

Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

Volume 9

Article 13

12-1-2016

Review – *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations*, by Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp.

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Recommended Citation

Mikulich, Alex (2016) "Review – *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations*, by Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp.," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 9, Article 13.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol9/iss1/13>

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***Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations.* Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014. 371pp. \$40.00. Paper. ISBN: 0268037388**

Father Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp. offers extraordinary scholarship in his latest book. His bold aim is concisely stated: articulate a "Christian ethical discourse that is at once Christian and African (4)." He achieves that complex and breathtaking task beautifully. *Morality Truly Christian Truly African* will endure as an African Catholic theological ethic.

Few scholars create such a respectful and insightful conversation across diverse ecclesial, theological, cultural and academic divides. This book practices the wisdom of Vatican II in the way it exemplifies critical and charitable dialogue between tradition and culture in the "ongoing encounters and contacts" between Africans and Europeans over 500 years, in the encounter of African Traditional Religion and Christianity and its missionary impulse, and between diverse "new" theologies (Black, Womanist, Latino/a, etc.) and traditional Roman Catholic theologies (Augustine, Ambrose, Thomas Aquinas, etc.).

Odozor celebrates the fact that the "third church is here," in how most Catholics live in Latin America and the Catholic Church in Africa is growing at annual rate of over 3 percent per year with the largest seminaries in the Christian world. He articulates a richly contextualized African Catholic moral theology.

I raise two interrelated fundamental theological and ethical themes. Odozor raises complex questions of globalization and global crises afflicting the world including but not limited to "ongoing ferment" in the Catholic Church over issues of sexual ethics, ordination of women, and dissent from authoritative teachings as well as conflicts within Islam and the incapacity of the "Western liberal tradition" to justify its answers on "key issues concerning the life and destiny of the human person (65)." Simultaneously, African traditions "are struggling to survive, adjust, or renew themselves in the face of so much change, so much disequilibrium, and so much flux (65)." He underscores the frailty of humanity at this critical moment of history.

Yet I wonder if these historical and contemporary crises might be more fully engaged in both substantive and methodological ways. A classic theme in Roman Catholic theology and spirituality is that of “dark night” or “impasse,” perhaps most famously articulated by Saint John of the Cross. Many theologians are engaging the theme of impasse as a fundamental category and way of contending with the multiple threats to the most basic conditions for the possibility of sustaining both human and non-human life on the planet. Engaging impasse is a way to discern the need for, and nurture openness to, the purification to which God calls people of faith and also to discern the emergence of a new way of being to which the Spirit draws humanity.

Odozor recognizes that current cultural and economic threats to an authentic humanity are no less evident in Africa. He contends that the “theologian of inculturation must have a deep knowledge of the culture in which he or she is working—that is, a deep appreciation for its strengths and honesty about its weaknesses (169).” Odozor does this well. I found joy his telling both of African religious and cultural stories and Gospel parables.

However, the substantive question of the theme of impasse also raises a methodological question. While the methodology is certainly dialogical it is not necessarily mutually correlative. It is not clear that a mutually critical interpretation of both texts and situation is operative here. Put another way, it seems that, Odozor’s interpretation of a Vatican II Roman Catholic moral theology has all the answers to the crises of our time and no need for transformation itself.

I wonder if a mutually critical methodology might lead not only to deep spiritual practices of purification and openness to an unknown future led by the Spirit, it may also lead to a uniquely African Christian Catholic moral theology that exemplifies “a collaborative venture, a critical enterprise, and a discipline with big ears” that is “attuned to the movement of ideas within all parts of the world-wide Church and the global community (298).” Nevertheless, *Morality Truly Christian Truly African* stands on its own as an authoritative and enduring contribution to Roman Catholic moral theology in a global context.

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