

# **African notions of the Trinity: toward socio-political redress in South Africa**

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## Declaration

I, Zamuxolo Charles Botha, declare that this paper and the research presented therein are my own and have been prepared by me for my own independent research.

Further explain that:

- I. This work was produced, in whole or primarily, during the application for a Master of Theology degree specializing in systematic theology.
- II. If any part of this research report has been previously submitted for a degree or other qualification from Free State University or any other institution, it will be clearly stated.
- III. When I refer to the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed and referenced.
- IV. Sources are always acknowledged when I use the work of others. Except for such quotes, this work is entirely mine.
- V. I have acknowledged all major resources.
- VI. To the extent that the paper is based on work I have done in collaboration with others, I have clearly stated what others have done and what I have contributed.
- VII. This work, or any part thereof, has not been previously published or submitted.

Signed :  .....

Dated : **14 November 2022** .....

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## **Abstract**

Social indicators such as socioeconomic inequality, ethnicity, race, and double economic system show that Southern Africa is divided. The dualistic economy is a system used to perpetuated territorial separation between the races and thus create an unequal society.

Therefore, in this paper I argue that an African understanding of the Holy Trinity can help address socio-political challenges in South Africa. This research attains several tasks. First, it analyses the socio-political situation in South Africa. Second, it explores historical developments in doctrine, particularly African understanding of the doctrine. Third, it enhances aspects of African understanding of the Holy Trinity and provides possible remedies to address socio-political challenges in South Africa. The study concluded that Africans' understanding of the Holy Trinity possess characteristics that can be used to correct society.

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# **1. Introduction and Methodology**

This chapter explores the statement of the research question and the methodology that will be used which is an interpretive phenomenological approach that is correlated with liberation theology.

## **1.1. Background**

The African continent has great potential to succeed but what is needed is the right nurturing and the African people taking responsibility for their future. Julius Nyerere, ex-president of Tanzania, once uttered that:

Africa will have to rely on Africa. African governments will need to develop and implement policies for maximum national and collective self-reliance. If they do, Africa will thrive; If they don't, Africa will perish (van Zyl, 2009:53).

One of the areas which can be instrumental in the development of Africa is the church and her hermeneutical approach. In South Africa's case, the social indicators denote that it is divided by considerable socio-economic inequality, ethnicity, race, and a dual economic system (Schlemmer & Møller, 1997:15). The social and economic status of the modern South Africa is a result of its history. The reason for an inequality societal system in South Africa is due to the crafted dual economic system.

This dualistic economic system was configured by the apartheid government to ensure that a particular race is suppressed (Madavo, 1971:22). This apartheid system was so well crafted that it segregated the native people who are in majority into underdeveloped area (Madavo, 1971:22). And this segregation was done based on skin colour and so the segregation system ensure that the minority are not only privileged but own most of the country's economic system. This created an unfair participation in the economic system of the country and an unequal supply of basic needs such as education, employment, and healthcare system (Biko, 1972:17).

## **1.2. Research Problem**

The research problem focuses on how South Africa remains an unequal society nearly three decades after democracy. The Holy Trinity is a doctrine that that Christians use to convey that God is three substances still one. The Godhead is inclusive of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Triune God performs economically three

distinct function that of being Creator, redeemer, and Sustainer (Plantinga et al, 2010:120). The intent of this paper is to investigate Africans understanding of the Holy Trinity and how to use its characteristics to redress socioeconomic disparities in South Africa.

### **1.2.1. Primary research question**

In what way, can an African understanding of the Holy Trinity assist in redressing socio-political challenges in South Africa?

### **1.2.2. Sub-questions**

Herewith are sub-questions to be addressed to provide answers to the primary research question:

- 1.2.2.1. What is the socio-political context in South Africa?
- 1.2.2.2. What is the traditional doctrine of the Trinity?
- 1.2.2.3. What is the African notion(s) of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity?
- 1.2.2.4. How can the characteristics of these notions assist in redressing socio-political challenges in South Africa?

### **1.3. Literature Review**

The African continent is suffering from a range of issues which needs to be addressed for the continent to prosper. Some of the challenges are a result of the colonial phase which penetrated through the natural resources and mindset of the African people. The current challenges cannot be solely blamed on the colonial system. Van Zyl (2009:52-53) asserts that colonialism, if it is a contributing factor to the current situation (poverty and economic stagnation), cannot be solely responsible for what is currently happening in Africa. The colonial system was defeated even though it left traces of poverty and economic stagnation, but the control of the countries was left in the hands of African leaders.

In Africa, there has been a long litany of abusive and intrusive intervention by Western missionaries and their imperial co-workers which lead to a call by African leaders such as Desmond Tutu for a moratorium on Western missions in Africa (le Roux, 2011:35). This moratorium would allow Africans to develop their own antidote of dealing with their social problems. Stubbs denotes that we need to ensure that the African God and voice are given space to express themselves because all this time it has always been

then Western perspective that has been heard (Stubbs, 2004:4). Moreover, Desmond Tutu wrote, "In the midst of all our difficulties we are trying to know Jesus Christ; please leave us alone for a while" (le Roux, 2011:35). To formulate a solution for the African continent, it is important to use biblical principles interpreted through African lenses.

The early theologians whose work added immensely to the development of the doctrine of Holy Trinity were amongst others, Tertullian, Origen, Arius, Athanasius, and Augustine (Sakupapa, 2019:1). And these theologians originate from Africa which then presupposes that the historical development of this doctrine has its roots in our continent. Tertullian is credited with being the first theologian to coin the term "Trinity" (Kunhiyop, 2015:55). Since the contribution from these early writers, more work has been done and developed regarding the doctrine of the Holy Trinity which is contained in the contemporary African Christian theology (Sakupapa, 2019:1).

Africanisation, correlated with Hellenisation of the Christian faith, is when the African culture and values are used to explain the Trinity to an African community (Kombo, 2009:134). Charles Nyamiti, through a process of Africanisation, the imagery of an ancestor, descendant and Labation is used to express the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively (Moscicke, 2017:12). And Labation is described as a sacred rite, that is, the Holy Spirit or the holy oblation (Moscicke, 2017:12, c.f. Sakupapa, 2019:4). Nyamiti is not opposing the traditional understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which is also encompassed in the Nicene Creed, rather affirms the Triune God but seek to express the Godhead using symbols that are familiar with the African people. Therefore, Nyamiti then uses the relations between the human beings and the ancestors and assert the following:

An ancestor is or act as a personal parent of another person, of whom he or she then is the archetype of both nature and behaviour, and with whom he is entitled to have a regular sacred relationship through communication of some sort through any form of worship (Moscicke, 2017:11, Sakupapa, 2019:4).

This presupposes that the ancestor becomes the canvas and a prototype for the descendant because they provide a morality compass of how people should behave and act. And so, through regular sacred rituals and worship the descendants becomes connected to the ancestor and this connection is through the Labation which not only maintains the sacred relations but is the reason for the homogenous relationship.

Thus, Nyamiti uses the African imagery and symbols to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This is achieved by correlation the relations between the ancestor, descendant with the relations between the Father and Son. This affirms the assertions of Homoousios, which states that the Father and the Son are one and the same substance. And that the source of all life proceeds from the Father and without the other neither can ever be. Similarly, the ancestral god becomes the source of life and a prototype for the descendant (McGrath, 2011:17, Moscicke, 2017:12).

The ancestral relationship between the ancestor and the descendant becomes source of mutual love and life giving. Those that participates in the sacred relationship that exist in a state where there is communication, love and life shared equally which ultimately produces that Holy Spirit, which is not only the Confirmer, but the Sustainer is this sacred equal state (Moscicke, 2017:13). The key aspect of these sacred relations and production of the Labation which occurs through this reciprocating relationship between the ancestor and the descendant is paralle with the concept of filioque which theologically states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the God and Jesus Christ (McGrath, 2011, p. 247).

The Holy Trinity promotes and elevates a social image which is oriented around communal living. And this equitable, communal living is reflected from how the three *Divine Persons* share everything to an extent that they are no longer viewed as three gods but only One (Sakupapa, 2019:5). These aspects of rationalism and communalism can therefore be used for the attainment of an equitable society.

#### **1.4. Research Design**

The research design provides an overall structure for the process or structure in which the researcher follows, this includes the procedure of data collection and data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:74). The research epistemology and ontology that is employed in this research is a constructionist and subjective approach. The ontology is the study of being or the nature of existence and the structure of reality. And epistemology refers to the assumption made about the nature of knowledge (Al-Saadi, 2014:1).

And so, the approach for the research is constructive in nature because it assumes that things in the world are subjective and socially constructed. Therefore, the research becomes constructivist because configures a theory form the literature study and it is

subjective because of it chose in using liberative approached as its methodology (Al-Saadi, 2014:3).

The research method for this study uses the interpretive phenomenological analysis methodology which allows for the incorporate of knowledge from multiple disciplines. Alase (2017:11) argues that the interpretive phenomenological analysis is a qualitative research approach that seeks to combine other knowledge and expand one's own knowledge base. This multidisciplinary approach will make it possible to engage sociological aspects such as documenting the historical causes of socio-political imbalances in South Africa, while incorporating liberation theology which forms part of contemporary theological methods.

The epistle to the Ephesians 4 vs 4-6 will also form part of the theoretical framework. This pericope will be used thematically to elevates aspects which promote equitable living. The Apostle Paul in this text is speaking about Christians serving one Lord, having one faith, and been baptised by the same baptismal act. Paul therefore alludes to the aspect of the Trinity, to say assert that the believer's unity is based upon the Trinity and that the Holy Spirit is the one who has called both Jews and Gentiles (this constitutes a community of all people regardless of race, gender, sexuality, economic background) into one body of Christ, the church and has given them all a shared hope in Christ. This expresses the salvation project of God in ensuring that the entire created order shares in the abundance that creation has to offer without no hoarding or wanting to unjustly treat the other. For all have been created equally in the image and likeness of the Triune God.

Liberation theology is one of the schools that forms part of the contemporary hermeneutical methodologies. The purpose of liberation theology is to interpret the Bible through the lens of the oppressed and marginalised. Liberation theology originated in Latin America in the 1960s. Allen (2012:216) states that Gustavo Gutierrez was not only a pioneer and father of liberation theology, but also contributed to the promotion and development of this approach to text interpretation. Allen (2012:216) further argues that liberation theology rescues the Bible as an oppressive tool by adapted various elements of Marxist and biblical theology to affirm God's preferred option is for the poor, oppressed and marginalised.

Liberation theology aims to prevent the text from being used as an instrument of oppression by consciously reading the Bible through the eyes of the poor, marginalised, and oppressed. Allen (2012:216) states that liberation theology emphasises inequalities and social prejudices against marginalised groups and devotes much of the organisational intellectual energy to analysing economic relations and the structural distortions of society.

The research theories and methodologies applied in this study are:

#### **1.4.1 Research Methods**

This study uses a qualitative research approach as it allows researchers to collect and explore data in various forms to meaningfully analyse situations and problems. This method of approach provided the researcher with in-depth knowledge and information regarding the subject sample behaviour, thinking and feelings. The Phenomenological research methodology has been used in this research to analyse the life experiences of the people who are affected by an unequal social disparity.

#### **1.4.2 Qualitative Research Approach**

This research approach requires careful analysis of literature and a thorough understanding of the problem phenomenon. Researchers collect data in a variety of formats, providing opportunities not only to look at it from different outlooks, but also to create significant pictures of complex, multifaceted situations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:139).

According to Leedy & Ormrod (2013:139), there are two segments that encompass a qualitative research process. The process starts by analysing the occurrence in its natural state or context and there after it intentionally formulates a way to understand and study the density of the phenomena. And so, the research project uses a qualitative research approach known as 'interpretative phenomenological analysis'.

#### **1.4.3 The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach (IPA)**

For Alase (2010:10) the IPA is a specialised methodology that incorporates a multidisciplinary approach in its process of gathering knowledge and understanding. Its scientific approach allows the researcher to understand the lived experiences of people and gain understanding from that. And so it can be defines as a qualitative

approach that intends to conceptualise the life experiences and draw meaning from those experiences in order to improve the situation of others. Phenomenological studies aim to understand people's insights, views, and understandings of circumstances. (Reeds and Ormrod, 2013:145). In this paper, the researcher intends to analyse and understand the causes of the inequality in South Africa, how these were worsened with the arrival of COVID-19 pandemic and pave a way of how the doctrine of the Holy Trinity can offer characteristics that can remedy this situation.

A researcher may already have subjective understanding because they have a direct connection to the problem that is being investigated. The intention of partaking in this exercise is not only to rely on their own personal experience but to also benefit from the experiences of others. Deductive phenomenological analysis allows researchers to use life experience to set this as a foundation for unravelling the occurrence. I personally have been through the effects of COVID-19 and my experience has helped to understand the typical experience people go through. As a minister of a church, I have encountered people who were affected, and their lives worsened by the arrival of this pandemic.

The researcher used the interpretative phenomenological analysis to interpret and analyse the lived experience of those affected. The process that was followed was to collect the data through literature review, which analysed the causes of the socio-political challenges, the historical development of the doctrine of Holy Trinity, the African understanding of this doctrine and the application of characteristics that can be applied to redress his unequal society. The methodology is multifaceted for it incorporates the epistle of the Ephesians as its theoretical work and uses the lenses of liberation theology to not only analyse the socio and economical challenges but offer probably ways to redress this situation.

#### **1.4.4 The Epistle to the Ephesians as theoretical framework**

The epistle to the Ephesians 4 vs 4-6 will also form part of the theoretical framework. The Apostle Paul in this text is speaking about Christians serving one Lord, having one faith, and been baptised by the same baptismal act. Paul therefore alludes to the aspect of the Trinity, to say assert that the believer's harmony is founded upon the Holy Trinity and that the is it the Spirit of God that is responsible to call everyone, from all works of life, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. They are called to

become an alternative community, a people that God intends to be the beacon of hope and a prototype of how society should live and exist. And they exist by expressing the shared home that they have seen in Christ.

The paper employs the same framework by asserting that the society needs to exist in a manner like the believers who were united by one Lord, faith, and baptism. This presupposes that God's intent for humanity is to exist as a community that is united and shares the natural resources at their disposal without having a hoarding mentality.

#### **1.4.5 Liberation Theology Methodology**

This paper used liberation theology as a methodology who provided the researcher with a hermeneutical tool of analysis the text and materials through the lenses of those who are affected by an unequal society. In this paper, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is investigated through the African Christian theological lenses with the aim of unravelling attributes of the doctrine which are liberative. Liberation theology is a modern theological methodology that is used to rescue the text from being used as an oppressive instrument. It is a social phenomenon that the world does undergo changes every phase of an era and these changes at times bring a sharp cultural change (Gutierrez, 1973:13). The cultural change and societal construct should never be the reason why other remain oppressed or revert deeper in their level of poverty and injustice. The period changes should be a moment of transformation that is positive and brings solutions of emancipation. Liberation theological methodology is used as an instrument of not only diagnosing the current social ills but offer tangible solutions of redress.

According to McGrath (2011:90-91), liberation theology is an approach that not only call for emancipation but states emphatically that God takes a specific and preferential option for those who are hurt and unjustly treated. And so, any act that oppresses other is a choice that is taken to be against God. Therefore, liberation theology is a hermeneutical approach used to deal with oppressive situations. Is it a methodology that the falls under the umbrella of Black theology which is a movement that was formed to fight a theology which was division and elevated one race over the other. A theology that considered black skinned people to be cursed and not deserving of a better life. A theology which perpetuated a society where those who

did not have wealth were degraded and perceived to be lesser people in the community (Cone, 1986:5, McGrath, 2011:91).

Even though this movement is called Black theology, but its fight was far more than skin colour. Blackness was associated with anyone that is undergoing any form of oppression and marginalisation regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This movement reached the South African fertile soil in the 1970's during the time where the native people were fighting against the apartheid system (Biko, 1972:23; Motlhabi, 2009:162). Through this hermeneutical methodology, theologians were able to initially address the oppressive doctrine that was preached by the church as used by the government to oppress those in the periphery. Secondly, they formulated responses to declare apartheid as an evil system which is against God's intent.

It is Gustavo Gutierrez who denotes that the process of emancipation of a society undergoes three faces (Gutierrez, 1973:24-25). The first phase is the unravelling or exposing of the depth of the injustice. The second phase entails understanding human behaviour and learning from those who are affected what true transformation and emancipation means. The last phase intends to use the Bible as a foundation for the reason for the emancipation by revealing how God intends people to live.

### **1.5. Research lay-out**

The research analysed the African understanding of the Holy Spirit as well as the causes of socio-political imbalances to determine the characteristics that can assist in redressing the socio-political challenges in South Africa. The research also looked at the aspects of the Holy Trinity, as interpreted through the African lenses, and how they can be used to redress the socio-political challenges in South Africa.

Herewith is the table of contents and aims of each chapter:

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology**

This chapter includes the details of the research project, such as research problem, literature review, research methodology, research layout, research value, and ethics.

The research methodology used is the interpretive phenomenological approach correlated with liberation theology.

## **Chapter 2: The socio-political condition in South Africa**

This chapter analyses the socio-political status in South Africa.

## **Chapter 3: The Doctrine of Holy Trinity: An African perspective.**

This chapter explores the historical developments of the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically examining African understanding.

## **Chapter 4: African understanding of the Holy Trinity and its assistance in societal redress.**

This chapter elevates the aspects of African's understanding of the Holy Trinity and provides remedies for redressing socio-political challenges in South Africa.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion.**

This chapter concludes the study and provides final thoughts on the doctrine of the Trinity and how to address socio-political challenges in South Africa.

### **1.6. Value of the study**

Research forms a structured understanding of the Trinity through an African lens, which can be instrumental in achieving the common life of natural resources. This study will contribute to the Africanisation of Trinity doctrine and provide a framework for eradicating socio-political challenges.

### **1.7. Ethics of the study**

The researcher was aware of the ethical implications of the work, and it was done with this in mind. And no animal interviews or work was done. This study received a certificate of ethics from the Research Ethics Committee.

### **1.8. Conclusion**

The study shows that the African understanding of the Holy Trinity contains characteristics which can be used to promote an equitable society in South Africa. These characteristics includes aspects of oneness, relationality, communality, and the notion of UBUNTU which promotes wholeness.

## **2. The socio-political conditions in South Africa**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter analyses the socio-political status of South Africa. This is achieved by analysing the causes and impact of the socio-political divisions. By looking at the extent and impact of COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. And lastly by looking at the role of the church in promoting equality and a just system. In South Africa's case, the social indicators denote that it is divided by considerable socio-economic inequality, ethnicity, race, and a dual economic system (Schlemmer, & Møller, 1997:15). The social and economic status of the modern South Africa is a result of its history. The cause of economic inequality in South Africa is its dual economic system. The church which is supposed to be an epitome of unity and an egalitarian community has also shown traces of division. This is due to the interconnectedness between the society and the church.

### **2.2. Socio-political divisions**

South Africa is believed to encompass one of the more complex, divided, and diverse societies in the world (Schlemmer & Møller, 1997:15). The division within the society are a result of its history which promoted a legislation that segmented people among ethnic and racial lines. The society is also divided by socio-economic inequality which functions on a dual economic configuration.

Economics is the study of how entities such as governments balance the notion of scarcity and can deal with the supply and demand aspects (Parkin, 2010:2). This balance of supply and demand hinges upon the control of resources and how these can be distributed equally and justly. Economic inequality can be measures in different scaled such as individual, corporate and government levels. And this disparity becomes a measurement of the poverty levels of a particular society (ESRI, 2021). Economic inequality then provides a synopsis of the gap between the rich and the poor or the rich between those that are in the centre and those who are in the margins.

The reason for this disparity in the configuration is due to the double configured economic system which intends to separate people according to race (Madavo, 1971:22). The dual economic system was a radical legislation that ensured that the division imposed on a society widened the gap between the 'well-established industrial and commercial economy' from the 'marginal economic system' which ensured that those condition of those who are poor does not improve, rather remain reliant on those who hold economic power. And this dualistic economic system was perpetuated through the apartheid policy (Schlemmer, & Møller, 1997:15). Apartheid policy called for territorial division of people according to their skin colour and those of a particular race where segregated to places which were underdeveloped (Madavo, 1971:22). The reason behind this segregation was to ensure that a minority race is the one that fully benefits and participates in the economy leaving most native people to live in unhuman circumstances (Biko 1972:17).

For Biko and later Manganyi, this system of ensured that the native people do not participate fully in the economy. And this resulted from a long litany of events where land was even forcefully taken from the native people (Biko, 1972:18, Manganyi, 2019:135). This created an environment where black skin was associated with evil, darkness and poverty. And so, by virtue of skin colour people were segregated to spaces that ensured that they have minimal participation in the economic system. This activity in the economy at times was for the benefit of the minority since hard labour was not part of being privileged. This economic disparity perpetuated an environment where cities and town became centres that were economic hubs and all amenities were in abundance, but townships and rural settings become the place where those who are in majority were segregated to. And these places were undeveloped and received substandard if no amenities at all.

Part of the amenities that were substandard was the education facilities. Unfortunately, one of the ways to escape poverty is through education. And education according to (Macionis & Plummer, 2008:640) is a societal construct that is meant to provide knowledge and skills. If the education system is unequal this means that the children from these will always be steps behind as compared to their counterparts who attend schooling that has all facilities. This system of education perpetuates inequality and so makes the gap between those who are at the centre and the periphery to remain wide.

It is a sad reality that South Africa not only has a dual economy but had one of the most unequal education systems in the world (Pillay, 2021:2). Those that can afford and have managed to escape the poverty lines are able to send their children to private schooling. But most South African parents are not able to achieve this and so must settle for substandard schooling system with limited facilities. This system is the driving force for perpetuating the cycle of poverty because access to quality education comes with a cost. And this cost is inclusive of bus fare, school uniforms, stationary and extra mural activities (Pillay, 2021:2). And so, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to be widened because those who are able to receive this quality education will always be at an advantage of securing a life which is at least considered to be middle class.

The South African Constitution affirms that everyone has the right to all basic needs, and this includes water, housing, education, and healthcare system (Gordon et al., 2020:1, Harris et al, 2011:102-103). And so, any system which deprives people from this basic human right is not only against the constitution of the land but also is against God. The access to these basic needs is always mirrored with high barriers of entry such as travelling distance, high travel costs and access fees (Harris et al, 2011:103). And these barriers of entry also perpetuate an unequal society.

### **2.3. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa**

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached our shored in early 2020, the South African economy was already at a negative trajectory. The pandemic worsened this situation, and the economy recoded a negative growth to an extend that a great number of people lost their jobs and businesses had to close shop (Anakpo & Mishi, 2021:1). The impact of this negative growth was experienced in all spheres of life, whether it was the education, health, economic, social, and even religious spaces (Van der Merwe, 2020:2).

Van der Merwe (2020:2) asserts that the impact of the pandemic will be felt for a long time and the impact it has on the economy has even affected the disposable income of people. This has a negative impact because it has pushed several people below the poverty line. For Pillay (2021:4-5) the greatest injustice was that those who were privileged were affected minimally during this period.

While the schools were closed, the private schooling system was able to continue with online classes in which government school could not do because most of these learners do not even have access to the internet not have facilities to support this teaching platform. And so, some learners were left behind while others progress. This was again another reminder of the unequal system that we have in our country.

Initially, when the vaccine began to be produced, the dual economic system of the country came into the spotlight especially in the health sector (Bangalee & Suleman, 2020:2). Those who had medical aid and afforded where able to be priorities for access to vaccines. People who lived in long flung areas had to wait for a longer time due to their places being either far from the hospitals and clinics or hard to reach by medical people

The church is not immune from societal ills and the emergence of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 directly affected the church, as a result during the hard lock-down, public worship was prohibited and at times regulated depending on the restrictions that were imposed. The churches who were wealthier and had a social platform and facilities continued with online services while most churches could not because access to data is still a privilege in our country. This presupposes that there is a direct correlation between the society and the church.

#### **2.4. Impact of the Church on society**

The church is gathering of the people of God from the world to become an alternative community (McGrath, 2011:377). According to McGrath (2011:377), this definition first states that the Church is a spiritual society, replacing Israel as God's people in the world. Second, it affirms that all Christians are united in Christ, even though they have different backgrounds and backgrounds. This denotes that Christ is at the epicentre and unites every single believer, regardless of ethnicity, gender, and race. Third, is that the church is the repository of true Christian teaching. And finally, is that the Church brings together believers from all over the world, to help them grow together in faith and holiness. This entails that every member of the church is to be afforded an equal opportunity to growth in faith and holiness without any segregation but in adherence to Christian teachings.

The Christians church or church universal is defined as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic (Migliore, 2004:220-222, c.f. McGrath, 2011:390-391). The epistemology of the church unity is based on Ephesians 4:4-6, which speaks about “one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all”. For Migliore (2004:221), the unity of church is a fragmentary and provisional participation in the costly love of the triune God. McGrath (2011:393) sees the unity of the Church as a spiritual entity in the sense that it is the Triune God who gathers the dispersed from all places and times and makes them one. God's people. The Triune God himself, by his word and his Spirit, unites all in the same bond of communion in the one body of Christ. This description clearly articulates the oneness ideology of the church and how the church is supposed to exist, as one body, Christ being the head.

The unity of the body of Christ was challenged and made to exist as a divided community who serve One God. This forced the church to introspect and take a stand against this divisive system that went against Christian teachings. This effort was through the English-speaking churches, like Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist, who in 1948 spoke against the following:

race classification: different education laws created different types of education along ethnic lines; job reservations, where certain occupations are reserved for a racial group, to the detriment of blacks; many security bills and laws allow for detention and imprisonment without trial, the deportation of church workers and missionaries, and the expansion of police powers beyond the normally democratic limits established by law (De Gruchy, 1990:88).

And these were factors which not only separated the people socially but only within the borders of the church. This then led to tensions between the English-speaking churches and the state because in their view, the ‘very nature of the policy of apartheid is anathema’ (De Gruchy, 1990:89) because this led to division of society. De Gruchy (1990:89) further states that the tension between the church and state was unavoidable because the government policy was to separate and divide people based on ethnicity this went against what the church stood for, which is the promotion of reconciliation and social equality.

This meant that the implementation of the government policy also affected the business of the church because of racial segregation. Also, it was, sad reality of the

apartheid system was motivated through the church and perpetuated divisions also in the church. Kumalo (2009:43) denotes that the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was both political and theological. Those who orchestrated apartheid believed that they were doing it in the name of God and that it was God's will for most native people to be subjected to oppression, segregation, and poverty. The divisive mentality was not limited to the society, but it also penetrated the church walls. Within the church it meant that people could not share in the ordinances of God, such as the Eucharist or Holy Communion, which is the table of Grace hosted by Christ and invites all to partake in.

The church needed to understand its role towards an oppressive state and provide a framework of how the state function ethically. And this was through the formulation of 'The Message', 'Belhar Confession' and 'Kairos Document'. For Laubscher (2009:1661), these documents were important markers which elevated the role theology plays in the public domain.

In 1968 a publication known as 'The Message to the People of South Africa', which was initiated by Beyers Naudé and Bishop Bill Burnet. This document challenged the basis of the racial segregation and the ill-treatment of people of colour. According to De Gruchy (2019:19), the message is a prophetic statement that rejects racism as a false gospel and emphasises that the gospel of Christ is not only about personal salvation but has direct implications for life justice. political and social life.

Inspired by the efforts of Manas Buthelezi in 1977, who was able to persuade the sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to reject apartheid as a false doctrine. This decision propelled the formation of the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa in 1981 which was led by Allan Boesak which also led to the drafting of the Belhar Confession in 1982 (De Gruchy, 2019:22, c.f. Koopman, 2009:65).

The Kairos Document was another document that was put together by theologians from different denominations. Kumalo (2009:56) denotes that the Kairos Document was formulated to educate the leadership of the church on the direction it needs to take to fight against injustice of apartheid. It also analysed the contesting theologies that were in the country at the time, including State, Church and Prophetic.

The analysis of the three theologies found in South Africa were as follows:

*State Theology* characterised by its support and underpinning of the system of repression. *Church Theology* held by most churches and sought to promote easy reconciliation with the policy of apartheid. *Prophetic Theology* encouraged the church to join the liberation struggle (Kumalo, 2009:57).

These formulations were instrumental in ensuring that the church becomes prophetic and speaks truth to power but also introspect to deal with the internal divisions that exist within the walls of the church.

## **2.5. Conclusion of the socio-political conditions in South Africa**

In conclusion, South Africa is a country that is divided by socio-economic inequality, ethnicity, race, and a dual economy. South Africa's dual economy, which is the product of apartheid, has created a foundation for persistent inequality where most indigenous peoples cannot participate and enjoy the produce of the country. The ripple effect of the double economic system in South Africa is discrimination between people, where most blacks are cornered in underdeveloped places.

These underdeveloped places lack adequate service delivery, access to proper amenities and lack of proper infrastructure. And these places are far from towns and cities where proper amenities are found. This dualistic system creates an environment where those that are privileged and able to afford can gain access to the best services that are available.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic on our shores has further exposed the inequalities experienced at home. This has been experienced in all areas of society, including education, health care, and economic participation. The effects of a divisive system in society also affect the church. The church is a community of called out believers. This community does not exist in a vacuum but is a part of society in general and is directly affected by socio-political conditions.

The church through the formulation of 'The Message', 'Belhar Confession' and 'Kairos Documents' intended to fight against itself and against the state which perpetuated a system of segregation. The church, which is known to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic did not live up to this but allowed the division in the society to exist within the church walls. Which resulted in a segregated worship service and Holy Communion. The church is a mirror of its society and a prototype of how society should be. And so,

if the division and injustice is perpetuated by the church itself, the society in general will find it hard to exist in a homogeneous society. Because those that are ambassadors of a Triune God in the world are not able to influence the characteristic of a God who is the epitome of unity, love, justice, and equality.

The proceeding chapter will look at the origins of the Holy Trinity. Focus will be placed on the African understanding of this doctrine.

### **3. The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: An African perspective**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The historical development of the Holy Trinity throughout the Christian era will be analysed. The aim is to correlate this understanding to the African analysis of the doctrine to elevate characteristics that can be used to redress an unequal society.

#### **3.2. The origin of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity**

Genesis begins by expressing the Triune God. Genesis says: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth is formless and empty, darkness lies upon the depths of the sea, the spirit of God floats upon the waters, and God gave light, "and there was light" (Genesis 1: 13, TNIV) Second, in Genesis, God created man in God's image. God, "Then God said: let us make man in our image . . . (Genesis). 1: 26, TNIV)" is written. It assumes the idea that all human beings are created in the image of God and have equality in creation. access to basic needs. This presupposes that if the creator is a Triune God, human being is created in the image of God, then creation need to be able to live according to the one who created them.

There are three persons in the head of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when analysing the people of the Trinity, they must be considered equally divine and of equal caste (McGrath, 2011: 11). This shows that in the doctrine of the Trinity, there is a unique relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This speaks to the biblical way of speaking about God which is through the notion of koinonia (Kärkkäinen, 2017:156). This states that there a exist a communion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This communion speaks of a relationality that exist in the Godhead. And this states that even though the Godhead is distinct (hypostaseis) yet there exists a divine mutual relation. Therefore, this means that in Godhead there is a perfectly equal community, an equal relationship, where there is no authority or lordship over each other, and they exist in perfect relation to each other. Interestingly, Trinitarian relationships provide us

with an archetype of how society should exist. The work of the doctrine was again further refined during the medieval period.

### **3.2.1. Medieval Period**

During the medieval period, the theologians began to build on the biblical understanding and foundation of the doctrine of Holy Trinity (Kärkkäinen, 2017:139). In a sense, the Holy Trinity is a Christian doctrine that expresses the view that God is three persons in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Plantinga claims that as Creator, the only God is Father; as Redeemer of the Son; is the sanctifier, the giver of grace and eternal life, the Holy Spirit (Plantinga et al., 2010:120). This assumes that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are just the names of one divine God. In terms of similar sentiments, it is also easy to understand as three separate gods or divine figures operating in three distinct states, this is a heresy known as tritheism.

The doctrinal conception of the Trinity correlates with the emergence of dogma. A creed is a formal statement or set of Christian beliefs (Johnson, 2003:10). And so, the Nicene Creed was originally written by the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (325 C.E.), called or convened by Constantine, to unite the already severely divided new Christian empire. respected by the teachings of Arius (Johnson, 2003:33, see Gonzalez, 2010:186). The council sought answers to questions concerning the oneness of God and the notion that God is both Father and Son. And, to answer a question that mankind has grappled with through the ages: "How can a person who is born, lives, and dies be God, let alone God by definition?" changeable?" (Comby, 1985:88).

Bishop Athanasius was among those who defended the divinity of Jesus Christ and the relationship between Jesus Christ and God. The overall response of the delegation was that the Son was "homoousios" with God, meaning of same substance (Johnson, 2003:33, c.f. Gonzalez, 2010:190). This was to assert that the Son is just as divine as the Father or that the Son was begotten from the same substance as the Father. This assertion was then put forward by Eusebius of Caesarea to be added into the creed, which was subsequently accepted by the council and the word "homoousios", meaning that the Son is the same "ousia"- same substance as Father or consubstantial with

Father was added. It affirmed the absolute equality between Father and the Son; this meant that Jesus is truly God and equal to the Father (Comby, 1985:92, c.f. Gonzalez, 2010:190). The result was that the Nicene Creed was adopted at the end of council.

The agreement that was reached at the Council of Nicaea was short lived and factions started to reject the term “homoousios” because it was not found in scripture. The nature or divinity of the Holy Spirit was also questioned, and the Arian argued that the Holy Spirit cannot be God. Hence those who supported this notion were titled as “pneumatomachoi” – meaning those who fight against the Spirit (Comby, 1985:93). Basil, bishop of Caesarea, demonstrated that the Holy Spirit is the same substance as the Father.

Subsequently, the First Council of Constantinople met in 381 C.E., convened by Emperor Theodosius I and convened by Gregory of Nazianzus. According to Gonzalez (2010:217), this distinction is made between “ousia” (substance) and “hypostasis” (person). It makes it possible to realize the equality of the Father and the Son in a single being and their distinction in two persons. The Council reaffirms the teaching of the Nicene Creed and adds the declaration of the Holy Spirit: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, the One with the Father and the Son being worshiped and glorified.” In the eight century, later Latin bishops added “filioque” – taken from the Father and the Son (Comby, 1985:94, c.f. Gonzalez, 2010:312).

The term *filioque* states that there is a clear existence of a dual procession of the Spirit which comes from the Father and the Son (Kärkkäinen, 2017:146). There is scriptural evidence that supports this understanding of the dualistic procession of the Spirit. In John 16:17, Jesus is perceived as sending the Spirit out which is called the *Parakletos* and in the same wavelength, in John 15:26 it is stated that the same Spirit also proceeds from the Father. It is Augustine who pushes this narrative further and states that the dualistic procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son also expresses aspects of shared love (Kärkkäinen, 2017:146). This presupposes that there exists a symbiotic love between the Triune God and this love also correlates to the bond that exist.

The medieval theologians continued with the affirmations of what the Nicene creed confessed and with promoting the assertions of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. One

of the theologians is John of Damascus whose work was centred around re-establishing the work of the Cappadocian fathers (Kärkkäinen, 2017:146). John of Damascus also added one dynamic to the understanding of the doctrine which speaks of the primacy of the Father. This primacy denotes that the Father is the source of both the Father and the Son. And being the source means that the very essence and being of the Godhead is dependent on each other. And this in simple terms mean that unless the Father is, then neither the Son nor the Spirit can never be.

Another instrumental theologian during this period was Thomas Aquinas whose works elevated the notion of the Threeness of the Triune God (Kärkkäinen, 2017:153). This Threeness is an affirmation of the procession understanding of the Holy Trinity which then ascertains that in the Godhead exist an equally identical and yet divine essence which is independent on each. During this period there was also a promotion of the concept of social Trinitarianism (Kärkkäinen, 2017:155). This concept intended to explain the aspect of the personhood of the Godhead. And the personhood, according to Boethius, is an understanding of the Trinitarian formulae with respect to the individual substance of the rational nature (Kärkkäinen, 2017:155). This presupposes that there is an aspect that exist within the Godhead that is individualistic yet relational. And so, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity promotes an interconnected and interrelation communion.

### **3.2.2. Reformation Period**

The fundamental precepts of the Holy Trinity were configured during the early Christendom but ratified towards the medieval era. This meant that by the reformation period the precepts of the doctrine were well established, and any further work became a futile exercise. But the reformers went beyond the aspects of the foundations of the doctrines and intended to formulate refined hermeneutical approaches of the doctrine that can align to the contextual challenges. And so, The reformers of the time such as John Calvin and Martin Luther interpreted the Holy Trinity through their contextual lenses and understanding (Kärkkäinen, 2017:165-166).

For an example, Luther's understanding of the Holy Trinity is that based of God's self-revelation. Luther articulates that through the doctrine of the Holy Trinity God

gives Godself to the world (Schwarz, 2017:91-92). This gift entails a spirit of unity, love, sharing and abundant living. This is correlated to how God created the heavens and the earth and gave these gifts to humanity to subdue or have authority over it. This gift continued through the incarnation, when Godself gave us a gift through Jesus Christ so that humanity should not perish. The expectation of God is for use to ripple effect this gift to the world and ensure that we are life giving to others and promote a system of unity, love and sharing.

Calvin's interpretation of the Holy Trinity is that which is correlated to the supremacy of the Father (Holmes, 2012:168; Schwarz, 2017:94-95). This understanding asserts that there is an order of importance that exist in the Triune God. This is in no way promoting a heretical notion of subordination, rather that the Father is the source of life, love and sharing permeated to the Son and the Holy Spirit. And this is not hierarchical order but an equal and homogeneous order which promotes oneness.

During this period there was also theologians known as Catholic mystics who focused on the spiritual aspect of the doctrine and lived according to it (Kärkkäinen, 2017:171). For these mystics the emphasis of the Holy Trinity is on the oneness that is portrayed by the Godhead. And this unity becomes the primary focus of how humanity need to live and what should be promoted to live in harmony.

### **3.2.3. Modern Period**

The contemporary era has seen an increased movements that challenged the essence of the doctrine. The opposition came from movements who were against the trinitarian formulae (Holmes, 2012:170-177). The opposing groups were divided into two, there were those who refuted the teaching of the Holy Trinity by arguing using the Bible. And the other group, where known as the rational anti-trinitarianists, who philosophically argued against the teaching of the doctrine. Their rational argument is that the trinitarian formula speaks against a monotheistic belief and so shaped their understanding of God negatively. And later, there was also a group who used both the arguments from the biblical and rational anti-trinitarianists and basically denied both philosophically and biblically the Holy Trinity.

The period of reason brought about an emphasis in reviewing most of the Christian doctrines, this is inclusive of the Holy trinity (Schwarz, 2017:116). The reason for this

was to purge the growing number of groups that were against some Christian doctrine or challenged them. It is during this time that the protestant theologians intended to refine the evidence that is found in scripture to substantiate the validity of the Holy Trinity (Kärkkäinen, 2017: 175; Schwarz, 2017:116). The efforts required the theologians to revisit the biblical foundations of the doctrine and scrutinise how it was coined and its journey through the Constantine councils. After these foundations were enforced, a process of solidifying the doctrine as the centrality of our Christian faith and belief then began and these were seen through the works of several theologians during this period.

Some of the theologians like Schleiermacher, based their emphasis on the personhood of Jesus Christ and part of the Triune God which possessed the absolute consciousness (Schwarz, 2017:120-121). Schleiermacher theological understanding was that there is a correlation between the precepts of the Holy trinity and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both these contain aspects of life giving, mutual sharing and absolute love. The Holy Trinity exists in a relationship that is life giving and divinely mutual. And so, is the notion of incarnation because God gave Godself to humanity so that they may live and Jesus also walked this earth. This presupposes that he was able to be in communion with humanity and shared part of the gift with us. And this speaks about the aspect of Gods self-revelation, in a sense that through incarnation God is revealed through Jesus Christ, therefore the church should be able to reveal God to the world and become an epitome of a society in which God wanted the world to be.

The other understanding that was promoted during this period was though the word of Hegel, whose Trinity understanding hinged upon the divine being unlimited in nature and that the human mind is unable to comprehend this (Holmes, 2012:184, Schwarz, 2017:116). This unlimitedness of the Holy Trinity is correlated through how the Holy Spirit, which is part of the Trinity can penetrate all spaces and dimensions. And so, this mirrors the unlimitedness of God. And so, this attribute of the Holy trinity is inclusive in nature because God can never be domesticated nor is bounded by space and time. This inclusiveness ascertains that everyone should be allowed to not only experience God but equally so benefit from the providence of God.

Based on these understandings, the Holy Trinity there are two ways on which one can be able to understand who God is or how God is revealed to us. It is either through a shared life experience or through the experience of the Cross (Migliore, 2004:71). The first experience is that which elevates aspects of a shared life that promotes love and self-giving. This is a sacrificial aspect that is experienced by analysing the Holy Trinity and we experiences how this divine mutual love and self-giving resides in this union. The second experience is extracted from the meaning of the Cross because it is where the fullness of God's self-giving and sacrificial love to humanity is experienced. This experience also precedes the crucifixion, but it is also experienced during the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost where the Spirit of God was shared amongst all believer's equality. And this is the canvas through which humanity can craft from in reconstructing an equitable society.

The understanding and interpretation of the Holy Trinity since the start of the Christendom did not change much. What has occurred was the refining of the precepts of the doctrine especially amidst opposition and using the teachings extracted from the doctrine to address social ills. And this is experienced in a greater extend during the contemporary period.

### **3.3. Modern Trinitarianism and its prospects**

In the late 20th century and early 3rd millennium experienced a renaissance in commitments to the Holy Trinity. It is during the modern era that refined efforts into the doctrine were experienced and one of the major works that shaped the development of the doctrine was known as Rahner's rule which intended to explain both the "economic"<sup>1</sup> Trinity is the "immanent"<sup>2</sup> Trinity (Kärkkäinen, 2017:188; Sakupapa, 2019:2). The essence of this rule also explains that this is not rigid, but these two terms are interchangeable because the immanence can be the economic Trinity and vice versa.

The economic Trinity and immanent Trinity is interchangeable and is a way in which God reveals Godself to humanity. This revelation is both ontological and epistemological in nature (Schwarz, 2017:163, Sakupapa, 2019:2). It reveals the interconnectedness between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also elevates the

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<sup>1</sup> God as expressed in the activity of salvation (Schwarz, 2017:132).

<sup>2</sup> God as expressed as God who is every present until eternity (Schwarz, 2017:132).

notion of communion which gives life and therefore in the absence of this interrelation there is no life.

In addition, the Rahner's rule, the contemporary aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is also interpreted in hermeneutical approaches such as feminist and liberation theology. All forms of hermeneutical approaches that falls under the liberation theology umbrella promotes a trinitarian understanding which intends to emancipate those who are poor, oppressed, and marginalised (McGrath, 2011:91, Kärkkäinen, 2017:208). And so, the communal, equitable relatedness in the Godhead becomes a prototype of how an equitable society should exist.

### **3.4. The Holy Trinity as expressed in African Christian Theology**

In this section, an analysis of the Holy Trinity as analysed in the African Christian Theology is discussed. There has always been a need for Africa to rediscover itself as a continent full of prospective and the epistemological place of theology. African is an incredible continent full of possibilities and potential. Professor Philip V. Tobias argued that "Africa has been an astonishing crucible of the earth's history for the last two billion years...nearly everything of note or consequence started in Africa" (Diop, 1999:3). Africa is the home of the first eukaryotes...the first marked enlargement of the brain, the first sign of spoken language...these are some of the things Professor Tobias mentioned to substantiate the wealth of history that the African continent has.

The African continent has great potential to succeed but what is needed is the right nurturing and the African people taking responsibility for the future. Julius Nyerere, ex-president of Tanzania, once uttered that "Africa will have to rely upon Africa. African governments will have to formulate and carry out policies of maximum national and collective self-reliance. If they do Africa will develop; if they don't Africa will be doomed" (van Zyl, 2009:53). The time has come for Africa to introspect and seek solutions within. One of the areas which can be a focal area is the decolonisation of theology and formulation of doctrines through the African understanding.

In Africa, there is a long litany of abusive and intrusive intervention by Western missionaries and their imperial co-workers in promoting a distorted mission history in Africa. The missionaries to Africa, being mandated by the World Missionary conference which was held in 1910 in Edinburg (Scotland), created a perception that

there existed no God in the continent and that there is no pre-Christian experience of God (Kombo, 2009:125-126, c.f. Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013:1).

This obscure narrative of the African history and religion lead to a call by African leaders such as Desmond Tutu for a moratorium on Western missions in Africa (le Roux, 2011:35). In the process allow the African to develop their own antidote of dealing with their social problems. Stubbs denotes that if the white God has been doing the talking all along, at some stage the black God will have to raise His voice and make Himself heard over and above noises from His counterpart (Stubb, 2004:33). Hence Desmond Tutu wrote, “In the midst of all our difficulties we are trying to know Jesus Christ; please leave us alone for a while”. And so, the call for the decolonisation of theology is significant and should be take serious by African theologians.

### **3.4.1. The need to decolonise content of African theologies**

In the article, “The Decolonising content of African Theology and the Decolonisation of African Theology”, Sakupapa argues for decoloniality as a methodological necessity in African theology. The parameters that are used in defining the phrase ‘African theologies’ is based mainly on the ‘Academic African Christian theologies’, Sub-Saharan context and on ‘black Africans’ (Sakupapa, 2018:407).

The written form of the African theology emerged in the mid-19th century as self-consciously contextual theological approach. This ideology was extracted and developed from the “oral (grassroots) theology and symbolic theology”; and is characterised by interpretation that include “inculturation, liberation, translation, and reconstruction” (Sakupapa, 2018:408).

The term decolonisation is a geo-political term that was used to describe the closure of European colonial rule and the emergence of the post-colonial rule (Sakupapa, 2018:409). For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:489) is it a process of removing the veil<sup>3</sup>. This

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<sup>3</sup> Decoloniality seeks to unmask, unveil, and reveal coloniality as an underside of modernity that coexisted with its rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity, and liberty. It is a particular kind of critical intellectual theory as well as political project which seeks to disentangle ex-colonised parts of the world from coloniality.<sup>51</sup> What distinguishes decoloniality from other existing critical social theories is its locus of enunciations and its genealogy—which is outside of Europe. Decoloniality can be best understood as a pluriversal epistemology of the future—a redemptive and liberatory epistemology that seeks to de-link from the tyranny of abstract universals.<sup>52</sup> Decoloniality informs the ongoing struggles against inhumanity of the Cartesian subject, ‘the irrationality of the rational, the despotic residues of modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:489)

process can be achieved by analysing the coloniality of power, knowledge and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:489-490). The coloniality of power intends to investigate the way the political power is configured or constructed. The coloniality of knowledge looks at how knowledge has been used to push others to the periphery while others occupied the richness of the centre. And the coloniality of being looks at aspects which makes subjective claims to issues pertaining human beings. Since the church is an integral part of the society, the effects of the colonial rule also reached the walls of the church. In response to this, there was an attempt by the African theologians and the churches through the ecumenical body, namely the “All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)”, to find a methodological approach of defining the contours of their belief system based on their context.

To break away from the chains of coloniality and the dependency syndrome on the West, the AACC furnished a moratorium on the receiving of money and resources from overseas (Sakupapa, 2018:410). This was to ascertain that African begins to loosen the economic hold that the Western forces has on it and purges the ideological indoctrination.

The content of the African theology was shaped by the Western Christian perspective. Therefore, the concept of decoloniality is not new in Africa, calls have been made by scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Steve Biko (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11) to redress the effects of the colonial system that has not only affected how Africans think but also the educational system including theological education. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:11) then asserts that the roots of coloniality are embedded in all societal systems and that the schooling system, religious institution are places for the reproduction of coloniality.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:11), Africans should not be complacent but be vigilant against the traps of normalising and universalising coloniality as a natural state of the world. Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts that what needs to be done is to expose and destroy the roots of colonialism.

Sakupapa (2018:418) therefore argues that the antidote for redressing the effects of the colonial system is an intentional implementation of “a decolonial imagination as a methodological necessity in African theology”. This entails that we intentionally question how theological knowledge is constructed, where does it originate and who are the

gatekeepers that authenticates it as orthodox. The challenge therefore is to analyse how the Christian understanding of revelation and the creeds were constructed. Then intentionally analyse the extent to which the African systematic theologies can be retained and how it reflects the roots of coloniality (Sakupapa, 2018:418).

For the process of decoloniality in African theology to be attained, one of the crucial aspects that needs to be addressed is the intentional delinking of reliance on western theology as supreme. Ward (2017:567) calls this ideology a “Provincialising Europe”, which is a process of destroying the mind-set that the West is the supreme powerhouse. Sakupapa (2018:418) asserts that decolonising African theology should include a disruptive act that reconstruct the colonial bonds. This presupposes that the African theology should be placed on par with the Western theology. One solution is in the form of Africanisation of the faith. Africanisation, which is correlated to the Hellenisation of the Christian faith, is the use of African intellectual culture to explain the triune God to African audiences (Kombo, 2009:134).

Embarking on the process of Africanisation is to seek understanding God through the lenses of the African context, which according to Ayanga (2016:3), will provide Africans with the opportunity to analyse their experiences in the light of their culture and their religious traditions. And, to begin to ask questions rather than simply accept that this is the way it has been and the way it will always be.

Asking probing questions include the review of how the Christians doctrines were formulated and seeking to interpret them in ways that the ordinary Africans will relate to them. For an example, the conversation around the decolonization of the doctrine of Trinity.

#### **3.4.2. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity through the African lenses**

The historical development of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity originated in Africa. These theologians were responsible for coining and giving shape to the doctrine. Since the doctrine was coined, there has been strides made in further refined the doctrine for the contemporary times, particularly in the prism of African Christian theology (Kombo, 2009:126, c.f. Sakupapa, 2019:1). These theologians were able to formulate an understanding of God which is not from Jewish origin and so this motivates for the Africanisation of the Christian faith. For Kombo (2009:134), the process of

Africanisation should be considered equivalent to the Hellenisation of the Christian faith which occurred during the early church. Under the Hellenisation, the church used Greek metaphysics to describe the Christian concepts to the indigenous people and so Africanisation will use the African culture to explain the triune God to the African people.

The essence of the Africanisation process is to reconceptualise our understanding of God as African people. The process of reconceptualisation of God entails re-identification, inculturation of monotheism and the reconceptualisation of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Kombo, 2009: 134-141).

#### **3.4.2.1. The re-identification process**

Firstly, it is important for the African Christians to understand their own identify (re-identification process). This process requires the native people to separate themselves from the Western influence or the Greco-Roman indoctrinated Christian understanding of God which was promoted by the missionaries to Africa. Then draw understanding from the African religious symbols and consciousness without being tempted to revert to African Traditional Religion (ATR).

One of the pitfalls regarding the ATR belief, is the relegation of Christ's role in the Trinity as well as the rejection of monotheism. For an example, Ogbonnaya when interpreting the Trinity, rejects both monotheism and polytheism (Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013:8). For Ogbonnaya, the notions of monotheism and polytheism when reflecting on God, are Western concepts which are foreign to African people. Ogbonnaya prefers referring to God as "divine as community"<sup>4</sup> and that there exist not on Supreme God but several unidentified gods. The idea of communal existence of the Trinity is a positive attribute but Ogbonnaya understanding relegates the role of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

#### **3.4.2.2. Inculturation of monotheism**

Secondly, the Africanisation process requires the inculturation of monotheism. According to Kombo (2009:135), pre-Christian Africa always had a form of

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<sup>4</sup> "divine communalism is the position that the divine is a community of gods who are fundamentally related to one another and are ontologically equal" (Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013:6)

monotheism called a primitive or diffused monotheism. The primitive monotheism asserts that there is but one God in Africa and that all the African indigenous languages recognise one Supreme God and are emphatic that the divinities, natural forces, or ancestors are not God. The primitive relationship of the Godhead is expressed as a relationship between the Great Muntu (Father) having a mutual NTU (Ntu is extracted from Muntu – meaning human being) with the Son and Holy Spirit (Kombo, 2009:137).

#### **3.4.2.3. The significance of incarnation**

Lastly, Africanisation entail engaging on the significance of incarnation as viewed by the African people. For Kombo (2009:139-141), the incarnation not only represents the uniqueness of Christ, but it is also the epitome of Godself. Thus, understanding who Christ is in God as embodied in African theology will reveal emancipating attributes of the Holy Trinity can advocates for a just society. And so in the African Christian theology the Holy Trinity can be analysed in the following three expressions (Sakupapa, 2019:4). It can be presented as a logical continuation of the ancestral Christological theories. Second, it is inspired by the African concept of relations and community. And finally, reinterpret the concepts of the traditional African ontology of the Trinity doctrine.

#### **3.4.3. A logical continuation of the ancestral Christological theories**

This expression of the doctrine of Holy Trinity correlates the Western understanding of the doctrine to an ancestral image through which the Father is seen as God the ancestor who has a relation with the Son and the Holy Spirit (Moscicke, 2017:12, Sakupapa, 2019:4). This is equated with the relations between the ancestor and descendent who through their mutual loving relationship produces Labation. The Labation is understood as the outpouring of the Spirit which proceeds from both the Father and the Son and is the reason for the communal living in the Godhead.

For Nyamiti, there is a sacred interconnectedness on the ancestral relationship between the ancestor and descendants which intends to promote mutual love and relationship (Moscicke, 2017:13). Not only does these liberation aspects of the Holy Trinity appear in the Western understanding of the doctrine but these are principles that can be adopted to attain an equitable society.

#### **3.4.4. The African notion of relationality and communality**

To understand communality in Africa, it is important to look at the epistemology of this concept by analysing the origins of humanity. The creation narrative in Genesis is often referred to as a myth. The word “myth” refers to stories, tales, and legends (Young, 1984:381). Every culture has its own myths that have existed since the beginning of time. The creation myths are stories used by a group of people who are grappling with human origin, life on this earth and the afterlife. Setiloane (1986:3) states that the Western (Judeo-Christian) civilisation derives its inspiration from the two sets of myths, namely the Ancient Greek world and Hebraic traditions. The Hebraic tradition exerted more influence since it contains the original stories found in the Bible and was a medium used to assert and spread Christianity.

The Creation narrative found in the Old Testament is regarded by modern scholars as a myth. The narrative was a representation of how the Hebrew (Hebrew) people intended to express the origin of life (Setiloane, 1986:3). This is the epic which Christianity embodied and used as its fundamental understanding of the origin of life. The missionaries sent to the African continent introduced a religion embedded in a Hebrew culture. In South Africa, it was not only used to discard the culture of the native as barbaric, but it was used as a vehicle to perpetuate apartheid.

The African people has had their own creation narrative or “genesis of things” (Setiloane, 1986:9). Setiloane (1986:9) further states that their myths range from the first people coming out of bed of reeds to the people coming from a hole in the ground. But what is key on these creation stories, they express a community of men, women, children, and animals emerging together from the beginning. The creation narrative in the African context is communal and every person is related to another.

In the African context, by nature, one cannot live in isolation. It is the western ideology of every man for themselves kind of living. The African culture has always subscribed to John Mbiti's utterance that ‘I belong, therefore I am’ (Setiloane, 1986:10). and therefore, no person can say boldly claim that they do not belong, and belonging is the root and essence of being. The notion of belonging together extends beyond the family, clan, and tribe. The different clans and tribes were able to work together to

defeat or eliminate an enemy. This principle has always functioned on the premises of inclusivity rather than exclusivity. This inclusivity or communal existence is the essence of doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

#### **3.4.5. Analysing concepts from traditional African ontology of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity**

This approach to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity intends to retrieve some of the African concepts such as oneness. This retrieval is what Kombo calls, the Christianisation of the African notions of God (Sakupapa, 2019:6). Like the use of the Greek metaphysics by the early Church theologians in expressing who God is, the modern African theologians should use the “African ethno-philosophy called the metaphysics of Ntu” (Kombo, 2009:134, c.f. Sakupapa, 2019:6).

The phrase ‘Ntu’ is extracted from the word ‘muntu’ which means human being. The African concept of a human person (Motho – Umuntu) is viewed as being dynamic. The dynamic concept of being “shows a belief in a potency locked up in the objects and being or an energy, a force which is immanent in all things” (Setiloane, 1986:13). Hence the term found is the Sotho-Tswana which says the human person is the energy or force (Motho ke Modimo). Setiloane (1986:13) asserts that ‘Modimo’ is an expression of divinity which refers to divinity, sacredness and mysterious being. And so, Kombo asserts that God is known as the Great Muntu<sup>5</sup>, who not only is the Supreme Vital Force but has oneness and activity with the Son and the Holy Spirit (Sakupapa, 2019:6). And so, for the African people, it is the genuine Muntu of the Son who is the Great Muntu Himself. And so, the Son (Muntu) has a direct relation with the entire creation order and His salvation order includes all<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘genuine *Muntu*’ that the Son has, is the ‘Great *Muntu*’ himself. Thus, the Son is a perfect reflection of the ‘Great *Muntu*’, the Holy Spirit is a perfect reflection of the ‘Great *Muntu*’, and the Father is a perfect reflection of the ‘Great *Muntu*’ (Sakupapa, 2019:6).

<sup>6</sup> The Son, therefore, saves mankind and presents him/her as holy and blameless before God, but his salvation has direct consequences to the entire ranges of *umuntu* (all the life forces with intelligence), *ikintu* (things, objects, animals, plants and minerals), *ahantu* (place and time), and *ukuntu* (modalities in which power acts, such as quality, quantity, relation, action, passion, position, and possession) – Kombo (2009:140-141).

### **3.5. Conclusion of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity**

The Holy Trinity is a Christian doctrine that expresses that the God we serve has three distinct substances yet poses a divine oneness. This expression is also known as the Godhead or the Triune God which is known as the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian formula is expressed from the first book in the Bible which is Genesis. The teaching of the Holy Trinity is the manifestation of the divine light of the cross by which the spirit of God is shared with all mankind. It also embodies the concept of a communal living that permeates love and emancipate all those that are in the margins. Human beings are encouraged to promote these liberating aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity primarily because they are created in the same image of a God who exist in an environment which is homogeneous.

From this chapter it is also evident that the immanent and economic aspects of the Trinity are interchangeable and at the same time separate entities of the Triune God. These two aspects provide offers us with parameters that we can implement to attain society in which God envisioned when God created humanity.

Liberation hermeneutical approaches such as Black and feminist theology, analyse the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to elevate characteristics that portrays God's image for humanity. A world that does not look at where you come from, your nationality, your gender nor your ethnicity. They also seek to redress the theological teachers which promoted division and a dual economy but ensuring that the Bible is read through the lenses of those that are in the margins.

There is a call to decolonisation content of the African theologies, and this could be achieved through a process of Africanisation. This process is correlated to the Hellenistic process which used the Greek metaphysics to express the Christian faith. The Africanisation uses native metaphysics such as Ntu which expresses God as the Great Muntu that is in relations through the Ntu with the Son and the Holy Spirit. From this process what is unravelled is the notion of oneness and communality.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity can be understood by correlation with the ancestral Christology understanding. This understanding analyses the communal relationship that exists between the ancestor and the descendants through the Libation spirit. And through this imagery, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is superimposed into this

imagery and the Father is viewed as the ancestor, the Son and the descendant and the Holy Spirit as the holy Labation. The characteristics that are elevated from this union are aspects of communality, relationality, interconnectedness, and inter-relationality. In the next chapter, we will analyse the African understanding of the Holy Trinity and its assistance in social redress.

## **4. African understanding of the Holy Trinity and its assistance in societal redress**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter elevates the aspects of African's understanding of the Holy Trinity and provides remedies for redressing socio-political challenges in South Africa. This is achieved by elevating the liberating aspects of the Holy Trinity such as relationality and communality. It also looks at how God envisioned the economy of the world to exist and function.

This research intends to prove that the African understanding of the Holy Trinity contains characteristics which can be a parameter for attaining an egalitarian society. The teaching of our Christian faith is that we teach us that the Triune God is the core aspect of what we process and advocate for. It is the central message of our belief system. And so, as the central teaching message it is important for us to fully understand the Holy Trinity and its liberating attributes so that these can be offered to the society as tools for redressing injustice (Gaybba 1994:86, Venter, 2016:156). Some of the liberating aspects that can be extracted from the Holy Trinity includes the notion of communalism and relationality.

### **4.2. Analysis of communality and relationality aspects**

Most theologians believe that the interpretation of the Holy Trinity can be used to redress an equal society. And this can be attained by elevating aspects such as the communion theology which based on the principle of *perichoresis* (Kärkkäinen, 2017: 209, Schwarz, 2017:170). The *perichoresis* elevates the mutual love and interconnectedness that exist in the Godhead. Even though each person of the Triune God has their own unique function, yet they exist in a communal interdependent relationship which promotes love and equal sharing. There is no hoarding or subordination of any persons in the Godhead, and each understands that they can never exist in isolation from the other.

The interconnectedness can be understood through the African concept of UBUNTU which promotes for the wholeness of an individual and interdependence of an individual to a community. This not only is a compass that can be used by a society to

measure moral standard living and aspects of ethics but can be used to measure an equitable society.

The notion of UBUNTU promotes aspects of equal sharing amongst all members of a community. In this image, there can never be an individual who is poor, sick and illtreated without the entire community beings affected by this unjust act. When there are issues of social just, care and empathy, this becomes a community project where all members are affected and becomes part of the solution (Mkhize, 2008:40, Kärkkäinen, 2017:195).

Is it Leonardo Boff who further elevates the relationality and communality of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity by stating an equitable society will need to mirror how the Godhead exist (Kärkkäinen, 2017: 208, Schwarz, 2017:170). The social aspect of the doctrine stands against any system which promotes injustice and oppression. Rather it promotes for an environment which there is no segregation of people due to race, ethnicity, or sexuality.

For Jürgen Moltmann, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a social project that offers a canvas of how people should live and exist. It also provides a godly legislation for the governments on how to ensure that all members in which they govern have equal access to all basic needs (McGrath, 2011:258). Ibrahim Bitrus further asserts that the harmonious relationship that exist in the God head can be used as a moral compass for attaining an equitable society. A society which is inclusive to everyone regardless of the religious beliefs, but each member can partake equally and so benefit equally form the natural resources that creation has to offer (Sakupapa, 2019:6).

This speaks directly to how God views the economy, and the worldly economy needs to be configured according to the relationality and communality of the Godhead. The next section will look closely as how God views the economy and unravel principles that can be used by any society to live according to how God envisioned Gods people to live and exist.

### **4.3. God's Economy**

God's economy is built around the relationality and communality of the Triune God. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity provides a God designed economic system which is formulated for the promotion of an egalitarian society. It is unfortunate that most

countries including South Africa do not have an economic system which is configured according to God's understanding of economics. Therefore, South Africa unfortunately functions on an economic system which is not mirrored to God's economy and perpetuates inequality.

It is important for the society, especially the church to participate in promoting an economic system that mirrors God's intended desire for humanity. At times the church avoids participating in engagements pertaining to God and the economy for two main reasons. Firstly, it is because many Christians find it very difficult to participate or be involved in issues that do not have a clear biblical motivation or perspective. And secondly, if as the church we have anything of value to offer in the public debate over issues of injustice, that always comes from the wisdom found in scripture (Meeks, 1989:3, Haddad, 2015:206).

According to Meeks (1989:10), the main issue for all global economies is the aspect of domination. God has been perceived as the epitome of power and authority in most communities and so the Triune God should be a central element in formulating an equitable economic system. Meeks (1989:11) further asserts the egalitarian understanding of God's economy was to ensure that there is freedom for all from all forms of domination. And the essence of equality in this egalitarian society meant the thrust to abolish forms of differences caused by wealth, race, sexuality, ecology, and economics. And so, any economic system which perpetuates oppression, segregation, duality, and marginalisation is against God's intent for the created order.

According to Haddad (2015:207), God wishes for all the created order to live and exist in an environment that is just and promotes equality. This economic system is for the entire cosmos, meaning how as human beings we treat nature and animals should mirror how the Triune God lives in harmony. Therefore, there are seven principles which detail how God's economy is configured (Haddad, 2015:207). It states that the earth is full of peace, love, grace, and natural resources. Secondly, labouring should be analysed carefully because it can either be a curse or a blessing. Thirdly, the Sabbath day is significant and precious to God as it can be understood through the events during the creation of the cosmos and so it becomes a fundamental rule in the economy of God. Fourthly, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity promotes equal sharing and so a shared prosperity then becomes the goal in the economy of God. Fifthly, the equal

sharing does not speak to serving two masters at the same time and so in God's economy we cannot serve both God and mammon. The sixth aspects speak about our identity and whom we belong to and therefore God's economic becomes a matter of discipleship. Lastly, God's intention for humanity was for us to live longer on this land.

These principles provide a picture of how God intends for humanity to exist and how the world economy should be wired. The earth being full of grace and love asserts that God gave humanity all the natural resource freely, unmeritedly, no one worked for them, but it was through God's mercy and love that God gave. Labouring and working the land should correlate with equal sharing of the produce. If labouring is for self-gratification, then it becomes a curse and do not serve the entire society. While labouring, it is important to take note of a Sabbath by resting and giving worth to God.

A shared prosperity not only mirrors the relationality and communality of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This is an environment that promotes equal sharing, a society where those who are at the periphery are drawn into the centre so that they can fully benefit and equally participate in this system. The economy of God is indeed a matter of discipleship and discipleship is linked to the one whom we follow who is Christ. Christ always promoted issues of justice and equality and took the side of the lost, least, and last. Therefore, it is essential to find ways of correlation God and the economy to ensure that an equitable society is created. And Meeks (1989:41-42) suggest three ways of achieving this namely through the disclosive, critical and transformative approach.

#### **4.3.1. Disclosive approach**

The disclosive approach analyses the way God's concepts and attributes influences the economy. There is a direct link between the Creator and the created order. Traces of the image of God permeates through humanity and all social constructs. And therefore, the way humanity thinks, and worship God should translate to how we think of ourselves and society. And so, the shaping, structuring, and designing of an economic practice should be moulded though God's intent (Meeks, 1989:41-42). Disclosive approach is God revealing Godself and being revealed through creation where humanity can see the fingerprints of God. And it is through this natural revelation that aspects of communality and interconnectedness are showcased.

### **4.3.2. Critical approach**

This approach focuses on the way God's concepts are produced by the economic conditions of a society. God's concepts emerge out of the modes of property, work, and consumption in society. Human beings form part of God's concepts and critical intent in what constitute a balanced community. And so, God's critical approach in creating the world and humanity was to ensure that work, property, the earth's minerals, and produce are divided equally amongst all people (Meeks, 1989:41-42). This is the praxis of what is entailed in the disclosive approach. It is in this approach that God requires humanity to look at the economic and work etiquette of the Triune God and replicate this to attain an equitable society.

### **4.3.3. Transformative approach**

The third approach understands the notion that praxis not only as a goal but also the foundation of theory. This approach encourages one to fully understand and emersed themselves in theoretical knowledge and understanding of how an equitable society can be achieved. And one of the theoretical understanding and teaching is on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the relations between the Godhead. Therefore, the theoretical understanding should then transform individuals to put into praxis that which they have conceptualised and start living it (Meeks, 1989:41-42). And so, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has attributes which theoretically can be used to attain a society which God intended.

## **4.4. Conclusion of the African understanding of the Holy Trinity and its assistance in societal redress**

The African understanding of the Holy Trinity entails aspects of relationality and communality. This way of living can be traced back to the creation narrative and the story of Noah. That each living being was created dually for purposes of procreation but also to ascertain the aspect of communal living. In the African context, communal living has always been a way of life. This is evident in how people used to live, with little or no fencing separating each family from the other. The notion of UBUNTU who premise is on ensuring wholeness and a just living for all members of the community. And so, the attainment of an equitable society or a methodology of attaining societal

redress should be based on the relationality and communality aspect of the Holy Trinity.

These principles can be achieved when we correlate God and the economy. God's economy is configured in parallel with how the Triune God exist. If the economic system functions outside of God and God's concepts, then that system will indeed be unjust and unequal. The ways of correlating God and the economy is through the disclosive, critical and transformation approaches. These three approaches seek to understand the relationship the Creator has with the created order and how God intended for this entire system to exist. Thereafter ensuring that all elements which form part of an economic system are critically analysed to ensure how they could be distributed justly. And the just distribution will be informed by the theoretical understand of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity which then transforms us to practice and live in an equitable society.

## 5. Conclusion

The research problem was concerned with how South Africa remains an unequal society nearly three decades post democracy. The intent of this research was to investigate the African understanding of the Holy Trinity and how its characteristics can be used to redress the socio-economic disparities in South Africa. This research project has accomplished several tasks. It has demonstrated that South Africa is a country that is divided by socio-economic inequality, ethnicity, race, and a dual economy. This divisive system was created by a governing system whose intent was not to create an equitable society rather a society where the minority benefit while the majority are leaving in dire circumstances.

The effects of the segregation system were that the native people were confined in areas that are far from the amenities and places of work. They were restricted to places that were underdeveloped with poor or lacking delivery services and access to basic needs such as education and healthcare system. The places that possess the best infrastructure such as healthcare system, schooling, places of employment were at the places occupied by the minority of the people and so this created a dual economic system. The inequality also reached the walls of the church which is supposed to be the embodiment of a community that upholds egalitarian principle. The church which professes to be the body of Christ was at times divided to an extent that even the Holy Communion could not be shared by all people. There was a segregation of people within the same Church where different services of Holy Communion took place.

Therefore it was imperative for the church, through the formulation of 'The Message', 'Belhar Confession' and 'Kairos Documents', to intentionally fight against itself and against the state which perpetuated a system of segregation. The church is meant to promote a people who follow a Triune God of order, equality, and justice. And so, it becomes problematic when the those who are supposed to be custodians of justice become the instigators of injustice, segregation, and inequality.

The historical development of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was given shaped by some African theologians who made it possible for us to say boldly that this doctrine has its roots in the African continent. This is the continent in which some historian

would claim that humanity originated from this continent. It is in this continent that the notion of UBUNTU was shaped and lived to an extent that it become a global compass for morality living. And so, the essence that is found from the Triune God is an imagine of three different, unique substances who are also in union with oneself. Persons that are divinely unique yet exist in a relationship of mutual love and self-giving.

A relationship that promotes that the diversity yet embraces the interdependency on each other. It is through this relationship that African theologians have seen and used symbols that correlate with this divine relationship of the Triune God in order achieve two things. Firstly, to ensure that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is explained to African people using African symbols without distorting the essence of the Triune God. Secondly, to elevate aspects of this African interpreted doctrine of the Holy Trinity that can help the continent and especially in our case South Africa on how to redress an unequal society. This process is not an easy one to achieve but can be attainable if we decolonise contents of the African Christian theologies.

And so, this project demonstrated the need to decolonisation content of the African Christians theologies which can be achieved through a process of Africanisation. The decolonisation can be achieved through a three-legged process that includes the re-identification, inculturation and understanding the significance of the incarnation. The process of decolonisation requires us to unlearn some of the oppressive indoctrinated theologies that intend to oppress rather than liberate. And these are the hermeneutical approaches which at one hand supported the evil system called apartheid and on the other hand domesticated the interpretation of scripture to be secluded to a particular group. And so, the effort that are placed on the process of Africanisation become critical. The Africanisation uses native metaphysics such as Ntu which expresses God as the Great Muntu that is in relations through the Ntu with the Son and the Holy Spirit. From this process what is unravelled is the notion of oneness and communality.

The African understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity revealed liberating characteristics which indeed can be used to redress the inequality that we find in the borders of this country. These liberating characteristics include the notions of oneness, relationality, and communality. The Triune God consist of three divinely

unique substance that are one. This presupposes that we are created in the image and likeness of God but similarly to the Triune God, we are created diverse. But this diversity should not be the cause for injustice and segregation but rather the reason to celebrate and embrace how each can contribute to the success of the masses.

The aspect of relationality and communality hinges upon the African concept of UBUNTU which states that I am because we are. In the Triune God, the Father can never be if the Son or the Holy Spirit is not. Therefore, there is an element of interconnectedness, relationality and communality that exist in the Holy Trinity. These are the characteristics that we can use to attain an equitable society. A society that promotes relationality, a community that understand that if one member suffers the entire community suffers.

A people that understands that their measure of wealth will always measure by the level of those who are poor and so it becomes a national project to ensure that all the natural resource of this country are shared equally amongst all people that reside in it. The communal living is one powerful aspect which in the past ensured that poverty does not exist in a particular community. There are stories told that on some communities in the past, if one member was impoverished, those that had livestock will lend them and allow them to produce calf, and they will pay back with the first produce of the calf and then asked by community leaders to also replication to notion of empowering others.

This way of living mirrors God's economy which is a system that promotes sharing of the natural resources of creation equally to ensure that an egalitarian system is attainable. God's economic system can be attained by following the principle of disclosive, critical and transformation approaches. The disclosive approach is a platform where God showcases who God is but parading aspects which promote equality, justice, and communality. The critical approach is the practical aspect of the three-legged process in which we then promote and effectively implement and economic system which mirrors how God envisioned how the world's economy should be or function. And lastly, the transformation approach requires us to be emerged in this project of redressing our society to an extent that it transforms our very being that our moral compass changes and instigating an equitable society becomes second nature.

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# Appendix

## GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

15-May-2022

Dear Rev Zamuxolo Botha

#### **Application Approved**

Research Project Title:

**African notions of the Trinity: toward socio-political redress in South Africa**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2022/0668/22**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

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# GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHIC COMMITTEE (GHREC)



## **GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)**

16-May-2022

Dear Rev Zamuxolo Botha ZC

### **Ethics Committee feedback**

Research Project Title:

**African notions of the Trinity: toward socio-political redress in South Africa**

With reference to your application for ethical clearance for your research: Find attached the letter and decision from the GHREC meeting.

If you need to do modifications or respond to conditional approval:

**[Click HERE to open the manual](#)**

Ethics Admin

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