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Desire and the crisis of nature: towards the ethics of moral theology in an African context

Dr Hassan Musa
ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro, Nigeria
musahass735@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay presents a general reception of some of the notable works of Oliver O'Donovan into the African (Nigerian) context. O'Donovan is a leading moral theologian, ethicist, and Christian philosopher, especially in European contexts. This essay is an attempt to receive his thoughts in an African context with the hope of an ongoing engagement and a growing interest in Africa for the contributions of O'Donovan. The notion of desire as an aspect in human nature will be used to interpret the nature of the crisis that we currently experience in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. A brief summary of O'Donovan's second Gifford lecture would be discussed as a key to further articulation of the urgent need to critically assess our moral life in order to find ways to renew and progress beyond the deadliness of chaos which is depicted in desire as an element of human crisis. The idea of hope as a theological category of Christian moral order will be discussed with particular emphasis on the significance of resurrection of Jesus Christ as the leading promise of God's renewal of life. With this essay it is my hope that the moral crisis of the world, not least the African (Nigerian) context, will be creatively stimulated to new directions and perspectives for restoration, healing, renewal of hope, and direction.

The renewal of theological discourse

What is a theological reflection or discourse? This is, of course, an exchange in the ideas of theology which have definite root in the reality of God and who God is in relation to humanity, the world, time, and all creation. There is no one who can be exhaustive in any theological discourse; this is why it begins and ends as a mystery. This means that there is no mastery of the reality of

theology. The best we can do is to be aware and to be drawn to the mystery of God in God's own terms as revealed word and will (De Gruchy 2013). This is the beginning and end of theology. It is not an argument but an invitation. It is the self-revelation of God in word and deed. The movement in theological discourse may be something of an adventure but this does not mean that the human determines where he or she is going. At best it is the God who calls that ultimately guides the way forward. The movement of theology is not out of human determinism; it is a movement that comes out of human obedience to the voice of God which is already ahead of human beings in the theological movement. The theological discourse of the history of human life and interactions remains open-ended in the midst of all the crises of the time in which mankind finds itself in the world.

The discourse of theology in Africa and the world has been constantly shifting its focus and horizon from one dimension to another. The idea of self-discovery has been an ongoing element of doing theology in context. The days of the romantic theology of the medieval era have moved into the rationalistic theology of the Enlightenment era which has given shape to the modern and even postmodern civilization. The contention and tension of life have been the constant bubbles within which the contours of theological movement in human history are discovered. The movement of theological history has come of age in the twentieth century with the transformation of man into another god for his life and time. The sense of human autonomy has been the movement in the modern and postmodern era. This is the political move of human self-discovery and the exertion of self as the king of the world (Toulmin 1990, Brueggemann 1993, 1997). This is seen in human mastery and manipulation of nature to suit human needs and desires. This is the new human condition that leads in the crises of the modern age of identity, self, and world. The human condition in the world has been reduced from being the creation of God in God's own image to being "homo faber" and "homo laborans" (Arendt 1998). This is the human being as a manufacturer of goods and a laborer who delivers services in the world for the sake of survival. The quest of human life in the twentieth century was not for knowing nor for serving either the purposes of God or life for their own sake, rather it was the quest for survival. This is seen also and more vividly in the ongoing social quest for power and survival in African contexts.

The movement of theological discourse has now reached beyond any certain boundary. This makes the nature of theology something without borders. There is no end to doing theology even in the self-awareness of the end of life. The realization of the movement of theological discourse opens it to some kind of unsettlement that leaves it open from within itself. This is why we cannot shut the world out of the church in order to make the church safer and purer nor can we shut the church out of the world in order to make it purer and more reliable. The foundation and reliability of the church is the person of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is only in Jesus Christ that the church remains the church of God and it is only in the person of Jesus Christ that Christian theology takes its sure root and remains true to its identity and mandate (Moltmann 1977 cf. chapter 3). All forms of theology remain anthropological musings without the definite foundation of the person of Jesus Christ. Political theology has invoked so many ways of doing theology in the world that the actual meaning of theology has been largely pluralized in many contexts to almost a vague sense of being and engagement.

In what follows we shall attempt to reflect on how theological discourse and movement has shifted its paradigms in the context of world development to a new critical order of being and action. This new critical order brings theology to the point of action. The action of life is being rediscovered as the outworking of God in the world. This movement helps theologians to relate their theological reflections to their practical deeds and being in life. The attachment of theology and life in the modern era has taken life and theological discourse very seriously in the quest for human survival and in a sense of meaningfulness in the midst of despair, evil, and death in the world. The world of the modern age has indeed come of age in that life has turned to a new dimension as if God does not exist (Selby 1999:226-45). The coming of age of our world has been revealed not only in the maturity of the world as an organism but also in the deterioration of the world as an edifice. The magnificence and wonder of creation have been gradually effacing from the conscious interaction of man in the world because of the loss of interest in what the world was originally. The movement into the new world of human-constructed civilization leaves the entire world at the mercy of the human self and human reasoning. The most acute problem of our age is the moral crisis of life. The moral crisis of life is degeneration in the sense of the being and doing of human life on earth. This moral crisis necessitates our quest for a new turn

in theology, not only as the search for what to believe about God and how to understand some of the knowable attributes of God and the salvific work of God in history, etc. This new movement and quest is also the rediscovery of self in relation to God, other people, time, and the entire world as the creation of God and not just as a human project of history. The new turn of theology in the modern era is the quest for meaning in the moral reconstruction of the inhumane civilization that we human beings have invented for ourselves. The loss of self in the world, the loss of world in the self, and the loss of God in both the self and world have largely left us and our history sterile and empty of the knowledge of our essence. This is why our major response to criticism in life and religion is often fear and the use of force to kill, dominate, and eliminate the other.

In our attempt to reflect closely on a possible way forward from and through the moral crisis of our time in its ironic maturity, we shall consider the works of Oliver O'Donovan, a leading British moral theologian of our time. This contribution is an attempt to further bring the works and life of O'Donovan into dialogue with the African context, Nigeria in particular. This will demonstrate an aspect of reception theory in order to see how significant the life and work of O'Donovan have been not only as a white, male, moral theologian from the West but also as a Christian who has something to share from his faith and moral perspective and as a fellow citizen of a world full of moral crises and tensions. We shall reflect briefly on some of his works, not necessarily in the order of their publication, with some hope for cohesion, not in terms of thorough analysis, but by means of general introduction. This will surely help to raise the interest of people in Nigeria and beyond on why they need to further read O'Donovan, and for him to continue the work of developing a new perspective on the moral needs of our time.

Desire and the crisis of nature

The problem of human desire in relation to the crisis of human nature was reflected upon in O'Donovan's second lecture in his Gifford Lecture series of 2021 under the general title of "The Disappearance of Ethics" (O'Donovan 2021). This second lecture is on the disappearance of the "frontier" which is "time." This remains essential to our human dilemma in the crisis of our human nature. It happens both from within and from without. The concept of "desire"

in itself is not wrong or evil. It only becomes dangerous when it is qualified on the negative. This opens the possibility for a “good desire” or a “godly desire” which moves one to search for that which is good and in conformity with the will and commands of God. Karl Barth judged human ethics only in relation to the “command of God.” It was Barth’s argument that every man (and woman) is under the command of God (Parson 1987:48-65). The freedom or slavery of human beings depends on how they respond to the command of God. The desire of a person is that which is expressed in their sense of being from the inside. But desire in this context means an inner openness to life that drives a person to a certain goal in time. This helps us see that desire is not just a human wish for something. It is an active movement that leads a person to a certain destination. It is not wishful thinking. A wish, on the other hand, is the human response to necessity. For example, those in captivity wish for freedom; the sick, wish for healing and health; and the dying wish to live. This brings wish into direct relation with the notion of hope. Hope is the sense of a human being alive beyond the present. The power of hope lies in the future of whatever the present can be. This is the strength that conquers the evil of a bad present and releases human beings in the full energy of life that moves them into the future. The future of human life is not the product of desire, if desire is the natural expression of what is liked or wanted for the selfish goodness of life.

The problem of desire as a point of crisis is the human critical quest beyond that which is good and possible. The human nature of desire becomes highly problematic in the unnatural sense of the term. This could be excused or judged as the human corruption or abuse of desire and not the danger or evil of desire in itself. The idea of desire as that which is the expression of feeling for power and control as aspects of the pleasure of life is what generally makes desire evil, bad, and dangerous. But not everything bad is actually evil, as argues O’Donovan. A bad tree may be bad but it is not necessarily evil. A good person may be good in how he or she looks, speaks, writes, behaves, etc. but he or she may actually be evil in his or her intentions and desires. Desire is the inner hiddenness of the sense of feeling which is the elemental idea of motive. Human motive is the elemental organ of the judgment of desire. Any desire whose motive cannot be discerned is not a desire. The rich may justify their desire to be richer, but that does not make their desire good or useful. The desire of man is the expression of human feelings in self-contradiction. The man who is alive desires to kill another man who is alive. The man who is

hungry desires to steal from another person who is hungry. The needy adds to the need of others instead of helping to alleviate it. The inter-religious crisis and killing of people, especially the innocent and the vulnerable, is the expression of human desire and the crisis of nature. It is a crisis because that is not what human nature has been created to be. It is not even what human nature is expecting to have for its own self at any point in time. It is the same evil experience that some desire to inflict on others. At the end of the day the entire world of beauty is turned into ugliness, and the world of life is turned into death. This is not what is called transformation in the positive sense of the word. This is nothing but destruction as the product of evil desire.

The sense of an ethical nature in human beings brings everyone to the threshold of desire and the event of its expression in life. The modern world is the invention of the modern man, and the modern man turns out to be the product of his modernity. The idea of man as *homo faber* in the social theory of Hannah Arendt (1998) brings mankind to the point of the organization that could be useful to make the world a beautiful place. But the misuse of that gift renders the world so ugly and destructive in the ongoing human creativity of death. The self-re-creation of man into *homo faber*, one who trades in the game of creativity, leads to the re-situation of the modern man into another god of his time and space. It is in the human conquering of matter and some aspects of space that the human person remains the slave of self.

The world as it was created has been the home of life and prosperity for humankind and all creation. But the world as it has become has become the new 'veil of tears' (Helmut Thielicke). The modern world has become the world of endless desires (Ward 2000: 52). The desire of man in the nature of its crisis has been the space of simulacra (Cox 1965, 1984). Everything is commodified and set for people as a trap. The new cities of the world today are many - some big, others small. Some grow into human mega cities of love and pleasure in the pursuit and expression of endless desires (Drummond 1988, Giddens 1984, Smith and Kollock 1999). The best of human desire is its sensitivity to the quest for the fullness of life. But the danger is that desire will go totally wrong from within itself in the sense that it will turn into the self-enslavement that renders the human self restless from within itself.

The ongoing move in the modern world is that of a human quest that begins and ends in choices. The modern world is restructured into the stages of human choices. The possible is left for the impossible. The goodness of life has been traded for the cheap appearance of the short-lived cycles of human desire. The crisis of human desire is a crisis in the dramatic self-betrayal of mankind into the thickness of the wilderness of life. The commoditization of the modern world has unleashed the endless crisis of value in which the depth of the value of life has shrunk into the wish and thoughts of human beings. The God-given texture of the goodness of life in the likeness and image of God has largely been betrayed to the image of the devil. People in the modern world suffer the crisis of desire and the destruction of the nature of grace. The simplicity of life has been largely forgotten in the depth of a complexity that leaves it deeply wounded from within itself.

The African context like many other glocal (i.e. the combination of the global and the local) contexts of the world suffers from the inner betrayal of the beauty of life in the crisis of desire and the contradiction of its nature. Nature in this context refers back to the originality of life in all its grandeur and value. It is not the endless processes of life as we see them in a dramatic moment. The movement of life in Africa within the vicious circles of death and oblivion as seen in the African sense of social, political, economic, ecological, and even religious contexts is a thing of deep concern. The way of redemption is to think back to Eden and to search beyond the horizons of the now into the eschatological future that lies ahead of us. The magisterial contributions of Oliver O'Donovan in creating ethical discourse from theological critical perspectives have been opened to challenge and stimulate us in our ongoing search for a better world for ourselves and the coming generation. In what follows we shall run through some of the thoughts that O'Donovan has discussed extensively in some of his leading works in order to see how his contributions can continue to stimulate our thinking in the African context in new ways of thinking and living out our faith in difficult and challenging times.

Oliver O'Donovan and the African context

It is the intention of this essay to argue for the possible contribution of Oliver O'Donovan to the formation of ethics and Christian moral theology even in an African context. It is clear that O'Donovan writes in the West, largely for

Western consumption. Nevertheless, it is our interest to also see how useful and significant his writings can be for the African reader. By means of reception, the work of O'Donovan speaks to the global context of theology and life beyond any specific local context. His move to articulate the contours of political theology testifies to this possibility. In his work *The Desire of the Nations*, (1999) O'Donovan outlined a new trajectory for political theology from a Christian philosophical perspective. The nations are envisioned from the larger context of life and this life is the creative gift and activity of God. The political cannot be totally separated from life. The missionary stereotype of seeing the political as a dirty secular game that does not fit the category of theology has been largely dismissed. O'Donovan's argument helps retrieve the value of theology and life within God's given revelation and God-centered ethics. The renewal of life in the African context will be the beginning of an African renewal of its political roots. The political history of Africa with its connection to European and Islamic slavery has dehumanized and traumatized Africa to the point of disinterest in life and action (Turaki 2010). The life of the African people has largely been reduced to violence, self-rejection, and the rejection of others. But the rediscovery of the ethical root of political life from a God-centered perspective remains helpful in rediscovering the value of life as God-given and God-loved. This makes us the object of God's love and not the object of human manipulation in the world. Africa in the midst of God-centered ethics remains inclusive and healed in the blessedness of the presence of God. This vision of God for the healing of the nations remains the significant paradigm that Christian political discourse can take from O'Donovan's perspective.

Furthermore, one of Oliver O'Donovan's seminal contributions that remains creatively significant for the modern world is his trilogy on *Ethics as Theology* (2013, 2014, 2017). O'Donovan creatively moved the foundations of ethics from human random choice and reformulated it in the givenness and vitality of the revelation of God. This rediscovery of the root of moral and political theology remains an opening for ongoing contributions that seek to critically outline the chaos of life in the world. It also calls attention to the basic need for Christian theologians to rediscover the new world of God that emerges from the biblical textual revelation. There is no doubt that the history of human life and the creation of civilization has uncovered abuse of the Bible by human beings as a tool for operation and marginalization. This leaves the Bible

as a “site of struggle” within the contexts of its reception and ongoing interpretations (Musa 2020:27-38).

Nevertheless, a new ethical approach to biblical interpretation and reception remains creatively liberating and restorative (Smit 1990, 29-43). This is the new ethical paradigm that Oliver O’Donovan amongst others has put forward. The three volumes of O’Donovan’s newest contribution to ethics are as follows: *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology, Volume 1*; *Finding and Seeking: Ethics as Theology, Volume 2*; and *Entering into Rest: Ethics as Theology, Volume 3* (2013, 2014, 2017). In these Christian contributions to ethics O’Donovan brings a new interest not only to the meaning and foundations of ethics but also to the meaning and relevance of theology to modern life. The rediscovery of the meaning and function of the self in relation to the world and time puts the self in the right context of being and action. The disorientation of the modern African person as well as Western people remains chaotic from within and from without. As a result of the loss of our bearings many people move to the point of despair and the loss of self in the process of seeking some kind of meaning and fulfilment in life. The enslaved self and the politically exploited self of the African person remains largely marginalized and traumatized in the arena of the world’s life to the point that violence is the only means of liberation. The use of violence as a means of liberation has not been a good end of the argument. Many people lose themselves in the process of finding life and liberation. Many African contexts today, such as Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Kenya etc., have many of their citizens in the bush as rebels and child soldiers. The African person has been turned apart and alienated from within. The sadness and danger of all this chaos is certainly the loss of self and the reduction of the human self to that of a beast. These evils in the world have turned the world upside down. The only sure route back to the world’s home is the rediscovery of the origin of humanity and the origin of the meaning of life in the world. In O’Donovan’s ethical paradigm, the idea of time is also rediscovered as the ongoing context of life. The tension of the loss of time leaves human life in serious chaos without the peace and concentration needed to pursue the meaning of life in its beauty and goodness. An understanding of time as the created time of God is one of the surest ways of finding peace in time. Human forgetfulness of the role of God in creating and keeping time makes his search and use of time totally inadequate. There is no time for the time when everything seem to melt

in the sun (Vosloo 2015:3-13). The renewal of ethics has its moral contours, but the understanding of its moral roots goes beyond morality. The beginning of ethics is not in the discourse between what is good or bad, right or wrong but rather it is in the discourse between what is given or not given from a God-centered perspective.

The movement of ethics in O'Donovan's contribution opens new contours in which life is not only discovered but also enjoyed as that which has been given and cherished by the creative wisdom and love of God. The love and will of God are the combination of God's single character by which God creates and sustains everything. This understanding of life from the perspective of God's love gives it a healthy and an enduring orientation. Nothing can be lost to chaos when the God of love redeems it in his love. The basis of human meaninglessness is found in the disorientation of life and the reduction of everything in life to the change of evolution. This kind of evolutionary theory leaves life open not to itself but also to chaos. This is where the impossible is made possible and human beings created in the image of God bear the image of the devil. The '*imago Dei*' in the human being is lost to the '*imago diabolos*' from without. The moral crisis of the world and Africa in particular is the manifestation of the '*imago diabolos*' that takes over the actual origin of the '*imago Dei*' in human beings. The route for life and ethics which O'Donovan has taken is largely the route of reconciling people from their inner conflict to the rediscovery of the gift of God's peace and joy. This is what brings hope and meaning to the human being in the modern world.

The lost person is found in Christ by the ultimate choice and love of God even before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The movement of ethics in *Finding and Seeking* brings the human being to the point of his or her usefulness as functional beings in the world. The value of human life is being restored in the idea that all human beings have been created in the goodness and love of God and through them that love and goodness are one and the same reality that is being reflected. The human being is an active agent who has been made another subject of life and creativity in the world. There is no idea of the creation of any person in order that he or she may destroy at their will that which God has already created. The creation of humankind in the world is the manifestation of the divine wisdom that the hiddenness of God would not lead to the loss of God in the world. Human beings are the representatives of God

not just as political beings whose social interaction leads them only to making choices. Yes, the free person can make choices and take responsibility for definite action. Nevertheless, in finding and seeking we first discover the movement of God toward humanity and then the movement of human beings toward God in response. This creative response continued to be the rehabilitating experience of human beings in the presence of God in order that that which has been lost may be found. This, for Jürgen Moltmann, opened the door to a new theology of joy in God (Moltmann 2017). Like the woman who found her lost coin or the father whose lost son returned home (Luke 15) God remains a joyful God in receiving the lost back. Theology is joy in God and the experience of God in a human being is an experience of joy because of the generosity of God. The movement of God to find the lost makes the lost valuable in the eyes of God even in their lostness. The love of God is the internal element that makes the move and the connection. This is the character of God as God and still active in the world through the Spirit of God's love and grace.

O'Donovan's discussion on *Entering into Rest* leads us to think not only on the origin of humankind but also on their goal. Where is history moving to? And what should be the goal or the end of humankind? These are salient questions that need careful attention. Humankind as the object of God's love are called in Christ to their ultimate destiny, namely, God. God is the origin and the destiny of humankind. God is the final goal and meaning of human history. This does not mean that humankind has to achieve God as a certain commodity or point of interest in the world. No. Rather, humanity is found and called into God. The life of human beings has its meaning and purpose only in its relation to God as its actual origin and goal. The focus of human history is not to seek and find the pleasures of life in their transience, rather it is to receive the ultimate gift of God's self in the person of his passion. This is the manifestation of the humanity of God as the ultimate revelation in history (Barth 1956, Grzegorz 2015). This is also the beginning of the end of history as seen in Moltmann's theology of hope (Moltmann 1967, 1975, 2012). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is something unique in the history of human life and in the interaction of the divine that has recreated history in the most critically redemptive way and manner. The manifestation of the Jesus Christ as God's own self-revelation marks the end of life in its glorious givenness and opens it into its glorious expectation (Chia 2006). We shall return to this later on with

reflections on the contribution of O'Donovan in *Resurrection and Moral Order*. What is here presented is the new paradigm of the reality of man in relation to the God of love and the actual purpose of human life. As seen in the Westminster Catechism, the chief end of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. (Question and Answer 1) This is not the product of human creativity, rather it is the extension of divine wisdom and grace. Human beings are not evolutionary phenomena that have no destiny beyond metaphysical metamorphoses in different aspects of life and nothingness. People are now given a sure sense of history in the history of God's being and relation to human reality. This in a better sense answers the questions of African Traditional Religion on the unending circle of life without a destination. It is in the eschatological vision of the revelation of God that we discover the fulfillment of human life in the actual restfulness which in its essence is only found in God. It is now the time for waiting the time for preparation and conscious expectation of the advent of the new time of God for the fulfillment of the destiny of humankind.

In his contribution *The Ways of Judgment* (2005) and *The Just War Revisited* (2013), Oliver O'Donovan takes our attention to the heart of the crises of our time. The elemental crisis of human history is the actual Sin of rebelling against the will and purpose of God. This rebellion as sin was actual but not made a destined ultimacy. O'Donovan in *Ways of Judgment* points out how humankind as created agent is being called to make life out of the open-endedness of life and out of situations in which they cannot avoid making choices. The content of human life remains in the creative circle of the choices that people make and in the ways that those choices inform the kind of person that they are or are becoming. There is no arbitrariness in the creative focus of human beings. God stands both in the distance and in the closest proximity with human beings. This is intended to help people discover their basic companion and in divine solidarity to learn wisdom and hope. The ways of human judgment are constant moves between the idea of action and the idea of the will. Critical thinkers and philosophers like Saint Augustine, Kant, Kierkegaard, Barth, etc., have all at different stages reflected on the perversity of humankind and the misdirection of the will to that which is not the will of God. The ways of judgment have become the inner prison of desire and wishful thinking which have incarcerated the same human being in its own natural tendency. The ultimate goodness of God became hard to discover even though it is made

known in the person of Jesus Christ. The moral crisis of the West and the rest of the world is an ongoing crisis not of nature but of humanity (Novak 2000:1-21). The evil we see and experience in the chaotic movement of life is the actual manifestation of the inadequacy of our understanding of the actual origin and purpose of life. This is why life has been dangerously devalued. It is a terrible crime in the history of human life on earth. The criticism of Nietzsche on the need for revaluation of life is an inner protest not only against Christianity but also against the dangerous trajectory of humanity in the modern world. The modern world is in definite danger if the life of persons refuses to be revalued and restored into the true ways of judgment. These true ways of judgment are the ways of self-discovery in the virtues of life. This is a call “back to virtues” (Vosloo 2013:1-12) not as a game change but as a sense of transformation from what is old to what is new. This is essential to Christian experience and history. I wish this could suffice as a response to Nietzsche, Bultmann, and Adolf von Harnack in order to see that the essence of Christianity is the essence of life. This is seen not in the action of the human persons but in the actions of God. The essence of Christianity as the essence of life is the love of God. Everything moves in and out of life from the vantage point of God’s love which gives it its true meaning and the capacity to know and be itself. The virtues of love, faith, patience, wisdom, self-control, humility, etc. are not the human characteristics of being that emanate from the observations of Plato or the thinking of Aristotle or the arguments of Goethe, Hegel, Heidegger, Kierkegaard etc. Nevertheless, with Saint Paul I would argue that these are the elemental fruit of the Spirit that make the practical Christian life Christian (1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22-23).

In *The Just War Revisited*, O’Donovan follows the path of human wisdom in searching for a godly alternative to the chaos of life. Just war theory is a human reaction to excessive violence. It is a justification of war in context not because of an interest in war or the killing of others but as an act of human responsibility to love one’s life and the lives of others. Yet, it is not a final solution to the crisis of human nature and the ongoing ideological desire in those who want to steal, kill, and destroy. This is the basic ethical tension in the Nigerian context today. Christians in Nigeria face a very serious dilemma whether to learn to trust in God in an absolute sense of loyalty or to use their sense of wisdom to share their loyalty with themselves and their quest for self-preservation. Criticism of human reasoning in the modern sense of the word

started with Kant (McQuillan 2016) but did not find its end in him. Kant only opened the dialogue to an ever limited sense of the binary nature of life as he has observed it. But O'Donovan takes his argument further by raising modern critical questions that show the complexity of the human will to power and to being. This complexity is the natural struggle of the good person to either love the bad person or to kill him. This has been the danger and the invitation of life in Africa today. The evolutionary theory of the survival of the fittest has no good news for the nature of the crises of life in Africa and the larger world today. Survival of the fittest is when the powerful threaten and even seek to eliminate the powerless or the undesirable. This is the danger of the crisis of human desire. For human beings to live and flourish in the joy of life and the goodness of God we need a better alternative. We need to heed the call to the ways of truth and love in compassionate justice, for indeed there is nothing as truly good as the good will which is created by God. This is the purity of the origin of life and the openness of that purity to mature to a certain good fulfilment. The idea of war cannot be the idea of love. The ways of war are only and always the ways of death. The new politics of power in African contexts have pushed so many politicians to use their fellow human beings as weapons for self-protection and the achievement of their certain political goals. This has turned the political arena of the world and of Africa in particular into an arena of human political slavery. There is no freedom when human will is bought with money or dominated by a certain ideology that makes it a slave. This is why many people cannot make their own choices. The age of rationality will not dawn in Africa if this kind of social and political trends continue to grow. The freedom of Africans is not in the hands of the Western colonialist. The freedom of Africans is in their own sense of self-realization and in the true discernment of their God-given gifts for life and godliness. Similarly, the freedom of Western people is found not in anything else but in their own discernment of their origin and destiny in the God of life and love and truth. There is no freedom without truth and God's truth is the content of his justice. There is no freedom, no true life without justice. Just war theory is a rational reaction of the human being as a human being. This is not the final solution, rather it is a demonstration of the hunger and thirst for life in the midst of death and destruction. Wars end when justice is done in love. The destiny of the African nations is left open to the outworking of their own will. The basic place of hope in all its grandeur lies in the horizon of the future.

Oliver O'Donovan discusses the horizons of the future in his *Resurrection and Moral Order* (1986). In what I have observed in this contribution, O'Donovan gives more priority to the reorganization of the moral order of the modern person than the close reflection on the meaning and function of "resurrection" as a theological concept. This helps us understand his approach to the ethical discourse that he pursues in the material. The correlation of resurrection and moral order is the concretion of the renewal of life as God has intended it. Resurrection as seen in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* is the other side of the project of God's creation (Moltmann 1964). Resurrection is God's new confrontation to the forces of chaos in human history and their subjugation to the enactment of the freedom of man in the freedom of God. Resurrection in Christian theology is the most unique event that leads us into the beginning of eternity as the real life of God through Jesus Christ. Resurrection is the most important sign of the end time. To the kingdom of darkness and evil it is the sign of defeat and to the kingdom of light it is the sign of the victory of God through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:13). This is the new Sabbath of the redeemed in which every aspect of life has been redeemed and restored in Jesus Christ. The Christian experience of Jesus Christ as seen in the discourse of O'Donovan is the dynamic openness of the Christian to the reality of his or her new creation. It is only in Christ that our sense of renewal begins and ends. What emerges is the new nature and the new life in Jesus Christ. In Christ we experience a sharp break from the old self of evil and lostness to the renewed "self" found in the resurrected person of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). The theology of resurrection is the revelation of the promise of life in the midst of death. This helps African Christians who constantly face Islamic insurgent extremism that results in gross abuse and the destruction of life. The death of many people in recent years because of the religious intolerance and persecutions that happen across the boundaries of religions in Nigeria remain the modern corruption of the human soul from within itself. This is the gift of death and evil in the context of life. This makes the goodness of life elusive from the experience of those who suffer and die in the midst of tragedy. The idea of resurrection is the new dawn of life that defeats the deadliness of death. The being of God is the promise of the rise of the new "Sun of Righteousness" (Moltmann 2010) which must arise in the midst of the darkness of our time in order to shine the new light of life upon us. This may be an eschatological reality that begins from the "Now" of the believer in the history of Jesus Christ.

The idea of moral order is the promise of goodness in the midst of chaos. Again, this does not follow the theory of evolution but rather revelation. From an evolutionary perspective that which is expected only comes from the old rotten reality. It is not the end of the circle but its continuation and ever widening. But in the revealing presence of God we are invited to experience and testify to something truly new. In reflection on the moral order the renewal of nature becomes necessary. There is nothing natural in the realities we experience today. The nature of things has been distorted to how things have now become. The process of becoming defies the force of the possibility of the end. This means that every end signifies a new beginning (Moltmann 2004). The modern project of life is being moved to a certain fixity that man could call the end, my own end. This is the limit of all human achievement. The idea of revelation in Christian theology defies the force of a certain human fixity on anything. The reality of God who calls life out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) directly confronts the nihilo and moves its fixation into something creatively new. This is the promise that the history of life will not eventually end in moral chaos and the anarchy of human callousness, but in the dawn of a new day for which the rule will be order and love, just order, and the love of justice.

Theology and the moral crisis of Africa

Looking at the dangerous development and move of misdirected human desire that contradicts and destroys human nature, the question remains, “What role can theology play in restoring the order and goodness of life and creation”? The answer to this question is affirmative. Christian theology has a lot to offer in response to the moral crisis of Africa and the rest of the world if it is well understood and taken seriously. In the discussion on the “moral crisis of the West” (cf. Novak 2000) it has been observed that humankind has degenerated or moved away from the God-given position of life and authority which it was given from the beginning of life and in relationship with God. The Western context today has become the new context of the trade of human desires in the arena of the world supermarket in which everything of value is on sale. The value of things has been taken more seriously than the value of life. Human beings take life for granted to the extent that they will trade the worth of human beings for mere things of the world.

The sad events of human trafficking and the wanton killing of the innocent are signs of the beginning of the end of the world of order and goodness and the world's becoming a world of chaos and death. "The god of this age has blinded the eyes" of so many people that they cannot see the goodness and value of life as the good life of God (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). An important contribution of Sunday B. Agang, namely *When Evil Strikes*, expresses his confrontation with the problem of violence in Africa, with special emphasis to the Nigerian context (Agang 2016, 2017a, 2017b). The sadness of the evil of violence in Nigeria is the ongoing hatred of humanity and of the goodness of God's creation. The Islamic extremists in Nigeria and the rest of the world are bent on destroying that which is good and peaceful. The rejection of the good is the beginning of the destruction of life in its goodness and beauty. The acknowledgement of the presence of evil in religious violence in Nigeria has been the most important point of Agang's contribution. Agang emphasizes a new alternative to the crisis of human nature. Instead of people following evil ways and the transient pleasure of power to dominate others, he argues for an ethic of hospitality and care. It is in our acts of hospitality that we discover the actual connection and unity of our humanity with the humanity of others. This is the creative symbol of our eternal destiny. This is where all that is desired is the good, not just for oneself but for all others. By our desire for the other in love and hospitality we shall find ways of healing the wounds of Africa. We cannot pretend that Africa is all good and that Nigeria is alright because of her religious traditions. The problem in Nigeria has not only been the idea of God in all its complexity and the eagerness of different adherents to project and protect it. It has to be understood that the problem of humanity everywhere is the same, namely, rebellion against God.

The religiosity of the people in Nigeria has in many ways only led them to the self-establishment of their own Tower of Babel, not to the acknowledgement of the good creation of God which must be cared for and the God of creation who must be worshiped. The moral crisis of Africa can be seen in many ways that have emerged within the history of Africa's self-discovery in the return of slavery, though not Eurocentric enslavement but an internal slavery within itself (Turaki 1993). The abuse of power either in social politics or church administration remains an ongoing sign of our captivity and alienation from within. The growing waves of social and religious corruption and bigotry has also been a major contributing factor. Many organizations today have been

reduced to tribal strongholds. Many church denominations in Africa now only identify with a certain leading tribe which becomes the criterion for the admission into the organization and life within it. A sense of occupation and domination has crept into the fabric of African life and has disrupted the unifying philosophy of unity and fellowship in it. This can be seen in the commoditization of life and religion. Human beings enslave and destroy one another in the name of religion. This is certainly the corruption and betrayal of the meaning and function of religion. In Christianity human beings are not seeking God for God has already found them. In other religions humankind is said to be seeking God in the present in order to secure their future. This is an orientation that should bring humanity into a deep sense of soberness and attentiveness especially as to when and how God speaks to them. But in a situation where people steal and kill one another society has only taken another route to a new religion of evil. This is the worship of death which Jürgen Moltmann critically acknowledges in the modern and the postmodern age (Moltmann 2017:3).

Christian theology can be useful in its restorative function to bring some sense of adjustment and the birth of life in the rebirth of hope. The restoration of humanity begins and ends in the new realization of the person and presence of God in the world through the person of Jesus Christ. It is in and through Jesus Christ that the old self of evil and the reign of death is put to death and the new self of God's righteousness and justice is made alive (Eph. 2; Col. 3). The new theology of life today emerges from our knowledge of the God of life. The righteous live with an unquenchable thirst for the "living God" (Ps. 42:1). A new understanding of God as the living God opens the door of life and its goodness to humankind. The theology of life begins in the divine initiative of the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. He came that we might have life in abundance (John 10:30). The reality of life is not the achievement or invention of humanity, rather it is the in-breaking of the glorious light of God in the midst of the world of darkness and evil (Isa. 9:1ff). We are like the slaves and relegated people who live in darkness but now have seen the great light of life which shines upon us in all its beauty and goodness. It is in this new realization of the presence of God as the presence of life in its newness that we remain hopeful for its resurrection the death and for its renewal in hope in the living God.

Conclusion

Three points are worth our close attention from O'Donovan's ethics especially as we reflect on the movement of our moral lives in context. First, there is a programmatic shift in time in the context of history with a special emphasis on resurrection and moral order. The concept of resurrection is a great promise of God's renewal of life and time and everything. This was the thesis of Moltmann in his *Theology of Hope* (1964). The life of evil and violence that we experience in Africa cannot end in violence, defeat, and death. Rather hope lies beyond all that destroys in the God who gives life in abundance (John 10:10). Second, the crisis of life and the chaos of nature shall be redeemed by God's power to bring moral order at the end of history. Thus for O'Donovan moral order is that which has been created and promised by God which will only dawn as the fulfilment of history at the end of time. Third, the human quest for justice does not begin and end in human rationality, such as just war theories. Rather such quests shall be satisfied in the reality of God's enactment of justice for all. What remains urgent for us here and now is a life of active responsibility and living hope.

The disappearance of ethics as seen in O'Donovan's Gifford lectures is a reality that demands our sense of acknowledgement no matter how painful or embarrassing it may be. Yet, the hope for renewal remains open in the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2) which leads us into a new understanding and celebration of life as the gift of God, not our human product. The high spirit of modernity must be adjusted in the creative power of the Spirit of God in the sense of our new orientation in the interest of life in its power and sacredness. The acknowledgement of the sacred sense of life as the creation and gift of God is the surest route to the restoration of ethics and the renewal of life in the power of God.

Presentation: I am happy to present this article to Prof. Oliver O'Donovan in celebration of his contributions through his Gifford Lecture series. With all best wishes to future readers.

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