human society when he writes that,

In the beginning is communion. By the name of God, Christian faith expresses the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in eternal correlation, interpenetration and love, to the extent that they form one God. Their unity signifies the communion of the divine Persons. Therefore, in the beginning there is not the solitude of One, but the communion of three-divine Persons. What relationship does the Trinity as understood by Christians bear to the God experienced in the history of humankind? Does it serve to confirm what we already knew or does it bring us something new? We have to say that, in an ontological sense, it serves to confirm and amplify what we already knew; on the level of understanding, however, it brings something different.²⁶⁷

Boff signifies that God exists in loving communion. Prior to the revelation of the Trinity by Jesus in the scripture, God is characterised by love and compassion. He states that.

On the ontological level (which refers to the reality in itself), the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is no different from what those who seek with a sincere heart have always sought and found. Whenever people have met with mystery, with absolute meaning, with something of decisive importance in their lives, they have come into contact with the true God. This true God exists as communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The names can vary, but they all indicate the same reality. It may be that they have had no consciousness of God as God, let alone of a Trinity of Persons as a union of the divine Three. But this does not mean that what they have experienced is any less the triune and true God, merely that this trinitarian reality has not entered their understanding. It is on the level of understanding that the Christian faith brings something new and different. It shows God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²⁶⁸

Boff indicates that it is a question of naming God because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the Creator of human beings is present in the hearts of all people. The difference is the name that each people and culture gives to this God. It is the Christian faith that understands God as Trinity. This knowledge of God comes from revelation. It is because one of the three divine Persons becomes a human being and revealed the Trinity that It is known to the Christian believers. Prior to this revelation, people acknowledge God in

²⁶⁶ Mary Amba, Oduyoye, “The Value of African Religious Beliefs for Christian Theology, in *African Theology en route: Papers from the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians*, ed. Kofi Appiah and Sergio Torres (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 110.

²⁶⁷ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 9.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

their lives without calling God the Trinity. Boff continues:

Not that there had been no previous communication of the Trinity to humanity. It had been communicated, because any true revelation of God's self must be trinitarian. But this dimension had not always been grasped by seekers after truth. Nevertheless, here and there, in the theologies of ancient Egypt, in Indian mysticism, in the works of certain great thinkers, there had been an affirmation of triads. There had been intuitions that the divine mystery was a reality of communion with itself and with the universe. But it had not yet been given to men and women to verify the truth of what their intuitions, conscious and unconscious, has told them. This is where Christianity made its contribution. Through Jesus and his Spirit, humanity came to a full understanding of the perichoretic reality of God, that by the name God it should in the future understand the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What was new, and could not be deduced from any earlier principle, was this: the Persons of the Son and of the Holy Spirit had not just revealed themselves but communicated themselves in person. The God-Trinity, which had been present in human history, now through the Son and the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, took on human history as its own and dwelt among us in its own dwelling place. The task of theology is to try to deepen this understanding which has been handed to us.²⁶⁹

Boff's words apply to Ezza people. They do not know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the light that God sheds in their hearts that makes them to know God and to realise that God loves human beings and wants people to live in loving communion.

2.5 Concept of Communion in African Traditional Religion

Adherents to African traditional religion practice what Okere calls "the concept of corporate responsibility."²⁷⁰ Thus, Africans believe in a religion of inclusion. Everybody is at home and participates in relation to religious belief. Okere further indicates that "African Traditional Religion is the home-grown religion of the black race of Africa."²⁷¹ In other words, this faith is peculiar to Africans. According to Okere,

Since the religion lacks a scripture it has developed many variant local features, but the basics seem to be the same. The core-beliefs of the system are: (1) One supreme God supported by (2) an array of created spirits, God's powerful agents, and (3) the ancestors or the spirits of dead forebears.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁷⁰ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 150.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 147.

²⁷² Ibid.

Okere reveals the interconnectedness of all creation, God, spirits, ancestors and human beings in African belief. The communal life of Ezza society is one expression of their faith in the existence of God whom they believe to be loving and benevolent. The Church's teaching that human beings are by "nature and vocation religious beings. Coming from God, going towards God" applies to Ezza people.²⁷³ This communal relationship of Ezza people with God overflows to every sphere of their lives, especially socially living with one another. The African traditional religion was the faith of the Ezza people before the advent of Christianity.²⁷⁴ Njoku describes it as

the communal expression of awe about the universe; expressions of wonder about life, death, and hereafter; the expression of belief that a supernatural Great Spirit (*Chi Ukwu/Chukwu*)...is in control; communal expressions indicating that the Great Spirit through the intermediary spirits could be influenced; and the goodness of the Great Spirit is acknowledged during sacrifices, rites, rituals and ceremonies.²⁷⁵

God who is called *Chiukfu* in Ezza society is the focus of African traditional religion. Thus, Njoku's passage indicates the experience of interconnectedness of all creation in the adherents of African traditional religion. Expressing wonder in relation to life and death inspires Africans to the belief that life and death are sacred areas that no one is allowed to tamper with. From conception to natural death and beyond, human beings are held in reverence. Njoku also reveals that God is the centre and director of communality in African traditional religion by the fact that the "Great Spirit" controls and accepts thanksgiving for benevolent acts towards the people. For example, sacrifices are made by the people. They gather at shrines or in squares to offer sacrifices to God through *Ali* (land) which acts as the sacrament of the presence of God for the people. The sacrifices involve communal meals. The animals and food items for the sacrifice are cooked and people eat together.²⁷⁶

The rites of passage also comprise a communal ceremony. The villages and community celebrate the birth of a child, for instances. The passage to adulthood and marriage are accompanied by rituals and ceremonies that are communal by nature. They involve the participation of families and extended families. During the marriage ritual, for

²⁷³ CCC, # 44.

²⁷⁴ Francis Cardinal Arinze, "Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion," in *Interface between Igbo Theology and Christianity*, 11.

²⁷⁵ Njoku, "Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts," 68. See also Nana Osie Bonsu, "African Traditional Religion," 109.

²⁷⁶ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 208.

example, the community assemble in a young girl's family to pray for her. According to Ezeanya, the priest who officiates at the ceremony would pray to God, calling the name of the bride: "behold Ugwuaku (the prospective bride); protect her...Give her children. Preserve her husband-to-be...May she not have difficulties in child-birth. May her health be good; may the health of her husband be good."²⁷⁷ Thus, people not only worship God, they unite to ask God for health, wealth and especially for children.²⁷⁸ Okere makes the point that communion with God is expressed in worship, offerings, sacrifices and prayers, both by individuals and community.²⁷⁹ Religion, according to Arinze, is

regarded as a normal part of life. A secularistic mentality which would live as if God and the spirits and the ancestors did not exist was unthinkable...major milestones in life were marked with religious beliefs and practices at birth, puberty, marriage, sickness, death and burial...the building of new houses, the undertaking of a long journey and the taking of social titles were occasions for religious rites.²⁸⁰

Okere, looking at the interface of Igbo Theology and Christianity, contends that in African traditional religion, people are linked religiously with God, the spirits and ancestors. Humanity does not originate from the material world but from the world of the spirit which God inhabits. People assemble to ritualise every stage of life, where they invoking God in the act of initiating the person to another stage of development. Thus, life is communal with God, spirits, human beings and entire creation. In Ezza society, for example, religion is intertwined with morality.²⁸¹ The observance of ethical morality is communal. *Ali* (land) is the agent of God. God sends His spirit through *Ali* which guides morality in Ezza. Okere continues that to commit an abomination such as killing another person is *iwhe Ali* (which means the desecration of the land).²⁸² Friday Mbon maintains that African ethics "had their origin in the world of the Spirit and ancestors...African social ethics were communal, not individualistic as Western ethics tend to be."²⁸³ Mbon demonstrates that communal life in Africa stems from the religious belief of Africans. In

²⁷⁷Ezeanya, "God, Spirits and the Spirit world," 41.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁷⁹Okere, "The Interface of Igbo Theology and Christianity," 24.

²⁸⁰Arinze, "Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion," 12. See also Okere, "The Interface between Igbo theology and Christianity," 27.

²⁸¹ Okere, "The Interface of Igbo Theology and Christianity, 24. See also Clement M. Azubike Uche, "Christianity, Islam and Igbo Culture: The Implications for Igbo Identity and Personality," in *The Church and Igbo Society: Proceedings of the International Symposium organized by Whelan Research Academy*, ed. T. I. Okere (Owerri: Whelan Academy for Religion, Culture and Society, 2011), 334.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Friday M. Mbon, "African Traditional Socio Religious Ethics and National Development: The Nigerian Case," in *African Traditional Religions*, 102.

Ezza, as part of Africa, people believe that every action of an individual affects others, either for good or for bad. Everybody tries to do good for the peaceful existence in the community.

Ezeanya suggests that people fear to commit abominations because this offends God who could punish the offender through *Ali* who is the agent of God.²⁸⁴ Relationship with God in African traditional religion according to Ezenweke, and Nwadior, “is foundational and gives flesh and meaning to the horizontal relationships” with other people.²⁸⁵ The faith of African people is the source of the beginning and the end of communal relationship among people. For instance, the worship and sacrificial offering to God in Ezza culture always involve celebrations. Afoke and Paul write that Ezza people celebrate by eating, drinking, singing, dancing, offering gifts to one another, sharing and making merriment before their God. *Okeaku* (new yam festival) is the time of giving thanks to God for the gift of good harvest of yams which is the staple food of the people. On the day of the festival, the whole community blesses God by offering goats, fowl and yams. These items are cooked by the women. One portion is offered to *Chikfu* in the shrine (*ngamgbo*) and the other is shared by the people. Each family gives food stuff and clothes to other families. Drums are beaten and people come to the square and dance.²⁸⁶ This spirit of participation and sharing in African faith is captured by John Taylor in his statement:

There are many who feel that the spiritual sickness of the West which reveals itself in the divorce of the sacred and from the secular, of the cerebral from the instinctive, and in the loneliness and homelessness of individualism, may be healed through a recovery of the wisdom which Africa has not thrown out. The world church awaits something new out of Africa.²⁸⁷

The “wisdom [and] something new” from Africa are none other than life of communion that results from Africans’ faith in God.

²⁸⁴ Ezeanya, “God, Spirits and the Spirit world,” 42.

²⁸⁵ Ezenweke and Nwadior, “Understanding Human Relation in African Traditional Religious Context,” 62.

²⁸⁶ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 48-50, 86.

²⁸⁷ John Taylor, *Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 108. See also Otijele, “Understanding the African Worldview,” 5.

2.5.1 Reverence for Ancestors

Ezenweke and Nwadiolor stress the importance of ancestors in African traditional religion. These are the dead members of the family who have gone to the spiritual world where they still look after the affairs of their relatives on earth.²⁸⁸ They have intimate “communion and relationships” with their relatives, according to Ezenweke.²⁸⁹ Afoke and Nworie write that Ezza people honour the ancestors annually in the month of November called *onwa eke* (November).²⁹⁰ Ezeanya elaborates: they invoke them with sacrifices and offerings of kola nuts, animals and food in the shrines which every family has for the dead members.²⁹¹ Ike writes that the reverence given to the ancestors demonstrates belief in eternal life.²⁹² For African people, life does not end when someone dies; rather, they perceive death as a gateway to “life that never really ends” as Njoku explains.²⁹³ The presence of the ancestors in the spiritual world assures Africans of the continuation of life after death. The participation of all humanity, from birth to death, demonstrates that “there can be no meaningful human relations without the spiritual...qualities that religion offers” as expressed by Boniface Obiefuna.²⁹⁴ Obiefuna’s statement here means that religious belief informs authentic communality in Africa because living in communion is held up as one of the “spiritual qualities” existing in African traditional religion. Thus, communal relationship is inseparable from the religious life in Africa.²⁹⁵

2. 6 God (*Chiukfu*) as Bond of Communion in Ezza Culture

Azubike suggests that loving communion is at the heart of Ezza culture; and as a very religious people, their communion with others stems from their loving relationship with

²⁸⁸ Ezenweke and Nwadiolor, “Understanding Human Relations in African Traditional Religious Context,” 63.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. See also Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1962), 57.

²⁹⁰ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 51.

²⁹¹ Ezeanya, “God, Spirits and the Spirit World,” 43. See also C.N. Uba, “The Supreme Being, Divinities and Ancestors in Igbo Traditional Religion: Evidence from Otanchara and Otanzu,” *Africa* 52, no. 2 (1982): 101.

²⁹² Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 57.

²⁹³ Njoku. “Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts,” 67.

²⁹⁴ Boniface A.C. Obiefuna, *The Prospects of the Graduates of Religion and Human Relations in Nigeria’s Economy* (Amawbia: Lumos, 2008), 10.

²⁹⁵ Arinze, “Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion,” 12.

God.²⁹⁶ Magesa's comment about God and African traditional religion is particularly apt for Ezza culture:

In the conception of African Religion, the universe is a composite of divine, spirit, human, animate and inanimate elements, hierarchically perceived, but directly related, and always interacting with each other. Some of these elements are visible, others invisible. They correspond to the visible and invisible spheres of the universe: the visible world being composed of creation, including humanity, plants, animals and inanimate beings, and the invisible world being the sphere of God, the ancestors, and the spirits. (These are seen as) forces of life or vital forces.²⁹⁷

Magesa signifies that creation is interconnected, from God to the entire creation; there is communion among them both the visible and invisible world. Magesa notes that

At the top of the hierarchy of the universe is the Divine Force, which is both the primary and the ultimate life-giving Power, God the Creator and Sustainer, the Holy...morality derives from people's understanding of the Holy. The Holy does not only encourage commitment...it demands it. Ethical commitment is ultimately anchored in the people's conception of God who is Holy, and in their interpretation of what God demands of them in real life. Invariably, this interpretation flows from their image of God and their perception of their relationship with God. In all religions, but much more obviously in African Religion, the most general moral argument seems to be: As God is and does, so human beings must be and do. Admittedly, the similarity can only be approximate and not complete; however, the understanding of God remains the standard against which the moral standards of human beings are measured.²⁹⁸

Magesa writes that in African belief, human beings are expected to imitate the love of God who is the source of their lives. This is true in Ezza culture where people treasure the life of living in peace with one another because they believe that God is the God of love and peace. Hence, it is imperative that human beings live communally with others. As Magesa says, the communion in God can never be equal with communion in human society. However, it is believed since God lives in communion, human beings will suffer if they fail to show love and unity to one another. Magesa writes:

The supremacy of God above all created order is the starting point. African Religion never questions nor debates God's ultimate importance. It is a given. It is because of the place God occupies in the universal order of things that human beings can even speak of their own existence, let alone their tradition...God is known and honoured as ...ultimate source

²⁹⁶ Azubike, "Christianity, Islam and Igbo Culture," 334. See also Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 75.

²⁹⁷ Magesa, *African Religion*, 39.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

and sanctioner of the tradition that sustains and nourishes the people, God possesses certain moral qualities that human creatures must emulate. This is also given...Among the most important of these attributes...is the love of God, the kindness and justice of God. God is also conceived as Father or Mother, accentuating the positive qualities of fatherhood or motherhood. It is important to remember that these are not abstract qualities within African Religion. They are qualities in relationship. God is in relationship or even better in communion, with humanity and the entire world.²⁹⁹

Magesa reveals that God is the centre of life in Africa. People in Ezza culture observe the goodness of God from His actions. God gives them food, light, life, children and good health. From these experiences they learn that God loves them intimately as parents love their children. Ezza people learn to organise their human society with the idea of communion from their experiences of the kindness of God. Magesa writes that,

The relationship between God and creation—specifically, humanity—is one of solicitude on the part of God. To associate God with anything that is not good, pure, just, and honourable is ridiculous...God is constant and does not change from good to bad and vice versa according to the situation. The fact that (God) is above the petty influence of (human beings) and does only what God's self) wants...make[s] (God's) character primarily good. God's protection for humanity is comprehensive...it extends over all kinds of action. People acknowledge that the power of God makes success possible.³⁰⁰

For Ezza people, everything they are or have comes from God. It is God's power that enables them to work and produce food for their families. The goodness of God results in the interconnection of all reality of life. Magesa speaks about Ezza culture when he states that,

God's mercy towards humanity endures and cannot be faulted in spite of human fallibility. If approached, God always shows the eternal goodness that is the mark of divinity. In spite of everything, people can expect that God will provide them with the power to overcome adverse situations. Through methods established by tradition, they can always turn to God to implore God for rain or good health with confidence that they will be helped. God can never be accused of lack of mercy and care for humanity and the world.³⁰¹

God is central to the religious life of Ezza people to the extent that they depend on God for everything. When they offend God, especially by breaking the rule of communion in the family, village or community, they beg God with prayer and sacrifice to restore

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 40-41.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 44.

harmony and peace. According to Magesa,

God has the final say in what does or does not happen because God stands as Creator, Molder, Begetter, Bearer of the World, Potter, Fashioner, Builder, and Originator of All...God is also Helper in Trouble, Healer, Guardian along the Path, Ruler, Water Giver, Distributor of Goodness, Sustainer of All. In Nigeria...characteristic names of the Divine are The One Who Is Most Merciful...The One Who Bestows Gifts. The complete goodness or impeccability of the Divine is also seen in names given to various individuals...The Mercies of God or I Lean on God...For African Religion, it is enough to know and trust that God is The Wings of the People. God is always there for humanity to snatch people out of danger when need be, to place them out of reach of any agent bent on destroying the fullness of life.³⁰²

As Magesa describes the goodness of God, Ezza people believe that God is the Father of creation and Saviour of human beings. God rescues people from all dangers and cares for them as God's beloved children. God's intention is that people and things should live in communion. In the words of Magesa,

Because God is so solicitous of humanity, every individual and every community should observe proprieties of behaviour. One ought not to behave improperly before one's elders...This is particularly true in matters that touch Great Elder, God. In behaving disrespectfully before one's elders, one risks incurring shame. An individual or group who behaves disrespectfully in serious matters that touch on tradition risks even greater shame and moral danger for the individual and entire community. In the moral vision of African Religion, God stands as the ultimate guardian of the moral order of the universe for the sole, ultimate purpose of benefiting humanity. Humanity, being central to the universal order, is morally bound to sustain the work of God by which humanity itself is, in turn, sustained. Humanity is the primacy and most important beneficiary of God's action.³⁰³

The most important behaviour to safeguard in Ezza culture is that of communion. Everybody strives to maintain the bond of unity because it is what unites God, people and creation. The breaking of unity is a very serious offence that carries the serious penalty of ostracising people from the community. It is believed that the breaking of communion is calling down the anger of God on people. Communion in Ezza stems from their faith in ultimate value who is God; this is what Ezza religion is all about. Both their system and practice of belief "caters for the spiritual side of [people]" as Okere indicates.³⁰⁴ He further states that the spiritual side means,

³⁰² Ibid., 44-45.

³⁰³ Ibid., 145-146.

³⁰⁴ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 136.

the area beyond food and drink and material needs; the area of ultimate values such as love and goodness; the area where we can look death and evil in the face, and see beyond them...just as food nourishes the body, religion nourishes the spirit...the society where the spiritual side of life is underdeveloped virtually degenerates and disintegrates.³⁰⁵

Okere raises the point that people who do not make God the centre of their lives will not attain authentic human development and their society will lack proper progress. Religious faith is needed in order to live in harmony with one another and live meaningfully in the world. Okere maintains that believing in God keeps human beings from

descending to the level of animals...by offering us the vision of another world, more lasting than the material world...by imposing laws of conduct and sanctions and by pointing out ideals and standards that keep us aiming high...It helps to resolve tensions. [Faith in God is] the healthy inhibition which restrains us from [committing all kinds of sin].³⁰⁶

Okere indicates that God gives people the sense of meaning in life and the ability to live well. God guides human beings by putting God's law in place to enable human beings to make right choices which will enhance the qualities of life such as love and peace in human society. According to Arinze, being in the image and likeness of God is expressed in the life of loving service. For Igbos, their sense of social cohesion or communion is rooted in their communion with God.³⁰⁷ Also, for Ezza people, God is in communion with every creature, even inanimate objects such as stones and trees.³⁰⁸ They believe that the Spirit of God is in them all. That is why they perceive everything in existence as sacred. They hold the view that all things in the material and spiritual worlds are interconnected. Onwu concurs and writes that their cosmology, like the rest of the Igbo tribes "has a deep religious root and their practical life and moral values are interwoven with their religion."³⁰⁹ According to Ezza people, every area of life is aligned with God. From their experience of God as communion, they developed their communion with one another. The words of Okere about Igbo belief are true of Ezza people's faith. Okere indicates that,

In Igbo traditional religion God...is remote but frequently uses the spirits to intervene in human affairs and is particularly present in every individual by the in-dwelling of the *chi*, God's double or man's guarding spirit and

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Arinze, "Christianity and Igbo Culture," 185.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Onwu, "Uzondu na Eziokwu," A paper presented during the 2002 Ahiajoku lecture series.

personal spirit of destiny. Priesthood takes care of worship, sacrifice and festivals. A divination system interprets the wishes of the spirits when they intervene and this is perfected in the oracle that pronounces hidden knowledge and adjudicates justice among litigants where the oat swearing system proves inconclusive. Morality which almost invariably has a social dimension is in the control of the earth goddess, *ala* – who is also the goddess of the major social group, the village. She provides the sanctions of the moral code punishing offenders, and there are certain special offences which are offences against *ala*.³¹⁰

Okere points out that God's invisibility makes people to perceive God as remote but the idea of the "in-dwelling of *chi*" is significant in religious belief of Ezza people. It helps them to trust in God, it removes fear of the unknown and it gives them courage in facing difficult situations. They believe that God lives in them through His spirit. The words of Anthony Akinwale captures well the centrality of religion in Ezza culture: "The religiosity of Africans is well attested. While visitors to cities of the Western societies often discover and remark with shock that such societies that brought Christianity to Africa have become post-Christian, visitors are equally amazed at the open display of religiosity in many Nigerian and African cities."³¹¹ According to Otijele, Ezza people's personal and communal relationship with God informs their connectedness with reality. It is communion that shapes their faith and their understanding of human beings.³¹² For Nworie, this is why murder, for example, is particularly abominable to Ezza people.

Killing of another human being is the greatest offence in Ezza culture because it is a grave sin against God who owns life.³¹³ It also breaks the sacred communion that exists among members of community. Uchem elaborates: consequently, murder carries a severe punishment of been ostracised from the community until proper atonement is made.³¹⁴ Idowu notes that Chi "carries the connotation of an overflowing fullness, the Main-Source or Main-Essence of Being."³¹⁵ This is because God is the beginning and the end of everything according to Ezza people. *Chi* means God and *Ukfu* means great, immense.

³¹⁰ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 148.

³¹¹ Anthony Akinwale, "Catholic Theology in Africa," in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 902.

³¹² Otijele, "Understanding the African World View, 9.

³¹³ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 117. See also Oraegbunam, "Crime and Punishment in Igbo Customary Law," 18.

³¹⁴ Uchem, *Overcoming Women's Subordination in the Igbo African Culture*, 125.

³¹⁵ E. Bolaji Idowu, "God," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, eds., Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), 25. See also, Themba E. Ngcobo, "The Holy Communion and African rituals: An encounter between African religion and Christianity," *HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (April 2020): 1, accessed, February 19, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.5614>.

Chi-ukfu identifies God the Greatest and Highest Being who is the source of life and communion. Ezza people conceive God as the Great Spirit because God is incorporeal who dwells in a transcendental reality far above humanity.³¹⁶ Nworie tells us that God is also called *Chineke* which means God the Creator, for it is God that made everything that exists.³¹⁷ Okere points out that Ezza culture also believes that God is personal because God lives in and guides every person.³¹⁸ Nwala, writing about Igbo Philosophy, believes that this knowledge of God as *Chi-Ukfu*, *Chineke* and personal *Chi* who is one and the same God existing in distinction reveals a trinitarian dimension in Ezza notion of God.³¹⁹ Desmond Forrister observes that “Each individual had his/her own *Chi* a personal guarding spirit who attended him/her from the cradle to the grave.”³²⁰ Moreover, *Chi-Ukfu*, *Chineke* and *Chi* the guiding Spirit work as one God in the lives of humanity and creation. Thus, there is a “connection between “*Chiukfu*” and “*Chi*” in every human being” as indicated by Okere.³²¹ He states that,

No form of worship can enter more deeply into man’s/ woman’s spirit than his knowing all the time that ‘Chukwu’ who created him/her and owns him/her is in him/her, leads him/her and counsels him/her through his/her ‘Chi,’ knowing that he/she is in the hand of his/her ‘Chi,’ that his/her ‘Chi’ is awake. One whose ‘Chi’ dwells in him/her, is in the hands of Chukwu, lives before Chukwu, lives within Chukwu. It is true that the Igbo have not been reaping to the full, the benefits derived from the connection between the small ‘Chi’ and ‘Chukwu’ because understanding that my Chi is the Chukwu living in me will help me feel as if heaven have been opened up to me. It is a good way of communication between man/woman and God, God becoming one with man /woman, commune together; man/woman obtaining advice, plans, teaching, leading, and comfort; asking questions, getting answers in all the trouble, in all the confusion in the life of man/woman, it will be as if man/woman wants to consult the Chukwu oracle but within the interior of himself/herself.³²²

Okere’s expression here means that God the Great Being, God the Creator lives and guides human beings as their personal God. Nwala concurs with Okere, contending that this statement signifies that for Ezzas who are part of the Igbos, God is one and not three

³¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

³¹⁷ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 26.

³¹⁸ Okere, *Okere in his own Word*, vol. II, 340.

³¹⁹ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 46.

³²⁰ Desmond Forrister, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan* (Dublin: Veritas, 1990), 51.

³²¹ Okere, *Okere in His Own Word*, vol. II, 352.

³²² Ibid.

or many gods.³²³ That means the people practice monotheism. In the words of Ezeanya, “It is a fact that belief in a Supreme Being is universal among the Igbo people.”³²⁴ According to Forristal, the God whom Ezza people relate to is “one supreme Chi...*Chukwu*, the Great God, or *Chineke*, God the Creator...who lives in heaven.”³²⁵ Okere writes about relationship. He suggests that not only do Ezza people believe in God, they have a deep relationship with God as their creator, who gives them life and “owns humanity through and through.”³²⁶ Mbiti, highlights how Ezza culture like other African cultures believes that God is the source of unity and love. As the creator of human beings, God looks after everybody by sending rain and sunshine to aid the growth of food for the sustenance of humanity.³²⁷

He continues with the theme of relationship—Ezza people enjoy an intimate relationship with God. They conceive God as their “Father” who walks beside them on the journey of life.³²⁸ Jordan relates how Bishop Joseph Shanahan, a missionary in Igboland during the 1930’s observed that “One Spirit Chukwu,” is the principle of life for the Igbo people.³²⁹ This image of God held by the Igbos is the reason for Ezzas’ belief in the interconnectedness of all creation. As expressed by Shanahan, for Igbos, everything has “a Spirit, the Spirit of life put into them by God which helps them to grow, blossom, and thrive.”³³⁰ In other words, the belief that the spirit of God resides in all creation informs Ezza people’s idea of communion in human society. They even say that God tells the sun not to set until a poor person finds his/her daily food. This indicates a belief that God cares for the vulnerable and insignificant members of society. This loving, caring providence of God for all inspires Ezza culture to look after the poor and afflicted people among them.

Idowu’s idea of God’s as source of communion is true to Ezza belief: “*God is One, the only God of the whole universe*. This is a significant part of the African concept of God which must be well understood if one is to understand African attitude to life with regard to personal relations.”³³¹ The image of God as a Being to whom the whole of

³²³ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 46. See also Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 7.

³²⁴ Ezeanya, “God, Spirits and the Spirit World”, 36.

³²⁵ Forristal, *The Second Burial*, 51.

³²⁶ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 340.

³²⁷ John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: S.P.C.K, 1970), 65.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ John P. Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1949), 125.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 161.

reality belongs points to the intimate relationship of all creation. This is the reason behind Africans' communality. Thus, for Ezza people, humanity descended from one source who is God. Therefore, they develop relationships with other people and seek to live in harmony with their neighbours. Their acknowledgement of the God who loves and unites humanity inspires them to see the interconnectedness of human beings. Parents reveal this intimate relationship with God by giving God's derived names to their children. As Okere points out, "names the Igbo give their children show how it is with them and their *Chi*."³³² In other words, children's names in Ezza culture reveal the bond of communion between the people and God. Okere observes that,

Igbo names are a real prayer from the heart that one carries all the days of his/her life. These names that invoke "*Chi*" or "*Chukwu*" like: Akachukwu, Ikechukwu, Dabirichukwu, Ogechi and Amarachi, Chukwu and Chukwuemeka: they are almost like prophesies. Names that place their bearers before Chukwu so that when they are named, God is invoked, God is remembered, God becomes unforgettable in his/her life. When he is called by name, it is as if God is invoked...the entire life of that man/woman and those around him/her become one long worship of God.³³³

Okere's statement explains the constant awareness of God among Ezza people. Each time they mention the names of their children, God is made present in their minds and lives. This remembrance of God brought about the attitude of respecting and honouring other people as creatures of God. Accordingly, Njoku tells us that names in relation to God are a bond of communion in Ezza culture such as: *Nwachukwu* (God's child).³³⁴ Nworie mentions "God is (*Chukwudi*), God knows (*Chima*), God owns (*Chinwe*), God does (*Chineme*), God saves (*Chinazo*), and God leads (*Chinedu*)."³³⁵ Idowu mentions "*Eberechukwu* (mercy of God),"³³⁶ and Nworie cites the example of (*Chijindu*) God sustains life."³³⁷ Their bond of communion includes everything, even inanimate objects such as stones. Thus, Njoku gives the example of children being called *Ali* or *Nwali* (land),³³⁸ *Igwe* or *Nwigwe* (sky).³³⁹ Magesa explains *Nwukpa* or *Nwakumba*, (trees for those born under the trees), *Nwenyim* (river), *Nwewhuru* (stone), *Agu* (lion), *Nwinya*

³³² Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 352.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Njoku, "Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts," 75.

³³⁵ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 191.

³³⁶ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 150.

³³⁷ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 194.

³³⁸ Njoku, "Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts," 75.

³³⁹ Ibid.

(horse), *Nwenyi* (elephant), *Nwegbe* (kite), and *Nwugo* (eagle).³⁴⁰ Afoke and Nworie Elaborate: They also name children after human beings, such as calling the first boy after his grandfather, the first girl after her grandmother and other children after relatives of their parents.³⁴¹

Ezza people according to Joseph Awolalu know that God owns both the individuals and other peoples and entire creation.³⁴² Thus, they understand that God encloses everything in creation in interconnected relationship. Their acceptance that God is the owner of the whole world, as Awolalu asserts, “implies that the basic conception that the human race is one, even though their places of habitation may be far apart and the colours of their skins... may differ from one another.”³⁴³ In other words, no external circumstances could obliterate the unity of all creation that has been created by God.

Nworie suggests that the understanding that humanity is one makes Ezza people perceive even strangers as people sent by God.³⁴⁴ He continues that they show great warmth to strangers by blessing and sharing “kola nuts, food and drinking water” with them.³⁴⁵ Hospitality to strangers demonstrates the union between God and Ezza people who see God in the stranger. That is why the “offering and participating in the kola-nut and wine communion, in addition to establishing a covenant relation between the host and the guest, bridges the mystical territory between the world of the living and the spirit world,” according to Njoku.³⁴⁶ That is, Njoku reveals not only that loving relationship and unity exist in human society; its foundation is in God as the source of mutuality in the world. People are good because, as Njoku puts it, “*Chi-na-eke* pass on their basic character of Goodness (*Mma*) and life (*Ndu*) to human beings.”³⁴⁷ This means that God infuses the perfection that exists in God into God’s creatures. Thus, God is the source of communion in Ezza society.

³⁴⁰ Magesa, *African Religion*, 59-62.

³⁴¹ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 70.

³⁴² Joseph Omosade Awolalu, “What is African Traditional Religion?,” *Studies in Comparative Religion, The First English Journal on Traditional Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter, 1975): 3, accessed January 19, 2020, www.studiesincomparativereligion.com.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 118.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁴⁶ Njoku, “Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts,” 74.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

Ezza people have their own version of “Ten Commandments” called the Ten Commandments of Ezekuna³⁴⁸ which, according to Afoke and Paul, serve as a guide in the communal life of the people.³⁴⁹ Like the Israelites’ covenantal relationships with God, these commandments bind Ezza people with their God and with their fellow human beings. They are the guidelines for life in Ezza community. In the words of Okere, “The Ten Commandments have been the silent school of humanity, and religion the real civilizer of [human beings].”³⁵⁰ Relationship with God is not only inseparable in Ezza culture; it is seen as the source of harmony in their society.

Ezeanya writes that God communicates to the people through the agency of *Ali* (land) and *Igwe* (sky). Both are agents of God.³⁵¹ God’s spirit works through them to commune with humanity. As Ezeanya explains, “*Ali* is the agent of morality.”³⁵² The spirit of God in *Ali* looks after the ethical life of the individual and the nation.³⁵³ The spirit of *Ali* is made visible by land which could be seen. Thus, land acts as a sacrament which makes the spirit visible. Land becomes a meeting point between the Spirit and the people. Njoku explains that just as land is ubiquitous, in the same way the divine spirit of morality covers the world and hearing and perceiving all things, even the secret actions of people. “*Igwe* is the agent of justice.”³⁵⁴ The firmament is the symbol of the spirit of *Igwe*. Although different assignments are assigned to the divine agents, one spirit of God works in them. They do not have power in their own right. It is true that Ezza people

³⁴⁸ Afoke and Nwoeie, *Ezza History*, 112-113. The ten commandments and its literal translation are as follows: 1. “Kwe l’Ezekuna Nweghu (Accept Ezekuna as your father).” 2. “Sophuru Ezekuna nwew ghu (Respect and honour Ezekuna).” 3. “Elikwa eja l’ishi (Always offer sacrifices as and when due.” 4. “Evukwa onu Nne le Nna; t’ iwhe durughu nma (do not elicit a curse from either father or mother so that things would be easy for you in this world.” 5. “Ishi Mma ba agbawahukwaghu l’eka [be egbukwa ochi] (Do not kill).” 6. A likwa ejo oli [l’eghu l’ata ji l’etsokwaru owhu l’atanu l’otagharu (Do not keep bad friends so that they will not lure you to do evils).” 7. “Mgburuma Nkogo le agbabekwaghu azu l’oshi, ochi ghu ta adukwa me ime eka l’iwhe madzu [be ezhikwa oshi] (Do not steal or you will be killed if you do and no court will adjudicate your case).” 8. Ntuwuhu le ege takwa nwa Nnaji whuti ya l’uwu [kfuje ire lanu] (A liar is not a worthy child that his father should be very proud of in his home. Always say the truth).” 9. Anatakwa madzu nye ya ke kee m’obu luru l’onwoghu, o no nke onye naturu madzu nye ya suru te onye ono be anwutashi nwa. (Do not snatch another man’s wife in order to marry her or give her to another person to marry. This is because whoever does that intended that the person should not beget a child.” 10. O no iwhe ali (l’madzu dzogburu oku l’woroworo turiya che logbo okfu liswi le madzu tawhudughu, ali whurughua; I du ya adu) (Do not destroy your neighbour’s oxen or property in secret thinking that nobody will see you; God surely saw you. You will confess your misdeed at your point of death. It is then that your evil deeds will come to light.)”

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 136.

³⁵¹ Ezeanya, “God, Spirits, and the Spirit World,” 42.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Njoku, “Motifs from Igbo Sacred Texts,” 74-75.

commune with God through these agents but as Ezeanya notes, they “do not bow down to wood and stone, [he/she] bows down to the indwelling spirit only.”³⁵⁵ Jordan tells us that according to Shanahan, Igbo people would not “credit a material thing with a spiritual power...it could never be more than a receptacle for a spirit which worked through it.”³⁵⁶ This is also true of Ezza people who are part of Igbo.

Mbiti provides an explanation—while these divine agents are not gods, they act as intermediaries between God and the people.³⁵⁷ People conceive them as powerful but also loving. The highest concept of God in Ezza culture is *Chiukfu obu oma* (God of compassion). They relate to God in trust because they believe that God loves and cares for them. In the Old Testament, God sends God’s “Word, Wisdom and Spirit” as divine personifications which were used in the interpretation of the Trinity by theologians.³⁵⁸ Thus, Ezza people in the words of Okere “believe in God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* as the creator, maker and originator of all there is. *Chukwu*...is spirit, in the sense of an invisible personal force, but [God] is not understood as just one of the gods...God or *Chukwu* is a lone God.”³⁵⁹ Ezza people’s belief in the invisible God as source of communion in reality induces them to accept the life of cordial relationships in human society as the correct manifestation of God in the world. This makes them seek and live out communal life in their dealings with one another. Ezza people believe in the Trinity of the Christian faith. The difference is that they do not call God ‘Trinity.’ Boff contends that,

The reality of the Holy Trinity is independent of doctrines. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always been present in the history of men and women, communicating their love, taking human endeavours into the divine communion of the three Persons. In other words, the reality of the Trinity is not just something expressed in doctrines or in phrases across in the scriptures. It is first and foremost a fact; only after this is it a doctrine about this fact. Because it is primarily a fact that has always been present in human life, at all stages of its evolution, we can talk of the emergence of an understanding of the Trinity in history, reaching its fullness in the New Testament. So we find preparatory revelations of the trinitarian reality before the Christ event, both in the deeds and sayings recorded in the Old Testament, and in other world religions and historical events. The presence of the Trinity in history was gradually uncovered, through devout reflection, till Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit revealed it to us fully, through entering into hypostatical relationship with us. The New

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 124.

³⁵⁷ Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 64.

³⁵⁸ Christopher Seitz, “The Trinity in the Old Testament,” in the *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 30.

³⁵⁹ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 485-486. See also Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 26. See Oborji, *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion*, 15.

Testament witnesses to the incarnational presence of Christ and the life-giving presence of the Spirit, both through the events themselves and the texts that show the meaning of these events.³⁶⁰

Boff points out that the God that Ezza people worship is the trinitarian God of Christian faith. The same God gradually reveals His self until the fullness of revelation of God as Trinity happens in the New Testament. Communion is the central event in Ezza culture that points to the presence of the Trinity in human society. Writing about communal life in Africa, Magesa maintains that,

What the African religious world view emphasizes...are relationships. Through the act of creation, God is related in an unbreakable way to the entire universe. At the centre of the universe is humanity, but it too is intrinsically and inseparably connected to all living and non-living creation by means of each creature's life-force. Although God, spiritual beings, ancestors, humanity, living things and non-living things enjoy the life-forces with greater and lesser powers, all the forces are intertwined. Their purpose is ultimately humanity; they can act either to increase or suppress the vital force of an individual person or of a community. The relationships of the vital forces in the universe constitutes the complex of African Religion; the management of these forces so that they promote the abundance of human life not diminish it constitutes the sum of Africa's religious activity.³⁶¹

God is at the centre of the promotion of loving communion in human society according to Magesa. The development of communion and unity is vital to the relationship between God and people. In the words of Magesa:

With regard to relationships of the vital forces in the universe, community stands as the determinant factor. This means that such relationships occur, and can only occur, because the elements involved *know* one another and have a certain interest in one another. This interest is usually positive, that is, life-enhancing; but it can also be negative or life-destroying. In this sense, the preoccupation that African Religion shows with the ancestors, elders, and the various spirits is understandable. The vital forces of the ancestors and elders must constantly be counted to enhance the vital forces of the individual, the family, and the entire community because they are linked to each of them and have a direct and lasting interest in their healthy development. Since they have the capacity to cause good or harm, the spirits must not be ignored: it is necessary to curry their favor so their powers will increase the human vital force and prevent or limit the damage to human life they might otherwise cause.³⁶²

God, ancestors, elders and spirits are constantly working together to promote fullness of

³⁶⁰ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 25-26.

³⁶¹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 285-286.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 286.

life for human beings. This calls for the same unity among people so that what human beings do will be in harmony with the works of the spiritual realities that protect them.

Magesa asks:

How does the individual, the family, or the community manage the various vital forces in the universe so that they foster fullness of life, the purpose and goal of African religious activity? (he answers): It is, first of all, by conducting one's life and that of the entire community in a manner consistent with the order of the universe as preserved in that community's tradition. However, when this order is violated, as it often is through human wrongdoing, it must be restored for life to continue and grow. The way to do this is through reconciliation, and reconciliation is achieved through prayer, offerings, and sacrifices. These are called for particularly when affliction – that is, famine, drought, flood, illness...strikes. The source of an affliction can generally be determined through such religious expertise as divination. It is essential to determine the source of an affliction in order to know how to proceed to restore the disturbed order or balance of existence.³⁶³

Magesa notes that “fullness of life is the purpose and goal of African religious activity.” His statement applies to Ezza culture. People believe that if they live good lives, God will send them blessings by giving them children, food and good health in abundance. On the other hand, if they disobey God, calamities come upon them. They see suffering as the result of human disobedience to God and maltreatment of other peoples. When they perceived that they have sinned against God and their neighbours, they make atone by praying to God and making sacrifices to the ancestors. For example, women normally gather in the square and sing to God if a calamity such as sickness strikes the village or community. They do this twice a day, morning and evening, to beg God to come to the aid of human beings and eradicate the threat that troubles them. While this is a particular feature of Ezza culture, it is not exclusive to that culture. John Ume also notes the centrality of God in Igbo culture. He writes:

In the beginning *Chukwu* (God) lived with men, women, animals, birds, other spirits...the terminus of every person's spirit is at one's Chi which is itself a part and parcel of *Chi-Ukwu* (Chukwu), the Great universal Spirit/God. The countless existence up and down the universe, animate and inanimate, spirit, non-spirit or a mixture thereof, are hinged on Chi.³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ John Anenechukwu Ume, *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Healing, Divination and Sacred Sciences in Nigeria*, vol.1 (London: Karnak House, 1997), 12, 26.

2.7 The Concepts of Persons as Being-in Communion in Ezza Culture

In my own culture – the Ezza culture of Nigeria – a person is “relational.” Okere explains that to live in isolation is anathema. Ezza people believe that a person exists in relationship with God, with other people, and with the whole of creation. Okere’s expression captures the communal aspect of life in Ezza culture: “No one ever came to being a bolt from the blues, like an oil bean seed falling from the sky...I am always a we. We, in the nuclear family, we, in the extended family, we, in the village and town.”³⁶⁵ This manifestation of unity and belonging is at the heart of Ezza communality. Okere contrasts this with the Western lifestyle, contending that “One often hears of the vaunted ‘rugged individualism’ of the West. As a matter of fact, we actually see it and experience it in this society in its fixation on individual rights, unlimited rights to freedom, to property, to abortion, to death.”³⁶⁶ Okere indicates that the expression of communal life in Africa differs from Western life-style. He argues that,

in Igboland, in Nigeria, in Africa generally, the community, the common good is the dominant reality and it alone ultimately provides the context and guarantee of individual rights. *Igwebuikwe* we say, that is, community is strength. *Ndinwem*, we say, literally those who own me, as the individual proudly refers to his/her relatives as the source and sustenance of his/her existence. Man/woman is therefore, relationship, connectedness, communion, community.³⁶⁷

Okere’s description is true in Ezza culture as part of Igbo culture, Nigeria and Africa. Moreover, communality is so central to life in Ezza that the people understand a human person in terms of relationship, participation and communion. No one lives for his/her self alone. People live in relation to each other. Mbiti’s description of personhood concurs with Ezza culture’s perception of what it means to be a human person in her society. Mbiti understands personhood as something that can never be understood without reference to other people. One is a person depending on his or her consciousness of obligation, and the rights and roles he or she plays with regard to other people. Anything

³⁶⁵Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 486. See also Innocent Chukwudolue Egwuatuorah, “Igbo Communalism: An Appraisal of Asouzu’s Ibuanyidanda Philosophy,” *Filosoiatheoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 2, no. 1 (January-June 2013): 1. “Igbo communality is expressed in living together and sharing responsibilities. The traditional Igbo society has a great asset in its practice of a mode of life called communalism.”

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 486. See also Elochkwu E. Uzukwu, “Igbo World and Ultimate Reality and Meaning,” *UTP-Journals University of Toronto Press* 5, no. 3 (September 1982): 207-208.

that happens to an individual happens to his or her group. Thus, a person can confidently say, “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am. This is a cardinal point in the African view of a human person.”³⁶⁸ The implication of Mbiti’s interpretation of a person living in communion with others is what inspires Ezza people to name a human being as *Amadu* which means a fully human person who exists in relationship with dignity and respect. Ezza people say that *Amadu kpu ogfu l’onu a laa maa*, that is, a human person is so cared for in his/her family or society that even if he/she is dying, the person will breathe his/her last with the remedy for the sickness provided by his/her people. In other words, the person would not be neglected in his/her hour of need. If a person behaves badly in the society, Ezza people say that *omeru onwe ya deekpu* which means the person has diminished his/her personhood.

The dignity of personhood is so high in Ezza that even if a human being is small in stature, Ezza people refer to the person as small but *ataawodokwi ya atawodo*, recognising that although the person is small in stature, he/she is complete as a human being. Thus, an Ezza person, as portrayed by Mbiti, is inter-dependent in society. He or she lives in solidarity and participates in his/her family relationships, extended families, kindred, age grade, villages and the entire community. Nwabude describes the Ezza family in his portrait of family in Igbo culture as “*ezi na ulo*.”³⁶⁹ The literal meaning of *ezi* is outside and *ulo* means house.³⁷⁰ Thus, the expression means the “outside relation and those in the house.”³⁷¹ In other words, a person in the understanding of Ezza culture is not enclosed in his/her self, but he/she is defined by relationship with the immediate family and the wider society.

Communal relationships in Ezza culture involve actions. People show that they belong to any group such as family or society by producing the corresponding actions that reveal their love and concern for the welfare of others. For example, a person has rights to visit relatives or to obtain items from them. If a person refuses to share what he/she has with his/her people, that person is diminishing his/her personhood. In the Trinity, when the Father acts, the Son and Holy Spirit are included in that action. We could not talk of Father if there were no concept of Son or of Holy Spirit. Thus, the communion in Ezza

³⁶⁸ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 108.

³⁶⁹ Nwabude, *Preparation for Marriage and Family Life*, 80-89. See also Ufearoh, “*Ezi-Na-Ulo* and *Umunna*,” 97. See also Victor Chikezie Uchendu, “*Ezi na Ulo: The Extended Family in Igbo Civilization*,” “Ahajioku Lecture 1995, accessed August 30, 2021, www.springerlink.com/index/532708t62500512.pdf.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

culture means that people share both good and bad times in the lives of others. People have to maintain their obligation in relation to their position in society. Parents have to be there for their children and children must respect and care for their parents. In Ezza language they say *eka nri kwo eka ekpe, eka ekpe akwo eka nri*, that is, when the right hand washes the left hand, the left hand would wash the right hand. In other words, Ezza people live by the principle of reciprocity.

Okere's words apply to the Ezza people's understanding of a human person. He maintains that "When the Igbo person uses *Onwe m* (myself), I believe that we are dealing not in imagery but in primary statement of reality. For the Igbo, it is this identity that is made manifest in the biological, social and religious activities in which the individual engages."³⁷² Okere indicates that in Ezza culture, a human being possesses him/herself before sharing in the lives of others. *Onwe m* which means myself, has to be fully accepted as a reality of dignity in order to relate well with others. Okere maintains that, the self though distinct,

is surrounded by a thicker layer of enveloping relationships. The self...remains in a way only an abstraction. Even though one can be thought of as a unity and in abstraction from anything else, in fact the self is never alone. The individual is never a pure, isolated individual.³⁷³

Okere's description of a human person in Igbo land is a correct interpretation of personhood in Ezza culture. For Ezzas, a human being is unique as an irreplaceable individual but his/her personality is linked with the lives of other people. The person is not only related to others, he/she participates in relationships that are as diverse as they are dynamic in society. For Okere and for Ezza people, "everyone has a source, a link, belongingness, the parents being the source of their children. Everyone comes into the world belonging and relating."³⁷⁴ In other words, fathers and mothers bring children into the world in a family context. Already the foetus in the womb is not on its own. It is attached to the mother where it gets nourishment and protection for growth and development. This union of baby with its mother in the womb is the primary relationship of love. In Ezza culture, the whole community ranging from family to village look forward to the birth of the baby. It is already one of their own. At birth, the relations and

³⁷² Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. 1, 566.

³⁷³ Ibid., 565-566. See also John Beattie, "Review Article: Representations of the Self in Traditional Africa: *La Notion de Personne en Afrique Noir*," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 50, no. 3 (1980): 314, accessed January 7, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1159123>. See also Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual, and Community* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 132.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 566.

village people rush to welcome the new boy or girl into the world with songs and jubilations. Thus, from cradle to grave, a human person belongs to his/her people and he/she is inserted in the lives of society. Okere captures the sentiments of Ezza people with regard to a human person in society:

It is characteristic of people in collective societies that they regard the individual as a differentiated part of society, while the West sees society as a plurality of individuals. ‘If the foot were to say I am not the hand, and so I do not belong to the body, would that mean that it stopped belonging to the body?’³⁷⁵

Okere’s description of communal life is true of Ezza culture. The penetration of Western education and Christianity in Ezza culture does not eradicate this communal aspect. It is true that some aspect of Western lifestyle such as television, cell phone and modern houses are gradually coming into Ezza society. (I say gradually because in my own community, dramatic changes to a Western way of life have not yet happened). Many people have converted to Christianity but Christian faith prizes communion. That is why the parish is grouped into Christian mothers’ organisation (CWO), Christian fathers’ organisation (CMO) and Christian youth’s organization respectively (CYO). These associations give each person the privilege of belonging to a group. Oral tradition is still part and parcel of transmitting the culture to the future generations through the actions of the families and elders. Thus, according to Okere, “The human being is conceived as the focus of a web of relationships. He/she is related first of all to parents and siblings but gradually to a whole kinship network that widens in concentric circles to include the entire village group or town.”³⁷⁶ What Okere points out is a relationship that originates from family and grows to embrace entire human society. He maintains that,

Beyond the nuclear, but within the extended family, cousins and more distant relations are referred to as brothers and sisters and special rights and obligations accrue taking care especially of children, widows and orphans and taking corporate responsibility on behalf of all members. The individual lives and moves within this orbit of solidarity.³⁷⁷

Referring to relations as brothers and sisters in Okere’s passage here demonstrates intimacy, love and communion with the family circle, extended family and village

³⁷⁵ Okere, “The Poverty of Christian Individualist Morality: An African Alternative,” in *Identity and Change: Nigerian Philosophical Studies*, vol. 1, ed. Theophilus Okere (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996): 127, accessed October 18, 2021, <https://books.google.com.au/books?isbn=3643901682>.

³⁷⁶ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol.1, 566.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. See also Ufearoh, “*Ezi Na Ulo and Umunna*,” 101.

community. In other words, each person knows that he/she is deeply cherished and totally belongs to others. This realisation invokes the same sentiments to love and care for one another. In Ezza culture, as Okere writes, the term *unwu* (children) is a prefix which is linked to many villages, clans, tribes and even a whole community, for example, *unwuenyi* (Enyi's tribe), *unwu aguba* (Aguba village), *Unwu onulo* (family and extended family), *Unwu Ezza* (Ezza people).³⁷⁸ Referring to this *unwu* terminology, Okere observes that it,

demonstrates the importance role of kinship in defining the Igbo person's self-understanding. It makes a statement of corporate solidarity based on blood relationship even when some sub-groups are known to be relatively new immigrants. It also makes this statement of solidarity within the geographical ancestral land shared by these villages.³⁷⁹

In Igbo land, as Okere stated above, as also in Ezza culture which is part of Igbo people, a human person understands himself/herself as inserted in the web of relationships. He /she does not exist alone. To be part of *unwu* (children) is to belong to family, extended family or village. Okere's assertion is true of Ezza people:

It is this solidarity of blood and soil...which creates and supports the living space and the network of relationships where the *Onwe*/self sees itself as part of a community and this community as a constituent part of the self. This is why in this culture (Igbo), the self is a congenitally communitarian self, incapable of being, existing and really unthinkable except in the complex of relations of the community.³⁸⁰

In other words, Okere indicates that the unity that comes from a person living his/her life as part of *unwu* (children) with his/her people is the source of love that binds a human person to his/her group. Loving relationship is innate in Ezza people. They are born to relate and to care for one another. The definition of a human person in Ezza parlance is a person in relationship with God, with other people and with entire creation.

2.8 Divination

Divination as mentioned earlier in this thesis requires further analysis because it is vital in identifying the causes of everything that cannot be explained plainly in human society. Magesa writes that,

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. See also SECAM, *The Church as Family of God, Instrumentum Laboris, Pastoral Letter* (Accra: Secam Publication, 1997), # 44.

³⁸⁰ Ibid. See also Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, 14-15.

Shame and guilt play major roles in diagnosing most forms of affliction...shame becomes guilt when a wrongdoer is identified, either by a segment or the whole of the community...shame becomes guilt when wrong doing becomes public. At this stage, an admission of guilt and a confession are demanded, and an appropriate punishment in the form of retribution or ritual purification is imposed in order to avert the negative consequences of the wrong. The punishment rehabilitates not only the individual but also the community and the environment. The ultimate purpose is to restore the original power of life.³⁸¹

According to Magesa, Ezza people believe that people who commit crimes should atone for their evil actions in order to avert the justice of God for the offenders and for the community. When Ezza people experience suffering of any kind, they have to find out the cause of the trouble. They also consult the spirit at any stage of life such as marriage, birth, death and burial times. They consult the diviners whom they believe have the gifts of the spirit to discern matters. Magesa maintains that,

as sometimes happens, the presume wrongdoer may deny culpability or afflictions may occur without a known cause. What, then, must be done to restore balance in the world? African religious perception demands that everything possible must be done to ascertain the nature and cause of the wrong doing that resulted in misfortune and disorder. Only then can proper procedure be undertaken to restore the disturbed power of life.³⁸²

The diviners are in the position to identify problems since they have the gifts of the spirit. Magesa notes that,

There are people who have the power to sniff out hidden sources of disorder, who can advise on procedures to correct the situation. They are generally known as diviners...Diviners...are persons who use medicinal powers particularly supranormal powers in favor of life. Throughout Africa, their profession consists in finding out whether a witch or a spirit has caused the illness, in advising...[their] patients in the procedure necessary to propitiate whichever is the cause, and...in prescribing the right herbal remedy to cure the physical damage already sustained by the patient.³⁸³

Magesa points out that the work of the diviners is to find out the peoples' problems and remedy for them. Diviners in Ezza culture sometimes prescribe charm to protect people from the actions of the evil spirits and from evil attack of their enemies in which case the charm could be worn around the body or kept in people's houses. Ezza people use the

³⁸¹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 211.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 211-212.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 213.

method of divination to discern the meaning of the unknown and how to solve the problems arising from their actions. According to Magesa,

Divination systems...are ways of knowing. An understanding pervades African societies that the true reasons for all events can be known, but sufficient knowledge is seldom available through mundane means of enquiry; therefore, divination is employed to ensure that all relevant information is brought forward before action is undertaken. This means that the scope of competence of diviners is extremely wide. Their spiritual gifts render them capable of diagnosing what kind of spirit or force substance is causing what kind of affliction to the individual, the family, or the society, and they also advise on what steps must be taken to obtain healing or coolness.³⁸⁴

Ezza people as Magesa writes, believe that everything that happens has a cause; therefore, the cause must be found and addressed. Magesa states that

the list of situations in which people might seek the help of a diviner...span every aspect of life and the central concern is to make sure that the forces of life prevail over the powers that attempt to destroy it. They include sudden and violent illness, persistent disease of any kind; gradual physical deterioration despite treatment; visits by ghost or spirits; encounter with creatures associated with witches (such as owls or hyenas); suspicions of having been bewitched; sterility or undue delay of pregnancy; complications during pregnancy or birth; impotence; sudden insanity; death by lightning; accidents; death suspected of witchcraft; disease or lack of productivity in cattle; repeated poor harvest while others reap well; poor human relations; bad omens; and epidemics and other suspicious events on a large scale.³⁸⁵

Magesa indicates that problems that arise in every aspect of life in Africa must be investigated by the method of divination. It is a means of safeguarding Ezza people from harm. They say that *atubuhu ume ejebuhu le eja* (only when a person dies is it time to stop consulting diviners). This shows the importance of divination in the life of the people. They rely on diviners to ward off evil and ensure that love and unity prevail in society. Magesa writes that,

Just as disease and suffering are necessary part of life, divination as a way of dealing with them forms part and parcel of the African way of life. Divination is intricately intertwined with notions of health and disease, success and failure, goodness and badness. It is thus central to the understanding of morality in African Religion because of the role it plays in ensuring the continuation of right relationships and order. Divination is

³⁸⁴Ibid., 214. See also Philip M. Peek, "Introduction: The Study of Divination, Present and Past," in *African Divination: Ways of Knowing (African Systems of Thought)*, ed. Philip M. Peek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

the most important way of determining how to ensure the society's collective ethical ideals.³⁸⁶

Magesa indicates that divination is very important in the life of African people. In Ezza culture, it is the duty of every adult in the family, especial a man who is the head of the family, to consult the diviners in order to know what is happening in the family and how to protect the family from the influence of evil. This is also true with the heads of the village and community. Magesa concludes that,

In the final analysis, divination is recognition that there are deeper realities in life than meet the eye. Divination provides a way of knowing these deeper realities, that is, the whys and wherefores of suffering, illness, anger, discord, floods, drought, poverty, barrenness, impotence, all kinds of loss, and death. To know the causes and reasons of these calamities is to name them; it is to give one power to eliminate or neutralize them. This is the power that enables one to achieve the purpose of being human: long life, good relations with other people, with the ancestors and other spirits, and with God.³⁸⁷

Magesa notes that the process of divination is an acknowledgement of spiritual realities which eludes ordinary human beings. In Ezza culture, divination is at the service of communion. The system helps to discern the source of conflicts and the means to eradicate them. People believe that harmony and concord is achieved by consulting the spirits through divination, to know their minds with regard to human beings and act according to their directives.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 220.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 243.

2. 9 Limitations of communion in Ezza Culture

It is true that communal life is intrinsic in Ezza culture and that Ezza people value communality and loving relationships. However, this exists alongside cultural injustices which fall short in comparison with trinitarian communion. The doctrine of the Trinity needs to challenge some aspects of life in Ezza culture such as: bad treatments of girls, perceiving women as second class citizens, denial of education to girls, early marriage and arranged marriage for girls, bad treatment of widows, bad treatment of childless women, classifying people into *ohu* (slave) and *amadu* (freeborn), and bribery and corruption of leadership and political parties. Although matriarchal system of social organisation exist alongside patriarchal in Ezza culture as shown earlier in this thesis, it does not eradicate the classification of girls and women as unequal to men.

2.9.1 Girl Child

Ezza people love children but a woman who has no male child is almost regarded as childless because a girl child cannot inherit her father's land or property. A girl child is regarded as a second class citizen. This situation is far from communion of the Trinity. In fact, although there is communal life in Ezza culture, this communality is tainted by the rejection of girl in society. A man whose wife gives birth to girls only will not hesitate to marry another wife in order to have sons. Sometimes the woman will not be looked after by her husband. The woman may be forced to return to her father's house in sorrow. The belief that the father's lineage will end without male children raises fears in relation to girls in Ezza. The words of Zizioulas concerning the loving life of the Trinity and fragmented life of human beings in society are appropriate to Ezza culture:

fear of the other is pathologically inherent in our existence (as it) results in the fear not only of the other but of *all otherness*...We are afraid not simply of a certain other or others, but, even if we accept certain others, we accept them on condition that they are somehow like ourselves. Radical otherness is anathema. Difference itself is a threat.³⁸⁸

According to Edith Dynan, Bishop Shanahan in his missionary work in Nigeria observed that "there was little or nothing being done for women. It was boys who came to the school. Parents saw no need of education for girls. They got married at an early age and

³⁸⁸ Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," *St. Vladimir's Theologically Quarterly* 38, no. 4(1994):349-50.

left the family. The fate of the girls concerned him.”³⁸⁹ Shanahan the great missionary in Igboland was concerned about the fate of girls in Nigeria. His experience was not a thing of the past. There are some parts in Nigeria today where girls are not free to go to school. In some places in Ezza, parents determine if their girls will go to school or not. The preference for boys over girls in Ezza culture is a great injustice. Evelyn Urama’s comment relates to Ezza culture:

Igbo society is a patriarchal society; men are the heads of families. Family inheritance is shared among the male children of the family. The female children are excluded because when a female child is married out of the family, her position shifts from her father’s family to that of her husband’s family. Her position in her husband’s family also depends on her bearing a male child for the husband. The implication of this is that a woman with no male child for her husband has no right of inheritance both in her father’s and husband’s house. This is why the birth of a child is received with joy and gladness, but the birth of a male child is received with unprecedented jubilation and celebration than that of a female child in Igbo culture.³⁹⁰

Urama notes that when a father dies in the family, his properties are shared among his male children to the exclusion of his female children. Male children are so crucial in Ezza culture and in fact throughout the Igbo culture that in cities where women have their children in hospitals, some doctors charge more for delivering baby boys than the baby girls. Moreover, some men abandon their wives in the hospital because they give birth to a girl, especially if the women have giving birth to girls before. This makes women reluctant to disclose the sex of their babies to relatives and friends if the babies are female. Child-bearing which should be a source of joy for them turns out to be an occasion of sadness and mourning. In some places in Igbo culture, when a person is sad, people say *ihu di gi ka imuru nwanyi* (you look so sad as if you have given birth to a baby girl.) Urama maintains that,

The Igbo ideology of male child dominance makes a man to marry as many wives as he can to have a male child. A woman who is able to bear a male child for her husband is considered a fulfilled woman. She is also accorded greater respect in her husband’s house more than other wives who have no male children. Women therefore take the blame for not having male children for their husband, even when the chromosomes that

³⁸⁹ Edith Dynan, *The Story of Bishop Joseph Shanahan: A Man for Everybody* (Dublin: Veritas, 2001), 64.

³⁹⁰ Evelyn Nwachukwu Urama, “The Values and Usefulness of Same-Sex Marriage Among the Females in Igbo Culture in the Continuity of Lineage or Posterity (May 2019): 2, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019850037>.

determine the sex of the baby are produced by men.³⁹¹

Urama's words apply to Ezza culture. A married woman in Ezza culture does not have peace until she gives birth to a boy. In Ezza culture, they refer to baby girls as *mkpokoroba*, that is a broken calabash, while any valuable thing is referred to as *nwanwoke* (baby boy), which means that the item is really a valuable pearl. Urama comments that, "Gender inequality is clearly evident in families and the society, and the girl child is exposed to insecurity and rejection just because she is born a female. The girl child is aware that she is not given the same acceptance as the male child in the family right from infancy due to the treatments given to the 'desired' male child."³⁹² In Ezza culture, the girl child is discriminated against in education, in inheritance and sometimes her freedom to choose whom to marry is denied her. Whereas boys are sent to school, girls have to stay at home and help their mothers cooking in the kitchen and working on the farms. They are not allowed to inherit their father's property. Most of the time the parents, especially the father, arranges marriages for his girls and the girls are forced to marry anybody whom their parents choose. C.C. Ohagwu et al. point out that,

The traditional Igbo society is very gender-sensitive and patriarchal...In the family, if a child is born, the sex is determined and if the baby was male, that meant greater joy for the parents. For the man, joy, because he has a man who will take his place after his death and continue his family line; joy for the mother because that will properly entrench her in her husband's heart. Having a son means for her that nothing can uproot her from the family. A son means having a voice to defend you in the family. However, if the child is a girl, the husband and wife receive it with mixed feelings. And if the female child is coming as third, fourth, fourth, fifth or sixth female in the family without a male child that is enough reason for sorrow. For the man, it brings sorrow because his hope of having a male child to continue his lineage is becoming slimmer, the females will soon be married off to other men. Having female children is like 'tending other people's vineyard while yours is unkempt.'³⁹³

Ezza people say that *nwanyi bu onye ibe onye odo* (Girls belongs to other people's families not their own fathers). Therefore, they treasure their boys who will succeed their fathers in the family. Ohagwu writes:

Male gender is a dominant feature of Igbo culture and could be the reason

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid., 3.

³⁹³ C.C. Ohagwu et al., "Perception of Male Gender Preference Among Pregnant Igbo Women," *Annals of Medical & Health Sciences Research* 4, no. 2 (March-April 2014): 2, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4103/21419248.129027>.

behind women seeking fetal gender at ultrasound...Male gender preference is strongly perceived among Igbo women and its perception is significantly influenced by socio-demographic factors. Male gender preference may be responsible for Igbo women seeking fetal gender at ultrasound...Male gender preference was strongly perceived by all categories of respondents (and) anxiety level associated with prenatal gender determination and loss of interest in the pregnancy due to disclosure of undesired fetal gender...socio-demographic factors were of significant influence on loss of interest in pregnancy associated with disclosure of undesired gender.³⁹⁴

In Ezza culture, the news of a baby boy is received with the greatest joy and shared by family and friends. By contrast, if it is a baby girl, the woman announces it quietly, sometimes in tears. According to Magezi Baloyi,

The problem is that, instead of child bearing being part of the joy of the family, it is made a burden that sometimes entrenches wife beating...and even women killing...Being unable to have children (especially male children) is considered a crime...wife beating and being thrown out of the house served the purpose of punishing the guilty...women are often blamed for infertility...women who cannot bear children face the curse of the community.³⁹⁵

Nworie speaks for Ezza when he writes that, “Generally, couples enter into marriage in Igboland primarily to beget children. A childless marriage in Igbo culture most often leads to second marriage or divorce.”³⁹⁶ The man divorces his wife and marries another woman because women are blamed if they do not bear children for their husband in marriages in Ezza culture. Mbiti captures Ezza’s sentiment around women and marriage by saying that,

The woman who is not married has practically no role in society, as far as traditional African world-view goes. It is expected that all women get married...this thought is bound up with the value attached to the bearing of children. The childless woman goes through deep sorrow in African society...bearing children gives the woman the security and joy of a family, of being taken care of in her old age, of being respected by the husband and the wider community...people will excuse a woman (mother) for losing her children through death, but the one who does not bear is hardly excused. Consequently people say: ‘A barren wife never gives thanks’...nothing else is as valuable as having children; they are the deepest cause for giving thanks. If a woman has everything else, except

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 2-6.

³⁹⁵ Magezi, E. Baloyi, “Gendered Character of Barrenness in an African Context: An African Pastoral Study,” in *die Skriflig* 51, no.1 (February 2017): 1-2, accessed January 19, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i1.2172>.

³⁹⁶ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 165.

children, she would have no cause or joy to give thanks...motherhood is the woman's fulfilment.³⁹⁷

The injustice that is meted to a childless woman or to a woman without male children is equally extended to a widow after the death of her husband. Nworie laments that, "In Igboland, when a woman loses her husband to death she is forced to undergo a 'dehumanizing ritual.'³⁹⁸ The woman will be forced to sit on bare ground inside her house and she is not allowed to interact with other people. This unjust treatment is particularly pathetic because only women are subjected to it. No man is allowed to sit on the bare ground when his wife dies. Emmanuel Otteh maintains that widows deserve "compassion and respect" and should not be treated as criminals.³⁹⁹

Ezza culture also has, in the words of Nworie, "unjust practices by which a woman is denied the inheritance of a property which she and her husband conjointly worked for during their marriage."⁴⁰⁰ When the husband dies, the male relatives of the man usurp his property of land and trees, and everything he acquired with his wife. The woman is left to fend for herself and her children. This leads to untold suffering for the widow. She lacks food and basic necessities to support herself and her children. This is worse if she has no male child. Mbiti states that, "Barrenness is not only unacceptable but also a disgrace and abnormal state. Because children are a glory to the family, barrenness is regarded as a curse and should be avoided at all cost, resorting to divorce or polygamy."⁴⁰¹ Not only the woman but the couple without children are treated with contempt. Ezza people call the couple without children *odo nwa* (life without children) and the man or woman without children is called *onye ikirikpo* (a person to be thrown to the bad bush). Baloyi and Manala write that,

Children are considered the crowning glory in an African marriage – the more children are conceived during the marriage, the greater the glory. There are certain expectations from family, and an African community, especially to married couples. Presumably, families pity the deaths of childless couples because they will not be remembered when they die.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ Mbiti, "Flowers in the Garden," 64.

³⁹⁸ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 166.

³⁹⁹ Bishop Emmanuel N. Otteh, "Pastoral Letter on the Title –Taking &Funeral Ceremonies," (March, 2003), 48.

⁴⁰⁰ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 166.

⁴⁰¹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 41.

⁴⁰² M.E. Baloyi and M.J. Manala, "Reflections on challenges of preferring the male child in African marriage – A practical theological observation," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no.1 (November 2019): 1, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1852>.

Childless couples are not given befitting burial in Ezza culture because the belief is that they do not leave children behind to mourn them. Even if they acquire material properties, they are regarded as the poorest of the poor. Oladimeji claims that “A person who has no descendants in effect quenches the fire of life and becomes forever dead since his line of physical continuation is blocked if he does not get married and bear children.”⁴⁰³ But the fate of baby girls and especially childless women needs be addressed urgently. Baloyi and Manala maintain that “Although childbearing is applauded, male children are given more priority than female children.”⁴⁰⁴ Auil Vahakangas concurs, stating that, “only male children were counted when dealing with the reasons that a husband could desert his wife – female children were not acknowledged, as if she did not have any children.”⁴⁰⁵ In other words, girls are treated like second class citizens.

Referring to childless women in Africa, Mbiti says that the failure “to bear children is worse than committing genocide.”⁴⁰⁶ A woman who does not conceive children is regarded as abnormal in Ezza culture. People call her *nwoke* (a man). Baloyi and Manala assert that this preference for male children is “the problem (that) is not exclusive to African ethnic groups; other cultures throughout the world share the same problem.”⁴⁰⁷ While this may be the case, it is pathetic that in Ezza culture, female children are made to feel inferior to their brothers simply because they are girls. Matsobane Manala notes that,

Traditional Africans teach *ubuntu* principles of communality, mutual respect, caring...but they do not walk the talk with regard to the treatment of widows...There is this an apparent deliberate uncaring, disrespectful, discriminating, impolite and unjust treatment of widows in African communities in spite of the *ubuntu* values...Widows seem to be neglected and even oppressed in our time...The issue of widowhood in Africa, in terms of the apparent plight of these bereaved and grieving women, needs to be urgently addressed for change in the 21st century.⁴⁰⁸

The plight of girls, barren women, unmarried women and widows in Ezza culture does not reflect trinitarian communion. Ezza people live in communion because they believe

⁴⁰³ O. Oladimeji, *African Traditional Religion* (Ilesa: Ilesanmi Press, 1980), 34.

⁴⁰⁴ Baloyi and Manala, “Reflections on challenges of preferring the male child in an African marriage,” 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Auil Vahagangas, *Christian Couples coping with Childlessness: Narratives Machame, Kilimanjaro*, American Society of Missiology Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 110.

⁴⁰⁷ Baloyi and Manala, “Reflections on challenges of preferring the male child in an African marriage,” 3.

⁴⁰⁸ Matsobane J. Manala, “African Traditional Widowhood Rites and their Benefits and/or detrimental Effects on Widows in a Context of African Christianity,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no.3 (2015): 1, accessed January 19, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2913>.

that God is benevolence; however, some of their cultural practices deviate from their faith in God. Pholoho Morojele claims that, “The ascendancy accorded to boys, especially those who had the resources to maintain and perform hegemonic forms of masculinities, ensured that boys were generally treated differently from how girls were treated. Being a boy was fundamentally oppositional to anything feminine.”⁴⁰⁹ In Ezza culture, boys are not even expected to cry because showing emotions will make them look like girls. Schineller supports the idea of having children. However he writes that,

The love of children, and the desire to have children, is beautiful. But if it is so imperative that the man or woman who cannot have children is held in disgrace, then it has gone too far. The worth of a woman cannot simply be judged by her ability to bear children. When absolutized, this value becomes a disvalue.⁴¹⁰

This shows how something that is beautiful can be turned into an ugly situation where people can be oppressed and subjected to untold suffering owing to a problem that they do not bring on themselves. Circumcision (FGM) of baby girls is another problem facing females in Ezza society. It is believed that genital mutilation will stop female promiscuity in adulthood. However, it has been found to be detrimental to the health of girls and it poses a big challenge for women during child-birth. The World Health Organization states:

FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person’s rights to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.⁴¹¹

Ezza people believe that they are helping their girls to develop into healthy and chaste womanhood. They do not see female genital mutilation of their baby girls as a wrongful practice. The Church and medical personnel in Ezza face real challenges in their efforts to convince villagers of the dangers of female genital mutilation. In relation to the treatment of girl child, widows, childless women and women in general in Ezza culture, the words

⁴⁰⁹ Pholoho Morojele, “What does it mean to be a Boy? Implications for girl’s and boy’s schooling experiences in Lesotho rural schools,” *Gender and Education* 23, no.6 (May 2011): 686, accessed January 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.527828>.

⁴¹⁰ Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 80.

⁴¹¹ World Health Organization on FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.who.int>.

of “The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World” captures the reality facing women in Ezza:

with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet be universally honoured. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.⁴¹²

In Ezza culture, there is still inequality between men and women in many areas of life such as opportunity for education, freedom to choose a husband or to engage in a career of one’s choice. Elizabeth Johnson contends that,

In the patriarchal system the nonrelational human male exercising unilateral power sits at the pinnacle of perfection. Relationality and the inevitable vulnerability that accompanies it are correspondingly devalued as imperfections. Being free from others and being incapable of suffering in one’s own person because of them become the goal.⁴¹³

Johnson’s description means that some men in Ezza culture think that it is weakness to show kindness to women. This leads to the fact that women are perceived as the weaker sex in Ezza culture and also as people who are less wise than men. Johnson writes:

Structurally subordinated within patriarchy, women are maintained in this position, not liberated by the image of a God who suffers in utter powerlessness because of love. The ideal of the helpless divine victim serves only to strengthen women’s dependency and potential for victimization...when what is needed is growth in relational autonomy and self-affirmation.⁴¹⁴

As Johnson notes, the subordinated role that men put in place for women in Ezza culture is particularly pathetic. When a woman commits adultery, she is subjected to degradation and abuse. She is publicly shamed by beating and other unjust treatments. She is not allowed to cook for her husband and children. Such treatment is reserved for women and is not applicable to men found to have had sex outside marriage. Patricia Fox states that,

The symbol of God as persons in communion communicates not only the strong biblical teaching that God is personal but also that to be a person is to be in dynamic mutual relation with other persons and entities. By

⁴¹² GS, # 29.

⁴¹³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 252.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

providing an image of different persons in communion, it gives witness to the fact that uniqueness flourishes within a true community of mutual relationships. When God is imaged as persons in communion, the teaching that women and men are made in the image of God acquires new depths that can nurture the full dignity and humanity of all persons. God imaged as persons in communion thus has the potential to function as a powerful symbol of hope for human beings who struggle to understand what it means to be a person and to find ways to live together in this global village.⁴¹⁵

Fox sees the communion of the Trinity as a corrective of unjust treatment for women. Thus, within Ezza society, cultural practices deviate from the mutual love and equality espoused in the trinitarian life. Thus, trinitarian life challenges these practices and calls for transformation and imitation of the communion of the Trinity. The trinitarian life of equality and love is what is needed to shed light in some dark places in Ezza culture. Fox writes,

When people become part of a living community in which relationships are built and valued and in which links between creation and humanity and between present and future are recognized and celebrated, a culture and an ethos have begun to be forged. Persons are brought into dynamic relationship with the three persons in God, a salvific encounter occurs, and the symbol ceases to be an inert doctrine within a creedal formula – it becomes a source of life.⁴¹⁶

Fox identifies trinitarian communion as the “source of life” for human beings. Although Ezza people reflect the love of the Trinity in their communal life, nevertheless, their communion falls short of the immense loving life of the Trinity. Therefore, the communion of the Trinity challenges Ezza people to a life of equality and inclusiveness where everybody’s dignity will be respected. In reference to the Elizabeth Johnson’s trinitarian theology, Fox writes that,

A vision of Holy Mystery such as the one offered by Elizabeth Johnson signals that women with men are in the image of God and that all creation is of immense value and communicates something of God’s very being. Inclusive imagings of God that are faithful to biblical witness and tradition provide a holy space that is truly redemptive for all, a space where the poorest and those who are considered different can be at home. An authentic imaging of God as Communion invites each person into relationship and collaboration with her triune self who is mercy, and inexorably challenges the believer toward an ethic and action on behalf of

⁴¹⁵ Patricia A. Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Retrieval of the Triune God* (Collegeville, MIN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 241.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 247

all peoples who suffer injustice and on behalf of the Earth itself.⁴¹⁷

Fox's explanation means that Ezra people have to realise that women and men are equal because all human beings bear the image of God. To hold men above women in society is not according to the will of God and this falls short of trinitarian communion. The communion of the Trinity embraces everyone without demarcation. Ezra people who have faith in the God of love need to show universal love. Fox states that,

a triune God...could be called Divine *koinōnia*: Three-personed God, God as Communion...They suggest a God of persons-in-communion, whose imprint of interconnectedness and relation is clearly marked within the very fabric of the universe. They ensure the transcendence and otherness of God by stretching human imagination well beyond all safe boundaries of definition and into the realm of not-knowing...they show that the triune symbol of God can become a profound symbol of hope for a world searching for meaning and direction. A weaving of these strands suggests a synthesis that gives witness to the Holy Trinity, who, while remaining totally 'other,' is also a personal God of compassion who relentlessly pursues those who search for meaning, freedom, and truth and who invites them to become partners of transforming communion.⁴¹⁸

Fox notes that it is the communion of both men and women that bears witness to the love of the Trinity. If men dominate women, then, they do not bear witness to the trinitarian communion. It is only when men and women live in harmony as equals who complement one another that people can talk of the resemblance of the communion of Trinity in their lives. Fox concludes by pointing out that,

the ancient symbol of the Trinity, held for so long at the centre of Christian life and worship, is a symbol whose time has finally come. It is only in these times that humanity has been able to glimpse the full implications of the intrinsically relational nature of personhood and creation, the interconnectedness of all the entities of the universe, and the potential of difference in communion. It is only in these times that planet Earth has become small enough, through global communication, for its people to be confronted with the urgency of the need for women's voices to be heard equally with men's. Only in these times has it become apparent that if humanity is to have any future at all, women and men must heed the imperative to be in relation, in communion, with one another and with everything in the universe. I believe that those interlocking factors enable Christians today, in a way never before possible in our history, to 'receive' more fully this Christian teaching that is new: that God is revealed as a three-personed God of Compassion whose very being is communion.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 247-248.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 248-249.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 249.

Fox believes the doctrine of the Trinity has helped people to understand the importance of loving communion in human society. One of the most contributions of trinitarian theology in our time is the realisation that communion marks life in the Trinity and in human society. The God who made the universe is the Trinity of love. This knowledge according Fox empowers people to understand God as God of “compassion and communion.” She calls people to embrace the urgency of this implication of faith both in Ezza culture and the whole world. Letting God’s love rule our lives will bring about the transformation of the world.

2.9.2 Burial Rites in Ezza Culture

Ezza people are selective in the way they bury their dead. Nworie explains what happens in Ezza burial ceremonies: “Igbo people regard a successful life as a married life with children. A person who dies childless is not given a befitting burial in one’s family compound.”⁴²⁰ The refusal to bury the person in his/her family stems from the belief that a childless person is a bad spirit who could interfere with the lives of relatives. Otteh maintains that, “the practice of burying adults without offspring, unmarried youth, those who die before their parents or by accident, in a bad bush is not just, it is unchristian and is therefore forbidden.”⁴²¹ Ezza people attach great importance to child-bearing. Childless people are thrown out, rejected by their relatives and communities. By contrast, Ezza people go to great lengths to provide a befitting burial to their people who have children. In the words of Nworie, this points to their

materialistic view of the next life and suggests that the wealth expended during burials enhances the status of the dead person in the spirit world. Igbo people think that the amount of wealth acquired in this present life is the index of one’s wealth and influence in the next. As a result many people borrow lots of money to enable them to hold an extravagant burial ceremony for their loved ones. If a family is unable to afford an expensive burial at the time of death of a relative, they tend to unduly extend the date of burial to time they presume they could afford an expensive and *befitting* burial.⁴²²

This type of arrangement in Ezza culture brings a lot of hardship to the families of those who died. The difficulty of acquiring enough money and items for burial ceremonies in

⁴²⁰ Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 166.

⁴²¹ Otteh, “Pastoral Letter on Title-taking,” 42.

⁴²² Nworie, *Missionary Evangelization and Cultural Values*, 167.

rural areas which lack bare necessities of life represents a great injustice. Moreover, childless couples are humiliated because when they see how people with children are buried with honour and dignity, they feel left out.

2.9.3 *Amadu* (Free Born) and *Ohu* (Slaves)

The division of people into free born (*amadu*) and slave (*Ohu*) is another undesirable feature of Ezza culture. Those classed as slaves are not fully respected, and are instead treated like second class citizens. Their equality with the free born is not maintained. There is another classification of people in other areas of Igboland known as *Osu* which is not applicable to Ezza culture. While Ezza people have the culture of *ohu and amadu*, they do not practice what Ezeanya calls “The *Osu* (Cult-Slave) system in Igbo Land.”⁴²³ While *ohu* are slaves, *osu* are people who are offered to “deities or spirits” and left in the vicinities of the shrines according to Ezeanya.⁴²⁴ They are not allowed to intermarry with the freeborn people.⁴²⁵ The Ezza people shun the company of slaves. Afoke and Nworie write that

Christianity catered first of all for the rejected and downtrodden in society. Because of that, initial converts to Christianity were slaves (*Ohu*) and the needy that were seen as the rejects of society. These were people who have no good opinion of Ezza customs and traditions as these customs were their greatest undoing. Their grouse against traditional Ezza culture and society led them to the first group to embrace Christianity. Without a doubt, they saw in the new Christian body an alternative to the Ezza society whose constraints they were eager to escape from⁴²⁶

According to Afoke and Nworie, the arrival of Christianity in Ezza helps slaves to realise that they are equal to freeborn people. This gives them human dignity but it does not totally eradicate the stigma of being a slave. Many families in contemporary Ezza culture will not approve marriages between slaves and freeborn people. The freeborn is not allowed to marry a person deemed as a slave. Slaves have to marry among themselves and avoid contamination of the free-born. This is another area in which the communion of the Trinity challenges communal in Ezza culture. The warning of Okere is applicable

⁴²³ S. N. Ezeanya, “The *Osu* ((Cult-Slave) System in Igbo Land,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1, no.1 (1967): 35.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 36, 40-41. See also Sylvia Leith-Ross, “Notes on the *Osu* System among the Ibo of Owerri Province, Nigeria,” *Africa* X (1937): 207.

⁴²⁶ Afoke and Nworie, *Ezza History*, 118.

to Ezza culture: *ohu*

is especially unjust since it means that fellow Christians are devalued in their person, imposing on them a loss of self respect that is not only permanent and irreversible...We have established that our (*amadu*) is part of reality...(Ohu) is only the *onu mere* (man-made). Therefore, we should not let our Christian assessment and acceptance of each other be determined by a shameful (practice) – Since we are by baptism all God’s children, called to be Christians equal and beloved of God, bidden to love one another.⁴²⁷

In Ezza culture, a slave is made a slave for ever, both himself/herself and their descendants are slaves. Thus, *Ihe onu mere* according to Okere means man -made laws. He condemns the division between slave and free-born in Igbo society as a man -made cultural practices that militates against human dignity. He accepts that (free-born) exists because everybody is born free before God and should be allowed to exist in freedom, while *Ohu* is not ordained by God. Ezza people so abhor slaves that they refer anything not acceptable in society as *Odigbo guohu* which means, the thing is worthless. Slaves are servants of their masters in Ezza. Before the advent of Christianity in Ezza, some slaves were killed and buried with their owners with the belief that they continue to serve their owners in the spiritual world. Like *Osu*, nobody is born a slave in Ezzaland. It is man made. A person either becomes a slave when hardships pushes the parents to sell their children to feed the rest of the family, or when some people are kidnapped by warring communities. The kidnapped people are seen as slaves in the communities that kidnapped them, or when a kidnapped person is sold into another household. The person automatically becomes a slave. Dynan refers to how the Igbo “people in general were not attracted to a religion that had slaves and outcasts for its main adherents.”⁴²⁸ She comments how the missionaries in Igboland welcomed slaves and outcasts to the Christian faith but those who were free-born refused to join the Church. This shows how the slaves are held in abhorrence by the people.

2.9.4 Corruption in Ezza Culture

Schineller contends that,

Familiar solidarity creates strong social, economic and religious bonds. But the strength of family ties can also be turned in on itself, so that the outsider receives no justice and no compassion. While providing for the

⁴²⁷ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol.1, 513-514. See also Dynan, *The Story of Bishop Shanahan*, 31.

⁴²⁸ Dynan, *The Story of Bishop Shanahan*, 31.

welfare of close relatives and friends, one refuses to see beyond the family and to work sufficiently for the good of the state or nation. Tribalism with all of its ambiguity is an example of this. If tribalism results in hostility or indifference to those in other ethnic groups, then it has taken a turn for the worse and will prevent the emergence of true nationalism or internationalism.⁴²⁹

Schineller notes tribalism is the root of corruption in Nigeria. It particularly affects Ezza people because many people did not receive education and Ezza is the one of minority groups that is discriminated against in Nigeria. Moreover, the most difficult problem facing Ezza culture at present is that the very few educated people who are in politics in Ezza neglect to help the poor masses. Instead, they line their pockets. This is contrary to the leadership of the elders where poor people are looked after and are provided for. This problem is not particular in Ezza culture; it is prevalent in all sectors in Nigeria and has brought about a situation where the rich enrich themselves and the poor are getting poorer. Schineller continues: "Personalism, the emphasis on personal rather than impersonal values, has a key contribution to make. But if it means loyalty to one's friends at any price, and at the expense of the common good and the law of the nation, then it has become a disvalue."⁴³⁰ This situation exists in Ezza culture at present. It is linked with political life where those who lead resort to corruption and favour only the people who support them in order to secure positions of leadership which does not pass through the normal way of democratic government. This contrasts with the leadership of elders which is done in accordance with justice, honesty and fair play. Schineller maintains that,

one can speak of the danger of greed. So much is happening in Nigeria – new ideas, new products, new possibilities. Television opens up new horizons, and everyone wants a share of the pie, of the new good life. The new attitude of consumerism needs careful scrutiny and criticism, for it threatens to undermine the stability, the sense of cooperation and the sense of solidarity that has been a hallmark of the culture.⁴³¹

Schineller's words apply to Ezza culture. The affluent life of those who live in the cities imparts life in Ezza culture. Young people, especially boys, strive to imitate the life-style of those living in cities such as Abuja and Lagos. This leads youths to migrate to the cities, abandoning farm work in villages in search of a better life. Because Ezza people are backward in education, their young people struggle to secure lucrative jobs in the

⁴²⁹ Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 80.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

cities. Consequently, people who live in developed areas in Nigeria look down on people from Ezza as if they are second class citizens in their own country. Schineller asserts that,

As one studies any culture, one becomes aware of ambiguities in that culture – the complex mixing of good and evil, of positive and negative possibilities. Urban conditions exemplify such ambiguity in Nigeria. In Lagos, for example, there is beauty and squalor, well-paid employment and far too common unemployment. There are places of recreation, as well as overcrowded streets and houses. There is wealth and poverty, hunger and feasting. There are modern medical facilities, but these are far from adequate. Nigeria's cities remain ambiguous. There are signs of hope, of a new future, but also signs of despair, of overpopulation, of the loss of personal roots.⁴³²

As Schineller explains about life in Nigeria, the process of this research has revealed the mixture of good and bad in Ezza culture. Their communal life is very attractive, and it binds people together and is a great source of support for individuals. In short, the life of communion is so prevalent in African ethnic groups that the continent is known internationally for valuing communal life. However, there are many cultural practices that deviate from this life built upon loving relationships. However, even in Ezza villages, which lack most of the infrastructures that exist in the cities, inequalities are creeping in which penetrates the activities of younger generations and are causing them to deviate from the style of leadership provided by the elders. Schniller laments that,

The oil boom is another striking example of ambiguity. The promised new Nigeria remains far from a reality, and one hears of oil doom rather than boom. The new wealth has made a difference, but not all to the good. The rich and powerful become richer and more powerful, while the mass of citizens see the better life eluding them, appearing only on television and in news papers but not in their villages and homes. Oil money has been used not for the good of the entire nation, for lasting progress, but for the benefit of the few, for short-term gains, and for show.⁴³³

Schineller, indicates the level of corruption in Nigeria. Ezza people are among the poorest in Nigeria. They lack basic health care, education and infrastructure owing to bribery and corruption. Government leaders embezzle public money and neglect to look after the population. Ezza people are, therefore, losing the leadership of the elders where they live in unity and communion. The new political system of government does not take care of their needs because those who represent them in the government usurp their share of the wealth of the nation. Okere asserts that,

⁴³² Ibid., 81.

⁴³³ Ibid.

one of the great beauties of Nigeria is the riot of human variety which is not only a joy to behold but which contains a richness of human potential not paralleled in most parts of the world. With the varied cultural background inspiring the greatest concentration of black men in the world, what height could we not achieve, what goals too far for our ambition? But if God created Nigerians the white men created Nigeria...Our success has been remarkable, but so has also our failure been tragic. We have had a political past that was deeply marked by tribal division. We have had a bitter war that was fought on tribal lines. We have a civil service, a university system, a personal identity and self understanding all wearing an unspeakable tribal badge....All these convince me that the greatest single motive factor in Nigeria today is perhaps the tribe. Curiously enough we have chosen to solve the problem like the ostrich by declaring tribalism our enemy and then closing our eyes to conjure its disappearance. So far tribalism is not being mentioned aloud. The new constitution threads gingerly around it. The manifestos are manifestly silent on it. But everyone knows it is the issue at stake. In Nigerian politics our tribal classification supersedes ideology, profession, class and even religion. Is it then not more dangerous to ignore this than to acknowledge it and channel it to positive end?⁴³⁴

Okere states the difficulties that rise from the evil of tribalism in Nigeria. His words are applicable to the Ezza people who suffer from the evil of tribalism. Ezza is a small part of Igbo tribe which is being oppressed because of her backwardness in education and her lack of wealth. Okere blames this situation on the colonial masters who amalgamated all the tribes of Nigeria into one big country without paying attention to the welfare of the people. He writes:

The Christian contribution to solving this problem and a contribution which a Christian politician should aim at is this. Basing communal living on the truth. Taking the tribal co-efficient into account, looking it in the face. Stopping the dangerous pretence that we can get well ignoring it or merely playing it down. Getting each tribe or nation to constitute itself and articulate its identity and priorities. Getting the nations together on the basis of equality of status but with the realism that recognizing the fact of differentiated figures in population and also of responsibility for carrying the national burden. We must create an atmosphere of give and take, a transparent justice that makes the smallest groups have a full sense of belonging without violating the sense of justice of any person. Full justice to each tribal unity and full justice to every individual Nigerian. Fair geographical distribution of amenities. No hegemonies, no exclusive permanent rights, no sheepish adhesion to the democratic creed that the multitude is always right, the few always wrong. So on these lines, working out the implications of a genuine pluralism, this would be a

⁴³⁴ Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 200-201.

typically Christian contribution to a typically Nigerian problem.⁴³⁵

Okere identifies tribalism as a typical “Nigeria problem.” He is right because tribalism has even led Nigeria to the civil war where the whole country engaged in brutal war with the Igbo tribe. Both the Nigerians and the Igbos have not recovered from the effects of the war. Okere indicates that Christian leaders are at the position to address the problems of tribalism. He suggests that Christian leaders need to practice honest leadership by avoiding the evil of tribalism which results in favouritism towards people who come from the same place as the leaders. Christian politicians have taken up the roles of the elders. They need to emulate the leadership of the elders who avoided the evil of tribalism by communal ownership of public property. The Christian leaders has to call the evil of tribalism by name and eradicate it, instead of pretending that it does not exists, while it continually causes problems for those who are neglected. Okere’s advice for Christians who are in politics in Nigeria is also directed to Christian leaders in Ezza culture. He writes:

And so as Christians and from whatever political platform you may choose to operate, press for the citizens of the country – liberty, equal chances, solidarity, for unity in diversity, unity in essentials and in others liberty: press for and practice tolerance of other and stranger views. Resist the tendency to absorb minority interests. Give no quarter to totalitarianism whether on the side of the party or on that of the state itself. No monopolies, no privileged religion, no devaluation of the spiritual, no diminution of justice, no obstruction of progress, no leveling to a general mediocrity. From whatever political platform you operate, make sure that your manifesto is shot through with this spirit.⁴³⁶

Okere wants leaders of the people to seek equal opportunities for all. This will lead to justice, equality, peace and communion in society. Okere continues:

In the realization of these fundamental values you will keep in mind our people, our history, our predicament. Do everything to protect our families, the nurseries and seminaries of the nation. Give serious thought to the proper feeding of our millions. Let us stop paying mere lip-service to the statement: ‘Agriculture is the mainstay of our economy.’ A well thought out and consequent agrarian policy is now indispensable to save us from the disgraceful possibility of not being able to feed ourselves.⁴³⁷

Okere demands loving actions from the leaders. Some educated people in Ezza culture look down on farming and prefer to travel to the cities to look for white collar jobs that

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

are not available. This is because the leaders are reluctant to empower young people to embrace farming work by providing them with equipment and salaries that would enable them to work for their living. Instead, the leaders embezzle State money and allow poor people to suffer and die in hardship. Okere writes that,

The New order to which our Christian politicians must commit themselves and their energy cannot be realized unless very special thought is given to the question of education, the real key to a lot of our dream for happiness. They should ensure that education for the future must not only embrace universal literacy, it should as a matter of course include the learning of skills for earning a living: it should be planned comprehensively enough to foster the development of varied talents. Above all it should teach our people the art of living humanly, this means the studied cultivation of private individual virtues such as: the ability to love, selflessness, ambition, hard work, orderliness: and of public virtues such as solidarity, readiness to cooperate, ability to look at life critically, obedience to law, punctuality, courtesy, fairness.⁴³⁸

Okere calls on our leaders to provide help by educating young people in order to help them to be able to feed themselves and their families. This includes teaching them how to live honestly and in loving communion with other members of society. This role was played by the elders and parents, who from infancy, have inculcated in children how to live the tradition of Ezza culture. Okere explains that, “Without such a thorough and comprehensive review of our educational system embracing practical skills, cultural self-development and moral rectitude we might more easily enforce democracy in poultry than hope to humanize our society.”⁴³⁹ Okere attributes the bad governance of Nigeria’s leaders to default democracy which is only in name and accompanied by actions which serve the governed. Because of the actions of corrupted leaders in Nigeria (Ezza included), the poor masses suffer abject poverty and degradation. Referring to this problem, Okere maintains that,

We on our part, lead the world in poverty, in disease, in famine, in illiteracy and general ignorance. We lead in bad roads, in planlessness, in cultural stagnation. Our underdevelopment has meant an unspecified high level of unemployment, the depopulation of our countryside, the stagnation of our rural economies especially agriculture, the mass migration of our young manpower into swelling cities where nearly half the population are under or unemployed. Who will now doubt that the future of any country in the 20th century lies in industrializations, in creation of work and employment, in total mobilization of resources and

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 201-202.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 202.

manpower? We have to begin to process our own goods instead of forever being exporters of precious raw materials, instead of developing more and more appetite for foreign consumer goods. In other words we should now at least start learning to process our cocoa, to make soap and margarine from our palm produce, to refine all our oil and develop the allied petrochemical industries. This general of civilian rulers should abdicate from power if they are unable to make this necessary breakthrough, if they have not the will to alter now and forever this master slave relation that we have for so long manifested with the rest of the world.⁴⁴⁰

Okere enumerates the sad situations that result from the action of corrupt leaders. In Nigeria, the bad actions of leaders create misery for Ezza people. Parents cannot afford school fees for their children. Only the rich and the children of the leaders go to school. Hunger and sickness are rampant in villages because of the lack of medical facilities like hospitals and health centres. There is a high rate of infant mortality and many young pregnant women die in child- birth while the wives of leaders and their children have access to expensive medical care both in Nigeria and outside the country.

In discussing bribery and corruption in Nigeria, Okere is critical, stating that, “many of our public officers seem to be spending their time doing nothing but spend their time conjugating the verb to bribe: I bribe, I was bribed, I will be bribed, I should have been bribed, I wish I could be bribed.”⁴⁴¹ Okere shows that bribery is endemic in the present society in Nigeria. It affects poor people in Ezza culture as they lag behind in education and do not have prominent people to do justice to them. Okere writes that “At elections, we have open bribery for votes...So we vote in the richest, not the best.”⁴⁴² Okere indicates that the politicians buy the poor masses with their corrupt money. They convince the people to vote for the leaders who give them money instead of voting for an honest leadership. This leads to the situation where corrupt people are in government. Okere laments that

we all see that the good people are the poor people and those who are rich have gotten rich at the expense of others. Where right can be wrong and wrong right, where a lie and a truth are interchangeable for a fee, if the price is right...Rampant dishonesty, world renown as 419, thieving no longer abhorred as was done in our traditional villages and society. This is what corruption has made of us. Our churches unquestionably accepting what might be ill-gotten goods.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 1, 501

⁴⁴² Ibid., 502.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Okere points to the fact that in the traditional settings in Nigeria, such as the Ezza culture, the leaders were not greedy and bribery and corruption were frowned upon. He argues that at present, even the Christian communities who should lead the people by exemplary adherence to honesty and justice, join in the practice of corruption. He explains:

Corruption has degraded our work—those who work at all earn less than those who don't. Merit and hard work have no more place and with that we can never develop our country. Here, working does not pay, therefore a lazy, thieving mentality has grown among us. People who earn salaries earn more in bribes and live beyond their earning abilities. Now no one asks how a soldier, even army officer, can own a ship or a civil servant a chain of houses. On account of people's show-manship, those who have stolen a lot of money do not and cannot hide it, they show it off like a dog carrying a mouthful of faeces.⁴⁴⁴

The few educated people in Ezza society who are in public offices are living out Okere's words. They engage in bribery and corruption and by their actions make poor people poorer. They do not try to improve the situation of the people they represent. Instead, they embezzle people's property and demand bribery from the needy. This brings about the situation where many communities in Ezza have no access to medical help or clean drinking water, electricity, or schools for their children. Every sphere of life is tainted with bribery and corruption in Nigeria. According to Okere, owing to this corruption in Nigeria, Ezza culture differs from the life of the Trinity. He writes: "how God is...points out to how God lives, how God acts and behaves. There is a plurality, there is a community and a unity and love is the uniting principle and essential attributes are shared equally by all the three divine persons of the Trinity."⁴⁴⁵ For Okere, God is loving communion which differs from the life of selfishness. Okere notes that

Living in the spirit of the Trinity is a way of saying living and being under the influence of the Holy Spirit, being directed by that power which pushes us to do God's will, to do good and avoid evil...Living in the Spirit of the Trinity is also living according to their ground norm, their motto, their ratio, their basic way of life, how they do things, according to their constitution ...We share God's life through the grace (God) showers on us...Living in the Trinity for us means imitating that model in God that combines unity and plurality...Living in the Trinity means living in the Holy Spirit which inspires us, inebriates us, fills us to do God's will, with the mind to think as God would and always keep in mind God's point of view. It is above all cultivating that supreme virtue of love which is the fulfilment of the law, which is God's own innermost being and driving

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., vol. II, 476.

force, binding us to (God) and to one another...How wonderful it would be to hear it said here in Owerri...How their traders never cheat... How their civil servants are free from corruption! How courteous they all are, how dedicated in conscience.⁴⁴⁶

Okere upholds trinitarian communion as the corrective of tribalism, bribery and corruption in Igboland. In reference to Ezza culture, his remarks mean that people need to embrace equality and respect in dealing with others. He implies that the communion of the Trinity challenges all the unjust cultural practices in Ezza. Fox concurs by writing that, “Trinitarian theology, based as it is in biblical story of salvation, has consistently taught that what constitutes the three divine persons is their relationality. It holds that relationality both constitutes each Trinitarian person as unique and distinguishes one from another. From this basis of understanding, the Trinity can be described as a mystery of real, mutual relations.”⁴⁴⁷ Johnson echoes Fox’s contention, stating that, “At the heart of holy mystery is not monarchy but community; not an absolute ruler, but a threefold *Koinonia*.”⁴⁴⁸ Johnson maintains that the world, despite its sinfulness, is capable of reflecting the communion of the Trinity:

The circular dynamism within God spirals inward, outward, forward, towards the coming of a world into existence, not out of necessity but out of the free exuberance of overflowing friendship. Spurn off and included as a partner in the dance of life, the world for all its brokenness and evil is destined to reflect the triune reality, and already does embody it in those sacramental, anticipatory moments of friendship, healing and justice breaking through.⁴⁴⁹

Johnson uses the image of “friendship” to describe the life of communion. This is an antidote to a life of corruption and injustice. When applied to Ezza culture, this means that people will engage in the life of loving service to one another. This will prove that in spite of her sins, Ezza culture reflects trinitarian communion in society. Johnson conceives the Trinity as “Another interpretation of fullness of being that includes rather than excludes genuine reciprocal relations with others who are different; another pattern of life that values compassionate connectedness over separation; another understanding of power that sees its optimum operation to be in collegial and empowering actions.”⁴⁵⁰ Her description of the Trinity is a corrective measure to unjust cultural practices in Ezza

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 476-477.

⁴⁴⁷ Fox, *God as Communion*, 137.

⁴⁴⁸ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 216.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 222.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 225.

culture such as the discrimination against women and preference of male child to female child. Johnson declares that:

What is slowly coming to light is a new construal of the notion of person, neither as a self-encapsulated ego[as in dominant males within patriarchal society] nor a diffuse self denied [as in females and oppressed males within patriarchy], but self-hood on the model of relational autonomy. Discourse about God from the perspective of women's experience, therefore, names toward a relational God who loves in freedom.⁴⁵¹

According to Johnson, communion of the Trinity means equality between men and women. There is no room for upholding one set of human beings as more important than others, or treating women as inferior to men, nor subjecting some people as slaves to the unjust treatments while recognising others as free-born and accorded to them the honour and rank associated with such a position. Johnson perceives the Trinity in relational terms. She writes: "being in communion constitutes God's very essence."⁴⁵²

She continues:

I suggest that the ontological language of being has the advantage of providing an all-inclusive category for reality at large, leaving nothing out and thereby entailing that the cosmos does not slip from view by too heavy a concentration on the human dilemma...It is thus a code word for God as source of the whole universe, past and present, and yet to come, and as power that continuously resists evil.⁴⁵³

For Johnson, being is an "ontological" reality. She conceives God as "power that resists evil." She echoes the idea of Zizioulas who describes the Trinity in terms of the notion of communion as reflected in the title of his book, *Being as Communion*. She declares that "the being of God we are speaking of is essentially love. God's being is identical with an act of communion."⁴⁵⁴ Johnson uses the biblical image of God to teach her readers the real meaning of trinitarian communion. The language of love constitutes authentic life both in the Trinity and in human beings. Anybody who strives to live well arrives at the end of his/her search when he/she embraces the life of loving communion. Johnson describes God using the image of a woman when she calls God "*SHE WHO IS*."⁴⁵⁵ God is neither male nor female but all interpretations of God are the ways that theology uses to teach us to try to understand God through human experiences. Johnson implies that

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 226.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 227-228.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 237.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 238. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 16.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 224.

people are capable of reflecting the trinitarian communion. She explains

alive in the *koinonia* of SHE WHO IS, women and men are called to be friends of God and prophets...This way of speaking crafts a partnership amid ambiguity of history: SHE WHO IS, Holy Wisdom herself, lives as transcendent matrix who underlies and supports all existence and potential for new being, all resistance to oppression and the powers that destroy, while women and men...through all the ambivalence of their own fidelity, share in her power of love to create, struggle, and hope on behalf of the new creation in the face of suffering and evil.⁴⁵⁶

Johnson demonstrates that while it is difficult for human beings to constantly maintain the life of communion in society, people are still capable of imitating the loving life of the Trinity.

2.10 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Ezza family is a place of communion with God and neighbour. It is an enduring communion and a web of relationships that is manifested in various ways from the family compound which is the cradle of communion to the deepening of communion in the village and community. There is communion during every event of life whether it is birth, death and burial, or during initiation to adulthood in the age grade system or during the celebration of marriage. Ezza people love and enjoy life and celebrate it often during seasons of planting and harvesting, or even in the welcoming of visitors and strangers. Although trinitarian communion is perfect, the communion in Ezza culture nonetheless resembles communion in the Trinity, albeit in an imperfect way. This is a social understanding of the Trinity which can be helpful in deepening authentic Christian life among the faithful. The Trinity has often been presented in abstract language that is very difficult to apply to the day-to-day existence of God's people, despite the fact that Christians are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This chapter has also shown that the origin of such communion is in God who created human beings in God's image. This implies that human beings are marked by love and communion. To exist otherwise is to bear false witness to our creator. Human beings then resemble God most when they live in love and communion. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in un-broken love and communion with one another in the one

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 244-245.

Godhead. If a God of love is the source of our being, then, human communion on earth comes from God. Being in the image of God means that we are brothers and sisters to one another in unity and love and communion is our programme of life. Communion as it is practiced in Ezza culture, although not perfect as the communion that is obtained in the Trinity, is still a reminder to the Church and indeed to the whole world that communion is the paramount source of peace and unity in the world. Communion in Ezza culture challenges the individualistic mentality both in Europe and in America. It is a corrective measure to a life of isolation and selfishness. It is a transformative tool which would change life on earth for the better. Communion in Ezza society is offered for the world for its transformation and human flourishing.

The chapter also indentifies some cultural practices in Ezza culture which do not measure up to her life of communion and the communion of the Trinity. This is because human society has not yet attained the fullness of communion that exists in the Trinity. Communion in Ezza culture is in a process of growth and maturity. Despite her communal life, Ezza people still struggle to accommodate one another in society. In the next chapter, communion in the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers will be researched.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNION IN THE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

“All that the Father is, we see revealed in the Son; all that is the Son’s is the Father’s also; for the whole Son dwells in the Father, and he has the whole Father dwelling in himself...The Son who exists always in the Father cannot be separated from him, nor can the Spirit ever be divided from the Son who through the Spirit works all things. He who receives the Father also receives at the same time the Son and the Spirit. It is impossible to envisage any kind of severance or disjunction between them: One cannot think of the Son apart from the Father, nor divide the Spirit from the Son. There is between the three a sharing and a differentiation that are beyond words and understanding.” Gregory of Nyssa, *Mystical Writings*.

3.1 Introduction

The Cappadocian Fathers, St. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa made an outstanding contribution to understanding the Trinity in terms of relationship and communion. The correct understanding of this core belief of Christians (the Blessed Trinity) is always necessary not only because the “Church believes as she prays”¹ but also because Christian belief ought to influence and impact positively on their lives. Christians believe that there are three Persons in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Boff explains that these three divine Persons are said to be equal and co-eternal. They are distinct from one another and yet, they live in eternal communion with one another.² The doctrine of the Trinity was established by the Council of Nicaea (325) and upheld by the Council of Constantinople (381). These Councils emerged to discuss the controversies around the interpretation of the Trinity in the Church. For example, there was a controversial teaching advanced by Arius, an Alexandrian priest, who in an effort to uphold the unity of God, conceived God as a monad and so subordinated the Son to the Father. This chapter will explore the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers in order to show the uniqueness of their teaching in refuting unorthodox trinitarian disputations and providing a corrective interpretation of this core doctrine of the Christian faith. It will also analyse their teaching and draw out the implications of their trinitarian interpretation for Christian anthropology and, more generally, for the Christian Church.

¹ CCC, # 1124.

² Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 133.

3.2 Background of Cappadocian Fathers' Interpretation of Trinitarian Theology

Neuner and Dupius write that Arianism which was a contentious teaching on trinitarian relations was started by Arius, an Alexandrian priest. He believed that God is eternal, and while the Son is divine, he is not eternal; he is less than God because he is begotten by God. God is unbegotten, unoriginated and uncreated while the son has a beginning; therefore, he is a creature since “there was a time when he was not...Before being begotten he was not.”³ Arius challenged the teaching that God is one and exists in three divine Persons. This teaching is contained in his book titled *Thalia* which is known through his critics such as Athanasius.⁴ The main teaching of Arius, according to Athanasius, is contained in the letter or profession of faith, *Ekthesis Pisteos*, which was sent by Arius to Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria.⁵ In the letter Arius declared:

We acknowledge One God, alone Ingenerate (*agenneton*, unbegotten), alone everlasting, alone Unbegun (*anarchon*, without beginning)...who begot an Only-begotten Son before eternal times, through whom He has made both the ages and the universe; and begot him not in semblance, but in truth; and He made him subsist at His own will...God...is altogether Sole, but the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and founded before ages, was not before his generation...He is not eternal or co-eternal or co-unoriginate with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father, as some speak of relations, introducing two ingenerate beginnings, but God is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all. Wherefore also He is before the Son.⁶

Arius indicated that God is One; therefore, there is no equal relationship between the Father and the Son as Arius identified the Father with God. The Son being a creature is totally subordinated to the Father. For Arius, the Holy Spirit also has a beginning like the Son since nothing could put the Son on a par with the Father. Overall, Arius believed in the Trinity but he saw inequality between the three divine Persons. The early fathers of the Church fought strenuously against this trinitarian controversy. In the Council of Nicaea in 325, the assembled prelates decreed that the Son is not a creature but “generated from the Father, that is, from the being (*ousia*) of the Father, God from God,

³ Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 6. See St. Athanasius, *On Synods*, *NPNF* vol. IV, 25. See also *DS*, 126.

⁴ Athanasius, *On Synods*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.* 15; 16; 36. See also Gerard S. Sloyan, *The Three Persons in One God: Foundations of Catholic Theology* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 56; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1977), 227.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16. Also see Hilary of Poitiers, “On the Trinity,” in *NPNF*, series II, vol. IX, 4.; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 227.

Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being (*homoousios*) with the Father, through whom all things were made,” which means the Son is not subordinated to the Father but shares in equal divinity with the Father.⁷ The decree of the Council of Nicaea did not completely stop heretical teaching about the Trinity. Indeed, after Arius’ death and during the time of the Cappadocian fathers in the fourth century, Eunomius emerged with his followers. This new set of opponents held that the Son and Spirit are not equal to the Father in divinity. Eunomius interpreted (understood) God in a non-relational way as the “One” who cannot be divided into three hypostases.⁸ Eunomius implied that God’s unity does not admit any relationship and communion with the Son and Holy Spirit. He contended that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not equal in nature with God. Eunomius completely subordinated the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father. For the Neo-Arians, in the words of Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, “God is supremely arelational and cannot share or communicate divine nature.”⁹ This contradicts the notion of communion and equality that exist among the three divine Persons in the one Godhead.

The Cappadocian fathers not only faught Neo-Arians, they also railed against Sabellianism whose originator was a Roman priest named Sabellius who denied the distinctions in the Godhead. He conceived God as “One” and the three divine Persons in the Trinity as modes or roles of God’s existence; hence, his teaching is also known as modalism. Thus, God is “one Person who changes ‘modes of being,’ roles or merely costumes.”¹⁰ In other words, it would be against the faith in the monotheistic God to conceive God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit which might result in tritheism.¹¹ Macedonius also subordinated the Holy Spirit to the Son and to the Father. He championed the debate of “*Pneumatomachianism*” which means “Spirit Fighters.”¹² For him, “only the Father is true God” and he “placed the Son and Holy Spirit in order of creatures.”¹³ However, Edmund Fortman writes that the Cappadocian fathers not only defended the Nicene Creed but they made a significant contribution to the Trinity. They

⁷ Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 6. See also *DS*, 150.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, *NPNF*, vol. V, 50, # 1.13.

⁹ Marmion and Van Nieuwehove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 70.

¹⁰ George W. Clarke, ed., *Ancient Christian Writers: The Letters of St. Cyprian*, vol 2, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 73. 4.2. See also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 122.

¹¹ *DS*, 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, 151.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 132.

established unity and distinction in the Godhead with their terminology of one “*ousia* three *hypostases*.”¹⁴

3. 2.1 Basil’s Interpretation of the Trinity in Relational Terms

St. Basil’s interpretation of the Trinity in relational terms is in contrast with Eunomius whose definition of the Trinity denies such relationship. Around 359AD, Eunomius wrote a work titled *Apologetics* in defence of the “simpler creed which is common to all Christians.”¹⁵ Basil¹⁶ felt compelled to respond to that creed.¹⁷ The creed of Eunomius is as follows:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, of Whom are all things: and in one only-begotten Son of God, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things: and in one Holy Spirit, the Comforter.¹⁸

Basil argued that the Creed was acceptable but Eunomius deviated from orthodox faith in how he interpreted the creed. Thus, Basil complained that “a reading into this simpler creed in itself orthodox and unobjectionable, of explanation which ran distinctly counter to the traditional and instinctive faith of the Church, inevitably demanded corrective explanation and definition.”¹⁹ Basil tried to refute Eunomius’ idea, because Eunomius

¹⁴ Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), 80. See also G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1952), 233. And Joseph T. Liehard, “Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of One Hypostasis,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerard O’ Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 99.

¹⁵ St. Basil, *Letters and Select Works*, xvi-xvii.

¹⁶ Schaff and Wace, ed. “St Basil, *Letters and works*, Stated that St. Basil was born around 330 AD at Caesarea in the land of Cappadocia. His father (Basil) married Emmelia, his mother, and of that marriage were born ten children, five boys and five girls (St. Basil, *Letters and Works*, xiii). Basil’s siblings included an elder daughter who was called Macrina after her ground-mother and Gregory of Nyssa who became a bishop and was one of the three Cappadocian Fathers (Ibid). Basil was educated at Caesarea where he met his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, and both of them studied rhetoric and philosophy at Constantinople. He went to Athens where he and Gregory of Nazianzus continued their studies and consolidated their friendship (Ibid). At Athens two young Cappadocians were noted among their contemporaries for three things: their intelligence and success in work; their stainless and devout life; and their close mutual affection (Ibid., xv). In his zeal Basil travelled to experience the life of monks in Pontus. Upon his return to Caesarea, he got baptised and embraced monastic life inspired by the lives of the monks. He established monasteries in Pontus. Basil was ordained a priest and later on was consecrated the bishop of Caesarea. With his friend Gregory, he attended the Council of Constantinople in 381 where together with his brother Gregory of Nyssa defended Nicene Creed and interpreted the Trinity as one essence and three hypostases (Ibid., xvi-xvii).

¹⁷ Ibid., xxxiii.

¹⁸ Ibid., xxxiv.

¹⁹ Ibid.

interpreted the “Son as *God*, and...of one substance with the Father” in the creed.²⁰

However, in Eunomius’

doctrinal system there is a practical denial of the Creed; the Son may be styled God, but He is a creature, and therefore, in the strict sense of the term, not God at all, and, at best a hero or demigod. The Father unbegotten, stood alone and supreme and the Son as begotten implied posterity, inferiority and unlikeness.²¹

Thus, when the Son and the Holy Spirit come after the Father, inferior to the Father and unlike the Father, there is no equal relationship in the Trinity. Basil challenged the idea of Eunomius because it seemed to be in agreement with the Arian expression, “We believe that ingenerate is the essence of God.”²² Basil maintained that the word,

unbegotten is nowhere to be found in Scripture...The word ‘Father’ implies all that is meant by ‘unbegotten’ and has moreover the advantage of suggesting at the same time the idea of the Son. He who is essentially the Father is alone of no other. In this of being no other is involved the sense of ‘unbegotten.’ The title ‘unbegotten’ will not be preferred by us to that of the Father, unless we make ourselves wiser than the Saviour who said, Go and baptise in the name not of the unbegotten, but of the Father.²³

Thus, Basil preferred the biblical name of Father to the unbegotten of Eunomius which Basil perceived to be a philosophical terminology that is incapable of expressing the essence of God. Moreover, the name ‘Father’ is a relational term in comparison with the notion of ‘unbegotten’ which is abstract and rational. Eunomius preferred unbegotten because he perceived the Father to be far removed from the Son. For him, the Father could not be equal with the Son. However, according to Basil, the word ‘Father’ implies that there is a relationship of God the Father with the Son in the Trinity while the term ‘unbegotten’ denies that relationship because the Father stands alone without equality with the Son or with the Holy Spirit. Basil wrote,

unbegotten is only one of many negative terms applied to the Deity, none of which completely expresses the Divine Essence. There exists no name which embraces the whole nature of God, and is sufficient to declare it; more names than one, and these of very various kinds each in accordance with its own proper connotation, give a collective idea which may be dim

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

indeed and poor when compared with the whole...The word ‘unbegotten,’ like ‘immortal,’ ‘invisible,’ and the like expresses only negation.²⁴

Basil stated that our knowledge of the Father comes from the Son who is in ‘communion’ and ‘fellowship’ with the Father. Basil insisted that if unbegotten is applied to God, it alienates “the Only-begotten from the Father” which implies that “there is no fellowship between the Father and Him who is of Him.”²⁵ Basil indicated in his letters *Against Eunomius* that God is incomprehensible in God’s essence. He clarified that “the word unbegotten is not a name indicative of the essence of God but only of a condition of (God’s) existence.”²⁶ Basil showed how the names of the Persons of the Trinity should be understood:

By the names of Father, Son and Spirit, we do not understand different essences, (*ousia*), but they are names which distinguish the (*hypostasis*) of each. All are God, and the Father is no more God than the Son, as man is no more man than another.²⁷

Thus, Basil indicated unity and distinction in the Trinity. In this way, according to Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, Basil opposed the Neo-Arians who insisted that “God is supremely arelational and cannot share or communicate the divine nature.”²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa writes that for the Neo-Arians, God is “unbegotten and ingenerate.”²⁹ And God’s unity does not admit of any relationship and communion with the Son and the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, Basil argued and affirmed that God exists as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit living in communion in the Godhead. Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove admit that Basil’s interpretation is opposed to Eunomius’ in the sense that “Basil saw God primarily as a relational being-related to the Son and to humankind.”³⁰ Thus, Basil demonstrated that God shares God’s nature (*ousia*) with the Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, he taught that the three divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit share equal divine nature and live in loving communion. Hence, Basil’s idea lends itself to the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., xxxvii-xxxviii.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 70. See also Philip Kariatlis, “St. Basil’s Contribution to the Trinitarian Doctrine: Synthesis of Greek *Paideia* and the Scriptural World View,” *Phronema: Annual Review of St. Andrew’s Greek Orthodox Theological College Sydney, Australia* 25 (2010): 10-11.

²⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, #1.13.

³⁰ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 71. See also R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1988), 141.

understanding of God as a *Being* who lives in communion. Also, unity exists in the Godhead instead of inequality and separation.

Basil also fought against another heresy by Sabellius who taught that God is “One and the three divine Persons in the Trinity are modes or roles of God’s existence hence, his heretical teaching is also known as modalism.”³¹ According to Sabellius’ teaching,

God is one hypostasis, but is described by Scripture in different Persons, according to the requirements of each individual case; sometimes under the name of Father, when there are occasions for this Person; sometimes under the name of the Son, when there is a descent to human interests or any of the operations of the economy; and sometimes under the Person of Spirit when the occasion demands such phraseology.³²

Basil was very critical of Sabellius and his followers and insisted that their error arose because they “understand *hypostasis* and substance to be identical” whereas they should be understood as distinctively different. According to Basil, “We are therefore bound to confess the Son to be of one substance with the Father, as it is written; but the Father to exist in His own *hypostasis*, the Son in His, and the Holy Ghost in His.³³” Basil refuted modalism by counteracting the “one *hypostasis* of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost” taught by Sabellius and his followers with the “one substance and three Persons of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”³⁴

Basil continued by telling us that the Arian opposition gave a different meaning to the term *homoousios* which the early Fathers used to interpret the Trinity. Basil declared that the fathers “assert that there is one *hypostasis* of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We distinctly lay down that there is a difference of Persons.”³⁵ Basil insisted that the opponents confused the two words *ousia* and *hypostasis*. To clear up that confusion he stated that,

Ousia has the same relation to *hypostasis* as the common has to the particular. Every one of us both shares in existence by the common term *essence (ousia)*, and by his own properties...In the same manner, in the matter in question, the term *ousia* is common, like goodness, or Godhead, or any similar attribute; while *hypostasis* is contemplated in the special property of Fatherhood, Sonship, or the power to sanctify. If then they

³¹ Ibid., 72.

³² Basil, *Letter* 214. 3.

³³ Ibid, *Letter* 125.1.

³⁴ Ibid. See also Norman P. Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo et al., eds., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 2: 28.

³⁵ Ibid.

describe the Person as being without *hypostasis*, then the statement is *per se* absurd.³⁶

Basil used the differentiation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Scripture (for example, Matt 19: 28), to refute the heresy of amalgamating the three divine Persons into one *hypostasis*. He maintained that the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit denote distinction of each person in the Godhead according to biblical witness.

Basil also wrote that the early fathers who used the image of *homoousion* to define that the Father and Son are one substance did not differentiate the word *homoousion* from the term *hypostasis*. Their opponents, exponents of Neo-Arianism represented by Eunomius and of modalism represented by Sabellius, capitalised on the confusion and used both words interchangeably in their description of the Trinity. Basil argued that the meaning of the two terms is different. He asserted that while *homoousion* which is the essence, substance or *ousia* describes the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, *hypostasis* which is the differentiation of the three divine Persons points to the distinction of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, while God is one *ousia*, essence or substance, there are three distinct divine Persons, namely, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the one Godhead. For Basil, the Godhead shares in one common *ousia*, essence or substance while *hypostasis* or distinction in the Godhead is particular to each divine Person as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Basil responded to the heresy of modalism which denied distinction in the Godhead, since he argued and demonstrated that God exists as Trinity of three divine Persons in the Godhead. He continued to point out the relationship in the Trinity by asserting that the essence of God (*ousia*) is shared by the three divine Persons, while *hypostasis* signifies their distinction. In the words of Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, “Basil contributed significantly to the clarification of Trinitarian terms...devised a formula that maintained both Oneness and Threeness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...attempted to balance the unity of the Godhead with the distinction of Persons.”³⁷ Thus, Basil safeguarded unity, equality and relationship in the Trinity. He stated that many people who failed to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 71. See also Tanner and Alberigo, eds., “Council of Constantinople II,” in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:14; Giles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to the Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 83; LaCugna, *GfU*, 243.

Distinguish between what is common in the essence or substance, and the meaning of hypostases arrive at the same notions, and think that it makes no difference whether *οὐσία* or hypostasis be spoken of. The result is that some of those who accept statements on these subjects without inquiry, are pleased to speak of ‘one hypostasis,’ just as they do of one ‘essence’ or ‘substance;’ while on the other hand those who accept three hypostases are under the idea that they are bound in accordance with this confession, to assert also, by numerical analogy, three essences or substances.³⁸

Basil highlighted the confusion in interpreting the word *hypostasis* to mean essence or nature. The danger with this description is that it eclipses the distinction of the three divine Persons. On the contrary, he suggested that people who uphold distinction and approve three hypostases tend to accept that three hypostases could mean three natures which are equal to three Gods which implies tritheism. Basil solved the dilemma by distinguishing between essence and *hypostasis*. According to Basil,

That which is spoken of in a special and peculiar manner is indicated by the name of hypostasis. Suppose we say ‘a man’...the nature is indicated, but what subsists and is specially and peculiar indicated by the name is not made plain. Suppose we say ‘Paul.’ We set forth, by what is indicated by name, the nature subsisting.³⁹

Here Basil used the analogy of a human being to teach the difference between nature and distinction in the Trinity. In other words, hypostasis is not identical with essence. Rather, hypostasis means “a special and peculiar manner” attributed to each of the three divine Persons. He gave an example of “man” as a generic term which describes humanity in general which means human nature, but when we say “Paul,” the particular name of Paul indicates his distinction from the general term of human nature which is man. In the same way, essence or nature is general to the three divine Persons in the Trinity, while the name Father, Son and Holy Spirit are particular to each of the divine Persons which means the Father is distinct from the Son and from the Holy Spirit. The Son is distinct from the Father and from the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and from the Son but they share one essence or nature in the Godhead. Basil’s contribution helps Christians to understand unity, diversity, the love and communion in God as witnessed by some scriptural passages (John 10: 30, 38; 1Jn 4:8). According to Zizioulas, Sabellianism

³⁸ Basil, *Letter* 38.1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, *Letter* 38.2-3.

made it impossible to understand how the Son, eternally or in the Incarnation had a relation of reciprocal dialogue with the Father, praying to Him, etc., as the Gospel stories require us to believe. It would also make it impossible for the Christian to establish a fully personal dialogue and relationship with *each* of the three persons of the Trinity. Furthermore, it would appear that God was somehow ‘acting’ in the Economy, pretending, as it were, to be what He appeared to be, and not revealing or giving to us His true self, His very Being.⁴⁰

Zizioulas’ critique stems from Sabellius’ refusal to acknowledge unity of essence and distinction in the Godhead which results in a lack of relationship and communion in his interpretation of the Trinity. Basil, however, faulted Sabellius’ incorrect understanding of the Christian God and Christian life. If God who created humanity in God’s image does not dwell in unity and communion in the Godhead, then, Christians and the whole of humanity can never be inspired by the example of trinitarian love. Neither will the life of relationship and love in the world be perceived as the image of the trinitarian love. But Basil emphasised “the fullness and ontological integrity of each Person in the Trinity. He distinguished between one *ousia* and three *hypostases* in God.”⁴¹ He established the ontological reality of each of the three divine Persons and revealed the difference between *ousia* and *hypostases*. He therefore interpreted the Trinity as one “*ousia* and three *hypostases*.”⁴² Basil further stated that in the Trinity, there is “a certain communion indissoluble and continuous...the communion and the distinction apprehended in them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable.”⁴³ Thus, Basil perceived that not only is there loving relationship between the three divine Persons in the Godhead; their communion is ever unbroken and eternal. For him, the common essence of the three divine Persons is not obliterated by their distinction and their nature is not hampered by their distinction.⁴⁴ Therefore, he argued successfully that there is a loving relationship in the Godhead.

Basil and his colleagues, the Cappadocian fathers, based their interpretation of the Trinity on the definition of the Council of Nicaea which professed:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-

⁴⁰ John D. Zizioulas, “The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Acts*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 46.

⁴¹ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 72.

⁴² Basil, *Letter* 159.2. See also Zizoulas, *Being as Communion*, 39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, *Letter* 38.4-5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

begotten, generated from the Father, that is, from the being (*ousia*) of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being [*homoousios*] with the Father, through whom all things were made, those in heaven and those on earth.⁴⁵

The teaching of the early Church suggest that the definition of Nicaea as to the divinity of the Son of God in the face of the controversy of Arianism and that of Sabellianism was not left to the whims of dissenting Christians. Every Christian was required to profess faith in the divinity of the Son. The Council of Nicaea sums up orthodox trinitarian doctrine as follows:

those who say: ‘there was a time when he was not, and ‘Before being begotten he was not,’ and who declare that he was made from nothing...or that the Son of God is from a different substance, (*hypostasis*) or being (*ousia*), that is, created...or subject to change and alteration,—[such persons] the Catholic Church condemns.⁴⁶

The Council of Nicaea declared the Father and the Son are equal in their divinity. The Son is not subordinated to the Father, but the philosophical meaning of the term *homoousion* remained prone to misunderstanding. It had no eternal connotation for some while others conceived it as a sort of modalistic interpretation of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Concerning the Holy Spirit Basil stated,

As we were baptized, so we profess our belief. As we profess our belief, so also we offer praise. As then baptism has been given to us by the Saviour, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, so, in accordance with our baptism, we make the confession of the creed, and our doxology in accordance with the creed. We glorify the Holy Ghost together with the Father and the Son, from the conviction that [the Holy Ghost] is not separated from the divine nature; for that which is foreign in nature does not share in the same honors.⁴⁷

For Basil, because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in one nature or essence, they receive equal honour in Christian worship, in the interpretation of the Church and equality of essence in the administration of the sacrament of Baptism. Thus, Basil did not subordinate the Holy Spirit to the Father and to the Son. He presented the Spirit in equal terms with the Father and the Son in these words:

⁴⁵ Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 6. Also see Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 5. See also Marthaler, *The Creed*, xx.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Basil's *Letter* 159.2. (The Cappadocian fathers used the term Holy Ghost instead of the Holy Spirit).

I confess what I have received, that the Paraclete is ranked with the Father and Son, and not numbered with the created beings. We have made profession of our faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and we are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Wherefore we never separate the Spirit from conjunction with the Father and the Son. For our mind, enlightened by the Spirit, looks at the Son, and in Him, as in an image, beholds the Father. And I do not invent names myself, but call the Holy Ghost Paraclete; nor do I consent to destroy (Holy Ghost's) due glory.⁴⁸

Basil not only believed that the Holy Spirit is divine since the Spirit is not a creature; he even ranked the Spirit equal with the Father and the Son both in honour and in worship. He berated those who “assert that the Spirit is not to be ranked along with the Father and the Son, but under the Son and the Father; not coordinated, but subordinated; not connumerated, but subnumerated.”⁴⁹ He argued that an individual is believed to be thinking rightly only if he or she confesses that the Holy Spirit is “holy by nature, as the Father is holy by nature and the Son is holy by nature.”⁵⁰ In what seems like his final statement about the belief in the Holy Spirit, he declared conclusively:

I testify to every man who is confessing Christ and denying God that Christ will profit him nothing; to every man that calls upon God but rejects the Son, that his faith is vain; to every man that sets aside the Spirit, that his faith in the Father and the Son will be useless, for he cannot even hold it without the presence of the Spirit.⁵¹

Indeed, according to Basil, not to believe in one person is tantamount to not believing in the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.⁵² In his *Letter* 38, Basil used the “analogy of the rainbow” to emphasize the unity and distinction in the Godhead.⁵³ Just as the rainbow has many colours, yet the different colours mingle with one another to the extent that nobody will differentiate them, in the same way the three Persons in the Trinity has particularity to each Person, yet they cannot be separated. Thus, the metaphor of the rainbow shows the undivided unity in the Godhead.

⁴⁸ Ibid., *Letter* 226.

⁴⁹ St. Basil, *On the Spirit*, 6.13.

⁵⁰ Ibid., *Letter* 125.3.

⁵¹ Ibid. 11.27.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., *Letter* 38.5.

3. 2.2 Gregory of Nyssa's Interpretation of the Trinity as Natural Relations

Gregory⁵⁴ of Nyssa supported Basil in his treatise against Eunomius. He perceived Eunomius' interpretation of the Trinity as subordinating the Son and Holy Spirit to the Father. Gregory responded to the non-relational interpretation of Neo-Arianism by arguing that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit "imply natural relationship to one another."⁵⁵ The three divine Persons share in one divine nature. Gregory maintained "the personality of both the Only-begotten and the Holy Ghost has nothing lacking in the way of perfect goodness, perfect power, and every quality like that."⁵⁶ Thus, Gregory demonstrated that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal Persons in the Godhead. To this equality and union, Gregory applied the analogy of human nature to portray one essence in the Trinity.⁵⁷ The fact that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in one substance or nature indicates intimate relationship in the Trinity. The Father begets the Son and the love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. Gregory pointed out that the "height of being (*ουσία*) [does not] belong to the Father alone."⁵⁸ For Gregory, each of the three divine Persons participates in the one Godhead. This partaking of one essence by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit reveals the union and love which exists in the Trinity. Gregory described the opposition of Eunomius by first of all stating the doctrine of Eunomius and his followers which in summary form is as follows:

There is Supreme and Absolute Being, and another Being existing by reason of the First, but after It though before all others; and a third Being not ranking with either of these, but inferior to the one, as to its cause, to the other, as to the energy which produced it...each Being is absolutely single, and is in fact and though one, and its energies are bounded by its works, and its works commensurate with its energies, necessarily, of

⁵⁴ Gregory was one of the ten children of Basil and Emmilia. Like his brother Basil, he was born in Cappadocia around 335 or 336 A.D. Their sister Macrina, a saintly woman who embraced monastic way of life, inspired all her family members on the way to God. Gregory studied rhetoric and was married to Theosebeia Philip Scaff and Henry Wace eds, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatise*, vol. V, 1-3 stated that He was made a bishop of Nyssa against his will under the pressure mounted on him by his brother Basil. It was said about him that "The enthusiasm of his faith on the subject of the Trinity and the Incarnation brought upon him the full weight of Arian and Sabellian hostility, aggravated as it was by the patronage of the Emperor. In fact his whole life at Nyssa was a series of persecutions (Ibid., 5)." At the death of St. Basil, Gregory became the bishop of Caesarea which was a bigger see than Nyssa. He attended the Council of Constantinople in 381 where he defended the doctrine of the Trinity from Eunomian controversy (Ibid., 6-7).

⁵⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Eunomius," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. V, 51.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa Against Eunomius* (London: Routledge, 1999), 33.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

course, the energies which follow these Beings are relatively greater and less, some being of higher, some of lower order.⁵⁹

Gregory contended that Eunomius' interpretation of the Trinity implies subordination in the Trinity because the image of "Absolute Being, another Being and a third Being" indicates that the Father is greater than the Son, and both the Son and the Holy Spirit are lesser than the Father. Moreover, for Eunomius, not only is the Holy Spirit subordinated to the Father and the Son, he went as far as describing the Holy Spirit as "inferior" to the Father and to the Son. Gregory argued against Eunomius on the ground that his interpretation of the Trinity departs from the teaching of our Lord in the Gospel. According to him, Eunomius,

will not make use of the words by which our Lord in perfecting our faith conveyed that mystery to us; he suppresses the names 'Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,' and speaks of a 'Supreme and Absolute Being, instead of the Father, of 'another existing through it, but after it' instead of the Son, and of 'a third ranking with neither of these two' instead of the Holy Ghost. And yet if those had been the more appropriate names, the Truth Himself would not have been at a loss to discover them, nor those men either, on whom successively devolved in preaching the mystery.⁶⁰

Gregory argued that the type of philosophical terms which Eunomius employs in his interpretation of the Trinity does not bear correct witness to the Gospel message which describes the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Cf Matt 19: 28). Moreover, Eunomius established hierarchy and subordination in the Godhead by defining the Father as higher than the Son and Holy Spirit, and by claiming that the Son is "lesser" than the Father and by describing the Holy Spirit as "inferior" to the Father and the Son. Thus, Eunomius denies distinction and equality in the Godhead. Gregory on the contrary, contended that,

Everyone when the words Father and Son are spoken, at once recognizes the proper and natural relationship to one another which they imply. This relationship is conveyed at once by the appellations themselves. To prevent it being understood of the Father, and the only-begotten Son, he robs us of this idea of relationship which enters the ear along with the words, and abandoning the inspired terms, expounds the Faith by means of others devised to injure the truth.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Eunomius," 50.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 51.

Gregory accused Eunomius of failing to interpret the Trinity in relational terms. Eunomius used abstract terminologies to define the Trinity instead of the inspirational names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to Gregory, the use of the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit naturally lend themselves to be understood as relation by the ears that hear them. Gregory maintained that it would be foolish to ascribe “being that is in the highest degree supreme and proper” only to the Father. He concluded therefore that,

in ascribing a being that is the highest degree supreme and proper only to the Father, he makes us surmise by this silence respecting the other two that (to him) they do not properly exist. How can that to which a proper being is denied be said to really exist?⁶²

Gregory attacked Eunomius because while he (Eunomius) conceived distinction in the Trinity, he failed to establish the equality of the three divine Persons. Instead, he propagated the Father as the highest among the three. Gregory argued that Eunomius’ interpretation denies the existence of the Son and Holy Spirit. Since they could not exist in equality with the Father, Eunomius removed them from the Godhead which means counting them as non-existent. In response to Eunomius, however, Gregory stated that the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in dignity with the Father. He argued that,

the personality of the Only-begotten and of the Holy Ghost has nothing lacking in the way of perfect goodness, perfect power, and of every quality like that...But if the Divine and unalterable nature is incapable of degeneracy...we must regard it as absolutely unlimited in its goodness and the unlimited is the same as the infinite. But to suppose excess and defect in the infinite and unlimited is to the last degree unreasonable; for how can the idea of infinite remain, if we posited increase and loss in it?⁶³

Gregory implied that the Son and Holy Spirit are perfect in every divine attribute. He concluded therefore, that if they are equal in every aspect of the Godhead, they are divine like the Father. The Son and the Spirit share in one divine nature in the Godhead in equal measure. He responded to his opponents’ definition of the Father as the “elder” and the Son as “younger” in the Godhead, with the argument that this controversy is more in line with and an “advocacy of the Jewish doctrine...that the being of the Father alone has subsistence.”⁶⁴ Gregory maintained that Christian monotheism differs from the Jewish’s conception of God. Although Christianity believes in the one God of Judaism, the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

Christian God exists specifically as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence, Gregory continued to assert that the denial of the existence of the Persons of the Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity is tantamount to “a plain denial of the message of salvation.”⁶⁵ He perceived this as rejecting the Christian belief.

Thus, Gregory insisted that Eunomius was propagating the monotheistic faith of the Jews which fails to conceive God as Trinity. While orthodox Christian faith believes in the unity of God, it equally confesses God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Gregory called those who deny the Trinity in the Godhead to join Judaism. He demonstrated the equality and distinction in the Trinity. He stated that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in one essence.

The Father is ‘ungenerate,’ the Son is the Only-begotten from the Father. Although, the Father shares in one essence with the Son and Holy Spirit, the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit. And the Son shares in one essence with the Father and Holy Spirit but the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit shares in one essence with the Father and the Son but the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.⁶⁶ Therefore, there is unity of essence and distinction of the divine Persons in the Godhead. Despite all the efforts of Eunomius and his followers, Gregory demonstrated clearly that there is equality and distinction in the Trinity. He maintained that to accept what Eunomius and his followers taught about the appropriate names of the divine Persons of the Trinity is tantamount to subversion and misinterpretation of the Lord’s teaching as contained in the scriptures.⁶⁷ He held that

in regard to attributes indicative of the Persons, our belief in Him is distinguished into belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; He is divided without separation, and united without confusion. For when we hear the title, ‘Father’ we apprehend the meaning to be this, that the name is not understood with reference to itself alone, but also by its special signification indicates the relation to the Son. For the term ‘Father’ would have no meaning apart by itself, if ‘Son’ were not connoted by the utterance of the word ‘Father.’ When, then we learnt the name ‘Father’ we were taught at the same time, by the selfsame title, faith also in the Son.⁶⁸

Gregory interpreted the three divine Persons to be divine, equal and relational. The idea of fatherhood implies relationship with the Son. He maintained that whatever quality we

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 60-61.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 101-102.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

ascribe to the Father should be applicable to the Son and Holy Spirit. He argued that the essence of God is not known by human beings and that,

it is plain that the title Father does not present to us the Essence, but only indicates the relation to the Son...the knowledge [of divine essence] is beyond our power. While then we have learnt that of which we are capable, we stand in no need of the knowledge beyond our capacity.⁶⁹

This is because Eunomius conceived that human mind is capable of knowing God's essence.⁷⁰ However, Gregory refuted this notion. For him, Fatherhood could not reveal the essence of God because even in human relationships, the name father implies relation whereby the person so called has a child or someone who relates to him in that intimate way. Gregory insisted that the orthodox Christian faith is in a God who exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in equality and communion. He questioned Eunomius' motive of ascribing subordination in the Godhead: "What argument ever established a distinction of the type that one (*ουσία*) is more than another being."⁷¹ Thus, in the estimation of Gregory, if the Son and Holy Spirit are subordinated to the Father, the relationship that exists among them would be hierarchical instead of union in equality.

Gregory fought against this erroneous understanding of God by defining the Trinity as one God in three divine Persons, which establishes equality and love in the Godhead.⁷² Anthony Meredith asserts that Gregory tried to "relate the three members of the Trinity together by means of internal relationships [and like] Augustine he uses the notion of relations."⁷³ In other words, he maintains that Gregory interpreted the Trinity in terms of relationship and communion. Morwenna Ludlow shows how two contemporary theologians-John Milbank and Sara Coakley detect "reciprocity and mutuality" in Gregory's interpretation of the Trinity.⁷⁴ Moreover, both theologians "assume that it is because of the Trinitarian relatedness that humans can be caught up or incorporated into the relatedness of God."⁷⁵ In other words, these two theologians perceive loving relationship in Gregory's interpretation of the Trinity which is capable of inspiring human

⁶⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁰ Anthony Meredith, "Orthodoxy, Heresy and Philosophy in the Later Half of the Fourth Century," *The Heythrop Journal* 16, no. 1(January 1975):13.

⁷¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 103.

⁷² Ibid., 35.

⁷³ Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocian Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 109-110. See also Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to the Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 346.

⁷⁴ Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa Ancient and [Post] Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 266.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

beings to relate to God in a loving way. It is possible that human communality takes inspiration from trinitarian communion.

Gregory agreed with Basil on the notion of one *ousia* and three *hypostases*; moreover, he highlighted the meaning of that assertion in his treatise to Ablabius, “*Not Three Gods.*” For Gregory, the three hypostases do not suggest ‘three Gods.’ He maintained that how people qualify human nature and their respective individualities differs from the divine life of the Trinity. According to that argument,

Peter, James, and John, being in one human nature, are called three men: and there is no absurdity in describing those who are united in nature. If, then, in the above case, custom admits this, and no one forbids us to speak of those who are two as two, those who are more than two as three, how is it that in the case of our statements of the mysteries of the Faith, though confessing the Three Persons, and acknowledging no difference of nature between them, we are in some sense at variance with our confession, when we say that the Godhead of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is one, and yet forbid men to say “there are three Gods”?⁷⁶

Gregory acknowledged that it is true that three divine Persons exist in the Trinity; they share in one nature in the one Godhead but they are not three Gods. He maintained that what is true of human nature is different from divine nature. While three human beings share in one humanity as their nature, they are three separate individuals with different will, and consciousness, who could not share in the mystery of living in one another as obtained in the Trinity. He believed that,

in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son has not special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to the Creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. For this reason the name derived from the operation is not divided with regard to the number of those who fulfil it, because the action of each concerning anything is not separated and peculiar, but whatever comes to pass, in reference either to the acts of His providence for us, or to the government and constitution of the universe, comes to pass by the action of the Three, yet what does come to pass is not three things.⁷⁷

Gregory demonstrated that the oneness that is obtained in the Trinity is far greater than the unity in human beings. He supported his argument, for instance, by expressing the view that a gift of life from God to a person does not imply that the person has three lives

⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On not Three Gods*, 331.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 334.

because of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. Indeed, he said that “we do not consider that we have had bestowed upon us three lives, one from each Person separately; but the same life is wrought in us by the Father, and prepared by the Son, and depends on the will of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁸ Like Basil, Gregory contended that since the Scripture and the tradition of the Christian Church united Father, Son and Holy Spirit in equality and communion, it is against the Christian faith to include separation or subordination in the Trinity. Concerning the Holy Spirit, Gregory declared that,

We...confess that the Holy Spirit is of the same rank as the Father and the Son, so that there is no difference between them in anything, to be thought or named, that devotion can ascribe to a Divine nature. We confess that, save His being contemplated as with peculiar attributes in regard to Person, the Holy Spirit is indeed from God, and of Christ, according to Scripture.⁷⁹

Thus, the Holy Spirit is distinct as one of the three divine Persons in the Trinity. However, the Spirit is equal with the Father and Son in their divinity. The bone of contention for Gregory is the Neo-Arians’ subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. The inequality they established in the Trinity removes the equal and intimate communion that exists between the three divine Persons in the Trinity. Against this situation of lack of fellowship in the Godhead, Gregory asserted that,

If, then the Holy Spirit is truly, and not in name only, called divine both by the Scripture and by our Fathers, what ground is left for those who oppose the glory of the Spirit? He is Divine, and absolutely good, and Omnipotent, and wise, and glorious, and eternal; He is everything of this kind that can be named to raise our thoughts to the grandeur of His being.⁸⁰

Gregory upheld the orthodox Christian faith and worship by indicating that the Holy Spirit whom the Church teaches about and worships as divine is indeed God in the true sense of the word. Therefore, he established the Spirit in equal divine rank with the Father and the Son.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, 315-316.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 316-317.

3.2.3 Gregory of Nazianzus' Interpretation of the Trinity as Relationship (Schesis)

Gregory of Nazianzus⁸¹ in particular described the life of the Father and the Son in the terminology of relationship and love. He summarized the unity and Trinity in his baptismal discourse to his catechumen as follows:

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illuminated by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.⁸²

In this passage Gregory established unity, equality and diversity in the Godhead. The Trinity does not admit greater or lesser degrees among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The 'one in three' is not a source of division into three Gods. Instead, the unity of the three divine persons makes for unbroken communion and relationships in the Godhead. According to him,

the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; and there is one mingling lights, as it were of three suns joined to each other. When, then, we look at the Godhead, or the first cause, or the monarchia, that which we conceive is one; but when we look at the Persons in whom the Godhead dwells, and at those who timelessly and with equal glory have their being from the first cause, there are three whom we worship.⁸³

Although, Gregory perceived the Father as the 'first cause' or the monarchy, he conceived the Godhead to be one. Moreover, the Son and Holy Spirit are equal in everything with the Father; hence they share in equal glory and worship. He insisted that the type of unity ascribed to the Trinity can be called a

Monarchy that is not limited to one person, a type of unity which is made of an equality of Nature and a Union of mind, and an identity of motion,

⁸¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, the friend and comrade of Basil of Caesarea was born around 33 AD in Nazianzus. His father was a prominent man in Nazianzus. His wife motivated him to embrace Christianity of which after his baptism he was consecrated the bishop of the city of Nazianzus. Gregory studied with Basil at Athens. On his return to his native land after ten years of studies, he taught rhetoric, helped his aging father and collaborated with Basil in monastic endeavours. Basil persuaded both Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus to accept the position of bishopric in order to help Basil to consolidate his territory which was invaded and divided by Emperor Valens, a supporter of the Arian controversy. After the death of Basil, Gregory succeeded him as the bishop of Constantinople. It was in Constantinople that he preached his famous theological orations and defended the Nicene interpretation of the Trinity (Edward Rochie Hardy, ed. "Gregory of Nazianzus," 114-118).

⁸² *Ibid.*, *Oration* 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, *Oration* 31.14.

and a convergence of its elements to unity—a thing which is impossible to the created nature—so that though numerically distinct there is no severance of Essence.⁸⁴

For Gregory, there is no hierarchical sovereignty in the Godhead. The three divine Persons share in one divine rule. The Father does not lord it over the Son and Holy Spirit. This common rule indicates equality which results in concord and harmony in the Trinity. Thus, uni-trinitarian love is obtained in the Godhead. LaCugna concludes that

This was a revolutionary idea of God, and unprecedented idea of divine monarchy. The *archē* of God was in a crucial sense no longer seen as *monē archē*, but *triadikē archē* (threefold rule)...the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another, is the hallmark of the reign of God of Jesus Christ.⁸⁵

In other words, LaCugna echoes the fact that the description of the life of the Trinity with the notion of equality and unity reveals intimacy and loving participation which marks the life in the Godhead. Meredith alludes to Gregory of Nazianzus' relational interpretation of the Trinity. He claims that Gregory introduced "one particular idea that seems to be quite new" and that is, he did not restrict fatherhood to divine essence as the Arians did.⁸⁶ This new innovation of Gregory, according to Meredith, means that fatherhood is not abstract terminology but denotes relationship and intimacy. In other words, Nazianzus did not use fatherhood as a term that refers to divine essence which would have excluded relation to the Son. He also did not use the term simply as an attribute which would introduce "accidents into the simple essence of the Deity."⁸⁷ To avert all these, as stated by Meredith, Gregory brought in "the idea of relationship (Schesis)."⁸⁸ This signifies that, in the Godhead, the Father is related to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. There is no separation or subordination whereby one of them is understood to be greater than the others or lesser in any degree or form. That is why Gregory declared that,

I should be frightened by your distinction, if it had been necessary to accept one or other of the alternatives, and not rather put both aside, and state a third and truer one, namely that 'the Father' is not a name of either of an essence or of an action, but is the name of relation, in which the Father stands to the Son and the Son to the Father.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibid., *Oration* 29. 2.

⁸⁵ LaCugna, *GfU*, 391.

⁸⁶ Meredith, *The Cappadocian Fathers*, 107

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 29.16.

Gregory asserted against the Arians that Fatherhood is “the name of relation,” and so the Son still shares in the same Godhead with the Father. This relationship in the Trinity proved that the Son is equal with the Father in their one Godhead. Thus, Gregory’s relational interpretation of the Trinity is in accord with the scripture. In the Gospel of John Jesus prays that all his followers may be one as he and the Father are one (17: 21-13). Meredith describes what Nazianzus meant by relationship in these words: “A relation is neither an action nor a nature nor an attribute. It is, even so, real.”⁹⁰ Thus, the relationship that is so “real” exists on a ‘experiential’ level where the Trinity enjoy their loving communion. The most crucial point that Nazianzus makes about the Trinity for Meredith is that,

The Trinity is not simply constituted by the age-old characteristic of deity, like omnipotence, goodness and eternity, but also and perhaps more importantly by relationship of the members of the Trinity both to each other (immanent Trinity) and to the world (economic Trinity).⁹¹

Meredith points out that for Nazianzus, the Trinity is not an abstract terminology, but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who is marked by loving communion in their inner life and in their dealing with creation. It is on the basis of these twofold trinitarian relations (immanent and economic) that this thesis argues that communion in Ezza culture resembles trinitarian communion. Moreover, Nazianzus’ interpretation of the Trinity inspires social trinitarian theologians to define God with the image of communion and love. The Godhead, according to Zizioulas, is communion.⁹² Indeed, Meredith, in his reference to the communal description of Zizioulas, writes that, “This idea has been explored by John Zizioulas in *Being as Communion* in which he seems to see the nature of the deity as constituted by their mutual interrelationships.”⁹³ The definition of the Trinity in terms of relationship proves that a life of sharing and participation exist in the Godhead. Meredith similarly echoes the importance of interpreting the Trinity with the idea of relation in these words: “so helpful and so powerful was this solution to the problem of the Trinity that it is possible that the celebrated analogies of Augustine in his *On the Trinity* owe something to it.”⁹⁴ This means that while Augustine’s analogies play

⁹⁰ Meredith, *The Cappadocian Fathers*, 108.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 49.

⁹³ Meredith, *The Cappadocian Fathers*, 108.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 108.

an important part in the understanding of the Trinity, the interpretation of Trinity in terms of relationship could shed more light in the knowledge of the Christian God.

Gregory maintained that God's rule in the Trinity is not particularly by the Father alone but it is shared equally by the three divine Persons. He declared that "Monarchy is that which we hold in honour. It is however, a monarchy that is not limited to one person."⁹⁵ He showed how such unity, which is impossible in created nature, is possible for the Trinity. The unity he spoke of is that which

having from all eternity arrived at motion by duality, found its rest in trinity. This is what we mean by Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The Father is the begetter and the emitter, without passion...without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner. The son is the begotten, and the Holy Ghost is the emission...Therefore let us confine ourselves within our limits; and speak of the unbegotten and the begotten and that which proceeds from the Father as somewhere God the Word himself says.⁹⁶

Gregory always proved his fidelity to the scriptures. He conceived the Father as unbegotten, the Son as the begotten and the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father; in that way he established unity and diversity in the Godhead. If the monarchy is ascribed to the Father alone, excluding the Son and Spirit in equal measure, the Godhead will exist in a numerical hierarchical order in which the Father alone will be exercising authority over the Son and the Spirit. Gregory also interpreted the Father as "unbegotten," the Son as "begotten," and the Holy Spirit as "proceeding." This is how Gregory revealed distinction in the Godhead. The Father as the "unbegotten" is not the Son. The Son as "begotten" is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit as "proceeding" is neither the Father nor the Son. Although each of them shares in the one Godhead, they are three distinct Persons in the Trinity.

Furthermore, Gregory portrayed the Trinity as eternal in these words: "When did these come into being...when did the Father come into being? There never was a time when he was not. And the same thing is true of the Son and the Holy Ghost."⁹⁷ Gregory refuted the Arian controversy which described the Son as a created being who begins in time. The Arians held the view that "there is a time when the Son was not."⁹⁸ Gregory maintained that although the Father begets the Son, the process of begetting the Son

⁹⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, "The Third Theological Oration – On the Son," 161.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3.3.

⁹⁸ Neuner and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 6. See Socrates Scholasticus, *Socrates, Sozomenus Church Histories*, in *NPNF, Second Series*, vol. II, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 1.5. See also Athanasius, *On the Synods*, 16.

eludes human understanding. Therefore, according to him, “The begetting of God must be honoured by silence.”⁹⁹ In other words, the Father does not beget the Son in the same natural way that a human parent begets his/her child. Instead, in God, begetting is mysterious and eternal. The Arians identified the essence of God with “unbegotten,” but Gregory contended that “if the essence of God consists in being unbegotten; and so [God] would be a strange mixture, begottenly unbegotten.”¹⁰⁰ For Gregory, “unbegotten” is not the correct interpretation of God because “the word unbegotten is not used relatively. For to what is it relative? And of what things is God the God?”¹⁰¹ He implied that the word unbegotten referred to the Person of the Father and not to Godhead. It showed the distinction of the Father in the Trinity and not the essence of God. Thus, Gregory continued to insist that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are related to one another. To describe God as “unbegotten” is to affirm a lack of relationality in God. Gregory instead argued for equality and union in the Godhead. He summarised:

there is one essence of God, and one nature, and one name; although in accordance with a distinction in our thoughts we use distinct names; and whatever is properly called by this name is God; and what [God] is in nature, then [God] is truly called – if at least we are to hold that truth is a matter not of names but of realities.¹⁰²

Gregory indicated that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. Although they have one essence, one nature and one name which is their Godhead, the distinction is in the Father being the Father, the Son being the Son and the Holy Spirit being the Holy Spirit. Arguing against the Neo-Arians’ suggestions that “Father...is a name either of an essence or an action,” Gregory contended that the Father is neither a name of an essence or of an action but rather that of relation. He argued that since God has one essence it would be wrong to attribute such essence only to the Father and not to the Son. Also, if Father is considered as an “action” it would mean that “the Son is created and not begotten.” He said that this would also be incorrect “for where there is an agent there must also be an effect...how that which is made can be identical with that which made it” is itself frightening.¹⁰³ He believed that

Father is not a name of either of an essence, or of an action, most clever sirs. But it is the name of relation in which the Father stands to the Son,

⁹⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration*, 3.8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 3.13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.16.

and the Son to the Father. For as with us these names make known a genuine and intimate relation, so in the case before us too they denote an identity of nature between him that is begotten and him that begets.¹⁰⁴

According to Gregory, Fatherhood implies Sonship just as in a natural family where father is the father of a son or a daughter. Even in the sphere of human beings, to call God Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not abstract terminology. The term “Father” proves that the one called “Father” is related to another person such as a son or a daughter. In this case, calling God “Father” indicates that God has relation to the Son. Thus, Gregory interpreted the Godhead as communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He declared that Christ

is called the Son because he is identical with the Father in essence; and not only for this reason, but also because he is of [the Father]. And he is called only-begotten, not because he is only Son of the Father alone, and only a Son, but also because the manner of his Sonship is peculiar to himself and not shared by bodies. And [he is called] the Word, because he is related to the Father as word to mind; not only account of his passionless generation, but also because of the union of his declaratory function.¹⁰⁵

Gregory demonstrated that the Son is what the Father is; they are one essence. Thus, the Son is God because he shares in God’s nature. Moreover, Gregory argued that since the generation of the Son is divine and not according to human begetting, the Son is divine like the Father. Gregory asserted that the Holy Spirit too is God when he maintained that the attribute given to the Father can equally be given to the Son and the Holy Spirit. He perceived the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as equally “the true light, which lighteth every [one] coming into the world.”¹⁰⁶ He linked the three divine Persons in equal glory and dignity. He further refuted the objections of his opponents concerning the divinity of the Holy Spirit by arguing that,

But we have so much confidence in the deity of the Spirit whom we adore, that we will begin our teaching concerning his Godhead by fitting to him the names which belong to the Trinity, even though some persons may think us too bold. The Father was ‘the true Light, which lighteth every man coming into the world.’ The Son was ‘the true Light, which lighteth every man coming into the world.’ The other Comforter was ‘the true Light, which lighteth every man coming into the world.’ Light thrice repeated; but one light and one God.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., *Oration*, 4.20.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., *Oration*, 5.3-4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Thrice repeated in this passage denotes the distinction, while one God implies the unity in the Trinity. Thus, Gregory taught that the Holy Spirit is God equal in dignity with the Father and Son. For him, not to acknowledge any of the persons of the Trinity is not to acknowledge all. He describes the three divine Persons as “one light one God.” Although, they are one and eternal, their particular names Father, Son and Holy Spirit distinguish them from one another. He argued that if the Holy Spirit

is God, then the [Holy Spirit] is neither a creature, nor a thing made, nor a fellow servant, nor any of these lowly appellations...the Holy Ghost which proceeded from the Father; who inasmuch as [the Holy Spirit] is from that source, is no creature; and inasmuch as [the Holy Spirit] is between the unbegotten and the begotten [the Holy Spirit] is God...[The Holy Spirit] has manifested [the Spirit’s self] as God.¹⁰⁸

In this passage, he upheld the divinity and equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. In other words, Gregory removed separation and subordination in the Trinity. Rather, he gave equal divine status to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. With regard to their distinction, Gregory maintained that,

God has no deficiency. But the difference of manifestation...or rather of their mutual relations one to another, has caused the difference of their names. For indeed it is not some deficiency in the Son which prevents his being Father [for sonship is not a deficiency], and yet he is not the Father...For the Father is not the Son, and yet this is not due either to deficiency or subjection of essence; but the very fact of being unbegotten or begotten, or proceeding, has given the name of Father to the first, of the Son to the second, and to the third, him of whom we are speaking, of the Holy Ghost, that the distinction of the three persons may be preserved in the one nature and dignity of the Godhead. For neither is the Son Father, for the Father is one, but he is what the Father is; nor is the Spirit Son because he is of God, for the only-begotten is one, but he is what the Son is. The three are one in Godhead.¹⁰⁹

Gregory clearly demonstrated that it is the “mutual relations” of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is the source of their distinction. The Father is not the Son, nor the Spirit. The Son is not the Father or the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father or the Son. This does not occur because there is “deficiency” in any of the three divine Persons, but because they exist in relationship to one another. For him, the term unbegotten differentiates the Father from the Son and from the Holy Spirit. The word begotten reveals the property of the Son

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

which is different from that of the Father and the Holy Spirit and the notion of proceeding marks the distinctness of the Holy Spirit. However, the three distinct Persons are one in the Godhead. Because they are equal in divinity, Gregory contended that “the adoration of one is the adoration of the three, because of the equality of (honour) between the three...if you overthrow any of the three you will have overthrown the whole.”¹¹⁰ With this interpretation, Gregory removed any form of subordination, separation and inequality in the Trinity. According to him, the three divine Persons are to be worshipped equally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He maintained that Christians worship these three divine Persons as one God:

To us there is one God, for the Godhead is one, and all that proceeds from [God] is referred to one, though we believe in three Persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is one before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but the Godhead is, so to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; and there is one mingling of lights, as it were of three suns joined to each other.¹¹¹

Gregory used the analogy of the light of the sun to teach the unity and distinction in the Godhead. The three suns do not represent three Gods but the three divine Persons who shine as one light in the Trinity. He showed that the three divine Persons shared equally in the one Godhead. The oneness of God is not the property of the Father alone, because, “each of these Persons possesses unity, not less with that which is united to it than with itself, by reason of the identity of essence and power.”¹¹² Thus, there is one divine unity in the Trinity because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share one essence and possess equal power. Gregory’s interpretation of God as three divine Persons differs from Eunomius’ who describes God as a monad having one essence and the Godhead as unbegotten and unoriginated.¹¹³ Gregory however, said that the scripture witnesses to the revelation that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He further stated that,

The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself. For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 5.12.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 5.14.

¹¹² Ibid., 5.16.

¹¹³ Ibid., 5.17.

that of the Son was not yet received, to burden us further...with the Holy Ghost.¹¹⁴

Gregory praised the divine wisdom manifested in the gradual revelation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father took the centre stage in the Old Covenant, while the Son is the focus of the New Covenant. He implied that the contemporary period of Christian life is the time of the Holy Spirit. This progressive revelation according to Gregory is for the sake of human beings who would be overwhelmed by the great mystery, thus, God helped humanity to understand the doctrine of the Trinity by situating the teaching to the level where people could reflect on the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is revealed in the Old Testament, followed by the revelation of the Son in the New Testament which also alludes to the notion of the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to continue the mission of the Trinity in the world. Thus, Gregory called people “to worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons, one God, undivided in honor and glory and substance and kingdom.”¹¹⁵ For Gregory, each of the divine Persons is God in the one Godhead; therefore, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit deserve equal worship as one God. Gregory refuted his opponents in these words:

What great things are there in the idea of God which are not in his [Holy Spirit] power? What titles which belong to God are not applied to [Holy Spirit], except only unbegotten and begotten? For it is needful that the distinctive properties of the Father and the Son should remain peculiar to them, lest there should be confusion in the Godhead.¹¹⁶

Gregory claimed that the distinction of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit brought clarity in the Godhead. It would create disorder in the Trinity if the Father were perceived as a monad who could not relate in equal footing with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Gregory indicated that without proper distinction of the three divine Persons, the doctrine of the Trinity will be difficult to understand. For him, although, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, they differ in their distinction as Persons, that is, the Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son in the Godhead, and only differs from the Father in the distinction of the Father as unbegotten and from the Son as begotten. The Holy Spirit is not unbegotten which is the property of the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the begotten which is the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 5.26.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 5.28.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 5.29.

peculiarity of the Son. The Holy Spirit has the characteristic of proceeding from the Father and from the Son. Thus, the Holy Spirit is God because the Holy Spirit shares in one essence or substance of the Father and the Son. He concluded that the Trinity is:

one light and one God...And now we have both seen and proclaimed concisely and simply the doctrine of the trinity, comprehending out of light (the Father), light (the Son), in light (the Spirit)...If ever there was a time the Father was not, then there was a time when the Son was not. If ever there was a time when the Son was not, then there was a time when the Spirit was not. If the one was from the beginning, then the three were so too. If you throw down the one...you do not set up the other two. For what profit is there in an imperfect Godhead.¹¹⁷

For Gregory, not to establish Father, Son and Holy in equality and communion is tantamount to confessing an imperfect Trinity.

3.3 COMMUNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

The Cappadocian fathers' interpretation of unity and distinction in the Trinity indicates relationship and communion among the three divine Persons. Even the authority in the Godhead is not particular to any of the three divine Persons. Nazianzus, for example, showed in his teaching on the Trinity that monarchy in the Godhead does not belong to the Father alone. Although Nazianzus conceived the Father as the cause of the Trinity, he still believed that monarchy is shared equally by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹¹⁸ Shared monarchy demonstrates that there is no oppression or authoritarianism in the Trinity. Instead, the three divine Persons live in mutual equality, peace and communion in the Godhead. The Cappadocian fathers did not define God as a monad; rather, they described God as a community of three divine Persons who live in communion. Much as their opponents were able to preserve monotheism when they conceive God as a monad, their interpretation of the Trinity differs significantly from the interpretation of the Christian faith which understands God as three divine Persons in the one Godhead. The implication of such understanding for the Church is the belief that God lives in absolute unity and communion. The doctrine of equality of the Cappadocian fathers removes hierarchical gradation in the Godhead by which the Father is greater than the Son and Holy Spirit. Equality then, implies peace, love and communion.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 5.3-4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., *The Third Theological Oration on the Son*, 2.

The Cappadocian fathers also described the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as divine. This highlights their equality because if only the Father is divine as argued by the Arians, the Son and Holy Spirit as creatures will be less than the Father. In such an understanding, trinitarian communion will not exist because the Father would be different from the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Cappadocian fathers' application of equality and distinction in the Godhead establishes the divine Persons in their own right as God. It also shows how they differ from one another because of their particular qualities as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their distinction adds to the uniqueness and wonder of their relationship, of their communion. There is communion instead of division and separation. Is this a model for human beings? Is it possible distinctiveness could issue in something other than division and separation?

Another area that the Cappadocians revealed communion in their trinitarian theology is around their use of the term 'person.' Stanley Grenz writes that "The importance of the Cappadocians consists primarily in ontology of personhood they inaugurated which resulted in elevation of the principle of freedom and facilitated a philosophical understanding that struck a balance between the one (that is, nature) and the many (that is, persons)."¹¹⁹ The three divine Persons of the Trinity live in communion in their one divine nature. Their distinction does not separate from sharing in their divine nature. Grenz comments that,

Both the Greeks and the Romans explored the possibility of personal identity in the form of the capacity to act in a free and unique manner, as evident by the use to which they put the Greek concept of *prosopon* (the mask worn by actors in Greek theatrical performances) and the Latin term *persona* (the role a Roman would adopt in social or legal relationships)...Moreover, the Greek (and Roman) philosophers viewed being a person – that is, being identified by unique attributes and being in relation with others – as something additional to one's essential nature (that is, one's *ousia* or *hypostasis*). Personhood was viewed as added to a concrete entity, as is evident in the link between the Greek term *prosopon* and the theatrical mask. In this midst of this philosophical situation...the Cappadocians burst on the scene, providing the conceptual 'lift' needed to move the philosophical anthropology of the ancients toward an ontology of personhood.¹²⁰

Thus, the term person is not an ontological category if it is something added to being.

¹¹⁹ Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 135.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

However, Grenz notes that this situation was changed by the Cappadocians. He states:

the Cappadocians' far-reaching bestowal of ontological priority on personhood did not arise out of explicit philosophical reflection. Rather, it emerged from their engagement with the fierce theological controversy within the church of their day, which focused on the question as to the language that could express the fullness of Christian teaching about the God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Cappadocians entered the fray and set out to overcome the modalism, tritheism, and subordinationism that beset the various proposals bandied about by their contemporaries. In response to the claim of the Sabbellians that the trinitarian members are merely roles assumed by the one God (modalism), the Cappadocians asserted the full ontological integrity of the three persons of the Trinity...they identified the Greek term *hypostasis*, which hitherto had been a synonym of *ousia*, with *prosopon*, a concept with which *hypostasis* had enjoyed no previous connection in Greek philosophy. By connecting *hypostasis* with *prosopon*...the Cappadocians transformed 'person' into the constitutive element of a being, and the concept of being itself became relational.¹²¹

When the Cappadocians interpreted the terminology of person with the notion of relations, they paved the way to the understanding that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are relational because they are three divine Persons in the Trinity.

3.4 The Doctrine of Relations: Analysing the Cappadocian Fathers' Teaching on Trinitarian Communion

The Cappadocian fathers' interpretation of the Trinity contributed to the development of the "theology of divine relations."¹²² The Cappadocians stated that relation "shows only *how* not *what*" something is.¹²³ According to Gregory of Nazianzus, the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit are the origins or source of the distinctions and "relations" or relationships within the Godhead. Therefore, 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Holy Spirit' express how God is (God exists in three Persons), not what God is (God is one divine nature).¹²⁴ Thus, Father and Son are distinct by relation to each other but the same in *ousia*.¹²⁵

Boff writes that

What was lacking in Tertullian – reflection on the relationship between the three divine Persons – was developed by the Cappadocian Fathers...The

¹²¹ Ibid., 136.

¹²² LaCugna, *GfU*, 53.

¹²³ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁴ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 266; see also LaCugna, *GfU*, 63, 85.

¹²⁵ LaCugna, *GfU*, 58-59.

unity that forms the essence of the Persons springs from the communion and relationship between them. The Persons (*hypostaseis* in Greek) mean their singular, specific and individual existences, but if we stop there we run the risk of tritheism (three gods). To avoid this, we need to consider the peculiarity of each Person, which is always defined in relation to the others.¹²⁶

For Boff, the Cappadocians indicated that communal relationship is the source of unity in the Trinity, that is, it is their love for one another that unites them in the one Godhead. Although, they are distinct from one another, they are united in love and communion. Boff further explains that.

The Cappadocians restrict their differentiation of the three Persons to a purely formal level. They do not attempt to describe what makes up the nature of each of the three Persons, seeing this as the ultimate mystery inaccessible to human reason, however inspired by faith and piety. They state that the communion between the three is full, since the Father does everything by the Word in the Holy Spirit. The Trinity can only be conceived of as an interplay of mutual relations of truth and love. Their great contribution was to clarify teaching about the Holy Spirit being truly God, one of the divine Persons. There had always been a difficulty in tradition on this point.¹²⁷

Boff mentions that the Cappadocians perceived fullness of communion in the Trinity. For him, the Trinity constituted of love and relationship. They also interpreted the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Boff contends that,

Jesus refers to the Spirit as advocate, as Paraclete – as a *someone*. In 380 Gregory Nazianzen preached a famous sermon summing up interpretations current at the time: ‘for some the Spirit is a force, for others a creature, for yet others God...Others accept the Trinity as we do, but at the same time claim that only the first Person is infinite in substance and power, that the second is infinite in power but not in substance, that the third is not infinite in either’...The followers of certain Macedonius...also known as ‘pneumatomacheans’ openly denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. At the first Council of Constantinople, thanks to the collaboration of Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzen, all doubts were removed with the solemn definition: ‘(We believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified’...and here we have the establishment of orthodox faith in the Trinity as unity of three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹²⁸

Boff points out that the Cappadocians taught communion in the Trinity by establishing

¹²⁶Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 54.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 54-55.

the oneness and equality of the three divine Persons. They elevated the Holy Spirit to the rank of divinity. This results in communion among the three divine Persons, because the Father is equal with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son in their one Godhead. Boff continues:

The real difference in the modes of possessing and embodying the same and sole essence is based on the different ways in which the Persons relate to each other and to origination. So we say: The Father (the first Person) possesses the essence as unoriginated and uncommunicated essence; the Son (the second Person) receives the essence through being begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit (the third Person) receives the essence through being breathed out by the Father and the Son together. The Persons are defined by their relationship one to another, they are never absolute, subsistent in themselves (what characterizes essence), but *relative*, meaning related one to another. So we should understand them in accordance with the teaching of the eleventh Council of Toledo...the Father has reference to the Son, the Son to the Father and Holy Spirit to both the others; even though we speak of the three Persons by relationship. Yet we believe in one essence...In other words, the Persons receive their personhood solely from the relationship they sustain one with another. The distinction between the Persons is real, so that one is not another, even though one is always related to the others.¹²⁹

Boff interprets the unity and distinction in the Trinity with the notion of loving communion. Consequently, “Fatherhood” is a personal property (*idiomata, proprium*) of God the Father by virtue of his relation to the Son. “Father” as God’s name, is relative, that is, it indicates relation to the Son; the notion of the Father necessarily includes the notion of the Son.¹³⁰ God is called Father by virtue of not being generated and because of the Father’s eternal relation to the Son. Thus, the title of Father does not represent the divine *ousia* but only a relation to the Son.¹³¹ Thus, according to the Cappadocians, *agennetos* or ungeneratedness does not define the nature of God as Arius had asserted but rather the property of a *hypostasis*, the Father.¹³² Because these processions are eternal, God eternally existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, one can say that God, from eternity, has always existed as a divine communion.

Moreover, Gregory of Nazianzus’ notion that the term ‘Father’ is not an abstract concept but a “name of relation” signifies an existence of love and communion in the

¹²⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 60-61; see also Basil, *Against Eunomius*, II, 12.

¹³¹ Ibid., 63, 85.

¹³² Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 33.16.

Godhead.¹³³ He wrote that God is Father because God begets a Son and the love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. It means that love defines God. In other words, God is not an *isolated* but a *relational* Being. There is relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus, there is participation, sharing, give and take in the Trinity. In short, the three divine Persons live in communion. God is not solitary but exists in plurality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is a community of three divine Persons who live in communion. The name ‘Father’ indicates that there is sonship in God. God has a Son who is co-eternal with the Father and whom the Father relates to as the Father’s equal in the one Godhead. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not act “independently” of one another.¹³⁴ According to Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, “God is not a monad but triune. The one God who is love is not alone in his/her divinity.”¹³⁵ This statement points to the plurality in the Godhead whereby the three divine Persons share in that Godhead and live in love and communion. In other words, God is not closed in on God’s self or living in complete individualistic isolation refusing to participate in each other. Brian Daley accepts Gregory’s interpretation of the use of “Father as a name of relation” in the following terms:

As distinct hypostases and sharers in the Divinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are relations to one another...The Trinitarian view is that the divine (beings) called Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are nothing more (nothing less) than relation to one another, not separate (beings) at all – or rather, they are (beings) that are relations.¹³⁶

Thus, relationship exists in the Trinity because the three divine Persons are distinct and they share in the one Godhead. Their distinction establishes them in union with one another which results in loving communion in the Godhead. Alfred Beeley maintains that “as Gregory understands it, God has with increasing intensity revealed [God’s self] as Father, Son and Spirit over the course of salvation history, and now in the age of the Church, it is the Trinity as a whole that receives Christian worship, theology and contemplation.”¹³⁷ In other words, the union and communion in the Trinity are so complete that the three divine Persons receive equal worship and serve as an inspiration

¹³³ Ibid., *Oration* 29. 16.

¹³⁴ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 267.

¹³⁵ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 80.

¹³⁶ Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus: The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2006), 17.

¹³⁷ Alfred Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Trinitarian Theology, Spirituality and Pastoral Theory* (USA: UMI Dissertation Services, 2002), 209.

in the life of the Church. Daley shows the uniqueness of Gregory's interpretation of the Trinity in terms of relations in these words:

Much of our traditional understanding of this Trinitarian life of God comes from Gregory himself. One stratagem he occasionally uses is to speak of the relationship between God's unity as 'substance' or reality and God's threeness as eternally related 'individuals' Father, Son and Spirit.¹³⁸

According to Daley, Gregory presented the correct understanding of God in terms of love and communion. For him, Gregory described the three divine Persons with the image of "eternally related" which means that their love and union, unlike human relationships, do not break up or suffer diminishment. Thus, Gregory found in the Godhead "a singleness not ruptured by their distinctiveness as related individuals...this single being...is not in a generic sense...but as a relationship of origin and issuance."¹³⁹ Indeed, relationship constitutes the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Gregory himself declares that "Monotheism, with its single governing principle, is what we value – not monotheism defined as the sovereign of a single person...but the single rule produced by equality of nature...harmony of will, identity of action."¹⁴⁰ Gregory used the images of "equality, harmony of will, identity of action" to portray life in the Godhead. His description demonstrates that the life of God denotes union, relationship, sharing and love. "One of the most distinctive characteristics of Nazianzen's trinitarian theology," according to Lewis Ayres, "is the manner of his emphasis on the harmony of unity and diversity in the Godhead. For Gregory, the generative nature of God eternally produces the triunity as the perfection of divine existence."¹⁴¹ In other words, the union of love in the Godhead constitutes a perfection of divine life. Ayres contends that,

In designating relations the names designate only the relationships of persons with the others, they tell us nothing about the modes of existence of a divine person in the abstract. 'Relation' in Gregory's theology is thus a category that primarily serves to uphold the paradoxical unity in distinction as consonant with Scripture.¹⁴²

Gregory replaced an "abstract" terminology with the notion of relationship in his interpretation of the Trinity. The significance of his definition is that Christians should perceive their God as love. This conception of God is also witnessed in Scripture (1 John

¹³⁸ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 46.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 29*. 2.

¹⁴¹ Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 244-245.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 247.

4: 8). Thus, Gregory revealed the correct interpretation of God to the Christian faith, and this has implications for Christians to live a life of loving communion as it is lived in the Godhead. Thomas Torrance moreover, argues that,

It was the concept of *being for* (πρόστι) that Gregory Nazianzen found to characterise the profound hypostatic relation between the Father and the Son...For the Father to be Father is to be Father of the Son, and for God the Son to be Son is to be Son of the Father...This *Being for* one another naturally applies also to the interrelation between all the three divine Persons in the Holy Trinity, which we spoke of as...relations.¹⁴³

For Gregory, the distinction in God implies relationship. The three divine Persons are not distinct in order to do their own thing without reference to others. Indeed, their differences are so marked by mutual give and take within the one Godhead that they share equally in everything among themselves. Each of the three divine Persons is divine but they are not three Gods. Their union is beyond human expression. Gregory's conception of the Trinity in the words of Zizioulas, is "a unity or openness emerging from relationship, and not of substance, i.e. of the self-existent and in the final analysis individualistic being."¹⁴⁴ This is because the three divine persons do not close-in on one another; rather, they share in the reality of others. Although they constitute one substance in the Godhead, it is relationship that marks their life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, "relationship" not division or isolation defines life in the Trinity. Hanson, in his interpretation of the trinitarian theology of Gregory, maintains that the three divine Persons in the Trinity are "to be worshipped not less because of their relation to each other than because each is perceived and accepted in his own right."¹⁴⁵ In other words, the Father and Holy Spirit are equal in their relationship in the Godhead. Thus, each of the three divine Persons merits to be worshipped as God in the one Godhead.

Whereas Eunomius defines the Father as "substance or an activity," Gregory described the Father as relation. According to Gregory, if the Father is a substance, the Father will have a different nature from the Son and the Holy Spirit. If the Father is known as an action, then, it indicates that it is the "action of the Father that creates the Son."¹⁴⁶ In this way, Gregory refutes Eunomius and his followers who hold the view that the Father is a non-relational Being who could not share the Godhead with the Son and

¹⁴³ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: On Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 52.

¹⁴⁴ Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 52.

¹⁴⁵ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 710.

¹⁴⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 29.16.

the Holy Spirit. Thomas Rausch declares that “The doctrine of the Trinity reveals a self-giving God who is love, even if the majority of Christians have failed to integrate this mystery into their understanding of their faith.”¹⁴⁷ Rausch echoes the interpretation of the Cappadocian fathers who described God with the image of relationship and distinction. According to Rausch, Gregory of Nazianzus was one of the Cappadocian fathers whose work helped to resolve “the church emerging Trinitarian language in a way that respected both the unity and distinction in God.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, the contribution of the Cappadocian fathers in the area of trinitarian theology helps every generation of Christians to appropriate a correct image of their God. Rausch maintains that,

The Council of Nicaea had used the term *ousia*, being, and *hypostasis*, concrete individual embodiment of this common being, interchangeably, as did Athanasius up to 369. The Cappadocian Fathers clarified the traditional language used for how Father, Son and Spirit were related, distinguishing the terms and speaking of the mystery of God in terms of relations.¹⁴⁹

Thus, prior to the Cappadocian fathers, the notion of *ousia* and *hypostasis* were used to interpret the Trinity without differentiating their meaning. The result was a persistent lack of clarity as to the proper distinction existing among the three divine Persons. However, it was Gregory of Nazianzus and his two fellow Cappadocians who solved this question when they defined *ousia* to mean the one divine nature, essence or substance shared by and common to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They defined *hypostasis* as the individual property of each of the three divine Persons. This interpretation by the Cappadocian fathers show that the three divine Persons are distinct from one another, but remain in eternal communion in one Godhead. In fact, in the words of Rausch,

Gregory of Nazianzus was apparently the first to use the phrase, one nature and three hypostases, also using *prosōpa* (person) along with hypostases. He states that ‘Father’ designates a relation between the Father and Son; it does not designate substance or an activity.¹⁵⁰

According to Rausch, Gregory was the first of the Cappadocian fathers to describe the distinction in the Godhead with the terminology of “person,” which denotes that God is personal in God’s relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, Marmion and

¹⁴⁷ Thomas P. Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Collegeville, MIN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 63. And our thesis is an attempt to respond to this challenge in the context of Africa, specifically, Ezza society.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Van Nieuwenhove, write that Tertullian had also earlier used the term ‘persona’ in the West but in a slightly different context. They contend that “Tertullian is significant because he tried to find some way of relating unity and plurality within the Trinity. He devised terms that would become common parlance in trinitarian debate: God is one substance (*substantia*) in three persons (*personae*).”¹⁵¹ The three divine Persons share a dynamic and not static relationship in their one Godhead. God is not an impersonal being or an abstract phenomenon, but a being overflowing with love, unity and communion.

Thus, Rausch declares that “The doctrine of the Trinity, in one form or another is the *sine qua non* for preserving the essentially relational character of God, the relational nature of human existence, and the interdependent quality of the entire universe.”¹⁵² Rausch reveals that Gregory’s interpretation of the Trinity in terms of relation indicates that the correct understanding of God sheds light on how human beings are to live in society and points to the meaning of life in the world. If human beings realise that relationship marks the life of God, it follows that their own lives have meaning only if they live in communion and love. Gerald O’Collins maintains that “in the Trinity one consciousness subsists in a threefold way, shared by all three persons, mutually distinct only in and through their relations of origins.”¹⁵³ The images of sharing, mutuality, and relationship that O’Collins uses to describe the life in God reveal that intimate communion and love exist in the Godhead. Rausch continues that “Some contemporary theologians have seen in the relationality at the heart of the divine a model for a more egalitarian human community.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, some people who engage in theological reflection have perceived the implication of believing in a loving Trinity for human society. Communion in the Trinity could inspire the development of equality of persons in human society. In the words of Jürgen Moltmann, “We have said that it is not the monarchy of a ruler that corresponds to the triune God; it is the community of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation. The three divine Persons have everything in common, except for their personal characteristics.”¹⁵⁵ For Moltmann, therefore, communal sharing in the Godhead is a great inspiration for human life. This is

¹⁵¹ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 61. See also LaCugna, *GfU*, 55.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁵³ Gerald O’Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 178.

¹⁵⁴ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 198.

because when human beings live in love and communion they reveal the real meaning of God. Moltmann argues that,

What do we think of when we hear the name of the triune God? What ideas do we associate with the Trinity? What do we experience in the fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? The answer will vary greatly, if indeed an answer is attempted at all. Some people will think of the traditional rituals and symbols of Christian worship, baptism, the Lord's Supper and the blessing. Other people are reminded of passionate disputes in the early church. Some will see in their mind's eye the pictures of Christian art depicting three divine Persons, or two Persons and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Many people view the theological doctrine of the Trinity as a speculation for theological specialists, which has nothing to do with real life...Why are most Christians in the West, whether they be Catholics or Protestants, really only 'monotheists' where the experience and practice of their faith is concerned? Whether God is one or triune evidently makes as little difference to the doctrine of faith as it does to ethics.¹⁵⁶

Moltmann laments that the doctrine of the Trinity seems to be irrelevant to most Christians. They could not see that faith in God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit has implications for believers, that is, all Christians need to contemplate the life of the Trinity and try to conform their lives so as to resemble the trinitarian communion. Moltmann writes that,

Consequently, the doctrine of the Trinity hardly occurs at all in modern apologetic writings which aim to bring the Christian faith home to the modern world again. Even the new approaches made by fundamental theology do not begin with the Trinity. In the attempts that are being made to justify theology today—whether it is hermeneutical theology or political theology, process theology or the theological theory of science – the doctrine of the Trinity has very little essential importance.¹⁵⁷

Moltmann's idea is being addressed by contemporary trinitarian theology especially the social trinitarians who are trying through their writings to teach Christians how the doctrine of the Trinity is central to Christian life and how it has implications for the lives of the faithful. Hence, our thesis contends that the Trinity has to inspire the lives of human beings to live in love and communion. The Trinity is not revealed for the sake of rational knowledge. The life of God is to be lived out by human beings who are the children of God.

Moltmann continues:

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

What it does mean is that experience of the self has to be integrated into the trinitarian history of God with the world. God is no longer related to the narrow limits of a fore-given, individual self. On the contrary, the individual self will be discovered in the over-riding history of God and only finds its meaning in that context.¹⁵⁸

He indicates that the authentic human life is to be found in the communal life of the Trinity. He maintains that “God...is the triune God. But what does characteristically Christian answer mean in relation to those other concepts of God...How are we to understand the reality of the world if we are to understand God, not as supreme substance and not as absolute subject, but as triunity, the three-in-one?”¹⁵⁹ Moltmann asserts that our faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit has to shed light on how we understand God. That is, if we believe that the Trinity lives in love, then we do not have to believe in the Father alone but to know and live out the fact that they are three divine Persons in the God. He explains that, “We shall ask too whether the doctrine of the Trinity itself cannot provide us with the matrix for new kind of thinking about God, the world and man.”¹⁶⁰ Moltmann reveals that the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be underestimated. Both human beings and indeed the entire creation is closely bound up with trinitarian life. He expounds upon his idea of the consequence of faith in the Trinity:

In distinction to the trinity of substance and to the trinity of subject we shall be attempting to develop a social doctrine of the Trinity. We understand the scriptures as the testimony to the history of the Trinity’s relations of fellowship, which are open to men and women, and open to the world. This trinitarian hermeneutics leads us to think in terms of relationships and communities; it supersedes the subjective thinking which cannot work without the separation and isolation of its objects. Here, thinking in relationships and communities is developed out of the doctrine of the Trinity, and is brought to bear on the relation of men and women to God, to other people and to mankind as a whole, as well as on their fellowship with the whole of creation...we shall try to think *ecologically* about God, man the whole in their relationships and indwellings. In this way it is not merely the Christian *doctrine* of the Trinity that we are trying to work out anew; our aim is to develop and practice trinitarian *thinking* as well.¹⁶¹

For Moltmann, the doctrine of the Trinity calls human beings and the entire creation to live in loving communion, participation and sharing. It inspires human beings to develop loving relationships in society. This is because, for Moltmann, the kingdom of God is not

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 19-20.

power but the reign of love. He states:

The sole omnipotence which God possesses is the almighty power of suffering and love. It is that he reveals in Christ. What was Christ's essential power? It was love, which was perfected through voluntary suffering; it was love, which died in meekness and humility on the cross and so redeemed the world. This is the essence of the divine sovereignty.¹⁶²

Moltmann presents this idea to human beings by telling us that our God is not omnipotent but omni-loving. Love defines the life of the Trinity. He explains that,

God loves the world with the very same love which he is in himself...the unity of the triune God in the perichoretic at-oneness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...does not correspond to the solitary human subject in his claim to lordship over the world. It only corresponds to a human fellowship of people without privileges and without subordinances...The more open-mindedly people live with one another, for one another and in one another in the fellowship of the Spirit, the more they will become one with the Son and the Father...God as love is experience in the community of brothers and sisters through mutual acceptance and participation. That applied too to any human order of society which deserves the name of human...the further the acceptance of the other goes, the deeper the participation in the life of the other is the more united people who have been divided by the perversions of rule will become...it is *love* that corresponds to the perichoretic unity of the triune God...in human society it is solidarity that provides this correspondence.¹⁶³

Moltmann describes what it means to believe in the Trinity. It is to see and treat other people as God sees and treats them, that is, to respond to people with love, sharing and participation in their lives. Moltmann further writes that,

If the concept of person comes to be understood in trinitarian terms – that is, in terms of relation...then the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons. More – they are alive in one another and through the others...John Damascene's profound doctrine of the eternal *...circumincessio* of the trinitarian Persons goes even further. For this concept grasps the circulatory character of the eternal divine life...The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy. Precisely through the personal characteristics that distinguished them from one another, the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in one another...In the perichoresis, the very thing that divides them becomes

¹⁶² Ibid., 31.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 157-158.

that which binds them together. The circulation of the eternal divine life becomes perfect through the fellowship and unity of the three different Persons in the eternal love. In their perichoresis and because of it, the trinitarian Persons are not to be understood as three different individuals, who only subsequently enter into relationship with one another.¹⁶⁴

Moltmann relates personhood in God to the loving relationships that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He asserts that the three divine Persons in the Trinity are not different persons who form relationships among themselves because this will amount to having three Gods in the Trinity. Instead, the Trinity is united intimately and become one in the Godhead. He continues:

The doctrine of perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness. The unity of the triunity lies in the eternal perichoresis of the trinitarian Persons. Interpreted perichoretically, the trinitarian Persons form their own unity by themselves in the circulation of the divine life...If the divine life is understood perichoretically, then it cannot be consummated by merely one subject at all. It is bound to consist of the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related to one another and exist in one another. Their unity does not lie in the one lordship of God; it is to be found in the unity of their tri-unity...through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided...the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.¹⁶⁵

Moltmann uses the term perichoresis to interpret the eternal communion that exists in the Trinity. Perichoresis is the notion that unites the three divine Persons as one God – the Trinity. It establishes distinction and oneness in the Godhead. It equally maintains equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He further states:

We have said that it is not the monarchy of a ruler that corresponds to the triune God; it is the community of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation. The three divine Persons have everything in common, except for their personal characteristics. So the Trinity corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession...What the doctrine of Trinity calls *perichoresis* was also understood by patristic theologians as *the sociality* of the three divine Persons. Two different categories of analogy have always been used for the eternal life of the Trinity: the category of the individual person, and the category of community...the Cappadocian Fathers...incline towards an emphatically social doctrine of the Trinity...The image of the family is a favourite one

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 174-175.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 175-176.

for the unity of the Triunity: three Persons – one family. This analogy is not just arbitrary...What it means is that people are made in the image of God. But the divine image is not the individual; it is person with person: Adam and Eve – or, as Gregory of Nazianzus declared, Adam and Eve and Seth – are, dissimilar though they are, an earthly image and parable of the Trinity, since they are consubstantial persons. Whatever we may think about the first human family as trinitarian analogy, it does point to the fact that the image of God must not merely be sought for in human individuality; we must look for it with equal earnestness in human sociality.¹⁶⁶

Moltmann implies that it is the social model of the doctrine of the Trinity that is the correct image of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live in communion. He sees the psychological analogy of the Trinity as another way of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity, but it refers to the life of an individual person as the image of the Trinity while the social model of the doctrine conceives relationships in human society as the more acceptable image of trinitarian communion. He argues that,

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides the intellectual means whereby to harmonize personality and sociality in the community of men and women, without sacrificing the one to the other...If today we understand person as the unmistakable and untransferable individual existence, we owe this to the Christian doctrine of the trinity. But why was the concept of the perichoresis – the unity and fellowship of the Persons – not developed with equal emphasis? The disappearance of the social doctrine of the Trinity has made room for the development of individualism, and especially possessive individualism in the Western world: everyone is supposed to fulfil himself but who fulfils the community? It is a typically Western bias to suppose that social relationships and society are less primal than the person. If we take our bearings from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, personalism and socialism cease to be antitheses and are seen to be derived from a common foundation. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity compels us to develop social personalism or personal socialism...The human rights of the individual and the rights of society fall apart. Today it is vitally necessary for the two to converge in the direction of a truly human society; and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity can play a substantial role.¹⁶⁷

Moltmann notes that there is a need to emphasize the communion of the Trinity in the development of trinitarian theology in the same way that the doctrine developed the concept of person. He believes that the lack of the understanding of the significance of trinitarian communion is the root of individualism in Western society and that the social

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 198.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 198-200.

implication which comes from knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity is the remedy for individualistic tendencies in human society.

Rausch comments that Moltmann “turns to the Cappadocian Fathers and the theologians of the East to emphasize a social doctrine of the Trinity.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, it is the interpretation of the Trinity in terms of relationship that inspires contemporary theologians to understand God as a community of three divine Persons who live in communion. There is hardly any doubt that this knowledge of God has far-reaching significance in combating individualism in human society. Rausch states that “The doctrine of the Trinity is rooted in the relation of Jesus to one he called Abba and in the prayer and worship of the church.”¹⁶⁹ The word “Abba” denotes an intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father. This is indicative of the type of communal life that Jesus shares with His Father in the Godhead. This also echoes the idea of the Christian faith which defines God as love (1Jn 4: 8).

G.L. Prestige contends that Gregory “maintains a memorable sentence that each of the divine Persons possesses a unity with the associate Persons no less actual than Himself, by reason of the identity of *ousia* and power, and this is the ground of divine unity.”¹⁷⁰ The word “associate” used by Prestige indicates relationship in the Trinity, just as it signifies a bond of friendship and union among people. Prestige maintains that “It was assumed that the divine relationship disclosed in the course of revelation, made through religious history and assisted by reflection on the constitution of the universe, corresponds to real and permanent facts in the life of God.”¹⁷¹ This means that the Trinity is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live in communion. This union and love in God is reflected in the good order of creation by God who links reality together in harmony. The interdependence of creation points to the harmony and union that exists among the three divine Persons. For Prestige, God is “one eternal principle of light and love...the light is reflected in a social order of morality; and the love in a genuinely mutual activity.”¹⁷² Prestige is right: God is the source of love and communion in society because; it is the love from God that inspires human beings to love one another in the world.

¹⁶⁸ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 71.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1981), 260-261.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 301.

¹⁷² Ibid.

The notion of relations in the Trinity is extremely important to contemporary trinitarian theology that Paul Collins asserts that his book *Trinitarian Theology: East and West* emerges from a concern to understand and set in context the twentieth-century interest in the doctrine of the Trinity and, in particular, the concept of “*koinonia* and relationality.”¹⁷³ Collins may have been inspired by the Cappadocian fathers who conceived the Trinity in terms of “divine *koinonia* and ontology.”¹⁷⁴ Contemporary theology is interested in the image of “*koinonia* and relationality” in trinitarian life because it will inspire an intimate life of love and sharing in the human society which will help to bring peace in the world. Collins echoes the idea of Zizioulas who interprets the Trinity as “an event of communion.”¹⁷⁵ For Collins, “God is love, and God knows by love. Love is understood in terms of relationality, in so far as the relationship between the Father and the Son (*Logos*) is seen as God’s relationality.”¹⁷⁶ This sense of relation that exists among the Persons of the Trinity extends to us humans in a limited way. According to Karl Barth,

As and before God seeks and creates fellowship with us, [God] wills and completes this fellowship in [the Godhead], [God] does not want to exist for [God’s self], to exist alone. On the contrary, [God] is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and therefore alive in [God’s] unique being with and for and in another.¹⁷⁷

In other words, God delights to exist as love and communion. God is a community of three divine Persons who live in communion with one another and God allows this love and sharing to overflow to the entire creation. Thomas Torrance too praises Gregory of Nazianzus’ contribution to the understanding of relationship in his trinitarian theology. He declares that,

It may well be claimed that Gregory’s understanding of the Holy Trinity registered a significant deepening of the Athanasian conception of the divine *οὐσία* as being considered in its relations, for it was cast in a more dynamic form. In the Godhead all subsistent relations are dynamic, mutually interpenetrating, unitary and without opposition in their reference to one another.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Paul M. Collins, *Trinitarian Theology: East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xi.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 18.

¹⁷⁶ Collins, *Trinitarian Theology*, 109.

¹⁷⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker et al (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 275.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 320-321.

For Gregory, *ousia* means the one essence or substance which is shared by three divine Persons in the Godhead. The unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one essence implies that they live without division or subordination in the Godhead. Torrance maintains that,

Gregory declared, there is one God, and one Godhead, and all that issues from him is referred back to him so as to be one with him, although we believe that there are three. And one is not more and another less God, nor is one before and another after. They are neither divided in will nor separated in power, nor are any of the distinguishing marks of separated individualities to be found there, but divided as the Persons are, the entire and undivided Godhead is one in each Person.¹⁷⁹

Torrance quotes the statement of Gregory in order to emphasise the importance of unity and communion in the trinitarian theology of Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory's interpretation is significant in the understanding of the correct image of the Christian God because he interprets God as a community of three divine Persons who are related to each other. The implication of this knowledge is an invitation to the renewal of human society through love which comes from trinitarian communion. According to Gregory, "each of these Persons is entirely one with those whom he is conjoined, as he is with himself, because of the identity of being and power that is between them."¹⁸⁰ Thus, equality marks the union of the three divine Persons. They are not united as greater or lesser or higher or lower in the Godhead, but as one in their Threeness. Oneness then, indicates communion and love. This undivided unity of the three divine Persons leads us to the *perichoretic* doctrine which comes from the interpretation of the Trinity of Gregory of Nazianzus.

3.5 THE DOCTRINE OF *PERICHORESIS*

The term *perichoresis* is used in the study of Christology and in trinitarian theology. Christological perichoresis according to Edward Schillebeeckx describes "The mutual indwelling of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. Trinitarian perichoresis...is the sacred indwelling of the three (divine) Persons in one sole God."¹⁸¹ Some theologians such as

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 321-322.

¹⁸⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31.16*.

¹⁸¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Perichoresis, Christological," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, 128. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle CI* in *S. Cyril of Jerusalem: Catechetical Lectures, S. Gregory of Nazianzum: Select Orations, Letters*, vol. VII, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Henry Wace (Oxford: James Paker,

Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff use it to describe the unbroken unity of the Trinity. Boff declares that, “The Greek term *Perichoresis* – translated into Latin both by *circuminsessio* and *circumnicessio* – is used to sum up the essence of unity and union in the Trinity and the unity of the natures of God and humankind in Jesus.”¹⁸² Thus, *perichoresis* describes the eternal communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hunt echoes Boff when she writes that, “The term *perichoresis* is a particularly evocative trinitarian notion...It describes the nature of this mystery of communion of love as so complete that each of the divine persons interpenetrates the others.”¹⁸³ The Father, Son and Holy Spirit though distinct from one another live in one another. Thus, the Father lives in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The Son lives in the Father and in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit lives in the Father and in the Son. Boff declares that, “the binding revelation of salvation history...speaks of three distinct, inter-related Subjects – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹⁸⁴ He sees *Perichoresis* as the best terminology that describes the loving relationships in the Trinity, stating:

In my view, the perichoresis–communion model seems to be the most adequate way of expressing revelation of the Trinity as communicated and witnessed by the scriptures. Seen within the framework of perichoresis, the theories elaborated by theology and the church to signify the Christian God as person, relationship, divine nature and procession, are not invalidated, but become comprehensible.¹⁸⁵

Boff situates the notion of *Perichoresis* within the history of Salvation. For him, *Perichoresis* captures the true meaning of revelation of the Trinity in the scriptures. To conceive God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit means the unbroken communion within the Godhead. He shows that *perichoresis* describes the biblical revelation of the Trinity by saying that,

The New Testament witness to Jesus’ consciousness of his intimate union with the Father: ‘the Father and I are one’ (John 10: 30); ‘the Father is in me and I am in the Father’ (10:38; 14:11); ‘Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you’ (17:21). Christian tradition, in combating Arianism, modalism and tritheism, had asserted the consubstantiality of the three Persons of the Trinity. The Council of Florence summed up this tradition by declaring: ‘The Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son wholly in the Father and

1893), 439-440. See also Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 162, 174.

¹⁸² Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 134. See also Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 174-176.

¹⁸³ Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?*, 11.

¹⁸⁴ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 137.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.¹⁸⁶

The communion in the Trinity, then, means that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit lives in eternal and unbroken unity and love. Boff cites the Council of Toledo as interpreting the Trinity with the idea of loving relationships. The Council maintains that:

These three persons are not to be considered separable, since we believe that no one of them existed or at any time effected anything before the other, after the other, or without the other. For in existence and in operation they are found to be inseparable, because we believe that between the Father who generates and the Son who is generated and the Holy Spirit who proceeds, there never was any interval of time in which the one generating would at any time precede the one generated, or in which the one generated would not be present to the one generating, or in which the Spirit who proceeds might appear to come after the Father and the Son.¹⁸⁷

In other words, the Council affirmed the union and equality in the Trinity. Boff maintains that the Council's "statements stress the eternal co-existence of the divine Persons and their respectiveness, that is, the relatedness they bear to one another. Theology came to use the Greek word *Perichoresis* to express this interpenetration of one Person by the others"¹⁸⁸ Boff asserts that

The Greek word (perichoresis) has a double meaning, which explains why two words were used to translate it into Latin. Its first meaning is that of one thing being contained in another, dwelling in, being in another – a situation of fact, a static state. This understanding was translated by *circuminsessio*, a word derived from *sedere* and *sessio*, being seated, having its seat in, seat. Applied to the mystery of the communion of the Trinity this signified: one Person is in the others, surrounds the others on all sides (*circu-*), occupies the same space as the others, fills them with its presence. Its second meaning is active and signifies the interpenetration or interweaving of one Person with the others and in the others. This understanding seeks to express the loving and eternal process of relating intrinsic to the three Persons, so that each is always penetrating the others. This meaning was translated as *circumincessio*, derived from *incedere*, meaning to permeate, com-penetrates and interpenetrates. In this sense, perichoresis is a good term to designate what we have seen to be meant by communion, *koinōnia*: a permanent process of active reciprocity...this process of communing forms their nature.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 134-135.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 135. See also *DS*, 531.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 135-136.

Hunt echoes Boff's description, writing:

The divine perichoresis clearly precludes any elevation or subordination of one person relative to another. Each divine person exists in relationships of equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. So it is that the model of the divine perichoresis serves as a source of inspiration for the human community of relationships.¹⁹⁰

Perichoresis is a Greek word which means in-dwelling or living in one another. In applying it to the Trinity, it means that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit inhere in one another. *Perichoresis*, according to Thomas Rausch, is a “notion which not only [draws] out the distinctiveness of each of the Persons, but their relationship to each other, that is, their unity or mutual indwelling of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.”¹⁹¹ Rausch implies that the three divine Persons live in one another. Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove trace the origin of the term to John of Damascus' teaching on the Trinity in the eighth century on the text from the Gospel of John where Jesus says ‘Know that the Father is in me and I am in the Father’ (John 10: 38).¹⁹²

Damascene's concern is to avoid a fusion or confusion of the Persons, on the one hand— the Persons ‘neither mingle nor coalesce’—and tritheism, on the other hand—the Persons are ‘inseparable and cannot part from one another’ and, ‘cleave to each other’...Each divine Person encompasses the others and is co-inherent with the others, not in a static sense, but in a dynamic cyclical and eternal movement of giving and receiving.¹⁹³

Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove's description of the term *perichoresis* reveals that it has its roots in the scriptural passage which interprets the Trinity as the three divine Persons who live in one another. St. John's Gospel helps the early Church fathers such as John Damascene to arrive at the correct interpretation of the relationship of love and communion in the Godhead. The Church fathers coined the Greek term *perichoresis* as a metaphor to describe the sublime fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, for Damascene, the term *perichoresis* solves the dilemma of interpreting the Father as monad who does not have equality or relationship with the Son and Holy Spirit and the danger of conceiving the Trinity as three Gods. The three divine Persons are distinct, yet they live in one another. Gregory of Nazianzus alluded to this indwelling when he stated that “the

¹⁹⁰ Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?*, 11-12.

¹⁹¹ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 72.

¹⁹² Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 21-22.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22. See also LaCugna, *GfU*, 270-271.

Holy of Holies converges in a single lordship and a single Godhead.”¹⁹⁴ Gregory used the word “converge” to demonstrate that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit inter-penetrate one another.

Najeeb Award in reference to the doctrine of relations in Gregory’s trinitarian theology claims that “Discourse about the ‘koinonial’ nature of the Godhead and a radical construal of *perichoresis* of the three *hypostases* in terms of being, not only in terms of operation, can be readily found in Gregory’s writings.”¹⁹⁵ Award indicates that communality and mutual inter-penetration of one another is found in both ontological existence and in the actions of the three divine Persons in the teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus. He also maintains that “Sensitivity to the Spirit’s hypostatic individuation and co-constitutive impact in the Godhead is a unique outcome of Gregory of Nazianzus’ perichoretic ontology.”¹⁹⁶ Award understands Gregory’s interpretation in terms of distinction, relationship and communion in the Trinity. He indicates that “Homoousios is definitely a Nazianzene contribution to the Council [of Constantinople 381], because his belief that the Son and the Spirit are both homoousios with the Father is expressive of his conviction that...the Godhead is the perichoresis of three homoousiotic persons.”¹⁹⁷ He believes that Gregory’s one essence in the Godhead revealed that the three divine Persons live in one another:

Gregory says that what is revealed in the three-in-one is the inner reciprocal koinonia of triunity and not a single isolated divine ousia. The idea of ‘reciprocal koinonia’ corrects, in other words, the mere epistemological, apophatic emphasis on the Fatherhood of the Godhead.¹⁹⁸

This indwelling of the three divine Persons in one another signifies that communion marks life in the immanent and economic Trinity in the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians. Award demonstrates that Gregory did not ascribe an absolute rule to the Father; rather, the core interpretation of his trinitarian theology is love and fellowship in the Godhead.

For his part, Rausch maintains that in *Perichoresis*

each Person has a distinctive mission, each is present in and to the other two, ‘without mixture or confusion...the doctrine is important because

¹⁹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration*, 38.3.

¹⁹⁵ Najeeb G. Award, “Between Subordination and Koinonia: Toward a New Reading of the Cappadocian Theology,” *Modern Theology* 23 (2007): 190-191.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

speaking of the mutual indwelling or *perichōresis* of the three persons ‘obviates both tritheism and modalism’...Persons are essentially interpersonal, intersubjective and relational.¹⁹⁹

This means that because the Trinity live in one another, the question of the three becoming three Gods does not arise. Equally it excludes the notion of one Person becoming greater or lesser in the Godhead. Rausch indicates that Gregory of Nazianzus was the first person who interpreted the interpenetration of the divine and human nature of Christ with the term *perichoresis* before its application to the Trinity by John Damascene.²⁰⁰ This demonstrates that just as Christ has both divine and human natures and both are intermingled within the person of Christ without dividing him into two personalities, in the same way, the Persons of the Trinity live in one another without obliterating the distinctive hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. LaCugna contends that the notion of *perichoresis* has inspired theologians such as feminist theologian Wilson-Kastner and liberation theologian Leonardo Boff. According to LaCugna,

the substance of God is the *perichōretic* relatedness of three coequal persons...The particular merit of Wilson-Kastner’s theology is to make dynamism and relationality constitutive of divine substance. Father, Son and Spirit are coequal because they *are* the same namely, God...Like Wilson Kastner, Boff equates the divine substance with *perichōresis*; *perichōresis* is the ‘glue’ holding together the three divine persons in a substantial unity. The substance (interrelationship) is the principle and the cause of the persons...Speaking of God must always mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the presence of one another, in total reciprocity, in immediacy of loving relationship, being one for another, by another, in another and with another.²⁰¹

Thus, both feminist and liberation theologians find inspiration in interpreting the trinitarian unity and communion with the term *perichoresis*. This term demonstrates that human beings are called to imitate the type of love operative in the Trinity. In other words, the doctrine of *perichoresis* is important to contemporary theology because it leads to the understanding of God as a communal Being. The consequence of this loving life of God is an incentive for human beings to exist in communion in human society. To confess faith in a loving God means to conform to what we profess in the conduct of our lives if we are to be true to our trinitarian convictions.

¹⁹⁹ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 63-64.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁰¹ LaCugna, *GfU*, 272-276.

Prestige points out that Gregory of Nazianzus mentions *Perichoresis* three times in his works: “Life and death, [Gregory] observes...though they appear to differ as far as possible from one another, yet reciprocate and resolve themselves into one another.”²⁰² He also praised the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians in the following terms: “Nothing of importance remained to be added to the Greek patristic definition of the Trinity. It stands as a monument of inspired Christian rationalism.”²⁰³ Arguably, the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers not only involves a rational conception of God, it is also a definition of faith which has profound implications for believers. Faith in the triune God is not just about rational confession but also allows our lives to be transformed into the image of God who is loving communion. Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove put it more clearly when they state that the “correct understanding about God (*orthodoxy*) leads to the correct way of living the Christian life (*orthopraxis*)” in the world.²⁰⁴ This means that true knowledge of God results in authentic human living. The doctrine of *perichoresis* has been shown to be a great contribution of the Greek fathers to the understanding of trinitarian relations. However, Prestige maintains that,

The only criticism that might seem substantial is that the whole doctrine of unity rested on physical metaphors...it needs to be recognised that it is impossible for mortal men [and women] to comprehend or to discuss God except by using symbols derived from mortal experience.²⁰⁵

This implies no human words or human thoughts can express who is God. Human beings rely on limited human terminologies in their discourse of God. In reference to the doctrine of *perichoresis*, LaCugna signifies that

The three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, and “are” what they are by relation to one another. *Perichoresis* means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion. No person exists by him/herself or is referred to him/herself...to be a divine person is to be by nature in relation to other persons. Each divine person is irresistibly drawn in to the other, taking his/her existence from the other, containing the other in him/herself, while at the time pouring self out into the other...a reciprocal irruption. While there is no blurring of the individuality of each person, there is also no separation. There is only the communion of love in which each person comes to be...what he/she is, entirely with reference to the other. Each person expresses both what he/she is...and at the same time expresses what God is: ecstatic, relational,

²⁰² Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 291.

²⁰³ Ibid., 299.

²⁰⁴ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 2.

²⁰⁵ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 299.

dynamic, vital. *Perichoresis* provides a dynamic model of persons in communion based on mutuality and interdependence.²⁰⁶

The doctrine of *Perichoresis* explains the interpretation of equality, distinction, unity and communion in the conception of the Trinity by the Cappadocian fathers. Zizioulas writes that the doctrine of trinitarian perichoresis demonstrates that communion and distinctiveness or individuality is essential for a holistic understanding of personhood. The human person is an autonomous, unique, unrepeatable concrete individual and at the same time essentially relational.²⁰⁷ We are autonomous and interdependent, distinct and yet one-with-the-other. These two dimensions of communion and autonomy, interrelationship and particularity, must always be present in an authentic conceptualisation of personhood and community. Zizioulas adds that “The person cannot exist without communion; but every form of communion which denies or suppresses the person is inadmissible.”²⁰⁸ Thus, a person as an existence or being destined for communion through perichoresal relationship has to maintain a balance between individuality and communality for a healthy personal and communal life.

Boff claims that the relational character of a person should not obliterate his/her distinctiveness just as the union of the Three Persons, Father, Son and Spirit, “does not blot out the difference and individuality of each. Union rather supposes differentiation. Through love and through reciprocal communion they are one single thing, the one God-love.”²⁰⁹ Analogically, human beings still retain their uniqueness in their loving relationships with others. Authentic gift of self to others in loving service, demands self-possession, maturity and freedom. LaCugna concurs with Boff when she maintains that “Personhood requires the balance of self-love and self-gift...Personhood emerges in the balance between individuation and relationality, between self-possession and being possessed, that is, interdependence.”²¹⁰ This challenges us to avoid, on the one hand, extreme autonomy which is a total, individualistic reliance or focus on self, and on the other, avoiding an extreme heteronomy which is a total dependence or focus on the other (including social, cultural, and religious institutions or organisations).

²⁰⁶ LaCugna, *GfU*, 270-271. See also Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 119-120.

²⁰⁷ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 15, 17.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰⁹ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 5.

²¹⁰ LaCugna, *GfU*, 290.

A way of avoiding the extremes of individualism on the one hand, and conformism on the other, according to LaCugna is to collapse autonomy and heteronomy into theonomy (God-regulated), that is, defining oneself in reference to God as our origin and destiny. By remaining distinct while at the same time open to perichoresis relationship, the trinitarian Persons help us to see “that the true person is neither autonomous nor heteronomous but theonomous.”²¹¹ Theonomy in regard to the human person does not imply the espousal of a “me and God piety” that neglects the human community.²¹² This is because our experience of God and the emergence of our personhood are ineluctably mediated by other people. Thus, a theonomous person is one who integrates and transforms both autonomy and heteronomy into a genuine communion.²¹³

3.5.1 *Filioque*

The notion of *filioque* is a controversial theological stance that brought about the division of the Church in the middle ages (1058).²¹⁴ The introduction of the *filioque* to the creed by the West angered the Eastern believers. They separated themselves from the Western Church. Thus, the Church split into two – Roman Catholic in the West and Orthodox in the East. The first Council of Nicaea (325) added “And in the Holy Spirit” to the creed.²¹⁵ The first Council of Constantinople (381) stated: “And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord (*to Kurion*) and Giver of life, who proceeds (*ekporeuomenon*) from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,” without mentioning that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son.²¹⁶ The problem arose because of the Western Church’s expression that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*).”²¹⁷ The Eastern Church believed that the Western Church changed the creed without consultation between the two Churches by the addition of the *filioque*. Kasper maintains that,

The *filioque* first became a problem when the Latin turned their theological formula into a dogmatic confessional formula and thus unilaterally changed the originally common text of the creed...Rome was

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ See Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 189. See also Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 71.

²¹⁵ Neuner and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 6.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

very reserved and even opposed to the development. Pope Leo III defended Nicaea...He maintained his position when Frankish monks in the monastery of St. Sabbas in Jerusalem introduced the *filioque* into the creed of the Mass and gave occasion for considerable controversy. The pope defended the teaching contained in the *filioque* but he refused its incorporation into the creed. Pope Benedict VIII took a different attitude when Emperor Henry II demanded that the *filioque* be incorporated into the creed of the Mass at his coronation in 1014. With the agreement of the pope a new confessional tradition was begun in the West.²¹⁸

Could this be seen as two traditions that upheld the orthodox trinitarian faith, instead of perceiving the addition of the *filioque* as a departure from true Christian teaching? Kasper observes that the addition of the *filioque* could be “a recognition that East and West have two different traditions, based on a common faith, which are both legitimate and which can therefore acknowledge and complement each other, without either reducible. There are present here complementary theologies and complementary formulas.”²¹⁹ In other words, the addition of the *filioque* by the West should not have been a source of division between the East and West since it is not an erroneous interpretation of trinitarian faith. However, the problem could have been escalated by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and the Second Council of Lyons (1274), which expressed that the “Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.”²²⁰ This might have provoked the reaction of the East. It seemed to them that the West has acted without consulting them. Moreover, the monarchy of the Father is undermined if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Kasper argues that

The essential concern of the *filioque* is twofold: to preserve the consubstantiality (*homoousios*) of the Father and the Son, and to emphasize the fact that according to the scripture the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of the Son. Conversely, the East is more concerned than the West to maintain the monarchy of the Father and the freedom of action of the Holy Spirit. These concerns are not contradictory...The ultimate question that waits in the back ground is that of the relation between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and the being of the Spirit within the Trinity. A dialogue on the different formulas of the past must be conducted with openness to the future, in order to bring clarification to the still unresolved problems of both sides. Only the future can show whether such a dialogue can lead to a new common formula that accepts both traditions and at the same time opens a way forward...But more important than such a commonly accepted formula is unity in the objective

²¹⁸ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 219.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

²²⁰ Nuener and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 15-17.

truth...and the differences of the theologies in this area do not amount to a difference that should divide the churches.²²¹

Kasper implies that attaining the unity that the Trinity stands for is more important than losing our bearing in words and notions that distract us from living in love and communion as the Trinity wants to do in our lives. He contends that,

more important than a new commonly accepted formula is the misunderstandings of the past should stimulate us to be sensitive to the concerns of the other tradition and thereby to clarify and enrich our own tradition, thus deepening the existing unity in truth and making both parties more clearly conscious of it. The issue here is not a useless quarrel about words but a deeper understanding of our salvation, that is, the question of how the salvation effected by Jesus Christ is communicated through the Holy Spirit...A hasty elimination of the *filioque* could easily tempt us to leave problems untouched instead of seeking an answer to them.²²²

Kasper wants our faith to be centred on the love of the Trinity and not on theological controversy which does not help us to reflect the trinitarian life in our lives. According to Anne Hunt,

The insertion of *filioque* into the creed emerged in the West, where it was used to counter the reemergence of Arianism that surfaced in Spain in the fifth century, and to affirm the equality of the Son with the Father. The insertion was much a christological issue as a trinitarian one. Theologically, the insertion was justified by Augustine's trinitarian theology, and also that of Hilary of Poitiers. It was however, to prove a fateful interpolation. Its usage gradually spread in the West. The third Council of Toledo (589) professed the double procession and severely anathematized any who denied it. At that point, the creed, together with the *filioque*, entered into the Latin eucharistic liturgy.²²³

Hunt cites the trinitarian theology of Augustine and Hilary of Poitiers to support the notion that the *filioque* was not heretical. However, she observes that,

From the perspective of the East, the insertion of the *filioque* was effrontery in the extreme. First, it was an illegitimate insertion into the creed, which had been promulgated by an ecumenical council. Second, but no less important, it was theologically incorrect. The notion of the double procession violated the monarchy of the Father, as source of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In the Orthodox tradition, going back to John Damascene, the Father is sole source within the Trinity. Many in the East would admit the statement, through the Son, *per filium*, but not

²²¹ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 222.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 232.

filioque...The Latin West was uncompromising. The Fourth Lateran General Council in 1215 solemnly proclaimed the double procession of the Holy Spirit, stating that the ‘the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from Father and Son, not as from two principles but from one, not by two spirations but by one only’. The Council added anathemas: ‘We condemn and disapprove those who presume to deny that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from Father and Son, or who rashly dare to assert that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from two principles, not as from one’. The *filioque* was dogmatically affirmed again at the attempted reunion of East and West at the Second General Council of Lyons in 1274.²²⁴

The two traditions of the East and West hardened their views around the procession of the Holy Spirit and neither was prepared to yield. Hunt laments that,

The history of the *filioque* controversy is a sad and sorry history of mutual misunderstanding. While the *filioque* emerged in the West as much for christological as for trinitarian reasons, it constituted an ecclesiological issue of great import in the East. The controversy is as much a matter of ecclesiology and of ecclesial authority as theology. Throughout, the truth and correctness of saying that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son were confused with the issue of the legitimacy of its insertion into the creed.²²⁵

The division between the East and West does not reflect a common faith between the two traditions. Rather, it shows a lack of mutuality between the two. John Meyendorff also remarks that, “The difficulties created by history could have been resolved if there had been a common ecclesiological criterion to settle the theological, canonical, or liturgical issues keeping the East and the West apart.”²²⁶ Thus, the separation of East from West is the work of human beings which does not reflect the unity and love of the Trinity. Hunt concludes that,

A range of opinions currently exists in regard to the situation. Some in the West argue for the removal of the *filioque* from the creed...and a return to the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Some perceive that the substance of the teachings in the East and in the West in regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit (*per filium*, through the Son, and *filioque*, and the Son) are in fact different perspectives on the one divine reality and essentially identical. Though the scars of the previous centuries no doubt remain, the church today would seem to be free than ever before to consider the *filioque* question anew, free of the political tensions and the acrimony of the past, free to move to a new and gracious space of

²²⁴ Ibid., 233.

²²⁵ Ibid., 234.

²²⁶ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (London: Mowbray, 1974), 91.

authentic dialogue and discernment.²²⁷

Both East and West are truly in a different place than at the time of the controversy which means that they are able to look at the past and see what unites them instead of clinging to what divides them. Boff asserts that,

We must start with the Trinity: with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal communion. The Three have their origin from all eternity, none being anterior to the others. Their relationship is one of reciprocal participation rather than hypostatic derivation, of correlation and communion rather than production and procession. What is produced and proceeds is intra-trinitarian and interpersonal revelation. One person is the condition for the revelation of the others, in an infinite dynamism like a series of mirrors endlessly reflecting the image of the Three. This emphasis on communion and perichoresis, the always triadic relationship operating between the Persons, avoids the risk of tritheism. This perichoretic communion does not result from the Persons, but is simultaneous with them, originates with them. They are what they are because of their intrinsic, essential communion. If this is so, it follows that everything in God is triadic, everything is *Patruque, Filioque* and *Spirituque*. The coordinate conjunction ‘and’ applies absolutely to three Persons: ‘and’ is always and everywhere.²²⁸

Boff indicates that “what proceeds is intra-trinitarian,” which means that procession is happening in the Trinity. This suggests that it is not heretical to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He writes that,

In begetting the Son, the Father bestows everything on him...So the Son receives the capacity to make the Holy Spirit proceed and has that capacity with the Father. Through their same, common and unique nature, the Father and the Son are one and the same (John 10:30). Therefore, in proceeding from the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son also, not from two sources (which would suppose two Fathers), but from a single source.²²⁹

According to Boff,

The Greek intention was to assure the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit through the fact that both proceed from the Father, who is the only source and ultimate origin of all divinity...The Latin intention was to assure the divinity of the three divine Persons by showing them as consubstantial; the Holy Spirit possesses the same nature that the Son received from the Father; as the Son received it from the Father, he bestows it with the Father on the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 146.

²²⁹ Ibid., 200.

proceeds from the Father and the Son.²³⁰

However, the bone of contention, as Boff states it, is that,

In the East, it was considered a schismatic act to modify the sacred text of the common Creed, the more so as the Council of Ephesus (431) had pronounced an anathema on anyone who professed ‘another faith’ differing from that of the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 had repeated the same sanction. But there were also theological considerations. For Eastern theologians, the only source of the divine Persons was the Father (the monarchy of the Father). In the eighth century St. John Damascene summed up their position: ‘The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father...but is also the Spirit of the Son, not because he proceeds from the Son, but because he proceeds *by means of* the Son from the Father, since there is but one sole source, the Father.’ So in the Greek conception, the Father is the originating source of all divinity and of the diversity of the Persons. In another text, St. John Damascene stresses: ‘We do not say that the Son is source, so we do not say He is Father...We do not say that the Spirit proceeds from the Son.’ The Son and the Spirit come conjointly and together from the mouth of the Father.²³¹

In other words, the East held that the Father is the source of the Trinity; hence, the Holy Spirit cannot proceed from the Son as well as from the Father. Moreover, the East perceived the addition of the filioque as a departure from the orthodox trinitarian faith of Nicaea.

Kärkkäinen also observes that,

The consideration of the earliest Christian Trinitarian tradition showed clearly that the Bible does not clarify the interrelations of Father, Son, and Spirit. A classical example, with reverberations still felt, is the question of the procession of the Spirit. On the one hand, Jesus says that he himself will send the Spirit (Jn 16: 7) or that he will send the Spirit (called *paraklētos* here) who proceeds from the Father (15: 26). On the other hand, Jesus prays to the Father for him to send the Spirit (14: 16), and the Father will send the Spirit in Jesus’ name (14: 26). Because of the lack of clarity in the biblical record as well as the rise to prominence of the Augustinian idea that of the Spirit as shared love (another idea which of course has its basis in the biblical idea of the Spirit as *koinōnia*), the Christian West added the Spirit’s dual procession, *filioque* (Latin: ‘and [from] the Son’) to the Nicene Creed, which originally said that the Holy Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father’...The Christian East objected vigorously to this addition, claiming that it was a one-sided addition without ecumenical consultation, that it compromises the monarchy of the Father as the source of divinity, and that it subordinates the Spirit to Jesus with theological corollaries in ecclesiology, the doctrine of salvation.²³²

²³⁰ Ibid., 202.

²³¹ Ibid., 71.

²³² Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 56-58.

The biblical witness does not clarify the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Church tried in her theology to express how the Holy Spirit proceeded. This led to the different views of East and West. It should not have been a source of division since as human beings both traditions were trying to express their faith in the Trinity. As Kärkkäinen comments,

While the details of the origin of the *filioque* addition in the West are not fully known, besides the Augustinian idea of the Spirit as the mutual love, it is believed that the addition also served a function in opposing Arianism. Mentioning the Son along the Father as the origin of the Spirit was seen as a way to defend consubstantiality. With all its exaggerations, the Eastern critique of the *filioque* is important both ecumenically and theologically and should not be dismissed. The West did not have the right to unilaterally add *filioque*. In my judgement, *filioque* is not heretical even though ecumenically and theologically it is unacceptable and therefore should be removed. Ecumenically and theologically it would be important for the East to be able to acknowledge the non-heretical nature of the addition. Furthermore, the Christian East should keep in mind the fact that with all its problems, at first *filioque*, as mentioned above, was used in the West in support of consubstantiality, an idea shared by both traditions.²³³

The addition of the *filioque* by the West removes subordination in the Trinity. Moreover, it was not a question of heresy but one of different interpretation of faith. It called for understanding and dialogue instead of separation of the Eastern Church from the West. George Tavard maintains that, “it would seem that the classical Eastern and Western conceptions of the derivation of the Spirit, far from being mutually contradictory, should be reconciled: they bespeak two aspects of the procession of the Third Person.”²³⁴ He observes that the East and West did not contradict each other concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. Bertrand de Margerie states that, “there is a dogmatic definition specifying that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from one principle and by one single spiration, a dogmatic definition that was formulated twice (at Lyons and Florence).”²³⁵ This shows that the West strongly believed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Grenz maintains that,

In *De Trinitate*, Augustine went beyond the statement about the Holy Spirit that had been included in the creed devised at Constantinople. Although the creed affirmed that the Spirit is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, it declared simply that the

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ George H. Tavard, *The Vision of the Trinity* (Washington D.C.: University of America Press, 1981), 132.

²³⁵ Bertrand de Maegerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, trans. Edmund J. Fortman (Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publications, 1982), 317.

Spirit proceeds from the Father. Augustine in contrast, taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well. Two centuries later, a regional Spanish synod (the third Council of Toledo in 589) incorporated Augustine's view into the Latin translation of the ancient creed, adding the word *filioque* ('and from the Son') to the description of the Spirit's procession. Then in 809, a synod in Aachen, Germany, adopted the altered version as the official creed for the newly constituted Holy Roman Empire. These developments eventually evoked a vigorous reaction from the Eastern church. In 867, the patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, levelled the charge of heresy against the West for assuming the prerogative of tampering with an ecumenical creed...the differing outlooks toward the triune God that had separated East and West for centuries contributed to a theological parting of ways climaxed in the Great Schism (1058), which divided Christendom into Orthodox and Roman Catholic communions.²³⁶

The doctrine of perichoresis holds the notion that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in one another. In essence, the Trinity is one God. The Father is not one, the Son one and the Holy Spirit one. Since God is the undivided Trinity and Christ has said that all that the Father has is his (Jn. 16:15), it means that the Holy Spirit belongs to the Father and also belongs to the Son. Thus, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son which the Western Church understands as *Filioque* (and the Son). Hunt laments that, "The tragedy is that the procession of the Holy Spirit, whom Christians worldwide revere as the divine person of unity and love, has become the point of disunity and polemic in the Christian church."²³⁷ Thus, the interpretation of the procession of the Holy Spirit should never be a source of division for Christian faith. It rather calls for dialogue so that both the Western and Eastern Churches will reflect and find a way of expressing their belief in a manner that imitates trinitarian communion.

3.5.2 Immanent and Economic Trinity

Immanent Trinity is about the inner life of the Trinity and Economic Trinity is how the Trinity is revealed in the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in salvation history. In regard to the discussion of the immanent and economic Trinity, Hunt writes that,

in contemporary academic theological circles, controversy over the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinities (as distinct from previous consideration in terms of God *ad extra* and *ad intra*) has

²³⁶ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God in Contemporary Theology: The Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 10.

²³⁷ Hunt, *Trinity*, 231.

been keen. Karl Rahner threw this issue into prominence with his contentious *Grundaxiom* that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa.²³⁸

Ad extra refers to the actions of God in creation especially in the sending of the Son and Holy Spirit. *Ad intra* is about how God exists within the Godhead. Thus, God is separated into two aspects of how God is, namely in relation to creation and God's inner life. Hunt laments that this separation led Rahner to interpret that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. She states:

the very statement of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* was itself indicative of the separation that had developed between economic and immanent considerations in trinitarian theology and of the more general remoteness of trinitarian theology from day-to-day Christian life and from the mainstream of theological issues and concerns.²³⁹

Rahner wants to put the Trinity at the centre of theological discourse which is actually where the Trinity belongs because it is the central belief of Christian faith and source of creation. According to Rahner, the economic Trinity is God's revelation and communication of God's self in the history of salvation and immanent Trinity is the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the inner life of God.²⁴⁰

He asserts that,

The isolation of the treatise of the Trinity *has* to be wrong. There *must* be a connection between Trinity and man. The Trinity is a mystery of *salvation*, otherwise it would never have been revealed. We should show why it is such a mystery. We must point out in *every* dogmatic treatise that what it says about salvation does not make sense without referring to this primordial mystery of Christianity. Whenever this permanent perichoresis between the treatises is overlooked, we have a clear indication that either the treatise on the Trinity or the other treatises have not clearly explained connections which show how the mystery of the Trinity is for us a mystery of salvation, and why we meet it wherever our salvation is considered, even in the other dogmatic treatises. The *basic thesis* which establishes this connection between the treatises and presents the Trinity *as* a mystery of salvation (in reality and not merely as a doctrine) might be formulated as follows: *The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity.*²⁴¹

For Rahner, the Trinity that is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the history of

²³⁸ Ibid.; see also Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?*, 3-4.

²³⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁴⁰ Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, with an introduction, index, and glossary by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: Crossroads, 1970), 22.

²⁴¹ Ibid. 21-22.

salvation is the same eternal Trinity that is the Godhead. He explains:

First, appealing to the above mentioned basic axiom, we may say: the differentiation of the self-communication of God in history (of truth) and Spirit (of love) must belong to God 'in himself,' or otherwise this difference, which undoubtedly exists, would do away with God's *self*-communication. For these modalities and their differentiation either are in God himself (although we first experience them from our point of view), or they exist only in us, they belong only to the realm of creatures as effects of the divine creative activity. But then they are God's mediations in that difference which lies between creator and that which is created out of nothing. Then they can only be that communication of God which occurs precisely in creation, in which what is created contains a transcendental reference to the God who remains forever beyond this difference, thus at once 'giving' him and withdrawing him. Hence there occurs no self-communication, God himself is not there, he is only represented by the creature and its transcendental reference to God.²⁴²

Rahner believes that communication of God's self as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in salvation history must belong to the inner life of Godhead. If the economic Trinity is not the immanent Trinity, it means that the Trinity is only revealed in creation and ceases to exist in the inner life of God. Rahner argues that if his axiom is not true then, the fullness of God is not revealed in salvation history. He contends that,

the real self-communication of God...has its effect in the creature (the creaturely reality of Christ and 'created' grace); and the relation between self-communication as such (divine hypostasis as hypostatically united; uncreated grace) and effect in the creatures may ontologically be explained as one prefers, according to the different theories which exist about this point in Christology and the doctrine of grace. But if there is to be a real-self-communication and not mere creation, this creaturely reality is, at any rate, not mediating in the sense of some substitute, but as a consequence of the self-communication (and as a previous condition brought about by itself). God's self-communication, as concretely *experienced* by us, may always already imply this creaturely consequence and condition. But if this created reality were the real mediation of the self-communication by way of substitute, in the difference between creator and creature, there would be no longer be any *self*-communication. God would be the 'giver,' not the *gift itself*, he would 'give himself' only to the extent that he communicates a gift distinct from himself. The creaturely difference which is experienced also in the case of God's self-communication ('humanity of Christ', 'created grace') does not constitute the difference of both modalities of the divine self-communication but allows this difference to appear as the consequence of this self-communication.²⁴³

²⁴² Ibid., 99-100.

²⁴³ Ibid., 100-101.

According to Rahner, what makes the economic Trinity to become the immanent Trinity is that the self-communication of God in creation is from the inner life of God; otherwise, the self that God communicates to the world would be something different from God. Grace of redemption also flows from the inner life of God. He maintains that,

When from this point of view we try to express the ‘economic’ Trinity as ‘immanent,’ that is, as it is in God, prescinding from his free self-communication, we may say what follows: There is a real difference in God as he is in himself between one and the same God insofar as he is—at once and necessarily—the unoriginate who mediates himself to himself (Father), the one who is in truth uttered for himself (Son), and the one who is received and accepted in love for himself (Spirit)—and insofar as, *as a result of this*, he is the one who can freely communicate himself. The real differentiation is constituted by a double self-communication of the Father, by which the Father communicates *himself*, while, as the one who utters and receives, he posits, precisely through this self-communication, his real distinction from the one who is uttered and from the one who is received. That which is communicated, insofar as it makes the communication into an authentic self-communication, while not suppressing the real distinction between God as communicating and as communicated, may rightly be called the divinity, hence the ‘essence’ of God.²⁴⁴

Thus, the only difference in the Godhead is the distinction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The bond between the original self-communicator and the one who is uttered and received, a bond which implies a distinction, must be understood as ‘relative’ (relational). This follows simply from sameness of the ‘essence.’ This relationality should not be considered first of all as a means for solving apparent logical contradictions in the doctrine of the Trinity. As such means, its usefulness is quite restricted. To the extent that relations are understood to be more unreal of realities, they are less well suited to help us understand a Trinity which is more real. But relations are as absolutely *real* as other determinations; and an ‘apologetics’ of the ‘immanent’ Trinity should not start from the false assumption that a lifeless self-identity without any mediation is the most perfect way of being of the absolute existence. Afterwards it will then claim that in God the distinction is ‘only’ relative, and thus try to remove the difficulty brought about by an assumption which amounted to a false initial conception of God’s simplicity.²⁴⁵

For Rahner, the distinction in the Godhead is relative because Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in one essence. According to Ted Peters, the idea that the “immanent Trinity is the

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 101-102.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 102-103.

economic Trinity (is) Rahner's Rule."²⁴⁶ Peters sees this as Rahner's innovation in the area of renewal of trinitarian theology. Concerning "Rahner's Rule", Roger Olson and Christopher Hall believe that,

Rahner was concerned that too much focus on the inner life of God and especially on God's unity of being...led the church into neglect of the Trinity and of the intrinsic link between it and doctrine of salvation. He wanted to make the Trinity more practical by demonstrating its connection with salvation. His goal was to forbid or discourage all speculation about the immanent Trinity that was not relevant to salvation...He was convinced that the only purpose of speaking of God's immanent triune being is to guard against dissolving God into history and to protect God's transcendence and the graciousness of salvation.²⁴⁷

Roger and Hall imply that Rahner wants to demonstrate that there is only one Trinity. He does not want to collapse the immanent Trinity in economic Trinity but to show that the work of salvation is done by the immanent Trinity which reveals God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in salvation history. Kärkkäinen comments that "Rahner's rule means that God is in (God's self) the same God we meet in salvation history. We can trust that the way God appears to us in dealings with us is the way God exists in (God's) own inner life."²⁴⁸ Does it mean that the inner life of God is what is revealed in creation? It is true that the Trinity is one, but the whole reality of trinitarian God is not seen in the world. Jesus revealed the Father and the Spirit and salvation is the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but human beings still long to behold the fullness of Trinity. The Trinity will be revealed more in beatific vision but nobody knows if human beings will ever arrive at total knowledge of the Trinity, here or in the next world. Rahner claims that "God relates to us in a threefold manner, and this threefold, free, and gratuitous relation to us *is* not merely a copy or analogy of the inner Trinity, but this Trinity itself, albeit as freely and gratuitously communicated. That which is communicated is precisely the triune God."²⁴⁹

LaCugna in her introduction in Rahner's book *The Trinity*, argues that,

The discussion of Incarnation and grace constitutes Rahner's effort to reconnect the doctrine of the Trinity with the doctrine of salvation, and in the process to re-establish links among trinitarian theology, christology and soteriology, and pneumatology, and especially between *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*. Incarnation and grace are offered as 'dogmatic proof'

²⁴⁶ Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1993), 96.

²⁴⁷ Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity Guides to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 98.

²⁴⁸ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 78.

²⁴⁹ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 35-36.

of Rahner's axiom: 'The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa.' The economic Trinity refers to God's activity and presence in salvation history, particularly the missions of the Son and Spirit in redemption and deification. Immanent Trinity, for Rahner, refers to the divine persons in relationship to one another 'within' God.²⁵⁰

LaCugna implies that the "Incarnation" of Christ inspires Rahner to link the Trinity with the history of salvation and to put the Trinity at the centre of theological investigations. Because of the unity of one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the life of God as God exists with the Godhead (immanent Trinity), is identified with the life of God in the history of salvation, which means the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit (the economic Trinity).

LaCugna contends that,

Rahner's theology of God is based on the premise that God is by nature self-communicating: Father to Son and Spirit. The economic Trinity manifests the perpetual self-communication of God under the conditions of time and history, hence in the missions of Christ and the Spirit. The identity of 'economic' and 'immanent' Trinity means that God truly and completely gives God's self to the creature without remainder, and what is given in the economy of salvation *is* God as such. Both the distinction and the identity between the economic and immanent Trinity are conceptual, not ontological. There is only one trinitarian self-communication, which has both eternal and temporal aspects. Rahner does not mean, as in a tautology, that eternal and temporal realms are strictly identical, only that no gap may be inserted (as in neo-scholasticism) between 'God' and 'God for us.' Missions and processions are the same reality under different aspects. The eternal begetting of the Son is the eternal ground of the sending of the Son in the Incarnation. Likewise with the Holy Spirit.²⁵¹

By virtue of the fact that God communicates God's self, the economic Trinity reveals God as God exists in the salvation history. Thus, the Son and Holy Spirit reveal God as immanent as well. LaCugna comments that,

What distinguishes Rahner's axiom from neo-scholasticism is that he derives the axiom not from *a priori* principles but from salvation history. More than any other feature of this book, Rahner's axiom prompted wide commentary and some criticism. While there has been general agreement with the basic meaning of the axiom (God truly is as God reveals God's self to be, and *vice versa*), many theologians, and from different confessional traditions, have questioned whether there can be a *strict* identity between 'economic' and 'immanent' Trinity. Must there not be a certain asymmetry between God '*in se*' and God '*pro nobis*'? Rahner

²⁵⁰ Ibid. xiii-xiv.

²⁵¹ Ibid., xiv.

certainly did not intend to promote pantheism. Nor did he mean the axiom to license speculation on the immanent Trinity apart from the economy of salvation history. If the axiom is taken to describe an ontological state of affairs, then the critics are correct to insist that there remain some essential difference between the being of the triune God and the being of the creature...Even if any asymmetry is acknowledged, it does not follow that there is a second Trinity, an immanent Trinity, that can be treated in the manner of neo-scholasticism, independently of God's self-revelation in salvation history. There is only one divine self-communication, only *one* Trinity of persons.²⁵²

LaCugna seems to concur with Rahner that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. It is true that there is only one Trinity but the Trinity is a mystery beyond total understanding by human beings. The fact that God comes to us in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit does not mean that economic Trinity exhaust trinitarian life in salvation history. There is more to the inner life of God than what we experience in salvation history. For example, we are looking forward to more experience of God in the beatific vision which is not our reality now. The same God who has come as Son and Holy Spirit is going to reveal God's self more fully to us when we meet God in eternity.

LaCugna contends that,

the order of theological knowledge must adhere to the historical form of God's self-communication in Christ and the Spirit. Knowledge of God takes place through Christ and the Holy Spirit, according to the order (*taxis*) of the divine mission. However scholars choose to amend Rahner's axiom, this much must be preserved: the essential connection between the doctrine of God and soteriology and the unacceptability of the long-standing isolation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the rest of theology.²⁵³

It is true that we know God through the Son and Holy Spirit but this is what God chooses to reveal in salvation history. There is no human being who will attain the complete knowledge of God even in the beatific vision unless God wants to reveal that to creatures. It cannot be doubted that the Trinity is at the centre of all theological discourse. But even that discussion is still limited. Theology tries to understand the God we believe in which is good. However, the Divinity is beyond human comprehension.

Boff argues that,

Before the universe was, before the tiniest atom of cosmic matter moved, before time began, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed in themselves in the immense irruption of life and love. The immanent Trinity existed. And

²⁵² Ibid., xiv-xv.

²⁵³ Ibid., xv-xvi.

we, as creatures, existed in God as eternal projects, ‘begotten’ by the Father in the heart of the Son with the love of the Holy Spirit. All we know of this immanent Trinity, as it is in itself, is what this Trinity has graciously shown us, in words and deeds, and most especially through the incarnation of the Son and the coming of the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁴

The immanent Trinity is God who is eternal; in time, this God reveals God’s self as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to Boff, human beings only know what God reveals to them in the history of salvation. The inner life of God is incomprehensible to the human mind. Boff continues,

the Son of the Father exists in himself immanently. The same holds good for the Holy Spirit: by following Jesus, believing in his words and deeds, accepting the witness of the disciples who touched the Word of life (1 John 1:1), we are imbued with the transforming power that is the Spirit, we are led by the Spirit to give ourselves to the Father, confirmed by the Spirit in our knowledge that Jesus is truly the Son and Liberator, assured by the Spirit that God is our Father and we God’s sons and daughters. Furthermore, we see the Spirit come down on Mary and from a virgin makes her the Mother of God; in her the Spirit is fully present in such a way that she can be called the tabernacle of the Spirit. Here is the Spirit in a unique sense manifesting itself as a divine person, as it is. If this is how the Spirit is manifested in our history, then this means that the Holy Spirit is immanently God together with the Father and the Son. Because the triune God is revealed to us as God is, the immanent Trinity is correlated to the economic Trinity.²⁵⁵

Boff sees the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as one God, since this God is revealed at the incarnation and sending of the Spirit, he claims that there is equality between the immanent and economic Trinity. Boff maintains that,

This correlation should not be understood in a reductionist manner, as though we were doing away with the barrier between time and eternity. What is manifested in our history is indeed God as God is, trinitarian. But the Trinity as absolute and sacramental mystery is much more than what is manifested...What the Trinity is in itself is beyond our reach, hidden in unfathomable mystery, mystery that will be particularly revealed to us in the bliss of eternal life, but will always escape us in full, since the Trinity is a mystery in itself and not only for human beings. So we have to say: the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, but not the whole of the immanent Trinity. This is much more than has been revealed to human beings. As a further consequence of this, we also have to say that not the whole of the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. The correlation is perfect (which allows the ‘vice-versa’ in the axiom) when we are dealing with the incarnation or – in...the coming of the Spirit on Mary. Here

²⁵⁴ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 213-214.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

indeed the self-communication of the Son and the Holy Spirit means the presence of the eternal in time, of the divine Person as 'person' in human reality. What happens on earth corresponds exactly to what exists in heaven. But the Trinity is all this and still much more.²⁵⁶

Boff concurs that the economic Trinity does not exhaust the inner life of God (immanent Trinity) which is a mystery beyond understanding even if the Trinity is the same Father, Son and Holy Spirit known in the history of salvation. He even agrees that no human being would be able to know the whole reality of the Trinity in the beatific vision. Yves Congar remarks that Rahner's

essential argument ...is that the 'economic' Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa. By 'economy' is meant the carrying out of God's plan in creation and the redemption of man or the covenant of grace. In it, God commits and reveals himself. One of Rahner's intentions and one of his main concerns in his Trinitarian theology is to establish a relationship, and even a unity, between the treatises which the analytical genius of Scholasticism and modern teaching present successively, but without showing their mutual coherence. We attribute 'creation' to 'God,' for example, but at the same time we continue to have a fundamentally pre-Trinitarian notion of that 'God.' We obviously attribute 'redemption' to Jesus Christ, but he is 'God' and we do not place the Word as such into that 'God.' In addition, despite the exegetical studies that have been written about this question, the relationship between creation and redemption, which is a relationship that is closely connected with the Word made flesh, is seldom developed...Rahner brings them together when he affirms his 'fundamental axiom' that the *Trinity that is manifested in the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa.*²⁵⁷

For Congar, Rahner sets the Trinity at the centre of theological studies and unifies the different aspects of theological discourse under the doctrine of the Trinity. He gives reasons for Rahner's axiom, by explaining that,

Three reasons justify and throw light on that fundamental principle: The Trinity is a mystery of salvation. If it were not, it would not have been revealed to us. Our recognition of this fact enables us to establish a relationship and even a unity between the treatises which have to a great extent lacked this. This implies...that the Trinity in itself is also the Trinity of economy. There is at least one case of fundamental importance in which this affirmation must be made—the incarnation...there is at least one 'sending,' one presence in the world, one reality in the economy of salvation which is not merely appropriated to a certain divine person, but is proper to him... Here something takes place in the world itself, outside

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 215.

²⁵⁷ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: The Complete Three Volume Work in One Volume*, vol. III, (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 11-17.

the immanent divine life, which is not simply the result of the efficient causality of the triune God working as one nature in the world...The history of salvation is not simply the history of God's revelation of himself. It is also the history of his communication of himself. God himself is the content of that self-communication. The economic Trinity (the revealed and communicated Trinity) and the immanent Trinity are identical because God's communication of himself to men in the Son and the Spirit would not be self-communication of God if what God is for us in the Son and the Spirit was not peculiar to God in himself...however, God may be partly revealed in the economy by his activity, but he remains absolutely hidden in his essential being.²⁵⁸

According to Congar, "The Trinity is the mystery of salvation," hence, there is relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. But before the creation of the world and its redemption, God already exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If God decides not to create the world or to save it, God is still the eternal Trinity. While the economic Trinity reveals that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the history of salvation at the same time hides and reveals God. It hides God as God is in God's self. The inner life of God is not totally revealed to human beings; otherwise, we would be able to behold God in God's glory. The economic Trinity equally reveals God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one true God, but not the whole reality of God.

3.6 The Concept of Person in the Trinitarian Theology of the Cappadocian Fathers

3.6.1 Etymology of the term 'person'

It appears that the origin of the term 'person' is elusive to scholars through generations. Thus, it is difficult for them to arrive at a complete definition of the concept of 'person.' Max Müller and Alois Halder who define the concept of person claim that they are not sure of its origin. They state that,

The word 'person' comes from the Latin *persona*, usually derived from the verb *personare*, 'to sound through,' though this is not certain. In Medieval philosophy it was sometimes said to come from *per se una*, which is certainly false. Modern philosophy links it with the Etruscan *persu*, a word found written beside a representation of two masked figures. It was used to translate the Greek πρόσωπον, face, first in the sense of the actor's mask, which designated his role.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁵⁹ Max Müller and Alois Halder, "Person," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1975), 1206-1207. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 31-39.

John Rist concurs with the idea that it is difficult to establish the origin of the concept of person. In his book, *What is a Person? Realities, Constructs, Illusions* he gives reasons for writing the book:

I have written this work because although ‘persons’ are often philosophically or theologically newsworthy, and excellent more or less systematic accounts of them exist – especially in their different ways...there are few adequately detailed historical accounts of how the concept of person originated, how it was constantly modified, how it is open to further modification, how it disintegrated, and whether, to what extent, and under what wider cultural conditions, any version of it can still do useful philosophical work: in brief over persons – as in other philosophical domains – we have found ourselves – I would argue for worse – where we are. Since understandings of what a ‘person’ is are now so varied, so vague and so disputed, it is unsurprising that those who employ the word – usually to advocate some mode of treating human beings well or ill – do not recognize that in their neglect of history they are often talking past one another.²⁶⁰

Because of the difficulty associated with consensus around the concept of person, and because understanding the term person seems to evolve through generations, trinitarian theologians find it problematic to apply it to the interpretation of the Trinity. Some accept it as an adequate notion when speaking about God, while others argue that it is too individualistic to be used to describe the Trinity. However, the Cappadocian fathers helped the understanding of person in trinitarian theology. They did this by identification of *hypostasis* with *prosopon*.²⁶¹ *Hypostasis* is that which stands under nature, the individuating instance of nature. Thus, according to Ludwig Ott,

an hypostasis is an individual complete substance existing entirely in itself, an incommunicable instance. A person is hypostasis endowed with reason. Hypostasis is the bearer of nature and the ultimate subject of all being and acting, while nature is that through which the hypostasis is and acts.²⁶²

Zizioulas is of the opinion that prior to the Cappadocians’ linguistic ambiguation, *hypostasis* was not equivalent to *prosopon*, the Greek equivalent to Latin *persona*. *Prosopon* originally meant a role or theatrical mask that enabled an actor to perform

²⁶⁰ John M. Rist, *What is a Person?: Realities, Constructs, Illusions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9-10.

²⁶¹ See LaCugna, *GfU*, 244.

²⁶² Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James C. Bastible, trans. Patrick Lynch, rev. and updated by Robert Fastiggi (London: Bronius Press, 2018), 69.

several roles or *prosopa* at one time.²⁶³ LaCugna argues further that while *hypostasis* was a metaphysical concept for an autonomous concrete existing being or subsistence, *prosopon* meant something added to a being.²⁶⁴ According to Zizioulas, it was this pre-trinitarian meaning of *prosopon* that Sabellius employed in his trinitarian theology.²⁶⁵

The Cappadocians abandoned the classical Greek understanding of *prosopon* as something added to being by identifying *hypostasis* with *Prosopon*, a theatrical term which relates to roles or relationship. Consequently, they suggested that “person” as a Greek term, moved from being merely a mask to being an epiphany of *hypostasis*, that which stands and upholds the mask; what makes a human being an “I” that wills, decides, loves, and relates in freedom. It was this Cappadocians’ identification of hypostasis which is a distinctive, incommunicable instantiation of substance, and *prosopon* which has to do with roles, relationships, and moving outward in freedom that highlights both the distinctiveness and the relatedness of each person and gives personhood its fundamental meaning as an ontological reality-in-relation. Hence, Zizioulas contends that a person is more than a mere individual; it is rather an individual substance with the capacity for relationship because of its freedom and emotive, cognitive and rational capacities. In other words, a person is one who has the ability to think, will and love freely.²⁶⁶ Fox writes that,

In order to preclude the Sabellian interpretation, the Cappadocians started from the assumption that each of the persons of the Trinity was a *full and complete* being. At the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E., the words *hypostasis* and *ousia* had been used synonymously in language for God. What the Cappadocian leaders did was to take the word *hypostasis* which meant *concrete and full being* and identified it with ‘person.’ God as Trinity was therefore to be understood as three *hypostases*, three full beings. Then, to avoid introducing tritheism into God, they suggested that *ousia* should be taken to mean ‘substance’ in the generic sense, and therefore applicable to more than one being. Basil of Caesarea was the first to make a clear distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. Soon after, Gregory Nazianzen identified *hypostasis* with the Word *prosōpon*, and Basil’s brother, Gregory of Nyssa, reinforced the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* and coined the Trinitarian formula *mia ousia – tres hypostaseis*. The concept of person as an ontological category was thus born.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 34. See LaCugna, *GFU*, 66.

²⁶⁴ LaCugna, *GfU*, 244. See also William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1988), 100.

²⁶⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 37.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶⁷ Fox, *God as Communion*, 38.

Fox indicates that Cappadocian fathers identified *hypostasis* with the term ‘person.’ LaCugna writes that it was with this identification that the Cappadocians applied the term “person” to the distinction in God.²⁶⁸ This implies that for the Cappadocians, trinitarian Persons are not only divinely subsistent but also distinct beings which highlights communion as the essence of the Trinity. According to John Wilks,

The linking of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* in Trinitarian thought altered the meanings of both words so that personhood became the distinctive mark of beings that exists in relationship. By introducing a relational term, the notion of communion (*koinonia*) appears at the heart of Trinitarian doctrine.²⁶⁹

Wilks argues further that the trinitarian interpretation the Cappadocians brought into the meaning of person as a relational entity means that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in relationship. This is why Zizioulas argues that a purely humanistic understanding of personhood that eschews its theological underpinning and enthrones radical individualism in which a person becomes a closed and autonomous arbiter of truth and morality is false.²⁷⁰ Wilks proposes that such an approach forgets “that historically and existentially the concept of the person is indissolubly bound with theology...Without this, the deepest meaning of personhood can neither be grasped nor justified.”²⁷¹ Tanner and Alberigo make the argument that theology paved the way for the correct understanding of personhood. They suggest that the concept of ‘person’ as a concrete and distinct being but one who is fundamentally communal or relational is the result of the Church’s effort in the patristic era to understand the true nature of person. Official recognition of the new synonymous meaning of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* came about at the Council of Constantinople, 381, when it stated “that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have a single Godhead and power and substance...in three most perfect hypostases, or three perfect persons.”²⁷² So, the official formulation of Christian faith consolidated the teaching of the Cappadocians.

Hill argues that it is important to note that there is a fundamental difference between “person” as applied to human beings and as applied to the divine subsistents. He

²⁶⁸ LaCugna, *GfU*, 244.

²⁶⁹ John G.F. Wilks, *The Trinitarian Ontology of John Zizioulas*; 76, accessed February 4, 2021. http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol25/zizoulas_wilks.pdf. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 39.

²⁷⁰ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 18.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷² Tanner and Alberigo, eds., *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils*, 28.

explains that applied to human beings, “person” means an individual, a separate subsistent of the human nature. Consequently, human persons on the one hand are easily divisible and sometimes fragmented physically, intellectually, psychologically, culturally, and economically. On the other, they can also lose their individuality through common neurosis, collective consciousness, group thinking, mass hysteria, or a mob mentality. But applied to God, “person” refers to divine subsistents which, although distinct, are inseparably united in a numerically one divine substance.²⁷³

LaCugna believes that the trinitarian concept of person, especially as a hypostasis, locates relationship as the centre of personhood; that is, a person is by nature relational. Despite our individuation as a free, self-conscious individual capable of willing and acting as a moral agent who can be held accountable for his or her actions, a person is inherently reaching out to the other.²⁷⁴ Personhood is both a gift and a vocation; it is an ontological given and existential project. Created in the image of God who is a communion of Persons, we are gifted with inalienable personhood. But as free, hence, moral agents, ours is a life-long journey to authentic personhood, a journey that is made easier by the presentation of Christ as the authentic and model person, and one who reached perfect *perichoresis* communion with God and with humanity. It should be noted that, as already stated in this work, the meaning of person as we have it today and as it is applied to God is from the identification of the theatrical term person or *prosopon*, and the metaphysical term hypostasis.

The application of the term “person” to the three distinctions or substantial relations in the Godhead was a major breakthrough during the formative stage of trinitarian doctrine, albeit not without controversy. In relation to the application of the term “person” to God, one of the early objections noted by Aquinas was that it was not a revealed name of God.²⁷⁵ Nevertheless, as Aquinas argued, even though the name might not have been explicitly revealed by the scriptures, the scriptural description of God certainly presents God as a person.²⁷⁶ In the Judeo-Christian scripture, God revealed God’s self principally as a Person; that is, one who knows, wills, communicates, and enters into deep communion with the other. According to Michael Schmaus, in the scriptures God never appears as “it” but always as “I” (cf. Isaiah 40-49). God is also

²⁷³ Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 103. See also Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 289-290.

²⁷⁴ LaCugna, *GfU*, 250.

²⁷⁵ Aquinas, 1a. 29.3.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

presented as one who is self-conscious or self-aware; that is, one who knows himself (John 8: 42-47); 15: 18-36).²⁷⁷ Thus, even though the scriptures might not have used the term “person” to describe God or the distinctions in God, its presentation of God and God’s activities exhibit the characteristics of “personhood”.

Aquinas points out that the second challenge in applying person to God is that, following Boethius’ classical definition of a person as an “individual substance of a rational nature,” calling God a person could imply the individualisation of the divine substance.²⁷⁸ This problem was intensified with the identification of the Latin *persona* with the Greek *hypostasis*, which in Latin could be interpreted as substance and made it open to misunderstanding as either substance or what underlies accidents.²⁷⁹ Schmaus explains, when the three distinctions in the Godhead are called persons, it could imply three separate individuation or instances of the divine substances in which case saying there are three Persons in God which would amount to tritheism. While individual human beings are individuations of the human substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share a numerically one substance. The above difficulty made Richard of St. Victor adapt Boethius’ definition of the Trinity by defining a person as “the immediate existence of an intellectual being.”²⁸⁰ This means as Aquinas writes that a divine Person is an instance of the subsistence of the one, indivisible divine nature.²⁸¹ Kasper contends that the individualistic conception of personhood has resurfaced in the modern tendency to misconstrue personhood as an isolated, “self-contained” individual who is capable of existing all by itself.²⁸² This led to a renewed objection to the use of ‘person’ to designate the distinctions in God. According to Schmaus,

The very fact that God is not one person but three makes it impossible to apply the concept of person to [God] in the sense it has for our daily experience. Indeed the threefold personhood of God makes the use of the concept of person extraordinarily difficult in theology.²⁸³

²⁷⁷ Michael Schmaus, *Dogma: God and Creation*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 33.

²⁷⁸ Aquinas, 1a 29.1; see also Schmaus, *Dogma Two: God and Creation*, 31.

²⁷⁹ Hypostasis is a combination of *hupo* – under, beneath, and *stasis* – standing. Therefore, literally, it means substance, essence, sediment, foundation, the underlying or fundamental reality. This makes it the equivalent of the Latin *substantia* which is a combination of *sub* – under, and *stantia/sto* – standing. As we have already shown in this work, the Cappadocians did a lot to clear this ambiguity. See Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 60.

²⁸⁰ Schmaus, *Dogma Two: God and Creation*, 31.

²⁸¹ Aquinas, 1a.29.3.

²⁸² Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 285.

²⁸³ Schmaus, *Dogma Two: God and Creation*, 31. See also Rahner, *The Trinity*, 109; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1, ed. G.W. Bromilley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 412.

Therefore, the term “person” can only be applied to the Trinity analogously, especially if we define a person as a subsistence characterised fundamentally by intellect, or rationality, will, self-consciousness, transcendence and communion both horizontally and vertically. The term is more our own way of speaking about God. Schmaus further states that “The idea of analogy is particularly important here. That is to say, God is personal in a sense different from that in which human beings are personal, and personhood as it applies to human beings must be denied when we speak of God.”²⁸⁴ He explains that, “person,” when applied to God, refers to relationships that are mutually exclusive, that is, unique and incommunicable in the sense that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit and vice versa. Schmaus continues explaining that the three relations are also mutually inclusive in a sense that the three divine Persons are mutually correlating and also because, consequent on trinitarian perichoresis, the three Persons are inseparable. Therefore, when we describe God as one *mia physis/ousia, treis hypostaseis* (one nature, three persons), we mean that even though God is one, God exists fundamentally as Persons in relationships.

Therefore, Schmaus argues that despite the observations and objections, the term “person,” even in its modern conceptualisations which tends to over-emphasise the individualistic dimension of a person, still remains indispensable in trinitarian theology.²⁸⁵ As Schmaus notes, “it will no doubt be scarcely possible to dispense with the concept of person entirely if we are to be able to make clear statements regarding the Trinity and Christology.”²⁸⁶ The description of God as person is a special character of Christian understanding of God which differentiates it from other religions. So, Schmaus suggests that by applying the term “person” to God, Christianity emphasises the truth that the God of Jesus Christ is not an impersonal force that commands and rewards good behaviour and punishes sins but rather a person capable of sharing our lives in a free, deliberate and self-transcending way.

LaCugna is concerned about the identification of *prosopon* or *persona*, an external, theatrical term, with *hypostasis*, a metaphysical, ontological term as the appropriate meaning of person made the term “person” change from being a mere physical mask that we wear to what stands and upholds the mask; the “I” who wills,

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

decides, loves, and relates in freedom. The identification of *persona* with *hypostasis* also means that personhood is not an “addition to being but how being exists.”²⁸⁷ In other words, personhood is not something that is added to us at some point in our existence; it is rather essential to our being. Therefore, as the image of a trinitarian God for whom “to be and to be a person are identical,” we are essentially defined by personhood so that from the moment of our being we subsist as persons.²⁸⁸

Another important point we need to note is that the above understanding of trinitarian personhood emphasises both the distinctiveness and the relatedness of a person. Applied to us as the image of God, it means that personhood underlies both our distinctiveness and relatedness. In other words, the Trinity teaches us that a person is not only rational and autonomous by nature but also relational, so that while a person must maintain his or her distinctiveness, he or she is also inexorably ordained for relationship or communion. This understanding of personhood confounds the modern tendency to over-emphasise the individualistic dimension of being a person. As persons, we are not only masks, that is, individuals separated from others by an external demarcation; we are also *hypostasis*, that is, beings defined by our capacity to relate and to love.

It is only when the human person harmonises autonomy and communion that he/she truly becomes an image of God who is fundamentally persons-in-communion. Anthony Menkiti writes that this emphasis on distinctiveness and relatedness as fundamental elements of personhood is also very important in safeguarding individual autonomy and rights without endorsing individualism. He stresses that this is very important for Africa where most of the time society or community takes precedence over the individual. He makes the point that while this situation can promote relationship and communality, it often crushes the individual and misconstrues unity as rigid uniformity which subsumes individuals into an amorphous mass where all members of the community are expected to behave and conform; thereby creating a kind of anthropological modalism, where to see one is to see the other.²⁸⁹ As LaCugna maintains, “not every configuration of person-in-relation images God. Indeed, many structured societies destroy or inhibit full personhood. Many societies are, in a word, antithetical to

²⁸⁷ LaCugna, *GfU*, 244.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 88. See also *CCC*, 2270.

²⁸⁹ Anthony Ifeanyi Menkiti, “Person and community in African Traditional Thought,” in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. Richard A. Wright (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 172. He contends that “as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be.”

divine life.”²⁹⁰ Therefore, as the Cappadocian fathers tell us, trinitarian theology helps us to clarify the authentic meaning of person as more than an individuated substance that stands in contra-distinction over against other members of its species. The trinitarian perichoresis (interpenetration) without confusion calls us to maintain the delicate balance between the need for communion and individual autonomy; between unity and personal uniqueness. Thus, the interpretation of person in the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers contributes to the understanding of communion of three Persons in the one Godhead. Marmion and Nieuwenhove echo this contribution of the Cappadocians, stating that,

Prior to the Cappadocians, the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* had been used fluidly and interchangeably. The Cappadocians however, gave the notion of person greater prominence. God as person – as *hypostasis* of the Father – freely out of love begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit.²⁹¹

Marmion and Nieuwenhove, observe that while the Church Fathers defined *ousia* and *hypostasis* to mean either the oneness or distinction in the Godhead, the Cappadocians differentiated the two words. For them, *ousia* means the essence, nature or substance while *hypostasis* designates the distinction in the Trinity. Thus, *hypostasis* is the personal quality of each divine Person as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This understanding of personhood in the Trinity helps to acknowledge relationship in the Godhead. Marmion and Nieuwenhove further contend that, it is the “Cappadocians’ insight that God’s Fatherhood must be thought of relationally, one person in reference to another.”²⁹² In other words, the Cappadocians contributed to the understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live in loving communion with one another.

However, Tertullian was the first person to use the concept of person in trinitarian theology and in relation to the incarnation of Christ. Referring to the book of Genesis where it is said: “Let us make human beings in our own image and after our own likeness,” (1: 26), Tertullian argued that “because he was himself the Father-Son-Spirit, did he for that reason make himself and speak to himself in the plural...because there already was attached to him the Son, a second Person...and a third Person, the Spirit.”²⁹³ Tertullian used the terminology of ‘person’ to establish distinction in the doctrine of the

²⁹⁰ LaCugna, *GfU*, 266.

²⁹¹ Marmion and Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 82.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁹³ Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Treatise Against Praxeas*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (London: S.P.C.K), 1948), # 12.

Trinity. Rist comments that, “In post-biblical Christian thought the word *persona* in a theological sense can be found at least as early as the second century when Tertullian applies it to the Persons of the Trinity...probably to indicate their different roles, especially the different roles of the Person of Christ. Thus the masks worn by actors [*personae*] indicate different roles played by the actors on the stage.”²⁹⁴ The understanding of the term ‘person’ as a mask in a theatre shows the different actions of those who wear them. Applying it to the Trinity indicates the distinction of the three divine Persons. Rist writes that

the theological use of the term (person) goes back at least to Tertullian and persisted in Latin writers discussing the Trinity. In Greek however, although the equivalent of *persona* – that is, *prosopon* – existed, the Persons of the Trinity are normally called, as at the Council of Constantinople (AD 389), *hupostaseis*. That word literally refers to the subject-term which indicates what underlies the ‘species’: thus, one being, three *hupostaseis*, each of whom is ‘personal.’ Hence the Father exists, the Son exists, and the Spirit exists; they exist individually and together. But although there can be no objection to using both *persona* and *hupostasis* of the Trinity, the two terms indicate rather different approaches: *persona* suggests an actor, an ‘acting person,’ an agent: it is thus in a sense a rather historical-sounding word, perhaps better indicating God’s activity so far as it can be recognized in human history. *Hupostasis*, on the other hand, is more metaphysical, indicating the metaphysical ‘Godhead’ of the divine Persons. It is also more likely to be misinterpreted as indicating some sort of underlying inertness. *Persona*, on the other hand, cannot be misread in that way, and is thus more readily applicable to human as well as divine subjects with no fear of it seeming to be an underlying ‘I know not what,’ and thus liable to an ‘Human’ critique.²⁹⁵

Rist indicates the Council of Constantinople used the term *hypostasis* in reference to the Trinity instead of the concept of person. He equally reveals the different meanings of person and *hypostasis*, noting that “Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa” used “the Greek *prosopon*’s equivalence in theology to what the Latin called a *persona*, as also with *hypostasis* (in their) post-Nicene theology.”²⁹⁶ In other words, the Cappadocian fathers identified the concept of person with the idea of *hypostasis*. They applied it to their interpretation of the Trinity.

²⁹⁴ Rist, *What is a Person?*, 23.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

3.6.2 Theological and Philosophical Concept of Person

Christian faith links the notion of “person” to God the creator. Rist maintains that Christian beliefs holds that a human person “is created in the image and likeness of God, recognizing it as the justification of that intrinsic dignity which we all share, whatever our social estate.”²⁹⁷ Some theologians have tried to define the concept of person. Aquinas asserts that

a human being is said to be made in the image of God insofar as by ‘image’ is meant something with understanding, free in its judgement and with power in itself...it remains for us to consider God’s image...A human being, insofar as he is also the source of his actions, i.e. having free will and power over his own actions.²⁹⁸

Rist challenges Aquinas’ description of ‘person,’ when he writes, “it is impossible to separate the theological/evaluative from the philosophical/supposedly descriptive.”²⁹⁹ That means the term ‘person’ is theologically and philosophically intertwined. He/she cannot be separated from God who is the source of human persons. Aquinas also conceived a person as “a distinct individual subsistence of a rational substance endowed with intellect and will; that is, it has control over its actions; that is, it has the freedom to act or not to act.”³⁰⁰ Aquinas developed and modified Boethius who gave the first known ontological definition of person: “*personae est definitio: naturae rationabilis individua substantia.*”³⁰¹ This could be literally translated as “The individual substance of rational nature.”³⁰² Implicit in this definition of person by Aquinas is that reason and autonomy or freedom determines a person. LaCugna contends that it became not only valid for Christian thought in the Middle Ages but also fundamental to the contemporary individualistic understanding of what it means to be a person.³⁰³ Rist goes further to develop the Christian understanding of ‘person’ by stating that,

‘person’ has come to be used in the developing Mainline Tradition to refer to all human beings, both male and female, created in the image and likeness of God...all, whether born or unborn, able-bodied or disabled, healthy, gravely ill or senile, each person a unique and ultimately

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 70.

²⁹⁸ Aquinas, *ST* 1.IIae (preface).

²⁹⁹ Rist, *What is a Person?*, 63.

³⁰⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, 1a.29.1.

³⁰¹ Boethius, *The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester (London: Heinemann, 1973), 84. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, 1a. 29.1.

³⁰² Ibid., 85. See also LaCugna, *GfU*, 247.

³⁰³ LaCugna, *GfU*, 247.

incommunicable combination of body and soul, to a degree capable of independent action whether virtuous or vicious, aware – unless psychologically damaged – of the parameters within which he or she can so act in the passing of historical time: thus, capable of recapturing the past and, to a degree, predicting the future. All can be *inspired* to virtue or *aroused* to vice, their self-awareness enabling them to transcend themselves by reflecting on the modifying instincts in a way not possible to other animals. This ‘transcendence’ is sometimes called ‘spiritual;’ it at least refers to a capacity to objectify ourselves without losing sight of our underlying subjective self: I can recognize myself *as* myself, a specific human being, without ceasing to be that specific and unique human being also recognizable by others...since mature the person is able to modify his or her behaviour, because more than merely instinctual, we are able to shoulder responsibility for our actions: to be capable of sympathy for our fellows, to put ourselves, to a degree, ‘in the shoes’ of others and to signal our freedom not least by regretting our failures. Human persons are capable of self-giving love...inspired by and for goodness itself.³⁰⁴

Rist balances a philosophical understanding of the notion of person with a theological view of the human person. A human being is an individual with a network of relationships with God and with other human beings and the entire web of creation. Thus, Rist joins some modern thinkers such as Müller and Halder who disagree with a concept by which person is understood as “essence or nature.”³⁰⁵ According to Müller and Halder, “Person does not mean ‘essence or nature’ but actual unique reality of a spiritual being, an undivided whole existing independently and not interchangeably with any other.”³⁰⁶ It seems to mean that the concept of person is best understood from the spiritual reality, upon which depends its “inviolable dignity” according to Müller and Halder.³⁰⁷ In other words, a person can only be known in reference to the triune God who creates human persons in the “image and likeness of God” (Gen 1: 26), and endows them with intrinsic value. They argue that, “on this basis too, though God is the absolute mystery, we are entitled to designate God as a person and to call [God’s] relationship to [human beings] a personal one.”³⁰⁸ Thus, because of the unique bond that exists between God and a human person, God is seen as acting in a very intimate way with human beings. God shows the capacity to act in a ‘personal’ way with humanity when God becomes a human person in Jesus Christ.³⁰⁹ Zizioulas argues that,

³⁰⁴ Rist, *What is a Person?*, 256-257.

³⁰⁵ Müller and Halder, “Person,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology*, 1207.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1208.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1207.

Philosophy can arrive at the confirmation of the reality of the person, but only theology can treat of the genuine, authentic person, because the authentic person, as absolute ontological freedom, must be 'uncreated, that is, unbounded by any 'necessity,' including its own existence. If such a person does not exist in reality, the concept of person is a presumptuous daydream.³¹⁰

The concept of person is meaningful only in relation to God. Fox states that,

Christology is the assurance to the human person that her or his nature can be 'assumed' and hypostasized in a manner free from ontological necessity and that her or his existence can be affirmed as personal on the basis of relationship with God in Christ. The unity of the human and the divine that was effected in Christ means that the human person is now capable of the freedom and love that exist within the communion of Godself...In Christ every woman, child and man may be saved from the fate of being separated individual entities, and personhood may be restored...This has relevance for all humanity.³¹¹

Christ is the second Person in the Trinity. He draws human beings into the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and at the same time, because the three divine Persons live in love with one another, their communion overflows to human society and inspires human beings to live life of loving communion. Moltmann writes that,

The word *persona*...originally meant mask and comes from the language of the theatre. What is meant is the mask disguising the actor's features, through which his voice is heard (*personare*). In modern speech this corresponds exactly to the sociological concept of the role. Role sociology has also borrowed this term from the theatre and applied it to the social functions of men and women...In Greek theology...the term *hypostasis* was used quite early on, parallel to the term *prosopon*, in the doctrine of the Trinity. Hypostasis does not mean the mask or mode of appearance; it means individual existence of a particular nature...The personality which represents their untransferable, individual being with respect to their common divine nature, means, on the other hand, the character of relation with respect to the other Persons. They have their divine nature in common; but their particular individual nature is determined in their relationship to one another...The three divine Persons exist in their particular, unique natures as Father, Son and Spirit in their relationships to one another, and are determined through these relationships. It is in these relationships that they are persons. Being a person in this respect means existing-in-relationship...The inner being of the Persons is moulded by these relationships in accordance with the relational difference...But this relational understanding of the Persons has as its premise the substantial interpretation of their individuality; the one does not replace the other.³¹²

³¹⁰ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 43.

³¹¹ Fox, *God as Communion*, 47.

³¹² Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 171-172.

For Moltmann, the three divine Persons in the Trinity are distinct as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but they exist in communion with one another. Father as a divine person is related to the divine Persons of Son and Holy Spirit. Each of them relates to the Divine Persons of the others in their one Godhead. He elaborates:

The doctrine of *the Trinity of love* carried on the development of the concept of Person, and took it one step further. This doctrine was evolved in the West from the time of Augustine and Richard of St. Victor and was pursued right down to the Idealistic theology of the nineteenth century. According to Richard of St. Victor, being a person does not merely mean subsisting; nor does it mean subsisting-in-relation. It means *existing*. He proposed as improvement of the old definition: ‘A divine person is a non-interchangeable existence of the divine nature’....By the word existence – *eksistentia* – he meant: existence, in the light of another. It is true that in the first place he related this other to the divine nature. But it can be related to the other Persons too. Then existence means a deepening of the concept of relation: every divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they exist totally in the other.³¹³

Moltmann indicates that the authentic understanding of the term ‘person’ is formulated from the doctrine of the Trinity. In his view, trinitarian theology uses the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to teach that to be a ‘person’ is to exist in relationship and love. He writes that the understanding of a person in relational terms will also shed light on the knowledge of the Trinity. “Only when we are capable of thinking of Persons, relations, and changes in the *relations together* does the idea of the Trinity lose its usual static, rigid quality. Then not only does the eternal life of the triune God become conceivable; its eternal vitality becomes conceivable too.”³¹⁴

3.6.3 The Contemporary State of the Concept of ‘Person’

The shift from theological understanding of ‘person’ as a being in relation to God makes it difficult to relate the Trinity with the notion of ‘person.’ For example, René Descartes perceives a human person as a thinking thing. He states: “I think, therefore, I exist.”³¹⁵ He

³¹³ Ibid., 173-174.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 174.

³¹⁵ René Descartes, *Meditation on First Philosophy*, trans. J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.

posits the notion that only human reason is at the centre of everything. Rist refers to a letter that Descartes wrote to Colvius, comparing Augustine's notion of person with his:

He [Augustine] goes on to show that there is a certain likeness of the Trinity in us, in that we exist, we know that we exist, and we love the existence and the knowledge we have. I [Descartes], on the other hand, use the argument to show that the I which is thinking is an immaterial substance with no bodily element.³¹⁶

Descartes elevated the mind as the concept of person. Rist claims that Descartes "has reduced the human being to something like an 'immaterial' computer able to reflect on itself. Were that correct, then not only the traditional soul but virtually every other 'component' of the 'person' hitherto recognized – other than the fortuitous connection to our bodies – has disappeared."³¹⁷ However, Kasper expresses a different view from Descartes, contending that:

Once the foundations has been laid in the fourth century for the church's doctrine of the Trinity and the concepts used in it, this doctrine and these concepts remained for a millennium...the undisputed joint possession not only of the churches of the East and the West but also of the churches of the Reformation and the Catholic Church. Anti-trinitarian trends came into existence only in the modern period...the seventeenth century rationalism, which left its mark both on the theology of the Enlightenment and on liberal theology. The objections raised were of many kinds...one objection stands out as more important than the others: modern subjectivity and the modern concept of person which it has produced. In the modern period, person is no longer understood in ontological terms but is defined as a self-conscious free centre of action and as individual personality. This modern ideal of person was quite compatible with the idea of a personal God. But once this new concept of person was accepted, the idea of three persons in one nature became impossible...For the modern self-conscious person could see in other persons only competitors. The combining of oneness and threeness became an insoluble problem.³¹⁸

Patrick Quinn contends that Descartes inspired the Enlightenment movement in eighteenth-century Europe with his idea that "if reason is employed in a methodical, logical, mathematical and scientific way, it is possible to find everything there to know...the motto of the Enlightenment is to have the courage to use one's intelligence, to dare to understand and thereby free oneself from dependence on others."³¹⁹ The concept

³¹⁶ Rist, *What is a Person?*, 94.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹⁸ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 285. See also Emmanuel Durand, "The Trinitarian Influence on the Christian Life" in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 163.

³¹⁹ Patrick Quinn, *Philosophy of Religion A-Z* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 69-70.

of person according to Descartes is not open to relationships with others. Human beings are not immaterial. They interact with one another with their whole being and not only through their minds. The concept of person as used by the early Church is no longer what the idea of person means in modern era; hence the use of person in trinitarian theology is challenged. According to Kasper, the “self-conscious individual personality” of the modern period cannot be used to describe the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who exist in eternal communion. It becomes impossible to use the notion of a self-centred person to discuss the image of God who is a family of three persons living in loving communion.³²⁰

Kasper concludes:

The traditional concept of person is undoubtedly an ancient and venerable one. Admittedly, it is not found in scripture, but the same is true of many important dogmatic concepts; this is certainly not a sufficient reason for excluding it from use in dogmatic discourse. ‘Not biblical’ is far from the same as ‘unbiblical’ or ‘antibiblical.’ The decisive question is not whether a concept as such occurs in scripture, but whether it represents an objectively valid interpretation of the biblical testimony. The tradition undoubtedly regarded the concept of person as that kind of valid interpretation, and as such the concept formed part of the church’s official language beginning with the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381). The language of ‘one God in three persons’ thus has the authority of tradition behind it. Tradition as such is not, of course, a decisive argument. But it becomes one when it gives an objective interpretation and more precise statement of an original statement of revelation itself. According to the Catholic view the church can unequivocally raise this kind of interpretation of scripture to the rank of a proposition of faith.³²¹

Although, God is indescribable and ineffable mystery, human beings only have human terminology to talk about God. In so far as the term they use is not heretical and helps them to understand God who befriends them, it is legitimate to use the term ‘person’ because it helps human beings to learn how to articulate the experience of God. Even the name ‘God’ we call the Divinity is not adequate description of God. It is good for every generation to seek ways how to understand God and make God meaningful for society. That is why Kasper comments that,

For the same tradition that transmits the concept of person also show an awareness of the problematic character of the concept of person. Jerome in his day was already of the opinion that the language of three hypostases was like honey in which poison was concealed. Even Augustine was

³²⁰ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 285-286.

³²¹ Ibid.

conscious of being in a predicament. He is aware of a linguistic inadequacy and a poverty of concepts, and he asks: three what? His answer: 'Three persons – not because I want to say this but because I may not remain silent.' Anselm of Canterbury even speaks of 'three something-or-other (*tres nescio quid*).' Thomas Aquinas, too, realizes that the adoption of the concept of person, which is not in scripture, was due to the need of debating with heretics.³²²

Kasper enumerates some of the theologians that struggle with the concept of person in trinitarian discourse. This shows the difficulty of applying human terminology to the description of the incomprehensible God. He writes that,

The problem was rendered more acute in the modern age because the concept of person changed in relation to that which was current in the early church and in the Middle Ages. Ever since Locke, 'person' has been looked upon as characterized by self-consciousness: a person is a thinking, rational being endowed with understanding and reflection and capable of knowing itself as itself and as the same thinking being through different times and in different places; this continuity is possible only by reason of self-consciousness, which is inseparable from and essential to thinking... The definition of person which had been current in the early Church and in the Middle Ages and which the doctrine of the Trinity presupposes, thus became open to misunderstanding and even became unintelligible. For the one divine nature evidently excludes three consciousnesses. Now since the church is not master of the history of concepts and since it must speak within a concrete pre-given linguistic situation and make itself understood therein, the question arises of whether the church in such a situation cannot best ensure the objective continuity of its confession by varying the linguistic expression of it; whether, therefore, in the doctrine of the Trinity it should renounce a concept of person that has become unintelligible and open to misunderstanding and replace it with a better one.³²³

The shift in understanding the concept of person makes it difficult to insert it in the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, some theologians look for an alternative in trinitarian theology. Rahner for example uses "three distinct manners of subsisting" instead of three persons.³²⁴ He tries to solve the problem raised by the concept of person in trinitarian theology:

The one self-communication of the one God occurs in three different manners of given-ness, in which the one God is given concretely for us in himself, and not vicariously by other realities through their transcendental relation to God. God is the concrete God in each one of these manner of given-ness – which, of course, refer to each other relatively, without modalistically coinciding. If we translate this in terms of 'immanent'

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid., 187.

³²⁴ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 109.

Trinity, we may say: the one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting. ‘Distinct manner of subsisting’ would then be the explanatory concept, not for person, which refers to that which subsists as distinct, but for the ‘personality’ which makes God’s concrete reality, as it meets us in different ways, into precisely this one who meets us *thus*. This meeting-us-*thus* must always be conceived as belonging to God in and for himself. The single ‘person’ in God would then be: God as existing and meeting us in this determined distinct manner of subsisting.³²⁵

One problem with using the term ‘person’ to describe the Godhead is that it is not clearly stated in scripture.³²⁶ However, if we speak about three divine persons as three subsistent relations we are talking about three distinct and different centres of consciousness, awareness and activity, we intend three distinct subjects, three distinct natures which suggest three Gods. Kasper argues that Rahner,

prefers to speak instead of ‘three distinct manners of subsisting’...his intention is not to eliminate use of the concept of person; he simply wants to use his own terminology as well, in order to make it clear that the concept of person as used in the doctrine of the Trinity is not perfectly clear and obvious...his suggestion is at least a possible and permissible contribution to discussion in the framework of a Catholic dogmatics...It must in fact be said that if the concept of person is open to misunderstanding, the concept of ‘distinct manner of subsistence’ is unintelligible...it is not enough that the trinitarian confession should be marked by logical clarity; this confession is also to be fit for doxological use. But no one can invoke, adore and glorify a distinct manner of subsisting...If, then, we are not to conjure up new misunderstandings and if we are not to turn the trinitarian confession completely into a book with seven seals for ‘ordinary’ Christian, we have no choice but to retain the traditional language of the church and interpret it to the faithful.³²⁷

Kasper argues for the retention of the concept of person in trinitarian theology in order to make the faith meaningful and avoid confusion in the interpretation of the central belief of Christianity. In regard to the “three distinct manners of subsisting” by Rahner, Kasper maintains that,

What Rahner describes is in fact not all the full modern understanding of person but an extreme individualism in which each person is a centre of action who possesses himself, disposes himself and is set off over against others. But Fichte and Hegel had already moved beyond such a point of view. Ever since the time of Feuerbach modern personalism as represented by M. Buber, F. Ebner, and F. Rosenzweig...have made it entirely clear that person exists only in relation; that in concrete

³²⁵ Ibid. 109-110.

³²⁶ Aquinas, 1a.29.3.

³²⁷ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 287-288.

personality exists only as interpersonality, subjectivity only as intersubjectivity. The human person exists only in relations of I-Thou-we kind. Within the horizon of this modern understanding of person, an isolated unipersonal God is inconceivable. Thus it is precisely the modern concept of person that offers a point of contact for the doctrine of the Trinity.³²⁸

In other words, if a person were to be defined with the notions of relationality and love, it could be used to interpret the Trinity. However, Kasper warns that,

It is clear that personalist categories can be applied only analogically to the Trinity. This means that every similarity is accompanied by an even greater dissimilarity. Since in God not only the unity but also the differentiation and therefore the opposition is always greater than in human interpersonal relationships, the divine persons are not less dialogical but infinitely more dialogical than human persons are. The divine persons are not only in dialogue, they *are* dialogue...in other words: in God and among the divine persons, and because of, not despite, their infinitely greater unity, there is also an infinitely greater inter-relationality and interpersonality than in human inter-personal relations.³²⁹

Kasper implies that no human terminology can describe God. The different notions that theology uses to describe God are only what help to get a little glimpse of the divinity. To say that loving relationships exist in God means that God is a million times more loving than human beings. He says that “the concept of person by reason of its origin expresses the idea of dialogue and of God as a dialogical being. It points to God as the being who lives in the Word and subsists in the Word as I and Thou and We.”³³⁰ Human beings ultimately come from the Trinity who created them, thus; to be a person means to exist in dialogue with other human beings, God and creation. Hence, for Kasper:

Neither the substance of the ancients nor the person of the moderns is ultimate, but rather relation as the primordial category of reality. The statement that persons are relations is, of course, first of all simply a statement about the Trinity of God, but important conclusions follow from it with regard to man (woman) as image and likeness of God. Man (woman) is neither a self-sufficient in-himself/herself (substance) nor an autonomous individual for-himself/herself (subject) but a being from God and to God, from other human beings and to other human beings: he/she lives humanly only in I-Thou-We relations. Love proves to be the meaning of his/her being.³³¹

³²⁸Ibid., 289. See also Durand, “Trinitarian Influence on the Christian Life,” 163; LaCugna, *GfU*, 259; John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 24.

³²⁹ Ibid., 290.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

Kasper echoes the idea that communion in human society is a representation of trinitarian communion. Any experience of love in the world comes from the God of love. The concept of person is applicable to God because it denotes inter-relationships and dialogue.

Barth is another theologian who suggests that the concept of person should be replaced in trinitarian discourse. He claims that we should avoid using the term 'person' to talk about the Trinity. He suggest that "we do not use the term 'person' but rather 'mode (or way) of being,' our intention being to express by this term, not absolutely, but relatively better and more simply and clearly the same thing as is meant by 'person.'"³³² Barth prefers to describe the Trinity as "three modes (or ways) of being."³³³ This is exactly what the early Church fought against in the controversy of modalism which perceived the Trinity as one God in different modes. Thus, Barth's idea can very easily be perceived as a modern version of modalism.³³⁴ However, Kasper challenges both Rahner and Barth. He claims that,

the critical acceptance of the modern concept of person is more a problem of content than of terminology...Barth and Rahner have only apparently rebuffed the modern concept of person as unusable...they have no place for three subjects but only for three modes of being or distinct manner of subsisting...because Barth and Rahner accept the modern concept of subject or person, they come to more or less negative conclusions regarding the three persons. But the conclusion is neither cogent from the standpoint of traditional doctrine of the Trinity nor necessary from the standpoint of the modern concept of person. From the standpoint of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity it is clear that the unity of being in God entails unity of consciousness. It is impossible to accept three consciousness in God...in the Trinity we are dealing with three subjects who are reciprocally conscious of each other by reason of one and the same consciousness which the three subjects 'possess,' each in his own proper way. With the modern concept of person as his starting point, H. Muhlen in particular has taken an important step forward in applying personalist categories to the doctrine of the Trinity.³³⁵

The terminologies that Rahner and Barth use to replace the concept of person in trinitarian theology suggest three Gods because it implies three different consciousnesses in God which does not represent the orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Moreover, according to Kasper,

³³² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 359.

³³³ Ibid, 355.

³³⁴ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 287.

³³⁵ Ibid., 288-289.

we can now speak of persons in the Trinity because some modern philosophers and psychologists have reintroduced and stressed the vital importance of the concept of relationship in the notion of person. In other words, these writers understand that a person is not only autonomous but a relational being. For instance, the concept of a human person by Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou* implies that a human being is marked by relationship and communion.³³⁶ Moreover, Aquinas argues that though the term ‘person’ might not have been explicitly revealed as God’s name by the scriptures, the scriptural description of God certainly presents God in personal terms.³³⁷ Another theologian, Nicholas Lash develops this further:

To say that God is three persons in one nature tells us no more about God than would God is three things in one thing, or than God is three and God is one. Not only does the concept of person misleadingly give the impression of telling us something about God which we would not otherwise have known, but the information that it seems to give is false. For us, a person is an individual agent, a conscious centre of memory and choice, of action, reflection and decision. But when we say there are, in God, three persons, we do not mean that (God) has it were, three minds, three memories, three wills.³³⁸

Lash is trying to avoid the idea of tritheism in the interpretation of the Trinity. For him, to use the concept of person to describe God is tantamount to say that they are three Gods in the Trinity. To use the term person in trinitarian theology means that there is no eternal relationship in the Trinity because each of the three would be an autonomous being who exists on its own. He maintains that, “there is no doubt whatsoever, to say my mind, but that the arguments for ceasing to speak of persons in Trinitarian theology greatly outweighs those in favour of the term’s retention.”³³⁹ He does not see any need to use the terminology of person to describe God. His view cannot be totally dismissed because in relation to God, theology is dealing with a mystery beyond human concepts. However, only human experience is available for theology to use in the interpretation of God. Therefore, theology seeks to use human terms in its description of God.

More recently, Johnson also declares that the use of the concept of person in trinitarian theology “is highly inadequate, in fact, improper...To say that God is three persons inevitably gives rise to the picture of God as three distinct people with separated

³³⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1970), 26. See also Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 289.

³³⁷ Aquinas, 1a. 29.3. See also Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 286.

³³⁸ Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in one God* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 32.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

consciousness who are personally interrelated and somehow one. Tritheism is endemic.”³⁴⁰ The different ways of understanding the concept of person raise problems around its use in trinitarian theology. However, Fox maintains that “there seems to be consensus among contemporary theologians regarding the intrinsic value and importance of the retention of the concept of person for an authentic theology of the mystery of God as Trinity.”³⁴¹ Despite the rejection of the use of concept of person to define the Trinity by some theologians, their counterparts welcome it as an adequate notion to use, when speaking about God. Hill notes that “there is no reason whatsoever for supposing that the nuance given to person in contemporary usage is not a development of what *hypostasis* and *substantia* seek to convey.”³⁴² Hill implies that the concept of person is the correct interpretation of the terminologies used in the early Church to describe the Trinity. Fox says that some contemporary theologians are supporting the concept of person because the meaning connotes relationships. She states that some theologians such as,

Mühlen transposes the analogy between God and the creature from the static domain of nature to the more dynamic sphere of communication, from individual self-knowledge and self-love to interpersonal exchange...the meaning of person has evolved, thanks to research in both psychology and philosophical anthropology, and now discloses explicitly a world of meaning that previously went unnoticed...the evolving understanding of person, far from rendering its use improper, are in fact making it more relevant, more expressive of the truth as an extension of consciousness of self and others, its greater emphasis on relationality and its focus on intersubjectivity as an examples of how the contemporary use of person offers certain advantages to Trinitarian theology.³⁴³

Modern psychology and anthropology have shed more light on what it means to be a human person. Their disclosure yields positive results around interpreting the Trinity with the notion of person. Kasper agrees that it is proper to use the concept of person in trinitarian because,

person is highest category we have at our disposal. We can predicate the category in analogous way...The category of person holds fast to the truth that God is not an object or thing that can be observed and thus pinned down; he is, instead, a subject that exists, speaks and acts in a freedom which cannot be reduced to anything else...As a person God is utterly and irreplaceable unique. The concept of person precludes any reduction of God to function, whether the intention be conservative and affirmative or

³⁴⁰Johnson, *She Who Is*, 203.

³⁴¹ Fox, *God as Communion*, 28.

³⁴² Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 222.

³⁴³ Fox, *God as Communion*, 29.

progressivist and critical...The concept of person thus gives expression to the glory and holiness of God...When we define God, the reality that determines everything, as personal we are also defining being as a whole as personal. This entails a revolution in the understanding of being. The ultimate and highest reality is not substance but relation. The meaning of being is therefore to be found not in substance that exists in itself, but in self-communicating love...Wherever, then, love occurs, there too the definitive meaning of all reality is realized in anticipatory way and there too the reign of God has come, even if only in a fragmentary and provisional way.³⁴⁴

For Kasper, God is personal because God only exists in love. Thus, the concept of person could be used to describe God. Moreover, because the essence of God is love, human beings are able to reveal the image of God whenever and wherever they live in loving communion. Kelly concurs with Kasper that it is appropriate to use the concept of person in trinitarian theology. He writes:

The context of person language is that of real or possible love. Love in its most authentic experiences is between persons. To speak the language of love and not use the language of person would be linguistically and psychologically violent. That is why there is some special sensitivity in the retention of this word in Trinitarian theology where what is most loving and what is most personal coincide.³⁴⁵

Kelly demonstrates that love is related to personality, because, love treats each person as unique and personally bestows itself on human beings. He declares that “we human persons are radically personalized by the divine three.”³⁴⁶ In other words, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is present to each human being and loves everyone in a personal way as if the individual is the only one in the world. Referring to LaCugna’s trinitarian theology, Fox comments that

in her (LaCugna) analysis of what she calls the ‘defeat’ of the doctrine of the Trinity – the fact that it became essentially irrelevant to Christian believers – she concludes that the primary reason that the doctrine of the Trinity was ‘defeated’ was because Trinitarian discourse was moved from its biblical base in popular religiosity and worship and shifted into the esoteric realms of speculative theology. While retaining ‘persons’ in theological language of the dogma, de facto it was separated from the personal lives and experience of believers, from the ‘economy’ of their salvation. Revelation of the triune God did not impinge on them personally in any way and therefore, faded from the essential imagination of Christian

³⁴⁴ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 155-157.

³⁴⁵ Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 185.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

life.³⁴⁷

The interpretation of God in personal terms helps people to understand the type of God they believe in. In other words, God is not remote in human lives but loves and comes near to people as their best friend whom God engages in relationships of loving communion just as it happens in the life of the Trinity. Fox writes that,

When LaCugna sets out to retrieve the doctrine of the Trinity, she places at the center of her proposal an ontology of relation, a description of what it means to be a person and to exist as persons in communion. However, she too safeguards the analogical use of language for God by cautioning that when we use the term ‘person’ of God...we are not giving a description of the essence of God as it is in itself, but using a term that points beyond itself to the ineffability of God. She affirms that the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity is a way of holding on to the truth that God is personal, that God is free, that God cannot be reduced to human history or human perception. However, she also holds to the assertion that since God is *personal*, the proper subject matter of the doctrine of the Trinity is the encounter between the divine and human persons in the economy of redemption.³⁴⁸

The concept of person could be applied analogically to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is rich in the description of God. It makes it easier for human beings to understand God when God is defined in personal terms. Fox states that “while there is still debate about the issue of the validity of the concept of person in a contemporary Trinitarian theology, there is strong support from some theologians for its relevance.”³⁴⁹ Some theologians have acknowledged the importance of interpreting the Trinity through use of the concept of person. For example, Zizioulas understands the term ‘person’ in a relational way. He states that,

Being a person is basically different from being an individual or ‘personality’ in that the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static identity, but only as it *relates to*. Thus personhood implies the ‘openness of being,’ and even more than that, the *ek-stasis* of being i.e., a movement toward communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the ‘self’ and thus to freedom.³⁵⁰

The doctrine of the Trinity does inspire the understanding of person in relational terms. The interpretation of the Trinity by the Cappadocian fathers is helpful in this area. It does

³⁴⁷ Fox, *God as Communion*, 31.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 408.

not imply that God is a human person who relates and communes physically like human beings. The implication is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are related to one another in a very intimate way that exceeds human understanding. From this unique love of the Trinity, analogically, comes communion and love in creation. The Cappadocians' conception of the Trinity as one God and three divine Persons is faithful to the scriptures which designate God as eternal love and communion (John 17: 22-23). This leads to the truth that human beings are constituted by a life of participation and sharing. Thus, our thesis draws inspiration from the Cappadocians' teaching in order to expound the view that communion in Ezza culture can be related to the loving life of the Trinity.

Zizioulas notes that, "The safest theology is that which draws not only from the Economy, but also, and perhaps mainly, from the vision of God as (God) appears in worship. The Cappadocians' way of thinking is thus strongly present behind the Eastern preference for a meta-historical or eschatological approach to the mystery of God."³⁵¹ The teaching of the Cappadocian fathers on the Trinity implies not only that life of communion is intrinsic in the Trinity as it is revealed in the mystery of salvation but communion marks the life of the triune God in the immanent Trinity. Fox argues that "It is the ecstatic character of God, the fact that God's being is identical with an act of communion, that ensures freedom from ontological necessity. The Father as a person wills communion with the Spirit and the Son."³⁵² Because communion is central to trinitarian life, Zizioulas concurs that it shows that "the only exercise of freedom in an ontological manner is *love*. The expression 'God is love' (1 John 4: 16) signifies that God 'subsist as Trinity, that is, as a person not as substance.'³⁵³ Thus, love becomes the centre of human freedom as Zizioulas writes that, "Love is *a relationship*, it is the free coming out of oneself...It is the other and our relationship with him/her that gives us our identity, our otherness, making us who we are...persons; for by being an inseparable part of a relationship that matters ontologically we emerge as *unique* and *irreplaceable* entities...our personhood."³⁵⁴ This idea points to the fact that it is love that defines the understanding of the concept of person both in the Trinity and in human beings.

³⁵¹ Zizioulas, "The Teaching of the 2nd Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective," in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, ed. J. S. Martins, 1:29-34 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vatican, 1983), 40.

³⁵² Fox, *God as Communion*, 40.

³⁵³ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 46.

³⁵⁴ Zizioulas, "The Contribution of Cappadocia to Christian Thought," in *Sinasos in Cappadocia*, ed. Frosso Pimenides and Stelios Roïdes (London: Agra Publications, 1985), 34.

Thus, according to Fox, “In language developed to speak about the triune God, *person* was thus conceived not as an adjunct to *being* but being itself...By usurping, as it were, the ontological character of *ousia*, the word *person/hypostasis* became capable of signifying God’s being in *an ultimate sense*.”³⁵⁵ The existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an unbroken communion makes it possible to interpret the Trinity with the concept of person. Fox comments that,

the struggle to find language to communicate the experience of the triune God of love generated a breakthrough in ontology. An entirely new concept was created – the concept of person. In searching to formulate a doctrine of God from the Christian communities’ experience, theologians uncovered, in embryo, new understanding about humanity itself.³⁵⁶

What emerges from interpreting the Trinity with the term of person is the conviction that authentic human beings too are constituted by loving communion.

3.7 Criticism of the Cappadocians’ interpretation of the Trinity in Relational Terms.

Some theologians such as Sarah Coakley raise criticisms against the use of the Cappadocian fathers’ writing on the Trinity to interpret the Trinity in relational terms. She observes:

A long-standing trend in twentieth-century theology is to drive wedges between so-called ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ trinitarianism, and to utilize the Cappadocian fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa) as pedagogical opposites, or contrasts, to the ‘Western’ work of Augustine. The often repeated, but quite misleading, pedagogical slogan that ‘The East starts from the three and moves to the One,’ and that the ‘West,’ in contrast, ‘starts from the One and moves to the three,’ had become by the 1970s so prevalent and so widely assumed in systematic theology, that any attempt to compare Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine was simply taken to conform to some such pattern.³⁵⁷

Our thesis does not argue from the West or from the East or from Latin versus Greek or Eastern trinitarian theology. Both theologies are two sides of the same coin. The Cappadocians’ interpretation is valid for the Western and Eastern Christians alike. As Brink maintains:

³⁵⁵ Fox, *God as Communion*, 40. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 88.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁵⁷ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 268-269.

In the wake of careful re-readings of both Western authors like Augustine and Eastern ones like Gregory of Nyssa...it has become widely acknowledged that the clear-cut distinctions that were traditionally associated with the work of Théodore de Régnon – with Western or ‘Latin’ trinitarianism starting from the divine unity and being unable to account for the threeness, and Eastern or ‘social’ trinitarianism proceeding the other way around and ending up with the opposite problem – are far from adequate.³⁵⁸

This is because both East and West are concerned with the orthodox interpretation of Christian theology. However, Morwenna Ludlow concurs with Coakley, when she says that there is “a concept of two traditions of Trinitarian theology, Eastern and Western (or Cappadocian and Augustinian.”³⁵⁹ She claims that there is a problem which

is not so much an assumption that all three Cappadocians thought the same thing, but rather the tendency to presuppose what ‘Cappadocian theology is (or ought to be), and to use this to judge the true ‘Cappadocianness,’ as it were, of each of the Cappadocian fathers. When the notion of ‘Cappadocian theology’ sits so lightly on the historical fathers themselves, it becomes clear that ‘Cappadocian’ has in effect come to stand for what a particular writer takes to be the orthodox fourth-century doctrine of the Trinity.³⁶⁰

The Cappadocians’ contribution brought clarity to the trinitarian controversy of the fourth century. As authentic Christian theology, our thesis takes inspiration from their teaching in order to shed some light on the understanding of the Christian God and how that view of God influences human cultures. Although Ludlow contends that “there is a recurrent tendency to offer Cappadocian theology [Eastern] as (positively) an alternative or (negatively) a foil to Augustinian theology [Western], in a way which often ignores similarities between them,” both theologies complement each other.³⁶¹ She further states that “just as ancient historians have paid increasingly more attention to late antiquity, so experts on classical literature have become more interested in late antique Christian writers.”³⁶² Being supportive to each other, both the Eastern and Western theologies are

³⁵⁸Gijsbert Van Den Brink, “Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of some Recent Theological Criticisms,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 3 (July 2014): 347. See also M. R. Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995), 51-79; Kristin Hennessy, “An Answer to de Régnon’s Accusers: Why we Should not Speak of ‘His’ Paradigm,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 179-97.

³⁵⁹Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and [Post] Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83.

³⁶⁰Ibid., 83-84.

³⁶¹Ibid., 152.

³⁶²Ibid., 222.

objects of studies in contemporary theology in order to enrich Christian belief. Brink emphasises that,

From close readings of the important sources in their proper contexts, a much more complex picture emerges. Whereas Augustine's [the West] account of the Trinity turns out to be more subtle and less deviant from its Eastern predecessors than was sometimes assumed by adherents of social trinitarianism...the Cappadocian Fathers cannot be advocates or perhaps even precursors of social trinitarianism.³⁶³

Thus, Brink suggests that the Cappadocian fathers did not set out to expound the doctrine of communal or social trinitarianism in their conception of the Trinity. He writes that communality is developed from their interpretation of the Trinity. Moreover, there is no radical dichotomy between the Western or Eastern interpretation of trinitarian theology. The two traditions are concerned about expounding orthodox Christian faith. Some theologians such as Charles Raith raise objections around the use of Cappadocians interpretation of the Trinity in the development of social model of the Trinity, arguing that,

One feature of the so-called 'revival' in trinitarian theology is the frequent appeal to the East and in particular the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus – to justify a 'social' understanding of God's triuneness. The Cappadocians are portrayed as somehow more fully trinitarian, taking their starting point in the three 'persons' of the Trinity and only afterwards addressing the unity of God; this is in contrast to the West, and in particular Augustine, where the oneness of God is supposedly addressed first and only then are attempts made to account for God's threeness.³⁶⁴

Our thesis is focused on the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers where it argues that their interpretation of the Trinity opens an avenue to the understanding of the Trinity as loving communion. It does not prefer East to the West; nor does it reject Augustine's teaching on the Trinity. It merely reveals the fact that the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians is true to the revelation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one God who lives in unity. Our thesis does not compare and contrast oneness and threeness in God. To say that God lives in communion does not mean that the Godhead starts from three Persons and moves to oneness or to claim that God starts from oneness and moves into three Persons. This is not the topic of our thesis. The oneness and threeness in God is

³⁶³ Brink, "Social Trinitarianism," 339-340.

³⁶⁴ Charles D. Raith II, *Resourcing the Fathers? A Critical Analysis of Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Appropriation of the Trinitarian Theology of the Cappadocian Fathers*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (July 2008): 267-268.

a great mystery which cannot be separated and treated as if they are different notions in God. Moreover, Christian theology is not static; rather it is dynamic and a living tradition. Thus, the teaching on the Trinity by the Cappadocian fathers supposes to illumine every generation of Christians in order to help them know God and grow in their faith.

Raith also raises objections around the meaning of ‘person’ in Cappadocian trinitarian theology and its application in the communal model of a trinitarian understanding of contemporary theology. In reference to LaCugna who uses the term person, Raith claims that, her attempt to unpack a relational understanding of ‘personhood’ fails to note that the term does not carry the overtly personalistic nuances that she gives to it. For the Cappadocians, “a *ὑπόστασις* (*hypostasis*/person) is that which ‘stands under’ the *οὐσία* (*ousia*/ substance) and is differentiated from the *οὐσία* (*ousia*/ substance) by means of expressed peculiarities.”³⁶⁵ He implies that the Cappadocians were concerned with the establishment of distinction and unity in the Godhead and not the introduction of relationship in the Trinity. Raith writes that,

What becomes clear is that the Cappadocians never developed a dense psychological understanding of *ὑπόστασις* (*Hypostasis*/ person) for the divine Three, nor do they attempt to speak of human ‘persons’ and divine ‘persons’ in any univocal manner...Attributes added to the divine *ὑπόστασις*, like memory, will and understanding, are added to a *divine* being in perfect form and within the context of divine simplicity; ultimately, the Cappadocians believe that we do not know what it is for divine persons to possess such qualities. Any attempt to use the term ‘person’ in a univocal manner for the divine *ὑπόστασεις* and human persons in Cappadocian theology therefore fails to appreciate the reservation and qualifications used by the Cappadocians in their explanations of the divine *ὑπόστασεις* (persons).³⁶⁶

Theology is about learning to talk in a meaningful way about God. Raith is trying to discern the meaning of person as used by the Cappadocian fathers. Other theologians such as LaCugna who use the teaching of the Cappadocians on the Trinity to support their work have equally been inspired by their use of the term person. When discussing God and human beings, theology does not use equality between God and people or use univocal language when reflecting on the term ‘person’. It is always analogical discourse about God and human beings. People use human language to interpret God who is a mystery. The term ‘person’ in trinitarian theology does not reduce God to a human

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 273.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 274.

person. However, it takes cognisance that Jesus Christ who is one divine Person in the Trinity did become a human being and lived with people. Hence, God actually acts in a personal way to creation. Raith claims that LaCugna misunderstood the notion of relation as used by the Cappadocians:

When the notion of ‘relation’ is introduced into her trinitarian picture, the logical result is that ‘relation’ takes the form of a dynamic, inter-personal relationality that is found among human communities. This, she claims is part of the genius of the Cappadocians, and so she believes the Cappadocians provides the impetus for her fully developed relational ontology...It is clear that the term ‘relation’ can be used in many senses with different implications. LaCugna’s use of ‘relation’ is highly ‘relationalistic,’ consisting of a dynamic, inter-personal ‘give-and-take’ that can occur between two or more personal beings. From this type of relation LaCugna draws ontological conclusions about the nature of God and the created order.³⁶⁷

In our thesis, the term ‘relation’ is used as it refers to the revelation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the scriptures. The three divine Persons are so related that the notion of ‘oneness’ is used to describe their communion (cf John 17: 21). It is equality and oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that led the Cappadocians to challenge different controversies in the early Church that tried to remove the equality and communion in the Trinity. Raith, however, comments that,

This is not...how the Cappadocians understand the term ‘relation.’ When the Cappadocians refer to the ‘relation’ (*schēsis*) between the Father and the Son in its trinitarian context, the ‘relation’ serves primarily to uphold the *ὁμοούσιον* (oneness/nature) of the Son with the Father, as well as the eternal existence of the Son. The Cappadocians argue that ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ imply a correlation: God could not be ‘Father’ without the existence of a ‘Son.’ Unless one maintains that the Father became something he once was not, the Father must *always* have had a Son, and therefore the Son is eternal. The correlation also reveals, when understood according to common ideas and the force of these names, that the natures between the two are continuous.³⁶⁸

Raith indicates that the Cappadocians were talking about eternal relations in the Trinity and not about relationships in human society. However, Jesus calls people to relate deeply with the Trinity when he teaches people: “Abide in me as I abide in you...As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (Jn: 15:4; 9). Jesus knows that human beings are not divine Persons of the Trinity, yet he calls them to live in him. If

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 276.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.,276-277.

Jesus loves us as the Father loves him, it reveals that the Trinity wants intimate relationships with human beings which consequently have implications for how people live in society. Sarah Coakley also contends that,

In the remarkable recent outpouring of writing on the doctrine of the Trinity we may detect...an interesting double paradox. On the one hand, sophisticated logicians amongst the analytic philosophers of religion have devoted much energy in defending the so-called 'Social' (or 'Plurality') doctrine of the Trinity, whilst decrying the coherence of a 'Latin' (or 'Unity') model. In so doing...they have...paid relatively little attention to the *type* of entity that they are calling 'person' when they count 'three' of them in the Godhead. Indeed, when we probe a little with the tool of the hermeneutics of suspicion, we may detect distinct whiffs of influence from 'modern' perceptions of 'person' (or 'individual' 'smuggled into the debate, and read back into the patristic texts which are being claimed as authoritative.³⁶⁹

Coakley claims that while the analytic philosophers of religion support a communal model of the Trinity,

systematic theologians have been at work debunking precisely those 'modern' notions of individualism that they perceive to have distorted Christian anthropology since Enlightenment and to have undermined trinitarian conceptuality altogether. For them, constructing 'persons' as 'relations' (whatever this means exactly) has become a theological watchdog.³⁷⁰

She underlines how the Cappadocians and the early Church fathers lived in a different time from the contemporary period. Thus, the trinitarian theologians of our era are in danger of reading the meaning of contemporary understanding of person into the age of Church fathers. She maintains that both the

analytic philosophers of religion and systematic theologians...(have) fully grasped the complexity and subtlety of late fourth-century trinitarianism at its best. Moreover, it will be suggested...that the modern contestants' predetermined commitments to (divergent) perceptions of 'personhood' may lead, in the end, to insoluble difficulties. In arguing thus I shall take Gregory of Nyssa as my focus and example, a figure whose trinitarian contribution is often too easily conflated with that of the other 'Cappadocians,' but whose profoundly apophatic sensibilities make the assessment of the intended *status* of his trinitarian language a particularly subtle matter for reflection.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹Sarah Coakley, "Person in the Social Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of the Current Analytical Discussion," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

Coakley contends that it is wrong to designate the Cappadocians as social trinitarian theologians. She analyses the trinitarian theology of Gregory of Nyssa to raise her points, noting.

One of the more surprising conclusions to which my argument will lead is that Gregory's approach to the Trinity is not 'social' in the sense often ascribed to that term today; it does not 'start' with three and proceed to the one. Nor does it attempt to 'nail' the meaning of divine *hypostasis* by particular reference to the analogy of three individual men...I shall ...take a brief look at the analytic defence of the 'social' doctrine of the Trinity with an eye to the notions of 'person' that may be in play here. Then I shall turn to an explication of some suitably representative trinitarian texts in Gregory, and thereby suggest that those from the analytic school who have sought to explicate his trinitarian intentions may have in large part missed the mark. (Current theology may be in no better shape...from such a 'Nyssan' perspective, if it seeks to *reduce* 'personhood' to relationality).³⁷²

Coakley implies that relationships do not wholly define what it means to be a person in the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians. She mentions some theologians such as "Peter Van Inwagen, Richard Swinburne, and David Brown" who interpret a social model of the Trinity from the teaching of the Cappadocians. She claims that these theologians

import notions of 'person' into their 'social' doctrines of the Trinity that are implicitly, or explicitly, beholden to modern forms of 'individualism,' and that lead their understandings of the doctrine to veer dangerously towards tritheism. (She fears) the perils of importing anachronistic notions of 'person' into the patristic texts...It will...become clear...that 'social' trinitarianism can come in more than one form, and – unsurprisingly, granted the intense contemporary philosophical debate on the defining characteristics of 'personhood' – that the notion of 'person' in play is also capable of variation. What we have noted...is the presumption that on a 'social' model one starts with 'three' – whose individual identities are at least clearly and distinctively bounded – and that the task thereafter is to account for the unifying *community* which they share.³⁷³

Coakley is concerned with the modern understanding of personhood which has individualistic overtones. If this is used to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity, it implies that there are three Gods in the Godhead. She contends that Gregory of Nyssa

does not 'start' from the three...Apologetically...Gregory has every reason to give primary emphasis to the unity of the divine Nature. (Gregory) gives a logical pre-eminence to the Father...rather than to three

³⁷² Ibid., 125-126.

³⁷³ Ibid., 128-130.

‘individuals...Gregory ‘starts’ with this *one* ‘person,’ as source and cause of the others...*The analogy of three men united by ‘manhood’ is also a significant disanalogy...*In the case of the Divine nature we do not (as in the case of men) learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit...the emphasis is again thrown away from the ‘threeness’ to the unity...*There is no suggestion that three ‘consciousnesses’ are in play; ‘hypostasis’ does not denote consciousness or self-consciousness...*A *hypostasis* is simply a distinct enough entity to bear some ‘particularizing marks’ – in the case of the Trinity the distinctions of differing causal relations within the Godhead. As for the word *proson*, more commonly used by Gregory but arguably less technical, *proson* in its human sense and evocations is nonetheless severely tempered when applied to God.³⁷⁴

Coakley concludes that the Cappadocians are not social trinitarian theologians. In their development of the doctrine of the Trinity, their definition of the term ‘person’ does not point to a communal model of the Trinity. They were trying to solve the controversies that challenged the unity and equality of the Godhead in the fourth century Christianity.

However, this idea is criticised by Brink who states that it is not good:

to let the concept of person be defined by extra-Christian (or mixed) sources, but rather to start from its specific Christian connotations as emerging in the doctrine of the Trinity, in order then to draw out its ontological implications and use it to evaluate critically any current alternative understanding of the person. In fact, this is exactly what proponents of social trinitarianism usually do: rather than uncritically adopting standard modern accounts of personhood, they criticize these from the insight, derived from trinitarian doctrine, that to be a person does not mean to be an autonomous self-centred individual in the Cartesian sense but to find one’s very identity in mutual relations with others.³⁷⁵

Hence, it is the doctrine of the Trinity that taught us the real meaning of personhood by the way the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist as love and communion in their one Godhead. It is true that we have to pay attention to the dangers of projecting human ideas about God and the world into the Godhead, but at the same time, our lives do take inspiration from the God who made us. However, in order to answer Raith’s objections, it is instructive to hear how Boff explains faith in the triune God:

In the first place came the original experience: the first disciples lived with Jesus, saw how he prayed, how he spoke of God, how he preached, how he treated people, particularly the poor, how he faced up to conflict, how he

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 131-133.

³⁷⁵ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 347. See also Allan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury, 1996), 229.

suffered and died and rose again; they also saw what happened in the community that believed in him, especially after Pentecost...they proclaimed the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...they call each of these God. Later, Christians began to think about this experience and to translate this proclamation into a formula. This gave rise to the classical expression of the doctrine of the Trinity: One God in three Persons...In this development, it is important to distinguish what is faith and what is explication of faith. So, saying that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is faith; saying that God is one nature and three Persons is an explication of faith...All explications of faith seek to shed light on faith so that it may become stronger and find more reasons to praise and proclaim... Any new explication of trinitarian faith should make faith more credible and acceptable...Then what is new is not a distortion but something that can be recognized as a true expression of the treasure of faith.³⁷⁶

Boff's reflection applies to the terminologies that are used to interpret the Trinity and the models such as social model of the Trinity. Person, nature and substance are used to help with understanding the mystery of the Trinity. Social trinitarian theologians argue that faith in the Trinity has to influence human life. Authentic faith in the God of love has to reveal itself in the life of communion. That is why Boff argues that,

It is not surprising, then, that Immanuel Kant should have written: 'The doctrine of the Trinity provides nothing, absolutely nothing, of practical value, even if one claims to understand it; still less when one is convinced that it far surpasses our understanding. It costs the student nothing to accept that we adore three or ten persons in the divinity. One is the same as the other to him, since he has no concept of a God in different persons (hypostases). Furthermore, this distinction offers absolutely no guidance for his conduct.' This observation shows that the Trinity, for most people, has become a problem in logic and has ceased to be the mystery of our salvation. It has been reduced to a curiosity rather than being a reality that matters to us because it sheds light on our own existence and tells us the ultimate structure of the universe and of human life: communion and participation. And such an understanding has consequences for social and personal behaviour.³⁷⁷

Boff indicates that without living the life of love, trinitarian faith could only become a mathematical logical expression without meaning for human life. In other words, trinitarian faith could be separated from Christian life. He continues:

The starting-point is the conviction that has guided all debate on the Trinity: That the fact that the eternal God is three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – has to be presented in the most real way possible. This is the

³⁷⁶ Ibid. 1-2.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 19-20.

primordial and essential question, with that of the unity of the three Persons following later. But affirming the real existence of the Three is not enough; we have to place equal stress on the relationship that obtains between them: the existence of the one God is made up of the most complete communion and the most absolute and eternal participation. The unity of the three Persons expresses the infinite dynamism of communion and interpretation prevailing in the Holy Trinity.³⁷⁸

This dynamic communion in the Trinity needs to be emulated by human beings. The life of God is meant to shed light on the lives of human beings.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers. It can be concluded that what makes their theology different is that they both settled the controversy around the doctrine of the Trinity and brought a corrective measure to the orthodox interpretation of the Trinity. The Cappadocian fathers responded to the controversies by establishing distinction and equality in the Godhead. For them, God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in equality of one essence, nature or substance.

Another conclusion drawn is that the orthodox interpretation of the Trinity developed by the early Church fathers and affirmed by the Council of Nicaea, established the equality of the divine Persons in the Godhead through their use of the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* to define both the distinction and oneness in the Trinity. However, many people did not really understand what these terms meant when applied to the divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity. This was clarified by the Cappadocian fathers who described the *ousia* as the common essence, nature or substance of one God and *hypostasis* as a particular character of the three divine Persons in the Trinity. Thus, they designated the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in relational terms. They (interpreted)/described God using the notions of relationship and love since the three divine Persons are united in equality in the one Godhead and dwell in communion in their distinction as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The implication of the trinitarian interpretation of the Cappadocian fathers overflows into the understanding of communal life in human society such as we have in Ezza culture, albeit an imperfect reflection of the relationship that exists in the Trinity. In the next chapter, the theme of communion in Ezza culture in dialogue with the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers will be examined.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 122.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNION IN EZZA CULTURE IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

“God is purely and simply the living One. Rightly has the concept of life – which humans consider the highest and richest of concepts – been attributed to God. So the supreme goal of human life is represented as sharing in the divine life.”
Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*.

4.1 Ezza Culture and the Concepts of Communion and Trinitarian Communion: Prospects and Limitations

Our thesis argues that communion in Ezza culture is an image of trinitarian communion. Hunt in the introduction to her book *What are they Saying about the Trinity?*, writes that “a very brief survey of contemporary trinitarian theology shows that theologians, from a variety of perspectives, are showing striking creativity and imagination in their efforts to render the mystery which lies at the heart of our Christian faith meaningful and effective for the transformation of culture and society.”¹ The life of communion in the Trinity according to Hunt is “effective” in Ezza culture as the source of transformation and development of human life. The life of loving relationships in human society comes from God who is love and communion. She writes that, “The Trinity is manifestly a mystery of inclusion and participation. So, too, the mysteries of creation and redemption, for the Holy Spirit and the Son are sent that all creation may participate in the trinitarian communion.”² She indicates that the work of the Trinity is to establish communal relationships in the world through the incarnation of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

However, Kathryn Tanner writes that while communion in God is perfect, human communion, although it mirrors divine love, is fragile in the sense that it is the source of

¹ Hunt, *What are they Saying about the Trinity?*, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

peace but also unlike the Trinity, division creeps in sometimes.³ Our thesis discusses Ofoegbu's idea that Ezza people have solid arrangements in place such as *ndzuko* (participation) and *ochi idzu* (dialogue) of different groups to restore communion when it is broken.⁴ On account of the difference between the eternal communal relationship in the Trinity and the communal living in Ezza culture, the role of analogy comes in. The Godhead cannot be reduced to social arrangements in human society. Human communion is important but divine communion is far more than human relationships. However, Hunt maintains that, "If our creedal affirmations of the mystery of the Trinity are true, then they must be very true, affecting profoundly every dimension of our existence."⁵ She indicates that the Trinity as the source of human lives has implications for how people live in human society. Hunt holds that "whatever our actual understanding of this great mystery...trinitarian meaning is obviously there to be found."⁶ That is, human experience such as communion in human society can be a revelation of the trinitarian God.

Alister McGrath suggests that analogical discourse helps us to understand something of God. Human language cannot describe God. Analogy helps us to know about God without making God equal to human beings or even to creation. McGrath asserts that what would assist humanity to "speak meaningfully and positively about God without reducing God to the human level is [the] principle of analogy."⁷ He affirms that "The fact that God created the world points to a fundamental 'analogy' of being...between God and the world on account of the expression of the being of God in the being of the world."⁸ He echoes the idea of Paul in the book of *Romans* 1: 19-20. For McGrath, "it is legitimate to use entities within the created order as analogies for God, provided the limits of the approach are understood and acknowledged."⁹ He asserts "By doing this, theology does not reduce God to the level of created object or being; it merely affirms that there is a likeness or correspondence between God and that being which allows the

³ Kathryn E. Tanner, "Trinity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 325-326.

⁴ Ofoegbu, "The Contribution of Culture to Nigeria's Political Culture," 220.

⁵ Hunt, *What are they Saying about the Trinity?*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 165.

⁸ *Ibid.* See also Aquinas, "These names are said of God and creatures in an *analogous* sense, that is, according to proportion." *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed. and trans. Fathers of English Dominican Province (London: Burns & Oates, 1920), 161, Question 13, Article 5, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

latter to act as a signpost to God. A created entity can be like God, without being identical to God.”¹⁰ For McGrath,

analogies...are still extremely useful and vivid ways of thinking about God, which allows us to use the vocabulary and images of our own world to describe something which ultimately lies beyond it. In saying that ‘God is love,’ we are referring to our own capacity to love, in order to try to imagine this love in all its perfection in God. We are not reducing the ‘love of God’ to the level of human love. Rather, it is being suggested that human love provides a pointer toward the love of God, which, to some limited extent, it is capable of mirroring.¹¹

McGrath captures the main contention presented in our thesis. Communion in Ezza culture falls short of the perfect communion in the Trinity. But communion in Ezza culture because it is real and sustains peace and concord in the society, it mirrors in some way trinitarian communion. God is the root of loving relationship in human society. This echoes the CCC’s teaching that “The manifold of perfections of creatures—their truth, their goodness...all reflect the infinite perfection of God.”¹² Consequently, “We really can name God, starting from the manifold perfections of [God’s] creatures, which are likenesses of the infinitely perfect God, even if our limited language cannot exhaust the mystery.”¹³ In other words, as Schneiders contends that the experience of what we perceive in human society could act as a “revelatory text” of God whom we cannot see.¹⁴ Thus, communion as lived in human society, including Ezza society, although imperfect, reflects God who is communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This idea of coming to understand God through creation is enunciated in the *Book of Wisdom*: “For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (13:5). Thus, analogically, communion in Ezza culture reflects trinitarian communion. Giles Emery also captures the heart of analogy in speaking about God and creation when he states that,

The analogy between God and creatures rests on the action of God that communicates to creatures a participation in (God’s) perfection. The noble properties that one finds in creatures are caused by God, in whom these perfections exist in a supereminent and transcendent mode. Thus, God is called “good,” but the goodness of God and that of creatures are not stipulated at the same level. God is the transcendent source of goodness of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 167. See also CCC, #40-41.

¹² CCC, #41.

¹³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 55.

creatures. God is very goodness by essence, while creatures are good inasmuch as they participate in the goodness of God, in a radically limited mode.¹⁵

Emery demonstrates that God is the source of any resemblance of God's self in reality. Applying his idea to our thesis means that God is the root of loving relationships in human society because God's life is marked by love. Thus, from what the Cappadocians interpreted, it means that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in the one Godhead and live in eternal communion. None of them is subordinated to the others. In human society people are created equal to live in respect and communion with others. Just as a life of love exists in the Trinity, true human life is marked by relationship and love. Subsequently, both trinitarian communion and communion in Ezza cultures lead to universal communion where humanity will perceive itself as brothers and sisters, living in communion with one another.

Bediako puts it well with regard to the fullness of communion in the Trinity and the limitations of communion in human culture. For him, in the Trinity there exists "a fellowship infinitely richer than mere social binds of lineage, clan, tribe or nation that exclude the stranger as a virtual enemy."¹⁶ He continues that such is the weakness, imperfection and fragility of every human communion, even in the communion in Ezza culture. This echoes the idea of Gisbert Greshake who contends that "the unity of God transcends all comprehension, an original relational unity of love."¹⁷ Tanner argues that one cannot apply to the human person what is applicable to the Persons of the Trinity. This is particularly because human persons are not established essentially by their relations in the same sense as the Persons of the Trinity. She argues that "human relatedness is marked by sin in a way that divine relatedness is not...To a world of violence, corrupt and selfish people, the Trinity seems to offer only the feeble plaint, why can't we all just get along?"¹⁸ Bediako's Greshake's and Tanner's ideas allude to the fact that no human communion is equal to the infinite and incomprehensible love in the Trinity. Therefore, any such comparisons should be applied analogically. However, Boff holds that

¹⁵ Giles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine of the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 95.

¹⁶ Bediako, "Jesus in Africa," 297.

¹⁷ Gisbert Greshake, "Trinity as Communio," in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Theology*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Robert Robert J. Wozniak (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 338.

¹⁸ Tanner, "Trinity," 325-326.

Theology seeks to discern the presence of God in human and historical process. If *analytically* one being is present to another, perceives a basic reciprocity with that other, experiences an immediacy of relationship demanding the formation of a community; if *philosophically* this particular mode of being demonstrates an existence characterized principally by oneness, by self-transcendence forming an 'us' with whom to relate, then *theologically* this means that these values and this mode of being find their deepest roots and ultimate model in God. As creatures are the image and likeness of God...In the Old Testament God is revealed as the God of the Covenant with his people, the God who wishes to assimilate all humanity to himself (Gen. 9)...In the New Testament, St. Paul, St. John and the Acts of the Apostles best express God as communion...Communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is translated into communion between all (cf 1 John 1: 1-3)...In the early church, the church community was defined as *communio sanctorum*. This described not so much the institution as the attitude and behaviour that guided relations between the members...Communion demonstrated openness to one another, reciprocity in relationships, mutual recognition.¹⁹

Boff indicates that communal life is at the heart of human existence. This is because communion in human society according to him, finds its roots in God' love for people. Therefore, the life of communion reflects God's love in human society.

4.2 Human Communion as the Image of Trinitarian Communion

Since God is first of all rooted in goodness, human beings' love for one another reveals their likeness to God. According to John Scally,

a community which expresses the compassion of God in its life together, is a community where we will find God present. The corollary is where a community which fails to reach out to meet the needs of all is a community where God is absent.²⁰

This means that only social relationships that correspond to the divine life are authentic and life-enhancing. Human relationships are authentic when they reflect or manifest the presence of God; and that is when we truly become Godlike. Thus, it indicates that communality in Ezza culture reflects trinitarian communion. LaCugna too maintains that "The mystery of God is...the mystery of love, the mystery of persons in communion...we become by grace what God is by nature, namely, persons in full communion with God

¹⁹Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 131-133.

²⁰John Scally, "Finding Room at the Inn," *Doctrine & Life*, Religious Life Review 69, no. 6 (July-August. 2019): 41.

and with every creature.”²¹ If to be God, according to LaCugna, is to be love, then God gifted humanity with the grace of communion in order to be able to live the life of God in human society. Boff concurs with LaCugna by expressing that,

Society is not just the sum total of individuals that make it up, but has its own being woven out of the threads of relationships among individuals, functions and institutions, which together make up the social and political community...So human society is a pointer on the road towards the mystery of the Trinity.²²

This means that loving relationships mark human lives, as it is central to life in God. Thus, being created in the image and likeness of God indicates that authentic humanity resides in the ability to exist in love and communion as the Trinity lives in the one Godhead. According to Grenz,

The image of God does not lie in the individual per se but in the relationship of persons in community. The relational life of God who is triune comes to representation in the communal fellowship of the participants in the new humanity. This assertion calls for a relational ontology that can bring the divine prototype and the human anti type together.²³

Grenz asserts that relationality is central to the trinitarian life and human life. He believes that “the most promising beginning point for a viable trinitarian theology lies in the constellation of relationships among the three trinitarian persons.”²⁴ This portrays the fact that it is in loving relationships in human society that the paramount reflection of God in the world lies. Grenz echoes the idea of David Cunningham who declares that “God is *relational*.”²⁵ If loving relationships mark the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then a human person who does not live the life of love and communion does not reflect the image of God in the society. He/she is defined by a self-enclosed individualistic existence without concern for the welfare of others. This type of selfishness is far from imaging the trinitarian communion. David Cairns captures the notion of a correct reflection of God in his expression: “It is the individual-in-the-community...that is the image of God.”²⁶ In

²¹ LaCugna, *GfU*, 1.

²² Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 119.

²³ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social Self and Relational God: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2007), 305.

²⁴ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Trinity*, 117.

²⁵ David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), 26.

²⁶ David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: SCM, 1953), 44.

other words, the true image of the Trinity is the human person who shares in the concerns of other people. Emil Brunner too maintains that,

Human life is characterized as human, not by its attainments in the realm of reason, but by the union of human beings in love. That is the content of human existence, which is in accordance with man's original divine destiny, and is an earthly reflection of the divine nature itself.²⁷

According to Brunner, "the union of human beings in love is an earthly reflection of the divine nature." Brunner's understanding of communion among human beings as the image of God differs from the use of brittle reason which the Enlightenment in the modern period upholds as the centre of human activity in the world.²⁸ Reason alone cannot define human beings. It is communion that points to authentic human existence. Although Descartes held the view that pure rationality defines human beings, Brunner faulted his idea since it is a life of love that defines both God and humanity.²⁹ John Sullivan also observes that the image of the Trinity is in every "creature" and in the "universe."³⁰ Thus, the interconnectedness which exists in creation is the sign of the Trinity who dwells in love and communion. The human communion as the image of the Trinity is captured well by Kasper:

If God is love, then his innermost essence can be understood, in an approximate way, on the basis of analogy of human love...For the essence of human love entails not only giving something to the other, but communicating oneself in that gift and making oneself the gift. By bestowing ourselves in love, we simultaneously divest ourselves; we give ourselves away. By giving ourselves away in and through this gift, we nevertheless remain ourselves; in fact, we find our own fulfilment in love. For love entails becoming so one with the other that, as a result, neither the beloved nor the lover is absorbed into the other. Rather, love's secret is that, in becoming one, we first find ourselves and come to our own individual fulfilment. True love is not obstrusive, it respects the other's being other; it safeguards the dignity of the other. In becoming one with the other, love creates and grants space to beloved, in which he or she can become themselves. The paradox of love is that it is a unity that includes otherness and difference...it becomes clear through this analogy that the trinitarian confession is not nonsense...It firmly holds that the one and only God is no solitary and dead God, but rather that God...is life and love.³¹

²⁷Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wynn (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939), 106.

²⁸Quinn, *Philosophy of Religion A-Z*, 177.

²⁹Descartes, *Meditation on First Philosophy*, 18.

³⁰John Edward Sullivan, *The Image of God: The Doctrine of St. Augustine and Its Influence* (Dubuque, IO: Priory Press, 1963), 84.

³¹Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, trans. William Madges (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 91-92.

Kasper implies that when human beings love one another, they are revealing trinitarian communion in human society. Grenz in the concluding part of his book, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, declares that,

the perichoretic life—within the ecclesial community marks a visual, human coming-to-representation of the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity...In effecting this coming-to-representation—this fulfilment of the divinely given human destiny to be the *imago dei*—the Spirit constitutes continually...the ‘self’ of all humankind in fulfilment of Gen. 1:26-27, and by extension the being of all creation.³²

Grenz indicates that it is the Spirit of God which enables people to live in loving relationships in the fulfilment of their status as people who are created in the image of God. He uses the image of “visual” which denotes the tangible experience of communion as a representation of trinitarian love in human society. Bernard Cooke assumes a similar position, positing that “Christian anthropology forms an intrinsic and indispensable part of any theological understanding of what we have for many centuries called ‘the trinity’—and vice versa.”³³ He alludes to the fact that the understanding of human beings in Christian terms is an important step in the knowledge of the Godhead. Christian faith upholds the relational nature of human beings; thus, this leads to an understanding of the Trinity who is love and communion. For Cooke, “theology can never afford to divorce itself from life...it is in this living experience of faith...that the revealing presence of Father, Son and Spirit is manifested.”³⁴ Christian charity is best expressed in the fullness of charity among people. Thus, whenever and wherever this love is present, God becomes a reality.

Daniel Callahan argues that “Love of God and neighbour was central” in the understanding of human life.³⁵ Similarly, Cunningham states that our communion with one another is “echoing the mutual indwelling of the Three – all pretensions to wholly autonomous existence are abolished.”³⁶ Thus, Cunningham critiques unbridled individualism, which is similar to an Ezza saying that, *oto dudu onye nwuhujeru lia onwe ya* (nobody has ever died and buries him/herself). In other words, people need other human beings in human society. Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove echo this when they

³² Grenz, *The Social Self and Relational God*, 336.

³³ Bernard J. Cooke, *The Aquinas Lecture Beyond the Trinity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1969), 61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

³⁵ Daniel Callahan, ed., *God, Jesus and Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 116.

³⁶ Cunningham, *These Three are One*, 166.

claim that “We reach wholeness and integration not in autonomy and self-sufficiency, but in self-donation, that is, through our *relationship* (communion) with others, thus, imaging a triune God who is pure self-gift.”³⁷ They imply that communion is central to authentic human development and flourishing. Loving service and participation in the lives of others for them, is the reflection of the Trinity. Cunningham, too, faults the individualistic world view; he writes that, “The Trinitarian virtue of participation also marks...the relationship among human beings. Created in the image of God, we participate in one another’s lives to a much greater degree than the modern obsession with individualism would ever admit.”³⁸ For Cunningham, “individualism” is a modern phenomenon which upholds the centrality of human autonomy over communion with others. He counteracts selfish individualism with trinitarian communion which engages in participation and sharing with others. He observes that human relationality bears the imprint of the trinitarian communion.

This communal love is demonstrated in an expression of Dumitru Staniloae who maintains that “The responsibility that one believer feels for one another, the prayer that is offered on behalf of another, represent imperfect degrees of this permanent and reciprocal substitution of the divine persons.”³⁹ In other words, the concern and support of humanity for one another, though in itself imperfect in comparison with the fullness of trinitarian communion, is nevertheless an image of the perfect trinitarian communion. Zizioulas encapsulates this well when he declares that, “There is no other model for the proper relation between communion and otherness...for human beings than the Trinitarian God.”⁴⁰ He demonstrates that trinitarian communion is the pattern of love where humanity learns how to live in love and in communion. Zizioulas further maintains that for human beings to be true to themselves, they “must try to mirror the communion...that exists in the Triune God.”⁴¹ Thus, authentic humanity is revealed in the life of love and communion. According to Paul Collins, “The being of God as Trinity and communion is...the ontological reality of otherness and the space for the Other.”⁴² For Collins,

³⁷ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 19.

³⁸ Cunningham, *These Three are One*, 183.

³⁹ Dumitru Staniloae, “The Holy Trinity: Structure of Supreme Love,” in *Theology and the Church*, trans. Robert Barringer (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 78.

⁴⁰ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Paul M. Collins, *The Trinity: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 124. See also Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 151.

communion is an “ontological” feature which is not merely external observance but something that stems from inward reflection of love of God in the human heart. God made being in relation possible. Even God who does not need an external perfection in order to be complete dwells not in isolation but exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This reveals that communion and love mark the life of the Trinity and in turn the lives of human beings.

Joseph Bracken concludes that it is how one perceives the reality of God that influences his/her understanding of creation. For him, if God is seen as a single Person, creation will be seen as related but separated but if God is seen as a “community of divine persons,” then creation will be seen as “a mega-community, a systematically ordered set of subcommunities.”⁴³ Bracken is correct to say that one’s understanding of God depends on the understanding of the problem of the one and the many. This means that if God is conceived as “One” who cannot share the oneness with another, then reality will be understood as a series of autonomous entities that have no link with others. But if God is known to exist as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in loving communion in the one Godhead, then this knowledge leads to the understanding of creation as a communal society where people love and participate in the lives of others. Thus, Bracken tells us that understanding of God as One God in three Persons implies social relations in the Trinity, and this knowledge shapes the perception of the world as the reality that sustains the participation and sharing among human beings. On the other hand, if God is seen as a unity without diversity, then, the result would be a conception of humanity shaped by an individualistic mentality not open to participation in the lives of others.

Our thesis argues that God is a unity in diversity which makes the notion of communion possible both in the Trinity and in human society. The interpretation of the world according to Bracken “depends upon how one pictures God, since by definition creation is made in the image of God its creator.”⁴⁴ So, human beings and in fact the whole creation exists in a web of inter-relationships of mutuality and participation. Pope Francis echoes the idea of the inter-related nature of creation when he contends that “It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected.”⁴⁵ Thus, all creatures are

⁴³ Joseph A. Bracken, *God: Three who are One* (Collegeville, MIN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 74.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* On Care for our Common Home, accessed October 5, 2019, http://www.vatican.va-content-papa-francesco_20150524.

created to belong and participate in communion in imitation of God of love and communion.

Boff is correct in his description of the communion and the image of the Trinity when he notes that,

There is a renewal of trinitarian thought taking place now on the basis of reflection...very serious, on the links that bind women and men together in community and society – links that also involves the Persons of the Trinity. Society is not just the sum total of the individuals that make it up, but has its own being woven out of the treads of relationships among individuals, functions and institutions, which together make up the social and political community. Cooperation and collaboration among all produce the common good; within a multiplicity of social and political mediations and instruments and manifestations of community life, a unity in the social process can be discerned. So human society is a pointer on the road to the mystery of the Trinity, while the mystery of the Trinity as we know it from revelation is a pointer toward social life and its archetype. Human society holds a *vestigium Trinitatis*.⁴⁶

This means that loving relationships in human society reveal the presence of God, while the interpretation of the Trinity as loving communion is the source of human communion. Thus, love in human society, including Ezza culture, is from God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This proves the truth of the scripture which says that “if we love one another, God lives in us, and (God’s) love is perfected in us...and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4: 12-16). Boff maintains that “The community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit becomes the prototype of the human community dreamed of by those who wish to improve society,” (and) serves “as a source of inspiration, as a utopian goal” for suffering humanity.⁴⁷ Boff sees the trinitarian communion as the perfection of love which God holds for human beings to imitate in their lives in the world. That is why Boff calls it the “sacrament of the Trinity.”⁴⁸ He indicates that communion is the sacrament that makes God’s life present in the world. It reveals how God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternal communion. Kärkkäinen comments that Boff “acknowledges the importance of the social, relational notion of personhood, which leads to the primacy of communion and community rather than

⁴⁶ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 118-119.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

individuality.”⁴⁹ This is because Boff centres his communal theory on trinitarian communion which is the source of love in human society. Kärkkäinen notes that,

Boff affirms communion as the way of being...In keeping with the communitarian and communal outlook, the term person must be conceived in a relational way. This is a corrective to earlier ways of seeing personhood...The contemporary notion of personhood in terms of being-in-relationship is about being oriented toward the other, reciprocity, and mutuality...his can also be expressed with the help of a litany according to which God is ‘absolute openness, supreme presence, total immediacy, eternal transcendence and infinite communion.’ Persons ‘face each other,’ share the life of one with the others, without boundaries.⁵⁰

Kärkkäinen indicates that to be is to be in communion. For him, because God exists in communion, then communal life is possible in human society. It is the Spirit of God that inspires human beings to live in loving relationships. Kärkkäinen writes that,

Communion is the paradigm for structuring human society, for Boff...Trinity resists individuality, isolationism, use of privileges without consideration for others, and similar abuses of power so prevalent in our society...Boff argues for Trinity-like communion that does not know domination but rather mutual acceptance and giving, a society built on fellowship, equality, and generosity...the embrace of the Other.⁵¹

Kärkkäinen interprets Boff’s trinitarian theology with the image of communion. Boff himself explains that “The greatness of trinitarian communion ...consists precisely in its being a communion of three different beings. In it, mutual acceptance of differences is the vehicle for the plural unity of the three divine Persons.”⁵² Boff identifies communion as the source of unity in the Godhead. For him, ‘Three different persons’ does not mean they are three Gods in the Trinity, rather he uses this notion to highlight the distinction of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Loving communion is the bond that unites and makes them one God in three divine Persons. Boff does not advocate three Gods, according to Kärkkäinen: “Boff seeks to guarantee oneness with the help of the ancient idea of *perichōrēsis*.”⁵³ Boff contends that,

the eternal relationships bringing about, realizing, the interpenetration and co-inherence of the divine Three...proper speaking, *constitute the Trinity and unity* of God...Father, Son and Holy Spirit (is) in eternal correlation, interpenetration, love and communion which makes them one sole

⁴⁹ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 278.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁵² Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 149-151.

⁵³ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 281.

God...the permanent interpenetration, the eternal co-relatedness, the self-surrender of each Person to the others form the trinitarian union, the union of persons.⁵⁴

For Boff, it is communion that constitutes the unity in the Godhead. Kärkkäinen notes that according to Boff,

Perichoresis correlates with the relational and communal understanding of personhood. 'The essential characteristic of each Person is to be *for* the others, *through* the others, *with* the others and *in* the others.' Unity is based on communion. Communion represents unity. 'Diversity-in-communion is the source-reality in God, whose unity can only be the union of this personal diversity. The divine unity is the actualization of the process of one Person communing with the others, of one Living sharing in the lives of the others...living is synonymous with communing, being with others. Father, Son and Spirit are always in the presence of one another.'⁵⁵

Perichoresis for Boff defines the oneness of the Trinity. It derives from biblical description of God. Kärkkäinen comments that, "For Boff, the centrality of the model of perichoresis is not primarily based on the interest in contemporary theology and secular thought in the concept nor even on its honorary pedigree in the (Eastern) Christian tradition, but in the first place on its biblical basis. Perichoresis and communion are but another way of saying that God is love."⁵⁶ In other words, trinitarian communion is based on biblical revelation which interprets God as loving communion. It is not that the Trinity created the world and wants people to live in communion; rather it points to the fact that the God of creation is marked by love. Therefore, the authentic human life is lived in loving relationships. Boff maintains that the Father, Son and Spirit are

in mutual dialogue, love one another and are intimately related...The everlasting love that pervades them and forms them unites them in a current of life so infinite and complex as to constitute the unity between them. Unity in the Trinity...is always a union of Persons; it is not something that comes after them, but is simultaneous with them. Since they are always one *with* the others and *in* the others. The Persons are not the product of the relation of their nature to itself, but are at the origin of the divine nature, being co-eternal and co-equal.⁵⁷

Boff notes that unity and diversity mark the life of the Trinity. Apply this to Ezza culture, it means that people are united as siblings, family members, everybody belonging to the

⁵⁴Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 128, 3, 4-5.

⁵⁵Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 281.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 138-139.

village and community but each person is different. That is why their communing is enriching because this diversity brings lots of gifts and talents which complement the society. Kärkkäinen observes that in the trinitarian theology of Boff, “human beings are not outside the Trinity but included in divine Trinitarian life. Even creation as a whole exists in the Trinity and is a ‘receptacle capable of holding the manifestation of the Trinity.’ Boff therefore feels comfortable in calling creation the body of the Trinity.”⁵⁸ This conception of God in relational and intimate terms is what is proposed for human emulation as creatures created by God of love. However, as Lash contends: “*We have relationships; God is the relations that (God) has... God, we might say, is relationship without remainder, which we, most certainly, are not.*”⁵⁹ Lash implies that no human communion is perfect like trinitarian communion. Swan concurs that,

One of the unique features of our faith is that it shines a light on both the darkest side of our human nature – our propensity to sin and our capacity for evil and the brightest side of our nature – that we are made in the image and likeness of God, share in (God’s) life and are called to be saints. An assertive orthodox faith does justice to both these aspects and looks both of them straight in the eye. We see this human paradox early on in Scripture. When God contemplated (God’s) creation and delighted in human beings who (God) made in (God’s) own image and likeness, (God) exclaimed: ‘God saw all (God) had made and indeed it was very good’ (Gen 1: 31). Yet in short order, the corruption of human nature after the fall became evident: ‘God saw that the wickedness of humanity was great on earth’ (Gen 6:5).⁶⁰

Swan notes that while God is perfect in love, human beings are capable of great love and also of great evil. Thus, Ezza people although they live communal life, they too share in the duality of good and evil as narrated by Swan. Thus, they are capable of manifesting loving communion in their culture but at the same time they have some cultural practices that do not resemble trinitarian communion. Swan goes on to say that,

What we need is a constant acknowledgement of what is true and real. That is why entering a Church is so important. Just look around what you see there – a confessional room side by side with images of the saints. Both are deeply symbolic of the two sides of our humanity that we can never ignore – how we are fragile sinners and yet summoned by God to blessedness and to enjoy (God’s) company in this life and the next.⁶¹

According to Swan, Ezza culture has produced both saints and sinners alike around their

⁵⁸ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 283.

⁵⁹ Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God*, 32.

⁶⁰ Swan, *Love has a Source*, 140.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

communal life. The man who beats the talking drum in my village sings *ndu suru te eburu, ndu suru te ekpo* which translates as ‘some said to live in peace, some want to fight.’ By creating human beings in God’s image and likeness, God calls humanity to live in peace and love in the imitation of the Trinity. However, human beings are equally capable of self- destruction and destruction of their fellow human beings. When this happens, their actions are far from trinitarian communion.

4.3 Imago Dei: Ezza Persons as Image of the Trinitarian Persons

The idea of “image of God” comes from the creation story of the book of Genesis which declares that God made human beings in the “image and likeness of God” (1:26-27). This has been interpreted in a variety of ways, but our thesis focuses on the fact that an Ezza person best images God when he/she lives in loving communion. This echoes the idea of Mark Medley who says that “To speak of human persons as *imago Trinitatis* is to affirm that human persons image the communion and relationality of the triune God.”⁶² Consequently, it is in relationships of loving communion that an Ezza person exists as the image of the Trinity. The Cappadocians’ introduction of “person” in the Trinity sees the *hypostasis* as a distinct reality although free and autonomous, but bound in intimate relationship with one another. This personhood of distinction and relationality is mirrored in an Ezza person who is distinct and free but is bound in relationship with others. As Cunningham puts it:

Particularity does not render us into isolated individuals; it recognizes that we are different from one another, but understands this difference as a product of our interactions with others. It also recognizes that human beings are constantly in the process of being formed and re-formed by these encounters.⁶³

Cunningham implies that only a human being who is confident and free from coercion could form authentic fellowship with others. Marmion and Van Nieuwehove write that a person has to find himself/herself before giving that self to others in meaningful relationships. That is why in the application of trinitarian theology of personhood we

⁶² Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 171.

⁶³ Cunningham, *These Three are One*, 201.

must avoid the extreme where relationship is overstretched to the point of undermining the freedom, rights, uniqueness, and personal space of the individual.⁶⁴ They state that

Relationality and substantiality go together as two distinct but inseparable modes of reality. There must be an in-‘itself’ (*substantiality*) as the necessary grounding for relationality (*towards others*). Relationship should not be at the expense of autonomy. Even within the perichoretic life of the Trinity where the divine persons mutually indwell each other, the distinct personal identity of each is preserved.⁶⁵

LaCugna concurs that the trinitarian concept of personhood, especially as hypostasis, stresses that a person is first and foremost, a subject in relationship. As a subject, a person is characterised by freedom, that is, a self that is capable of having an objective view of the world around him or her. It is only as a subject that relationship becomes a free and self-transforming act, a movement in love towards the other. A person who is not a subject can only be completely immersed in his or her culture and tribe when he/she thinks and acts with a crowd value and mentality.⁶⁶ Although an Ezza person is born to belong and relate to the people and the world around him/her, first and foremost, he/she develops a strong personality capable of engagement with others.

LaGugna argues that the trinitarian concept of personhood challenges us to balance autonomy with communion. Without relationships, personhood remains stunted but without autonomy and individual space, a person loses his or her subjecthood. She writes that personal freedom and independence should be complemented by communion and relationality; autonomy by heteronomy.⁶⁷ She develops this point explaining that one must have interiority, internal, integral communion, before exteriority, external communion. In Ezza culture, personhood unlike in the Trinity is in the process of growth and becoming as *hypostasis*. Here, *hypostasis* is not used as an unqualified synonym of “person” but rather as the numinous personhood which is the image of God who is a family of persons. This *hypostasis*, as the image of God, undergoes growth, development and transformation by the Spirit of God working in human beings. Durand remarks that “In the Trinitarian mystery, unity between the Three is entirely pre-eminent, but the singularity of each is also incomparably more radical than it is among human beings, for

⁶⁴See Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 206.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 205-206.

⁶⁶ LaCugna, *GFU*, 255, 290.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 290.

the divine person is identified by its distinctive relationship.”⁶⁸ He implies that no human communion could equal the loving relationship in the Trinity. However, he further states that,

Of course, human relationships have neither the simplicity nor the perfection of divine relationships. However, recognizing the failing character of the analogy between the created...subject and the Trinitarian God, we must acknowledge that our vocation to share in the Trinitarian communion demonstrates a powerful capacity for relationship, reciprocity, and communion. While the relationship stemming from our status as *imago Dei* does not legitimize excessive similarity between human and divine, the Trinitarian archetype removes any false opposition between otherness and relationship, between asymmetry and reciprocity, since both characterize the divine communion between Father, Son and Spirit...Beyond our woundedness and weaknesses, we are images of the Trinity, well able to give and receive, take on our origin and consent to it in reciprocity.⁶⁹

He subsequently means that because we originate from God who is love and communion, our source disposes us to a life of loving relationship. Thus, an Ezza person displays his/her God-given instinct of love in his/her loving sharing in family and society. For example, he/she manifests this trinitarian life when he/she engages in caring for the sick, the afflicted and the hungry around him/her. Mark Medley notes that,

To argue that human beings should image or model the Trinity involves the recognition of two basic limits on all such imaging or modelling...First, since ontically human beings are manifestly not divine and since noetically human conceptions of the Trinity do not correspond exactly to who the triune God is, trinitarian concepts such as ‘relation,’ or ‘*perichoresis*,’ can be applied to human persons only in analogous not a univocal sense...as creatures, human beings can correspond to the uncreated God only in a *creaturely* way; any other correspondence than creaturely ones would be wholly inappropriate.⁷⁰

Medley suggests that it is true that in real life, we are not God, and neither can we understand fully who God is with the human mind. While we are dealing with the “uncreated Trinity,” however, the second Person of the Trinity has become a human being in Jesus Christ. God came among human beings. In his human life, Jesus lived the life of loving communion. Vertically, he relates intimately to the Father whom he calls

⁶⁸ Durand, “The Trinitarian Influence,” 164.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Mark S. Medley, *Imago Trinitatis: Toward a Relational Understanding of Becoming Human* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

“Abba” (Mark 14: 36) and to the Holy Spirit. Horizontally, he went about in the midst of people “doing good” (Acts 10: 38) by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising the dead and preaching the message of the kingdom. In Jesus we see and know how God loves us personally. Jesus himself says that to see him is to see the Father (John 14: 9).

Medley further contends that:

The deep mystery of the triune God as Persons-in-Communion forms the patterns of love, life and relationship which ground human wholeness and all human relationships. As human persons are iconic of the triune delight of communion, she or he is a sacrament of God’s divine fecundity. To image the triune God is to share or participate in the divine *perichoresis*, the mystery of communion which includes God and humanity as beloved partners in the dance of life. *Imago Trinitatis* means conforming in our personal existence to God’s personal existence as Persons-in-Communion as a joyous, doxological response to the triune God who gifts humanity with personhood. The human creature thus exists from and for the Divine Persons-in-Communion; human beings are created to be a sacrament of God’s trinitarian presence in the world.⁷¹

Aquinas concurs by arguing that although the radical equality of the trinitarian Persons might not be replicated by human persons because while the divine Persons share divine nature in an inseparable way, humans possess human nature in an individualised way. Thus, human beings possess what could be regarded as equality of kind. Secondly, unlike the divine Persons who are equal in all the essential attributes...like eternity, omnipotence, love, goodness, righteousness, human beings differ in their attributes and are differentiated by age, level of giftedness, and opportunities. They are also differentiated by causal subordination; that is, children are under their parents because the latter are their foundation.⁷² Rist points out that despite our differences as persons, all human beings, as far as they share a common humanity, are radically equal. We may not be equal in the accidental human elements or personal attributes, that is, in our distinguishing characteristics like beauty, health, physique, social background, profession, and possession which make each person unique, nevertheless, all human beings remain equal as children of God because these accidents do not modify their essence as human beings and as the image of God.⁷³ According to LaCugna,

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Q. 13. Art. 5-6. See also LaCugna, *GfU*, 257. “The origins of authentic personhood, of coming-to-be-a-self, belong to the mother-child relationship.”

⁷³ See Rist, *What is a Person?*, 256-257.

The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to see that the true person is...*theonomous*: The human person is named with reference to its origin and destiny in God...each human person uniquely exemplifies what it means to be human just as each divine person uniquely exemplifies what it is to be divine.⁷⁴

Thus, Ezza people believe that a human person derives his/her origin from God. To be an authentic human being is to try to imitate God who created the human person. Ezza people also subscribe to Gregory of Nazianzus' notion that "In nothing does man's (and woman's) affinity with God lie so much as in his/her capacity to do good."⁷⁵ Boff provides us with information about the human culture and trinitarian communion. He writes that a human person could not image God in God's essence, his/her goodness in the world is a reflection of the Trinity.⁷⁶ In Ezza culture, this goodness starts early in life. That is, in Ezza society, a human person is a child, a brother, a sister, parents and relatives in the family unit. This means he/she is inserted in the web of relationships where he/she serves others and is served by them. The same person gives himself/herself to others in the village and in wider society in loving service and receives the same from others. Thus, from infancy a person is caring towards others and is cared for. Similarly in the Trinity, the three distinct divine Persons in freedom give themselves to each other. Boff captures the core of this type of relationality when he maintains that

Personal incommunicability exists only so as to allow communion with other people. In the light of the Trinity, being a person in the image and the likeness of the divine Persons means acting as a permanently active web of relationships: relating backwards and upwards to one's origin in the unfathomable mystery of the Father, relating outwards to one's fellow human beings by revealing oneself to them and welcoming the revelation of them in the mystery of the Son, relating inwards to the depths of one's own personality in the mystery of the Spirit.⁷⁷

Relating this to Ezza culture means each person is called to enjoy unbroken loving communion in his/her environment be it family or society. It is in emulating the love in the Trinity that authentic Ezza man is revealed. Pelzel argues that a human being is to be understood in terms of love and communion that comes from Trinitarian life. For him, "An understanding of personhood is necessarily Trinitarian."⁷⁸ Pelzel echoes the notion

⁷⁴ LaCugna, *GfU*, 290.

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 14. 27.

⁷⁶ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁸ Pelzel. "Christian Anthropology," 530-531.

of life in Ezza culture where systems are put in place for people to work for one another. For example, in the farming season, people do not hire labourers; instead, they unite and work in different farms each day. In this way they help others and receive help themselves.

The mutual support becomes a uniting factor in society which echoes the expression of Fergusson: “The end of human existence is to reflect under creaturely conditions the entire love that is grounded in the life of the Trinitarian persons.”⁷⁹ Thus, the vocation of all human beings, including an Ezza person is to strive to live in loving relationship since “men and women are summoned to correspond to the divine likeness,” according to John O’Donnell.⁸⁰ He implies that only a person who lives in love images trinitarian communion. This is what an Ezza person does by not living only for him or herself but instead sharing his or her gifts and talents for the benefit of others. Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove contend that “Made in the image of God...God did not create us as solitary creatures. We are created male and female and therefore as essentially social beings.”⁸¹ They indicate that true image of God lies in loving relationships which implies diversity and complementarities.

In Ezza culture, men and women respect one another. The male group, for instance, honours women by following their recommendations concerning family life. Husbands and wives, too, see to it that their homes are places of love. The entire society helps them to achieve this by aiding them in difficult times such as bereavement or famine (scarcity of food). Peter Phan expounds Rahner’s idea about the analogy of life in the Trinity by saying that “For Rahner, it is not the mind knowing and loving *itself* that is the analogy of life in the Trinity but our knowing and loving *others*... in the *world*...that points to the plurality of God’s inner life.”⁸² In other words, the concrete practice of give and take that characterises Ezza society is an experience of the divine in human society. Brian Doyle signifies this reality when he states that “humanity, like God, is constituted by dynamic interpersonal relations.”⁸³ Ezza people mostly resemble the love in the Trinity in the engagement of life of loving service shown by sharing in the sorrow and

⁷⁹ Fergusson, “Eschatology,” 234.

⁸⁰ John J. O’Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 108.

⁸¹ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 18.

⁸² Peter C. Phan, “Mystery of Grace and Salvation: Karl Rahner’s Theology of the Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, 194.

⁸³ Brian M. Doyle, “Social Doctrine of the Trinity and Communion Ecclesiology in Leonardo Boff and Gisbert Greshake,” in *Horizons* 33, no. 2 (2006): 244.

joys of others. Nobody suffers or rejoices alone in Ezza culture. In fact, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that,

Indeed when the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, that all may be one...as we are one (Jn 17: 21-22)...He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and in the union of God's (people) in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that (a human person)...cannot fully find himself/herself except through a sincere gift of himself/herself.⁸⁴

In this passage, Jesus reveals that loving communion exists in the Godhead. Therefore, he demonstrates that an authentic human person is one who lives in unity and love with his/her brothers and sisters in human society. This is what an Ezza person shows in relating to others and serving them by joining his/her society in actions of loving service such as contributing to help the underprivileged. Individualism is curbed by a life of love and sharing. In Ezza culture, the web of relationships includes the entire creation. In the words of Irvin:

creation is the work of one who lives in communion...Creation itself is...fundamentally relational, for it bears the image of the one who makes it. This means that the ultimate character of the universe is not impersonal but personal...Humanity bears the image of this God who lives in communion. Human society is to be an expression of this God, a communion in which the other is received and embraced.⁸⁵

Ezza people live the words of Irvin by showing solidarity even in their care of creation. For example, when they divide themselves in group work and plant trees, clean and keep the village pond in order, sweep the square and make it a beautiful place for the gathering of the people. They feel loved and accepted by others. Their life of communal living echoes the idea of the meaningful way a human being imitates trinitarian communion. According to Grenz, "every human person uniquely exemplifies humanness, just as each of the three divine persons uniquely exemplifies deity."⁸⁶ Grenz points out that it is in their humanity that human beings are called to live the life of communion just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is God who lives in love. Moreover, just as loving communion reveals how God is, loving relationships define authentic human beings. People exhibit their true selves when they live in love in human society. Grenz agrees that "the most promising beginning point for a viable trinitarian theology lies in the

⁸⁴Abbott, ed., "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," # 24, 12. See also CCC, #1878-1879.

⁸⁵Irvin, "The Trinity and Social-Political Ethics, 410.

⁸⁶Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 55.

constellation of relationships among the three trinitarian persons.”⁸⁷ It is the web of communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that overflows to human beings and indeed to the entire creation. It is the love of God that nurtures us and helps us to live in communion.

4.4 The Models of Interpretation in Trinitarian Theology

Moltmann suggests that in the development of the trinitarian theology, two types of models arose to help in the understanding of the doctrine and its relevance for human life.⁸⁸ One is the psychological model which was started by St. Augustine and developed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Another later model is social trinitarianism which is propagated by Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff and other current theologians.⁸⁹

Our thesis is rooted in a communal model which stems from social trinitarianism. The social or communal model of the Trinity in contemporary trinitarian theology has its roots in the Cappadocian fathers’ definition of the Trinity with the image of relationship and love. St Basil observed that “The unity of God lies in the communion (*koinonia*) of the Godhead.”⁹⁰ Basil implied that loving relationship is central to the being of God. Hunt also maintains that “God is not the solitude of persons. The Trinity is a mystery of relationships existing among divine equals.”⁹¹ This describes in a nutshell that there is loving communion in the Trinity. Moreover, Basil echoed the idea of Richard of St Victor who perceived communion at the core of the Trinity. Richard indicated that,

fullness of charity-love resides in the divinity...in that fullness of happiness a plurality of persons cannot be absent...supreme happiness is

⁸⁷ Ibid., *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 117.

⁸⁸ See Moltman, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 198-199. He writes that “What the doctrine of the Trinity calls *perichoresis* was also understood by patristic theologians as the *sociality* of the three divine Persons. Two different categories of analogy have always been used for the eternal life of the Trinity: the category of individual person, and the category of community. Ever since Augustine’s development of the psychological doctrine of the Trinity, the first has taken precedence in the West: whereas the Capadocian fathers and Orthodox theologians, down to the present day, employ the second category. They inclined towards and emphatically social model of the Trinity and criticize the modalistic tendencies in the ‘personal’ Trinitarian doctrine of the Western church. The image of the family is a favourite one for the unity of the Trinity: three persons –one family”.

⁸⁹ For example, Catherine Mowry LaCugna and John D. Zizioulas.

⁹⁰ St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* xviii, 45. See also Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Difference between Essence and Hypostasis, *Basil Letter*, 381. Gregory expressed that “In the life-creating nature of Father, Son and Holy Spirit there is no division, but only continuous and inseparable communion (*koinonia*) between them...It is not possible to envisage any severance or division, such that one might think of the Son without the Father, or separate the Spirit from the Son; but there is between them an ineffable and inconceivable communion (*Koinonia*) and distinction.”

⁹¹ Hunt, *What are they Saying about the Trinity?*, 10.

nothing else but divinity itself...the manifestation of gratuitous love and the returning of due love demonstrate without doubt there has to be a multiplicity of persons in the divinity.⁹²

Richard demonstrated that communion marks life in the Trinity. Although he maintained that God is “that which intelligence cannot comprehend,” nevertheless, for him, to live in communion is to experience God.⁹³ He further stated that

in order to be authentic, charity-love needs a plurality of beings...in order to be perfect, it requires a trinity of persons...we rightly speak of *co-love* when a third [person] is loved by the two, in harmony and with a communitarian spirit. [We rightly speak of *co-love*] when the two [persons] affects are fused so to become only one, because of the third flame of love.⁹⁴

Richard again indicated that it is love that united the three divine Persons in the Godhead. Not only Richard perceived communal relationship in the Trinity; contemporary theologians too, such as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, John Zizioulas, Miroslav Volf, Colin Gunton and Catherine LaCugna, to mention but a few, all emphasise a communal or social model as the correct understanding of God who is Trinity. They argue that human beings best resemble God when they live communal life in society. For them, people who live the life of loving, sharing and participating in the lives of others in human society best mirror trinitarian communion.

For example, Ratzinger’s trinitarian discourse emphasises communion as central to the trinitarian life. He maintains: “man (or woman) is the more himself/herself the more he/she is with ‘the other’...Only through ‘the other’ and through ‘being’ with ‘the other’ does he/she come to himself/herself.”⁹⁵ Thus, authentic human life is directed to sharing God’s love with others. For Ratzinger, communion and sharing define a human being in society. He further asserts that, “God is not only *logos* but *dia-logos*, not only idea and meaning but speech and word in the reciprocal exchanges of partners in conversation...[D]ialogue, the *relation*, stands beside the substance as an equally primordial form of being.”⁹⁶ In interpreting this, God is one but exists in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

⁹²Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity*, trans. and commentary Ruben Angelici (Cambridge: James Clark, 2011), # 3.2; 3.3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.10.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.13; 3.19.

⁹⁵Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 175.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

Moltmann too, one of the pioneers of the contemporary social doctrine of the Trinity, states that, “In distinction to the trinity of substance and to the trinity of subject we shall be attempting to develop a social doctrine of the Trinity...Here, thinking in relationships and communion is developed out of the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁹⁷ Moltmann finds that the communal model of the Trinity comes from interpreting the Trinity with the image of equality and communion. He understands trinitarian communion as: “relations of fellowship, which are open to men and women, and open to the world.”⁹⁸ For him, the life in God overflows to humanity in all embracing relationship of fellowship and love.⁹⁹

Boff also contends that the social relations we have mirror the communion of the Trinity because the understanding of society is derived from trinitarian communion. He observes that

The sort of society that would emerge from inspiration by the trinitarian model would be one of fellowship, equality of opportunity, generosity in the space available for personal and group expression. Only a society of brothers and sisters whose social fabric is woven out of participation and communion of all in everything can justifiably claim to be an image and likeness (albeit pale) of the Trinity...Only a Christian community that is whole, united and unifying, free from class domination and dictatorial oppression, can claim to respect the trinitarian God. This is a world in which human beings are characterized by their social relationships and not by their power or possessions. This is a world in which human beings hold everything in common and share everything except their personal characteristics.¹⁰⁰

In other words, he observes that loving relationship in society mirrors trinitarian communion because love comes from God whom the Scripture reveals as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Zizioulas concurs that “The life of God is...realized as an expression of free communion, as love.”¹⁰¹ For Zizioulas, communal relationship marks life in the Trinity. Miroslav Volf even maintains that, “ecclesial communion presupposes the Trinitarian communion, since the Church is *Imago trinitatis*.”¹⁰² According to Volf, loving relationships that exist in Christian faith come from God because the Church is the image of the Trinity. In a similar vein, Colin Gunton asserts that “The point about the communion in the Trinity is that in God the three persons are such that they receive from

⁹⁷ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 19.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 151.

¹⁰¹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 49.

¹⁰² Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 74.

and give to each other their unique particularity. They have their being in relation to one another.”¹⁰³ He defines the Trinity with the image of communion which implies that the three divine Persons love one another and share in one another’s life. LaCugna, too, agrees with Gunton when she declares that “The ultimate source of all reality is not a ‘by-itself’ but a person, ‘a toward another’...God is self-communicating existing from all eternity in relation to another. The ultimate ground and meaning of being is therefore communion among persons.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, she interprets a divine Person as a being whose meaning is communion. The description of God as communion led to the model of social trinitarian theology. This has contributed immensely to the understanding of the importance of the Trinity in human society. Timothy Ware describes the social doctrine of the Trinity as,

thinking of God in terms of life rather than substance-of life and love. ‘God is love’: not self-love, the love of one, isolated, turned in upon himself, but mutual love that is exchanged and shared...The being of God is a relational being; there is within God a relationship of ‘I– and Thou.’ God is not just personal but interpersonal. (God) is not a unity but a union, not a lonely God...not the eternal monad, the self sufficient and transcendent One of Neoplatonism, but a *koinonia* or communion of three persons, coeternal and coequal. God is ‘social’; (God) contains within (God’s self) something corresponding to what we mean by ‘society,’ but at an infinitely higher level...The three persons are joined to one another in a union that does not destroy but enhances and fulfils the distinctive character of each.¹⁰⁵

Ware indicates that communion in the Trinity does not eliminate the distinction of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Applying this to Ezza culture, one can agree that communal life does not eradicate the individual existence of every human being. He also points out that the way God exists, that is, the social life in the Trinity, is the source of loving communion in human society, albeit in lesser measure than in the Trinity. This demonstrates that although the social model of the Trinity is not the whole reality of God, it is nonetheless central to the understanding of the Godhead. Our thesis concurs with Gunton’s contention that “There is not a ‘model’ known as Trinitarian doctrine, a fix set of formularies, but rather a process of intellectual development – a tradition – during the

¹⁰³ Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays towards a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), 16.

¹⁰⁴ LaCugna, *GfU*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ Timothy Ware, “The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity,” revised text of a university sermon preached in the Great St. Mary’s Cambridge (13 October, 1985), 7.

course of which a number of conceptual possibilities have been shaped.”¹⁰⁶ He indicates that it is the reflection on God and what God has done for us that result in human understanding of God as love and communion. Both Christian faith and Ezza traditional religion believe that God is compassionate. It makes sense that a life of communion mirrors the life of God. Thus, social trinitarian theology contributes to the understanding of God. The core of social trinitarianism, according to Brink, lies in these insights. Brink offers four insights (a) We have a Three-personal God, (b) Relational ontology and (c) Historical-reorientation and (d) Practical relevance:

- (a) *Three-personal God*. Father, Son and Holy Spirit might best be conceived as three distinct and fully equal centres of consciousness who together constitute the one God. Though not all connotations of the (post) modern concept of personhood apply, it is more adequate to refer to the divine *hypostaseis* using the term ‘person’ than by means of impersonal alternatives (‘modes of being’)...which conjure up the image of God as...a unitary substance or single subject.¹⁰⁷

For Brink, the social model of the Trinity is found in addressing God as personal Being which is the image that denotes closeness and intimate relationship among the three divine Persons and in their relation to creation. Brink describes relational ontology:

- (b) *Relational ontology*. Whatever personal faculties we may ascribe to each of the divine persons (will, power)...these in any case comprise the capacity freely to love and commune with one another, because it is the mutual relationship of eternal perfect love for one another which constitutes their personal subsistence. Therefore, it is unthinkable (i.e. ‘rationally impossible’) given the nature of their love, that one of the three breaks apart from the others. Father, Son and Spirit find their personal identity in their eternal perichoretic relationality.¹⁰⁸

Brink locates the divine life in loving communion which is eternal and perfect. Thus, Trinity cannot admit division and separation from one another since they live in one another. Brink advises us on historical re-orientation:

- (c) *Historical re-orientation*. Since in the past we have become largely oblivious to this way of conceiving the Trinity, something must have gone awry in the Christian theological tradition – perhaps especially in its Western part. As a result, there is a need for a careful re-examination not only of this tradition but also of its normative sources, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. For presumably, it is in the scriptural account of

¹⁰⁶ Colin E Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 164.

¹⁰⁷ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 336.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

God's revelation that the (social) doctrine of the Trinity finds its deepest roots.¹⁰⁹

Brink signifies that the communal model of the Trinity is a later development in Christian theology. Both the Christian tradition and her scriptures need to be read in the light of revelation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The communal model, according to Brink, comes from this revelation which he describes thus:

- (d) *Practical Relevance*. The doctrine of the Trinity is not intended as an obscure piece of theological mathematics, embarrassing most people because of its sheer incomprehensibility and only offering some fun to philosophical nerds who want to break its one-three-code. Rather, as a doctrine of the church it is intended to guide and inform Christian ways of viewing, experiencing and acting in relation to God, ourselves and the world. In that sense, it is a practical doctrine, entirely relevant to the Christian life, rather than a speculative one.¹¹⁰

Brink suggests that from our baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to the last signing of the Trinity at our death, the doctrine of the Trinity is meant to permeate our lives, thoughts, words and actions. We are inserted in God and we need to live our lives within that relationship. Thus, he concludes by saying that “a social (or relational) account of the Trinity may provide the most compelling interpretation of the biblical saying that God is love.”¹¹¹ He demonstrates that it is the social model of the Trinity that bears witness to the biblical revelation of God as “love.” He implies that the image of God as love is the core biblical revelation. It is the communal model of the Trinity that has significant implications for Christian theology. Thus, the communal model is at the heart of Christian message. Brink's statement is central to our thesis. Communion in Ezza culture arises from a relationship of love with God whom Ezza people perceive to be compassionate captured in the Ezza term (*Chiukfu obuoma*), that is, a God of compassionate love. Hence, in their communal life, their aim is to imitate the love of God. Their lives flow from their religious belief. To do evil against a neighbour is a grave evil which merits ostracising from the community and denial of a befitting funeral after death. The person is thrown in a bad bush because he/she breaks communion with others by failing to cherish them. According to Brink,

A participatory account of salvation articulates the facts that Christ died for us and lives in us, that the Spirit prays for us and in us, and that in such

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 349.

ways we are reunited with the Father. All this seems to presuppose if not a social, then at least a fairly robust form of trinitarianism. If all this is correct, and if – along these lines—social trinitarianism is strongly rooted in the New Testament witness, then we can continue carefully to explore the ways in which the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than being ‘an embarrassing obscurity,’ can illuminate the various strands of Christian thought and show itself ‘profoundly relevant to the life of individual Christians, to the life of the Church, and perhaps beyond.’ It seems to me that this is a more promising avenue than the prospect of falling back into the ages of trinitarian oblivion and confusion that preceded the twentieth-century trinitarian awakening in ecumenical thinking.¹¹²

Brink sees the social model of the Trinity as one way of bearing witness to the Christian faith. For him, the communal model of the Trinity reveals practical ways by which the doctrine of the Trinity will influence human living. Through the social model of the Trinity, faith in the Trinity will cease to be an abstract confession which does not have implications for human beings. Ezzar people in the same vein believe that they are sharing in the life of God because the Spirit of God lives in them and directs their actions in society. Moreover, they also hold that communal life reflects God most in reality. From their eating together with one another to the celebration of ancestors who are in the next world, their life is one long act of communion from cradle to eternity.

Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove also praise the place of social analogy in the understanding of the Trinity as “a critical principle of theology” whether in terms of understanding the cross in which God identifies with the weakness and powerlessness of humanity or in a “more relational understanding of human personhood” or even of presenting a “perichoretic relationship of the trinitarian persons—characterised by mutuality rather than lordship.”¹¹³ Moreover, they contend that “Biblically, this perichoretic theology is reflected in Jesus’ high priestly prayer John 17:21: May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us.”¹¹⁴ This again demonstrates that the communal model of the Trinity is rooted in scripture. Marmion and Nieuwenhove conclude that the communal model of the Trinity “provides the basis for a cosmic *perichoresis* for a mutual indwelling of the world in God and God in the world.”¹¹⁵ It is the immense communal relationship between God and humanity

¹¹² Ibid., 350.

¹¹³ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 206.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

that brings social trinitarian theologians to interpret God with the image of communion.

Johnson demonstrates this relationship between God and the world as follows:

The nature of God as inherently *communion* makes it possible to speak of how the mystery of God is capable of relating to what is creaturely and laced with history. Incomprehensible depth of personal communion, Sophia-God is free to create the historical universe and relate to it not out of necessity but out of overflowing graciousness. In so doing, Holy Wisdom whose very being is relational dwells not in isolation from the world nor in ontological opposition to it but in reciprocal relation, sustaining its life, continuously resisting destructive powers of nonbeing, appearing in the myriad shapes of the historical praxis of freedom, approaching from the future to attract it toward shalom. Reflecting its Creator, the universe has relationship as its fundamental code. Hence Sophia-God and historical world exist in mutual, if asymmetrical, relation. Insofar as each is directed toward the other with reciprocal interest and intimacy, the relation is mutual. Insofar as the world is dependent on God in a way that God is not on the world, the relation is not strictly asymmetrical. God in the world and the world in God: this is one way to summarize these radical distinct yet mutually related realities.¹¹⁶

Johnson implies that human loving relationships reflect trinitarian communion. She argues that God involves God's self intimately with human beings and entire creation. Life of communality marks humanity because God relates to creation in loving ways. She writes that,

contemporary theology has become aware that, given the presupposition that there is only one God, God's being is by nature relational...even essential things said of the three divine persons are spoken in a way that connotes relationality...Trinitarian communion itself is primordial, not something to be added after the one God is described, for there is no God who is not relational through and through. The mutual coinherence, the dancing around together of Spirit, Wisdom and Mother; or of mutual Love, Love from Love, and unoriginate Love; or of the three divine persons – this defines who God is as God. There is no divine nature as a fourth thing that grounds divine unity in difference apart from relationality. Rather, being in communion constitutes God's very essence. Divine nature exists as an incomprehensible mystery of relation. *What* the divine nature is constituted by *who* God is in triune relationality without remainder.¹¹⁷

Johnson identifies God with the notions of love, communion and relationality. She supports communal model of the doctrine of the Trinity with her conception of the Divinity as loving communion. She contends that,

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 228.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

Nature and relation in God differ in our conceptuality because, historical and finite, we tend to consider things first under one aspect, then under another. But for God as God, divine nature is fundamental relational...Being related is at the very heart of divine being. God's being is not an enclosed, egocentric self-regard but is identical with an act of free communion, always going forth and receiving in. At the deepest core of reality is a mystery of personal interconnectedness that constitutes the very livingness of God. The category of relation thus serves as a heuristic tool for bringing to light not just the mutuality of trinitarian persons but the very nature of the holy mystery of God...Divine unity exists as an intrinsic *koinōnia* of love, love freely blazing forth, love not just as a divine attitude, affect, or property but as God's very nature: 'God is Love' (1 Jn 4: 16).¹¹⁸

Johnson's interpretation of God concurs with the idea of social model of trinitarian theology. The fact that love is intrinsic in God denotes that interconnected relatedness marks human beings whom God created. This loving God empowers human beings to live in communion. She continues:

The one relational God, precisely in being utterly transcendent, not limited by any finite category, is capable of the most radical immanence, being intimately related to everything that exists. And the effect of divine drawing near and passing by is always to empower creatures toward life and well-being in the teeth of the antagonistic structures of reality...God's presence among creatures touches them with power the way fire ignites what it brushes. We know that fire is present wherever something catches on fire. Everything that exists does so by participation in the fire of divine being. Everything that acts is energized by divine acts. Everything that brings something else into being does so by sharing in divine creative power. Since something is present wherever it operates, and since God operates in the existence and working of all things, we can avow that God is present in all things.¹¹⁹

Johnson uses the image of "fire" to describe God's powerful actions in human life. She says that everything in reality shares in this power of God. For example, it is through the power of God that Ezza people are capable of living in communion with one another because God is good and does good things. If God makes it possible to share in the divine life by living the life of communion, it shows that the purpose of God for creating humanity is to live in love, then, evil actions such as hatred and destruction of one another are not the ways of God but comes from sinful humanity. Johnson describes how trinitarian life empowers creatures to live divine life:

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 228.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 229.

The trinitarian template discloses this one God in the world in multifaceted ways. Spirit-Sophia who blows where she wills, pervading the world with vitalizing and liberating power, brings divine presence in the world to its wider universality. Jesus-Sophia, preaching the nearness of the reign of God, embodying in his own relationships with the poor and outcast the compassionate love of heaven for earth... the fact that God's creative, liberating power can be effective in everything that exists does not diminish the autonomous power of the creature. On the contrary, such power increases in direct proportion to one's communion with the source of all power. Similarly, the glory of God is being manifest to the degree that creatures are most radically and fully themselves. Consequently, divine presence in the world should not be spoken about in terms of a suffocating overwhelming shadow but rather as the ground of freedom itself. Similarly, referring to God in the world does not connote an occasional intrusion or intervention, God, as it were...is in the world as ground, support and goal of its historical, struggling existence.¹²⁰

According to Johnson, the power of God does not mean autocratic rule of creation nor does it erase the freedom that God bestows on human beings. Instead, God empowers people to exist and act in freedom as children of the Trinity who dwells in communion. She implies that the Trinity demonstrates to human beings how to imitate trinitarian communion by the way the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live their lives.

4.5 Criticism of Social Trinitarianism: The Danger of Projection

It is important to take cognisance of criticisms around the social interpretation of the Trinity. This will help communal model theologians to be careful to avoid importing any idea of human relations into God. Brink writes that,

The most common objections to social trinitarianism in recent literature concern, (1) the purported practical usefulness of social trinitarianism, (2) social trinitarianism's relation to the theology of the Fathers, (3) social trinitarianism's assumed background in Scripture, (4) social trinitarianism's claims about the inner being of God, and (5) social trinitarianism's difficulties in doing justice to the unity of God.¹²¹

According to Brink, the first objection to social trinitarianism is "the purported practical usefulness of social trinitarianism."¹²² He states that critiques of social trinitarianism "complain that various proponents of social trinitarianism draw different practical conclusions from it, and that these differences simply reflect their own preconceived

¹²⁰ Ibid., 229-230.

¹²¹ Brink, "Social Trinitarianism," 337.

¹²² Ibid.

views.”¹²³ This signifies that there are different conclusions arising from the doctrine which could be a personal view projected into the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, its usefulness is called into question if its proponents are not in agreement about the possible advantage that may come from it. However, Brink contends that “If pointing to two theologians who disagree about the implications of a certain claim is enough to falsify that claim, then, certainly, not a single piece of Christian doctrine...will stand.”¹²⁴ In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity, like any other doctrine, is not restricted to one interpretation. It could shed light on different situations that arise and need to be addressed in the light of the Gospel. Another critique was advanced by Karen Kilby. Although she perceives social trinitarianism as a “new orthodoxy in Trinitarian theology,”¹²⁵ nevertheless, she argues that,

what we find in social trinitarianism is a process by which theologians first identify *perichoresis* as the name of whatever it is that makes the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The meaning of *Perichoresis* is then supplied by projecting onto God what we value most in our relations with other human beings (e.g. warmth, love, empathy, equality).¹²⁶

This is a valid warning from Kilby. Social trinitarian theologians such as Christoph Schwöbel took notice of this and agreed that “it would be disastrous if one...proceeded by projecting a view of desirable human relationships on the divine being.”¹²⁷ Applying this to the communion in Ezza culture means that it is true that the communion and participation that exist in Ezza culture is also apparent in other human societies. However, communion in Ezza culture and in other cultures is only an imperfect resemblance of the perfect communion in the Trinity. Tanner tells us that Catholic theology holds that “between the Creator and creature there can be no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.”¹²⁸ This indicates that there is a great difference between the human situation and life in God. Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove contend that, “in the end no image or symbol can provide an adequate picture of God...Speaking about God entails a moment of negation as well as

¹²³ Ibid., 338.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrine of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 957, no. 81 (2000), 442.

¹²⁶ Ibid. See also James P. Mackey, “Are There Christian Alternatives to Trinitarian Thinking?,” in *The Christian Understanding of God Today*, ed. James M. Byrne (Dublin: Columba Press, 1993), 67.

¹²⁷ Schwöbel, “The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, 11.

¹²⁸ Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 232.

affirmation.”¹²⁹ Thus, the incomprehensible God cannot be reduced to a utopian form of social relationships. Indeed, whatever humanity expresses about God is not an exhaustive description of who God is.

Nonetheless, even though Kilby conceives social trinitarians as “projectionists,”¹³⁰ human beings are able to affirm truly certain attributes of God even if God is indefinable. The revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth invites humanity into dialogue with the divine. Thus, scripture refutes the idea that “the meaning of “*perichoresis*” is projected into the Godhead because Jesus’ prayer in John’s Gospel is, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us... so that they may be one, as we are one. (Jn 17: 21-22). This demonstrates that the three divine Persons live in one another. Not only do the Trinity live in one another, Jesus’ prayer includes the fact that human beings should share in the trinitarian communion and make it a reality in human society. When all people become one in human society, the presence of God is realised. Thus, Brink contends that the dangers of projection

do not specifically threaten social trinitarianism...but every form of theology which does not consistently take its starting point in God’s revelation. Therefore, whether or not social trinitarians are guilty of projection depends on whether or not they are true to the sources of the Christian faith. For if they are, it cannot be sustained that they project their own or their society’s latest ideals of how human beings should live in community unto God.¹³¹

Brink contends that social trinitarian theology flows from the Christian understanding of God as love and communion. Frederick Bauerschmidt argues that “Novak and Boff use the Trinity to underwrite quite different economic arrangements.”¹³² However, he observes that “Volf, with a host of others maintain that it is only in some sort of ‘social’ account of the Trinity that the vital future of Trinitarian thought lies.”¹³³ This echoes Brink’s idea that,

if the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity is questionable indeed, then we may end up with the situation that preceded the trinitarian renaissance, that is, with a doctrine of the Trinity which is hardly more than a logical conundrum, embarrassing both believers and non-believers.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 5.

¹³⁰ Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 441.

¹³¹ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 338-339

¹³² Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Trinity, Politics, and Modernity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 534.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 339.

Brink suggests that while we need to take criticisms of social trinitarianism into consideration, the benefits of social trinitarianism outweigh its limitations.

“(2) social trinitarianism’s relation to the theology of the Fathers.”¹³⁵

One of the objections, according to Brink, is that the adherents to social Trinity have “claimed an overtly easy victory in the interpretation of patristic sources.”¹³⁶ Brink alludes to the fact that the early Church fathers’ interpretation of the Trinity is held as orthodox, and thus the root of social doctrine of the Trinity. And it is assumed that their teaching would be used in later developments of trinitarian theology. The purpose of their teaching about the Trinity is to help Christians understand better the God they believe in. It is relevant that social trinitarians should look to the teaching of our forefathers to shed light on contemporary situations. For instance, Brink maintains that “it seems clear that contemporary social trinitarians still can turn to the Cappadocians for drawing an *inspiration* from their work, expanding not only on their well-known use of social metaphors but also on their distinctive definitions of *ousia* and *hypostasis*.”¹³⁷ In other words, the teaching of the fathers can serve as a spring-board for the further development of trinitarian theology.

For Brink,

social trinitarians do not need to denounce Augustine’s view or uphold an over-simplified construction of Eastern versus Western accounts of the Trinity. It is enough for them to point to the undeniable fact that the patristic sources contain a variety of trinitarian accounts, some of which may be more illuminating than others. As long as social trinitarianism subscribes to the orthodox ‘three *hypostases* in one *ousia*’ formula, it is not at all clear why it should be at odds with Nicene Christianity.¹³⁸

Brink suggests that it is not a question of preferring the Eastern interpretation of the Trinity to the Western conception of the Divinity. Rather, the communal model of the Trinity seeks to establish the implications of faith in one God whom the fathers interpreted as Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live in an unbroken and eternal communion. Social trinitarians reflect on the authentic description of the Trinity by the Church fathers. The result of their reflections is that both Scripture and Christian tradition

¹³⁵ Ibid., 337.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 339.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 340-341.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 341.

hold that there is unity and diversity in the Godhead. Thus, God is a communal Being who lives in love.

The same warning of projection is raised by Coakley when she claims that social trinitarians are “importing anachronistic notions of person into patristic text.”¹³⁹ She perceives that interpreting the Trinity as three divine Persons is wrong because “*Number cannot strictly apply to God...we cannot ‘add up’ the numbers in the Trinity in the same way as we count heads at a gathering of humans.*”¹⁴⁰ She contends that the Cappadocians were teaching about the unity in the Godhead instead of social trinitarian theology. For Coakley, even the three men analogy used by Gregory of Nyssa has nothing to do with social description of the Trinity, rather it emphasises the “*indivisibility of the ‘persons’ and even certain fluidity in their boundaries... (it) has the particular and additional merits of stressing the incorporative, reflexive flow of the divine ‘persons,’ as well as the indeterminate boundaries, at least from our human perception, of the ‘persons’ distinctness.*”¹⁴¹ These criticisms highlight that the early Church fathers lived in a different epoch from ours. Therefore, social trinitarian theologians of our era are in danger of reading the meaning of contemporary understandings of person back into the age of the early Church fathers. However, Kasper contends that the early Church fathers who interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity had an “ontological” notion of the term ‘person,’ which links a human person to God who is source of creation.¹⁴² He maintains that

The statement that persons are relations is...simply a statement about the trinity of God, but important conclusions follow from it with regard to man/woman as image and likeness of God. Man/woman is neither a self-sufficient in-himself/herself...nor an autonomous individual for-himself/herself but a being from God and to God, from other human beings and to other human beings; he/she lives humanly only in I-Thou-We relations. Love proves to be the meaning of his being.¹⁴³

Kasper implies that human beings cannot exist without relating to God and to one another. They are meant to live in relationships like the God who created them. Coakley further argues that Gregory of Nyssa’s approach to the Trinity is not ‘social’ in the sense

¹³⁹Coakley, “Persons in the Social Doctrine of the Trinity,”129.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 134.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 134-135.

¹⁴² Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 287.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 290.

often ascribed to that term today.¹⁴⁴ For her, social trinitarian theology is “a plurality model which starts with three-foldness” which is in contrast with Gregory of Nyssa who begins trinitarian debate with the “Father as source and cause of others.”¹⁴⁵ However, Nyssa did not subordinate the Son and Holy Spirit to the Father. He maintained that the three divine Persons “imply natural relationship to one another.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the Cappadocians indicated that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct, equal and in loving relationship.

“(3) social trinitarianism’s assumed background in Scripture.”¹⁴⁷

Carl Mosser writes that “Classical Trinitarians have always been aware of the kinds of texts modern Social Trinitarians cite in favour of their distinctive positions. Moreover, they have always accepted the evidence drawn from these...narratives.”¹⁴⁸ This indicates that social trinitarianism is based on an authentic interpretation of the scripture. There are biblical passages which lend themselves to conceive God in terms of love and communion.¹⁴⁹

(4) “social trinitarianism’s claim about the inner being of God.”¹⁵⁰

Kilby warns that social trinitarians “look for a particular insight into God of which the doctrine of the Trinity is the bearer.”¹⁵¹ She accuses social trinitarians of rejecting the inner life of God by projecting a social agenda unto God. However, to interpret God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are distinct but One in the Godhead as the social trinitarians do includes both the immanent and economic Trinity which is, according to Brink, “a particular insight into God.”¹⁵² Kilby further argues that

The doctrine of the Trinity, I want to suggest, does not need to be seen as a descriptive, first order teaching—there is no need to assume that its main

¹⁴⁴ Coakley, “Person in the Social Doctrine of the Trinity,” 123.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *NPNF*, vol. V, 51.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 337.

¹⁴⁸ Carl Mosser, “Fully Social Trinitarianism,” in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147.

¹⁴⁹ See Fred Sanders who contends that “Everyone is bound to be a social trinitarian at the economic level.” “The Trinity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45. Brink concurs that “Indeed, one only needs a plain reading of John 14-17, where the Father and the Son are depicted as two distinct persons who mutually address, glorify and coinhere in each other, to see the point of this statement.” “Social Trinitarianism,” 342. See also Cornelius Plantinga, who maintains that “A person who extrapolated from Hebrews, Paul and John would naturally develop a social theory of the Trinity.” “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 27. See also Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 343.

¹⁵⁰ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 337.

¹⁵¹ Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443.

¹⁵² Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 344.

function must be to provide a picture of the divine, a deep understanding of the way God really is. It can be instead be taken as grammatical, as a second order proposition, a rule, or perhaps a set of rules, for how to read the Biblical stories, how to speak about some of the characters we come across in these stories, how to think and talk about the experience of prayer, how to deploy the ‘vocabulary’ of Christian in an appropriate way...Theologians are...free to speculate about social or any kind of analogies to the Trinity. But they should not...claim for their speculations the authority that the doctrine carries within the Christian tradition, nor should they use the doctrine as a pretext for claiming such an insight into the inner nature of God that they can use it to promote social, political or ecclesiastical regimes.¹⁵³

However, Kilby has to know that a solely mechanical and rational understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity cannot inspire human life. Christ reveals Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that believers will be inserted into the life of God and henceforth reveals the communion of the Trinity in how they live in oneness and love with others. Moreover, Kilby’s notion of understanding Scripture is not only applicable to the doctrine of the Trinity, as Brink shows but to “*any* Christian theological doctrine.”¹⁵⁴ Mosser also complains that social trinitarians collapse the Immanent Trinity into the Economic Trinity.¹⁵⁵ He maintains that if a literal interpretation is given to the biblical narratives of Genesis where God dealt with Adam and Eve, Abraham and Jacob, it could be claimed that “God is an embodied human being or angel who enjoys taking walks through beautiful gardens and the occasional wrestling match.”¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Nicholas Wolterstorff contends that “Determining what Christian Scripture claims or assumes about God is no simple task.”¹⁵⁷ Brink’s words are apt to refute this challenge. He maintains that “Clearly, however, biblical statements about Christ and the Spirit as participating in the identity of God cannot be put on the same footing as various kinds of clearly anthropomorphic narrative portrayals of God in the Old Testament.”¹⁵⁸ While it is difficult to resolve the balance around the immanent and economic Trinity in the development of social trinitarian theology, it is also true that “dissolving the connection,” as Brink observes could lead to the situation where

¹⁵³ Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 443-444.

¹⁵⁴ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 344.

¹⁵⁵ Mosser, “Fully Social Trinitarianism,” 147.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God: Selected Essays*, ed. Terence Cuneo, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁵⁸ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 345.

“theological statements in the end would not say anything at all about God.”¹⁵⁹ After all, there is only one Trinity and communion cannot be located in the Immanent or the Economic Trinity alone. Loving relationship is intrinsic to the life of God both in the inner life of God and in God’s work *ad extra* in creation.

“(5) social trinitarianism’s difficulties in doing justice to the unity of God.”¹⁶⁰

The use of the term ‘person’ in the development of trinitarian theology raises the problem of its relevance in the interpretation of God. Hence Barth warns:

The meaning of the doctrine is not, then, that there are three personalities in God. This would be the most extreme expression of tritheism, against which we must be on our guard...But in it we are speaking not of three divine ‘I’s, but thrice of the one divine I.¹⁶¹

The image of persons seems to imply tritheism. Yet, Brink states that

Barth’s argument here was that the concept of person has a very complex history. The fact that in the nineteenth century the attribute of self-consciousness became attached to it made its use in trinitarian theology only more problematic. Therefore Barth famously preferred the term ‘mode of being’ to ‘person.’¹⁶²

The application of the notion of person in the Trinity does not mean that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are separate individuals from one another. Brink maintains that social trinitarians

rather than uncritically adopting standard modern accounts of personhood, they criticize these from the insight, derived from trinitarian doctrine, that to be a person does not mean to be an autonomous self-centred individual in the Cartesian sense but to find one’s very identity in mutual relations with others.¹⁶³

In the interpretation of the Trinity, personality connotes distinction and communion in the one Godhead. Thus, trinitarian personhood is marked by love and communion. According to Brink,

Interpreted this way, Father, Son and Spirit are persons in the most perfect sense of the term. To be sure, in line with the New Testament, they should be viewed as distinct centres of consciousness and will, and in that sense as distinct ‘personalities’ to which one can properly refer by using singular personal pronouns. Far from been independent self-sufficient individuals,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 345.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 337.

¹⁶¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatic*, 1, 403.

¹⁶² Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 346.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 347. See also Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 10-13; 86-103; Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 229.

however, their identity is constituted by the reciprocal personal relationships of love in which they eternally live and have their being. According to many adherents of social trinitarianism, it is this perichoretic communion which accounts for the divine unity. Given its unbreakable bond of perfect love, the divine communion clearly surpasses any human community.¹⁶⁴

According to Brink, this indicates that the terminology of person is analogically applied to the doctrine of Trinity. Only God could exist both in distinction and communion at the same time. Human persons on the other hand are separate from other human beings. They do not live in one another as the Trinity do. Yet the three divine Persons act in personal ways through their love and communion. Moreover, it is the communion in the Trinity that unites the three divine Persons. Thus, McCall contends that “Theologians can – and should – work to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity is not incoherent, but they need feel no pressure to show how God is both three and one.”¹⁶⁵ Theologians are dealing with a mystery when it comes to the interpretation of God. No human being could explain how God is “three and one” at the same time. However, Brink maintains that

Confessing the unity of the three ‘names’ is not the same as conceptually explaining the exact mode or modes of their unity; nor does the former require the later. For perhaps it is here, when it comes to the ‘how’ of the divine unity, that the appeal to mystery and apophaticism which has always surrounded the doctrine of the Trinity is rightly placed.¹⁶⁶

In other words, human beings do not have complete knowledge of God. Faith in the Trinity does not require a complete understanding of God. What God reveals to humanity is not the total reality of God. The human mind, according to Aquinas, is finite and cannot fully understand God.¹⁶⁷ No matter how close people are to God, the Divinity is a mystery that reveals and conceals the whole reality surrounding the Godhead. The three in one God does not yield the conclusion of three Gods, according to Janet Martin Soskice:

The doctrine of the Trinity is precisely the reflective means by which unacceptable inferences from the primary language of the New Testament have been kept in place for instance, the unacceptable inference from the fact that there are three names – Father, Son, and Spirit – to the conclusion that there are three Gods...It was of the essence to the earliest defences of

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ McCall, *Which Trinity?*, 232.

¹⁶⁶ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 349.

¹⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, part 1, q. 12.

the doctrine that the Godhead be understood as life, love, and complete mutuality.¹⁶⁸

She affirms that Christian faith believes in one God who exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They do not signify the existence of three Gods, but one God who lives in communion. With regard to the importance of social trinitarian theology, Brink concludes that:

Despite its critics and despite the continuing work that has to be done to evaluate and accommodate their claims...social—or relational – or communal – trinitarianism flows from two lines of thought that are deeply embedded in orthodox Christian faith. First of all, there is the (formal) argument from the trustworthiness of revelation or divine self-communication, and secondly the (material) argument from the nature of salvation.¹⁶⁹

Brink writes that the social model of the Trinity is linked to the revelation of God in the Scripture. It is an orthodox interpretation of Christian faith. It is true to the belief and tradition of Catholic teaching: concerning this, Brinks holds that the “social (or relational) account of the Trinity may provide the most compelling interpretation of the biblical saying that ‘God is Love.’”¹⁷⁰ This indicates that social trinitarian theology is at the heart of Christian message. It also seeks to establish the implications for faith in a God who is love in the lives of human beings. Regarding the link between social trinitarianism and salvation, Brink states that

there is a growing consensus among contemporary Christian theologians that salvation should be understood in terms of a participatory ontology, according to which human beings are transformed in the Spirit through Jesus Christ into fellowship with the Father...If indeed we need a participation-oriented account of salvation in order to do justice to the heart of the gospel, it seems that we need a relational model of the Trinity for that very same reason: the deeply personal union and communion with God and with our fellow- humans to which we are restored by grace is not something alien to God, but a reflection and extension of God’s own life-in-communion (as the doctrine of our being created in the *imago Dei* suggests)...If all this is correct, and if – along these lines—social trinitarianism is strongly rooted in the New Testament witness, then we can continue carefully to explore the ways in which the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than being ‘an embarrassing obscurity,’ can illuminate the various stands of Christian thought and show itself ‘profoundly’ relevant

¹⁶⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113.

¹⁶⁹ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism, 349.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

to the life of individual Christians, to the life of the Church and perhaps beyond.¹⁷¹

Brink points out that it is the grace of God that enables humanity such as Ezza people to live in communion. Grace is available for both Christians and non-Christians.¹⁷² Rahner contends that “The only absolute mysteries are the self-communication of God in the depths of existence, called grace, and in history called Jesus Christ, and this already includes the mystery of the Trinity in the economy of salvation and of the immanent Trinity.”¹⁷³ This means that God who is communion brings about communal life in human society through grace. Stephen Duffy agrees with Rahner that “everything is grace,” given only by God to humanity out of love for people.¹⁷⁴ This grace includes a life of communion. Thus, for Duffy grace is “loving kindness...God’s dynamic love for people revealed in acts which demonstrate that love in ways unexpected.”¹⁷⁵ God’s love is gratuitous; humanity does not merit it. Duffy continues that “God’s love for humans, grounds love for the neighbour in which the mutuality between God and humans becomes manifest.”¹⁷⁶ This corresponds with the words in the first letter of John which says: “We love because (God) first loved us” (4:19). In other words, God’s love is the source of human communion.

The social model of the Trinity is at the centre of Christian belief and is significant for life because human beings are bound up with God. Thus, while contemporary trinitarian theology cannot completely eschew speculation on the immanent Trinity, relationship completely defines the immanent and the economic Trinity, and loving communion is central to the definition of God who is love (1Jn 4: 8). Our assumption is that the trinitarian theology of the Church fathers including

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 349-350.

¹⁷² See Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 391-392. According to Rahner, everybody who responds to grace by living the loving life is not only an “anonymous theist but also an anonymous Christian.” He also said that God has graced humanity both intrinsically and historically, cf Karl Rahner, “Grace,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (Kent: Burns & Oats, 1993), 590.

¹⁷³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 12. See also CCC, # 1996-1997, “Grace is participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian Life.”

¹⁷⁴ Stephen Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville, MIN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 26.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 22. See also Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 180-181 “the whole spiritual life of (human beings) is constantly affected by grace...(a human person) always lives consciously in the presence of the triune God.” He includes “personal categories of (love, personal intimacy, self communication,” in his description of grace.” Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 316.

Athanasius, Ignatius of Antioch and Augustine continues to be relevant to contemporary Christian life. And our specific focus is to see how we can mine the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers to ground and explicate our claim that the call to communion lies at the heart of human living.

The psychological analogies which both Augustine and Aquinas identified in the operations of the human mind also helped in our approach to the mystery of the Trinity.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the Trinity remains an unfathomable mystery which we accept in faith and adoration.¹⁷⁸ Social trinitarian theologians argue that the threeness is not in the mind but in human relationships and communion. For them, a good understanding and interpretation of the Blessed Trinity must take into account that God is not solitary but a society of three divine persons—the Blessed Trinity.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Rahner laments that

A psychological theory of the Trinity, however ingenious the speculations from the time of Augustine down to our own time, in the end does not explain precisely what it is supposed to explain, namely why the Father express himself in Word, and with the Logos breathes a Spirit which is different from him. For such an explanation must already presupposed the Father as knowing and loving himself, and cannot allow him to be constituted as knowing and loving in the first place by the expression of the Logos and the spiration of the Spirit...such psychological speculation about the Trinity has in any case the disadvantage that in the doctrine of the Trinity it does not really give enough weight to a starting point in the history of revelation and dogma which is within the *historical and salvific* experience of the Son and of the Spirit as the reality of the divine self-communication to us, so that we can understand from this historical experience what the doctrine of the Trinity really means. The psychological theory of the Trinity neglects the experience of the Trinity in the economy of salvation in favor of a seemingly almost Gnostic speculation about what goes on in the inner life of God...it really forgets that the countenance of God which turns towards us in this self-communication is, in the trinitarian nature of this encounter, the very being of God as he is in himself.¹⁸⁰

Rahner centres his discourse of God on the Trinity, especially as God revealed God's self in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He does not separate the inner life of God from the salvation history. Therefore, he perceives the psychological model of the Trinity as

¹⁷⁷ Augustine sees the triad in the “lover, the beloved and love between them; a human person knowing and loving himself/herself; memory, understanding and loving” and Aquinas perceived “word from the speaker and yet remaining within the person’ as the triad that could image the Trinity.” See Augustine, *The Trinity: The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 45, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), Bk XV-XIX. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1q, 27.

¹⁷⁸ Brink, “Social Trinitarianism,” 122, 136, 1 q, 27.

¹⁷⁹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 43.

¹⁸⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 135.

introspection into the inner life of God instead of providing the saving work of the Trinity in creation. In other words, the psychological analogy of the Trinity does not help us to experience Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, the first Vatican Council declared that,

And reason, indeed, enlightened by faith--when it seeks earnestly, piously...attains by a gift from God some understanding of mysteries, even a very fruitful one; partly from the analogy of those things which it naturally knows, partly from the relations which the mysteries bear to one another and to the last end of man (and woman).¹⁸¹

Thus, the psychological analogy of the Trinity is one way of trying to understand the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But the discourse about the Trinity does not stop at that one model. As a mystery of salvation revealed to human beings, there has to be ongoing investigation on how to understand our centre of believe and make it meaningful in each generation until we reach the beatific vision where human beings attain more revelation of the Trinity.

A central doctrine of Christianity is the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one and three at the same time. Also, the Trinity is love: The Father loves the Son and the love between the Son and the Father is the Holy Spirit. Thus, the inner life of God is love. Out of love therefore, God created the universe and all it contains, and made human beings in God’s image. Since God is a perfect communion of three divine Persons, communion in human society can serve as an image of a God who lives in a community of three divine Persons.¹⁸² The psychological and social models of the Trinity are not exclusive to each other. For example, Augustine maintained that

the trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love (God) by whom it was made. And when it does this it becomes wise. If it does not do it, then even though it remembers and understands and loves itself, it is foolish. Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made, and acknowledge and love (God).¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Vatican 1, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Filius)*: 4, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.catholicplanet.org>. See also DS 3016.

¹⁸² Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 9-11.

¹⁸³ St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XIV, 4. See also Peter Drilling, *Premodern Faith in a Postmodern Culture: A Contemporary Theology of the Trinity* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 98. He says that “In his Trinity of the mind, Augustine claims to have found the analogy that is most serviceable. For the mind is of the same spiritual character as God...it is not totally contained within the corporeal...the analogy of human spirit is closest to God when human spirit in its three dimensions is directed to God. See also Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 137; Mary Ann Fatula, *The Triune God of Christian Faith* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 65.

Augustine even centres love at the heart of his psychological model of the Trinity. Thus, the social model of the Trinity takes inspiration from the image of the trinitarian love in human hearts according to scripture which says “it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (Luke 6: 45). And again “may they also be in us,” of John’s Gospel (17:21) shows that the outward expression of the loving communion of the Trinity stems from the interior contemplation of the Trinity of love in the human heart. Both the psychological and social models are relevant to human living. Without the interior inspiration, the outward social expression will not be a Christian phenomenon and without the social living out of the love of the Trinity in human society, the psychological model will only be an introspection of human beings who focus on their inward contemplation without the active witness to the loving Trinity. However, Boff maintains that,

Faith in the Trinity enriches the intuition of faith that human beings are the image and likeness of the divinity, as expressed in Genesis 1: 27. If there is a real symbol of this great mystery, this would be found in the vital dynamic of human beings, shown primarily as a living and simultaneous unity of three components...This mystery is not just expressed intelligently; it is also communicated and establishes communion of love with others; it is not will that loves, but persons who love and bestow themselves on one another. Deep feeling, understanding and will, or mystery, truth and love – these are not just ‘powers’ of the soul, they are human life itself in its dynamic unity, always the same and always differentiated. Such manifestations are seen as figurative of a greater Reality, from which they come and of which they are images: the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So by analogy with human life (already created in the image of the Trinity), we can say: the ultimate mystery, as mystery without origin and from which all things come, the source and final reference of all things...There are not three mysteries here, but one, and it is open and living, in an eternal process of being in-itself, going out from itself and returning to itself, embracing the whole of creation, but human beings in a special way. The more we live true to our basic nature...the greater our potential for revealing the Trinity in history.¹⁸⁴

Boff writes that love comes from the Trinity and it is the image of the Trinity. That is, the communion of the Trinity overflows to the entire creation and specially human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God. Thus, Boff reveals that communion among human beings is the better image of the triune God. Moreover, Hunt contends that “the perennial theological challenge then, as in every age, remained as to how to understand the trinitarian faith we confess, and how to speak in ways that are disclosive

¹⁸⁴ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 104-105.

and persuasive of its essential meaning.”¹⁸⁵ Social trinitarian theology is surely one of the ways to discuss meaningfully about the Trinity and how to reveal the loving life in the Trinity in human society.

4.6 The Social Model and Africa

In the context of theology today, the social model of the Trinity is very appropriate for Africa. This is most especially because, in the words of Kärkkäinen,

One would assume that Trinity would fare well in the African milieu, if for no other reason than the key role played by communality and communion in African cultures and religions. Add to this the central role of intermediaries, both ancestors and spiritual beings, and one could imagine a revival of interest in the Trinity. That however, has not been the case. On the contrary...the doctrine has been marginalized, even eschewed. This lacuna has many causes...as a doctrine based on Hellenistic metaphysics, it is very difficult to understand...it uses the non-African term person; and it has a no practical nature among other issues. African theology, however, needs to continue work on the Trinity, if for no other reason than that it is not possible to maintain that there would be a genuine African Christology if the doctrine of the Trinity is inherited from the West without original African reflection. Most African Trinitarian reflections represent the social analogy in one form or another. This is understandable in light of the primacy of communion in general and family community in particular. Family for Africans, of course, means extended family, consisting of the living and dead, as well as the spiritual worlds, an idea closely related to the African concept of the church...Not only are there several African cultural features that point to the possibility of a specifically Christian interpretation of the Trinity in that context; there is also a rich and varied *theological* heritage with a long history of African conceptions of the divine.¹⁸⁶

Kärkkäinen identifies many important features in African culture that could be used to develop the doctrine of the Trinity in African context. He mentions communion and communality as central to the way of living in Africa which point to the loving communion of the trinitarian life. For him, communal life is a significant feature in Africa because it comprises the relationships of the living with the dead and spiritual realities that exist in the world and in the next world. He laments that the rational way of interpreting the Trinity might be an obstacle for the Africans in the interpretation of trinitarian theology. However, he notes that the lack of the development of African

¹⁸⁵ Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?*, 1-2.

¹⁸⁶ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 256-257.

trinitarian theology will lead to deficiency in the development of an African Christology. Our thesis contributes to the development of an African trinitarian theology. It takes roots in social trinitarianism but differs from it. While some social trinitarian theologians such as Boff and LaCugna propose communion of the Trinity as the prototype of communion in human society, this thesis argues that, communion in human society such as Ezza culture is already the resemblance of trinitarian communion.¹⁸⁷ This brings out the fact that African culture is embedded in communal relationships. Thus, the Trinity is interpreted in terms of communion ontology of Ezza culture. Kärkkäinen is right when he asserts that “The reverberations of Trinitarian renaissance at the end of second millennium...are felt all over, from theology to liturgy to social issues such as community and equality to Christianity’s relation to other religions.”¹⁸⁸ He indicates that it is time for Africa to contribute towards the development of trinitarian theology for the enrichment of the Christian faith. Kärkkäinen echoes the idea of Gunton who maintains that “Because the theology of the Trinity has so much to teach about the nature of our world and life within, it could be the centre of Christianity’s appeal to the unbelievers.”¹⁸⁹ The communion of the Trinity appeals to all human beings and even the entire creation as it invites creatures to live in interconnectedness with one another. Kärkkäinen concurs that the doctrine of the Trinity

needs to be related to the religiosity of the human person created in the image of God and the history of religions as well as the Christian doctrine of revelation...Trinity is not only a structuring principle of *Christian* faith and Christian theology but also of reality itself...If the God of the Bible is the creator of all reality and the human being has been created in the image of the Triune God, then it is inevitable that imprints of the Trinity can be found in the created reality.¹⁹⁰

Kärkkäinen explains that human beings created in the image of God possess the resemblance of the Trinity. He conceives the Trinity as “reality,” that is what is behind everything that exists in creation. Kärkkäinen writes that, “All observers of the African context agree that community, communalism, and participation are key features of those cultures.”¹⁹¹ This is not to say that the West does not live or love community or communal living. The West, more than African culture emphasis the individual more than

¹⁸⁷ See Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 148-149.

¹⁸⁸ Karkkainen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 384.

¹⁸⁹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 7.

¹⁹⁰ Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 385.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

the community. He even states that,

If there is one crucial development concerning the Trinity on which almost all Christian theologians are currently in agreement, it is the rise to prominence of the understanding of God as communion...there has been a definite shift in Christian theology from considering the God of the Bible as one subject to seeing God as Father, Son and Spirit, an eternal communion of love...The idea of God as communion indicates simply the biblical notion of God as love, who shares and is related. Relationality between Father, Son and Spirit and by extension between the Triune God and the world, rather than the idea of the one God as self-contained monad, is indeed a biblical and theologically correct way of speaking of the Christian God...The move to relationality is also in keeping with the dynamic understanding of reality and the human being as well as human community in late modernity. Speaking of postmodern insight for Trinitarian thought...The concepts of isolation, individualism, and independence are children of modernity. Over against the typical modernist bias to classify and categorize everything into distinct units (only think of the methods of the natural sciences), postmodernity speaks of relationality, interdependence, becoming, emerging...In this changing intellectual atmosphere, the value of communion theology is being appreciated in a new way.¹⁹²

Kärkkäinen notes that the rise of the social model of the doctrine of the Trinity is an important development for Christian faith and contemporary society. He perceives that the understanding of communion as central to both the Trinity and human beings is the true knowledge of Christian revelation. Cunningham, too, says that “To speak of ‘Father’ or ‘Son’ is not to speak of an individual who is potentially isolated from other individuals; rather, the two terms specify *relations* that depend absolutely on *each other* for their meaning.”¹⁹³ He points to the doctrine of relationship in the Trinity. Kärkkäinen concurs by explaining that, “While hardly a uniquely postmodern idea, the mutual *relationship* between Father and Son...is but one example of the thoroughly relational nature of God as communion.”¹⁹⁴ He points to the fact that communion of the Trinity sheds light in the understanding of relationality in the postmodern era. Cunningham concludes, writing that,

In sum, then, postmodernism’s emphasis on complex relationality...has made it easier for theologians to think through the fundamentally relational nature of God that is inscribed in the doctrine of the Trinity. In the process, ancient claims about the Trinity’s co-equality, co-eternity, and mutual

¹⁹² Ibid., 387.

¹⁹³ David S. Cunningham, “The Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189.

¹⁹⁴ Kärkkäinen, *Trinity: Global Perspectives*, 388.

reciprocity are being recovered and reendowed with a fullness of meaning and significance that had been largely obscured in the modern era.¹⁹⁵

Cunningham indicates that the understanding of communal relationships in contemporary society is a great help in interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity through the notion of communion. He implies that the experience of the communal relationships in human society helps theologians to describe God with the terminology of loving communion. He says that communion is at the heart of the Trinity but the teaching of it was not obvious in the modern time. According to Cunningham, the African sense of community, too, is manifest in their perception of reality. This sense of belonging to one another in African society upholds the unity and love that exist therein.

John Probe describes the difference between African communion and Western individualism in these words: “Whereas Descartes spoke for Western man when he said, ‘Cogito ergo sum,’ –I think, therefore I exist–Akan man’s ontology is ‘Cognatus ergo sum’ –I am related by blood, therefore, I exist, or I exist because I belong to a family.”¹⁹⁶ He implies that communal relationship is paramount in the life of African people. Ogbonnaya says that the difference between the communal aspect of life of Africans and other world cultures is that it embraces “the ancestors, spirits, and other beings within both my immediate cosmos and beyond.”¹⁹⁷ He states that not only do Africans treasure communal life, they also believe in an unbroken communion between those living in the world and spiritual beings in the spirit world. Furthermore, he observes: “The African conception of communality, particularly as manifested among the Igbos of West Africa consists of a spiritual unity and binds people together, thus creating a communal bond that is unbreakable by distance or death.”¹⁹⁸ That is, wherever an Igbo person goes, he/she is aware of his/her people both at home and abroad. Josiah Royce confirms that African communality makes it possible for many African individuals to share “one spiritual bond.”¹⁹⁹ His words mean that the relational tie between Africans is difficult to break in times of peace and when war threatens the community. The people unite to face whatever confronts them. Indeed, according to Bediako, the difference between the

¹⁹⁵ Cunningham, “The Trinity,” 190.

¹⁹⁶ John Probe, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 49.

¹⁹⁷ Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity*, vii.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹⁹ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 133.

notion of communion in African culture and other parts of the world is traced to inclusiveness and trans-generations of communities in the life of Africans.²⁰⁰

An African sense of communion encompasses all aspects of reality. Gerhardus Oosthuizen observes that the concept of communion in African culture bridges the gap between the “sacred and secular or between the spiritual and material” areas of life.²⁰¹ In other words, there is no demarcation between the holy and profane aspects of reality. Life is one thread woven together by the events of life. Tonkumbo Adeyemo notes that communality is prevalent in Africa to the extent that the world that we see is “enveloped in the invisible spirit world.”²⁰² That is why for Africans, in the words of Cyril Okorochoa, “Salvation” comprises “the visible and invisible worlds.”²⁰³ Thus, one cannot save the soul without saving the body. Saving the soul in the spiritual world starts with love in the material world.

Ezza people, for instance, only honour the ancestors *mere guu* (that is those who loved as they lived). Christianity, like Africa, emphasises communality as a proper way of living in society. Andrew Walls recognises the contribution Africa could make to the discourse about communality when he says that “anyone who wishes to undertake serious study of Christianity these days needs to know something about Africa.”²⁰⁴ This is more so because God is central to the African notion of communion. Communal living is written into the fabric of the African soul. It is intrinsic to the African way of life. Although, each segment of community in Africa has a leader, God is the supreme ruler of all creation in Africa, according to Joe Kapolyo.²⁰⁵

In the African world view, communion is from God because “God gives life” and brings people together through families and communities.²⁰⁶ Ezza communion is vital to contemporary trinitarian theology since, according to Kwesi Dickson, “systematic

²⁰⁰ Bediako, “Jesus in Africa,” 295-296.

²⁰¹ Gerhardus Cornelius Oosthuizen, “The place of Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa,” in *African Traditional Religions*, 40-41.

²⁰² Tonkumbo Adeyemo, “Unapproachable God: The High God of African Traditional Religion,” in *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Vies of God*, ed. Aida Besancon Spencer and William David Spencer (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 130-131.

²⁰³ Cyril Okorochoa, “The meaning of Salvation: An African Perspective,” in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dryness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 59-92.

²⁰⁴ Andrew Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 105.

²⁰⁵ Joe M. Kapolyo, *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 35-40.

²⁰⁶ Diane Stinton, “Africa, East and West,” in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parrat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 120-121.

theology reflection on God has not paid much attention to how African theologies and spiritualities have challenged classic theism and contemporary God-talk.”²⁰⁷ He means that Africa can contribute much to theological discourse concerning the mystery of the Trinity. According to Manus Ukachukwu, African culture is rich in theological perceptions but is lacking in literacy expression due to the fact that oral tradition is still the prevalent method of transmitting knowledge and information in society.²⁰⁸ This thesis is an effort to add the African voice to the discourse about communion in trinitarian theology, and how communion in Ezza society can serve as an image of trinitarian communion. The importance of communion and family relationships in Africa highlights the use of the social analogy in African trinitarian theology.²⁰⁹

The social analogy presents the Trinity in social terms. For example, Gregory of Nazianzus perceives the image of the Trinity in the human family of “Adam, Eve and Seth.”²¹⁰ This does not mean that God is a human being but it does highlight how God exists in a personal way. Moltmann, too, sees the human family of husband, wife and child as the image of a triune God. For him, this image is not “just as the image of his rule but also as the image of his inner being. In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, human fellowship corresponds to the unique, incomprehensible fellowship of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.”²¹¹ In this way, Moltmann proposes true family/community as the image of both the rule of God and inner life of God. Through the Spirit of God, humanity is enabled to live in the same way that God lives, that is in love and communion. Notwithstanding the maxim of Rahner who claims that the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity is still a “radical monotheism,” communion in Ezza reveals that there is a glimpse of human life that resembles trinitarian communion.²¹² The implication of faith in the Trinity is to imitate loving communion in the Godhead. Mary Timothy Prokes agrees that such “mutuality” in human society is truly the image of the Trinity.²¹³ This is

²⁰⁷ Kwesi Dickson, “African Theology: Origin, Methodology and Content,” *Journal of Religious Thought* [Washington] 30, no.2 (1975):37.

²⁰⁸ Manus Chris Ukachukwu, “Methodological Approaches in Contemporary African Biblical Scholarship: The Case of West Africa,” in *African Theology Today*, ed. Emmanuel Tatongole (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2002), 1-21.

²⁰⁹ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, chap II.

²¹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Theological Oration-On the Spirit II,” in *The Library of Christian Classics: Christology of the Later Fathers*, 200.

²¹¹ Moltmann, *History and Triune God*, 60, 65.

²¹² Rahner, *Theological Investigations: God and Revelation*, vol. 18 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 105.

²¹³ Mary Timothy Prokes, *Mutuality, The Human Image of Trinitarian Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 6.

true because the Father ever loves the Son and the Son is ever returning the same love in the Spirit. When people love one another, they embed trinitarian life in society.

4.7 Trinitarian Communion as Inspiration for Believers and Non-Believers

The communion in Ezza culture comes from their communion with and belief in God. That is basically trinitarian communion. In Ezza culture, God is the source of communality in family and society. Ezza culture has a significant contribution to make for all people in their life of communality and love.

4.7.1 Family

Ike maintains that “One area where many non-Africans see the original African lifestyle is the family. The essence of community, sharing, ‘living and let live’ and togetherness was shown through the large family. The family was a sign of life. Loneliness was unknown.”²¹⁴ Ike demonstrates that communion is first learnt and practiced in the family before it spreads to the villages and communities. According to him, family in Africa is the centre of love and communion. The adage which says that “charity begins at home” is very apt in conveying the importance of family in imparting loving communion to people. Ezza people say that *nne eghu le ata echera nwiya elee ya enya l’onu* (If the mother goat chews bamboo, her baby kid looks at her mouth). In other words, the children learn from their parents and elders in the family setting how to live a loving life. The African way of discipline is to restore relationship in the family.

The question raised by Ike as to what Africa could “offer the civilized world of Europe and America,” is answered by saying “It may simply be called, the gift of family, which is an extension of the place of the life and the promotion of life and community.”²¹⁵ And there is no doubt that adopting the African propensity to give and protect life can enrich other cultures.²¹⁶ African families, including Ezza families, are the places where life is enhanced and promoted. Ike maintains that “The African family seen as the place for giving life and protecting it...can enrich other cultures.”²¹⁷ Ezza society

²¹⁴ Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 54.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

not only holds babies as sacred, they equally celebrate the life of their dead members in thanksgiving to God who sent the person into the world.²¹⁸ Ike further states that “This attitude to life, seeing life and death as a gift thus celebrating it enhances the dignity of life and encourages the community...Celebrating by means of feasts and events encourages community harmony and peace”²¹⁹ His words mean that celebrating the different stages of human life is at the centre of Ezza communality. The family crisis ravaging our world today in various forms is, according to Ike sure to receive an alternative solution in Africa because of their understanding of family.²²⁰ For example, family life in Ezza culture contrasts with family life in Europe where only the husband and wife decide how and when to terminate the marriage. Africans’ religious beliefs taught them that marriage is from God and children are sacred and gifts from God. Their faith influences their communal living.

4.7.2 Wider Society

In Ezza culture, there is a clear synergy in the participation of *unwuunna* (male descendant of a family), *otu ogbo* (age grade), *unwuada* (women who are married to other families) and *ndu inyomuji* (women who are married into the family) in the community. The *eze* (the community leader) and his cabinet also play a unifying role in society. This type of organisational structure in Ezza community could inspire democratic governments to include everybody in regulating the affairs of the people. This could also be applied to the Church to imitate closely the leadership of the “Good Shepherd” (Jn 10: 11). *Unwuunna* and *otu ogbo*, according to Ray Ofoegbu, “instil the values of Igbo culture...Igbo attachment to and love of [*unwuunna*] compel the Igbo to avoid bringing shame, disgrace and dishonour to their kinship groups.”²²¹ This type of organisation is worthy of emulation by other human societies as a source of peace and harmony.

Ofoegbu writes that *unwuada* “are guided by the demands of social justice through arbitration and reconciliation.”²²² They bring peace and harmony in their families and in society. Ofoegbu’s words suggest that the Church in Abakaliki is also reaping a large harvest of believers because she organises her members into Christian

²¹⁸ Ibid., 58.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 55.

²²¹ Ofoegbu, “The Contribution of Igbo Culture to Nigeria’s Political Culture,” 221.

²²² Ibid., 220.

mothers/fathers associations, Christian boys/girls groups which are the ideas that the Church gets from Ezza communion.²²³ This method promotes participation and enhances a sense of belonging in the Christian community. The leadership of *Eze* and his cabinet as facilitators of dialogue, peace and reconciliation in the community could serve as agents for change, abandoning a punitive form of discipline and adopting a restorative alternative in the community. Such an arrangement would lead to imprisonment of offenders being abandoned.²²⁴

4.7.3 Joy and love of life

Ike asserts that “the joy of life is one of Africa’s greatest gifts and thus a challenge to the peoples of the rest of the world.”²²⁵ Joy comes from love and communion. Nobody rejoices alone. It takes other people to share in the joy of others. An Ezza adage says that *Oto dudu onye bu ikfu nkunyi* (nobody lives for him/herself alone), and this is because all people are connected. This linking with others leads to participation and harmony. Ike cites Bishop de Longe’s Munich address in 1988, where the Bishop reminded his Western audience that, “You, dear friends, have everything but you are serious and sad. We have almost nothing, yet there is joy on our faces.”²²⁶ Longe indicates that even extreme poverty does not erase joy in Africa. This joy flows from communal living in Africa. It is a valuable gift which Africans can offer to the whole world. A joyful person is contented and lives in peace. Writing about his experience in Zambia, Swan remarks:

the little I contributed to the people was tiny compared to what I received from them. Most of these people had barely enough to eat each day and had little or no possessions. Yet they had a joy that was infectious and a humility that melted my pride, helping me see my own poverty with new eyes. Realizing my poverty drew me closer to them and to God. Being among them confirmed at the deepest level within me that God has truly united himself to ‘the least of these brothers and sisters of mine’ (Matt 25: 40, 45).²²⁷

Swan notes that the abject poverty in Africa does not prevent people from being joyful. Moreover, his experience of the joyful faces in Africa transforms him and changes his

²²³ Ibid., 223.

²²⁴ It does not mean that Ezza society is perfect; however, it does mean that the communal confession of wrong doing can be an alternative to prison in Ezza society.

²²⁵ Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 50.

²²⁶ Bishop De Longe, “Munich address 1988,” cited in Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 51.

²²⁷ Swan, *Love has a Source*, 148-149.

perception on what real life is all about. This is a missionary who was converted by the people he went to convert. Furthermore, Pope John Paul II observes that,

The Sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe instinctively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them.²²⁸

The Pope indicates that continual living in communion even after death makes Africans enjoy life and often celebrate it. The pontiff further recognises that “In Africa, the Mass is truly a celebration: you ‘celebrate’ it, while we ‘attend’ or ‘participate’ in it; the very word denotes the cultural difference.”²²⁹ He notices that the Africans bring their culture to the celebration of Mass. The respect and sacredness of life with their accompaniment of feasting and celebrations are treasures from Ezza culture which could enrich the world. Is there any other thing that is more excellent as love and communion? How happy could human beings be if they express love and communion in their daily lives?

4.7.4 Communality as Cultural Value

Pope John Paul II asserts that Africa is,

Endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole...They are values which can...facilitate that worldwide revival on which the desired development of individual and nations depends.²³⁰

Our thesis presents communion as the ‘cultural value and priceless human quality’ *par excellence* which Africa could propose to the world as a solution to peace and harmony in human community. The pontiff understands that real human progress of both individuals and nations rests on peace and tranquillity in human society. While war leads to destruction and death, loving communion offers progress and human development. Communion is even capable of healing division among the Christian denominations. In Zizioulas’ address to the “World Conference of Faith and Order”, he stated that, “All of us can profit from the careful and profound study of this concept [*koinonia*] as we try to

²²⁸ Pope John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation,” *Ecclesia in Africa* (September 1995): 43, accessed December 13, 2019, <http://www.vatican.va>. See also Ike, *A World for Everybody*, 51.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, #42.

find ways of overcoming division in the Church of Christ.”²³¹ He sees the life of communion as a remedy for lack of unity and love even in the Church.

The relevance of linking communion in Ezza culture to the communion in the Trinity cannot be overemphasised. In the words of John Pobee, “If there is to be a serious and deep communication and rooting of the gospel of Christ, the African stamp will have to replace the European stamp.”²³² The African stamp is particularly evident in the communal life of Ezza culture. I am not arguing that Ezza society is a new broom that sweeps clean in relation to Christian practice. I acknowledge the immense contributions of Europe, especially in her missionaries and theologians, to the development of evangelisation in Africa. Nonetheless, I believe that communion in Ezza culture can serve as an image of trinitarian communion, and this could lead to a deeper understanding of the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity. As communion brings peace and harmony in Ezza cultural life, it could do the same if the pattern were to be adopted in other cultures. Anybody who embraces the vision of communal life advocated here would hardly contemplate tampering with human life. He/she would understand the sacredness and interconnectedness of every aspect of creation. Moreover, this sense of belonging to his/her people and God, inspires the person to love life and shun hatred.

Ike titled a draft paper that he presented to the World Synod of Bishop: “Africa: Salt of the Earth and Light of the World in the 21st Century Evangelization.”²³³ He describes Africa as ‘salt’ and ‘light’ because he perceives that Africa has something good to offer to the whole world, something that could change the world for the better, namely “communion.” The life of communion lived in family and community is a rare treasure which is at the centre of life, peace and harmony in human existence. Thus, Ezza culture, though poor in material possessions, is very rich in human values that enhance human flourishing in human society and in the entire creation.

²³¹ Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, ed. Gregory Edwards (California: Sebastian, 2010), 49.

²³² Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 17.

²³³ Ike, “Africa: Salt of the Earth and Light of the World: A Draft Paper for the 2012 World Synod of Bishops on the Theme: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,” accessed April 11, 2022, <https://www.Obioraike.com>.

4. 8 Conclusion

Faith in God who is a Trinity of love and communion has huge implications for humanity which is created in the “image and likeness of God” (Gen 1: 26-27). If God who creates reality is love and we are made in the image and likeness of that God, it implies that human beings are marked by love and communion. To exist otherwise is to bear false witness to our Creator. Human beings then resemble God most when they live in love and communion. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in un-broken love and communion with one another in the one Godhead.

In chapter five, communion in the Trinity and the Ezza culture will be appraised and I will offer a personal reflection and assessment.

CHAPTER FIVE

APPRAISAL OF COMMUNION IN THE TRINITY AND EZZA

CULTURE: A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY

“For this pillar you see in the west corner of the building symbolizes the true Trinity; for the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit are One God in Trinity, and that Trinity is in Unity. It is the perfect pillar of all good, reaching from the heights to the depths and governing the whole terrestrial globe.” Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias.

The analysis of the works of the fourth-century trinitarian theologians, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, show that they made unique theological contributions to trinitarian theology. These Cappadocian fathers were the first to teach the oneness and distinction in the Godhead.¹ In this way, they promoted what later came to be viewed till today by the magisterium as the orthodox conception of the doctrine of the Trinity. This contribution by the Cappadocian fathers is significant in that it came at a time when there were competing conceptions of relationships in the Trinity. Thus, they helped settle the controversy concerning the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which was problematic in their era of Christianity.

A major conclusion of this thesis is that the contribution of these fathers of the Church represented a giant step towards an orthodox understanding and application of the doctrine of the Trinity in the life of society. Indeed, their teaching became a touchstone for the interpretation of this core aspect of the Christian faith for subsequent generations of Christians. There are different applications of the Cappadocians’ trinitarian theology in contemporary theological studies. Some theologians such as Catherine LaCugna, Jürgen Moltmann and John Zizioulas mine the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers to formulate a social model of the Trinity, while other theologians, such as Karen Kilby, see this as projecting contemporary social problems onto the Cappadocians, arguing that they were not strictly speaking social trinitarian theologians.

¹ Basil, *Letters*, 214.4.

5.1 The Cappadocian Fathers and Social Model of the Trinity

A second conclusion is that the Cappadocian fathers, one could argue, did not set out to expound a social model of the Trinity; their interpretation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are equal and united in one Godhead, opened the door for the development of a communal model of the Trinity. There is no doubt that in some contemporary works on the social model of the Trinity, certain researchers find the Cappadocians' interpretation of the Trinity beneficial or inspirational in the formulation of a social model of the Trinity. These social trinitarians praised the Cappadocians' interpretation of the Trinity as a thorough and viable Christian account of the Trinity, and hence, it can inspire a social model of the Trinity. Thus, they see the Cappadocian fathers as valid theological forerunners of modern communal trinitarian theologians. It is in recognition of this status of the Cappadocian fathers that our thesis dealing with trinitarian communion as a reflection of the communion that exists in Ezza culture needed to critically examine and understand the Cappadocians' theological texts. A third major contribution is that, on the basis of the various interpretations of their theology, our thesis affirms that their interpretation of trinitarian relations helps in understanding and application of the life of communion to every Christian baptised in the name of the Trinity. Another conclusion drawn as evidenced in our thesis asserts that communion in Ezza culture is a reflection of the communion that exists in the Trinity. It is based on the Cappadocians' interpretation of trinitarian relations.

5.2 Cappadocians' Contribution to Trinitarian Relationship Questions: An Interpretation

A fifth contribution is that the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers, developed in the fourth century, is not easy to interpret or explain because they were produced in a context plagued by such trinitarian controversies as Arianism, Modalism and the practical resolution of the Council of Nicaea. Contemporary social trinitarians who mined the Cappadocians' trinitarian theology have also influenced my position of interpreting communion in Ezza culture as a reflection of trinitarian communion.

The Cappadocians' teaching on the Trinity is inspirational to our thesis' affirmation that communion in Ezza culture is an image of trinitarian communion. This is drawn from the way in which they used the notions of equality, unity and distinction in their development of trinitarian theology, and these notions point to loving relationships and sharing. The Trinity is equal, united and distinct in their Godhead. When this way of interpreting the Trinity is applied to Ezza culture, one arrives at the following conclusion: human beings are equal in their humanity, united as people in families and society and distinct as individuals who relate to fellow human beings without lapsing to individualism.

It can be concluded that the Trinity that lives in eternal communion and communal relationship and its relationship to my culture always intrigued me. I always wondered if there is a link between these two kinds of communion. My curiosity increased when I find in scripture that God is described with the image of love and that God created human beings in the image and likeness of God. Being born into Ezza culture and raised as a second-generation Christian, I experienced first-hand the practice of African traditional religion (ATR) and the relationship of the Creator (*Chineke*) and all other creatures. ATR believes in the existence of one God who is the Creator of heaven and earth. Thus, faith in one God is central to both Christians and to adherents of African traditional religion. It has been the focus of our thesis, however, to concentrate specifically on the doctrine of the Trinity as interpreted by the Cappadocian fathers in conversation with communion in Ezza culture. As a result, it does not deal with the historical development of the Trinity nor does it cover every aspect of Ezza culture such as organisation and migration. It limits itself to the investigation of the Cappadocians' teaching on the Trinity and communion in Ezza culture.

5.3 Cappadocian Teaching and Christian Belief in the Trinity

A major contribution which can be drawn from our research is the implication of the teaching of the Cappadocians; that is, believing in the Trinity has positive consequences for human life. The doctrine of the Trinity can inspire life in human society. The understanding of the doctrine is not only about rational knowledge which stays in the head but it implies a communal life in human society which reflects the communion in the Godhead. Thus, trinitarian communion calls forth communal relationships in the world. Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, human society such as Ezza

culture is called to live in unity. As the three divine Persons live in one another and share in each other's life, Ezza people are enabled to exist in relation to other people in society. Thus, the contributions of the Cappadocians to the doctrine of the Trinity have far reaching implications for human life. Some theologians, such as LaCugna, have used the teaching of the Cappadocians on the Trinity to formulate a social model of the Trinity which has contributed to the development of trinitarian theology.

Another conclusion drawn is that the Cappadocian fathers individually and collectively interpreted the Trinity in such a way that made it easier to relate the doctrine to society. Basil, for example, interpreted the trinity in relational terms. He affirmed that the Trinity is one substance and three divine Persons which means that the divine Persons are one in the Godhead but distinct as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, his doctrine of one *ousia* and three *hypostases* helped establish equality, unity and distinction in the Godhead.²

For Gregory of Nyssa, the Trinity is best understood analogically in terms of natural relations. He stated how Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in one divine nature. Each of them is perfect in divinity with the others. Thus, he applied the analogy of human nature to the Trinity. He vehemently argued against both those who denied the equality of the divine Persons and those who replaced the relational names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit with terms not found in scriptures.³

In like manner, Gregory of Nazianzus argued that the name 'Father' denotes relationship. Fatherhood relates to a son or a daughter.⁴ In human society to be a father means to have a son or a daughter who relates in a familial way to the father. Gregory not only removed subordination and creatureliness in the Trinity, he also taught that the Godhead exists in eternal communion. For him, just as father and son or daughter live in intimate relationships, in the Trinity the communion is even higher because the Trinity is divine and eternal. He also affirmed the equality, oneness and distinction of persons in the Trinity.

² Basil, *Letters* 214.4.

³ Gregory of Nyssa, *NPNF*, 51.

⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Third Theological Oration- on the Son*, 3.16.

5.4 Analogy: Applying Trinitarian Terms to Society

Drawing a ninth conclusion from our research, several terms like ‘perichoresis’ and ‘person’ are variously used when the Cappadocian fathers speak of the Trinity. Such terms when applied to human beings can only be done analogically. The undivided unity in the Trinity implies that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit co-inhere in one another. They are not three Gods but one Divine Being. Thus, there exists an eternal reciprocity in the Trinity. Ezza culture has the notion of offering one’s life for another in a ritual ceremony whereby a parent or a friend may choose to die instead of a sick child or a friend. The person asks God to heal the sick one and let himself or herself die instead. This could be described as a *perichoretic* relationship in Ezza culture. The *perichoretic* life of the Trinity means that the Trinity works in unison.

The same is true when speaking about the concept of person. The term person as applied to the Trinity is problematic because the Trinity is not a human being; hence, person can only be applied analogically. Human beings have to use human language to try to understand something of God who always remains a mystery beyond human comprehension. Moreover, the fact that the second Person of the Trinity became a human being in Jesus Christ and revealed the Father and Holy Spirit supports human endeavour to learn about God. Thus, to speak of God as a person does not mean that theology reduces God to the human level; rather, it means that God acts in personal ways in relationship to creation. Thus, in theology as well as in human society, the concept of person denotes relationship and love. To be a person is to be capable of relating with God who is the source of life. It is also the capacity of sharing life with fellow human beings and the establishment of a web of relationships with the whole of creation.

Another conclusion drawn is that one cannot speak of communion in the Trinity in the same manner as speaking about communion among human beings. Communion in the Trinity is partly the same and partly different from communion in human society. Communion is a source of peace and love in Ezza culture, nevertheless, unlike the Trinity, it is sometimes marred by tension and an absence of concord. Trinitarian communion is eternal; it does not come to an end. Applied to the communion in Ezza culture, it does not end in human life, but communion comprises both the living and those who died and live in the world of the spirit. Since God is rooted in the communion of

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, human beings show that when they live in love they reveal their resemblance to God. God is to be found where people live in communion. That is why our thesis argues that the life of communion in Ezza culture is the image of trinitarian communion, albeit not perfect. There is no peace in human society without the life of communion.

Human beings learn to live the life of communion because they are created in the image and likeness of God. When it is said that a human being is the ‘image of God,’ what does it really mean? God is Spirit; so how could human beings who are embodied become the image God? Although human beings are corporal, they most resemble God their creator when they live in love and communion as the three Persons in one God live in the Godhead. In Ezza culture, a person is expected to live as his/her father or mother. They are usually surprised if a person is *Oshi nne l’oshi nna* (One who does not resemble father or mother). Thus, it is possible in Ezza culture to see the communion among human beings as resembling the communion in the Trinity. So, if human beings live in communion as God lives, they can easily be regarded as *ome goo nna ya* (people who behave like their parents).

5.5 Focus of Research, Literature, and Choice of Methodology:

Reflecting on the Research Methodology used in our thesis, the documentary research method was the most appropriate for our topic. The theological focus for the research is the assertion in the book of Genesis that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. It also examined the declaration in the first letter of John that “love comes from God” and the fact that “God is love” (4:7-8). These Christian statements about the loving characteristics of God are examined in close relation to the famous Ezza people’s claim that God is compassionate (*Chiukfu obu oma*).

The methodology of this study was based on the documentary social research method by Teresa Whitaker and Marjorie Fitzpatrick which is a research method of documentary analysis. It was used to study the documents of the Cappadocian fathers and communality in Ezza culture. It analysed the primary sources of the Cappadocian fathers and also the secondary sources that commented on their teaching. The investigation of the notion of communion in Ezza followed the same pattern by examining the writings of

African trinitarian theologians and those who wrote on Africa/Ezza culture and their commentators. Our thesis followed the four criteria of evaluating findings by Whitaker and Fitzpatrick which are: “Authenticity, Credulity, Representativeness and Meaning”. Our thesis showed the ways in which the sources used in this study are authentic, believable, reliable and meaningful as to accomplish what it sets out to do.

A review of literature by firstly tracing the development of the sources of the three Cappadocians on the Trinity; it also looked at the teaching of their opponents in fourth-century Christianity. This formed the basis for the investigation of the contemporary development of social trinitarian theology. The exponents of trinitarian theology in Africa and communal life such as John S. Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Charles Nyamiti and Okechukwu A. Ogbonnaya were also engaged in conversation. Our thesis looked specifically at such Ezza authors as Gerry Nworie and Njoku Afoke. Given the limited nature of literature on the Trinity in Africa and particularly in Ezza, the reliance on these authors is evident. The modest contribution of our thesis to the important subject matter of communion in the Trinity and Ezza culture remains the motivation for this study. Our thesis also contained the definition of terms. It further traced Ezza to my Igbo roots in Nigeria; and to my African roots in general. It identified the geographical area and cultural life of Ezza people. The meanings of some words such as ATR are also explained. Moreover, Ezza words which are included in the study are interpreted for a non-Ezza audience.

5.6 Ezza Culture: Sharing in Universal Communion with God

Our thesis began with the hypothesis that communion in Ezza culture is based on a universal communion of human beings with God based on the fact that God created human beings in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1: 26-27). This “communion” is related to and reflected in trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers. Ezza people believe that everybody comes from God which means that there is a link between humanity and God as the Creator of human beings. Indeed, the word communion comes from the Greek word *koinōnia* which, when applied to the Trinity or Ezza culture, is about equality, love and sharing in the lives of others. In the Trinity it is known as a *perichoretic* relationship because Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in one another. In Ezza religious tradition, it is called *imekotaonu* which means communal relationships and sharing. *Imekotaonu* is the

unity that binds the family members, extended families, villages and the whole Ezza community together. For example, Ezza people greet themselves by saying: Ezza Ezekuna, “*ndu lanu, obu lanu*” which means one people, one heart.⁵ Hunt maintains that “the Trinity can be understood as a prototype of human society motivating social and historical progress. Through the revelation of the Trinity, society is summoned to transform itself after the model of trinitarian communion.”⁶ The Trinity is the God who creates human beings. In Christianity, God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, Ezza people believe in this same God. Hence, their faith in God is so strong that it influences their lives in human society.

The Ezza cultural context reflects their way of life and how they express themselves in their day-to-day relationships and communality. This includes the organisation of families, villages, communities and the entire society. It is in these areas that Ezza cultural communion is revealed and experienced. Ezza culture is centred on communality, a term exemplified in the *o bo odukwa onye l’agharu nwunne ya* (let nobody leave his or her brother or sister behind). The terms “brothers and sisters” in Ezza culture is not limited to siblings from the same parents; rather they have much broader meaning. Indeed, the whole of Ezza society sees itself as related to one another in intimate bonds of relationships derived from belonging to the same parents. This communal relationship is learnt first and foremost from the nuclear and extended family. Communion in Ezza culture is embedded in their religious beliefs, and religion is central to their way of life. In their faith they believe in the sacredness and in the interconnectedness of life. There is no demarcation between the holy and secular. Human life is interwoven within webs of relationships which unite both the people living in this world and those who have died and live in the world of spirits. Both this world and the world of spirits influence everyday human life. God, whom Ezza people call *Chiukfu*, is the highest Being in the spiritual world, followed by spirits created by God, God’s agents such as *Ali* land the most agent of morality, *Igwe* sky, the agent of justice, and ancestors.⁷

⁵ This is also the motto of Ezza people.

⁶ Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?*, 5.

⁷ See Echema, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today*17; Okere, *Okere in His Own Words*, vol. II, 147148.

5.7 *Chiukfu* as the Bond of Communion

One of the central themes of our study is that *Chiukfu* (Supreme God) is the bond of communion in Ezza culture. The communion in Ezza culture flows from their loving relationship with God. The world of the Spirit is as real as the material world for Ezza people. They believe that God is the Great Spirit. This spiritual relationship with God expressed in prayers, worship and communal meals informs the lives of Ezza people. They held God to be compassionate, and therefore, the life of love makes God present. Ezza people begin and end their days, including all their activities, with an invocation of God to be with them. Thus, they believe that *Chi* who is the Great Spirit is with them. United under the protection of God, the people strive for unity and peace as a way of honouring God in their midst and tasting God's benevolence among them. The Ten Commandments given to humanity by God was adapted by Ezekuna⁸ and given to his sons and daughters. The ten commandments of Ezekuna serve as a guide to all Ezza communities in order to consolidate communion with God and with one another. God is the source of unity in Ezza culture. This relationship with God informs human love and sharing in Ezza society.

5.8 Human person as Being-in-Communion in Ezza Culture

Since *Chiukfu* (God) is the bond of communion in Ezza culture, a human person is understood in terms of relationship and communion. And communion is established first of all with God but also with fellow human beings. Ezza people see themselves as children of *Ezekuna*, their ancestral father. Descending from one progenitor establishes Ezza people in unity and love. Ezza people believe that living in communion, unity and love is required of every living human being. They believe that all people are children of the same *Chiukfu* (Supreme God) and, therefore, it is an offence to God to treat people badly because they are different. Furthermore, communion encompasses all creation. Ezza people express this interconnectedness of all by giving their children names whose prefix or suffix are related to God's names or even naming them after earth, sky, trees, rivers and animals. These names are very significant because they reveal the

⁸ The ten commandments of Ezekuna (*Iwu iri Ezekuna*) see details in chapter two.

circumstances around the birth of a child in Ezza culture. A child's name, for example, reveals the happiness or thankfulness of parents to God for the arrival of their baby or that they are begging God for the preservation of the life of their baby if they lost a previous child. Indeed, names are always meaningful in Ezza culture.

5.9 The Limits of Social Trinitarianism and Communion in Ezza Culture

At the core of the Christian faith is the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrines of the Church are ultimately useful to the extent they can be translated into the lives of the faithful. Social trinitarian theology, according to this study, is beneficial for understanding of the Christian faith in general. It serves the need to relate trinitarian doctrine to society. The social model theologians make use of the evidence of scripture and tradition as the basis for their interpretation of trinitarian doctrine. However, it is important to note the danger of projection that sometimes forms part of such interpretations. The life of the Godhead differs from human life since God is a mystery beyond human understanding. It is simply not always possible to project the activities of temporal human life to the life of the Trinity of persons. Nevertheless, it is still possible to relate the image of communion in society to communion in the Trinity. Our thesis also identifies some cultural practices in Ezza culture which do not imitate the communion of the Trinity or measure up to her communal life.

5.10 General Conclusion

The concept of communion is central to both Christianity and Ezza culture. Our thesis insists that communion starts with and belongs to the Holy Trinity in its perfect form. In fact, the Trinity is one God who lives in eternal communion. This God creates humanity in the image and likeness of God. Since communion is central to the life of the Trinity, it follows that communion in human society comes from God. Thus, our thesis argued that communion in Ezza culture is somehow the image of trinitarian communion. Our research analysed the contributions of the Cappadocians and concludes that contemporary trinitarian theologians need to investigate further the Cappadocians' interpretation of the Trinity. The social implications of their interpretation of Trinity in relational terms are a departure from what used to be a more abstract interpretation of the Trinity. Such

interpretation made the mystery of the Trinity even more remote. Our study limits itself to communion as one of the implications of Cappadocians' interpretation of the Trinity. Their teaching can also shed light on other areas such as faith and worship of God. Their contribution helps to understand the God we believe in and the type of reverence we owe to such a God of love.

In conclusion, the social/communal model of the Trinity also needs to be further explored in order to achieve a deeper understanding of Christianity which will remain a trinitarian faith. From my documentary research it is possible to argue that the communion in the Trinity has been and is successfully related to the communion in Ezza culture on the basis of God creating human beings in God's own image and likeness. Our thesis, therefore, calls on other scholars of Igbo or African heritage to research different cultural aspects of their peoples such as attitudes to and practices around peace and justice with a view to exploring how these interact with Christian faith and tradition in the work of evangelisation.

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