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THE JUSTIN MARTYR'S CONCEPT OF *LOGOS SPERMATICOS*  
AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION  
IN AFRICA TODAY

**A b s t r a c t.** In this article the author argues that in the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans are found authentic revelation of the *Logos*, which should be regarded and appreciated as a preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel message in the African cultural and religious milieu. Indeed in African religious beliefs and practices, there are fundamental values that represent both a preparation for the incarnation of the *Logos* in the vast religious and cultural African heritage as well as means of salvation for the adherents, until a personal encounter between the individual followers of the African traditional Religion and the incarnate *Logos* takes place. This knowledge and conviction is fundamental indeed a *conditio sine qua non* for doing theology in Africa. As a consequence then, it remains a daunting task of the Church in Africa to discern the mysterious presence of the *Logos* in the African heritage, to purify it from the stains of human sin, which might have contaminated it, and then incorporate it into Christian heritage, so that, one may give witness to the universal character of the Church of Christ that embraces all peoples and cultures.

**Key words:** *Semina Verbi*; African traditional Religion.

INTRODUCTION

In his encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris missio*, John Paul II insisting on the dialogue between Christian faith and non Christian religions states that that: “through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the seeds of the Word, a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men; these are found in individuals and in their religious traditions of mankind.”<sup>1</sup> *Semina verbi* is a very ancient expression, coined by Justin Martyr c. 150 A.D., which returned in the documents of the Second Vatican Council to designate whatever is “true and

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris missio*, No. 56.

holy” even in the non-Christian religions. Since Vatican II which is in many ways a “watershed” in as much as it presents a more positive and optimistic view of non-Christian religions, indeed the world, the attitude of the Church towards African culture and religion has changed from negative to positive. There is a very optimistic attitude towards the values, true and holy ones, which are present in African culture and tradition. The objective of this article is to relate the theology of *semina verbi* with the ongoing discussions among the theologians in Africa, particularly concerning the role of the African traditional religion in mediating salvation for its adherents.

#### 1. THE WISDOM OF THE ANCESTORS: THE LOGOS THEOLOGY OF THE EARLY GREEK FATHERS

Already in the early Church, some fathers manifested greater openness towards other religions specially the Hellenistic culture in which they lived and moved, by acknowledging the presence of *semina verbi* in non-Christian religions and cultures and as such perceiving the dispensation of truth in them. This theology, commonly known as the “logos theology” of the Church fathers has indeed been a helpful insight in developing African theology that is able to appreciate African culture and religious tradition. Indeed in the Fathers of the Church we find the greatest support for any theological research, they are the real pillars of the articulation of the Christian faith and, through them we can shed light on our way of doing theology. Among all the Fathers of the Church, the ones who can be of more relevance to the task of elaborating a Christian Theology of Other Religions are the Greek Fathers, especially Justin, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. The following section shows how these early Greek Fathers through their theology of the *Logos* were able to perceive the dispensation of the Truth in other cultures, specially the Hellenistic culture in which they lived and moved.

##### 1.1 JUSTIN THE MARTYR AND THE *LOGOS SPERMATIKOS*

Justin is the first Church Father who expresses the idea of the dispensation of the *Logos* in other religious dispensations with the term *Logos Spermaticos* because of the influence he got from the Greek concept of *Logos*. The environment in which Justin lived helped him to make a synthesis of his Christian faith and to express it in philosophical categories so as to present Chris-

tianity as something not irrational. Justin's Theology is, without doubt, influenced by the concept of *Logos* present in the philosophical schools of his time. Danielou identifies an influence of Stoicism in Justin, at least in the terminology used. The Stoics considered the *logos* as "the immanent principle of all reason, of which the rational faculty in each man is a manifestation. It is the action of this *Logos* which gives to each man the capacity to form certain moral and religious concepts, which are found throughout the human race."<sup>2</sup> According to Justin, human mind participates in the truth through the action of the *Logos* which sows seeds of the truth in all humankind.

Since he writes primarily from a Christian perspective, Justin was also influenced by the concept of *Logos* presented in the prologue according to the gospel of St. John. Thus the idea of the *Logos* being the Truth is also from Johannine literature. In fact there are two passages of the Gospel which show this influence: the first one is Jn 14:7 in which Jesus says "I am the Way; I am Truth and Life." The second one is in the so called prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 in which John writes "[...] your word is truth" (Jn 17:17). Indeed in the prologue, John affirms that "the Word is the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9). This idea is also present in the parable of the sower in Mt 13: 3-9.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1.1 Justin Martyr and the Mediation of the Logos in Other Cultures and Religions

Justin uses the concept *logos spermatikos* to show how the Greek Philosophers could have access to the truth, to which they were completely dedicated. Throughout his Apologies, Justin uses indistinctively four terms to express the same reality: the *Logos Spermatikos*, the *meros tau Logou*, the *spora tou Logou* and finally the word *metechein*.<sup>4</sup> All these expressions have in Justin the same meaning, i. e. the participation in the Truth of all the Greek Philosophers who spoke rightly.<sup>5</sup> According to Justin in his writings, the Cosmic Christ is the element of dispensation of the Father's revelation not only to the Christians but indeed to all cultures and religions. This Cos-

<sup>2</sup> Jean DANIELOU, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chrys SALDANHA, *Divine Pedagogy: A Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, 62.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SALDANHA, *Divine Pedagogy*, 62.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SALDANHA, *Divine Pedagogy*, 62.

mic Christ was already acting in the human race before the full revelation of the Logos in the Incarnate Son. As Dupuis state,

The cosmological function of the Logos is, in effect, the foundation for Justin's theology of revelation. The Father acts through the Son; all divine manifestation in the world takes place through him [...] such manifestation of God [...] took place before the incarnation of the Word.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.1.2 Mediation in Greek Philosophy

It is interesting that Justin who was very critical of the Greek cult and myths perceived Philosophy to be not so much as a mere intellectual work, but as a search for truth. For him, "Philosophy is a very great possession and very precious in the eyes of God. Those who have applied their mind to philosophy are truly sacred."<sup>7</sup> According to Justin, all those who engage themselves in searching for the truth participate in the Logos because the Logos has sown seeds of truth in the human race. Thus the idea of the pre-existence of the logos in the human race is very constitutive in Justin's Theology of revelation.<sup>8</sup>

In order to explain how the Greek philosophers had access to the truth, Justin introduces the notion of *Logos Spermatikos*. He conceives that the Logos acted as a sower of truth before his Incarnation. In one part of the second Apology, Justin puts it succinctly that "all the right principles that philosophers and lawgivers have discovered and expressed they owe to whatever of the Word they have found and contemplated in part (*karta meros*)."<sup>9</sup> However, even though the cosmological action of the Logos was at work even before his Incarnation by the sowing of truth in the whole human race, this dispensation remains partial and obscure, as it has been shown in the preceding quotations. As Justin puts it in the Second Apology, "it is one thing to possess a seed (*sperma*) and a likeness proportioned to one's capacity and quite another to possess the reality itself."<sup>10</sup> The fact that they have

<sup>6</sup> DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> *Dial.* 11, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> *II Apol.* X, 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> *II Apol.* XIII, 4-6.

only partial access to the Truth is what makes the philosophers contradict themselves.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.1.3. Mediation in Jewish Religion

The key to understand Justin's conception of the dispensation of the *Logos* in the Jewish Religion is found in his First Apology, when he says that, "those who have lived in accordance with the Logos (*meta logou*) are Christians, even though they were called godless ... among the barbarians, Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Misael and Elijah."<sup>12</sup> Again Justin says, "For he [the *Logos*] exhibits among every race of men the things that are righteous at all times and in all places ... it was well said by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that all righteousness and piety are fulfilled in two commandments."<sup>13</sup> The implication of what Justin is saying here is that those who lived before Christ and observed the Law will obtain salvation not through the cultic practices contained in the Law, but in virtue of the eternal and / universal principles that are present, even if partially, in the Law. Based on this, Jewish religion stands a privileged place in the Christian dispensation of salvation. In comparison with the general participation in the Logos which is attributed to other religions, the divine presence is more decisive in Jewish Religion.<sup>14</sup> Mediation comes to the Jews through the Mosaic Law and especially the ethical part of it.<sup>15</sup> Justin sees the Old Testament as a "theophany" of the Incarnate Logos.

### 1.1.4 Mediation in Christianity

While the dispensation of the *Logos* remains obscure in the Greek Philosophy and a bit more decisive in the Jewish religion, the dispensation in Christianity is complete in as much as we acknowledge his full revelation in his Incarnation. According to Justin, "our (Christian) doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching, because the complete truth became

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Apol.* XVI, 1-4.

<sup>13</sup> Triantafyllos STYLIANOPOULOS, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. STYLIANOPOULOS, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, 56.

Christ, the one who appeared for our sake, both body and reason and soul.”<sup>16</sup> Justin affirms that:

All that they have said [the Greek philosophers] belong to us; the Christians ... These writers were able to perceive the Truth obscurely (*amudrés*) thanks to the sowing (*spora*) of the Word which had been implanted within them. But one thing is to possess a seed (*sperma*), and a likeness proportioned to one’s capacity, and quite another to possess the reality itself.<sup>17</sup>

The Greeks have only a partial knowledge of the truth due to the seed that the *Logos* has sown in them, whereas the Christians have received the *Logos* Himself. This full revelation of the Incarnate *Logos* is not a merit that Christians could claim; it is actually a gift, a grace.<sup>18</sup> The human reason by itself is incapable of contemplating the divine Truth were it not by the action of God through his *Logos*.<sup>19</sup> Since it is a special gift of grace which Christians have, it is necessary that God opens up our minds, so as to be able to perceive the Truth. As Justin asserts: “Pray then before all things... that the gates of light be open to you. For these things are not seen nor understood by all, but only by those to whom God and his Christ give understanding.”<sup>20</sup>

## 1.2 IRENAEUS AND THE *LOGOS EMPHUTOS*

Irenaeus like Justin the Martyr in deepening the logos theology as presented in the prologue of the Gospel recognizes a salvific value of the pre-biblical religions, thus integrating them in the history of salvation.<sup>21</sup> He uses the concept he calls *Logos Emphutos* translated as the Logos Revealer. The *logos Emphutos* of Irenaeus was made to be an answer to the Gnostics of the time whose idea of the divinity was that there were two gods, i.e one which is incomprehensible and invisible and the other one was the creator (demiurge). In order to defend the transcendence of God and the knowability of man, Irenaeus developed the concept of *Logos Emphutos*.<sup>22</sup> For Irenaeus, knowledge of God cannot be reached by human beings except through an act of

<sup>16</sup> C. SALDANHA, *Divine Pedagogy*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> II *Apol.* XIII, 4-6.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. DANIELOU, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. SALDANHA, *Divine Pedagogy*, 71.

<sup>20</sup> *Dial.* VII, 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SALDANHA, *Divine Pedagogy*, 81.

God's love. The knowledge of God is made possible to man only through an act of love of God himself; no man or woman has the natural capability to know God. The knowability of God is only possible through the mediation of the Logos. It is the Logos that reveals the Incarnate One as well as the Father since the creation of the world, making God knowable to all people and presenting them to God as well. Consequently, the main role of the Logos is for Irenaeus to be the dispenser of the revelation of the Father, in other words, the Logos is the *Logos Emphutos*.

### 1.3 CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Clement of Alexandria contributed enormously to the logos theology of the early Christian centuries by developing a concept known as *Logos Protrektikos*. The major argument of Clement is that there is, though in an imperfect manner, God's revelation and salvation outside Jewish and Christian dispensation. He bases his argument on a theory of a natural notion of God which is common to all people universally, according to which people can know God through the use of human reason, "for there was always a natural manifestation of the one Almighty God, among all right thinkers."<sup>23</sup> According to Clement, Philosophy is a gift from God to the Greeks and it constitutes a divine economy parallel, if not equal, to that of the Jewish economy of the Law, in as much as both have as their purpose to bring people to Christ.<sup>24</sup> He writes "But as the proclamation of the Gospel has come now at the fit time, so also at the fit time were the Law and the Prophets given to the Barbarians, and Philosophy to the Greeks, to fit their ears for the Gospel."<sup>25</sup>

For Clement, there are many "paving ways," all directed to the same goal, i.e, the recognition of the Logos in Christ: "The way of Truth is therefore one. But into it, as into a perennial river, streams flow from all sides [...] the commandments and the modes of preparatory training are to be regarded as the way and the appliances of life."<sup>26</sup> However, these "paving ways" or rather streams, as he would call them, through which the *Logos* dispenses salvation, are valid until "the Lord should call the Greeks". The implication here

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<sup>23</sup> *Strom.* V, 13.

<sup>24</sup> DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Strom.* VI, 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Strom.* I, 5.

is that although we believe that through Christ event, the revelation of God has reached its apex.

## 2. KARL RAHNER'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE AS "SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL"

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Theologian Karl Rahner becomes relevant in our discussions especially in reference to his theory of "anonymous Christian" which is based on what the early Greek Fathers had already speculated upon about the presence of God's revelation and saving Grace outside Christian tradition, but also, and essentially, on the new insights in the understanding of grace and human nature from a perspective of Christian anthropology.

In Rahner's anthropology, all human beings have an inner determination towards God and it is this inner determination that he calls "supernatural existential". Human beings are conditionally yet constitutively oriented towards God, for man possesses unlimited transcendence of knowledge and freedom, accruing from the transcendental relation between God and man. According to Rahner, human existence from its very beginning has had one single goal, i.e. eternal life in the immediate possession of God.<sup>27</sup> Men and women are always and everywhere ordained to definitive communion and intimacy with God and the human nature as such is capable of receiving such and ordination and orientation. The inner determination of man towards God has been posited by God Himself, so that His free self-communication to man and woman can be accepted in a dialogical partnership, to the point that this pre-positing condition of the human spirit appears as a condition for this self-communication of God to take place.<sup>28</sup> That is, if God wanted to communicate himself to human beings, He must have created them in such a way that they could respond to that invitation of sharing in God's divine life. This inner determination is, according to Rahner, of a permanent character and not something that appears sporadically in the human person. "In virtue of this self-communication, the transcendence of man is permanently and necessarily ordered to the direct presence of God."<sup>29</sup> Even prior to the justification event, the human person stands under God's universal plan of salvation, to the

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<sup>27</sup> Karl RAHNER, "Original Justice", 328.

<sup>28</sup> RAHNER, "Grace", 590.

<sup>29</sup> RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, XVI, 40.

point of finding himself and understanding his very nature only in reference to this supernatural call.<sup>30</sup>

It is from this perspective of the hidden and inner condition and human orientation towards God, that Karl Rahner considers incorporating even non-Christians into Christian dispensation by calling them anonymous Christians. According to this theory, there is a hidden, unknown operative presence of the mystery of Christ outside Christian dispensation, in nature, in other religious traditions and cultures, indeed in each and every human being. All non-Christians who attain salvation must have received the grace of Christ, just as Christians do, without realizing it; and this is exactly the anonymous character of their condition. These anonymous Christians even though they stand outside the social unity of the Church stand in a salvific relationship with God; this is because they have accepted in their freedom the call of God to supernatural communion with Him.

### 3. AFRICAN THEOLOGIANS' ADVOCACY FOR AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Unfortunately due to the fact that the early missionary evangelization of the African continent identified Christianity with the western culture, missionaries of the time treated everything pre-Christian as either harmful or at best valueless, and to consider the African once converted from paganism as a sort of *tabula rasa* on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow to be imprinted.<sup>31</sup> The missionary enterprise as a result was not only oriented towards evangelization of the African peoples, but also as a way of civilizing (westernizing) Africans.<sup>32</sup> As a result, African traditional Religions were classified in the group of animist religions, which were considered to be practiced by people of low category in the scale of humanity and whose practitioners lacked a sense of moral life. This has led to Christianity in Africa to suffer the problem of alienating. This explains the kind of dichotomy of beliefs that exists in many Christians in the continent; the Christian beliefs have not transformed the totality of the African mind and as a result, many Christians continue to practice African traditional religions *viz a viz*

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<sup>30</sup> RAHNER, "Original Justice," 328.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Adrian HASTINGS, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, 60.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Kwame BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, 227.

Christianity. According to one of the African Theologians Bediako, “The theological problem which has arisen from the missionary tie-up between Christianity and ‘civilization’ (that is, European culture), consists therefore in this, that it threatened to deny African Christians their own past and sought instead to give them a past which could not in any real sense become fully theirs.”<sup>33</sup>

It is precisely clear that African theology and African Christianity lack an identity and authenticity. African Christianity must be able to remove the dichotomy that exists in African Christians of being absolutely Africans and at the same time absolutely Christians without compromising the Gospel message.

### 3.1 BOLAJI IDOWU AND THE CALL FOR AN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CHURCH

One of the African theologians who have done a commendable work in articulating Christian identity in Africa is Bolaji Idowu. He has who has his own the plea for an authentic theology and churchmanship.<sup>34</sup> According to him, the main problem of African Christianity is lack of identity, or rather a lack of “loyalty” of Christians who on the one hand are active members of a Christianity embodied in western categories and practices; on the other hand, these very Christians consider African traditional religions as the ultimate answer to their existential problems.<sup>35</sup> The cause of this is the fact that missionaries from the very beginning ignored the presence of a revelation of the *Logos* in African traditional religions and the Church of the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued the same mentality. For him, the Logos has been active and present all along in the African religions dispensations and African traditional religions enjoy just like all other traditions the gift of the revelation of God. In his book *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, Bolaji observes:

We find that in every age and generation, there is a direct contact of God with the human soul, the personal awareness of God on the part of man through God’s initiative. What man knows about God what he discovers about God, comes as a result of this self-disclosure

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<sup>33</sup> BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, 237.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, 267.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. E. Bolaji IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 205-206.

[...] if revelation indeed means God's self-disclosure, if he has left his mark upon the created order and his witness within man – every man – then it follows that revelation cannot be limited in scope and that it is meant for all mankind, all rational beings [...] for Africans as part of human race, the self-disclosure of God is evident.<sup>36</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing assertion that God's self-revelation is offered to all mankind and, hence, to Africans as part of the human family and the manifestation has to be found in the way in which Africans live their religious experience and in the way they express it. The faith of the Africans in one God, who is a "personal" God, as it can be confirmed from the names Africans give to Him, is one way of expressing the awareness that God is present and operative. Different names given to God by different people of diverse African cultures are "descriptive of his character and emphatic of the fact that he is a reality and that he is not an abstracts concept."<sup>37</sup>

It is quite clear that there has been a failure within the Church circles to recognize dispensation of the *semina verbi* or the *logos* which undoubtedly has walked with Africans even prior to the African Christian era. Missionaries presented to the African peoples an "alien" God who, apart from being a stranger, was demanding them to abandon their African identity. There was a failure to make a bridge of continuity between the dispensation of the *Logos* present in the African context and the Christian dispensation.

Since the revelation of God is already present in the traditional beliefs of the Africans then it should not be difficult to see African traditional religions as the foundation stone for an authentic evangelization that makes Africans feel Christianity as part of their religious experience. It is imperative that the Church in Africa makes it an arduous task to reconcile the presence of the Logos in the pre-Christian era with the newness of Christianity. The Church in Africa must begin from the revelation of the logos already present in the African religions and cultures. According to Idowu, she must keep continuity with the African identity and God's revelation in it.

It is important, however, that as the Church in Africa becomes indigenous by recognizing the presence of the logos in the African religious traditions and cultures she must also remain faithful to the long standing tradition of the universal Church. She must live in the "watchful consciousness that she is part as well as 'presence' of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."<sup>38</sup> The Church in Africa is called to be locally incarnated in the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> IDOWU, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, 11.

life of a given culture but at the same time keeping the unity with the whole body with which it forms the Body of Christ.

### 3.2 JOHN MBITI ON AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AS *PRAEPARATIO EVANGELICA*

John Mbiti shares the same conviction with Idowu and, indeed, with all African theologians that African traditional religions are places for the dispensation of the *logos* as the medium of divine revelation. The first thing John Mbiti identifies is that deep rooted religiosity of the Africans. For him, “religion is part of the cultural heritage [...]. It is by far the richest part of the African heritage. Religion is found in all areas of human life.”<sup>39</sup> Africans have a profound conception of God: “Expressed ontologically, God is the origin and sustenance of all things. He is ‘older’ than the *zamani* period; He is outside and beyond His creation. On the other hand, He is personally involved in his creation, so that it is not outside of Him or His reach.”<sup>40</sup> And without African religiosity, whatever its defect might be, Christianity would have taken much longer to be understood and accommodated by African peoples.

The effort of the Church and any missionary for that matter should therefore be “to discover and set forth the most effective and appropriate ways in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ may find deeper rootage in African religious and cultural consciousness.”<sup>41</sup> The Church has the role of becoming the primordial bearer of the Gospel of which it is its embodiment. It is in the Church that all the deeper aspirations of the African peoples must find their fulfillment, not by way of annihilating them, but by showing how all their hopes come to be realized in the message of Jesus Christ. Indeed “The Church will become for them a community in which the corporate aspirations are not destroyed but fulfilled and intensified, in which tribal foundations are not simply shaken and replaced with a vacuum but are made more secure in Christ.”<sup>42</sup>

Indeed according to Mbiti, there is a very close affinity between the African concept of God and Christian. The God the Africans worship is the same

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<sup>39</sup> John MBITI, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, 308.

<sup>42</sup> John MBITI, “The Ways and Means of Communicating the Gospel,” 341.

God “of our Lord Jesus Christ [...] who for thousands of years has been known and worshipped in various ways within the religious life of African peoples and who was not a stranger in Africa prior to the coming of missionaries.”<sup>43</sup> It is in Jesus Christ that all the expectations of African traditional religions reach fulfilment.

### 3.3 MULAGO GWA CIKALA ON AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AS “STEPPING STONES” TO CHRISTIANITY

Mulago shows that in the African traditional religions we find rudimentary elements that are in harmony with Christian dispensation and as such create the basis for an incarnation of the *Logos* in the African reality.

Because of this harmony, he regards African traditional religions as “stepping stones” for the Gospel and to Christianity. He highlights some of those elements present among the Bantu peoples of Africa such as the concept of ‘unity of Life’ drawn from the Bantu worldview as the intergrading principle. It refers to a “dynamic concept, arising from life-resources (*moyens vitaux*) – ultimately derived from God, *Nyamuzinda Imana* – and with tremendous implications for relationships and participation within the universe of the living, the deceased, creatures animate and inanimate.”<sup>44</sup> The task of the missionary work is to purify the *semina verbi* already present so as to present to the African peoples “a Christianity which has been comprehended and lived through, an incarnated and involved in Christianity which has become more deeply rooted than the old ancestral beliefs.”<sup>45</sup>

It should be however noted that there is an evident weakness in that these theologians by overstressing the continuity, they blur the discontinuity of the same. The impression one gets here is that these theologians do not remember that all the “seeds of the Logos” present in other religious dispensations, are contaminated by the condition of the unredeemed humanity, i.e. in African Traditional religions there is also the presence of evil which obscures the truth revealed in them. The optimistic attitude of the African theologians is positive and it challenges the derogatory European evaluation of African tradition by seeking to achieve a genuinely sympathetic interpretation of the

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<sup>43</sup> J. MBITI, “On the Article by John W. Kinney: A Comment”, 68.

<sup>44</sup> BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, 358.

<sup>45</sup> Vincent MULAGO, *Un Visage Africain du Christianisme*, 17.

religious past. The critique notwithstanding however, the effort of the African theologians is a valid one and represents a more positive attitude towards the pre-Christian heritage of Africa. It is the task of theologians to continue discerning the presence of the Logos who has walked for years with the African peoples in order to lead them to Himself. It is our responsibility to facilitate the *Logos* in continuing His work of incarnation in Africa, not by destroying the already present revelation, but by showing that all the aspirations of their hearts find their fulfillment in the incarnate Son of God through whom He has decided to talk to us. All the positive elements of revelation that we find in African Traditional religions have one and only one purpose: to serve as a background both intellectually and morally to the full manifestation of God the Father in the Son, Jesus Christ.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In African culture and Religion, we find positive values that are authentic revelation of the *Logos* and as such serve as a sure and solid foundation upon which the Gospel and Christian faith could be planted. These positive values could be regarded as a *praeparatio evangelica*. They represent both a preparation for the incarnation of the *Logos* in the vast religious and cultural African heritage, and a means of salvation, until a personal encounter between the individual followers of the African traditional Religion and the incarnate Logos takes place. The task of the Church in Africa is therefore to discern this mysterious presence of the Logos in the African heritage, to purify it from the stains of human sin, which might have contaminated it, and then incorporate it into Christian heritage, so that, one may give witness to the universal character of the Church of Christ that embraces all peoples and cultures. John Paul II in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* marveled at this rich patrimony when he said:

At the same time, it (Africa) is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole. The Synod Fathers highlighted some of these cultural values, which are truly a providential preparation for the transmission of the Gospel.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 42.

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JUSTYNA MĘCZENNIKA KONCEPCJA LOGOS SPERMATICOS  
I JEJ ROLA WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM DYSKURSIE TEOLOGICZNYM W AFRYCE

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule autor argumentuje, że tradycyjne wierzenia w Afryce są oparte na autentycznym objawieniu Logosu. Ten fakt powinien być uwzględniony w pracy duszpasterskiej na afrykańskim kontynencie. To z kolei stwarza obowiązek dla Kościoła w Afryce, aby na nowo odkryć obecność Logosu w dziedzictwie kultur Afryki, oczyścić to dziedzictwo z błędów wynikających z grzesznej natury ludzkiej i wcielić do dziedzictwa chrześcijańskiego – znaku Kościoła uniwersalnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *Semina verbi*; tradycyjne religie afrykańskie.