RIPPLES OF POWER: TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF POWER WITH A VIEW TO INTER-RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION
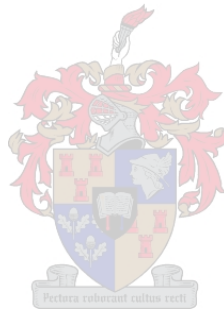
By

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Declaration

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Abstract

Divine power is a religious belief which ascribes apparently inexplicable acts of wonder to God, affirming God's authority, might, and abilities. It is a conviction which often relates to God's sovereign activities in creation and human lives. Typically, the theme is associated with God's attributes in that it describes God as omnipotent, almighty, and all-powerful. This belief is deeply entrenched not only in the Christian tradition, but also in other religious traditions. This project engages understandings of divine power, primarily in the Christian tradition.

In order to understand this motif, the study engages in conversation with the theology of the two important scholars who have written on the subject of God's power. It explores this subject by examining each of the scholar's standpoints. Each of them approaches the subject from a different perspective arguing how they believe it should be understood. The Presbyterian systematic theologian, Daniel Migliore, argues that God's power is understood as triune power which is defined, and described, by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and which is demonstrated by his love. Divine power is centred in love and not in domination or coercion.

The second scholar, Hans-Ruedi Weber, comes from an ecumenical theological position. He approaches divine power from the perspective of biblical theology. Weber approaches the question of power from what he calls 'faith trajectories'. These faith trajectories or traditions include: God's liberating acts (the Exodus tradition or Mosaic Faith); God's royal rule (the Royal tradition); God's empowering wisdom (the Wisdom Tradition); God's holy presence, (the Cultic tradition); God's vindication of the poor (the *anawim* tradition); and God' renewing judgement (the Apocalyptic tradition). Each of these trajectories offers a distinctive understanding of God's power.

Towards the end of this thesis Weber's interpretation of power, and Migliore's approach are brought into conversation by highlighting places where they share similar interpretations and so complement each other, and where they differ. These faith trajectories serve to offer some additional material to Migliore's interpretation of God's power. In addition to investigating what God's divine power means, the study also proposes that this theological theme could be an avenue for engaging in inter-religious discussion, particularly in Nigeria. It is proposed that such an approach could deepen and enrich the conversations of the different religious traditions with one another in a deeply divided country by understanding and accommodating religious similarity and the appreciation of distinctive religious and theological beliefs.

Opsomming

Goddelike krag is 'n godsdienstige oortuiging wat oënskynlik onverklaarbare wonderwerke aan God toeskryf en God se gesag, mag en vermoëns bekragtig. Dit is 'n oortuiging wat dikwels verband hou met God se soewereine aktiwiteite in die skepping en mense se lewens. Die tema word tipies met God se kenmerke verbind in dié sin dat dit God as alvermoënd en almagtig uitbeeld. Hierdie oortuiging is diep veranker in nie net die Christelike tradisie nie, maar ook ander godsdienstige tradisies. Hierdie projek handel oor begrippe van goddelike krag, hoofsaaklik in die Christelike tradisie.

Om hierdie tema te verstaan, verken die studie die teologie van twee belangrike vakkundiges wat oor die onderwerp van God se krag geskryf het, en ondersoek elkeen se standpunte. Die twee benader die onderwerp uit verskillende hoeke en lewer elk betoë vir hoe húlle glo dit verstaan behoort te word. Die Presbiteriaanse sistematiese teoloog Daniel Migliore meen God se krag word begryp as drie-enige mag, word bepaal en beskryf deur die lewe en bediening van Jesus Christus, en blyk uit sy liefde. Goddelike krag gaan oor die liefde, en nie oor oorheersing of dwang nie.

Die tweede vakkundige, Hans-Ruedi Weber, redeneer vanuit 'n ekumenies-teologiese hoek. Hy benader goddelike krag uit die oogpunt van Bybelse teologie. Weber beskou die kwessie van mag deur die lens van 'geloofstrajekte'. Hierdie geloofstrajekte of -tradisies sluit in God se bevrydingshandelinge (die Eksodus-tradisie of Mosaïese geloof), God se koninklike bewind (die Koninklike tradisie), God se bemagtigende wysheid (die Wysheidstradisie), God se heilige teenwoordigheid (die Kultiese tradisie), God se verdediging van die armes (die *anawim*-tradisie) en God se vernuwende oordeel (die Apokaliptiese tradisie). Elk van hierdie trajekte bied 'n unieke begrip van God se krag.

Die tesis eindig met 'n vergelyking van Weber se vertolking van krag en Migliore se benadering, en lig areas uit waar hulle soortgelyke vertolkings toon en mekaar sodoende aanvul, en waar hulle verskil. Weber se geloofstrajekte bied sekere bykomende materiaal vir Migliore se vertolking van God se krag. Die studie ondersoek nie net wat God se goddelike krag beteken nie, maar doen ook aan die hand dat hierdie teologiese tema 'n manier kan wees om in intergodsdienstige gesprek te tree, veral in Nigerië. Daar word voorgestel dat so 'n benadering in 'n diep verdeelde land die verskillende tradisies se gesprekke met mekaar kan verdiep en verryk deur godsdienstige gelyksoortigheid te erken en te verstaan, en godsdienstige en teologiese eiesoortigheid te waardeer.

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CHAPTER ONE: RIPPLES AND POWER?

1.1 Introduction

Many religions seem to believe in divine power[1], Melissa Raphael[2], in her book *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz,* writes from a Jewish feminist theological position, in a subheading titled "*Re-figuring divine power*". She argues that the Jewish tradition understood God's divine power "as a non-negotiable, definitive attribute of an infinite God who will, finally vanquish evil. Judaism's hope has been in the God of the Exodus who, before Israel's 'very eyes', ventured to go and take for himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and portents, by war, by a mighty and outstretched arm awesome power' (Deut. 4: 34)" (2003: 38).

She continues, the "doctrines of omnipotence figure God as the ruler of all, including those who practice evil." Writing about evil, in her understanding of the Holocaust, she says it is not like God is not omnipotent, but "[b]ecause God is omnipotent he could have prevented the Holocaust if he had been inclined to do so. But for reasons of his own he did not. The Holocaust ran its cause and God triumph over evil was once again deferred to an eschatological dimension" (*ibid*). It is worthy of note that in the midst of evil, God's power is still acknowledged, though his power is often being associated with his actions either in terms of intervening in human predicaments the above reflection argued God's power is not limitedly to be determined or quantified by his action or inaction.

In his book, *Lessons on Islamic Doctrine,* Sayyed Mojtaba Musavi Lari[3] expresses divine power in relation to God's work; the wonders of the nature of creation provides the comprehensible phenomena of the creator. He argues "[i]t is God's incomparable power that compels man to bow humbly before the creator of this great scheme. There is no word to

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[1] This phrase is interchangeably used to refer to 'divine power', 'God's power' or 'God's divine power'.

[2] A professor of modern and contemporary Jewish Theology. Her academic interests focus on feminist perspectives on theology and religion, art and religion, and the sacred/profane distinction in Western religion.

[3] An Iranian Shi'a Twelver Islamic scholar and social commentator. The Twelver are Shi'a Islamic group. Andrew J Newman in his publication *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* expounded on the Twelver groupings that "(t)he Twelvers believes that the spiritual-political leadership (the Imamate) of the community passed down through Ali's male descendants, via Al-Husayn, until the twelve Imam. The latter is understood to have been born in 870, but to have gone into *ghayba* (occultation) soon after the death his father's in 874 for safety's sake. He is still alive and will return when Allah determines it to be appropriate and safe. As the *Mahdi* (the Rightly Guided One) his return will inaugurate the process associated with the last days as part of that process Jesus will return. Other title ascribed to the twelfth Imam include *Al-Muntazar* (the Awaited One); *Sahib* or *Imam Al-Zaman* (the Lord, or Imam, of Time), *Sahib al-Amr* (the Lord of Authority), *al-Qaim* (the One Who Arises) and *al-Hujja* (the proof [of Allah])" (2013:2).

express the dimensions of His power; that unique essence has much power that whenever He wills a thing to come into existence, it suffices for the command '*Be*!' to issue from Him and the object addressed will be" (2010: 121).

Africans, believe in divine power[4], they have always done that. Though they do not have a religious Scripture as a source reference, it is inscribed in their hearts and minds. It is ascribed to a Supreme Being. Geoffrey Parrinder [5] an authority on indigenous African Religions describes the African understanding of power as follows

> "[t]he powers are not only individual but are ranged in proper order, in a hierarchy. The greatest power is God, the creator or cause, described by Smith as the apex of pyramid… The Supreme Being, by definition, has power in himself but he is related to other powers in giving them vitality and increasing or diminishing their strength. The first men, the founding fathers, derived their power from God and passed on through their descendants. They may be ancestors or gods who are ancient heroes or mere purely nature spirits, but all are powers related to men" (1969: 27).

Africans believe that power is real, it is described in reference to a personality who in this instance is the Supreme Being. It belongs to the Supreme Being, as such, he[6] distributes it (power) to other mediums such as ancestors, nature spirits, and they in turn relate it to human beings.

Whatever this (divine power) may mean to each of the religions, it is a belief that is entrenched in each of the religions. This poses the question what does it mean? How does each religion

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[4] See this in J. Omosade Awolalu *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (1979). Further comments on this belief are found in Edwin W. Smith (ed.). *African Ideas of God: A Symposium* (1950). Malcolm J. McVeigh *God in Africa: Conceptions of God in Africa Traditional Religion and Christianity* (1974). S.F. Nadel. *Nupe Religion: Traditional Beliefs and the influence of Islam in a West African Chiefdom* (1954). Agbonhianmeghe E. Orobotor. *Theology Brewed in An African Pot* (2009). Awolalu, argues that denial of the existence of a Supreme Being and the subsequent denial of God's power is a current phenomenon among some Africans. It is argued that such denials will come about when Africans have "been exposed to non-African cultural influences" (1979:3 cf. 14).

[5] The late Methodist bishop, was a professor of Religious Studies and Comparative Study of Religions both in Nigeria and London.

[6] The Supreme Being as understood is not exclusively masculine, speaking of a gender neutral God, Mercy Ambo Oduyoye argues that in the African Religion God is described as a woman in some instances (2001: 41, 43 cf. 1995: 111). Again, in her analyses she states that "[t]hroughout Africa, generally, the variant ways of reading about God do not pose fundamental problems. By and large the idea of God attracts male imagery in three religions (Christianity, Islam, Traditional Religion), in spite of the fact that everyone knows that God does not have body. This maleness, however, does not seem to be a cause for concern, as the language for talking about God uses no gender-specific pronouns. God's 'maleness' is further masked by appellations of God that suggest androgyny, lie the Ga name Ataa Naa Nyyommo (Grandfather Grandmother God); the Creatrix Woyengi; *Tamarau*, the name given the Creatrix by the Isoko of Bendel State in Nigeria; or the androgynous Mawu-Lisa of Ewe" (1995: 110 cf. 2001: 42). Concern is raised even though there is non- gender-specific language in the name of God, Mercy Ambo Oduyoye states that, "most African women and men would say that the gender of God is irrelevant to their theology and spirituality. While there is specifically male and specifically female imagery of the Source Being to be found in Africa, under the influence of Christianity and Islam a patriarchal God has been enthroned, in whose name women pray to God as 'God our Mother' are victimised" (2001: 43).
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understand and interpret this belief? Does it mean the same thing? What it means, how it is understood and interpreted by each religion suggests that the belief in divine power is not only acknowledged, but is also a significant theme in each of the religions. It is from this series of questions, the metaphor ripples of power evolved.

Therefore, the metaphor ripples of power in this study is about God's divine power, it refers to the way this belief is understood, viewed, and interpreted. The concept of this topic is rather a Christian theological reflection exploring what it means, the way in which it is understood and how it is interpreted.

1.2. Divine power in Christian understanding?

Christians believe in God's power, and it is often common to hear sermons being preached, or to hear Christians sing, or praise, or talk about God's power. Different words such as "almighty", "omnipotent," "all-powerful," "all-mighty" is used to describe this theme. Belief in God's divine power is a central tenet in the Christian faith tradition. Typically, it is rather an acknowledgment, ascribing apparently inexplicable acts of wonder only to God, affirming God's authority, might, and ability to control. It is a conviction which often relates to God's sovereign divine activities to the entire universe. Even when divine activities seem unnoticeable, God's divine power in the Christian tradition is religiously affirmed and acknowledged. It is affirmed largely because existence itself has its being from God. For this cause, it is not strange either in the Christian tradition to hear or to see how people invoke or pray for the manifestation of the power of God in their lives, particularly when human beings are in need, or when things have gone bad. One of the reasons this is carried out is to appeal to higher authority (who in this context is God), seeking and hoping for a divine mediation to change the situations.

Christians believed, God is divinely in control of their religious and physical reality, even when they are confronted with the issues (of life) such as the problem of evil, suffering. This, in other words, is an indication of trust in God to intervene in times of difficulties, it all points to the acceptability of God's ability to intervene and to help. Other times when things are going on well when people succeed in their work and the ecological nature flourishes. It is believed that this was made possible through the ennoblement of God's power.

Traditionally, divine power in the Christian theology is more often referred to as God's attributes. It has been described in diverse ways, according to Donald G Bloesch,[7] Arthur Cochrane describes God's attributes as properties of God, Karl Barth described it as the perfection of God. Again, Citing Karl Barth, Donald G Bloesch speaks of the essence and the attributes of God, by saying that, "if we continue to speak of essence and attributes, we must insist that the essence of God is reflected in his attributes; the attributes, on the other hand, are manifestations of his essence. The God of the Bible is not monochrome. He radiates his splendour in myriad ways" (1995: 41 cf. Berkhof, 1958: 41-43; Thiessen, 1979: 80; Leith, 1993: 51). Bloesch argues that God's essence is revealed in God's attributes. An attribute is the characteristic, an indicative of God's being or divine nature that reveals God's personality as He relates to the world and human beings. It describes, in many ways the kind of person God is. Collin E. Gunton[8] contends

> "[t]o speak of God's attributes is to attempt to speak of the kind of god that God is; of the things that characterize him as God; of what make him to be God, rather than some other being or kind of being. While the doctrine of Trinity, we might say, identifies God, say who he is, as Father, Son, Spirit, the doctrine of the attributes is a proposal about the defining characteristic of the deity. To be sure, this is not an absolute distinction, and one cannot be divorce from the other. To speak of the Trinity is already to say something of God characteristics, while to speak of the attributes apart from the Trinity-as is often done – is a mistake, and one which we shall be exploring below. The central difficulty of the situation as it meets us after nearly two thousand years ago of discussion is that there seems to be little clarity about how the two are related: how the identity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit relates to the kind of things that have been, and said of the kind of being God is." (Gunton, 2002: 1)

Attributes being that which characterizes, and distinguishes God from human beings, Collins E. Gunton with others[9] argue God's attributes is to be seen from the Trinitarian understanding. The conversational partner in this study, Daniel L. Migliore[10] in his theological proposition argues that God's divine power should be understood to mean God has the power to accomplished God's purpose. He explains this as he says

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[7] A professor emeritus of theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque.

[8] The late professor of Christian doctrine at King's College London, among other things, he founded and directed the Research Institute in Systematic Theology, and co-founded the International Journal of Systematic Theology with Ralph Del Colle, and John Webster.

[9] See for example, Allan Coppedge, *The God Who is Triune: Rediscovering the Christian Doctrine of God* (2007). Daniel L Migliore has listed some of the trinitarian advocates in *Faith Seeking Understanding* (2004) 84.

[10] He is an ordained Presbyterian minister, who until recently was the Charles Hodges Professor of Systematic Theology. He holds a B.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and M.A. and Ph.D. from Princeton University. He also received an honorary doctorate from Westminster College. His teaching interest include Systematic Theology, the Trinity, Christology, the doctrine of God; the Theology of Karl Barth and has written variety of topics in theology. Daniel L. Migliore was specifically chosen because he engages notions of divine power, and argues that theology ought to be contextual. He affirms the value of inter-conversation with other religions. Hans-Ruedi Weber was used for similar reasons, but also because he writes from an ecumenical theological perspective.

> "[t]he divine attribute of being 'all powerful,' or having 'power over all things.' Mistakenly construed to mean that God can do everything (including what is self-contradictory) or that God is the direct cause of every event (including what is evil), divine omnipotence is properly understood to mean that God has all the power to accomplished God's creative and redemptive purpose in a manner consistent with God's character. A major concern of Christian theologians, ancient and modern, has been to distinguish God's omnipotence from tyrannical or abusive power" (2004: 418 cf. 86).

God's power, in his view needs to be understood that it is not to do something self-contradictory in his being, but need to be understood in terms of God accomplishing his purpose. As stated earlier, Collins E. Gunton has argued that God's attributes are Trinitarian, because God is triune. In the same vein, Migliore asserts that God's attribute of power is to be interpreted from Trinitarian understanding, arguing this he contends that

> "[t]he *power* and *love* of the triune God are inseparable. To be sure, God is properly called omnipotent, but how shall we speak of the omnipotence of the triune God? Certainly not in the manner of debating whether God can square a circle or create a stone too heavy for God to lift. Nor is the omnipotent, all-determining power of God appropriately defined by saying it is like the power of a human emperor or monarch, only raised to the highest degree. The omnipotence of the triune God is altogether different from the human exercise of power to control and dominate others. The power of the triune God is *omnipotent love*. Christ crucified is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:23-24). The love of God made known supremely in the cross of Christ has all the power necessary to accomplish the divine purpose of creating and redeeming the world and bringing it to its appointed goal. Because God's omnipotent love is God's own, it does not work by domination or coercion but is sovereign and effective without displaying or bludgeoning God's creatures" (*ibid*: 86 cf. Weber, 1989: *ix*).

Migliore suggests the way to understand God's power is in his love. God's divine power is inseparable from his love. For him, Trinity is a manifestation of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As such, God's power is not like what human political leaders do, which is the exercise of power rooted in domination, control or coercion, but to see power as reveal in and through Jesus Christ. With this understanding of the Trinitarian interpretation of omnipotence Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen[11] explains further that

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[11] A Finnish Systematic Theologian at Fuller Theological Seminary and a Docent of Ecumenics at the University of Helsinki. Kärkkäinen has authored or edited about twenty books in English (and seven in his native language, Finnish), including *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (2007); *One With God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (2004); and *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (2004); as well as more than 150 articles that have appeared in international scholarly journals. He is also the editor of the *Global Dictionary of Theology* (with William Dyrness, 2008); *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts* (2009); and *Holy Spirit and Salvation: The Sources of Christian Theology* (2010). Currently he is finishing a five-volume series covering all topics of systematic theology titled *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, published by Eerdmans (2013–2017); the first volume is *Christ and Reconciliation* (2013); the second; *Trinity and Revelation* (2014; and the third, *Creation and Humanity* (2015). Kärkkäinen is member of several editorial boards, including the Strategic Initiatives in Systematic Theology series by InterVarsity Press, the Studies in Systematic Theology series by E.J. Brill (Leiden, Netherlands), and is a reviewer for the *International Journal of Systematic Theology.*

> "[w]hereas in traditional theology the attribute of omnipotence played a central role, in the beginning of the third millennium any reference to the divine power—or any kind of conception of power, for that matter—raises eyebrows and subjects the speaker to the abuse of power. It is also integrally related to the suspicion of religion's link to violence. Against those valid suspicions, the Cuban-American González rightly notes that the biblical God does not 'rule the world with iron fist, as Pharaoh ruled over Egypt or Pinochet ruled Chile. God does not destroy all opposition with a bolt from heaven, nor is opposition something God has created — like the military dictator who sets up an opposition party in order to claim that his rule is democratic.' Does this view compromise the power of God? No says González. 'The Crucified is also the Risen One, who shall come again in glory to judge the quick and dead. What it denies is an easy jump from creation to resurrection, with no cross.' The cross is indispensable; it is 'the supreme instance of the manner in which God's power operates.' Yet some may claim that this view denies God's omnipotence. González responds that Scripture nowhere claims God to be omnipotent in the sense of being able to do 'whatever strikes the divine fancy" (2014: 302).

The above-mentioned Trinitarian description demonstrates God's power is different when compared to how human beings perceive and define power. It illustrates that human assessment of power revolves around control which is most often entrenched in proving to be in absolute authority. But, according to Donald G. Bloesch "in the biblical or evangelical view, God is neither Absolute Power (in the sense that his power is unrestricted) nor a Life Force within universe that needs to be harnessed for the sake of divine and human fulfilment. Rather he is the living Lord who creates the universe as an act of grace and rules the universe for the sake of bringing it redemption from the evil that has intruded into it through demonic and human sin" (2002: 45).

Engaging Biblical Theology as a tool to examine power, one more conversation partner used in this study is Hans-Ruedi Weber[12]. He observes that the Bible is the common heritage of all Christians, and the major link which unites Christians across the centuries, cultures and confessions (1989). He argues that the Bible is the basis for the interpretation of Christian belief, he argues the meaning of God's power ought to be derived from what the Bible says.

1.3. Research Statement

God's divine power, as an attribute of God, it is not only a central theistic belief in the Christian tradition, but appears on the surface to be a similar religious theme in other religions, which includes Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But, even in the Christian tradition, there are diverse and multiple interpretations of the doctrinal belief on the meaning of God's divine power,

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[12] Weber was a one-time associate director of Ecumenical Institute at Chateau de Bossey and was a director of Biblical studies both are under the auspices of World Council of Churches. His book *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology* (1989) since it presents theological insights from an ecumenical perspective.

therefore, this study will investigate the existence of a theology of divine power in Christianity with reference to the thought of Daniel L. Migliore, and Hans-Ruedi Weber.

1. 4. Research Question

Based on the aforementioned statement, the research question is **what is divine power according to the Christian tradition? More specifically, how has the concept of divine power been comprehended and interpreted by two recent and authoritative representatives of ecumenical protestantism in the Christian tradition?**

1. 5. Aims and Objectives

The immediate objective of this research is to examine the Christian religious understanding of divine power and to study what God's divine power means for the Christian tradition. In addition, it is expected that the understanding of this religious belief might provide an important key or insight in understanding the religious worldview of the faith tradition, as it applies to its spirituality and its relationship with everyday experiences, with major relevance for Christian faith and spirituality in Africa.

This study from Christian perspective investigates the concept of divine power with a view that, it can hopefully turn out to become, an avenue for engaging in inter-religious discussion, particularly in Nigeria, which might possibly deepen and enrich the conversations of the different religious traditions with one another in a deeply divided country and region by understanding and accommodating religious similarity and appreciating religious differences and diversities.

1. 6. Research Process

This study takes the form of a non-empirical literary study regarding the Christian understanding about God's divine power. The study engages the use of systematic theological books. The primary systematic theological books used include the Presbyterian theologian Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (2004). His other writings include *The God of Power* (1983); *Commanding Grace: Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics* (2010); *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for Reclaiming Christian Prayer* (1993); *Called to Freedom: Liberation Theology and the Future of Christian Doctrine* (2010). *Philippian and Philemon: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (2014). He has co-authored with others like *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope.* (With Kathleen

D. Billman, (2007); he is the editor of *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for Reclaiming Christian Prayer* (1993), and *Reading the Gospels with Karl Barth* (2017).

Furthermore, the second book studied was the *Power of God and the gods of Power* (2008) the second edition, also by Daniel L. Migliore. This book is the revised edition of *"The God of Power"*, published in 1983. The book was situated in the context of his whole theology, particularly, in the second edition of *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. This book serves as the gateway to understanding God's omnipotence from Daniel Migliore's broader theological deliberations. In this book, the *Power of God and the gods of Power* (2008) the second edition, although originally earlier than the comprehensive, systematic theology, he focused his own attention on the specific question of this research and in the later revised version he reworked that in the light of his whole systematic theology.

Thirdly, the last main book used is *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology* (1989) a biblical theology book by Hans-Ruedi Weber. Engaging biblical theology in this part is to examine a theological insight in understanding the subject of power from all the biblical books. He has authored the following works: *Experiments with Bible Study* (1972)*; The communication of the Gospel to illiterate* (1957); *Cross and Culture* (1975); *On a Friday Noon: Meditations under the Cross (1979)*; *Immanuel: the coming of Jesus in art and the Bible* (1984); *Living in the image of Christ: Christ the Sage, Christ the Crucified, Christ the Artist* (1986); *The Way of the Lamb: Christ in the Apocalypse, Lenten meditations* (1988)*. Other secondary sources that have been used include articles, journals, and books by different scholars whose names are equally indicated in the appropriate citations. The structural design below represents the structure of the argument of the research

Chapter two examines the theology of Daniel L. Migliore. It emphasizes how the knowledge of God is most importantly appropriate to understanding the question of divine power. For this reason, Chapter two employs Migliore' broader theological exposition, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theolog*y (second edition) as the framework for describing who God is. The discussion in this section understood God as an inexhaustible divine mystery revealed from a Trinitarian perspective. God is revealed in accordance with the biblical gospel as Triune God the Christian distinctive way of understanding God, as Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three distinct, equal, eternal, persons related to each other in the unspeakable eternal communion of divine love. Hence, divine power is to be seen from triune

manner which does not separate God's love from his power. God's omnipotent love redefined God's omnipotence from other forms of powers such as human powers which are characterized by the desire to control and dominate others. The propositions of this argument place forward all theological themes to be understood and interpreted from the Trinitarian perspectives. In other words, God's nature and God's deeds should be seen in the light of the nature of the Triune God's power - in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, at work in the church, at work in history. Divine power from Trinitarian interpretation does not see power in terms of dominance or tyrannical power but that power is related to omnipotent love.

The third Chapter focuses and continues with the theological argument on the subject of God's divine power, by laying emphasis on the basis in which power can be understood. Using Daniel Migliore' second book *Power of God and the gods of Power* (the second edition), the theological discussion begins with the usage of power and the question of God and God's power. The contents of this book offer a clear understanding on how "distinctive the power of God is in accordance with the biblical witness, and how this understanding of God's power profoundly affects how we live and how we exercise power both as individuals and as communities and nations" (Migliore, 2008: *x*).

Chapter four engages in discussion on God's divine power using Hans-Ruedi Weber's book *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology.* Whose background is biblical theology. Hans-Ruedi Weber explored God's divine power from the Old Testament through the inter-testamental period to the New Testament; he does that by considering six biblical traditions of the Bible. These traditions include Exodus tradition, the Royal tradition, Wisdom tradition, Cultic tradition, *Anawim* tradition, and Apocalyptic tradition. Each of these traditions expresses a different, unique ways through which God distinctively reveals his powers, commencing from the pre-exilic, exilic to post-exilic that leads to the New Testament. The situation of the periods (pre-exilic, exilic, post-exilic) becomes the context through divine power was understood.

As consistently stated, the study aims to comprehend notions of divine power. In addition it is intended that this approach can be used as a theological theme in interreligious conversation. Chapter five examines how interreligious conversation in its multi-religious context has been, particularly in northern Nigeria. In addition, with this understanding of shared belief of God's divine power, this chapter argues that the shared belief in God's divine power can possibly be a means to engage in interreligious discussion.

With this proposition, Chapter five suggests that the use of the concept of divine power is relevant in interreligious conversation, particularly in Nigeria. As a multi-religious country, most Nigerians are affiliated with one of these religions: Christianity or Islam. It is a country which is sometimes deeply divided along religious affiliation. Therefore, this Chapter also highlights the implications for the Nigerian context, which is to use every possible means of engaging with the other, and divine power is one of these shared theological propositions.

CHAPTER TWO - MIGLIORE: GOD AS TRIUNE

2. 1. Introduction

Belief in God is generally a religious conviction that is shared by many persons across the world; however, what makes the difference is how God is understood by the different religious traditions, and what it means to each of them. The previous chapter introduced the nature of the study, which is in God's divine power. This chapter introduces a Christian understanding of God. An understanding of who God is, in the Christian tradition is the basis for understanding God's power. Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* is the primary material used in examining the Christian understanding of God. The chapter begins by examining the following themes, God and the modern theology, and God as revealed. It examines the classical Trinitarian doctrine and distortions in the doctrine of God. It also focuses on the restatement of the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity and the triune mystery, and the triune power.

The usage of Migliore's book as a primary source of engagement is for the reason that, in his material, he has made a substantive reflection the doctrine of God with particular reference to divine power. In his theological work, he advocates that,

> "theology must understand itself not as abstract speculation but as concrete reflection that arises out of and is directed to praxis of Christian faith, hope, love. Thus, a revised trinitarian theology, a corresponding relational understanding of creation, redemption, and consummation, and an orientation of theology to praxis are major components of the theological vision that inform the following outline of Christian doctrine" (2004: *xv*).

He further goes on to interact with other religions, especially in another book "*The Power of God and the gods of Power.*" This is more relevant to the subject of this discussion, it serves as the foundation on which chapter three will be based on.

In his conversation regarding the Christian understandings of God, Migliore argues that the basis for understanding God in the Christian tradition comes from the Christian Scriptures. The Christian Scripture is the religious source of reference when it comes to faith and praxis. He maintained that the "Scripture is the unique and irreplaceable witness to the liberating and reconciling activity of God in the history of Israel and supremely in Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Scripture serves the purpose of relating us to God and transforming our life." (2004: 44 cf. 64). The Scripture is the basis that bears witness to God and his activities both in history as seen in his relationship toward the Israelites and in Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Scripture serves to communicate God's actions to human beings, and

to relate people to God and to transform them. It, therefore, means the Scripture is the basis that not only presents the Christian belief regarding who God is, but the source to discover and to understand him through his activities.

God's activities in the Scriptures further demonstrate what can be identified as appearances through which God showed God's self particularly to individuals. To understand more on how the Scripture presents God, Migliore says:

> "Scripture is filled with accounts of the revelation of God breaking into human life as a surprising gift and unsettling commission. Moses hears the voice of God from a burning bush instructing him to lead the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt (Exod. 3); David becomes aware of the sin he has committed when Nathan tells him the story of a rich man who robs and kills a poor man's only lamb (2 Sam.12); Isaiah has a vision in which God summons him to service (Isa.6:1-8); Paul experiences a revelation of Jesus Christ that changes him from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 1: 12); Peter has a dream that teaches him that God shows no partiality and intends the gospel message to be preached to Gentiles as well as Jews (Acts 10:0ff.). Revelation is the disclosure of the character and purpose of God, and when it is received, it radically changes the lives of its recipients" (2004: 21).

The Scripture reveal God in different ways, the revelation is to communicate and unveil the nature of God through his activities in such a way that he might be known to human beings. The purpose in each of the revelations is to impact and to transform human lives. Times have changed presently, the question how does contemporary society understand this phenomenon?

2. 2. God and Modern Theology

Modernity[13] is not only a term which designates a metamorphosis of society, but describes the society in an innovative era which is characterized by its quest for individualism, freedom, equality, reliance on social, scientific and technological advancement. It is also marked by its enquiries or rejection of tradition. It ensembles other entities such as economic, industrial, and political development, among other factors too is its emphasis on reason as the sole component by means of which people can come or arrive to knowledge and insight (Bosch, 2011: 357-371). The late Steve Gruchy (according Beverly Haddad) argues that all these factors are rooted in a culture that believed in progress as the common good (2015: 198 cf. Colin E. Gunton,

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[13] It is also not restricted to the stated factors alone, it is argued that it influences how African Arts are perceived according to Salah M. Hassan in his article "The Modernist Experience in African Art: Toward a Critical Understanding" in the *Muse of Modernity: Essays on Culture as Development in Africa* (1996) 37-58.

Among other things in his discussion regarding modernity, Jürgen Moltmann in his essay, "Has Modern Society Any Future?" in, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity,* argues that as a result of modernity, "modern industrial society has produced more wealth than any society before it. However, it produces this wealth for human beings, at the expense of nature. No earlier society irrevocably destroyed so much of the natural environment as has this one. The 'ecological crises' into which our societies have brought nature and human beings is probably already an 'ecological catastrophe,' at least for weaker forms of life" (1995) 169.

1991:18). The modern world has been described by the late South African missiologist David Bosch as an era "which is fundamentally different from the period in which Matthew, Luke, and Paul wrote their gospels and letters for the first and second generations of Christians" (2011: 185).

The concept of God has been seen in different ways, particularly in the modern secular culture, or to the modern world as it is also referred to. In this section, the emphasis is on what Daniel Migliore refers to "the problem of God in modern theology". To believe in God is, however, seen as problematic in modern society, some theologians[14] have undertaken the task of engaging with the issue of modernity. For example, Colin Gunton, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Daniel Migliore, have made a similar observations as to why the issue of God seems to become a problem of the modern mind. According to Migliore, the reason why the question of God has become a problem to the modern mind is that God does not sufficiently fit into their reality as expected. Migliore in his analysis has identified and examined why and how the subject of God has become a problem in modern theology. Some of the issues, which are problematic in the modern secular culture he stresses, are:

Incompatibilty of God with human freedom. It is believed that the subject of God or Belief in God is incompatible with human freedom and fulfillment. By this it means, belief in God is seen to bring about human restriction, which hinders self-determination, and it prevents and deters human beings from maximising its full potential. Since the knowledge of God (or the Belief in God) and human freedom are seen as opposing things that are in conflict with each other. Therefore, Theology and doctrine of God are seen as less relevant to modern secular culture because it (religion) is seen to serve to justify and sanction existing conditions of misery and exploitation. In a way, religion has been used in victimising and ill-treating people. It justifies and sanctions existing conditions of misery and exploitation of people and the earth.

The problem of evil. Again, another problem that modern philosophy put forward is the problem of evil.[15] The problem of evil raises the question of the presence of God in history.

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[14]See Colin Gunton *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (1993). *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*. Studies in in Constructive Theology. (1998). Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen *Trinity and Revelation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World Volume 2*. (2014).

[15] See Grayling AC. *The God argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism*, (2013) 1-9. Brink, Gijsbert van den. *Almighty God: A study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence* (1993) 240-246.

God, according to this view, seems to be unaffected by the events of human injustice, social, racial and gender domination and exploitation.

God in modern theology seems to be irrelevant. The traditional doctrines of God are seen to be inadequate because God is viewed as obsolete and unaffected by the events of history. The traditional thinking and imagery of God are associated with attitudes and structures that explore and perpetuate a relationship of domination, which "[a]t the heart of our most pressing issues today is the misuse of power" (Sallie McFague) (2004: 64-65 cf. Gunton, 1991: 16-29). If this is how the modern secular culture sees and interprets the nature of God, the question is how has God been revealed biblically?

2. 3. God as Revealed

The Christian Scriptures introduce God through his actions. The Scripture imagery and metaphors in communicating, illustrating and describing God's activities. These activities become the means in which the Bible introduces God. Daniel Migliore and Timothy C Tennent, both share this phenomenon that in Christian theology, God has been revealed through his activities. Speaking of Christian theology Migliore believes "it speaks of God, however, not in vague and general terms, but on the basis of the particular actions of God attested in Scripture," (2004: 64, 66 cf. 2008: 78; Tennent, 2007: 31, 32). In explaining on how the Scripture has made God known, Migliore argues that,

> "[t]he Bible teaches and experience confirms some revelation of God in the created order, in human conscience, and in the lives of people who do not possess the Mosaic law and have not heard the gospel message. 'The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handy works,' writes the psalmist (19:1). The apostle Paul contends that God's eternal power and deity have been clearly shown in the things that have been created (Rom. 1: 20). When Paul speaks to the Athenians on the Areopagus, he proclaims to them the identity of an unknown God that they have been worshipping (Acts 17: 22ff.). (2004: 29).

Thus, the Scripture attests of the different observable indicators which discloses and emphasizes how God has been made known, through his activities both in the natural order (or general revelation) and (special revelation) immaterial means. As mentioned in the above reference, these indicators considerably describe some of the ways in which human beings have understood and related to God's manifestation. As God's activities become stepping-stones in revealing and a means of knowing God. Theistically, God is understood to be the sovereign personal uncaused first cause, the uncreated sustaining creator of all creation, powerful, eternal, unchanging, (Mal. 3: 6; Heb. 6:18; Gen.1: 1; Col. 1: 17; Heb. 1:3; Matt.19: 26), infinite (1 Kings 8: 27; Isa.66: 1), all good (Ps. 86: 5; Luke 18:19) Lord.

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Furthermore, what the Scripture revealed pertaining God comes from the Christian understanding of revelation, which Migliore refers to as the whole of the triune God's activity in creation, redemption, and consummation that has its centre in Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection are the supreme manifestation of the nature and purpose of God. The free grace of God in Jesus Christ is the core of the Christian message and the focus of a Christian doctrine of revelation (2004: 39).

Some have suggested that the scriptural disclosure revealed God from a Trinitarian position, as seen in the following references: Deut. 6:4; Mark 12: 29-30; Ex. 20: 2; Eph. 4: 6; I Cor. 12: 3; II Cor. 3: 17. This understanding of God has been the Christian conceptuality of God throughout the ages. There is a measure of consensus among Christian scholars, for instance, Daniel Migliore, (2004: 67; 68; 74, 91, Cf. 2008: 77, 78), and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, (2007: *xiii*)*; Richard Swinburne, (2008: 22); and (Plantinga, Richard J. and Thompson, Thomas R. and Lundberg, Matthew D, (2010: 109) among others. The Trinity is Christian theology's distinguishing mark, in which God is understood, described, revealed, and interpreted, which is in reference to the biblical witness.

The Trinity, according to John Macquarrie is the "cardinal doctrine of Christian theology," (1977: 211; cf. Usue, 2011: 62). Karl Barth expresses it as a "revelational analogy", says Donald G Bloesch (2000: 51). Karl Barth again, according to Roger Olson, interprets the Trinity in terms of "an immediate implication of the structure of revelation as self-disclosure" (2002: 148) of God. Catherine LaCugna, a feminist Catholic Theologian as quoted by Roger Olson, says, the "Trinity is the mystery of salvation," (2002: 141 cf. Migliore, 2004: 69). This unique understanding of God as triune remains at the heart of the Christian faith and Christian theology.

The basis for the Trinitarian doctrine originates in the whole of Scripture. The root of the Trinitarian faith as stated by Migliore is the good news of the love of God in Christ that continues to work in the world by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is the church's effort to give a coherent expression to this mystery of God's free grace announced in the gospel and experienced in the Christian faith (2004: 67 cf. 2008: 78, 80).

It is, again, stressed by Migliore that the entire Scriptural witness remains the heart and the centre of the doctrine of the Trinity and not on some few "proof text" verses. The whole of

Scripture gives a greater depiction on how the Trinity is understood. He, says, "[i]ts basis is the pervasive trinitarian pattern of the scriptural witness to God, foreshadowed in the Old Testament according to the Christian reading of it, and found more explicitly in the writing of the New Testament to the presence of the one and only God in the saving work of Jesus Christ and the renewing of activity of the Holy Spirit." (2004: 68 cf. Plantinga, Thompson, Lundberg, 2010: 111-118).

The Trinity testifies to the scriptural witness of God, the saving work of God in Jesus Christ, and in the renewing activity of God in the Holy Spirit. This belief in the Christian reading does not reverse the biblical teaching, which states and affirms the unity of God, which means God, is one. God manifest God's self in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. To clarify this Migliore states that, "the trinitarian faith of the church upholds rather than contradicts this unambiguous scriptural testimony. The first commandment is honored with equal zeal in the faith of Israel and in the faith of the Christian church: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exod.20:2)" (2004: 68). The unity of God and the triune understanding is a Christian monotheistic view of God. In addition, not the approval of polytheistic view.

The Scripture articulates that the triune God who is unique, has expressed his uniqueness in his love. Interpreting the way God expresses his love Migliore states that,

> "[t]he witness of the New Testament, however, is that the reality of the one God cannot be separated from God's love for the world in Jesus Christ and his renewing Spirit. The earliest Christian confession and experience thus implies a trinitarian understanding of God. In the New Testament account of the coming of God to rescue and renew creation, there are three inseparable reference points. The love of God comes originally from the one called 'Father' is humanly enacted for the world in the sacrificial love of the one called 'Son,' and becomes a present and vital reality in Christian life by the one called Spirit" (2004: 68).

The witness of the New Testament interprets the triune God from a triune love story; this expresses God's love both in his being as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and his love for the world. In God's being, each person of the Trinity expresses the triune love towards a common purpose of knowing God. Moreover, the manifestation of God's love towards creation is to rescue and renew creation as a result of the sacrificial love of Christ and it becomes present in the Christian life by the Holy Spirit. The love of God for the world as demonstrated in the work of the triune God has been made known through the soteriological purpose of God in the world. This work, the soteriological work expresses the redemptive love of God's economy of salvation (economic Trinity). In which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are mutually involved in the aspect of salvation (or deliverance) of human beings from sin and the power of sin and death, and offer in exchange the gift of a fulfilled life in communion with God.

The redeeming work of Jesus Christ, though, being interpreted in diverse ways, it is manifold and diverse in nature. It shows God's gracious love to the entire creation, (this includes individuals, society, and the entire cosmos). It liberates creation, human being from the shackles of the bondage of the evil forces; it reconciles human being to God and offering (and obtaining) of God's forgiveness, which brings liberation from the burden of guilt. The situation of the human condition as described by Migliore is that "[h]umanity under the condition of sin finds itself caught in a web of despoilment, corruption, pollution, and disintegration" (2004: 155). The atoning work of Christ alters the human condition, but the efficacy of "the atoning work of Christ is complete only when it is appropriated in the act of faith and allowed to transform one's life." (2004: 185) What it does is that it entails the embodiment of the biblical testimony of Christ' ministry, teaching, cross, resurrection and its resultant effect on the entire creation. Therefore, human beings could experience what Richard Swinburne pronounces as "living a good life in the present," (2008: 61).

In the Trinitarian exposition, "Father," "Son," and the "Holy Spirit" are "immanently" distinct in their mode of being, (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternally distinct: *immanent Trinity*); the distinction is not to contradict the belief in the unity of God or the Oneness of God, rather it is to interpret God as biblically understood. According to the gospel story, Migliore argues, "God is active as 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Holy Spirit' as the source, the medium, and the effective promise of liberating and reconciling love". This points God's relationship to humanity through Christ in the Spirit. Trinitarian theology must return and again when the Christians speak of God as eternally triune, they simply affirm that the love of God that is extended to the world in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is proper to God's own eternal life in a relationship (2004: 69).

Migliore maintains that the Trinity distinctively entails that God being: "Father," "Son," and "Spirit," are in loving communion, which expresses the three persons of the Trinity are in mutual love, unconditional self-giving, mutual sharing of life and mutual interaction and collaboration, with each of the persons of the Trinity, (Migliore, 2004: 109, 177, 181, 230, 231, 234, 420 cf. Migliore, 2008: 78, 129-130). The communion of the triune God upholds the unique differences and the unity that embraces the other (*ibid*: 109; cf. Bevan & Schroeder, 2004: 383) that is neither stifling absorption nor damaging division Macquarrie concluded, (1977: 403). This indescribable communion leads to the next section that has to do with an explanation of what is referred to Classical Trinitarian doctrine.

2. 4. Classical Trinitarian Doctrine

Classical Trinitarian doctrine is the doctrine the church formulated over the centuries regarding its position and its teaching on the biblical understanding of God. Subscribing to the scriptural witness, the church's theological understanding described God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This affirmative understanding turns out to be the uniquely Christian understanding of God.

The confession of the triune God was an important belief in its teaching, and prayers, and worship of the New Testament church (Migliore, 2004: 69). The church's acknowledgment and teachings of the triune God are central to its doctrinal interpretation. Therefore, the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity by the Church centuries ago took place because of the needs that arose for doctrinal guidance in the face of heresy. This was, carried out in two councils of Nicea (325 A.D) and Constantinople (381 A.D). The church stood firm and insisted on the same essence within the Godhead, i.e., the equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The church's interpretation of the triune God was in defence of the orthodox doctrine of the persons of the Trinity, and to correct the controversial misinterpretations emanating within and outside the church, as others often saw it, i.e., the Trinity as polytheism, (cf. Durand, 2007: 64; 83; 160-161; Migliore, 2004: 169). As he explains the heretical speculation, the South African theologian Jaap Durand describes, that "[t]he heretical possibilities of some of these speculations led to a conscious attempt to re-appropriate Augustine by building on the foundation he had laid" (2007: 105). Some of the misinterpretations which existed undermine the essence and the equality of the "Father" "Son" and "Holy Spirit" of the Godhead, (regarding Trinity), notably among them are the subordinationism, modalism, tritheism. These interpretations of these three beliefs oppose the scriptural teachings of the triune God, subordinationism hold that the "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" are different positional levels. It is, as Migliore explains, a reference to "orders of deity. There is one great God ‒the eternal Father‒ and two exalted creatures or inferior divinities" (2004: 71 cf. Durand 2007: 163; 165). The Son and the Spirit are therefore inferior to the Father in this heresy. In modalism, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are "mere masks of God that do not necessarily manifest God's innermost being", but a mere appearance and possibly unreliable indicators of the true nature of God. In addition, in tritheism, "Father, Son and Spirit refer to three separate and independent deities who collectively constitute the object of Christian faith" (*ibid*).

As such Classical Trinitarian doctrine became the creed which speaks of God in God's essence. It states that God in his divine being is one, in essence, distinguished in three persons. In other

words, he exists in three different modes of being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as scripturally described. Daniel Migliore has stated that "[a] trinitarian understanding of God, rooted in the revelation of God in Christ, gives expression to the rich and differentiated expressions of God's relationship with the world as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (2004: 132). God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one divine being eternally existing as "[t]hree persons yet one God; three who are completely equal to one another, three which know and love one another eternally and everlastingly. They lack nothing. Yet their interrelationship is dynamic, communicative, and creative", according to Tissa Balasuriya, (1984: 164 cf. Olson 2002: 133; Volf, 1996: 51; Migliore, 2008: 80; Fergusson, 2014: 21). This mode of being is God's self-revelation of God's self-disclosure, which lays the emphasis on the triune equality and distinction. The other intent of the doctrine was to describe and to explain God's triune being. It is to teach the biblical truth as contained in the Scripture. The classical Trinitarian doctrine remains the doctrine which speaks of God in his essence, it states that God is one, distinguished in three persons.

Speaking of person as stated above, this is the description and the reference of the concept used in association with Trinity. The ancient and the medieval churches used the technical word *hypostasis*, (personal distinction) to communicate the distinctiveness within one being (*ousia*) of the Trinity. Migliore and others would argue that how the "personal" distinction of the Trinity was used, does not mean that the modern translation of what "person" is, can be described in the contemporary language.

> "The trinitarian 'persons' are not to be understood as separate and autonomous selves. Instead, they have their personal identity in relationship. A trinitarian understanding of personal life questions modern views of personhood that equate personal existence with the self-consciousness and autonomy of the individual. In such understandings, there is no reference to relationship with others as constitutive of personal life. The trinitarian persons are precisely not self-enclosed subjects who define themselves in separation from and opposition to others. Rather, in God 'persons' are relational realities and are defined by intersubjectivity, shared consciousness, faithful relationships, and mutual giving and receiving of love" (2004: 77, cf. Bloesch, 2000: 269; Macquarrie, 1977: 192-3).

Persons in the Trinitarian interpretation again communicate about togetherness, diversity and unity. The description of the "persons" (individuality) of Trinity in their "mode" of being (distinction) connotes the characteristics of the persona that unpacks the distinctiveness of triune personality in unity. This is a unique relationship in comparison to human personality, thus articulating an inseparable togetherness, diversity and unity of the triune being. Allan Coppedge explains this stating that,

> "[t]he early church described the unity and diversity of the persons of the Trinity through *perichoresis,* a concept that is particularly appropriate in our discussion of personhood. *Perichoresis* means 'coinherence' or 'interpenetration.' Thus the three members of the Trinity interpenetrate each other; that is, they share life together. No one of them is present without the others. This *perichoresis,* is an expression of their social nature. Their lives coinhere in such a way that both the distinctness and oneness of their being is maintained. The relationships within the Trinity are always completely reciprocal. That is their nature" (Coppedge, 2007: 179; cf. Migliore, 2004: 420; Macquarrie, 1977: 194; Bloesch, 2000: 51; Olson, 2002: 141, 145).

The definition of the persons of the Trinity suggests unique persons in the Trinity, who in their unity are inseparable. In other words, they are together, bonded in emotion, imagination, openness, reason. On the one hand perichoresis emphasizes a life of communion, it is a harmonious relationship, unity that accommodates the distinctiveness of the persons of the Trinity in their social nature.

Classical Trinitarian doctrine affirms the unity of God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, and yet also affirms the equality and the distinctiveness of each of the persons of the Trinity. Being equal and distinct in personality, is the benchmark or criterion for an understanding of who God is according to the Christian reading of Scripture. Migliore continued by saying that the Classical Trinitarian doctrine is,

> "[t]o protect the unity of God's being, the governing rule is, 'All of the acts of the triune God in the world are indivisible.' Hence the Father does not act alone in the work of creation, or the Son alone in the work of redemption, or the Spirit alone in the work of sanctification. Every act of God is the act of the one triune God. Balancing this rule is the rule of 'appropriations' that guards the distinctions of the persons of the Trinity. While creation, redemption, and sanctification are all acts of the triune God, scriptural usage authorizes the appropriation of the act of creation primarily (though not exclusively) to the Father, the act of redemption primarily (though not exclusively) to the Son, and the act of sanctification primarily (though not exclusively) to the Spirit" (2004: 71).

Migliore is also of the opinion that the Trinity speaks of God's activity, it is about the nature of how God works, particularly in creation, redemption, and sanctification. The nature of God's work is in unity, and harmony. It is a unity of togetherness that embraces diversity. Similarly, God works in appropriation. This is an appropriation of purpose, in which domination and superiority are not the order, but the communion of purpose and the inseparableness of Trinity.

The central theme of classical Trinitarian doctrine is that the doctrine,

> "re-describes God in the light of the event of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of God's transforming Spirit. It wants to say that God is sovereign, costly love that liberates and renews life. It wants to say that God's love for the world in Christ now at work by the power of the Spirit is nothing accidental or capricious or temporary. It wants to say that there no sinister or even demonic side of God altogether different from what we know in the story of Jesus who befriended the poor and forgave sinners. God *is* self-expending, other-affirming, community-building love. The exchange of love that constitutes the eternal life of God is expressed outwardly in the history of costly love that liberates and reconciles. Only *this* God who 'loves in freedom' (Barth), both eternally and in

relation to the world, can be worshiped and served as the ultimate power in full confidence and total trust" (2004: 72).

Classical Trinitarian doctrine describes God's divine power, by highlighting the dynamics of power between God and human beings. Migliore says in this regard

> "[t]o speak thus of God as triune is to set all of our prior understandings of what is divine in question. God is not a solitary monad but free, self-communicating love. God is not the supreme will-to-power overs others but the supreme will-to-communion in which power and life are shared. To speak of God as the ultimate power whose being is in giving, receiving, and sharing love, who gives life to others and wills to live in communion, is to turn upside down our understandings of both divine and human power. The reign of the triune God is the rule of sovereign love rather than the rule of force. A revolution in our understanding of the true power of God and of fruitful human power is thus implied when God is described as triune. God is *not* absolute power, *not* infinite egocentricism, *not* majestic solitariness. The power of the triune God is not coercive but creative, sacrificial and empowering love; and the glory of the triune God consists not in dominating others but in sharing life with others. In this sense, confession of the triune God is the only understanding of God that is appropriate to and consistent with the New Testament declaration that God is love (1 John 4:8)" (*ibid*: 72).

The Classical Trinitarian interpretation speaks of who God is and, therefore, stating the context in which the triune should be understood.

2. 5 Distortions in the Doctrine of God

The doctrine of God in the Christian tradition discloses that God is triune, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. However, teachings regarding God that contradict the triune doctrine of God distorts the fundamentals of the Christian traditions. Distortion is the misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the doctrine of God.

The misinterpretation of the doctrine of God takes on many forms. One of these is by unitarianism of each of the persons of the Trinity. Unitarianism is when one person of the Trinity is exclusively and unitarily dignified above the others. Once this scriptural doctrine is misrepresented distortion sets in. Intrinsically distortion changes the intended meaning of the triune God.

Three distortions and the forms which it takes according to Migliore are:

1. Unitarianism of the creator: God is viewed as the first and the only principle of the universe, the origin of all things.

2. Unitarianism of the redeemer: only Jesus Christ is regarded the central reference to salvation.

3. Unitarianism of the Spirit: the experiences and the gifts of the Spirit are everything.

Unitarianism of each of the persons of the Trinity limits, as well as changes, the biblical presentation of who God is.

2. 6. Restating the Meaning of the Doctrine of the Trinity

The church's confession of the Classical Trinitarian doctrine of God has been the creed that has guarded the church on the scriptural teaching over the centuries. However, as previously pointed out, misinterpretation of the doctrine of Trinity leads to distortion. Distortion is something that needed to be guarded against to preserve the biblical doctrine.

The question now is how the doctrine of the Trinity should be approached; and how should the doctrine be understood? Vincent Brümmer, like Migliore, has pointed out a similar concern in this regard, in which he,

> "described the way in which the Fathers tried to interpret the faith in terms of the Platonist forms of thought that were current in the Hellenistic world in which they lived and to which they addressed their message. I argued that these Platonist ways of thinking are so strange to us today, that on their patristic interpretation the doctrines of Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity have become puzzling if not unintelligible to most ordinary believers in our time" (2005: 117, cf. 1).

Brümmer not only identifies, but argues, that time and context play an important part in the interpretation of the doctrine of Trinity. In any case, as context and times are important in maintaining the relevance of meaning of religious concepts, Icons, theologies. Brümmer is of the view that there is an eminent need to have a re-interpretation, of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is because the platonic language that was common in the early church is not a familiar concept now in use. On the same note, Migliore argues for the reinterpretation of the Classical Trinitarian doctrine for easy understanding of the biblical message. He argues,

> "[i]n so interpreting classical trinitarian doctrine, our aim is to get beneath its 'surface grammar,' to penetrate to its deepest intension, its 'depth grammar,' rather than remaining stuck in the ancient conceptuality with all of its strange terminology. We do not truly respect doctrines if we simply repeat them as trained parrots might. Indeed, such mindless repetition often results in the subversion of the real intent of church teachings. Thus the important question for us is, what was then, and what is now at stake in affirming that God is triune, that God is communicated to us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit? The answer to this question is that trinitarian doctrine describes God in terms of shared life and love rather than in domineering power. God loves in freedom, lives in communion, and wills creature to live in a new community of mutual love and service. God is self-sharing, other regarding, community-forming love. This is the 'depth grammar' of the doctrine of the Trinity that lies beneath all the 'surface grammar' and all of the particular, and always inadequate, names and images that we employ when we speak of the God of the gospel" (2004: 72).

The Restatement is an interpretive statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, which is centred on the scriptural image of God. As the Scriptures articulate and use different images in reference to God, the Bible depicts God in a comprehended representation, which seeks to communicate as well as to relate to human understanding, reasoning, and thoughts. Such images consist of the use of personal images, images that use masculine and feminine attributes or symbols of gender classification to illustrate the distinctiveness of each of the images. Therefore, they

serve as metaphors to continually learn more about God. It also uses other impersonal images to describe God. The usage of these images seems to indicate the importance of an inclusive image as a reference for communicating God's attributes. The usage of the masculine and feminine symbols does not suggest a structural hierarchy of dominance of one gender over the other. These images aim to describe God and God's attributes in God's own being and God's actions towards human beings.

A restatement of the doctrine of the Trinity is not, primarily, to change the meaning of the doctrine of Trinity. As it has been transmitted, in its reflection, it searches to extract the meaning of the Trinitarian faith as Migliore argues, it "tries to uncover the depth grammar of the trinitarian faith" (2004:74), by exploring and searching for new images and avenues to understand God, while still holding to the classical Trinitarian doctrine. Migliore again gives the reasons for advocating for the restatement which is to "help us retrieve much-suppressed imagery of God in the biblical tradition. As the church's hymns and prayers increasingly employ a wide range of images of God, the spiritual life and theological sensitivity of both men and women in the church will be enriched" (*ibid*: 75). In the same vein, as the Bible gives different images of God, these images shed light on the understanding of God's divine being. The question is, how does it shed light in understanding God's divine being? Migliore in this view has stated that these images are,

> "only a sampling of the breadth of biblical imagery of God — all the more remarkable considering the patriarchal setting of the biblical witness. In view of this rich imagery, the language of Father, Son, Holy Spirit, while constituting an enduring biblical baseline for the church, must not be absolutized in its theology and liturgy. The search for other imagery to speak of the triune God should be affirmed. At the same time, new images of God should be considered complements to, rather than replacements for, the traditional images. It must also be remembered that all of our images of God, old and new, masculine and feminine, personal and impersonal, receive a new and deeper meaning from the gospel story beyond the meanings that they have in the contexts in which they are ordinarily used. When we speak of God as father or mother, the meaning of these designations is determined finally not by our cultural or familial history but by the history of God's steadfast love for the world that stands at the center of the biblical witness" (2004: 75).

Migliore again (as stated above) has stated the basis for arguing for the search and the usage of imagery in restating the meaning of the Trinity, (which is to complement the Trinitarian teaching), but also caution against stating the criteria for undertaking such task (by assessing it by the history God's steadfast love for the world that stand at the centre of the biblical witness). How to go about with the restatement he argues is not to lose the depth grammar (*ibid*: 76). Migliore defined the depth of grammar "as the grammar of wondrous divine love that freely

gives of itself to others and creates community, mutuality, and shared life. God creates and relates to the world this way because this is the way God is eternally God" (*ibid*: 76).

Since restatement serves to give a complementary re-interpretation of the meaning of Trinity, Migliore in his affirmation for restatement of the meaning of the nature of the Trinity, he offers the following "three additional interpretive statements on the doctrine of the Trinity"

1. He articulates, that *"[t]o confess that God is triune is to affirm that the eternal life of God is personal life in relationship*." This statement describes the nature and the basis on which God's life is revealed. It designates that God is a personal living being, whose nature is based on relationship. In addition, as a personal being He "lives and loves as Father, Son, Holy Spirit. In God's own eternal being there is movement, life, personal relationship and the giving and receiving of love" (*ibid*: 77). Furthermore, as the personal living God, he "enters into living relationship with creations," (*ibid*: 76). How do we understand this relationship?

2. To confess that God is triune is to essentially, confirm the Christian assertion with reference to God. The restatement of the doctrine of the Trinity according to Migliore is that *"[t]o confess that God is triune is to affirm that God exists in communion far deeper than the relationships and partnerships we know in our human experience."* (*ibid*: 78) As he acknowledges, God lives in communion. He explained that the nature of God's communion, or the kind of communion that exist in the Trinitarian God's relationship, is a personal relationship which is a profound and inseparable relationship. Clarifying the deepness and the inseparable relationship of God Migliore writes that "[a]ccording to classical trinitarian theology, the three persons of the Trinity have their distinctive identity only in deep and inseparable relationship with each other. Since John of Damascus, a revered Eastern Orthodox theologian, this ineffable communion of the triune life has been expressed by the Greek word *perichoresis*, 'mutual indwelling' or 'being –in-one-another.' The three of the Trinity 'indwell' and pervade each other; they 'encircle' each other, being united in an exquisite divine dance; or to use still another metaphor, they 'make room' for each other, are incomparably hospitable to each other," (*ibid*: 79). Furthermore, the Trinitarian communion

> "points to experiences of friendship, caring family relationships, and the inclusive community of free and equal persons as hints or intimations of eternal life of God and of the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed. That God is a trinity of love means that concern for new community in which there is a just sharing of the resources of the earth and in which domination are replaced by relationships of honor and respect among equals has its basis in the divine way of life" (*ibid*).

The triune communion as explained above emphasizes that the triune life is in an atmosphere of togetherness, unity, and sharing of life that transcends distinctiveness. This suggests

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distinctiveness is not a barrier to communion. Migliore in his conceptualisation believes that understanding the triune communion sets a record for human beings which is also important for human society, he argues that,

> "if God's being is in communion, then human life too is intended by God to be life in communion. The Christian hope for peace and justice and freedom in community among peoples of diverse cultures, races, and gender corresponds to the trinitarian logic of God. Confession of the triune God, properly understood, radically calls in question all totalitarianisms that deny the freedom and rights of all peoples, and resists all idolatrous individualisms that subvert the common welfare" (*ibid*: 80).

The analogy of the use of communion to describe God is a description regarding the nature of God's divine life or triune life. What it entails, says Migliore is what trinitarian theology is. "Trinitarian theology, when it rightly understands its own depth grammar, offers a profoundly personal and relational view both of God and of life created and redeemed by God" (*ibid*: 80). This seeks to give more detail about the personal, relational view of God and the life created by God.

3. To confess that God is triune according to Migliore's restatement "*is to affirm that the life of God is essentially self-giving love whose strength embraces vulnerability*" (*ibid*: 81). This is to say, that God has made life in such a way that he is identifiable, God expresses God's self in what Migliore went on to say, i.e., the Trinity speaks of the nature of the life of God, in defining or describing the life of God he refers to it as "a singular act of love" (*ibid*). Which means God can be known through his acts. These acts have been communicated in his love and compassion. The Compassionate love of God is his acts of love in his self-giving. It is a self-giving love which has been communicated and demonstrated to the world through "'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13: 13)" (*ibid*). Speaking of God's self-giving love, Migliore goes on to say what God's self-love does:

> "[i]f the triune God is self-given love that liberates life and creates new and inclusive community, then there is no salvation for the creature apart from sharing in God's agapic way of life in solidarity and hope for the whole creation (cf. Rom. 8:18-39). Thus a trinitarian understanding of God and of salvation gives new depth and direction to our awakening but still fragile sense of the interdependence of life and our still half-hearted commitment to struggles for justice and freedom for all people" (*ibid*).

What God's self-giving love does, is to liberate, and transform a community into a new and inclusive community that models what we must do if God is self-giving love.

"If the life of the triune God is the mutual self-giving love of Father, Son, and Spirit, and if the triune God is active in history out of love for the creation, it follows that we must not, as has often happened in the theological tradition, think of the Trinity only in retrospect, looking backward from God's dealing with the world to the Trinity before creation. We must think of the Trinity first of all as the life of God with and for us here and now, which we receive by faith, and in which we participate by worship and service as we hear and obey God's Word and Spirit. Then, too, we must think of Trinity prospectively, looking at the ahead to the glorious completion of the purpose for which God created and reconciled the world. The history of the triune God encompasses past, present, and future. It includes suffering and death but also new life and resurrection, and it moves forward to the consummation symbolized as the reign or commonwealth of God" (*ibid*).

In a way, how the act of self-giving love of God has been communicated has been in God's attitude of compassion. Speaking of Compassion Migliore writes,

"[t]o have compassion means to suffer with another. According to the biblical witness, God suffers with and for creatures out of love for them. Above all in Jesus Christ, God goes the way of suffering, alienation, and death for the salvation of the world. It is this compassionate journey of God into the far country of human brokenness and misery that prompts a revolution in the understanding of God that is articulated — although never fully adequately —- in the doctrine of the Trinity. God loves in freedom not only in relation to us but in God's own eternal being. God can enter into vulnerable interaction with the world, even to the depths of temporality, deprivation, suffering, and death, because as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit God is essentially an inexhaustible history of mutual self-surrendering love. This boundless love of the triune God is decisively revealed in the cross of Christ and is the eternal source and energy of human friendship, compassion, sacrificial love, and inclusive community" (*ibid*: 81).

Compassion as stated above shows the relevance of human beings to God and what God does, and how God expresses his love to the world.

Knowing that the knowledge and the understanding of God are something that never end, it is continually unfolding. That is why Migliore believes that,

"[f]rom the earliest centuries of the church, the triune being of God has been recognized as a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend. Augustine, the person who perhaps spent more effort wrestling with the mystery of the Trinity than any theologian in the history of the church, said 'If you comprehend something, it is not God.' Through the centuries discerning theologians have stressed the limitations of our knowledge of God and the inadequacy of all our language about God-including the trinitarian symbols" (*ibid*: 74).

Now, since the knowledge of God is continually unfolding, it means that the knowledge of God is something that can be repeatedly be explored. This mystery, as unveiled in scriptural concepts, reflects the manifold power of God, which in itself is also the mystery of God.

2. 7. The Triune Mystery

The depiction of Trinity, speaks of the biblical revelation of God's divine being, however, this belief correspondingly invokes an enigmatic concern, outstandingly asked by Roger Olson, "[h]ow one being can be three persons and how three persons can be one being seem beyond comprehension" (2002: 145, cf. Macquarrie, 1977: 190; Durand, 2007: 83; Grayling, 2013:1-

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9) or human logic. This phenomenon raises a challenge on how this manifestation can be rationally explained.

The Triune mystery demonstrates a distinction of God from creation, it advocates that God in his essence cannot be completely comprehended or equated by human faculty, (cf. Durand, 2007: 47, 83; Fergusson, 2014: 27; Plantinga, Thompson, Lundberg, 2010: 591). This is to mean as Miroslav Volf says, that "[s]ince human beings cannot comprehend what is boundless, God is 'incomprehensible and ineffable' to them; only God can comprehend and express who God is" (2011: 51). In this quest, too, medieval mystical theology advocates that God is not known in his true nature as stated by Jaap Durand (2007: 72). What is known is what has been revealed, according to the biblical account. Migliore, quoting Augustine, further commented that "'if you comprehend something, it is not God'. Through the centuries discerning theologians have stressed the limitations of our knowledge of God and the inadequacy of all our language about God -—including the Trinitarian symbols. Today we are even more aware of how imperfect and historically burdened all language about God is." (2004; 74, cf. Bloesch, 2000: 274; Olson, 2002: 138, 145).

Though the triune exposition is surrounded by what seems difficult, the limitedness of human discerning ability to fully, explain the mystery of one divine Being in three distinct persons. The biblical and theological declaration on the triune God, is, however, interpreted in his imminent and economic activities. The economic Trinity represents God's activities in the history of salvation, "approached from the 'economy of God's actions in the history of salvation" (Durand, 2007: 39; 47), unravelling part of the mystery of the Trinity.

With the limited human understanding of the Trinity, it is also noteworthy as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen advocates the essential reason to embrace the triune belief "[y]et a *mystery* is different from a contradiction. Mystery is 'an apparent contradiction which there is good reason to believe.' It is rational to believe in mystery when there is sufficient reason to believe that its alleged contradictory nature is just that alleged not real; even more so when there are compelling theological reasons to believe that mysterious doctrine." (2007: *xiii;* cf. Olson, 2002:145; Macquarrie, 1977: 190).

The triune mystery, therefore, deduces the component of trust in God on the one hand, while on the other hand, it gives in to the need for divine assistance to wholly know more about the Trinity. According to Allan Coppedge, "human reason and perception, which are limited to this world, cannot comprehend the supernatural, transcendent and personal triune God who

stands outside of the universe of space and time," (2007: 214; cf. Horton, 2011: 294; Bloesch, 2000: 274; Migliore, 2004: 67, 74, 78; Macquarrie, 1977: 210). As such, in the words of Donald G. Bloesch "[t]he mystery of the Trinity is best described in terms of paradox, and this perception is in full accord not only with the biblical witness but also with church tradition" (2000: 274 cf. Migliore, 2008: 80). The partial knowledge of the triune reality of God possibly experienced here and now "can fully be comprehended when we arrive at the final destination," says Roger Olson (2002: 145).

Surrounded by the difficulty to explain fully the mystery of the Trinity, it is to be realized that the mystery is not an excuse, but the realization of the limited knowledge of the human effort. There is also a need to realize that despite the limited knowledge of our human effort, biblical and theological declarations of triune reality, give a basis to hold onto the available evidence using analogies to understand these realities.

2. 8. Triune Power

In his theological argument Daniel Migliore briefly delves into an exploration regarding God's power. He argues that God's power is triune power. The intention here is not an attempt to divide the substance of the Trinity in terms of their distinctive powers (Macquarrie, 1977: 329), or actions. However, this sub-topic in other words seeks to understand the appropriation of God's divine power from the triune perspective in which Migliore suggested that triune power needs to be seen or understood "in the light of the gospel" (2004: 83). The gospel explains God's power in comparably different ways from the human logical assumption of interpreting power. The centrality of the gospel message of God is grounded in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The difference, Migliore observed, is that when it comes to God's divine power, God's love is fused with his power, when the triune power is emphasized, triune love is equally associated with it.

> "[t]he *power* and *love* of the triune God are inseparable. To be sure, God is properly called omnipotent, but how shall we speak of the omnipotence of the triune God? Certainly not in the manner of debating whether God can square a circle or create a stone too heavy for him to lift. Nor is the omnipotent, all-determining power of God appropriately defined by saying it is like the power of a human emperor or monarch, only raised to the highest degree. The omnipotence of a triune God is altogether different from the human exercise of power to control and dominate others. The power of a triune God is *omnipotent love*, (2004: 86 cf. Migliore, 2008: 63-64, 92).

Migliore describes God's power as omnipotent love, which is not centred to control or to dominate others. If omnipotent love is not a power that seeks to prove itself using mechanisms to control and to exert dominance on others as power is often associated with, then triune power is but a sovereign power centre of love which is open to a willing response. It consistently

acknowledges the human free will in which God's wisdom is applied. As Migliore has said "[i]n God's wisdom creatures are given space and time to develop their own existence and to respond freely to the love of God. God's wisdom is exercised both in righteous judgment and in patient love," (2004: 86). God's power is to be understood and to be responded to through what is seen and understood. Here are some ways through which God manifests God's power.

2. 8. 1. The Triune power of God in creation

The question, to begin with, is in creation, how can God's power be understood; and how does creation manifest God's Power? The Biblical witness introduces creation as God's handy work; a careful rendering suggests it is the work of the triune God. Creation being the work of God, it came into reality through Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit. Speaking of this, Colin Gunton writes in his book *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* that,

> "[t]he world is created through the Son and in the Spirit, that is to say by persons in relation who freely relate themselves to that which is not themselves. As the creation of the love of God the world is not impersonal process, a machine or a self-developing organism – a cosmic collective into which the particular simply disappears but that which itself has a destiny along with the human: it is that whose destiny is to be realized along with and by the agency of the human creation, so that that which is not personal may come to be itself in being offered back perfected to its creator through Christ and in the Spirit" (1991: 13).

It communicates how creation came into existence; it is for the reason of the love of God. As such, it has a purpose and a destiny along with humans. It further says what creation is not: an impersonal process, a machine or self-developing organism – a cosmic collective into which the particular simply disappears. If creation is not an impersonal process or a machine or self-developing, then it has its destiny along with humanity, the question is what guides or leads creation towards its destiny? On the other hand, if creation is in contrast with an impersonal process, a machine or self-developing organism, i.e., a cosmic collective into which the particular simply disappears, it then means creation is God's work.

The Scripture attests of creation from the concept of *Ex nihilo,* which means God created things out of nothing, (Genesis 1, John 1, and Eph. 4). Explaining this biblical belief Colin E. Gunton makes the following explanation:

> "creation was 'out of nothing'. This teaching is fundamental and make the Christian teaching unique. It affirms that God creates the world relied on nothing outside himself, so that creation is an act of divine sovereignty and freedom an act of personal willing that there be something other. It further implies that the universe had a beginning in time and is limited in space: it is neither eternal nor infinite" (1998: 9).

Creation reveals that God is not dependent on anything to bring about creation, God's acts are centred on his divine sovereignty and freedom, and personal will that there is something other.

A Trinitarian description gives further detail of creation as Gunton has elaborated,

> "because the doctrines of the Son and the Spirit enable us to articulate an understanding of the way in which God works in and towards the world, our understanding of the divine work of creation is not limited to the beginning and the end. In various ways God can be understood to continue to be involved in the world, guiding its movement and enabling anticipations of its final perfection to take place. From christology and pneumatology together flow those further aspects of the doctrine which are indicated by words like 'conservation', 'preservation', 'providence' and 'redemption. The first two of the expressions refer to God's continuing upholding of and care for his creation. God does not, like the machine-maker deity of some conceptions, simply leave his world to go its own way, but actively maintains it in being. The latter expressions have a more forward-looking orientation, and refer to the forms of action by which God provides for the needs of the creation and enable it to achieve the end that was purposed for it from the beginning" (1998: 10)

The above assertion reminds the readers of the manner in which God works towards creation, he sustains and preserves it. Daniel Migliore says in this respect, "[t]he true God is no absentee landlord but remains ever faithful, upholding, blessing, and guiding the creation to its appointed goal." (2004: 117 cf. Migliore, 2008: 75). The creation is not wholly on its own. It is to say that creation depends on its maker for its sustenance; Migliore writes that "[a]ccordingly, God *preserves* the whole creation and maintains it in its existence. This act of preservation is not an arbitrary exercise of almightiness but an expression of God's faithfulness to the purpose for which the world was created," (*ibid*: 126 cf. Fergusson, 2014: 25). Thus, creation is not left to fend on its own, but its sustenance and existence lie in its maker. This knowledge is further strengthened by the Scottish Theologian David Fergusson, who believes "[t]he world is never apart from God or without the impression of divine action the divine Spirit as universal and omnipresent is at work everywhere to bring the created things to the end desired by God" (2014: 30).

Speaking of God's omnipresence, the divine Spirit, is at work all over the place. Regarding how it works Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, articulates that

> "[t]he biblical conviction of God's ever-presence in his creation (Jer. 23: 24) as well as his absolute transcending of all that is made, even the 'heaven and the highest heaven' (1 Kings 8: 27), is another way of saying theologically 'eternity' and philosophically 'infinity.' Whereas God's eternity means that all things are always present to *him*, the stress in his omnipresent is that he is present *to all things at the place of their existence*" (2014: 300).

What does God's presence mean in creation? Since God is present, it means creation is not left out, or alone. In developing this notion (the presence of God) Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen again articulates that, "[i]n theological perspective, the presence of God is explained in terms of the

divine Spirit that not only brings about all creatures but also upholds them everywhere. This is deep immanence. At the same time, the Trinitarian doctrine helps explain the transcendence of God, since God in his immanent life, as integrally related as that is the economic life, can never be contained by creation" (*ibid*: 301). Upholding creatures, and the preservation of creation is another way in which God is holding creation. This means that God has not left the creation alone.

2. 8. 2. Triune power in relation to the cosmos

There seem to be different representational interpretations of creation (Migliore, 2004: 110-113). Biblical records or documents (Gen. 1: 1-2; Ps. 104: 30; John 1: 3; Rom. 3: 17; Col. 1: 16; Heb. 1: 2) affirm that creation is the work of the transcendent triune God, who created everything in it. "Creation, accordingly, is a grace-ful affair - freely chosen and freely bestowed by God which makes every created existence and moment a gift of God's grace," says Plantinga, Thompson, and Lundberg, (2010: 168). In other words, creation exists based on God's grace, free will decision, "given to God's character, creation could not be ill motivated," (*ibid*: 169). The creation in its rich diversity and order was declared good by God, the coherence and the interdependence of creation seem to reflect the triune nature of God in communion.

Similarly, Plantinga, Richard J. and Thompson, Thomas R. and Lundberg, Matthew D comment on the ways God relates to creation. They argue, that God does this through God's *immanence*; "we must equally affirm God's *immanence* – the idea that God is also radically involved *within* creation (2010: 175 cf. Migliore, 2004: 108; 118; Fergusson, 2014: 50). This is also for "creation, redemption and eschatology" David Fergusson further explains (2014: 51). In effect, creation is not in isolation, but does indicate the means through which God interacts with creation, Plantinga *et'al* suggests three ways of expressing God's immanence:

1. Through "*an artistic touch,"* using this metaphor of an artwork it reflects the inscription of the artist; similarly, creation reveals God's action. Migliore continues first by seeing creation as an *artistic expression* of God, which he also refers to as the *play*. Employing the use of the comparison of God, with the artist is to relate God's "bond," or relationship with creation. He emphasizes this dynamic belief that "[t]his divine creative activity occur freely and spontaneously and thus displays features of play and artistic expression." He argues that "[a]ll artistic expression — whether in music, drama, dance, painting or sculpture — is creative, free, expressive, playful. While such playful activity has its own rules, they are not experienced as arbitrary but as defining a particular field of freedom. Second, there is free self-limitation is

required" (2004: 112; cf. Fergusson, 2014: 54). Artists must respect the integrity of the medium with which they work, and for this reason, some voluntary self-limitation is required.

2. Through *providence*, God provides for the creation. The provision for creation is carried out by means of preservation. Preservation suggests the way God sustains the creation in its natural integrity, (Plantinga, *et'al* 2010: 175; cf. Fergusson, 2014: 50-51). The preservation and the sustenance of creation in its existence,

> "…is not an arbitrary exercise of almightiness but an expression of God's faithfulness to the purpose for which the world was created. From all eternity the whole creation is chosen in and oriented to Jesus Christ as God's covenant partner. God's act of preserving the creation is thus an act of serving, an act of free grace to the creature, empowering and sustaining it for participation in the covenant of grace. God is not the impersonal or mechanical 'first cause' of all that happens but the one whom Jesus revealed as the heavenly Father" Migliore argued (2004: 126).

David Fergusson in this regard, believed God's providence demonstrates "divine care, involvement and direction of creation" (2014: 50). This suggests God cares for creation. Furthermore, he argues that, God's providence has the ability to manage "the whole divine economy of salvation, connecting creation as the making of the world with its redemption in Christ and its final consummation" (2014: 51). Fergusson continues as he explains that, "[a]t the same time its scope is extensive, including not only Israel and the church but moving outwards to comprehend culture, history, the natural world, and the wider realms of the cosmos" (*ibid*).

With reference to providence, Colin Gunton speaks of general providence and special providence. In his articulation, he argues that,

> "[g]eneral providence is a name for the activity by which God is conceived to hold in being the order of creation: maintaining the order and teleology of human and non-human realms. By contrast, particular and special providence are ways of speaking of saving or redemptive acts directed to restoring the right order, or, better, directedness, of creation. The incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth provides a way of showing that the distinction of forms of providence is yet embraced within a unity of activity" (1998: 176 cf. Fergusson, 2014: 51).

To sum up Gunton's argument, the order of creation, maintaining the order, and redemptive acts that restore the right order have their place in God. Therefore, creation cannot be separated from God. In line with the above stated statement, God recognizes and respects the free activity of creatures and does not play the part of a tyrant. The creature is not a mere puppet or a tool in the hands of the creator.

3. God's concern or care for the creation, in a "particular Trinitarian way in which God is radically within creation, namely, *in the Spirit*. A classic way of understanding the general pattern of God's actions toward the world is 'from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit'

(whereas creation's response, conversely, is in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father'). As all of God's work, creation is a Trinitarian act, a cooperative effort of all and energies of all divine persons," (Plantinga, *et al* 2010: 176). God's transcendence and immanence describe the relationship between creator and creation. There are coherence and unity in the diversity of creatures, which somehow indicates the unity of purpose. John Macquarrie observes the work of the Spirit in all creation in relation to Rom. 8:19, 22-23 in which he says that,

> "[h]ere we have the picture of the Spirit, as a unitive Being, lifting the whole creation toward God, bringing the beings into reconciling unity with Being, yet without destroying their diversity, so that this is a higher and fuller unity than would have been possible had Being remained in itself and not gone out into the risk of creation. The culmination of this unity that the Spirit builds is the free conscious communion of spiritual (existent) beings with Being, which is in effect their 'adoption as sons,' that is to say, their participation in the life of God, so that the creatures will indeed have fulfilled their potentiality to become 'offspring.' But although this is the culmination, it is clear that the operation of the Spirit is represented as taking place at all levels, through the 'whole creation,'" (1977: 221).

The whole creation is not in seclusion, from the triune God. From John Macquarrie "we get a remarkable statement about the work of the Spirit in all creation from St. Paul. He says 'the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God,' and he enlarges on this by declaring that 'the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for the adoption as sons.'…for the Spirit that has proceeded into creation labors there to build it up into a harmonious whole, at one itself and with God," (*ibid*: 221; 329, cf. 330).

Gunton, speaks of the Spirit in terms of energy in his acts in which he says "[w]e returned to the concept of energies, and possibly to the Spirit as in some sense the energy of the Godhead, in such a way, we may understand the Holy Spirit as the divine energy releasing the energies of the world, enabling the world to realise its dynamic interrelatedness. Thus, God, the Spirit conceived as the perfecting cause, the truer source of the dynamic of the forward movement of the cosmos" (1991: 158). The Spirit is projected as the agent or the catalyst, which is active in the world and its sustenance.

In relating to the work of the Spirit in history, the Holy Spirit appears not only to be active in the church (Migliore, 2004: 234 cf. Macquarrie, 1977: 332) but transcends it; when this is linked with the power of God, it suggests that the triune power of God is present and active in human activities outside the church. The question is how this phenomenon is seen, view and understood? Migliore points out, "[t]here is a cosmic dimension of the work of the Spirit. If the Spirit is like the wind that '*blows where it wills*' (John, 3: 8), we must expect and be open to the working of Spirit beyond the walls of the church. The Spirit of God is present and at work

in the world of nature, in the restlessness of the human heart, in the work of justice and harmony in human relations, in the search for truth in the sciences, in the skills of creative artists, and in the histories of world religions" (2004: 234 cf. Macquarrie, 1977: 332). If God in his sovereignty is at work in various ways as stated above, it means human history is also not isolated. This leads to the next discussion on divine power.

2. 8. 3. The Triune power of God in Christ

The triune power of God in Christ is a reflection on the triune power of God, being, manifested in and through Jesus Christ, the Son. In other words, it is God's power through Christ. Continuing from the previous sub-heading on the triune power of God in creation, it is seen that creation is a manifestation of the acts of God, and it is also seen in how God's power has been manifested in creation. The Scriptures once more, with reference to creation, have it that Jesus Christ is a co-agent of creation with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In considering God's power through Christ, Jesus is very much involved in creation. In relation to the New Testament in its interpretation of Christ's power in the creation account, Colin E. Gunton expresses that,

> "[t]he definitive New Testament contribution to the development of the doctrine is to be found in its Christological form. This is already indicated in the best known of likely allusions to Genesis 1, John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word…without him was not made anything that was made.' The Word who, according to verse 14 of that passage, became flesh is the one through whom the whole creation has its being. But there is a case for saying that other New Testament passages indicate the wider Christological basis of the teaching. 1 Corinthians 8: 6, which, as John Gibbs has argued, is likely to reflect very early tradition as a confession of belief appealed to by Paul, sets the scene, placing Christ alongside God the Father as co-agent of creation. There is one God, the Father, from whom all things, and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.' The later doctrinal tradition reinforces the Christological claim. Colossians 1:16, in a passage of astonishing profundity — possibly anticipating Irenaeus' later attacks on theories that intermediate beings rather than God himself were responsible for the creation of the material world— describes Jesus Christ as the one in whom 'all things were created, in heaven and on earth…all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' A similar form of expression is to be found in Hebrews 1: 2f which speaks of: 'a Son, through whom (God) created the world. He reflects the very stamps of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.' This is a classical statement of the double function of Christ in creation, at once to mediate the creation of the world and to sustain it once it is made. It brings out again the point that Christian belief in creation is not a general product of reason, but a very specific credal affirmation which implies both origination and continuing interaction and upholding" (1998: 20-21).

Creation, its sustenance, and preservation are because of Jesus Christ. In him and through him creation can be what it should be.

Other ways in which God's power in Christ has been made known is in his "soteriological" activities. The soteriological deed is how God provided "the way" or the means to save

humanity and the world at large. This is another way of showing how God relates to both humanity and the creation. This has been done through the saving work of the Son Jesus Christ. From Christian anthropology, people (both male and female) are created in the image of God by the triune God. Though Migliore acknowledges there are diverse interpretations regarding the image of God, he,

> "contend that the symbol 'image of God' describes *human life in relationship* with God and with the other creatures. In the first story of creation in Genesis, the statement 'God created humankind in his own image' is followed by 'male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). To be human is to live freely and gladly in relationships of mutual respect and love. The existence of human creatures in relationship — the paradigmatic form of which is the coexistence of male and female —reflects the life of God who eternally lives not in solitary existence but in communion. Thus the image of God is not to be construed primarily as a set of human faculties, possessions, or endowments. It expresses self-transcending life in relationship with others — with the 'wholly other' we call God, and with those different 'others' who need our help and whose help we also need in order to be the human creatures God intends us to be.
>
> The image of God is not like an image permanently stamped on a coin; it is more like an image reflected in a mirror. That is, human being are created for life in relationships that mirror or correspond to God's own life in relationship. In light of the history of Jesus Christ, Christian faith and theology are led to interpret the *imago Dei* as an *imago Christi* and an *imago trinitatis*" (2004: 141).

The image of God in the above quotation defines how the Scriptures view human being. It argues that human beings, in the image of God, are made for interaction and interrelation, both with God and with others. It is the kind of relationship Migliore describes as mutual love and mutual service, which he says it is perichoretic, drawing upon the Trinitarian notion.

However, the Scriptures described the fall of humanity in their relationship with God their maker, Migliore describes the scriptural position of the fall this away:

> "While affirming the good possibilities of human existence as created by God, theological anthropology takes with utter seriousness the profound disruption, disorder, alienation, brutality, and oppression that characterize the actual human condition. The condition is described in the assertion that we are 'fallen' sinful creatures. Our alienation not only from God but also from our fellow creatures and ourselves is vividly portrayed in the Yahwist account of creation and fall (Gen. 2-3). Driven to disobedience by their desire to be gods or 'like God,' Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden. This rupture of relationship with God is reflected in the poisoning of human relationships. The first human act outside the Garden is Cain's murder of Abel. The image of God in which humans were created is obscured and distorted by sin" (2004: 150).

The fall indicates the interruption of the human creation that was created good. The fall alters the behaviour of human beings which affects both human relationships with God and others. The effect of the fall alters the human-God, human-human relationship. As a result of this alteration, it may not be in the wrong to say that this alteration has impacted the humanity. The effect of the fall has been summed up by Migliore in his description of human being in the

section "Humanity as creature, Sinner and New Being in Christ" in his book *Faith Seeking Understanding*. He argues that,

> "[w]e human beings are a mystery to ourselves. We are rational and irrational, civilized and salvage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger. We are Rembrandt and Hitler, Mozart and Stalin, Antigone and Lady Macbeth, Ruth and Jezebel. 'What a work of art,' says Shakespeare of humanity. We are very dangerous,' says Arthur Miller in *After the Fall*. 'We meet … not in the sea garden of wax fruit and painted leaves that lies east of Eden, but after, after the fall, after many deaths.' the Bible and Christian theology gives expression to this mystery of the dignity and the danger of human being in three related affirmations: we are created in the image of God; we are sinners who deny and distort our created being; and we are forgiven sinners, enabled by God grace to begin life anew in faith, to serve as Christ's disciple in love, and to move in hope toward the promised fulfilment of life in the coming reign of God. Recalling Calvin's dictum, we recognize that knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are intertwined. We cannot know God truly without being awakened to new self-recognition, and we cannot know our true humanity without a new awareness of the majestic grace of God" (2004: 139).

The fall expresses what becomes the irony of humanity and what human beings are capable of doing, and also what they will become either as they put their faith in Christ or not. Experiencing God forgiveness by faith opens the way towards salvation. In his articulation regarding salvation, Alister E. McGrath says that salvation "is understood to be linked with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1994: 338). Salvation hinges on more than just reconciling humanity back to God, from Migliore's wordlist in *Faith Seeking Understanding* he argues that,

> "[t]he Greek term soteria is translated 'salvation' and means to rescue from mortal peril, deliverance from sin and death, and the gift of fulfilled life in communion with God. According to the biblical witness, salvation comes from God's mighty acts and above all from the work of Jesus Christ the Savior. The doctrine of the threefold office of Christ and the several theories of atonement are attempt to express the ways in which Christ accomplishes human salvation. It is significant that the New Testament speaks of salvation in the past, present, and future tenses: we 'have been saved' (Eph. 2:8); we 'are being saved' (1 Cor. 15: 2); we 'shall be saved' (Rom. 5:10)" (2004: 423).

From Migliore's standpoint, three things are prominent. Salvation has to do with rescuing or deliverance from human danger, sin, and death. Salvation gives the gift of fulfilling life in communion with God. It states the source, through whom salvation is realized, and it summarizes that salvation has multiple meanings. Salvation is not to be seen from one point of view only. Salvation hinges on more than just reconciling humanity back to God.

The saving work of Christ is a unique act of self-giving love for all humanity. Even though it may seem challenging, the saving activities of Jesus Christ have been interpreted in different ways. However, the unified theme, according to Migliore is that,

"[t]he New Testament witnesses are united in their faith in Christ. Yet their portrayals of him as Savior and Lord are remarkably distinctive. Paul's Christology focuses on the cross and resurrection of Christ. Against which is demonstrated in Christ's death and resurrection. This is "What the Bible and the church want primarily to affirm about this person is that in him God brings forgiveness, liberation, reconciliation, and new life to the world. A soteriology dimension is present in every layer of New Testament tradition and in all the classical Christological affirmations of the church. The real 'point' of Christology, therefore, is neither to satisfy historical curiosity nor to engage in idle speculation; it is to affirm that in Jesus, God is decisively present and graciously active for the salvation of the world" (2008: 167).

The omnipotent love of Christ consistently explains the nature of God's soteriological action and its purpose in relation to all God's creatures, particularly in the plan of salvation, "Christ crucified is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor. 1: 22-23). The love of God made known supremely in the cross of Christ has all the power necessary to accomplish the divine purpose of creating and redeeming the world and bringing it to its appointed goal. Because God's omnipotent love is God's own, it does not work by domination or coercion but is sovereign and effective without displacing or bludgeoning God's creature," says Migliore. (2004: 86). God's kind of love is the love that is unconditional, love that goes to the cross. Migliore emphasizes further that "… this unconditional love of God and his shockingly inclusive love of others. This and this alone makes the life and death of Jesus a radiant expression of the eternally self-giving, community-forming love of the triune God" (*ibid*: 177).

The above statements show the way towards the redemption of the world. Redeeming the world, results from God's omnipotent love which was fully expressed on the cross of Christ. The response to this act of God is based on the decision of the human will, this is to be made without domination or intimidation. As stated by Migliore "[i]n God's wisdom creatures are given space and time to develop their own existence and to respond freely to the love of God. God's wisdom is exercised both in righteous judgement and in patient love," (*ibid*: 86).

This has brought what is often referred to the good news, Migliore speaking of the good news says,

"[b]ut the good news is that God has not left us alone in our sinful estrangement from God, from others, and from the truth of our own created being. The gift of God in Jesus Christ is the forgiveness of sins, companionship in suffering and death, and liberation for a new life in self-giving love. Trusting in the grace of God, and on this basis alone, we may approach our death as a conquered enemy. The grace of God in Jesus Christ removes the 'stick' of death (1 Cor. 15: 56). Because of Christ, 'Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's' (Rom. 14: 8). Barth can therefore speak of those who look to the grace of God in Jesus Christ in life and in death as being 'liberated for natural death,' by which he means not 'natural death' in the secular sense of mere biological cessation, but death shorn of its 'sting' and now seen as the point of transition from 'one hand of God to the other' (2004: 158).

What can be understood about God's love is in reference to the cross. The cross is the demonstration of God's heart for humans. Through the cross, Christ intervenes to save human

beings. The interpretation of this has led to many atonement theories, from all the numerous theory of atonement, Migliore believes that,

> "[d]espite these limitations, the cosmic battle theory of the atonement enshrines at least two deep truths. One is that God achieves the liberation and reconciliation of the world not by employing coercion or brute force but by the foolish wisdom of the cross. God does not defeat evil by evil means but through the power of divine loves. As Gregory of Nyssa puts it, 'God transcendent power is not so much displayed in the vastness of the heavens, or the luster of the stars, or the orderly arrangement of the universe or his perpetual oversight of it, as in his condescension to our weak nature.' Another truth embedded in the cosmic battle theory is that evil forces are not only destructive but self-destructive. As morally offensive as the idea that God uses deception in the work of salvation may be, what the crude images of this theory intend to convey is that God's hidden or 'foolish' way of redeeming humanity is wiser and stronger than the apparently invincible forces of evil. It is worth noting that some feminist theologians have called for a retrieval of the insights of the classical battle theory of the atonement" (2004: 183).

As such the cross becomes the means through which liberation and reconciliation was made possible, and evil is defeated by God's divine love. According to Migliore "[w]hen God acts, human action is not displaced. Divine grace and human freedom are not mutually exclusive. The grace of God does not negate but permits and establishes truly free human action" (*ibid*: 179).

2. 8. 4. The Triune power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is traditionally referred to as the third person of the Trinity. This section is not to focus on how or why the Holy Spirit is referred to as the third person of the Trinity. As the sub-heading suggest, it is to reflect on the triune power of the Holy Spirit. Before doing so (reflecting on the triune power of the Spirit), it would be helpful to reflect on what Migliore says about the Holy Spirit: "Christian faith and theology speak of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the triune God. What the Spirit does in us and in the world has its basis in the eternal life of God. For trinitarian faith, God is the living God whose eternal being is a dynamic communion in love. God's being is the act of mutual sharing of life and love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (2004: 230). Migliore believes the Holy Spirit is not to be seen as a 'part' of triune God, but rather as the triune God. Whatever the Spirit does, is based on the unity of the triune God.

The interpretation of the perception of the power of the Spirit can be a debatable or divisive thing because divine power has been interpreted somehow amid denominational traditions. While Pentecostals or charismatics are often, more saturated attuned to (and identified with), the power of the Spirit, others are not. The question now is what and how does the Bible

interpret the triune power of the Spirit? The triune power of the Holy Spirit can be understood and be interpreted in reference to what the Spirit does in light of the biblical witness. What the Spirit does in some ways, unveils the manner the biblical witnesses' express how the power of the Holy Spirit can be understood. Migliore has cautioned, as well as recommended, why the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit is significant to understanding the power of the Spirit. He says that,

> "[r]outine neglect and suspicion of the work of the Holy Spirit has damaging effects on both Christian life and Christian theology. It can lead to distortions in the understanding of God, the doctrine of Scripture, the significance of the natural order, the value of human culture, the interpretation of Christ and his work, the nature of the church, the freedom of the Christian, and the hope for the final fulfilment of life. When the work of the Holy Spirit is forgotten or suppressed, the power of God is apt to be understood as distant, hierarchical, and coercive; Christocentric faith deteriorates into Christomonism; the authority of Scripture becomes heteronomous; the church is seen as a rigid power structure in which some members rule over others; and the sacraments degenerate into magical rites under the control of a clerical elites" (2004: 224).

In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit has a significant connection in understanding God's divine power, giving attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, i.e., what the Spirit does, helps to eliminate other distortions in understanding God, and the triune power of God.

The Holy Spirit, as the biblical creation story reveals, is a co-agent in creation. Migliore, re-counts the biblical interpretation of the triune power of the Holy Spirit in creation, when he states that "[i]n the Old Testament, the Spirit is the creative breath of God giving life to all creature (Ps. 104:29-30; Job 33:4)" (2004: 226 cf. Gunton, 1998: 148). This proposes that for creation to come into existence and for it to be effective as God intends it, it can only come to fruition as God's Spirit gives life to it. For Basil of Caesarea, as Colin Gunton has observed, in writing on a Trinitarian theology of creation, he describes and upholds the Holy Spirit "as the perfecting cause of the creation, he enabled us to say that it is the work of God the Spirit to enable the created order to be truly itself" (1998: 10). What does it mean to be truly itself? Has the creation not been what is has been made to be? In answering this, it is evident that, in his judgement, Gunton advocates for the eschatological view of creation in which he says, "creation is a project — that is to say, it is made to go somewhere — but by virtue of the fall can reach on that end only by a redemption which involves a radical redirection from the movement it takes backwards whenever sin and evil shape its direction" (*ibid*: 12). This is what creation was intended to be.

The triune power of the Holy Spirit in relation to creation is also linked to the eschatological purpose of the triune God. The eschatological purpose entails God's purpose and plan

regarding creation as it relates to the end (or fullness) of time. Gunton in his references to creation and eschatology argues that,

> "[a]ttention being given to the eschatological orientation of the doctrine of creation. While in one sense the heart of the doctrine is concerned with the 'past' in the sense of the once for all establishment of what God has created, both nature of the eternal God's relation to time and the fact that creation is 'project', a reality projected for perfection, required attention to the 'present' (as in the doctrine of providence) and 'future' the Holy Spirit can be understood to move creation forwards, towards its eschatological perfection, rather than simply upwards. This alteration tends to mean as is well known, a theological imprimatur on the modern doctrine of progress, reminding us again of Darwinism's displacement of the doctrine of providence. But that does not take away the providence to see the creation" (1998: 212).

Eschatology is described as Christian hope by Migliore, since eschatology has to do with the future. He says, "the doctrine of the last things, is a reflection on the Christian hope for the completion of human life in perfect fellowship with God and others and for the consummation of God purposes for all creation" (2004: 330). As hope reflects the purpose of creation, the perfect human fellowship with God, at the eschatological completion, "[t]he Spirit's action is eschatological action, enabling things to be themselves. The future is 'open' because the Holy Spirit is the one that enable things to become what they are made to be by relating them to the Father through the one who become incarnate," says Gunton (1998: 192). By this action of the Spirit, Allan Coppedge suggests that,

> "[t]he doctrine of creation comes to fruition in eschatology. Sometime in the future, God will bring history to a close and will re-create the world, forming a new heaven and a new earth (Is 65:17; 66:22; Rev 21:1). This new creation will be the context for the faithful ones who have been raised from the dead. Here they will enjoy life in the transform creation. The restoration of creation is the fulfilment of God's purpose in creation--- people enjoying life and love with other persons" (2007: 280).

The Spirit with respect to the (Godhead) i.e., the Father and the Son, is in dynamic communion in the trinitarian eternal being. What the Spirit does to the nature of the communion, according to Migliore is that,

> "[t]he Spirit is the uniting and consummating love of the Trinity, the energy of the life of communion, the gift of mutual love and friendship. The life of the triune God is not a closed circle but in the power of the Spirit is open to the world. Thinking and speaking of the uniting, bridging, and culminating activity of Spirit in the eternal triune life is not something that we dream up, not a mere projection of our wishes and fantasies. It is based on the revelation and experience of the Spirit as the gift of the love of God poured into our hearts, as the power of new community in Christ, as the comforter who unites us to God through Christ, as the promise of the completion of God's purposes," (Migliore, 2004: 231).

The Spirit provides the distinctiveness of the person and the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The distinctiveness is wrought or shaped, as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen says "[b]y the virtues of the resurrection, which confirmed Jesus' claim of having been sent by the Father, the divinity

of the Son who was raised by the Father through the power of the Spirit was established (Rom. 1:3-4)" (2014: 259).

2. 8. 5. The Triune Power of the Spirit and the Believers

The Old and the New Testament of the Bible affirms the power of the Spirit. One of the ways through which the triune power of the Spirit can be understood is through the work of salvation (to reconcile the world to God). Migliore states that "the Spirit is the agent of our second birth. Just as we are born from our natural mother's womb in our first birth, so we must be born anew by the power of the Spirit." (2004: 228). What does it mean? The Spirit enables human beings to believe in the gospel message, the acceptance of the gospel message brings about an admittance, which therefore unites (uniting) believers with Jesus Christ. It pours the love of God into believers' hearts, gives new life, helps believers in prayers, and liberates them to love God and their neighbours.

As to the conviction of sin, the Spirit convicts people of sin in the light of what has been revealed in the person and work of Christ (Macquarrie, 1977: 338). By believing in Christ, the concept of the second birth takes place. Triune power of the Spirit in the economic activity of salvation, leads to the "*creation of new life*… the Spirit is the agent of second birth: we must be born anew by the power of the Spirit" says Migliore, (2004: 228). It is by this power that Christians have a new life in Christ. In unity with Christ, which comes because of faith in Christ, believers are justified as well as sanctified; the process of being transformed into Christ-likeness. "The Spirit is the power of transformation from the old to the new, from enslavement to the power of sin and death to a new life in communion with God and others," (*ibid*), since having a new life in Christ comes from the Spirit. Transformation takes place in believers' lives, enabling them to become what God expects as they grow amid the challenges of sins.

The triune power of the Spirit, as synthesized by Migliore, empowers Christians in such a way that they "are enabled both to speak of God's mercy and righteousness and to act as co-workers with God in the renewal of creation," (*ibid*). Believers are, mystically joined in the communion of believers. The union that exists between the "body" of believers and what brings believers in Christ is based on the power of the Spirit. This is what Migliore calls, "incorporative work of the Spirit: 'Through the agency of the Spirit, believers are caught up, as it were, in the life of the Godhead, incorporated through the activity of the Spirit into the Son, given there the firm and assured status of the children of God by adoption, and enabled to join the Son, in ceaseless prayer of Abba to the father," (2004: 229).

With respect to believers, the Spirit works in the lives of the believers in which they are being transformed into becoming a unique community in the likeness of God's triune communion. According to Migliore's understanding of the Scripture, he argues that the Spirit creates a,

> "new community that unites strangers and even former enemies. It creates a community where formerly there were insuperable barriers.' There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3: 28). United in Christ by the power of the Spirit, we are one community; we are members of one body and mutually dependent on one another. By drawing us into new solidarity with Christ and each other, the Spirit remakes us as persons-in-community who no longer live as isolated, self-centered individuals" (*ibid*).

The nature of this unity is made possible because of the power of the Spirit that brings about freedom in God, and that creates a communion that disproves social strata, but is responsive to having the mind of Christ (Phil. 2: 5), as well as to living according to the law of Christ (Gal. 6: 2) and to loving God and others.

The community is, endowed with gifts for its necessary enablement and development (Gen .41: 38, Num. 24: 2). Macquarrie says, "[i]n the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, gave special powers to men, such as the ability to interpret dreams or to prophesy. Even in the New Testament, the Spirit might be supposed to 'possess' a man and cause him, let us say, to speak ecstatically 'with tongues'" (1977: 334 cf. 201, 221). Similarly, he continues by arguing that "when St. Paul discusses 'spiritual gifts' [1Cor. 12: 31] he does indeed still recognize the most ecstatic charismata, but the 'higher gifts' are personal, and the most excellent is love. These higher gifts, moreover, are not restricted to exceptional individuals, but are characteristic of the whole community of faith" (*ibid*: 334). This is to build and develop the community with necessary power.

The triune Spirit gives power to people to serve God appropriately (1 Cor. 12-14). This is made possible because the Spirit illuminates and teaches the believers what the mind of Christ is. By deciphering or interpreting the biblical message, the triune Spirit reveals God's revelation in this world.

The Spirit keeps hope thriving in believers' lives and in God's redemptive work all over creation. Regarding the future coming kingdom, the power of the Spirit in believers is to guarantee the future God is bringing as he promised. The Spirit sustains hope in believers' life as they await the fulfilment of the promises made. "The Spirit keeps hope alive and incites fresh visions of God's new world. Where there is no vision or hope nor discontent or protest against present injustice and evil, there is assuredly no presence of the Spirit in the biblical understanding of this term" says Macquarrie (*ibid*).

The life and the impact of the Christian community depends on their sensitivity and obedience to God's Spirit in order to be consistently relevant to the wider universe and to maintain their dignity as God-chosen ones.

2. 8. 6. Triune power in election or predestination

Election or predestination is one of the doctrines that specifically relates to God's sovereignty over all creation. This understanding is explained in some of the established creeds of the church, for instance, the Westminster Confession. It is the expressions of the church's beliefs, and position. Williams L. Rowe a philosopher of religion recounts the impression of this confession in his experience, he says,

> "[i]n many ways I was attracted to this idea. It seemed to express the majesty and power of God over all that he had created. It also led me to take an optimistic view of events in my own life and the lives of others, events which struck me as bad or unfortunate. For I now viewed them as planned by God before the creation of the world — thus they must serve some good purpose unknown to me" (2007:162).

This demonstrates that election or predestination speaks of God's plans, purpose, power, majesty, which has to do with his control of events over all that God has created. It is an interpretation through which God is seen to have planned events either good or bad before the creation of the world.

It is also about God's extraordinary choice - the choice of individuals, to the service of God, as his representatives here in the world or for the eternal hereafter. Stated differently, it (election and predestination) deals with the aspect of why some people are destined for salvation by believing in the gospel message while others are not. This is a contested theological issue that we will not be able to consider in full at this juncture. The determination for the choice of one from another, has generated various interpretations, difficulties, and contention; in the manner in which divine election or predestination is understood.

The difficulty that this doctrine creates is a problem regarding human freedom, human decision, and human choice (Rowe, 2007: 162-164 cf. Migliore, 2004: 88). If everything is predestined by God, it takes away from human responsibilities for every action, decision, and the choices they made. This interpretation of predestination also creates a problem with regards to the nature of God, as Migliore says, it made God to be "an arbitrary tyrant and an enemy of human freedom." (2004: 88). This matter arises, because of how the doctrine of election has been interpreted. Therefore, as he says the meaning of predestination can be distorted. Migliore argues that this is not what the intention of predestination entails, he notes that,

> "[a]ccording to the biblical witness, the electing grace of God is astonishing, but not dreadful. In the Bible election means that the God who freely chose Israel as covenant partner and who freely established a new covenant in Jesus Christ with Jew and Gentile alike is the God of free grace. Just as in the Old Testament Israel is chosen to be God's people not because of their power or virtue but solely by God's freely given love (Deut. 7: 7-8), so in the New Testament the favor of God is surprisingly directed to sinners, the poor, and the outcast. The mystery of God's will is that in Jesus Christ, God chooses to be freely gracious to both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 11: 25-36). Even the faith by which this grace is received is considered a free gift of God (Eph. 2: 8). Thus the biblical theme of election is doxological; it praises the free grace of God as the only basis of creation, reconciliation, and redemption: 'God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love' (Eph. 1: 4)," (2004: 88).

Biblical election is an inseparable attribute of the generous unmerited grace of God, where it expresses God's love and action made accessible to all in Jesus Christ. God's love and action open a door into God's embrace to the Jew and Gentile, the poor, the outcasts, and sinners. However, the objective of the doctrine of election or predestination has been miscomprehended as Migliore says, the

> "desire to explain why some hearers accept why others reject the gospel message (Augustine), the determination to follow rigorously what appeared to be the logical implications of God's omnipotence and providential governance of the world (Aquinas); the insistence that the righteousness of God is evidenced in the damnation of the reprobate just as God's mercy is displayed in the salvation of the elect (Westminster Confession)" (2004: 88. cf. Macquarrie, 1977: 341; Rowe, 2007: 162).

The [mis]interpretation of election as it has been stated above, leads to endless speculations. Migliore argues for a rethink of the doctrine of predestination and proposes that election or predestination ought to be understood from a Trinitarian standpoint (2004: 87). Migliore therefore asserts that "[w]ithin a trinitarian context, however, the doctrine of election has one central purpose: it declares that all of the works of God —creation, reconciliation, and redemption — have their beginning and goal in the free grace of God made known supremely in Jesus Christ. It affirms that the triune God who lives eternally in communion graciously wills to include others in that communion," (2004: 88). He further presents four affirmations that the doctrine of election includes:

1. *The subject of election is the triune God*. This affirms that the triune God is the being responsible for election. Migliore describes and also explains how the triune is involved. He describes what election means, and goes on to say how it happens. He says,

> "[e]lection means that God chooses to share with others God's life in communion. God's decision to be God for us and with us, to come to us in the superabundant grace (Rom. 5:20) of Jesus Christ and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, is no divine whim or afterthought. It represents God's primary intension from all eternity. It is the very foundation and starting point of all the works of God. Because election is God's eternal and irrevocable decision to be God for the world, the doctrine of election is appropriately included in the doctrine of God" (*ibid*: 89).

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Hence, the emphasis is that God elects in a manner which is not an abuse of God's power.

2. *Our knowledge of election has no other basis than the unfathomable love of God for the world in Jesus Christ that we share in communion of the Holy Spirit.* According to Migliore, God's election is based on his love for the world. He writes that,

> "[h]aving been chosen in Christ 'before the foundation of the world,' we know that we have no claim on God, that our salvation depends solely on God's grace, and that we can live in the confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:39). Moreover, because the subject of election is the triune God who loves in freedom, and because in Christ we are called to freedom (Gal. 5:13) and given the Spirit of freedom (2 Cor. 3:17), we know that God's election, far from negating human freedom, intends our free service of God and our glad participation in the new life of communion with God and others. In addition, because God desires that everyone be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and commissions the church to proclaim the gospel to all peoples (Matt. 28: 19), we know that we must not set any a priori limits to the electing grace of God" (*ibid*; cf. 126).

The generosity of the free grace of the Triune act of election does not deny or suppress human freedom, though human freedom can be a multifaceted subject. Terrance Tiessen (2000) contends that because there are different models of interpretation, each model defined it differently[16]. It is important to note that human freedom is relevant in the aspect of election or predestination.

3. *The goal of election is the creation of a people of God and not simply the salvation of solitary individuals or the privileging of particular nations or ethnic groups.* For Migliore the purpose of electing grace is to have a communion of God's people, this is "to open human beings to the blessings and responsibilities of life in the new community of God's own making. Election is the expression of God's will to create a community that serves and glorifies God" (2004: 89).

This is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit and the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. The invitation to participate in God's communion is made possible. The purpose of the triune free grace of God, made known in Christ Jesus (as mentioned in the above quotation), does not only seek to include others to partake in the eternal communion with God. Rather, Migliore believes "God's electing grace aims to open human beings to the blessings and responsibilities of life in the new community of God's own making. Election is the expression of God's will to create a community that serves and glorifies God" (2004: 89. cf. Macquarrie, 1977: 341). This, being the situation, the works of God in creation, reconciliation or

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[16] For further discourse see his book *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the?* (2000).

redemption, are blocks for reciprocal response based on the generosity of God's love, free will and grace, and as such "the doctrine of election must have a place not only in the doctrine of God but also in the doctrine of Christian life and the vocation of the Christian community," says Migliore. (2004: 90).

4. *The electing grace of God is accompanied by the righteous judgement of God but these are not related like two parallel lines as has been suggested in many traditional doctrines of double predestination.* From the above affirmation, Migliore argues how God's judgement is to be understood in the context of the election. This is noticeable as he argues that "in the biblical witness election and rejection are not timeless divine decisions and are not independent tracks of the divine purpose. Rather, God's judgement operates in the service of God's gracious will. If this is the case, we must not separate God's grace and justice, and certainly must not posit an eternal decree of rejection alongside God's electing grace" (*ibid*: 90). This is the reason that he argues in accordance with his understanding of scripture:

> "[t]his is the clear teaching of Romans 9-11, the locus classicus of the biblical understanding of the relationship of grace and judgement, election and rejection. In this passage, the apostle Paul does not teach that some human beings (Jews) are eternally rejected while others (Christians) are eternally elected by God. Nor does he contend that glad and faithful human response to God's free grace is a matter of indifference since in the end all will be saved. Rather, his point is that God's mercy is a free gift (Rom. 9:18) and that God judges human sins and unfaithfulness. At the same time, God's judgement, while always serious, is not necessarily final, for God wills to have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32). If any are excluded from the community of grace at the end. It is because they have persisted in opposition to God's grace, not because they were excluded before the foundation of the world (cf. Matt. 25: 34, 41)" (*ibid*).

This entails that God does not restrict human beings from exercising the freedom of their will. Rather, exercising this freedom comes with responsibilities. No one is fundamentally excluded. Removing restrictions to the electing grace of God, "creatures are given space and time to develop their own existence and to respond freely to the love of God. God's wisdom is exercised both in righteous judgement and in patient love," Migliore concluded (2004: 86, 127 cf. Macquarrie, 1977: 337).

2.9. Conclusion

The biblical revelation of God in the Christian tradition is trinitarian in nature, this tends to be a mystery of God's disclosure. The biblical witness expresses the mystery of God's disclosure in the manifestation of God in the loving activity of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to all creation. Therefore, the biblical motif of God's power is to be understood from Trinitarian perspective.

CHAPTER THREE - MIGLIORE: ON GOD'S POWER

3. 1. Introduction

This chapter focusses on God's power in Christian theology by engaging the revised edition of Daniel L. Migliore's book, *The Power of God and the gods of power.* The chapter follows the sequence in Migliore's work. It starts off by introducing the question of the power and powerlessness. What follows after that is how the images of power have been projected in American culture. In other words, it is how a given culture and context views God's power. Subsequently, the biblical witness regarding God's power is discussed. Then we shall consider divine power in the Church's experience, then, the power of God in the Trinitarian understanding will be analysed. Finally we will conclude with a Christian dialogue on the power of God.

Both God's power and who God is best understood to be, in the light of the biblical witness, are crucial points of theological reflection. The biblical and theological witness in the preceding chapter describes God as triune. In the same vein, it has introduced God's power as triune power, setting the scene in introducing what the present chapter would be concentrating on.

As this book *"The Power of God and the gods"* primarily focuses on God's power as a subject for theological reflection, Clint Le Bruyns, a reviewer of the book in the Journal of Reformed Theology, commented that "[t]he question of power has arguably received limited theological attention in contemporary discourse. This is both ironic and perplexing given the fact of various dramatic changes and events during recent decades". He argues that "Daniel Migliore contends that the nature and meaning power demands renewed exploration for any hope for peace in the world", 4 (2010) 145-168. This reflection by Le Bruyns introduces the inquiry of the question of power.

3. 2. The Question of Power.

3. 2. 1. Power and powerlessness

To understand what power is, Migliore believes we should focus on life experiences as significant sources towards gaining a deeper or fuller understanding of it. Human beings at one point or the other experience the reality of power and powerlessness, as such, he begins by analysing how human experiences of power and powerlessness can give us some insights into the notion of power. These experiences either good or bad, impact, inform, influence, and shape

people's views not only on other diverse issues, but also influences the understanding of divine power.

Migliore claims that power from the human perspective, expresses the human sense of control, or the ability to control or to manage one's life and circumstances. He affirms that,

> "[e]very human being, indeed every living creature, possesses and exercises power to some degree. We exercise power in everything we do, even in the smallest step we take. To be human is to have some power, to be able to do something, to reach a goal, to make a difference in the world. There is no life where there is no power. Possession and exercise of power is a necessity of life," (2008: 3).

The above interpretation suggests that human beings have power. This power gives them a sense of control to carry on with life, it enables them to improve and impact their significant other, environment. In this case power is important, needed, and beneficial.

Furthermore, he says "[t]he question of God is not limited to a particular type of experience or to a single sphere of existence. It may be asked when we marvel at the beauty of life, or when we grieve at the loss of life. It may arise at the birth of a child, or at the *death* of a child. It may take the form of a cry of thanksgiving for the goodness of life, or of a cry that comes, as the psalmist says, 'out of the depths' (Ps. 130: 1)" (*ibid*: 3).

It encourages and fosters development, interdependence and scientific advancement to human improvement. Migliore believes that,

> "[p]ower is necessary to act, to grow, to create, to help shape our own lives and the world around us. At the same time, when power is used to enlarge the self at the expense of others, when it is exercised oppressively rather than cooperatively, it brings ruin and misery to all dimensions of life. As already noted, the arrogant assertion and misuse of power is a symptom of what the Bible calls sin. Human sin, and the misuse of power that accompanies it, takes both personal and institutional forms, and it has consequences for the whole creation (*ibid*: 7).

As beneficial as power is, Migliore believes that on the one hand power can be destructive. It is destructive because once power is misused it becomes a threat in human relationships, to natural resources and "in every social and political order" (*ibid*: 5 cf. 129).

Migliore is of the view that at some point human beings experience what he describes as the misery of powerlessness or human limitation, or helplessness. Human suffering because of human limitation takes place either due to ill health, economic pressure, natural or ecological disaster (2008: 1-4). The sense of helplessness or weakness that powerlessness bears, not only leaves people incapacitated, but it indicates the manifestation of human "limits" (*ibid*: 3, 6-7) which similarly raises a series of reflections, questions, because of their experiences.

Human experiences seem to be the catalyst that coordinates, influences, and determines human responses to power and powerlessness. Migliore argues, "[i]t is in our experiences of power

and powerlessness that the question of God arises. Even if unspoken or neglected for long periods of time, this question never entirely dies out. That is because it is not a purely academic but a profoundly practical question. It arises not at the periphery but at the very center of human life," (*ibid*: 2).

Power and powerlessness are inclined to be a shared phenomenon (experience) at one point or the other in human existence. Additionally, the actuality of power and powerlessness is equally intense and dominant to "the world of impersonal constellation networks of power, [17]" says Migliore, (2008: 5). Walter Wink an American biblical scholar would call this the "[d]omination system" (1999: 39). What happens here is that, institutional (i.e. Political, multinational economic corporations, or structures) systems, lean towards contending or controlling the cultural, social, economic, and political sphere of a given nation for the purpose of influencing and dominating the other as a means of achievement (cf. Migliore, 2008: 5; Wink, 1999: 39).

Migliore argues that the reality of power and powerlessness is also a reality in ecological biospheres. The natural environment has been controlled by human beings for their purposes. The technique through which the environment has been controlled is through "science and technology" (*ibid*: 6). The environment, and its productivity has been maximally improved in considerable ways by using science and technology, and forces of nature have also been controlled through this means (*ibid*). This means that science and technology have been critical in ecological conservation.

Nevertheless, science and technology have equally been detrimental to the environment. The ecosystem has also been affected due to the activities associated with these technologies such as disposal of industrial waste. The destructive impact of the unregulated human activities associated with development, science and technology with the natural environment has brought about an ecological crisis that has a global impact that until now is yet to be fully understood. On the other hand, the forces of nature: hurricanes, tsunamis are natural disasters that have destroyed and have rendered the environment and human ability powerless, helpless, weak and pathetic, (Migliore, 2008: 6-7; cf. Marais, 2011: 1-3).

Consequently, power and powerlessness can have constructive as well as destructive impacts on human existence, impersonal constellations and the natural environment. The impact

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[17] Impersonal power networks include other sources of power, such as "the principalities and powers" Migliore, 2008:5 cf. Wink, 1999: 39.

depends either on the use or on the abuse of power vested on those responsible. This inference, it leads to the question of the notion of ultimate power which will be discussed in the section that follows.

3. 2. 2. The Question of Ultimate Power

Power and powerlessness are realistic constituents of human existence. Their impact has a consequential effect on human existence, the ecological environment and impersonal constellations. Most often when the question of God's power is probed, it is done either because there is a problem or its arises because there is a need for solutions. Daniel Migliore argues that at the heart of it is "[i]f the question of God and God's power arises in the context of our everyday experiences of power and powerlessness, in its deepest form the question of God is the question of the nature of ultimate power" (2008: 8). The question of ultimate power tends to be a question which inquires about "[w]hat power is finally sovereign in our world and how is it described?" (*ibid*: 9). The fundamental issues the inquiry raises is a focus on what is acknowledged as supreme, and what our allegiance is given to. This background reflects that "[w]hatever we look to as the ultimate power capable of giving our lives meaning and fulfillment is our God," (*ibid*: 10). Speaking of God here refers to whatever is looked up to for all good; whatever is capable that gives meaning and fulfilment; whatever we trust and believe with all our hearts and have confidence and faith becomes our God (*ibid*). This may be God (with a capital letter) or god (with small letter). Daniel Migliore, uses Luther's affirmation in recounting this by saying,

> "that we may in fact have a 'god' even when we do not recognize this to be the case. On the theoretical level, we may ignore or deny the reality of God. But in actual life practice, we demonstrate otherwise. However enlightened, agnostic, or even atheistic we may be in relation to traditional beliefs about God, we nevertheless have something that functions in our life as a god. We recognize in practice one of the powers within us or outside us as our ultimate good. We all have, in Tillich's words, our 'ultimate concern.' We all give our heart to something, allow something to become our highest value, our highest priority in life. We may not consciously acknowledge that we have god in this sense, but the fact is evident from our practical decisions of our way of life (*ibid*: 10).

The acknowledgement of ultimate power is consciously or unconsciously inclined to whatever meets the assumed criteria or the belief system. As identified by Migliore, Christians believe in an ultimate power called God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ, (1 Cor. 1: 25). Jesus Christ, being the revelation of the power of God, exercises his power in his servant ministry and finally on his cross and in his resurrection.

According to Paul, the power of God is at work in the 'weakness of the cross' (V. 23). The gospel of the crucified Lord is, paradoxically, the 'power of God unto salvation' (Rom 1: 16)

when one entrusts oneself to the true God, whose strange power is manifest even in the weakness of the cross, (2008: 13; 11; 19 cf. 127-130).

As stated by Migliore, what it means to believe in God is to trust in the power that has created and rules the world. It is confidence in the power that governs our lives and guides the course of history. It is reliant on the power worthy to judge us and able to save us from our bondage to the power of sin and death. It is committed to the power that rightfully claims our worship and unconditional allegiance (*ibid*: 9).

Others, see ultimate power in human institutions, and some in human acumen and creativity. It is seen also "in nuclear weapons and laser beams, in the huge oil and pharmaceutical companies, in space technology and gross national product, in the mass media, and superstar of popular culture," as seen and enumerated by Migliore (*ibid*: 13). The understanding of ultimate power leads to the images of God's power

3. 3. Migliore on Images of God's Power

Images create imagination towards understanding issues. Various kinds of images and symbols have been used to describe God's power. It has been described by way of using various kinds of images and symbols. This approach, suggests Migliore, "can help us to see things that we did not see before" (*ibid*: 19). Images and symbols serve as a means of enlightenment that empowers human knowledge and understanding. Migliore arguably emphasizes the necessity of having accurate knowledge, using Calvin's concept, which emphasizes the essence of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. Migliore believes how this knowledge is perceived would consistently reflect the understanding of the image of God's power. The symbiotic relationship between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves means they are inseparable. This is because one "significantly influences the other... A distorted understanding of God will be accompanied by a distorted understanding of ourselves, and a flawed understanding of ourselves will be accompanied by a flawed understanding of God," (2008: 17, cf. Migliore, 2004: 64), for what informs and influences, human understanding has a significant impact on its interpretation. Migliore continues that,

> "[a]ll knowledge of God, like other kinds of knowledge is colored by our personal interests or those of the group to which we belong. We usually have no difficulty seeing this process at work in other people. We readily note how their way of thinking of God seems comfortably tailored to their own benefit. More difficult to detect, however, are the ways in which our own thinking and acting, in matters of religion or otherwise, are influenced by our own economic and social interests or those of our community…human interests will affect our thinking and speaking about God. Moses believed that God wanted the Hebrew slaves in Egypt to go free. Pharaoh clearly thought otherwise. Our knowledge of God –and in particular our understanding

of divine power— is often influenced by our special interest, whether personal, economic, or political. Theology that fails to take this fact into account is neither serious nor honest; to paraphrase Calvin, our self-centered, class-centered, and nation-centered interests are a perpetual source of idols" (*ibid*: 22).

The previous line of reasoning suggests that every belief in and knowledge of God is guided and influenced by certain factors, so the likelihood of drifting away from 'correct' knowledge is great. How can the church run away from such pressure? Migliore argues that "[i]f we speak of Jesus Christ as *the* image of God, and speak of ourselves as created in this image, we are saying that all understandings, all images of God and of ourselves are to be measured finally by Jesus" (*ibid*: 21). The reason that Jesus is the source of reference is because any knowledge of God apart from Christ is influenced by personal interest.

Having a balanced understanding of the image of God leads to an understanding of the true nature of who God is. We must not make God what we think, as the probability is that we may then be likely to make God in the image of what we want, rather than who God truly is. As Migliore explains "[w]e end up imaging God in a way that suits our own wants and interests. We project ourselves onto a reality that we call God, but what we call God is only our mirror image. We talk of God, but we are really talking about ourselves. The human imagination is extraordinarily skilled in making God look, think and act just like us… We think of God as a mirror image of our sinful selves: God confirms our ideals, endorses our values, and defends our way of life" (*ibid*: 22).

Since the knowledge of God and of ourselves is so significant, to get an appropriate perspective of the knowledge of God and of ourselves, it must be identified from an unswerving source, as argued by Migliore: "we must receive wisdom from beyond ourselves," (*ibid*: 19). According to him this wisdom is a,

> "revelation, what God does to disclose himself and his will. Reliable knowledge of God must be based not on our own ideas of who or what God is but on God's self-revelation. Christians turn to the Bible as the primary witness to this revelation. What they find there are not just historical facts and religious poetry but witness to God's gracious covenant with the people of Israel that culminates in God's personal presence and activity in Jesus Christ for the reconciliation and redemption of the world. This witness of the Bible to God's self-revelation in Christ is regulative for the faith and life of the church" (*ibid*).

It is argued, by Migliore's that the Bible is the basis through which reliable knowledge for both the knowledge of God and human knowledge can be derived. God chose human mediums as the channel and means through which God's revelatory message has been revealed. Therefore, "Christians hold that these biblical witnesses, in all their humanity, are used by God to point to God's own self-revelation. The biblical witnesses themselves are not the revelation; they are

the primary witnesses to the revelation. They are servants of the revelation who are used by the Spirit of God to point to the light of God that shines above all in the face of Jesus Christ" (*ibid*).

3. 3. 1. Images of Transmission

Speaking on the images of transmission, Migliore states that the biblical writers in their communication used different anthropomorphic images and metaphors familiar to them to bear witness to God. Analogical images, used for portraying God, are from the world of nature, human relationships and vocations such as the politics to give the image of God and God's activities (*ibid*: 20). As relevant as the use of anthropomorphic images may have been in biblical communication, anthropomorphism is not acceptable to all. It seems that despite the challenges and "concern" for the use of anthropomorphism by some Migliore believes "it is clear that all language about God, including the language of the Bible, involves the exercise of human imagination. In our language about God images, similes and metaphors abound. The parables of Jesus often begin. 'The kingdom of God is like…'" (*ibid*). He maintains that two things are essentially noteworthy regarding anthropomorphisms:

First, it is God's identification with humanity. It "is the conviction that in Jesus of Nazareth God has freely and graciously entered into human life as one of us. In the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has revealed who God is and what God is really like" (*ibid*). It makes God understandable in that God is in close proximity in relation to human experience. These images communicate great mysteries in accessible human language "Jesus is the Word of God become flesh" (John 1: 14); "God with us" (Matt. 1: 23); "God's only son given for salvation" (John, 3: 16); "perfect image of the invisible God" (Col. 1: 15). What it thus communicates is what God is really like in relation to humanity. The relationship seems to be based on the biblical witness of human beings being created in his image.

The second explanation, as Migliore says is, that Christians believe regarding the discourse of God in personal terms is appropriately based on the belief that human beings have been created in the "image of God" (Gen. 1: 27) (*ibid*: 21). It should be noted that being created in the image of God "does not mean… a physical resemblance to God." Nor does it suggest "its meaning to be found primarily in the fact that humans are free, rational creatures and thus bear the marks of the living God who knows and wills… to say that human beings are created in the image of God is to say that we are made for a life in communion with God and one another. Even as God loves us and enters into relationship with us, so human beings reflect or 'image' God when

they love God and their neighbour. Because we are sinners, our true humanity in the image of God has been defaced, and we see its true contours only in the humanity of Jesus Christ" (*ibid*).

3. 3. 2. Cultural Images of God's Power.

Cultural images of God's power, in Migliore's work, explain how American popular culture in the contemporary era interprets the power of God. Popular culture has not only described the conceptual belief in God's divine power; it defines what God's power ought to be. This assumption has influenced and shaped by popular perception and thinking. Migliore, believes this understanding is directed by the way God is understood, which in turn influences the human understanding of human power. He enumerates three ways in which the image of God's divine power is expressed specifically in contemporary American culture. Even though our cultural contexts may differ, we can learn some things from the study of these cultural expressions:

Sheer Almightiness: this is an image where American popular culture describes God's power by way of images of superhero. This is the way the media depicts power (*ibid*: 24). A superhero in, popular parlance, displays what is popularly found in the media, Migliore states that for example the,

> "comic books, video games and films, …All of these superheroes are mighty defenders of justice, law, and order. Their wide appeal rests on their superhuman power that enables them to conquer forces of evil in the world. The world is out of joint, and someone must set it right. In their righteous crusades, the superheroes do not hesitate to use violence against violence. Violence in the cause of righteousness is unavoidable, and the superheroes employ it without compunction to redeem a world of peril," (*ibid*: 24 cf. Wink 1999: 45).

This interpretation perceives God to be the mighty defender, conqueror and fixer of the world's problems. The view's precedence is in God's solving ability. The concern and the obligation of the superhero is therefore to step in and provide solutions to human problems at whatever cost, regardless of the means. The representative image of a superhero echoes what God's divine power should be, and how it ought to be according to contemporary America culture. The superhero figure serves as a point of reference set up in the media as the operating standard for God.

Onward analysis of the image of God's power in the light of the myths of superhero reflect a divine power whose action is to triumph over every adversity. This reflection according to Migliore means that "God is the almighty warrior, the almighty vindicator, the almighty guardian. God's power is pure omnipotence. True divinity is known by its capacity to deliver

a knockout to every opposition," (*ibid*: 24). God's power as is primarily associated with God's action. The image of God's power from American popular culture suggests that the drive for devotion and worship towards God depends on the God's abilities at solving problems. With this view Migliore analyses the nature of such worship by saying that,

> "[i]f we are moved to worship such a God, it is not primarily because of the divine goodness or beneficence but because the power that this God wields gets the job done with dispatch and by whatever means necessary. The American superhero is a miniature replica of the almighty God who is able to blow away all opposition. The superhero/God is our ideal self made after the image of what we assume the omnipotence of God to be like, the redeemer 'who has dropped the ineffectual baggage of the sermon on the Mount'" (*ibid*: 25).

The implication of this interpretation on the above position is that divine power is perceived from a one-sided standpoint. God will always triumph because of the power God (frequently 'he') exerts. This supposition, may stimulate false hope in the hearts of people. In the same vein, worship can potentially be done with wrong motives, because when the superhero fails or does not meet the required expectations disappointment becomes an unavoidable experience, and people's allegiance and devotion to God could be affected.

Sheer almightiness, equally gives a series of meanings, when associated with leadership, as stated by Migliore, when it is compared with "an employer, government official, religious leader" (2008: 25) it takes a different form of a domineering power. When viewed as "enshrined in the traditional image of God as 'father', God is the great patriarch, lording it over the lesser members of the family tribe… this patriarchal image is the religious support for the image of the authoritarian power in all spheres of life – in education, church, business, and politics" (*ibid*: 25).

According to Migliore "[s]ome contemporary theologians contend that the idea of divine power as sheer almightiness is enshrined in the traditional image of God as '"father"'. (*ibid*). How this sheer almightiness has been understood and interpreted has again raised concerns, Migliore articulates the reason for the concern particularly for those who have negative experiences of such expressions of power. It could be that they would have a negative perception of God in this sense, e.g. for those who were abused in childhood such a view could become an image to be rebelled against rather than the symbol of a caring and gracious God (*ibid*: 26). The biblical witness of the prodigal son, illustrates God's fatherhood is different to human fatherhood. He is a forgiving father who does not hold a grudge when the wayward son returns. The "parable portrays God as father in a way that is far removed from the understanding of father as a tyrannical or abusive figure," (*ibid*). In Scripture God as father is described as merciful (Luke,

6: 36), he gives good gifts to his children (Matt. 7: 11), and is trustworthy in life and in death (Luke, 23: 46). The New Testament's designation of God as father bursts wide open our common understanding and usage of the term (*ibid*).

The challenge, which emerges from such an observation, is that the existence of negative experiences can lead to negative perceptions of God. However, the biblical witness gives a different meaning to the usage of a father. It is a different paradigm that suggests that the image of the father should not be discarded. Daniel Migliore believes, the image of God as a father should be employed and used. Nonetheless, he claims that "the image must be purified of its patriarchal connotations and interpreted in the light of gospel of Jesus Christ" (*ibid*: 26). This leads to the next description of God's power in American culture, which, according to Migliore is captive power.

Captive Power: this image of power in American popular culture represents, a kind of power, that is constantly available and at human disposal and ready to do whatever it is asked to do. It is a sort of power, that can be controlled at will by human beings. The description of this image is "a power who is useful to us and is at our beck and call. God is like Santa Claus. He comes on schedule and gives us what we want," (*ibid*: 27). It is the manipulation and the use of God or God's name for human benefit. Humans are inclined to be the determining factor through which God acts. This model of power is interpreted in some of the following forms below:

1. **In Business Partnership**: This power is described as reciprocal power. God and God's power is understood from the perspective of "business partners" (*ibid*: 27). As business partners, reciprocity and interdependent relationship becomes the determinant factor in which both parties stand to gain, it is interpreted by Migliore that when you "do something for God, and God will do something for us" (*ibid*). It suggests that human beings relate to God in an exchange of mutual services or by means of fulfilling certain conditions. Human effort, good deeds, and religious performances guarantee God's answer. "The repayment may come in the form of happiness and success in the present; or it may be postponed to another life after death," (*ibid*). It suggests that human beings have the capacity to control God's power to get what they want once certain conditions are met.

2. Ask and receive phenomenon: This is an additional form of representation of the model of captive power exemplified by the phenomenon of "ask and receive." The manifestation of God's power is based on asking God for special favour or concession through prayers where one will receive whatsoever he/she asks for. Migliore contends that God in this case is a captive

God who is viewed as a magician. He goes on to say "[t]he captive God also appears under the guise of a magician who is asked to pull all sorts of rabbits out of the hat for our benefit. If you want a promotion at work, or a new car, or a winning ticket in the lottery, just ask the great magician and you will receive your wish" (*ibid*: 27).

With this perception of power, God is made to be the means of gratifying human needs; what we so desire raises the question of who God is? How do we see God? Migliore further points out that Captive power portrays that God does not govern us; *we* control God. The supposition here is that all power can be manipulated if one is clever enough, and God happens to be that power which, if properly approached can get us whatever we want especially if we are in a jam (*ibid*: 27).

The above belief centres on human manipulation of God or the usage of God, or the act of using the name of God for self-interested purposes (like in the political domain), which has immersed itself with this phenomenon. As stated by Migliore this way of using power can be seen in the following conduct,

> "[w]hen the name of God is invoked to provide a religious halo to a burst of nationalism, or a political campaign, or a business venture, God is being 'used.' God is used by the politician or the political party that drums up financial support by peppering its advertisements with religious-sounding slogans. God is used by the television preacher who promises healing for an infirmity if the viewer will only say a little prayer and send in a cash contribution" (*ibid*: 28).

Captive power does seem to unveil the selfishness of human nature and makes the relevance of God become the means to a human self-gratification project. With this power, biblical witness turns into personal manipulation.

3. **An image of ineptness or indifference**. The image of ineptness, according to Migliore, in the popular culture sees God's power as ineffective and insignificant (*ibid*: 29). Comparted to the realistic "situation that affects the world," where cases of violence, political instability, wars, and other human complications dominate the headlines of the news, it shows the reasons that "things are not going as they should". God is perceived to be overwhelmed, though he "is doing the best he can with an impossible job". American popular culture sees God as an incapable master, an "underachiever" (*ibid*: 30 cf. Geisler & Brooks, 2013: 34-35; González, 2008: 192-195; Kurtz, 1995: 153). The image of ineptness or indifference could further be spelled out in the following way, God is detached from the creation, he lives in seclusion and has no connection whatsoever with creation. The creation is left on its own for its nourishment and survival. "The power of God is here imagined as above and outside the sphere of our

existence, unconnected with worldly events and history. God is entirely free from the suffering and misery of the world. God is uninvolved and unconcerned," (*ibid*). The grounds for God's indifference could not be due to distance or seclusion, but seems to be that he is "unmoved" (*ibid*) by the world's situation. Or, as the deist would believe, "God is too great and too exalted to be intimately involved with day to day affairs of the world" (*ibid*). If this were the case, how would people feel about their experiences? What is the essence of the creation? Could it be that God is too great as the deists would believe and too exalted to be intimately involved with the day-to-day affairs of the world? These questions, introduce Migliore's interpretation, of the biblical witness of God's power. In particular, he addresses what the biblical witness says in relation to the questions raised above.

3. 4. Biblical Witness to God's Power

A consistent affirmation of God's power runs through the biblical text from Genesis to Revelation. The question is how does the Bible interprets God's divine power? In response to this question, Migliore submits that the appropriate technique to comprehend God's power from the Christian perspective is to first and foremost inquire what the Bible teaches. Ironically, there is no specific method on how to read the Bible (2008: 37). The challenge this poses, has resulted in various means have been used. The question is, what constitutes a good and responsible reading of the Bible? It is advocated by Migliore that a reliable reading "would be a reading that attends closely to the particularity of the biblical witness. It would be a reading that lets the Bible tell in its own way the story of God's dealings with the people of Israel and God's presence in Jesus Christ for the reconciliation of the world" (*ibid*: 39).

The particularity of the biblical witness shows that the Bible bears witness to God's power, as seen in a variety of ways, from the general to the specific. At the outset Migliore claims that

> "Israel shared many beliefs about God with its neighbours of the ancient Near East. Like them, Israel could associate God's power with phenomena of storm, lightning and thunder. Like them, Israel could speak of God's power in the awesome vitality of nature and in the fertility of plants, animals and human beings. Israel too, could praise the power of the warrior God and declare God's superiority in battle" (*ibid*: 42).

As much as these phenomena serve as indices for identifying God's power, it is not limited to such occurrences. This leads us to a consideration of the way in which God's power is seen in the Old Testament.

3. 4. 1. The Biblical Witness of God's Power in the Old Testament

The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) expresses God's power as a liberating power (Ex. 20: 2; Deut. 26: 5-9). God's works of liberation are seen in the liberation of the disadvantaged and oppressed people. Emancipation changes and empowers individuals from the shackles of domination that infringes upon the dignity of humanity. The Exodus experience unveils the way in which God sees those who are suffering. God's power is distinguished, for the reason that liberation brings freedom from bondage. Migliore says, "[t]he power of God is sung and celebrated by Israel first and foremost in the story of *God's surprising liberation of a poor and oppressed people*. The core confession of the Old Testament— 'The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand' (Deut. 26: 5-9)," (*ibid*: 43).

Another dimension in which the biblical witness articulates divine power is that "the power of God is not only liberating; it also *demands justice and creates order*. It is both a power that grants freedom to those in bondage and a power that calls for justice on the earth," (*ibid*: 43). Justice is a responsibility, of what God demands on the part of those that have been liberated. It is necessary that they are to establish a sense of fairness where equality would reign, and the cause of the poor and the needy would not be neglected, for it is the root of "the covenant God" (*ibid*). It embedded a responsibility to ensure that fair-mindedness continues progressively, (Jer. 22: 16; Mic. 6: 8).

Migliore speaks of the merciful power and steadfast love (*hesed*) of God (*ibid*: 44). The steadfast love and mercifulness of God illustrates the manifestation of God's unwavering love, care, compassion and concern for the vulnerable. These are people who are poor, weak and easily abused widows, orphans, and strangers in the land. "God's steadfast love reaches out to people in their sin, in their forgetfulness of the freedom bestowed on them, and their violation of justice demanded of them. Unlike other gods, the God of Israel shows power in form of mercy and forgiveness" (*ibid*: 45).

The above discussion describes God as liberating, justice-making and compassionate. Migliore however, underlined that there are also violent writings in the biblical text (*ibid*: 46), such as 1 Sam. 15: 3 and Ps. 137: 9 were men, women, children and animals were ordered to be killed. How can such texts be reconciled with a liberating, justice-making, and compassionate God? The way to understand it, as Migliore argues, is to admit that there are "difficult texts" (*ibid*). Furthermore, he reiterated that, "we have to remember that we are addressed by God through the Bible as a whole and not piecemeal through isolated texts. If there are texts of violence in

the Bible, there are also texts that speak against the way of violence and even look forward to a time when violence will be removed from God's creation" (*ibid*: 47).

The fact that such texts (violent texts) exist, Migliore emphasizes, should not be given a "spiritual interpretation". Rather he affirms that we "have a responsibility to understand these difficult biblical passages, like all biblical texts, in their historical contexts. In what circumstances were these texts composed and what did they intend to say to their original readers or hearers? Is the anguished cry for justice also to be heard in these texts?" (*ibid*: 46) Migliore believes that hermeneutical caution needs to be taken, "simply because certain events are reported in the Bible does not mean we are required to endorse them uncritically. In his anger and grief over the savage treatment of children of his own people, the psalmist has given in to the desire for revenge and retaliation. It is not said, however, that God approves of this attitude, and it is not presented as an ethical norm to guide our lives" (*ibid*: 46).

In comparison with the psalmist, the human tendency to "violence and brutality that the modern reader cannot claim to be free of" (*ibid*: 47). The text calls for an evaluation for the challenges that are seen in our contemporary society.

3. 4. 2. The Biblical Witness of the God's Power in the New Testament

In the previous sub-heading, God's power was considered from the perspective of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the gospels and the epistles relate God's power in the person of Jesus Christ. Migliore, analysing this standpoint affirms that the New Testament speaks of Jesus Christ with the biblical identification which ascribed to him as,

> "'God's own Son', 'God with us', 'the eternal Word of God made human' (John 1:14), 'the image of invisible God' (Col. 1: 15) 'the power and wisdom' (I Cor. 1: 24). If the key image of God in the Old Testament are the events of Exodus, the key image of God and God's power in the New Testament is in a person, Jesus of Nazareth - what he does, what he suffers, what comes of his life" (*ibid*: 53).

He again articulates, "amid this diversity, there are common elements in the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ as the definitive revelation and the personal embodiment of the reconciling power of God" (*ibid*: 48). The God Jesus proclaims is the "very same God who liberated Israel from the bondage, gave the law to Moses, and spoke through the prophets. The God and the father of Jesus Christ is none other than the God praised by Israel," (*ibid*: 48). Jesus Christ explains the power of God in the New Testament in the following ways:

God's power is a transforming power. The transforming, renewing power of God is revealed in and through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the disclosure of the transforming power of God is

through Jesus' teaching and ministry. He teaches with astonishing authority (Mark, 1: 22), he proclaims good news to the poor (Luke, 6: 20), announces the long –awaited day of liberation to those in bondage (Luke, 4: 18-19), forgives sins on God's behalf (Mark, 2: 1-12) and through his deeds, he does more. In the power of the Spirit, he casts out demons (Mark, 1: 27), heals the sick (Mark, 1: 30-31) and raises the dead (John, 11: 38-44). Jesus demonstrated that God's reign is gracious, just, filled with boundless goodness, mercy and forgiveness to all creation. God's grace and justice in relation to the creation makes him send "rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5: 45), feed the birds of the air and adorn the lilies of the fields (Matt. 6: 26ff). He is acting to make all things right," (*ibid*: 49). Experiencing the transforming renewing power of God depends on our individual response to Jesus Christ.

Jesus shows how diverse people experienced the renewing/ transforming power. Jesus' proclamation of God's divine power is a liberating power that lifts the 'nobodies' to a place of dignity. Liberating is synonymous with doing good, embracing inclusion and intimacy. Migliore quotes God's power in reference to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke, 15: 11-32) which demonstrated what he calls God's "extravagant love and costly forgiveness…God's power, the parable teaches, is not like that of a vindictive despot but like that of caring parent. Redefining the power of God in this way creates anger and resentment among those who hear the parable," (*ibid*: 50). Jesus "boldly calls God 'Abba' ('dear father') (Mark 14: 36) and teaches his disciples to address God as 'Our Father in heaven' (Matt. 6: 9). As noted previously, this way of addressing God is an expression of Jesus' own intimate relationship with God and a sign of a different understanding of divine power embodied in Jesus' life and ministry. The God Jesus calls 'father' is not a God who oppressed but a God who calls for justice and freely offers mercy and forgiveness," (*ibid* cf. 51).

Since Jesus' life and servant ministry portray God's power in the gospels, what is it that can be deducted from the crucifixion? Migliore claims that,

> "Jesus dies as he lived in utmost solidarity with the lost and despised of this world. What Jesus' death means cannot be rightly grasped apart from his life and ministry. Jesus, the Son of God, dies on a cross in faithfulness to his divinely given mission of conquering the sinful powers of this world with the different power of God's forgiving love. Like nothing else, the event of the cross forever shatters the equation of divine power with oppressive rule and self-aggrandizing mastery over others. This is vividly expressed in one of the scenes under the cross. Those surrounding the dying Jesus mock him with the words: 'He saved others; let him save himself' (Luke 23: 35-37, 39)" (*ibid*: 52).

From the above assessment, the crucifixion discloses the power of God's forgiving love. Divine power is understood not in mastery, conquering, or dominating over others, something that

always wants to prove itself, but (power) to be seen in terms of God's mission. The death of Christ expresses a different and unpopular understanding of power. Migliore describes this power as the "power of God's forgiving love conquering the sinful power of this world," (*ibid*). Paul's Epistle, as translated by Migliore states that the power of God is at work in the 'weakness of the cross (v. 23). The gospel of the crucified Lord is, paradoxically, the 'power of God unto salvation' (Rom 1: 16) when one entrusts oneself to the true God, whose strange power is manifest even in the weakness of the cross, (2008: 13; 11; 19 cf. 127-130). Again, in building up this understanding he says, the Pauline interpretation comprehends the crucifixion and resurrection as the redefinition of "the power of God" (ibid: 53). Using this interpretation, he further argues that Paul,

> "takes with utmost seriousness the violent powers of this world—the coercive 'power of sin' (Rom. 3: 9) and the oppressive reign of death (Rom. 5: 14). In the light of the cross of Christ, however, Paul declares an even greater power. God has shown his power in a completely unexpected form. This man Jesus, crucified in weakness, is the Lord. What to human eyes is shameful, weak, and ineffective is God's own glory and strength. In a startling phrase, Paul proclaims 'God's weakness' (I Cor. 1: 25). This is an unprecedented way of speaking of the power of God, and it yields a highly paradoxical account of true power. The power of God made known in the cross of Christ is stronger than all human might," (*ibid*: 53).

In comparison, though, on the nature and the demonstration of God's power, Paul seems to emphasize that human power is unable to bring about salvation, whereas God has a plan for humankind and by extension the whole creation. Paul equates the power of God with the power of the gospel (*ibid*: 55). It breaks the barrier that created separation, made reconciliation between God and humanity and among human beings possible. This was made possible by the paradoxical means of what is seen as the weakness of God on the cross (*ibid*), which in reality is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1: 16). Moreover, it asserts that nothing would separate those who believe from the love of God (Rom. 8: 38-39). This leads to the next subtopic which examines the church's understanding of God's power.

3. 5. Divine Power in the Church's Experience.

Divine power in the church experience is about church understanding, knowledge, and interpretation of the power of God. It is also about how this understanding of God's power is not only interpreted, but translated through the history of the church and its interpretation of Christian theology.

The church in the New Testament was a new community the Holy Spirit formed that brought people together, it was a phenomenon through which people gathered, served and worshipped

God. The church gradually grows in other places, as such the interpretation of the biblical witness developed into church theology.

The church's experience of God's divine power was centred in the death and resurrection of Christ. This revolutionary experience was the heart of the church, this belief brought about the growth and the development of the church. Migliore strongly argues that "[a]s the church continued to expand from its Palestinian beginnings into the Hellenistic world, the biblical message had to be expressed in new terms. To better articulate and defend the faith in its new context the church made use of the categories of ancient Greek metaphysics. The biblical story of God's creative redemptive activity was recast in the metaphysical conceptuality that was then current," (*ibid*: 61. cf. Riggs, 2003:9, 14-17). As a method of contextualising its message, the church maximises the medium of communication to engage with the populace, Greek metaphysical philosophy was adopted as a means of communication, it was "familiar to the intelligentsia of that time. This made it easier for the church to communicate its teaching in an understandable form. Second, classical philosophy enabled the church to express the universality of God's lordship. By speaking of the God of the biblical witness with such terms as Pantocrator—the power that controls all things—the church prevented its witness from the story of a local or provincial deity" (*ibid*: 61 cf. 62, 66).

Within the above context, arises the advancement of scholastic theology, it became the lens through which biblical interpretation was carried out. Migliore highlighted that scholastic theology communicates God's attributes in three fundamental ways: negation, eminence and analogy (*ibid*. 62). These modes of transmission explained the distinction between human beings and God as it relates to his attributes.

Negation in scholastic theology, describes the distinctive nature of God in comparison to a human being. The distinction lies in what God is not. In other words, negation describes God in what God cannot be. For example, God is not a creature, God is the creator. God is not finite but infinite, God is not mortal, but immortal, God is not changeable, but is immutable.

Another way of speaking of God in scholastic theology is by way of *eminence.* It describes God in the highest term. It begins with what is good and laudable in creatures and then ascribes the highest degree of these virtues to God. Thus, God is not only wise, but maximally wise, all-knowing (omniscient), not only present here and there, but present everywhere (omnipresent), not only powerful but all-powerful (omnipotent).

An additional way of speaking of God in scholastic theology is the way of *analogy*. Analogy combines similarity and difference, likeness and unlikeness in its usage in defining God. There are both correspondence and divergence between the attributes of creatures and the attributes of God. To speak of God as father or mother, for example, is to speak analogically. God is like a human parent, but also very different from our experience of our parents or our own ways of being a parent (*ibid*: 62). God's attributes, which scholastic theology explains, include, among other things *immutability* (*ibid*. 64), and *impassability* (*ibid*. 65). It explained omnipotence in that context to mean,

> "all-powerfulness. God is able to do anything, except of course what is self-contradictory. God cannot create a round square or make two plus two five (these are simply nonsense). Beyond this, all conceivable power belongs to God… it comes to mean simply God's almightiness. The power of God is then the greatest power imaginable," (*ibid*. 63 cf. Migliore, 2004: 86).

The intention of scholastic theology seems to suggest that God's power is comparably different from other forms of power. It suggests that divine power is quantifiably greater than humanly imaginable power. The logic here is that human beings have a power that is limited in comparison to God's power, which is greater. The relevance of scholastic theology as Migliore concluded is,

> "in ways of speaking and protecting the otherness of God to guard against the domestication of God, to acknowledge the incomprehensibility of God. However, the more these ways of speaking of God become independent of the biblical story they fall short of a distinctively Christian understanding of God" (*ibid*. 62, cf. 63, 64, 72, 73).

This interpretation invokes the distinction of who God is in comparison with creation and created entities. Paralleling the biblical witness with scholastic theology, scholastic interpretation becomes partial in describing God's omnipotence i.e., what is described as God's power was formulated based on human evolutionary context as scholastic theology emerged. "According to the Bible, God is omnipotent in the sense that God has all the power needed to create, redeem, and complete the world in a personal and noncoercive way. The power of God made known in Jesus Christ is not sheer omnipotence but omnipotent love that judges and redeems" (*ibid*: 64). He reiterated that the biblical witness describes how and what the power of God is,

> "this power of God is altogether different from mere almightiness. According to the prophet Zachariah, God says, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit' (Zach. 4: 6). As we have seen, the decisive depiction of the power of God in the New Testament is the story of the passion and resurrection of Christ. The approach of scholastic theology tends to lose this narrative approach of the Bible and instead speaks of God's powerfulness in abstract speculation about all the things God can or cannot do. Let me be clear: the intention of scholastic theology is laudable. It wants to give God all the glory. But the crucified Jesus Christ, who is God with us, does not fit into a speculative framework. This story demands a complete overhaul of our

thinking about power. God is certainly the supreme power. But this does not mean that we have said what is most important when we declare that God is 'all the power there is,' or that 'God can do anything" (*ibid*: 64 cf. 62).

3. 6. The power of God in a Trinitarian Understanding

In this section we shall focus on a Trinitarian understanding of God, and the Trinitarian interpretation of the power of God. This approach seeks to interpret God's power, while at the same time examining the question of human suffering and the coming reign of God. The triune power of God, is a continuance of Migliore's Trinitarian theological framework from his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*.

The Trinity is a central doctrine in Christian theology. Migliore however, acknowledges that the interpretation of the Trinity for many "is the most obscure and confusing teaching of the church. The talk of God as 'three persons in one essence' seems to defy logic and common sense. Of all Christian teachings about God, this one seems Trinity to be the least significant for everyday Christian faith and practice" (2008: 77). The issue associated with the professed obscurity, defamation and the misunderstanding of the Trinity is the perceived belief that the Trinity is incomprehensible. Again, the other problem as stated, is that Trinity seems to surpass human reason.

For Migliore, the biblical witness that best affirms the interpretation of the Trinity, is the Christian gospel. He reiterates that Trinitarian doctrine "is not the result of murky thinking or the product of ecclesiastical smoke and mirrors. It is simply the effort of the church-in language that is true but inevitably inadequate——to affirm what God is really like in the light of God's unique presence in Jesus the crucified and risen Lord and in the coming of the Holy Spirit" (*ibid*: 78). As obscure as it may seem to some, the Scripture does not intend that it should be so. The Scriptures have employ notions of the Trinity, as a central understanding within the Christian tradition, to refer to God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. According to Migliore, the emphasis of the biblical narrative or,

> "[t]he gospel story in its fullness can be told only in Trinitarian terms. God the Father so loved the world that he gave his only Son to redeem it (John 3:16); Jesus Christ the Son of God freely emptied himself and became a humble servant for our salvation even to the abyss of death on a cross (Phil. 2: 5ff.); the Spirit of resurrection power (Rom. 8: 11) who comes from the Father and the Son moves freely in the world to transform and direct it towards God's new world of justice and peace," (*ibid*. 78 cf. 75, 80).

The Trinity speaks of God and how God in his manifestation revealed God's self as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what God does in his manifestation as he relates to creation. Migliore suggests that in the Trinity "God has been revealed to us in this way—— as a Trinity of self-

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giving, other-affirming, and community-forming love" (*ibid*: 78). The doctrine of the Trinity, accordingly, points to the nature of God in what God does.

It understands God in this way; self-giving, other affirming, and community-forming love. It gives a unique understanding of God's power. From this standpoint, it suggests that the Trinitarian power of God is different from the idea of absolute power. As Migliore has affirmed,

> "Christians do not worship absolute power. They worship God, whose different power is described in the gospel story and symbolized in the doctrine of the Trinity. The power of God is shared power, transforming power, power that makes for just and inclusive community. Here is a radically new beginning in our understanding of God and especially of God's power. Every previous idea of divinity and every previous understanding of human power must be thoroughly and continuously revised in the light of the supreme power of God, of the triune God" (*ibid*: 79).

He speaks of God's power as the shared, transforming power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It defines a new and unique way of seeing God's power.

Secondly, the doctrine of Trinity discloses in its distinction how God's own life has been revealed. Migliore "declares that *God's own life is communal* or social in nature. The life of God is not dead uniformity. God is not mere mathematical oneness. There are differences within the living unity of God. God does not affirm differences merely for its own sake. God affirms distinct persons in relationship for the sake of community, for the sake of friendship and mutual love" (*ibid*: 81). In his explanation, "[f]riendship and love are given and received by those who are different, yet whose love binds them together without dissolving their differences" (*ibid*).

Thirdly, he says, "the mystery of the Trinity means that *God is the power of self-giving love*. This is the deepest meaning of God's triune life-in-relationship. This is what decisively marks off the living God from the dead idols. They cannot give life because they cannot love. They cannot love because they cannot enter into communion with and freely suffer for another. The true God is alive and gives life for others. This is an understanding of God centered on the crucified and risen Christ and the work of his Spirit" (*ibid*: 82).

3. 6. 1. The Mystery of God and the Mystery of Suffering

The previous subtopic introduces a Trinitarian understanding of God, which is self-giving, other-affirming, and community-forming love, and as such it interprets triune power as the

shared, transforming power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, in this section we seek to examine God's power in relation to suffering.

Suffering in the broad sense of the concept, is an unfavourable situation that affects human beings in their existence at one point or the other. Migliore does not point to the origin of suffering, but affirms its existence. It seems he used suffering and evil interchangeably. Human life, however, seems to be surrounded with difficult experiences, and tough situations that people go through. These include the problems of evil, sickness, pain, and other human crises. It thus also includes matters like natural and man-made disasters. The issue of suffering is not limited to Christian tradition, but has cut across other religious spectrums. These situations have made people to reflect on their predicaments in the light of their religious beliefs to search for an explanation. They seek answers in regard to suffering. For example, Sandra B Lubarsky in her article "Reconstructing Divine power: Post Holocaust Jewish Theology, Feminism and Process Philosophy" in the book *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, asks the question many Jews asked with regards to Auschwitz "Where was the all-powerful, all-good God of the covenant at Auschwitz?" (2004: 289; cf. Sharon, 1984: 42). Another similar concern is raised by David Griffin, a philosopher of religion and theology, and a political writer, who believes that a "God unsurpassable in love, knowledge, and power, should be able to unilaterally prevent evils such as polio and the Nazi Holocaust" (1996: 301).

Migliore seems not to give any concrete reason for suffering. Nonetheless, these challenges and troubles have not only raised a series of questions, but the problem of evil has led to many differing interpretations of God's power in relation to suffering. There arguments range from notions attributed to human freedom, divine judgement, or avenues for spiritual growth. Some theologians argued as Migliore has observed,

> "[o]ne such attempt declares that the evil that human beings experience is entirely the result of the misuse of human freedom. If men and women are to be free agents rather than mere puppets, God must permit evil events to happen. Suffering is the unavoidable result of the creation of a world in which human beings have the capacity to turn away from God and do harm to their fellow creatures," (2008: 84; cf. Fergusson, 2014: 43).

Migliore continues as he explains that, according to another argument, suffering is interpreted as a form of divine judgement and as a stern call to repentance and a new way of life. Another argument is that suffering and evil can be put to effective use. They provide occasions for spiritual growth that would not otherwise be possible (*ibid*).

Do these assumptions and interpretations adequately solve the problems of suffering, or do they explain sufficiently the existence of evil and suffering? Does the presence of suffering mean it is an acceptable norm in life? Responding to the problem of suffering and evil Migliore upholds that,

> "[t]he doctrine of the Trinity does not give us a theodicy. It does not attempt to explain the presence of evil in a world created good by God. Instead, it tells us what God is doing to overcome evil in the world. It affirms the faithfulness of God to the world despite the reality of sin and misery. In the light of the Gospel story, we know that the triune God is the God of suffering love who takes the sin, suffering, and violence of the world into the very heart of God," (*ibid*: 86).

Explaining the Trinitarian understanding, he argues,

> "God is the Father who sends his Son and grieves over his loss; God is the Son who as one of us and on our behalf cries out in affliction on the cross; God is the Spirit who groans with the entire suffering creation as he works for the coming of the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21-23)," (*ibid*).

While the Trinitarian interpretation does not isolate God from sharing with human pains, the cries, grieves, groans, and the coming of glorious liberty for the children of God, thus states God's unwavering attention to creation both in the present and in the future. Migliore believes that suffering is a mystery of human being (2008: 86). What appears to make suffering a mystery is that it is both "a theoretical problem" as well as "an agonizing reality of life" (*ibid*: 89). He goes on to say, people suffer from different unimaginable realities:

> "[s]uffering is not primarily a theoretical problem but an agonizing reality of life. Far from being an attempt to justify all suffering as necessary or good, the belief that God suffers with and for us speaks to questions that arise from the depths of human life: Is God completely trustworthy? Can we trust in God as our companion in suffering and death? Can we look to God as one who does not glorify suffering in itself but instead freely accompanies us in our resistance to and protest against suffering that can be averted or that human beings impose on each other? These burning questions cannot be answered affirmatively if the God we worship is limitless, impassive, or coercive power. We can respond affirmatively, however, if the God we worship and adore is the triune God. God calls us to follow Jesus, to open ourselves in love to the costly risks of Christian discipleship, not because we enjoy suffering but for the sake of a more just world, a world, in which people live in communion with God and in friendship and peace with one another, (*ibid*: 87 cf. Weber, 1989: 120).

The Trinitarian proposition of the biblical witness (Mark, 15: 34; Psalm 22) regarding suffering acknowledges that God identifies God's self with human suffering. Migliore argues that "[t]he suffering God is the triune God. Only the Trinitarian understanding of God consistently and unambiguously affirms that God, the Creator and Lord of all, experiences the deepest abyss of human suffering, abandonment, and death for the sake of our salvation. The doctrine of the Trinity expresses what we know of God in the light of the crucified Jesus who was raised to new life in the power of the Spirit" (*ibid*: 85).

In the crucifixion and death, Christ experienced the intensity of pain and suffering. The agony that Christ experienced in the words of Weber, was

> "on behalf of all humanity and all creation. But his cry is also the cry of God, who in his Son goes to the depths of human brokenness and suffering and makes it his own. The passion and death of Jesus are not God's punishment, anger, or revenge directed at an innocent human victim. Nor is this cry of Jesus an indication of his loss of faith and trust in his Father. On the contrary, the crucified Jesus is the unsurpassable embodiment of the triune God's costly love for the world. All of the world's pain and suffering are taken into the life of God on the cross. In the incarnation and its culmination in the crucifixion, God the Father gives his Son to the world out of love. In obedience to the Father's will, Jesus freely gives himself for our salvation, even to death on a cross. With Psalm 22 on his lips, he continues to trust in God even as he experiences the loneliness and agony of crucifixion. Father and Son are bound together by the Spirit of this costly love for the world, and the Spirit radiates this love throughout the creation. The Spirit moves us to repentance and faith, creates in us a new freedom and joy, incites us to pray, encourages us to resist evil powers and to give ourselves in service to God's coming reign of justice, freedom, and peace throughout the creation," (*ibid*: 86 cf. 85).

This action of experiencing human suffering was not to show that God was a helpless and pitiful deity, but rather to point out how God loves the world, in such a way as to bring about "salvation" (*ibid*. 85) "forgiveness, freedom, and new life" (*ibid*: 86). He gave himself. The self-giving as Migliore emphasizes

> "the gospel of God's self-giving love does not end in unrelieved tragedy and hopelessness. On the contrary, the good news is that God's suffering love is victorious. This is the meaning of the confession, Jesus Christ the crucified is risen! In Christ, God is victor as well as victim; the love of God is not pitiful and effectual but singularly powerful. If the victory of the love of God is not yet evident to all; the resurrection of Christ and the working of his Spirit are God's promises of final and universal victory. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is God's own verdict on what Jesus has done for the salvation of the world. It is the promise of the ultimate triumph of the costly grace of God. God's victory over sin and suffering is won not by force but by God's self-giving love that bears the full brunt of evil. Evil exhausts itself in its opposition to that which is inexhaustibly good. This is the way in which the love of God wins victory. The Spirit of the risen Christ continues to liberate and transform human life by the different power of omnipotent, and unconquerable love" (*ibid*. 87).

The self-giving love of Christ demonstrates the resurrection victory thereof invoking the good news that "[t]he message of Christ crucified reminds us of the great difference between suffering that is inflicted on others and redemptive suffering that is freely accepted in the struggle against evil. The suffering love of God does not sanctify the abuse of power; it places all unjust and cruel exercise of power under judgement. The suffering love of God not only moves us to gratitude for mercy underserved; it also arouses us to resist all forms of injustice and oppression" (*ibid*: 87).

3. 6. 2. The Trinity and the Coming Reign of God.

The previous section discussed the triune God and human suffering. It showed that God is concerned about suffering. However, it also showed that God does not always demonstrate his power by removing suffering or pain as a demonstration of his authority. The triune power expresses God taking rather a different approach to demonstrating his power. In this case, instead of taking away pains that humanity experiences, God identifies with human suffering by taking up the cross. He takes human pain, seriously by demonstrating his love and commitment to human suffering in the coming age.

Migliore further describes the doctrine of Trinity as the power of God. The question is what does he mean, what kind of power is that? The Triune power of God expresses that divine power is not only restricted to shared power. Among other things the triune power of God is that which "moves the world towards God's coming reign" (*ibid*: 88). It means God is active in the world such that the world is moving towards God's purpose.

The coming reign of God in this background is the reference to the anticipated promise of the biblical fulfilment of the hereafter. This understanding of the coming reign of God is not simply the knowledge of the hereafter, it also suggests Christian hope. For Migliore the coming reign of God, and Christian hope, suggest a future dispensation when the creation would be wholly transformed to become what it was originally destined to be. The coming reign is characterised by the biblical images which describe it as the "time of peace and harmony in all creation." (Isa. 2: 4; 11: 6) (*ibid*: 88), furthermore, it is "pictured as a beautiful heavenly city (Rev. 21: 2), as a father's house (John 14: 2), as a great feast (Matt. 8: 11), as a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 1)" (*ibid*: 89). The coming reign of God entails that the present world would sometimes come to an end. These metaphors stress that "[t]his is only a sampling of the treasury of biblical image of God's purposes, the total conquest of sin and death, the end of hostility and war, the realization of perfect justice and freedom, the final triumph of God over all forces that spoil the good creation" (*ibid*: 89).

On the other hand, the idea or a desire for an alternative world is not limited to the Christian tradition. Others have proposed a kind of utopia to have an alternative form of an ideal world. Migliore highlights the following utopias: individualism, collectivism, and empirism. This thinking is an image for the future, and of hope. This utopia is inspired by a human dream or human desire. The distinctive difference between the coming reign of God and the other ideological utopias is that the coming reign is a Trinitarian initiative and is not guided by human

dreams and struggles such as communism, or collectivism, or needing to be built by military struggles (*ibid*: 90). All these utopias are efforts to build a would-be community. Whatever these utopias will promise, Migliore suggests,

> "[a]ll of these images of hope, whether the conflicting utopias of individualism and collectivism or the embattled utopias of empire and terrorism, offer no real hope at all. They are all destructive ideologies. Individualism contributes to the dehumanization of life by exalting individual interests at the expense of the common welfare. Collectivist and terrorist ideologies contribute to the dehumanization of life by sacrificing persons in the name of abstract principles and ideals such as the classless society or theocratic state. Imperial ideology contributes to the dehumanization of life by countering all opposition to its dream of world domination with practices that merely mimic the evils the empire supposedly removes," (*ibid*: 91 cf. 92).

The future promised reality is a community of "common welfare" (*ibid*: 92). The portrayal of the coming reign has its background based on "[t]he triune God is being - in - communion. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united in their mutually self-giving and mutually indwelling love. The life of God is community in which differences are celebrated and love reigns. In the divine society power consists not in domination and control over others but in mutual giving and receiving… the doctrine of the Trinity bears witness to the coming reign of God inaugurated by Jesus" (*ibid*). The description of the power of God "defines the power at work in God's coming reign as different." (*ibid*).

3. 7. Christian Faith and the Power of God

The previous section considered the interpretation of the power of God in a Trinitarian understanding and so sought to examine the mystery of suffering, and the coming reign of God. In this section, Christian Faith and the Power of God will be considered with specific reference to the power that shapes the Christian life. It also centres on the triune God's power. It considers how the understanding of God's power, and the difference is makes in the everyday Christian life. Migliore believes that understanding God's power makes a difference to how the world is perceived, the way people think, act, and view things. In other words, an understanding (or misunderstanding) of God's can influence religious, professional and political decisions (*ibid*: 94).

Migliore describes the everyday Christian life as Paul defines it. Paul describes the Christian life as a life of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13: 13). He refers to faith, hope, and love as "virtues." With this consciousness, Migliore further expresses how Christian theology explains the Christian virtues. He argues that "in Christian theology the theological virtues are not inherent human abilities or powers. They are powers of a new humanity made possible by the grace of God alone. By the free gifts of Christ and the working of the Spirit, human life comes

to full stature in faith, hope and love" (*ibid*: 95). Theologically, what he seems to be saying is that faith, hope and love are not natural to human beings, but something God has done through Christ in the power of the Spirit. The reality and the manifestation of Christian virtues become visible only through the grace of God. He thus suggests that everyday life, or everyday Christian life, is made possible through divine enablement. The life of faith, hope, and love is a life which is shaped by the grace of God.

What the grace of God achieves, is that it brings human beings to their true humanity. He believes that faith, hope, and love are human acts. His understanding is that the grace of God brings true humanity to new life in Jesus Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit, as such believers are equally empowered and called to freedom and responsibility as servants, children and friends of God (*ibid*: 95). This leads to a discussion on Christian life and faith in God.

3. 7. 1. Faith in God

The virtue of faith is basically to have faith in the triune God. Faith in God as Migliore explains "is letting God be God. It is placing our whole trust in God, who is decisively made known in Jesus Christ and at work in the world by his Spirit. Faith is relying on God alone not as a sheer power but as the loving power who has created us, who forgives our sins, and who renews us to a life of service of God and our neighbor" (*ibid*: 2008: 95; 107). Faith in God defines the principle of Christian living, it entails trusting, and relying on the acts of the triune God in whose love and care Christians are to put their confidence in terms devotion and practice.

All that God does, encourages humility, partnership, and the practice of forgiveness. The implication of faith in the triune God is that in the service of God and others, as God forgives, Christians are to forgive others (*ibid*: 96). Faith in God points towards undertaking God's activities in human life. Migliore believes that "[t]he practice of forgiveness is a 'virtue,' an act of extraordinary power activated by the Spirit of God. When we live by faith, we are both called and empowered to forgive, to engage in the practice of forgiving others because we have been forgiven by God" (*ibid*). Forgiveness has an impact both on the person who forgives and the person who is forgiven according to Migliore (*ibid*: 97).

True faith involves submission to God. Migliore stresses that such an attitude of humble submission ensures that "[w]hen we live by faith, we are both called and empowered to forgive, to engage in the practice of forgiving others because we have been forgiven by God. But is the practice of forgiveness aptly described as an act of power? Isn't it more like being powerless?

Not at all! While the act of forgiveness is different from power as control of others, it is far from a display of powerlessness" (*ibid*: 96). Nonetheless, in the act of submitting to God, Migliore argues, there is a limitation in comparison. "We cannot forgive exactly like God but in our acts of forgiveness we can take part in and bear witness to God's power of forgiveness and reconciliation and the new life in friendship with others that it makes possible" (*ibid*: 97).

3. 7. 2. Love of God

The love of God is the next emphasis that Migliore discusses in relation to the Christian Faith and the power of God. According to Liddell and Scott the Love of God can mean either love '*for* God' or love '*by* God'. Love for God (*philotheia*) is associated with the concepts of piety, worship, and devotion towards God (1953: 762). On the other hand, love of God also refers to God's love towards human beings. This idea seems to resonate with Jesus' message to love God and love our neighbour.

The virtue of Love has a significant characteristic in Christianity. The Biblical witness introduces God as the basis for love (John, 3: 16, 13: 34). Migliore argues that love is a gift from God, and thus demonstrates his love by giving Jesus Christ. He expresses this by saying that the Bible uses the figurative word "pour" to describe how God, through the Holy Spirit, pours his loves into the human heart (John 3:16, 1 John, 4:11; Mark, 12: 30-31; Rom 5:5). On this basis, human beings are to love both God and their fellow beings (*ibid*: 101, 102, 106). Human beings are to demonstrate their love in the following ways: By obeying the will of God, which is what he has instructed as the principle to be followed. Love is to be expressed by caring for fellow human beings, (whom Jesus Christ described in a parable as the neighbour). The neighbour is not only those who are close to us, may also be a person considered to be estranged from us. It is to extend welcome and care for our neighbours who may be strangers, the unwanted, poor, the abused or people who may be different from us, or even those we may consider as our enemies. An act of love is an act of hospitality to strangers. The list of strangers is endless. Love is about showing hospitality to strangers, hospitality is a concrete form of love (*ibid*: 102-105).

The purpose for showing hospitality is that the Israelites were once strangers in a foreign land. From Christ's example, it is evident that he dines with the outcast, and people of ill repute. Jesus says that whatever is done to those in need it is done to him (Christ). Love goes beyond the self, and it overcomes fear. The Christian understanding of love as a gift from God. Migliore says that it centres on God, "[l]ove is the gift of God whose own welcome and hospitality

enable us to rejoice in communion with others and to practice hospitality to strangers" (*ibid*: 108 cf. 103, 104). The way to love God is to engage in an act or deed of kindness to those who need it. The manifestation of the act of service has mutual affiliation with human beings loving God and also as a response of worshipping God. Love is expressed in open hospitality to strangers.

Migliore maintains that the Christian understanding of love is very different since the power to love comes from beyond ourselves, and the practice of love, like the practice of every Christian virtue, requires a lifetime of training. The conversion and transformation of human beings from self-preoccupation to concern for others does not happen in an instant. Christian life is a journey, encouraging, but also judging us on the way (*ibid*: 101 cf. 108).

Migliore believes that the power to love comes from beyond ourselves, to love, calls for human responsibility to develop the Christian virtue of love. The acts of love on the other hand reflect our religious commitment to God. The litmus test for a true religious commitment has an eschatological intonation, "in Jesus' depiction of the day of judgement, he teaches that it will not be those who have simply called him 'Lord' every day who will be accounted faithful. Instead, the faithful will be recognized by their service to the needy... (Matt. 25: 35-36, 40)" (*ibid*: 103). This is further stated by Migliore that, "[a]dding all this together, we have to conclude that Jesus not only calls us to show hospitality to strangers. He is the stranger who shows hospitality to us, and he is the stranger to whom we show hospitality when we give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and shelter to the homeless" (*ibid*).

He continues to argue, "[j]ust as faith in God finds an appropriate practice in the act of forgiveness, so love finds a concrete practice in the act of hospitality to strangers. The church is called to lead the way in cultivating this practice. It is called to provide the training ground of a new humanity marked by virtue of hospitality" (*ibid*.).

Showing hospitality to strangers builds up a diversity that is consistent with the biblical mandate of God's omnipotent love. Migliore strongly argues that Love opens doors and drives out homogeneity, wherever homogeneity is, it "is a display of spiritual weakness rather than the real spiritual strength," (*ibid*: 107). True love embraces all. For him, "love seeks out the different and the unwanted, the love that forgives and receives enemies as friends. Black and white, women and men, young and old, healthy and sick, are made one people by the love of Christ" (*ibid*: 106). The act of faith in God, and the love of God, is reflectively seen in the practice of these virtues of forgiveness, welcoming and showing hospitality to strangers. The

absence of these indicators of Christian virtue calls for an evaluation, it thus suggests that the attitude of a lack of forgiveness and lack of hospitality can be a reflective fulcrum to evaluate the attitude shown to strangers and how they are welcomed.

How to go about living the Christian faith? Migliore affirms that, "[t]he church is called to be for others, to reach out to others, not out of a spirit of pity and condescension, but out of the strong passion of triune God for a world of justice, freedom, and peace. Christian life is thus a practice of solidarity with the poor, the exploited, the victim of injustice" (*ibid*. 107).

3. 7. 3. Hope in God

Migliore introduces hope in God as the last virtue of the Christian life, in relation to the topic Christian faith and the power of God. Hope in God in the Christian belief has to do with trusting in the assurance that God's purpose will be realized. Kärkkäinen in his discourse on hope pointed out that "[i]n the biblical worldview, hope is expressed in terms of promise" (2014: 39). Quoting J. L. Austin's works in the book "*How to Do Things with Words"* Kärkkäinen goes on to say: "[t]his promise is not an empty word. Rather, promise is rightly said to be a 'speech-act.'" Kärkkäinen continues as he interprets it in this way, "God's promise has 'backing' since God can deliver the promises; human cannot. In this case, the divine promise can be rendered a *pro-missio*, a 'sending-ahead of what is to come.' It is making future 'present' in terms of anticipation" (*ibid*: 40).

Speaking of hope Migliore argues that "[h]ope too is a gift of God, a 'virtue' or power of the new life in Christ. It is the eager expectation of the transformation of all things by God. As a gift, hope, like faith and love, is not an inherent possession or capacity of our own. It is not something we possess, like the color of our eyes. Hope is a gift to be freely received and freely practiced and lived out in every day" (*ibid*: 108).

Hope reminds us of the realization of God's purpose. Migliore argues that Christian hope is to be found in God (*ibid*: 108, 109, 110). The foundation for what Christians call hope has its roots in,

> "the power of the crucified and risen Lord whose grace is stronger than all the powers of destruction and death in our world. Because the crucified Lord is risen and his transforming Spirit is at work in the world today, Christians boldly hope—'hoping against hope' (Rom. 4: 18) —for the coming triumph of God over all evil" (*ibid*: 108).

Christian hope brings about the courage to press on, having to do with the assurance that God is amidst human predicaments, until the future, coming reign, is realised. What hope is

according to Migliore, it is not a superficial optimism or quiet despair (*ibid*: 108) or an alternative opposition (*ibid*). Clarifying these he explains that in the Christian faith "[t]he practice of Christian hope is the practice of prayer and work for the coming kingdom" (*ibid*: 109 cf. 110). These two essential disciplines the practice of Christian prayer, and service for God's coming reign suggests that Christians are to be engaged and committed to God and society wherever they are. For Migliore, "to pray is to hope and place our future in God's hand and to work and serve in hope is simply to prepare the way for God's coming reign, it is to take small, first steps in the direction of God's new world. It is to bear witness to God's coming reign by creating signs and parables of this reign here and now" (*ibid*: 110). The signs, and not the actual coming reign, are the solidarity with those in dire need, and to be honest and to show forgiveness, which is to be manifested through the elements of "justice, peace and mutual care" (*ibid*.).

Hope influences Christians in the ways in which they are to live and to respond in the present situation which seems to drive many people to despair. Migliore believes that, "this hope enlists us in the struggle against all that demeans and destroys life. It encourages us to plead with God —even allows us to protest to God — to hasten the coming of justice and peace, to change what seems unchangeable, to redeem what seems to be totally lost. Christian hope keeps us restless for God' new world," (*ibid*: 109).

Living a life of hope, Migliore takes the view, is something challenging even though hope is a gift from God (*ibid*: 108). The difficulty he suggests is that "when our efforts to assist the downtrodden in their struggle for justice meets with repeated failures, it is only natural, and certainly easy, to give up or to turn bitter and cruel. Quiet despair, like cheap optimism, poisons hope" (*ibid*: 108). Human assistance is consistently important, but then it has its challenges and limitations. Christian hope stimulates the looking forward to the future promise of transformed humanity in a redeemed world (*ibid*).

The distinctiveness of Christian hope embraces the entire humanity and creation in the design of God for final redemption. Within this current context (before the final redemption or the second coming), believers are to engage in "work in the meantime for greater justice and peace as signs of his coming reign" says Migliore (*ibid*: 112). He advocates that the motivation for the commitment to justice and peace among humanity and creation is "to bear witness to the 'more excellent way' of love (1Cor. 12: 31)" (*ibid*). Christian hope is not primarily

concentrated on the coming future kingdom of God, but to be actively engaged in the here and now.

The particularity of the Christian hope in fellowship with God continues in the coming or future paradise. Based on the grace of God, in which both the living and the dead (the dead are not inferior, since they would be raised) are in the plan of God, in the coming kingdom both the living and death would partake in the forthcoming fellowship, for as Christ was raised from the dead so also the dead would be resurrected. The living and the dead are in the plan of God. Engaging in society can be part of what hope in God entails.

3. 8. Towards a Dialogue on the power of God

Migliore argues for interreligious discussion, particularly among the monotheistic religions. In his view, interreligious discourse is required more in this day and age than it has ever been throughout history. He believes that God's power, as a shared tradition, can be a link towards inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. This is because there is an ongoing encounter between the two religions. Migliore calls this meeting a "new encounter" (2008: 115). Even though, historically, they have coexisted for long years, he is confident that they will continue to exist together in the years to come. They have related in diverse ways. To some extent it has its good moments where things flourish, and other times the interaction was characterized by misunderstanding, suspicion and fear. Migliore acknowledges these issues and other events such as terrorism, religious attacks, have not only contributed to the misunderstanding among the religions, but that this reality at present poses a challenge in the world.

What is currently new about the encounter is the urgency in which the religious interaction takes, Migliore argues that the encounter is taking place worldwide. The world now, is more integrated than it has ever been. Subsequently, because of the new encounter, it is therefore important to develop Christian theologies that engage in this conversation, which would equally enable the church to participate in inter-religious interaction, which would be willing to go beyond stereotype (*ibid*).

In principle, Migliore argues for interreligious dialogues for two reasons: first and foremost, it is for an ethical purpose; a commitment to peace and justice among people of the world. The second is a common theological effort to achieve greater understanding of each other (*ibid*: 116). He states that, the significant aspect of this approach is to offer an explanation of some theological subjects of Christian and Muslim encounter. Such a commitment clarifies what

these two religious traditions have in common, and where they diverge in their understandings of God and God's power. The question that this section seeks to explore is: what might the Christian church have to learn, and what witness might the church have to make about the power of God, as Christianity and Islam unavoidably meet once again in our time? The focus will be on these three topics, which Migliore believes are bound to play a part in any theological engagement between Christianity and Islam today. They include the Sacred Scripture and its Interpretation, (Word of God and the task of interpretation), the doctrine of God and the threat of Idolatry (oneness of God and the danger of idolatry), and the triune God and the vision of the new community (*ibid*).

3. 8. 1 The Sacred Scripture and its Interpretation.

When it comes to sacred texts, both religions have sacred texts, the Bible for the Christian and Qur'an for Muslims. One of the main concerns for the clarification Migliore discusses is on the aspect of the sacred texts and the quest for their interpretation. The Scriptures or Sacred texts are both a unifying as well as a diverging point of reference of the new encounter. What the church might learn from the religious encounter is that, both religions have a parallel similarity that they both share. This is centred on the shared belief of a Scripture, which is their referent sacred religious texts. The sacredness of the sacred text is based on its conviction of divine origin, because of this it is said to be uniquely different compared to other books. As such, it is serves as a special source of guidance in terms of faith and practice. This means that the sacred text defines their worldview, ultimate reality, insights into God, and God's attributes and nature. It is the basis for their theological and philosophical discussions, and ethics.

The centrality of the sacred texts, play an essential role in the entire religious experience, for it is the foundation for religious teaching. Being the sole theological tool for religious teaching, understanding it has steered wide-ranging interpretations of the sacred texts. For this reason, there are diversity in understanding of the religious texts as well. Nonetheless, Migliore agrees there is some wide-ranging interpretations of the texts that also brings about sometimes "complex tension as they are" (*ibid*: 120), and as such disputes emerges in scriptural interpretations. Therefore, there are challenges concerning the use and interpretation of the sacred texts.

The challenges of religious interpretation of the sacred texts, has not only brought about the use of sacred text but also the misuse of it. These challenges are realities of how the Scriptures are often used by their different religious adherents. The issue being wrestled with here is more

related to hermeneutical interpretations. The question of interpretation is not the opportunity it gives for a variety of meanings, but with the variety of meanings or interpretations there arises a series of conflicting interpretations as well, thus the Scriptures can and are also being abused. The reflective question needing to be asked is, "[h]ow do *we* interpret our sacred texts?" (2008: 119). Alternatively, the question can be interpreted to mean what is the appropriate way to interpret the Scriptures? What principles are to be used in interpreting sacred texts? Some of the framework identified suggest some key factors, at least for Christians, are to search for the "central subject matter of the Scripture and by Scripture's primary purpose as recognized by the community of faith under the guidance of the Spirit of God. All this is to say that Christian do not or should not read the Scripture in a vacuum. The church has a history of communal guidance in the interpretation of the Scripture. This is one of the important ways of dogmas and confessions of faith, and to a lesser extent the whole Christian exegetical tradition, function in the life of the community" (*ibid*: 120 cf. 122).

This is to say Christian need to interpret the Scripture as suggested by Migliore in the light of Christian tradition, for instance, it is to be carried out by utilizing the history of communal guidance, (*ibid*: 120), and by understanding the historical or literary context (*ibid*: 119). He further says "[t]hey require a community of interpretation in which, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, Scripture are diligently studied and vigorously debated as well as cherished and received as normative for faith and life" (*ibid*: 120). Other ways to understand and interpret the Scripture is by reading the religious texts through the following themes as advocated by the following contributors: for Augustine - interpretation should never be in contradiction to the rule of love (*ibid*); for Luther - justification by faith is the pivotal element for interpretation. For Nicholas Lash - interpretation is guided by what the Scripture says at length. Karl Barth, believes interpretation and understanding of the Scripture is through Jesus Chris; (*ibid*: 121). Similarly, it is believed that Islam has its own point references for interpretation. Migliore maintains that the principle is, "[b]oth Christians and Muslims can learn from each other and challenge each other as they interpret individual texts and passages not in isolation but in relationship to, and in the light of their understanding of the central purpose and message of their sacred texts" (*ibid*: 122). They also need to critically examine and respond to their terror texts that exist in their sacred texts or Scriptures.

3. 8. 2 The doctrine of God and the threat of Idolatry

Since the Sacred texts are the primary source from which Christian religious teaching emanates, so too, the teaching about God in other faiths comes from their sacred texts. This is another unifying similarity and the basis for the differences among the two great religions. Being monotheistic faiths, these faiths understand and declare their conviction in the one and only God. The oneness of God is the basic essential belief of the monotheistic religions. The oneness implies the uniqueness and the distinctiveness of God who is eternal, unlike other deities, for this reason, nothing can be associated with him.

Understanding of God's oneness becomes not only one of the basic sources of unity, but the basis for the objection and the source of divergence between the Abrahamic faiths i.e., Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The Islamic / Jewish objection is based on their understanding or misunderstanding of the Christian doctrinal beliefs of the Trinity. The reality of the oneness of God, raises other objections in respect of the deity, the Sonship, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Islamic objections to these Christian beliefs are centrally based on the Islamic Scriptural interpretation and understanding of the Trinity. It sees the Trinity as tritheism, and for this reason rejects the Trinity, deity; the crucifixion and; the death of Christ on the grounds of their view of the oneness of God (*ibid*: 123). Their view it is to avoid idolatry (i.e., associating something with God, since God has no partner) (*ibid*: 124). In its quest to be honest to its own sacred text, Islam, is at the same time, misinterpreting the sacred text of Christians. This interpretation creates a kind of perception on how one religion sees the other religion, and how the one religion is using its own text in interpreting that of the other religion. Migliore engages this complex problem saying, "Christians will thus have the task of explaining the meaning of these doctrines in a manner consistent with the affirmation of the oneness of God to which they say they hold as tenaciously as do Muslims" (*ibid*: 124).[18]

3. 8. 3 The Triune God and the vision of new community.

In the previous section we reflected on the uniqueness, and the divergence of understanding among the great religions (Christianity and Islam). Specifically, we saw that it focused on different understandings of the Triune God and by extension understanding God's power. Now,

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[18] See David L. Windibiziri. "A Nigerian Experience" in Sigvard von Sicard and Ingo Wulfhorst (Editors). *Dialogue and Beyond: Christians and Muslim Together on the Way*. LWF Studies. Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation (2003) 159-163.

however, we shall move on a further reflection on an aspect of the belief in the power of the triune God, namely the power to create a new community.

The similarity of the religions, as Migliore has argued, is that both have a high opinion of the person of Christ. He is honoured more highly than other prophets. His unique birth is acknowledged by both faiths, they both affirm God's distinctiveness. To emphasize these differences in the language of the early Karl Barth, God is known as the "'Wholly Other.'" Some of the reasons why God is different from other creatures is because of his sovereignty, his power is different in quality and magnitude and his attributes such as compassion, mercy are beyond comparison with any creature. An additional similarity that is shared is that both religiously agree and warn about any human effort to construct God as is idolatrous, which leads to destruction (2008: 116 cf. 130-131).

The distinguishing differences between Christianity and Islam is in their interpretation, and understanding of the otherness of God, and his divine activities are revealed in their respective scriptural admissions. The otherness of God, being their source of divergence as Migliore has noted, is that, "the Islamic understanding of God does not include God's personal participation in the human condition even to suffering and death on our behalf. It is here that the difference between the Muslim and the Christian understandings of God and God's power is most apparent" (2008: 126 cf. 130). This suggest that the Islamic belief submits that God cannot experience what they refer to as,

> "experiencing the shameful suffering, humiliation, and death depicted in the biblical passion narratives. Lesslie Newbigin rightly calls this one of the most important differences between Islam and Christianity: 'For Islam it is impossible that the cause of Allah should be humiliated and defeated. That is why Muslims, who venerated Jesus, must deny his crucifixion. It would be an inconceivable humiliation of Allah'" (Migliore, 2008: 127 cf.130).

However, in Christianity the shameful, suffering, humiliation, and death means a different thing entirely. Christ's humiliating suffering is not a defeat instead it is what is referred to the priciest grace! Which is the surprising and extravagant "gift of God's grace" (*ibid*: 128). This Christian understanding can be described as a paradox of suffering. Christianity does not see the cross, as God being humiliated and being defeated as a self-contradictory conviction. Rather, this is God's generosity to human beings. This means that the impossibility in Islam is the possibility in Christianity. Migliore strongly argues that,

> "[w]hile Islam upholds the doctrine that all things are possible to God except what is self-contradictory, the incarnational possibility— the possibility that God's power could take the form of suffering love, could include the capacity to be humble and weak without loss of divinity—is rejected. The Christian doctrines of the incarnation of God's Word, the full

deity and humanity of Christ, the atoning death of Christ on the cross, and the Trinitarian nature of God are in the final analysis all about this outrageous possibility. They are all about the embodied, costly grace of God given to us abundantly and beyond all that we deserve. They are efforts to affirm the sole lordship of God who freely chooses a servant form to communicate God's self-giving love to the world not only in word and from a distance but also in deed and up close. In the encounter of Islam and the Christian gospel Christians may become more acutely aware of the difference between speaking of the compassionate God and speaking of 'the crucified God,'" (*ibid*: 127).

Christians believe in the incarnation of God's Word, i.e., the full deity and the humanity of Christ, the atoning death of Christ on the cross, which summarizes God's triune activity that expresses God's love toward human beings and the entire world. This triune activity expresses the confession of the Christian faith, which recognizes God as triune. Migliore further emphasizes that,

> "Trinitarian doctrine affirms that the unity of God is a union of communion. Does a proper understanding of God as Trinity compromise God's oneness and veer off into polytheism? The confession that God and God alone is Lord is the unbreakable bond between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The divergence comes at the point of understanding the unity of God. The oneness of God, says Trinity doctrine, is not a state but an event. The unity of God is a living, dynamic, and eventful unity. The unity of God is greater than sheer oneness. It is deeper than undifferentiated singleness. The unity of the triune God is in communion, in the sharing of love. The communion that is God's life is one in which 'no one is out to assert power over others.' In technical Trinitarian language, the unity of God is 'perichoretic' unity, the mutual indwelling and mutual self-giving love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to Trinity doctrine, the one God freely loves in God's own being in all eternity and freely shares that love with us, drawing us into communion with God and one another. The chief end of our human existence is to take part in the triune love of God extended to us by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit," (*ibid*: 129).

The Trinity defines the Christian perspective of unity when it comes to the understanding of the triune God, most aptly summarized in God's communion. Migliore acknowledges that, "the doctrine of Trinity has everything to do with the scandal of the cross and the indelible mark it makes on our understanding of God. As a summary of the gospel, the doctrine of the Trinity affirms that God is one with the eternal Logos of God incarnate in the crucified Jesus, and one with his life-giving Spirit" (*ibid*: 128).

The differences between Christianity and other faiths, is that the doctrine of the Trinity explains how the one and only God makes room for difference in God's own being. Islam on the other hand "disagree whether the reality of the one and only God makes room for difference, not only among creatures but in God's own being. For Christian faith, the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an eternal actuality. This union of communion belong to the very reality of God in whom distinctions of persons in relationship is not divisive but the fullness of life" (*ibid*: 131). In expressing God's fullness of life, God's love is also expressed. In his own life (Father, Son, and the Spirit), and in the incarnation and crucifixion, he loves the

world. This actuality in God's own being is a redefinition and the re-interpretation of the oneness of God or the unity of God. The differences between Christianity and Islam is in their understanding of otherness they both affirm. In Christianity, it is the otherness of the triune persons, reflected in their personal distinctions. The otherness is in personal distinctions, this personal distinction is in communion. Migliore clarifies that,

> "the doctrine of the Trinity affirms the reality of personal distinctions in the one act of life in mutual love that is God. According to the doctrine of the Trinity, communion in love is ultimate, but so also are the distinctions of persons in communion. Personal distinctions are of lasting significance; they belong to what is ultimately real. The differences of persons in relationship are of abiding worth. While holding fiercely to the oneness of God, the doctrine of the Trinity also affirms, as a deep ontological truth, the primordial reality of difference in personal relationships…According to the doctrine of Trinity, this dignity of personal difference goes to the depths of reality. As William Placher puts it, 'One of the central insights provided by the doctrine of the Trinity is that *difference is all right*. Islam surely agrees that God affirms difference in creating a world other than God and in creating the plentitude of differences among his creatures. But the doctrine of the Trinity goes one step further and affirms that God's own life includes otherness; it includes abiding distinctions of persons in relationship" (*ibid*: 130 cf.131).

Speaking of divine power, the Triune belief expresses God's power in different ways. In line with the otherness of God, it shows the distinctiveness of what divine power is. From the Trinitarian perspective, God's power,

> "as confessed by Christian faith, can be stated in many ways. First, Trinitarian doctrine describes God's power as altogether different from our finite and sinful human experience and exercise of power. God's power is communicative power, shared power, both in God's own eternal life and in God's relationship to the world. The power of God is different from the mere power to transcend the world and exercise absolute control over the world. God's transcendent power is greater still. God is not the prisoner of his transcendence. God is more than free *from* the world; God freely chooses to be *for* the world. Just as God's different transcendence include the capacity to be immanent without ceasing to be transcendent, so God's different power includes the possibility to be dependent and weak, yet without ceasing to be truly God. To say that God has the capacity to be weak is not to say that God is impotent. On the contrary, it is to say that the cross manifests God's strength in weakness even as it manifests the weakness of the supposed strength of the powers of this world," (*ibid*: 128).

At this point, the Christian understanding of God's power is ironically in contrast to the Islamic knowledge of the definition of power. The Christian understanding of God's power in the weakness of the cross, provides a distinctive Christian basis for the Christian faith. This understanding means different things to each of these religions. The differences however are grounded in their doctrines and hermeneutical knowledge of understanding of God.

However, the Trinitarian approach to God's power shows the emptiness of other forms of power in that, "[w]hat is considered power by a faithless world ——the ability to control and dominate others, the capacity to have one's way regardless of the harm that it does to others–is

at the end of the day a display of weakness. God's power in weakness is shown in God's freedom to humble himself, to accept vulnerability, to give himself for the good of others, to exercise patience and to reject coercion as the means of accomplishing the divine purposes" (*ibid*: 129).

Theological differences seem to be a critical reality which will always exist in religious conversation, but as John B. Glubb asserts, the "differences do not necessarily mean rivalry; on the contrary, they can be a means of harmony, for one becomes the complement of the other" (1957: 6).

3. 9. Conclusion

Migliore, emphasizes that what influences our human knowledge of God's power is profoundly significant since it has a resultant effect because it influences how God's divine person and nature are comprehended. The significance of human understandings of God's power depends on what constitutes the source of their knowledge. For Christians, Scripture is the source of their knowledge of human being, it is believed that the scriptural understanding of who God is, lays the basis for understanding God's divine power

The Scripture stresses that God is triune. The Trinity is the confession of the biblical understanding of God by the Christian church. The doctrine of the Trinity expresses the nature of God, which is self-giving, other-affirming, community-creating love. God as triune means God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in the union of a loving communion. The three persons of the Trinity are in mutual, unconditional interaction. The communion of the triune God upholds the unique differences, and unity, that embraces the other.

The scriptural basis of the doctrine of the Trinity explains the biblical position of the unity of God that is the oneness of God. This confession of the triune God has been interpreted that God is "not three Gods but three distinct personal expressions of the one, eternal rich God who is love (1 John 4:8)". A New Testament interpretation of the gospel story of God's love, that comes to rescue and to renew creation as an expression of triune activity. In addition the New Testament account of the coming of God to rescue and renew the creation, there are three inseparable reference points. The love of God comes originally from the one called 'Father', is humanly enacted in the world in the sacrificial love of the one called 'Son,' and becomes a present and vital reality in the Christian life by the one called 'Spirit.'

The dominant theme of power is that it has been the ability to exercise control. On the contrary, for Migliore divine power is understood from the Trinitarian perspective, in that it is understood

in the light of the New Testament. He goes on to say that God's power "is altogether different from the human exercise to control and dominate others. The power of the triune God is *omnipotent love*" omnipotent love is that which creates, it brings salvation, and redemption through Christ, without "domination or coercion, but sovereign and effective without displacing or bludgeoning God creatures" (2004: 86). In his description Migliore goes on to analyze what God's power is. In his understanding it is omnipotent love, sovereign, that brings salvation, redemption, and acknowledges the freedom of living beings, and on the other hand it describes what it is not, which is to control, dominate and oppress others. God's omnipotent love is the key through which God's divine power needs to be seen. The main principle behind this understanding is seen from God's freedom and love being a key point borrowed from Karl Barth, i.e., that God's attributes "are best interpreted in pairs that point to the being an act of God as the one who loves in freedom" (*ibid*: 84).

Migliore believes when God's power is understood from a Trinitarian perspective, it shows that there is a need for the reinterpretation of the traditional view of an understanding of God's divine power. As such, the Trinitarian interpretation of God is a key to understanding God's power.

This chapter considered God's power theologically. It now opens the way to reflect on how others may have interpreted and understood God's power. The next chapter will again reflect on divine power considering Hans-Ruedi Weber book, "*Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology*."

CHAPTER FOUR - WEBER: POWER IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY.

4. 1. Introduction

Theologically, the previous chapters examined God's power using Daniel L. Migliore's works, *Faith Seeking Understanding: Introduction to Christian Theology* and *The Power of God and the gods of Power*. In both books, it is argued that God's power is understood as triune power which is defined, and described by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, which is demonstrated by his love.

This chapter approaches the theological notion of God's power using biblical theology as a basis in seeking to understand it. Norman R. Gulley a professor of systematic theology, argues that biblical theology as other branches of theologies, provides valuable aid in the studying systematic theology (2003:179-182)[19]. Again, he comments that as systematic theology examines the all parts in relation to the whole, biblical theology[20] is valuable as it gives a dimension of what the Scriptures have to say on a topic (*ibid*: 180). Therefore, engaging Han-Ruedi Weber's material *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology* helps us in giving another important insight on the subject at hand. This book is written from an ecumenical perspective, which is slightly different in focus to Migliore's work that is regarded as more Reformed in nature.

In his discussion on God's power Weber believes biblical theology is the springboard for examining the theme of Power. The Bible becomes the basis for explanation through which the Christian can see God's action concerning the subject at hand. God's divine power is central in human conversation, within this certainty as Weber says, "[i]f Christians want to discover what it means to covenant together for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, biblical reflection on how God's power relates to human and cosmic powers of our time must be at the very heart of it" (1989: *IX*).

This chapter examines power from what Weber calls 'faith trajectories'. These faith trajectories (or traditions) as Weber puts forward include: God's liberating acts, or Exodus tradition or Mosaic Faith; God's royal rule or Royal tradition; God's empowering wisdom, otherwise referred to as the Wisdom Tradition; God's holy presence, otherwise known as the Cultic tradition; God's vindication of the poor or the *Anawim* tradition; and God' renewing judgement, or the Apocalyptic tradition. According to Weber "[e]ach of the faith trajectories led to a distinctive understanding of God's power in relation

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[19] Norman R. Gulley also argued biblical theology can be studied from the theology of either the Old Testament or the New Testament. It can be done on theology of the individual books of the Bible, or from a thematic topic. He argues that there are insights from the Old Testament that are relevant to systematic theology. He argued that Scripture should be studied for its sake.

[20] S. D. Snyman, S.D. appears to argue differently. See his article 'Some thoughts on the relationship between Old Testament studies and systematic theology', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35(1), Art. #782, 7 pages.

to the human and cosmic power struggle" (1989: 167). These faith trajectories serve to offer a slightly different take on the subject under investigation in relation to Migliore's work on God's power.

Hans-Ruedi Weber, first introduces a common perception regarding how human beings perceive power. He says that human beings, at all times acknowledge the idea of power, either divine power or demonic forces; or the power of nature (that is, of water and wind and fire, both life-sustaining and life-destroying) or power from the human dimension - this might include nuclear power which equally protects or threatens all of life. Subsequently, on the aspect of the use of power, he says persuasion, coercion and violence are frequently employed to achieve economic, political, and military ends and the purpose therein. Human lives are influenced, controlled and shaped by these powers; in the same vein, power can be a tool for accomplishment (1989: *IX*).

In his discussion on God's power Weber believes biblical theology is the springboard for examining the theme of Power with the Bible being the background. It therefore becomes the bedrock of explanation through which Christians can see God's action concerning the subject at hand. God's divine power is central in human conversation, with this view Weber states that, "[i]f Christians want to discover what it means to covenant together for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, biblical reflection on how God's power relates to the human and cosmic powers of our time must be at the very heart of it" (*ibid*).

The emphasis, as Weber has also pointed out, is that "[f]or the right understanding of biblical texts it is therefore important to see them in their own context" (*ibid*: 3). Based on this premise Weber focuses on what he calls "faith trajectories" or "biblical tradition" to engage in the discourse on power in biblical theology. Faith trajectories emerge, or originate as a result of diverse situations and experiences (*ibid*: 114) transcribed from the historic events in the Old Testament through to the New Testament accounts.

Biblical contextual circumstances were critical in the conceptualization and the development of each of the trajectories. The context of the biblical experiences was shaped by the political, social, economic and religious environment the people went through, it therefore facilitates the movement of each of the trajectories mentioned above. Craig Evans a New Testament scholar underscores the purpose of understanding the context, he says that if a subject is understood in its "proper context" (2007: 13), it then supplies what the intended meaning is and consequently the result would have a constructive outcome. The whole Bible gives the sensible sequence on what God's power is, and this ultimate provisional information becomes the bedrock of the basis of belief.

4. 2. God's Power of Liberating Acts

Weber termed introduces divine power from the aspect of God's liberating acts in relation to Exodus faith. These acts are more often a reference of God actions in the Old Testament, where God's involvement in human state of affairs is recorded. God's deeds in this circumstance are to emancipate those who live in captivity. The Liberating acts of God take diverse forms; one of the ways of God's unswerving involvement is using either human agency or some supernatural event to bring about liberation. Consequently, other symbols seem to be drawn into the interpretation of God's liberating actions. Weber noted "Mosaic faith sees divine power being manifested through direct interventions of God's mighty hand in the realm of creation and human history," (1989: 58). This introduces the hand of God as one of the means by which God shows God's power.

4. 2. 1 The Hand of God

The "hand of God" or "mighty hand of God[21]" is a figurative reference to God's liberating acts of might in interfering or intervening in human situations, rescuing on behalf of those being victimised. Weber argues that it is, "[t]he most common ancient Jewish and Christian symbol for God's powerful intervention is the *hand of God* reaching down from heaven." The "ancient Israelite story-tellers spoke of the mighty hand of the God who testified to Moses: 'The Egyptians shall know that *I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand* upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them' (Ex .7: 5)" (1989: 29). The "saving" or rescuing of those being maltreated, as in the case of the children of Israel, invokes hope to the rescued people knowing that they are set free from their captors and oppressors. The experience of God's liberation, according to Weber, "led to a first biblical tradition of faith" (ibid: 30).

The mighty hand of God led to the exodus experience. The Israelites experience of God's mighty hand, led them to sing in Ex. 15: 1-21 as a testament to God's direct intervention. His triumph and victories turned out to be a pillar in the worship of Yahweh, which became a commemorative reflection committed into memory passed on to generations for the purpose of not forgetting what God had done through their history.

The mighty hand of God in this regard appears to be in two dynamic positions, Weber has stated that, it indicates "power is the strict rule of God in intervening on behalf of the weak, those being oppressed

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[21] In the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, apart from the literal referent of the meaning of hand, among other things it has shown how the hand has been used in symbolic acts, and metaphorically (Gen 3:22; Judge 5:26; Lk 6:1; Mt 5:30; 2kings 5:18). The figurative use of hand has five primary ideas, it signifies "power and strength"; "authority, control or possession"; "right hand" "consecration and designation" "side, coast or border". In power and strength, it is all about God's acts of redemptive, judgement, restoration. "To be engraved on the hands of God was to be at the center of his power and control of history" (Is 49:16)." (1998) 361. It signifies that there are things that only the redemptive hands of God could have done.

by the powerful, and God's punishing those inflicting pains on others; in another way, it thus means liberation signifies justice for the weak" (1986: 39). Thus, it means liberating the weak serves to endorse the idea of fairness and equality from God's perspective.

The understanding of God's hand metamorphosed during the exilic and the postexilic period. Weber points out a situation in the postexilic period when Nehemiah came to rebuild the fallen walls, "[t]he spirit of Joshua was revived when the *governor Nehemiah* felt God's hands upon him (Neh. 2: 18). He challenged the dispirited exiles now back in Jerusalem, to rebuild the walls of the city, though the circumstances were difficult" (*ibid*: 36). The hand of God on Nehemiah serves as the strength needed to encourage the returned exiles to embark on the construction of the walls of Jerusalem. This supposition advocates that God's hand does not always display God's might as in the case, of using angels or miracles as in the exodus experience. The exile was the result of disobedience in the life of the Israelites as they forsook the Lord going after other deities. However, the motivation for the rebuilding of the walls was also to rekindle another way of reflection on the God of the exodus experience. Loring W. Batten, reflecting on the notion of the hand of God, suggests that the "sense in which Nehemiah uses *hand of God* becomes clear now; it is *guidance* rather than power, (1913: 202). The two scenarios suggest the hand of God is the context within which two interpretations are possible, namely, power and guidance.

4. 2. 2. God's Power and Humans as God's Medium

God's power and human medium describe what Weber calls God's royal rule. It is another way of God displaying God's power, often by the use of human beings as a medium for exhibiting such power. The human medium turns out to be an indirect or an unforeseen means through which God demonstrates God's might as in the case of using Moses for delivering the Israelites. Weber highlighted the use of Moses' staff, which was turned into a snake, the crossing of the Red Sea, using fewer and sometimes "insignificant" people like Gideon whose clan was the weakest and he was the least in is family. God does that in such a way that human beings would realize that victory comes from God's power (Ex. 14: 13f; Judg. 6:15, 7: 2FF) (*ibid*: 39 cf. 123). Such participation according to Weber "in *the Lord's battle does not lead to hero worship*. Power and victory come exclusively from the I AM- God, from his absolute theocracy. After the victory is won, the captive and the booty are therefore not at the free disposal of the people. According to the stern law of war (Deut. 20: 10-18) whatever is captured must be dedicated to the Lord. This often means that all must be utterly destroyed. If there are songs of victory, they exalt not human but divine power and majesty" (*ibid*).

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Weber states that the human representatives are "human kings as stewards of God's royal power" (*ibid*: 53). In using such human representatives, God's Spirit empowered them to carry out God's given task. Weber further interprets how God's Spirit is involved in the process, he states that

> "[a]ccording to Mosaic faith *God's Spirit* could suddenly take hold of a person for accomplishing mighty acts of liberation or judgement. Like several judges before him Saul still experienced this sudden invasion of God's Spirit, which came and went unpredictably just as the elusive presence of the God of the desert journey. Of David, however, it is affirmed that when he was anointed 'the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward' (1 Sam. 16: 13); also after this event God's Spirit was perceived to work in different ways. According to the royal tradition of faith, however, the power of God's Spirit manifested itself preferentially through this elected Davidic leader and king" (*ibid*: 50 cf. 49).

The presence of God's Spirit was a sign that God was with the king. If the Spirit is with the king it means that the king can be used of God. Weber underlined that "[t]he tradition of what God's mighty hand achieved continued with the history of God's anointed kings who represented his royal power" (*ibid*: 53). God's anointing of kings also extend to those kings that were not Israelites (*ibid*: 58). Interestingly, the royal representation was not limited to those that are presumed good, Weber states that,

> "[n]evertheless, even such unfaithful representatives of the Davidic dynasty were carriers of the great promise given to David through the prophet Nathan. However weak their stewardship of God's royal power, they still remained *vassals of God the King*. This exalted status was celebrated in the royal psalms (Ps. 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; and 144) where notions borrowed from Egyptian, Canaanite and Mesopotamian understandings of kingship are applied to Davidic kings" (*ibid*: 53).

Daniel L. Migliore shared this reality of God's power in liberating those that are in a difficult situation, though he has not interpreted it in the same detail as Weber has done. Weber details the usage of human mediums as agents of God's liberating acts. Yet, they both share this understanding regarding God's power.

4. 2. 3. The Power of God's Steadfast Covenantal Love.

Weber next considers God's steadfast covenant of love in relation to God's power. The covenant is the commitment that God made primarily with the Israelites after he brought them out of Egypt. The symbiotic covenant relationship reflects God's relationship with this people as a nation. It was a relationship that was based on the Ten Commandments, which, according to Weber were made by God through the covenant with Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. On the one hand, God's love was a new thing that was unveiled. Weber is of the view that God's love is an "incomprehensible love and faithfulness. His mighty hand which has power to rescue and punish is also the hand which has power to support, to lift up and heal" (*ibid*: 40). The covenant love speaks of God's attributes and commitment. When it comes to the observance of the covenant, God remains constant. The reliability of God's commitment to his covenant is described as follows by Weber,

> "[a]ccording to the exodus tradition of faith God's steadfast covenant love holds up the Israelites in an incomprehensible way and gives them their identity. This same divine love and faithfulness has singled out and upheld King David and his dynasty according to the royal tradition of faith. Both according to Mosaic and Davidic faith it is God's elusive presence with the people and the anointed king which make them special (*ibid*: 59).

Even though Israel has not remained committed and steadfast, as Hosea has pointed out, God remains faithful. It emphasizes God's nature of love to his people. The Israelites were secured to the promise of the Mosaic faith (direct interventions of God's mighty hand) yet, they did not submit and adhere to the God and God's covenant. Because, of their lack of consistency in obeying God Weber furthermore emphasized that Hosea's message was a reinterpretation of the Mosaic faith in the light of God's love for the Israelites. Hosea "[i]n his reinterpretation of the Mosaic faith there is indeed a shift of emphasis from the liberating and punishing power of the terrifying covenant God to the power of enduring covenant love, although these two ways in which God's mighty hand works are never totally separated… This change of emphasis within the same tradition is not caused by human repentance or merit, but by a conversion within God's own heart" (*ibid*: 40 cf. 53).

In terms of love, both Weber and Migliore wrote concerning the love of God in reference to divine power. In this regard, they compliment one another. In particular there is some coherence in their understanding that God's love is a demonstration of what it reflects. Migliore speaks of God's love as a love centred on the action both of God and a love that is directed to human beings.

4. 2. 4. God's Power in relation to Elusive Presence

Another unique way through which God's power is manifested, is in the elusiveness in some of God's actions. In an alternative sense, God's power of elusive presence can be described as the hidden action of God. To explain this Weber says,

> "[a]ccording to the exodus tradition of faith God's power is thus not at the disposal of human beings, not even within the control of the mediator Moses. *God remains free* to come or to go, to speak or to be silent, to intervene or not to intervene. Nevertheless, it is this elusive and hidden presence of the God of Sinai which gives the Israelites a unique identity. Moses himself expresses this when in his pleading with the Lord he says: 'Is it not in thy going with us, that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?' (Ex. 33:16)" (*ibid*: 41).

A reoccurring aspect of the elusive power of God is that of God's presence. The presence of God is synonymous with God's manifesting his power. As God's presence manifests power, the power of God is evidently demonstrated as God wishes. God decides what, when and how to act or to display God's power. In such a case, human prediction regarding God's actions or inaction becomes difficult, or even impossible. It seems that this relates to God's free will, in his actions and in manifesting his presence (power). Elusiveness entails the uncertainty, and vagueness of knowing whether God is there or not, and if God will act or not. Human desires and expectations are not what control or

"move" God. As could be recalled, the Ark of the Covenant from the exodus experience is a "sign" or a symbol of the invisible presence of God as well his mighty power (cf. *ibid*: 42). This interpretation is contrary to the current popular cultural superhero phenomenon that has saturated the world today in which God is expected to deal with every situation. Daniel Migliore brings this to the fore to be theologically evaluated in the light of biblical theology, which Weber supports, although from a slightly different theological perspective.

Liberating acts in the New Testament are in reference to Jesus Christ, and this is similar to the exodus experience. The association of the person of Jesus Christ to the exodus experience is about the saving activities of Jesus Christ. Even in the Old Testament the exodus faith trajectory laid the foundation which foreshadowed the purpose for which Jesus Christ came. Weber like Migliore, contends that the New Testament indicates Christ's connection with the exodus experience, which sets the precedence in identifying Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of prophecy and affirms that Jesus Christ came to save that which was lost (*ibid*: 42-43).

There is a parallelism of the exodus tradition in the New Testament in that it affirms and reinterprets the exodus liberation tradition in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Weber, argues that Christ's ministry is to save or liberate in order to manifest God's enduring covenant love in his blood (*ibid*: 43 cf. 44). This Biblical testimony explains that Christ's 'exodus' parallel (as expressed in the New Testament) does not end with his crucifixion, death and resurrection. Neither should it be "applied only to the spiritual salvation of the individual believer's soul. The New Testament does emphasize personal salvation within the community of believers, but it puts an equally strong emphasis on the cosmic dimension of Christ's saving work" (*ibid*: 45).

4. 3. God's Royal Tradition

The previous section recognizes God's power in liberating acts. Weber describes these acts "in the fact that the Mosaic faith sees divine power being manifested through [the] direct interventions of God's mighty hand in the realm of creation and human history," (1989: 58).

This subdivision of God's royal tradition introduces another faith tradition categorized as the "Royal tradition" or "Davidic faith," in which God's divine power is presented in what it refers to as "God's royal rule." God's royal rule opens up a dimension which indicates and signifies God's interacting relationship with the Israelites, and by extension to "other nations" (*ibid*: 57), through a system of administrative leadership where God assigned certain aspects of God's transferred authority to human representatives (*ibid*: 48 cf. 58). These human representatives include what the biblical historical text calls the judges and the kings.

Individual judges were raised at various times before the institution of the monarchy to carry out needed responsibilities. Weber describes how the leadership among the Israelites was constituted,

> "[a]ccording to the earliest biblical sources the establishment of *monarchy among the Israelites* had nothing to do with the Egyptian or Mesopotamian concepts of kingship. A 'prince/leader' (in Hebrew: *nagid*) was anointed as an emergency measure in order 'to save the people from the hand of their enemies round about' (1 Sam. 10: 1). The change-over took place only gradually, from the strictly theocratic rule of God's mighty hand, through the charismatic leadership of the Judges, to God's royal rule through his anointed kings and especially through the Davidic dynasty" (*ibid*: 49).

The emergence of judges/leaders as earlier argued, was God's way to save the people of Israel from their enemies. On this note, the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann affirms God's power as an expression of commitment and care. He says, "Yahweh's resolved capacity to intervene decisively against every oppressive, alienating circumstance and force that precludes a life of well-being" (1997: 174). Though this seems to reflect Mosaic faith, it is a liberating act using political leadership. This also opens a transition to another faith tradition. It is significant to comprehend the realism that surrounds the appearance and purpose of monarchical leadership. It is due to what seems to be the circumstantial problems and needs that arise in the history of the Israelites. It is an indication that reflects God's concern in raising mediums of assistance where the need arises. Weber argues that God chose "and he blessed the anointed representative of his royal power with the divine Spirit," (*ibid*: 48). The choice of who becomes the king was made by God by means of mediators: prophets/judges/priests (*ibid*: 48, 53) and the confirmation of the chosen king was made by God through God's Spirit manifesting on the chosen representative.

4. 3. 1. God's Spirit

In relating to the power of God in the royal faith tradition, one needs to consider the person and work of God's Spirit. One of the ways in which God's Spirit has been described is in terms of God's work. Similarly, as part of God's royal tradition, the appointment of human representatives (as stated earlier) was through the confirmation of God's Spirit. Through God's Spirit leaders are identified, and are carefully chosen, to carry out God's given assignment.

God's Spirit is also the distinguishing mark between the leaders and their followers. Therefore, Weber argues in this regard that, "[a]ccording to Mosaic faith *God's Spirit* could suddenly take hold of a person for accomplishing mighty acts of liberation or judgement. Like several Judges before him Saul still experienced this sudden invasion of God's Spirit, which came and went unpredictably just as the elusive presence of the God of the desert journey" (*ibid*: 50; 49 cf. Fergusson, 2014: 7). Subsequently, David also had such an experience: "when he was anointed 'the Spirit of the Lord came mightily

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upon David from that day forward' (1 Sam. 16: 13). Also, after this event God's Spirit was seen to work in many ways among the people of Israel.

As kings are God's representatives, the welfare of the people plays a critical role in their responsibilities (1 Sam. 17: 26). The representatives are to dispense justice and act fairly in their responsibilities. However, this was not the case, the behaviour of some of these human representatives (the judges) as the biblical witness showed that they were not wholly reliable. FF Bruce, the biblical scholar, noted what happened during the period of the judges when Samuel the prophet-judge was old. He says:

> "[b]ut Samuel grew old, and then the question arose who should take his place. He had two sons who acted as deputy judges for him, but they did not show their father's strict impartiality and were suspected of venality. The people had no desire to be judged by them when Samuel could no longer discharge his judicial functions. The old desire to have a hereditary monarchy which had found expression in Gideon's day was voiced anew with greater persistence. But a hereditary monarchy introduced a principle which was bound to change the character of civil rule in Israel. Hitherto they had been ruled by charismatic judges raised up by God from this tribe or that in His sovereign good pleasure; the hereditary principle meant that their rulers in future would not necessarily have the special spiritual endowment which had marked Samuel and his predecessors, but would more probably resemble the kings of Israel's neighbours (1963: 23 cf. Weber, 1989: 50).

With the emerging desire for change of Israel's leadership, it is noteworthy in the foregoing discussion that the transformational development of leadership begins from the judges onward to the monarchy. As it was argued earlier by Bruce the choice of the king was later changed. Hereditary lineage became the means of having political kings and this became the norm in subsequent years. Weber states that as in the preceding transition, *"human kings as stewards of God's royal power* remained part of Israelite faith. God's commitment to David and his dynasty remained as steadfast as God's self-commitment to his elect people at Sinai. The tradition of what God's mighty hand achieved continued with the history of God's anointed kings who represented his royal power" (1989: 53 cf. 58). Weber says leadership, whether monarchy or judges, were believed to be an extension of the hand of God, in terms of intervening and bringing succour to those being led. In "the royal tradition God's Spirit remains with the anointed king. As soon as the earthly rulers become autocrats and despots they are under severe prophetic criticism, whether they are Davidic kings or not. The stewards of God's royal power must use it responsibly and wisely for justice and peace. They are held accountable for the way they rule," (*ibid*: 58). The expectation is for kings to be balanced in their relational allegiance to God and God's directives, and their administrative responsibilities.

The power of God's Spirit manifested through the leader and king. The special leadership charism of David became manifest in the choice of his capital (*ibid*: 50). God's Spirit empowered the chosen representatives to carry out God's mandate. God's Spirit, at the same time reflects that God's presence

is with an elected ruler. Thus, the Spirit leads, empowers and influence decisions made by the chosen leader to embark on a mission as directed by God. Another human responsibility of the leader in this circumstance is to be sensitive to the leadership of God's Spirit.

An further change developed during the monarchic period between the Davidic and the Solomonic periods as stated below:

> "[t]here is a marked shift in the style and conception of life from the legendary stories of David's ascent (1Sam. 16-2; Sam. 6) to the historically well–documented *accounts of David's succession and of Solomon's reign* (2 Sam. 7-1 Kings 11). In the ascent stories God still appears with many traits of the exodus tradition of faith, while in the succession stories and the reports on Solomon's reign God's stands in the background. His elected and anointed kings, their wives and sons, their military commanders, administrators, priest and counsellors become their primary actors. No wonder one finds in that part of the Bible so many political intrigues and power games, so much human greatness and weakness, human faith and folly, contrition and prayer. It is no longer God's mighty hand which shapes history, but the responsible or irresponsible decisions and actions taken by the human stewards of God royal power" (*ibid*: 50 cf. F F Bruce, 1963: 23).

Responsibilities and choices of leadership echo the direction of chains of events as things unfold. Their unwillingness to abide within God's leadership leaves consequential effects which tend to affect their fellowship with God and natural resources otherwise described as the "fertility of the land" (*ibid*: 58). The rule of kings and God's royal rule were comparably different, the consistency in maintaining and obeying God's command was deficient, and the rule of kings was perceived to be "cruel" (*ibid*: 53).

Unfortunately, the monarchy abused God's given privileges and responsibilities which were meant to lead their subjects in justice and fairness. Sadly their rule oppressed some and discriminated against certain of their subjects. They began relying on their political structures and diplomacy, turning and serving other deities instead of Yahweh (1 Kings, 12: 1-11). The failure of the leadership, and the shift that has taken place among the Israelites was flawed. Weber further reiterates that despite the Israelite' decision,

> "[n]evertheless, *human kings as stewards of God royal power* remained part of Israelite faith. God's commitment to David and his dynasty remained as steadfast as God's self-commitment to his elect people at Sinai. The tradition of what God's mighty hand achieved continued with the history of God anointed kings who represent his royal power. However weak their stewardship of God's royal power, they still remained vassals of God the King" (*ibid*: 53).

The failure of the leadership for not obeying God led the nation into going to exile. Subsequently, while in the exile, God's royal tradition was re-examined. Weber argues that, "out of the royal tradition has grown a major trend in the messianic expectations" (*ibid*: 59), speaking of the future messianic king which the prophets announced (*ibid*: 56 cf. 59. This brings the new subtopic to be discussed in relation to God's royal tradition. However on the current point Weber, differs with Migliore in their discussion on the Spirit of God. While Weber speaks from the perspective of the

liberative work of God's Spirit, Migliore speaks from the perspective of the triune relationship with reference to God's Spirit.

4. 3. 2. The Messianic King: On the cross

In the pre-exilic era, God's power in the Royal tradition is interpreted as delegated power given to human representatives, as vassals of his power. Among other things the delegated representatives are to liberate and they are to act justly and fairly in judgement and peace. Jerusalem was conquered, by the Babylonians. Therefore, the question of what happen with the royal tradition of faith comes to the fore since it was a delegated authority. It is logical to say that the royal tradition had to be looked at again. The inhabitants were taken into captivity, including the king. However, in the midst of this situation, God was still communicating to the Israelites, however at this juncture in their history God's communicated primarily through God's prophets. The prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied God's messages to the Israelites. Part of the prophet Jeremiah's message, as Weber argued, was for the exiles to settle down in Babylon, to pray for the city for its welfare, such that the deportees will find benefits in its welfare Jer. 29 (*ibid*: 54 cf.61).

During this period God's commitment to the Davidic dynasty was reinterpreted (*ibid*: 55). Ezekiel the prophet-priest and one of the exiles declares the basis for the "downfall of Jerusalem and its Davidic kings in the sin of pride. They did not acknowledge God's glory" (*ibid*: 55). On the other hand, the priests, the religious leaders and the elders too, significantly contributed to the sin of the Israelites Ezekiel 7:23 ff. cp. 34:1-10 (*ibid*: 55). Therefore, the exile was God's punishment for the wrong the Israelites had committed. But in the midst of this, there was a message of hope. Weber emphasizes the message of hope as the biblical witness declared, had to do with the restoration of the temple and the re-establishment of a future Davidic ruler. Weber reiterated that "[a]ll the same a future Davidic ruler plays a role in the vision of hope: the kingdom will be reunited: My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes, … and David my servant shall be their prince for ever' (37:15-28)" (*ibid*: 55).

In the exilic period, and during the post-exilic period, the Israelites eagerly expected the future Davidic king which the prophets announced. The returnees' perspective was still the idea of the royal tradition. But then, the question is, was this the intended meaning of the prophet? Weber described that the exilic period led to a re-examination of the meaning and the understanding of delegated power of the royal tradition. Weber argues that the exilic period was a moment of "rethinking of Davidic kingship" (*ibid*: 54). He asserts that the prophets "reinterpreted God's commitment to the Davidic dynasty" (*ibid*: 55). Comparably, the reinterpretation uses the knowledge of God's commitment to

the Davidic dynasty to speculate what God will do in future in embracing the whole of creation (*ibid*: 55). The reinterpretation as argued by Weber would,

> "shift the emphasis from the past glory of David's kinship to the future glory of a coming new Davidic ruler. This future steward of God's royal power will exercise his rule on a universal scale. His use of power will be for the punishment of ruthless tyrant. He will secure justice and peace for the exploited poor and weak. In some prophetic reinterpretations the accent lies heavenly on the fact that the coming Davidic king will not use the means of human power, but will rule by God's Spirit. Thus Zachariah announced to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord' (Zech.4:6)" (*ibid*: 58).

However, among the returnees, the post-exilic situation and the inter-testamental period seems to advocate the central messianic understanding of the Davidic dynasty which contained both religious and political ideas. Why is it both religious and political? Weber argues that,

> "[a]fter centuries of submission to Babylonian, Persian and Hellenistic rulers, the Maccabean revolt established once again a Jewish state. The cruel persecutions of faithful Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanus and the victories of Judas the Maccabee (= the hammerer) gave rise to fervent Messianic hopes. When later the Hasmonean priest-kings with their political intrigues gave the lie to these expectations and when the Romans armies conquered Palestine, the hopes for a coming Messianic saviour revived all the more strongly" (*ibid*: 56).

Since the above factors strengthened the messianic expectation, Weber has highlighted the expectation of the returning exiles as an expectation of a political leadership. This specific expectation made them to see the messianic king, the "son of David", solely from a political perspective.

The New Testament witness introduces power as it was understood in the context of God's royal rule. Power belongs to God. The earthly kings' power is temporally given to them by God to be used in ruling God's people. Jesus' reply to the Roman procurator affirms this position, Weber explains Jesus' conversation:

> "'[y]ou would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above' (John 19: 10f.). Pilate's power is thus at the same time acknowledged and relativized: just as the Old Testament royal tradition of faith perceived the king's authority as one given by God and to be exercised under God, so Pilate's power is seen here as a given power which can at any time be revoked by God. This Old Testament conception of the rulers as stewards of God's power marked part of the early Christians' attitude to the Roman empire and its functionaries (for another — and corrective — early Christian attitude see the apocalyptic tradition)" (*ibid*: 61).

The Pauline Epistles, according to Weber, identify with the above position in 1 Tim. 2: 1ff; Tit. 3: 1; Roman 13: 1ff. Sequentially, there has been a shift of the prophetic reinterpretation of the royal tradition of faith of the past glory of David's kingship to the future glory of a coming new Davidic ruler who will exercise his rule universally, and whose rule will be by God's Spirit (*ibid*:58). Through this new ruler justice shall reign and the exploited will experience peace (*ibid*: 58),

Matthew, as well as Luke and John's gospel presentations point to Jesus Christ as the one who has the messianic title of the king of the Jews, (Matt. 2: 1-12; 27: 11; 25: 34, 40; Luke 23: 2; John 18:

36f;), "but when, misled by their political Messianic expectations, the Jewish crowd 'were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew' (John 6: 15)" (*ibid*: 63). The description of the messianic king was ironic in comparison to where kings would normally be situated and how they (kings) would normally conduct themselves. Quoting the biblical narrative Weber contends that the astrologers looked in the wrong place for the king. "Not in the proud city of David, the mighty king, but in the humble village of the shepherd boy David was the new king born. It was in Bethlehem, not in Jerusalem, where he could be found – the one who continued the royal tradition of faith but lived in a paradoxical way. For when finally we meet this king on his throne, the throne is a cross" (*ibid*: 61).

It could be said that the people's orientation somehow overshadowed biblical messianic prophesies, and that "[t]he son of David, this Messianic king, was seen as a human, political liberator" (*ibid*: 64). Weber, however, speaks of the paradoxical "New Testament reinterpretation of the royal tradition of faith. Jesus is the Messianic king, the son of David, but his messiah-ship has such a different character from the expected one that it remains hidden. Therefore Jesus strictly forbade all who began to perceive his true identity to tell anyone about it (cp. especially Mark 1: 25; 5: 43; 8: 30)" (*ibid*: 64).

4. 4. God's Power in the Wisdom Tradition

Weber suggests that the third strand of the biblical faith tradition is called the wisdom tradition (1989: 66). This section examines God's power in the context of the wisdom tradition of the Bible. Before examining God's power, it is worth pointing out that biblical wisdom as a tradition, seeks to understand, and to make sense of what life is. Moreover, it seeks to assist individuals to be able to distinguish the realities of life, and enable individuals to make the best of life.

Wisdom[22] as a tradition of faith existed in what Weber termed the "*oral tradition*" or "oral wisdom sayings" (*ibid*: 67). On a broad-spectrum wisdom can be a communication tool used in all strata of life. It serves as a means of communicating significance. Wisdom has been illustrated in a variety of forms such as didactic stories, fables, riddles, parables, proverbs, and it employs the use of figurative language (*ibid*: 66, 80, 82 cf. Witherington III, 1994: 3; Crenshaw, 2010: 27, 31). Through this means human beings are empowered to take responsibility. Weber argues that "[t]he empowerment to maturity has been marked *the style of wisdom teaching*: fables riddles, parables and stories which challenge listeners to search for meaning" (*ibid*: 80). In addition, Weber argues that wisdom

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[22] Stuarts Weeks writing on wisdom literature argues that "it is beyond doubt that all of the biblical wisdom books-along with apocryphal books of Ben Sira (also known as Ecclesiasticus) and wisdom of Solomon-are interested in the very concept of 'wisdom', and the concept itself, variously understood, embraces many of their central concern. Whatever else it may prove to be, wisdom literature is at least a literature about wisdom, and to understand the concept is to understand a great deal about literature" (2010) 1.

developed from two sources: one is the accumulated wisdom from the "everyday life-experiences of ordinary people in families and tribes", and other comes from "the schools for public servants and princes in ancient empires such as those in Egypt and Mesopotamia." (*ibid*: 67 cf. 69)[23]

Wisdom literature according to the New Testament scholar Ben Witherington III "is the sort of literature that more often than not seeks to persuade by causing the audience to think, rather simply assent to its world-view" (1994: 3 cf. Fergusson, 2014: 53). The usage of wisdom as a means of communication transcends pre-exilic, post-exilic, and inter-testamental periods as it has no inaugurating reference (Weber, 1989: 67), and is as old as humanity (*ibid*: 66) according to Weber.

Weber argues, that the sages, are more often the leading interpreters of wisdom and may differ in their communication and usage of wisdom. However, unlike the priests and prophets, and sages "only gave advice, fully conscious that their wisdom and insight were limited" (*ibid*: 78). The sages, according to Weber, intend to instruct "skill for living a useful and happy life". They seek to educate and to promote guidance for individuals to act responsibly on how to live "in harmony with the whole creation" and to develop "the skill[24] to administer and rule wisely" (*ibid*: 67). It should be noted, "[a]s the Israelite sages attempted to discern what leads to life and what is a path towards death, they did so in the presence of the Lord. *The awe/fear of the Lord,* often *related to the trust/confidence in the Lord*, is thus the source of all wisdom" (*ibid*: 69, 68 cf. Clements, 1992: 18; Fergusson, 2014: 53). Since the intent of the wisdom tradition is for people to individually think and to reflect, the motivation is to develop individuals who are capable of discerning and not to hurriedly come to a conclusion. Though the sages appear to be the leading interpreters and communicators of wisdom, it is not limited to them alone. "While in the pre-exilic proverbs wisdom was mainly seen as a human faculty, learned by people who fear and trust God, in the didactic poem of Job 28 wisdom become an elusive presence within creation." (*ibid*: 74)

Importantly, the influence of sages cannot be underestimated. They are very relevant in society, and especially in the political arena. Describing their function Weber states that "[t]he sages were often the advisers of the powerful in this world. By their patient observation of how things are and of what happens in the everyday life of persons and societies, they were led to *a sober and realistic assessment of all human powers*" (*ibid*: 78 cf. 67; 69). They frequently gave pertinent advice. Similarly, understanding God's power in the wisdom tradition developed from a series of reflections and discernments on creation and "accumulated everyday life experiences" (*ibid*: 67 cf. Witherington III,

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[23] This is not to suggest that wisdom was developed from these places, Weber argues that wisdom is international (1989) 67.

[24] According to Stuarts Weeks, wisdom in Hebrew also denotes skill for construction or in any other area. *An Introduction to the study of Wisdom Literature,* (2010) 39.

1994: 9-11). The analysis of political, social and religious experiences through different periods (exilic and post-exilic) has unravelled as well as shaped peoples' perspectives on God's actions (*ibid*: 70 cf. Sinnott, 2005: 54).

Wisdom as a tradition also examines the realities of day to day life experiences, compared to the relationship between religious belief and actual life. In other words, it observes matters of religious credence and actual life, or what Weber calls the unresolved tension between actual life and belief (*ibid*: 70 cf. Sinnott, 2005: 56). There seems to be a struggle between the truth of real life situations and spiritual belief. From the quotation below we can see that part of the tension in Israel's experience was about going into exile despite the religious symbols, such as the temple and the monarchy, which indicate God's presence or power among God's people. Commenting on this Sinnott says,

> "[i]n order to integrate their religious beliefs with the realities of the experienced world it was crucial that the survivors envisaged their lives as dependent on YHWH, their creator, and addressed the crucial question of the justice, power and wisdom of YHWH. Thus, they revisioned their way of understanding YHWH and their relationship with him in such changed circumstances. The wisdom writers' portrayal of the wisdom figure gives pride of place to the notion of a world shaped and governed by an all-wise, all-seeing, all-powerful Creator. They endeavour to grapple intellectually with the problems posed by a belief system that proved inadequate when faced with the collapse of institutional structures and symbols viable only within very restricted parameters. When the pre-exilic religious world-view, centred on the land, the Jerusalem temple, and the monarchy was confronted and undermined or destroyed, wisdom's adaptability to address the changed circumstances of the survivors enabled the fashioning and teaching of a tradition and way of life that were not dependent on the temple, monarchy or land" (2005: 56).

In addition to the above, God's power in the pre-exilic times is assumed to be revealed to those who do good or are righteous. This presupposition is based on the Near East interpretations of realism. Weber argues that "[c]onventional proverbs in the whole Near East assume and act-consequence sequence: the wise will have a happy and long life while the foolish will soon perish. 'The hope of the righteous ends in gladness, but the expectation of the wicked comes to naught' (Prov. 10:28). While taking over such a belief in a just development from cause to effect the pre-exilic sages were firmly convinced that 'in the fear of the Lord one has confidence' (Prov. 14:26)" (*ibid*: 70). In other words, the righteous will always have the best share of life. This view was held because reality was centred on cause and effect. Thus, when righteous individuals suffer, they suffered because they had sinned. Therefore, such individuals need to confess their sins for their lives to be restored. Weber's argument is on the premise that "Pre-exilic wisdom presupposed a relatively peaceful and orderly situation. It was not fit for confronting catastrophes. The traumatic experience of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile therefore led to new kinds of wisdom teachings, critical wisdom, almost anti-wisdom." (*ibid*: 71 cf. Sinnott, 2005: 53-54).

Exilic and post-exilic wisdom struggled with the problem of understanding the reason that God is silent in the midst of human problems (as seen in the life of Job). The book of Job unveiled the

struggle that the wisdom tradition seems to wrestle with, which is what Weber describes as "the credibility of God who remains silent and whose arbitrary power is experienced as that of a cynical power tyrant. Why dost thou hide thy face, and count me as enemy? (13: 24; cp 6: 4; 16: 6-22)" (*ibid*: 71). This was the struggle of Job and the psalmist in Psalm 73. The biblical illustration of Job's situation, shows that misfortune in human life does raise questions related to one's beliefs, and it challenges the commemoration of the past experiences of God's power that had been transmitted all through their history. Hence, "[t]his incomprehensible divine silence and the cruel divine presence which Job now experiences are totally different from the Lord he came to know from the faith transmitted to him and the faith experienced in former days (10: 11f.)" (*ibid*: 71). The pre-exilic faith that has been transmitted and the "[c]onventional proverbs in the whole Near East assume an act-consequence sequence: the wise will have a happy and long life while the foolish will soon perish" (*ibid*: 70 cf. 117). This supposition, seems not to be the ultimate experience. Weber has suggested that,

> "many wisdom psalms take up this unresolved tension between belief and actual life experience (e.g. Ps. 73). The most honest and realistic observer of life among the post-exilic sages soberly acknowledges: 'There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil doing' (Eccl. 7: 15). Pre-exilic wisdom presupposed a relatively peaceful and orderly world situation. It was not fit for confronting catastrophes. The traumatic experience of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile therefore led to new kinds of wisdom teachings, critical wisdom, almost anti- wisdom (*ibid*: 70).

The pre-exilic faith was transmitted based on the belief that God is with the righteous. As such when one makes a right decision or takes a right course of action, one ends up being blessed, which suggests God's power is for the righteous. The implication becomes that of cause and effect. Weber has reckoned that,

> "[s]ome specific aspects of God's power appear in the course of Israelite appropriation and reinterpretations of the universal wisdom tradition of faith. Three of these will be mentioned here: first, the sober and realistic attitude towards all human power; secondly, the human vocation to be responsible, mature stewards of power; and thirdly, the acknowledgement of powers, the order and beauty with which God has endowed the whole of creation and with which human beings must live in harmony, lest they should destroy both themselves and creation (*ibid*: 77).

As the sages assessed human power in the wisdom tradition they realize the powerlessness and limitedness of human power. Thus, their advice is that rather than relying on human power, or human wisdom, or human acumen, it is much wiser to trust in God (Prov. 16: 25; 26: 12; Sir. 24: 28f) (*ibid*: 78). Migliore in his book *"The power of God and the gods of power"* also acknowledges human powerlessness. His perspective is however in reference to other factors than the exile, for example sickness. Yet his advice remains as Weber has pointed out, "[t]he wise trust God and not in their wisdom" (*ibid*: 78).

Relating to human vocation, or to the socioeconomic situation, laziness in the wisdom tradition is abhorred, unjust oppression of the poor using the social structure to do injustice is equally repulsive. The sages maintain as Weber has said, "[w]ith the Lord whom they trust, they stand on the side of the powers which lead to life and against the powers which harm and oppress life and thus create poverty. True, the sages are not radical revolutionaries. They advise cautiously waiting for the right time rather than pronouncements and precipitate action (*ibid*: 79). Observations, re-evaluation, discernment, and insights gained out of the Israelites' experiences from the pre-exilic to post-exilic and to inter-testamental periods led to a re-awakening of the understanding of God and God's actions. The Israelites' appropriation and discernment of God's power in the light of their experiences, causes the sages to instruct people to trust in God.

The wisdom literature in the post-exilic period portrayed wisdom as personified. Alice M. Sinnott an Old Testament scholar argues that it "appears in many guises in Wisdom literature" (2005: 1). The wisdom literature personified the enigmatic figure as a woman[25] (*ibid*: 73, 75 cf. Sinnott, 2005; Fergusson, 2014: 53; Plantinga, Thompson, Lundberg, 2010: 113). Similarly referred to as Lady Wisdom (or Dame wisdom on older English language). Wisdom as a feminine figure serves as a guide for human existence. 'She' also functions as a guide for human interaction with creation. Plantinga, Thompson, & Lundberg describe how wisdom functions, they said Lady wisdom in its femininity "makes a personal appeal, as if in the public square, for people to heed her counsel" (2010: 113). The appeal is to save, and to protect by means of listening to the teaching and receiving wisdom, for those that are educated are protected once they heed to wisdom.

Equally, wisdom is understood to be a feminine creative agent. As a creative agency, Weber states the perspective demonstrates that,

> "wisdom hymns show a more '*feminine' way of creating*. Dame Wisdom seeks communion. She pervades and penetrates all things. She creates and renews through a loving relationship, by changing the earth and human beings from within. She works by transformation rather than separation, by slow process of growth rather than peremptory commandments by beauty rather than external strength. The same God is at work through word and shaping hands as well as through wisdom. It is the same Creator, yet ─ at the risk of using stereotypes – this Creator's acts are perceived in Genesis as more masculine and in the wisdom hymns feminine way" (1989: 81, cf. Fergusson, 2014: 53).

Creation is now being explained in a different way by Lady Wisdom. Lady Wisdom illustrates God's divine action, and purpose towards creation as well as its well-being. The wisdom literature

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[25] In essays to honour J.A. Emerton, Roland E. Murphy argues in his article, "The Personification of Wisdom" that there are different interpretations concerning the personification of wisdom. He is of the view that, "A truly satisfying assessment of the theological meaning of the personified Wisdom is hard to achieve, due mainly to the aura of mystery that surround her. One can detect various phases of emphasis in the emergence of this figure, from Job to the Wisdom of Solomon". In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*. John Day, Robert P. Gordon; H.G. M. Williamson. (ed.) (1995) 231. Cf. Stuarts Weeks. *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature* (2010).

correspondingly identified Jesus Christ as the personification of wisdom, (the Word of God). Wisdom is specifically personified in Jesus Christ as the divine agent in whom creation has its existence. This existence, which the Hebrew wisdom literature is asserting or interpreting, is that Jesus Christ is the creative agency that "helps Yahweh create and structure creation" (Plantinga, Thompson, and Lundberg, 2010: 113; cf. Fergusson, 2014: 2, 6; Weber, 1989: 84). Creation cannot be separated or isolated from Jesus Christ, neither can its "regularity of nature, the divine law, and human affairs" according to Fergusson, (2014: 6).

Jesus Christ, the personified wisdom of God, as revealed in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, is revealed in the New Testament. The use of the familiar concept was completely reconsidered in a way that would shape and concretise a new whole meaning through the New Testament narratives. Weber states,

> "God's wisdom and God's word have in post- exilic and inter-testamental times become almost interchangeable. The wisdom/word who was at the beginning with God participates in God's creating work and dwells with all human beings. But while the wisdom of Sirach 24 finally puts up her tent on Zion and can now be found in Torah, God's wisdom/word in John's prologue becomes the person Jesus and pitches his tent among us. The Johannine Jesus is indeed described with the key terms of the wisdom hymns: glory, light and life, coming from God, descending from heaven, knowing God's works, etc. The 'Son of man' in John's Gospel has much in common with personified wisdom as with the enigmatic figure in Daniel 7. Like Dame Wisdom so the Johannine Jesus provides the bread of life and living water. He is the vine, and above all he calls us into communion of mutual love, with warnings to those who do not respond to this call. Nevertheless, in the whole of the fourth gospel Jesus is never called God's wisdom, and John certainly draws terms and images from other sources as well for his testimony to Jesus" (*ibid*: 83 Cf. Fergusson, 2014: 7; Plantinga, Thompson, and Lundberg, 2010: 113)

He goes on to explain that wisdom/word were concepts in common use at the time. They were vital sources in John's interpretation of the person and work of Jesus. For example, existing sources, such as Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:35; Matt. 23:34; Luke 11:49; Matt. 11:25-30; Luke 10:21f. Wis. 10:21 personified Jesus Christ with wisdom/word. The gospel of John in the New Testament identified, and personified Jesus Christ with the Wisdom Incarnate thus presenting Jesus' uniqueness (*ibid*: 83 cf. 163), which lies in his divinity, his existence before time. Creation derived its existence from him.

The New Testament gospel narrative and some of the Pauline epistles reflect Jesus at the same time as the "wisdom/word incarnate" (*ibid*: 82; 84). This is not because he speaks as the Old Testament sages did (cf. Matt. 7:24-27), but because he is unique and has authority. In Weber's words "[m]any attributes and tasks assigned to the personified wisdom in the post-exilic and inter-testamental wisdom hymns are assigned also to Jesus in the hymn quoted in Colossians 1:15-20. The teaching about Christ in Colossians and Ephesians was therefore probably influenced by the confession that in him appeared wisdom incarnate" (*ibid*: 84).

Identifying Christ with wisdom, Pauline theology categorizes it with the "wisdom of the cross" hence linking it with "Christ's crucifixion (1 Cor. 2: 7ff)" (*ibid*: 84-85). The crucifixion became the heart of Christian preaching, strangely enough, it is "a stumbling block to the Jew and folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1: 22ff)" (*ibid*: 85). The cross according to the biblical position turns out to be the means, the "unusual" way of God's salvation for humankind. According to Weber, Paul further emphasizes, "the cross becomes the criterion for knowing God. The scandal, weakness and folly of the cross-turn upside down all the traditional concepts of wisdom and power. At the same time the cross event becomes a new means of communications between the divine and human realities. It is in line with this paradoxical novel way of thinking that in Revelation 'power and wealth and wisdom and might' are assigned to the lamb who was slain" (Rev. 5: 12), (*ibid*: 85).

Regarding Jesus' wisdom teaching, the Gospel of Matthew meaningfully identified Jesus with Wisdom teaching. Weber considers this in stating that the gospel of Matthew depicts Jesus "the rabbi from Nazareth as a wisdom teacher challenging his hearers to reflect and make up their mind. At the beginning and at the end of his gospel, Matthew puts before his readers a crucial choice. Are we with the mighty king Herod or with the vulnerable king Jesus? Will we participate in the mission of the guards, sent out to tell a lie, or, together with the doubting disciples, in the mission of the risen Lord, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 2: 1-12, 28: 11-20)?" (*ibid*: 82).

Jesus' teaching implores his hearers to examine life and faith critically before making a decision. Weber describes this understanding by saying:

> "His wisdom teaching therefore has an urgency not found in the Old Testament wisdom tradition. His counsel concerns the ultimate questions of eternal life or death for both individual persons and the whole of universe. In accordance with the basic creed of the Israelite sages Jesus lived as one who trusted wholly in God, but in his teaching ─ especially as recorded by the fourth evangelist – trust in God could be learned only through an intimate communion with Jesus himself (*ibid*: 83).

Human beings are empowered through wisdom to become stewards of this earth (*ibid*: 80). As stewards, Weber argues that the actuality of the stewardship, is that the "God of the wisdom tradition wants human beings to be free within the limits set by the fact that they are mortal creatures. Therefore the sages encourage those whom they counsel to explore the mysteries of creation, to enjoy life, to make their own decisions and to accept the good or bad consequences of such free decisions. There is little preoccupation with guilt or sin, a word which seldom occurs in the wisdom tradition" (*ibid*: 80).

4. 5. God's Holy Presence in worship

God's holy presence, in an earlier discussion in the exodus tradition highlights a facet of God's divine power, which in turn relates to God's liberating acts. This section suggests another dimension of God's holy presence which has to do with worship. God's power in this section focuses on its relationship to worship.

Religious worship has an integral reciprocal connection between human beings (creatures) and God (Creator), in which God is the object of worship. Deducing from the biblical tradition, Weber and many others refer to worship as the "cultic tradition of faith," or cultic tradition, (1989: 55; 87; 88; 97; 102; 104; 107; cf. Balentine, 2006: 4). Worship is described as a response to God's blessings and God's saving acts in the lives of both individuals and corporate entities. It cuts across all the biblical trajectories and biblical periods. Individuals have worshipped God; for the Israelites, corporate worship "began with the manifestation of God's presence, the 'theophany', at Mount Sinai" (*ibid*: 87 cf. 95). This inferential manifestation suggests that of the Mosaic tradition, God's holy presence can be a geographical location where God theophanically revealed God's self either specifically or momentarily Ex. 24: 16-25: 8; Gen. 22 (cf. *ibid*: 87; 91; 92) to individual people (as can be observed in the case of the patriarchs) or to the Israelites as a corporate group of people. God's manifestation is a representation of God's presences in a place, but is not limited to a given space (*ibid*: 87). God's presence and worship in this setting are essentially associated with each other. Weber has pointed out, "the specificity of Israelite worship consists in its exclusive concentration on Yahweh who met his people in the theophany at Sinai. The cult helps Israelites to remember their God and never to forget that all things belong to Yahweh. The first and the third commandments (Ex. 20: 3, 7) apply to the whole cultic tradition" (*ibid*: 88). Festivities too were also linked to "Yahweh's saving acts in Israel history" (*ibid*: 90). Whatever was done in worship was done with the realization that worship takes place in God's presence. Worship was rendered to God alone (Yahweh).

Offering sacrifices, prayers, giving and receiving blessings, holy places, holy times, priestly mediators (cf. 87, 91, 94, 95, 100, 101) are some of the elements of worship. These elements have their religious significance. Throughout the history of God's people these elements have been reinterpreted at various periods because the various situations and periods had unravelled as well as impacted the way worship was carried out (*ibid*: 95 cf. 100).

Worship seems to be a dynamic, not a static ritualistic phenomenon. According to Weber, when it comes to worship

"it is therefore difficult to clearly assign particular practices and convictions to definite periods of Israelite history. Both wisdom and cult are attentive not only to a linear view of time but also *a cyclical view of life*. The Yahwist version of the story of the flood ends with a statement: 'While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease' (Gen. 8: 22). Since worship is strongly linked to this rhythm in creation, similar cultic acts and words are found in all Israelite history" (*ibid*: 88 cf. 111).

Worship is not only a communal practice, but also, an individual practice incorporating both faith and ethics. This means worship and moral responsibility are indivisible: "to worship God now means to offer oneself, with one's words, acts and whole life, for God's glory and purpose" says Weber (*ibid*: 110 cf. 92, 109).

4. 5. 1. Worship centre

Designated places of worship such as the sanctuary, or tent of the tabernacle, or the tent of meeting as described in the desert journey, are places where worship takes place. In addition, the temple in the Promised Land or synagogue in the diaspora are special places. The purpose of having a designated place for worship, for example, the sanctuary was to give expression to God's intention to "dwell in the midst" (*ibid*: 87) of his people. God's emblematic dwelling in the midst of his people signifies a reminder of God's presence.

Equally, the designated places became a representational reference not only to God's presence, but also to the place of worship; in the same way, the designated places and the symbolic manifestation of God's presence developed as part of the rallying elements in worship. In relation to the nature of worship, Weber notes that "the worship rendered there must be in honour of Yahweh. God's presence made these places holy, and from this presence, the divine blessing was poured out to the whole land and people. God's presence could never be taken for granted. Even after the settlement in Canaan holy places were like the 'tent of meeting' and the ark during the desert journey. God's holy presence remained elusive" (*ibid*: 90 cf. 88; 91).

Weber maintains that the temple remains the centre where the sacrifices are offered to Yahweh. It "remained the centre of pilgrimages and sacrificial worship until the siege of Jerusalem and its destruction in AD 70, thus during the life-time of Jesus and the earliest Christians" (*ibid*: 100). The temple as a worship centre and as a symbol of God's presence was the place where the Prophet Isaiah had an encounter with God and received his prophetic commission. The exilic experience also indicate a ground-breaking perspective. The exiles came to understand that the designated place of worship does not suggest God was strictly limited to that specific geographical space, but it means the designated place is a chosen area set aside to worship Yahweh, and worshipping Yahweh is not restricted to the designated place alone. Thus, as important as the worship places are, worship is not restricted to these places "[m]any psalms show that worship needed no specific places, times, and

intermediaries." (*ibid*: 90 cf. 95). Later in the diaspora the development of the synagogue as a designated place of worship emerged.

4. 5. 2. Worship officials

As has been stated above, worship took place in specific places, at specific times and with priestly intermediaries such as, the temple high priests, priests, and the Levites and lay leaders in the synagogue. "Nevertheless, from the earliest period there were persons fulfilling priestly functions, beginning with *Moses, Aaron and the Levites"* (*ibid*: 90 cf. 101). The introduction of the priests and their responsibilities was later instituted. During the monarchic era priestly selection and the priestly function metamorphosed in that Abiathar, a priest from the line of Eli, was expelled from the priesthood, Zadok, a non- Israelite, became a priest who anointed Solomon, and later on, Solomon himself performed priestly functions (*ibid*: 91).

The Priestly function has to do with the ritualistic dimension of worship (i.e., the procedures or ways in which worshipping Yahweh is conducted). The function of priests according to Weber can be summarized, among others, into the following:

1. Intermediaries;
2. Teaching of the Torah;
3. Offering sacrifices.

Firstly, the priests functioned as representative intermediaries mediating between God and the people. The priestly intermediaries, seemed to have played a key role throughout the period (pre-monarchic, monarchy, exilic, post-exilic- intertestamental period) in mediating in worship activities. Weber states that "According to the Priestly Document Aaron and his sons became the priestly intermediaries (Ex. 28: 1)," (*ibid*: 90). Being priestly mediators, they were the intermediaries that gave answers when it came to knowing the will of God (*ibid*: 90), and they were expected to be God's messengers (*ibid*: 98).

Secondly, to teach the Torah was amongst the responsibilities of the priestly intermediaries, "especially as it related to questions that had to do with the whole of life, like: what is clean and unclean, what is holy or common, what is and what is not acceptable to God?" (*ibid*: 90, cf. 93; 98). It may seem, as in the exile, that the reinterpreting of Torah teaching emerged, for instance, "[f]rom the monarchic times there is little evidence that the Sabbath was rigorously observed. During the exile, the priests linked the Sabbath with God's holy presence and the human response to worship: Say to the people of Israel: 'You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you

throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you' (Ex.31: 13)" (*ibid*: 94 cf. Knowles, 2006: 1-2).

"Thirdly, the priests were given an increasingly important function in the *offering of sacrifices"* (Weber, 1989: 91; 100). Sacrifices were the human response of appreciation for God's work of blessing and protection (Gen. 4: 35; 8: 20). Further development of the other sacrifices emerged and the guiding principle/ rules for offering sacrifices came into the priestly writings. Prior to the instituted priestly sacrifice, people offered sacrifices on their own. However, in the worship context Weber stresses, "[s]acrifices are offered and prayers addressed to Yahweh alone" (*ibid*: 88). In offering sacrifices, he again, says the priest "had to sprinkle the blood on the altar. Blood was seen as a vital force for all living creatures. That was why it was forbidden not only to shed the blood of a human being but also to drink the blood of slaughtered animals (Gen. 9: 4-6; Lev. 17: 10-13)" (*ibid*: 91).

The priest offered different kinds of sacrifices as prescribed in the priestly documents and codes. For example, Weber underlined that the essence of offering expiatory sacrifice in worship was,

> "[n]either the people nor their priests, nor even the holy places and their altars can remain holy. Human efforts have no access to God's healing power. All must first be set right with God and by God. This explains the accumulation of expiatory rites at the Day of Atonement. Through various sacrifices and purifying baths Aaron must several times make expiation for himself, for the worshipping community and for the holy place and its altar. Only then can he 'lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away in the wilderness…The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land' (Lev. 16:20ff.). Transferring thus the people's sins on the scapegoat can become an empty or a magical ceremonial. This ritual can also be the deeply significant outward sign how God liberates human beings from the slavery of sin and the terror of guilt (*ibid*: 104).

Hence, presenting the renewing power of God's forgiveness, at work through the sacrifices (*ibid*: 104). Sacrifices give life, in a sense that they re-establish the communion with God and creation, "according to the cultic tradition of biblical faith the holy presence of God is the only radical remedy against evil powers and spirits which defile and destroy life. For keeping the heavens open, for returning again and again into the healing presence of God, Israelite worship emphasized the efficacy of the various sacrifices described earlier. Through them sins could be forgiven, guilt atoned and the communion with God, with fellow human beings and with the creation restored" (*ibid*: 104 cf. 91, 95).

In the context of the following Old Testament texts (Gen. 14: 18-20; Ex 24: 6-8; 25: 10-40; 26: 31-33; Lev. 16; Ps. 40: 6-7; 110: 1, 4; Jer. 31: 31ff.), the New Testament transmits the Old Testament sacrifice in the direction of Jesus's death as the sacrificial death offered for the ungodly (Rom. 5: 6 cf. 2 Cor. 5: 15; 1 Thess. 5: 10). Christ gave himself for our sins in order to deliver human beings

from what the Bible calls the present evil age (Gal. 1: 4; cf. e.g. Rom. 8: 31ff. Eph. 5: 2; Mark 10: 45). New Testament interpretation has largely held is that the blessing of Abraham might "come upon Gentiles" (Gal. 3: 13f. cf. 2 Cor. 5: 20f.). The expiation of sins was, therefore, redeeming sinners (1 Cor. 15: 3; Mark 10: 45; Rom. 8: 31ff; Eph. 5: 2; Gal. 1: 4) (*ibid*: 107). "Through his sacrificial death Jesus defeated the powers and principalities which work against God's purpose. The sin offering at Golgotha was thus experienced and celebrated as a victory" (*ibid*: 111).

4. 5. 3. Worship in the exilic period

The pre-monarchic and monarchic experience of God's power in worship was linked with "Yahweh's saving acts in Israel's history" (*ibid*: 90). It was an assurance that God was with them. The temple and the presence of God in the pre-exilic times were not only a "symbol of religious identity" (*ibid*: 93) or an intended institution to be a source of blessing to all the nations, but was also a guarantee of God's power, protection and God's abiding presence with God's people (Weber, 1989: 93 cf. Bruce, 1963: 85; Brueggemann, 1997: 641). The exilic situation, was a devastating moment for the Israelites. Their belief and assumption was that nothing would ever happen to them because of God's temple, which denotes God's presence and power of God with them. As such the devastating exilic situation became a new experience and a means of transition in their general religious experience that brought about internal reflection on their religious identity and practices. Worship in the exilic period, according to Weber "[a]s for other traditions of faith, for the cultic tradition too the Babylonian exile was *a crucial period of rethinking and reinterpretation*" (*ibid*: 93, 95 cf. Knowles, 2006: 1) of their religious beliefs. The underlying result in the re-examination of the temple, and the symbolic representation of the presence of God was to consider again what the temple and God's presence indicated at that point. What emerged was a realisation by the exiles that the presence of God is not limited to the temple, which is geographically situated in Jerusalem. God was now increasingly seen as a universal God[26]. The exilic experience brings a shift from ritualistic/sacrificial worship to a worship which consisted more of the teaching and reinterpreting the religious rituals. Melody D Knowles, writing on the religious practice during the exile says "[i]n addition, religion in the exilic period also emphasized nongeographic practices such as circumcision, keeping of the Sabbath, and the celebration of Passover in the home" (2006: 2 cf. Weber, 1989: 94).

Weber argues that the priests' responsibilities continued, although the nature of some their responsibilities had changed. "Because many of the cultic rituals could no longer be performed, the priest now concentrated on reflecting, writing and teaching about sacrifices and rituals," (1989: 93).

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[26] This understanding seems to be what the people want to convey in relation to God's work and God's power. That is as Migliore' suggests, God's person and power are universal. This idea seems to influence the usage of the language associated with the "almighty" understanding of God.

Still, regarding the change that occurred in the cultic formalities Samuel E Balentine a Professor of Old Testament Studies, shows that the situation also changed the content of their prayers (2006: 5). In this regard Weber says that,

> "[t]he Deuteronomistic interpretation of Israelite history was completed during the exile, and it taught that all the misfortunes and catastrophes experienced by the people of Israel were the direct result of disobedience to Yahweh. The exiles therefore lived under a heavy burden of guilt. According to the Holiness Code they had become so unclean that the holy land itself was defiled 'and the land vomited out its inhabitants' (Lev.18: 25). While the priestly legislators usually prescribed only the cultic rituals without commenting on their meaning, with regard to the sin offering they elaborated on the reasons for this sacrifice: it was to expiate unconscious sins and offences committed inadvertently (Lev. 4: 27-31). The mood of the exiles is well expressed in the complaints which Ezekiel heard and which he challenged by his vivid vision of the valley of bones: 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. We are clean cut off!' (Ezek. 37: 11)" (Weber, 1989: 95 cf. 90; 92; Balentine, 2006: 5).

The failure of Israel to live in consonance to the holiness code led to the migration of worshipping of other gods, as in the case of King Solomon (1 Kings 11:4), King Manasseh (2 Kings 21: 6). This had undesirable consequences that led to God's judgement on the Israelites. Although the situation seemed to suggest that there was no hope, because of Israel's failure in their covenantal commitment to Yahweh, the scriptural document was equally a source of consolation. Weber says,

> "[t]hough this Priestly Document does not speak about the exile, it is an interpretation of history which helped the exiles to cope with the disaster of the destroyed temple and the lost holy land. Not the fixed dwelling of God in the temple during the monarchic period but the remembrance of the mobile tent of meeting near the camp during the desert journey was seen once again as the privileged place of worship where from time to time God's glory appears. *The mood of worshi*p had changed. The accent now lay more on laments than on praises. Probably both the exiles in Babylonia and the Israelites left in Canaan organized special gatherings for fasting, mourning and lamentations. Many psalms and the tragically beautiful prayers of Lamentations were composed for such occasions" (Weber, 1989: 95).

The exile brought about a paradigm shift in Israel's orientation that influenced them towards seeing God's actions from a perspective limited to a symbolic representation associated with the temple to a limitless perspective, which is universal. Worship now was centred on repentance "fasting," "mourning" and "lamentation." As noted by Weber "[m]any Psalms show that worship needed no specific places, times and intermediaries" (*ibid*: 90). The exilic incident also brings a paradigm shift for hope and restoration. Weber argues that,

> "[i]n the final visions Ezekiel sees the glory of God returning to Jerusalem and filling the new temple. He hears the divine voice promising: 'I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever' (43: 1ff., 7). The Levitical priests whom Ezekiel calls 'sons of Zadok' will again faithfully minister to God in the sanctuary (44: 15ff.). The new temple is pictured as the centre of the world. From it issues the cleansing river on whose sides grow trees which 'bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing' (47: 12).
>
> These hopeful visions of the priestly prophet fit in well with *the universalist outlook* of the Priestly Document. 'All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord' (Num. 14: 21). Ezekiel's visions also anticipate part of the later apocalyptic tradition of faith. Yahweh is no more exclusively seen as the God of the land of Canaan, but also as the lord of the universe. This becomes evident towards the end of the exile, in the prophecies of the second Isaiah. The whole universe, the sea, the islands, the

deserts, the mountain tops and all the inhabitants of the earth are called upon to worship God and to sing a new song (Isa. 42: 2-12)" (*ibid*: 96).

4. 5. 4. Worship in the post-exilic period

This period ranges from the returning of the exiles to New Testament times. Weber's says "[t]he cultic tradition of faith therefore overlaps almost totally the post-exilic period" (1986: 97 cf. 56). Prior to the exiles returning to Jerusalem, Ezekiel's visions showed that God was not limited to being worshipped in a specific place (Jerusalem), "the prophet attributes to YHWH radical mobility– God can cross the Chebar in the multi-wheeled chariot (Ezek. 1), God's glory can leave and return to the temple (Ezek. 9: 3; 10: 18; 11: 22-23; 43: 1-5), and God can function as a 'sanctuary for a little while' (or to some extent; למקדש מעט) for the people of Babylon (Ezek. 11: 16b), (Knowles, 2006: 2). However, the temple was still central in the worship experience.

> "The account of what happened when the foundations for the new temple in Jerusalem had been laid expresses well *the mood of the exiles who returned*. There was singing and music, of course, but when the old people who still remembered the splendour of Solomon's temple saw how small the foundation of the new was, they 'wept with a loud voice'… 'though many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping' (Ezra, 3: 10)" (*ibid*: 97).

This period is characterised as a time of putting things in order. The rebuilding of the temple had produced mixed feelings among the exiles who returned. Although there could be comparable differences between the former temple and the second temple in terms of the structural dimensions, God's activity was not limited to the size of the designated temple. The promise was that the glory of the new temple would be exceptionally different (Haggai, 2: 9). Unfortunately, the period has shown that the exiles who returned neglected the rebuilding of the temple, as a result, God could not bless them, in other words, they could not experience what was referred to as God's glory. Haggai and his contemporary Zechariah had to encourage them to continue the work of the building (*ibid*: 97). Together they "took initiative to restore the altar for burnt offerings and they laid the foundations for the new temple (Ezra 3)" (*ibid*: 55). Ezra, a scribe and a priest, emphasized studying, interpreting and obeying the Scripture and prayers. He,

> "set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel' (7: 6, 10). This was exactly what Ezra did in Jerusalem, shaping the returned exiles in Judea into a cultic community centred on God's Torah and prayers. He endorsed the strict measures of Nehemiah against mixed marriages so that 'the holy seed' could be safeguarded and the land would not become unclean through the presence of non-Jews (9: 2, 11f.). All this was done on the authority of the book of the law which Ezra had brought to Jerusalem. The solemn reading and interpretation of this document during a two -day assembly, leading up to the celebration of the feast of Booths, gives a vivid picture of post-exilic worship (Neh.8)" (*ibid*: 98).

The religious commitment of the post-exilic faithful seeks to promote religious identity, which Nehemiah and Ezra emphasized as a sense of exclusivity. They understood this as a way returning to God. Weber, however, articulates that inclusivity, and openness to others was equally what the scripture drew attention to. He says, "[b]esides the strict and exclusive Judaism of Nehemiah and Ezra there persisted an *open Judaism* maintaining Yahweh's loving concern for all countries and all people. Thus we have Ruth, a Moabite woman, who came under the wings of the God of Israel to take refuge (Ruth 2: 12) … Jonah shows that Yahweh's love and forgiveness embrace much more than the cultic community in Jerusalem" (*ibid*: 99).

In the post-exilic period, a change of spirituality developed, of which the prophet Zechariah had a vision. According to Weber, is "[t]he visions of Zechariah illustrate a change in spirituality which increasingly marked Jewish worship in the post-exilic times. God's holy presence was felt to be hidden and far away. In his warning against false prophets Jeremiah had already spoken about the *God afar off* (Jer. 23: 23). Now Zechariah no longer had any direct access to Yahweh. Angels and other intermediaries transmitted and interpreted the Lord's words to him. This also meant that human intermediaries – priests, Levites and temple singers —— became more important for maintaining relationship with the far-away God" (*ibid*: 98).

Beyond the above, Weber emphasises the nature of worship in this period. However, the Jewish community are both in the diaspora and in Judah. The Chronicler described the character and nature of the community and their approach to worship during this period. "The cultic community the Chronicler describes had the following characteristics: it looked back to an idealized past; it celebrated sacrifices for atonement according to the cultic laws; it prayed for and trusted in God's forgiveness (cp. the prayers of contrition in Ezra 9 and Neh. 9); it sang and rejoiced in worship hoping for just reward for those who walk according to God's Torah" (*ibid*: 100). The historical information affirmed God's intervention in relation to people's prayers. Though the temple and the synagogue are important places of worship in the post exilic period, the book of Psalms gives an additional dimension to worship "Many psalms show that worship needed no specific places, times and intermediaries" (*ibid*: 90). In the New Testament,

> "[t]*his concentration of worship on Christ relativized holy places, times and persons*. Wherever two or three are gathered in his name, there Christ is present (Matt. 18: 20). As testified in the book of Acts such special worship assemblies which strengthened the worship of everyday life could take place in the Jerusalem temple, in private houses, in prisons, while travelling on the road. Usually the assemblies took place on the first day of the week (Sunday, the day of resurrection), but they were not bound to a definite hour or day… All that was said earlier about the power of worship can be applied also to worship in the New Testament: the healing effect of holiness, the renewing power of sacrifice and forgiveness as well as the way in which prayer and praise disarm evil powers. One element which is by no means absent in Old Testament but which strongly breaks through the New Testament is exuberant Joy (*ibid*: 111).

4. 5. 5. God's power in the context of worship

Worship is understood as a religious means of serving God. At the same time, as we have already seen, God has manifested his power in relation to worship. The demonstration of the power of God in this context says Weber, brings about the healing effect of God's holiness. "Yahweh will cleanse and heal his people" (*ibid*: 96 cf. 95). Therefore, the Israelites shall experience restoration. This entails that the Israelites will be reinstated again as Ezekiel sees the glory of God returning to Jerusalem and filling the new temple" (*ibid*: 96). Similarly, since uncleanness (transgressing God's covenant) "brought illness and death, which was unacceptable to God and therefore separated the land, times and persons from the holy presence of God, often as a result of a curse; on the other side the cleanness, brought health and life, which was acceptable to God and therefore imparted the healing powers of holiness and blessings. The unclean constantly invaded and threatened with its disruptive and destructive powers what was whole, healthy and holy" (*ibid*: 102). It is God who heals and restores and uses persons in these processes.

4. 5. 6. God's Power and the renewing power of sacrifice and forgiveness

The offering of sacrifices to God is an act of worship. It is one of the ways the Israelites encounter God. Among other things, offering of forgiveness from the people is a manifestation of God's power. The weight of this according to Weber, is the "forgiveness of sins, guilt atoned and the communion with God and with fellow human beings and the creation restored" (*ibid*: 104). Access to God is restored through offering sacrifices (*ibid*). However, there are two descriptions of how God's forgiveness can be experienced. They are the Priestly description, which has to do with the ritualistic dimension (i.e. procedural or ways in which worshipping Yahweh is conducted /things are done) and Psalmist's description. The Psalmist's experience of forgiveness comes "[t]hrough prayers" (*ibid*: 105). Through prayer, the psalmist "could be liberated from the defiling powers and be led to joy and singing" (*ibid*). The psalmist's experience of God's renewing power in worship comes as "the worshipper enters into the holy presence of God without any disguise, as the person he or she is" (*ibid*: 104). Compared to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18: 9-14, Weber says that "[t]he worshipper knows that what ultimately counts is not a desperate human struggle to become holy, but the presence of God … The psalmist is aware of the prophetic criticism of hypocritical sacrifices but he also knows that God will accept the sacrifice of a 'contrite heart' (vv. 16f.) … The worshipper could well have experienced the cleansing from sin while remembering with a humble heart the outward rituals of a holocaust. Worship, in any case, is not belittled" (*ibid*: 105).

Weber further explains that the "[t]he power of God's forgiveness has no boundaries according to this prayer. It includes even people like king Manasseh, who at the end ─ as many Old Testament

rulers do joins in the cosmic praise of God" (*ibid*: 106). The above account suggests that God's forgiving power is not limited to the ritualistic sacrifices alone. In the New Testament, God's forgiving power is in Christ' death. Christ's sacrificial and expiatory death happens, "for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2: 2; cp. Rom. 3: 25 and the words of institution of the Lord's Supper)" (*ibid*: 107).

God's power in worship dispels evil powers by prayers and praise. 2 Chronicles 20: 1- 23 offers another dimension of God's manifesting power as a result of prayer and the singing of praises. Weber notes that, "[P]rayer and praise can disarm more than human armies. They disarm the power of meaninglessness. To praise God is to disarm death because to praise God is the ultimate purpose of human life" (*ibid*: 106). He further says,

> "[a]ll that was said earlier about the power of worship can be applied also to worship in the New Testament: the healing effect of holiness, renewing power of sacrifice and forgiveness as well as the way in which prayer and praise disarm evil powers. One element which is by no means absent in the Old Testament but which strongly breaks through the New Testament worship is exuberant joy. This may seem strange after the strong emphasis made on sacrifice in the preceding paragraphs. Moreover, in the New Testament *the term joy is often used in the context of suffering*. It is not a joy which comes *after* the suffering, but in the midst of their suffering people are surprised by joy. How can this be explained? Through this sacrificial death Jesus defeated the powers and principalities which work against God's purpose" (*ibid*: 111).

Interestingly enough, Migliore did not specifically touch on the worship in relation to God's power as Weber has done above. As such, we could conclude that this is one area in which the two think slightly differently from one another.

4. 6. The Power of God and the Poor

Next we shall consider the *anawim* tradition. This theme focuses on God's power and its relationship with the poor, although notions of what constitutes poverty, or 'the poor', are wide-ranging. The reality of poverty cannot be denied. The question of the poor is significant in the biblical text. Primarily, the poor as Weber argues, has to do with the representation of a "socio-economic group of people" (*ibid*: 120) in relation to God's will. The biblical text acknowledges this group of people and the situation surrounding them; several factors contribute to why people are in poverty, such issues include exploitative structures (*ibid*: 118, 119), and many other things like "oppression, illness and injustice" (*ibid*: 114).

During the monarchic period, the understanding of poverty as stated by Weber was in terms of the following perspectives: "As elsewhere in the ancient Middle East, in the Old Testament *poverty is sometimes seen as the result of sin and laziness*. Conventional wisdom taught the rule of cause and effect, of act and consequence. Pre-exilic sages and the post-exilic friends of Job suspected therefore

that the poor and the sick suffered as the result of foolish acts. Nevertheless, this is not the dominant Old Testament view of poverty" (*ibid*: 117).

This perspective of cause and effect, of action and consequence, however, has conditioned society to see the problem of poverty from a certain position. On the other hand, socio-political factors weigh on socio-economic concerns, leading to situations which also "created poverty and exploitation (*ibid*: 7). Speaking of how socio-economic poverty is perceived Weber states that,

> "Such *poverty caused by socio-economic structures was seen as a scandal*. It clearly indicated that the rich and the powerful had not been responsible stewards of God's blessing entrusted to them. They had not listened to the advice of pre-exilic sages. Therefore they came under the judgement of God. This does not mean that poverty was romanticised. Before exile God's blessing was essentially seen in terms of material wealth- many children, large harvests, health, a long life, peace and victory in war (Deut. 28: 28-2ff.). Poverty, illness and misery thus could not be passively accepted as a matter of fate. They remained a scandal, a cause for crying out to God, for laments" (*ibid*: 118 cf. 119).

In this regard, God identifies with the plight of the poor (*ibid*: 114, 117, 118, 119, 120). Biblical texts affirm that God comes to their salvation. In Weber's words, they will be "vindicated", and "rescued" by God (*ibid*: 114, 116, 121, 123). In the Old Testament, one of the ways God rescued the poor was through his mediators (as described above). i.e., legislators and prophets who defended the poor (*ibid*: 114 cf. 118). The religious socio-economic legislation suggested some obligated responsibilities, on what ought to be done for the poor, to ease and to take care of their situation, as well as pointing out how it could be done. For example, it was required, in some instances, for the Israelites not to harvest everything but leave some of the harvest for the poor.

Weber offers the following oversight of the words used in the Hebrew Bible in relation to the poor. The poor are described in relation to the following terms:

(a) '*rash*'- means the poor generally with an accent on the economic poverty; the rash is the one who 'lacks', the 'have-not', in contrast to the economically rich who tend to exploit the poor.

(b) '*ebyon*' derives from the verb meaning 'to want something' and thus indicates the 'needy', the 'destitute', the 'begging', over against those who are in positions of power, plenty, and privilege;

(c) '*dal*' comes from a verb which indicates somebody who is 'meagre', 'weak', 'wretched' in opposition to the powerful and mighty;

(d) '*ani*' and 'anaw' (plural 'anawim') is a root which probably means 'to be bent over', 'to be crushed'; possibly 'ani' stands primarily for the material poverty of those who are crushed by oppression, illness or misfortune while 'anaw'

emphasizes more the inner attitude of humility before God of those who are brought low; often, however, the two words are used synonymously" (*ibid*: 114).

On the one hand, the prevailing commonality that connects the different words revolves around "Lack," "have - not," "needy," "destitute," "meagre," "to be bent over," "to be crushed" in contrast to those that are privileged or powerful. The dominant agreement among the concepts is the description of the condition of the poor. While on the other hand, it appears the terms "ani" "anaw" "anawim" and "ebyon" are identified with "just," "righteous" "poor" "lowly" "meek" and "humble" (*ibid*: 114 cf. 115, 122, 123). Two overriding meanings can be identified with reference to the poor: (a) it has to do with a socio-economic component and (b) a theological meaning which has to do with "a particular attitude towards God" (*ibid*: 115 cf. 114, 118, 120).

The term *anawim* appears to be the dominant theme in this regard. Commencing, from the prophecies of Zephaniah in the exilic period, the usage of the word *anawim* metamorphosed. The identification of the *anawim* was not limited to a socio-economic reality only. However, it inaugurated and acquired a theological meaning. The theological meaning interprets the word poor with humility, lowly, meekness, just and righteousness which can be aligned or affiliated with the persons of David, Moses, King David was identified as the "poor and humble one" and Moses was identified as very poor/ humble, more than any man that [was] on the face of the earth' (Num. 12: 3)" (*ibid*: 116). The notion of the poor in these circumstances is framed in humility. It epitomized the attitude of a person toward God (cf. 114, 115, 120, 123, 150). Cultic religious expectation and responsibility of those who are lowly, humble, righteous, was an understanding of *anawim* that also emerged and it was an "understanding of what constitutes true fasting, namely 'to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free' (Isa. 58: 6) (*ibid*: 122).

In the same vein, *anawim* correspondingly has to do with suffering (cf. 114, 117, 120). However, the nature and the existence of suffering in this circumstance might not be as a result of bad choices or decisions. But in this sense *anawim* entails spirituality and the poor of Yahweh, such as the suffering of the prophet, or the just/righteous one, who is the epitome of *anawim* spirituality. Suffering could be by way God's calling to the prophet or a just/righteous person who is called to suffer by God. However, when there are no logical explanation or reason for an unpleasant predicament, the situation of the poor, or the suffering of the just, or the suffering of the righteous, such a circumstance calls for prayers to God to release one from the unpleasant predicament. An example of the representative of the poor in this sense is Jeremiah the prophet. According to Weber, "[t]he prophet Jeremiah became the prototype of such a poor one. He was the suffering prophet, a figure who played an important role

in Jewish spirituality" (*ibid*: 114 cf. 120). *Anawim* spirituality is a spirituality that acknowledges, experiences, struggles and communicates these human sufferings, concerns, worries, difficulties, holy anger, and lament to God. The knowledge of Jeremiah's poverty or suffering seems to be part of the prophetic responsibility that accompanies Jeremiah's calling and task. For this reason, his prophetic task was a challenging one. But in all this, the prophet was vindicated. In relation to the suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 52-53) it can be established as Weber suggests, that "the suffering of the just/righteous one and the wretchedness of the anawim could thus become vicarious… The poor and the humble ones were not only the favourites of Yahweh, not only the remnant of the people of Israel, but they now received a crucial role in the accomplishment of God's purpose for this world" (*ibid*: 121).

The *anawim* interpretation of *anawim* spirituality was repeatedly retained in the post-exilic points to "the just and righteous one who suffered and was vindicated, described in Psalm 22, as well as the prototype of the poor one and the suffering prophet, in the person of Jeremiah. This led to the expectation that *the messiah will be a poor/humble one.* Such a hope is for the first time expressed in some oracles of second Zechariah. Very different kinds of expectations can be found in the message of that prophet. According to several passages God will be the one who through judgement and salvation brings history to its end without the mediation of a Messianic figure (e.g. Zach. 9: 11-17; 14)" (*ibid*: 123).

In the inter-testamental period, *anawim* spirituality was associated with vicarious or expiatory suffering and the death of martyrs. The martyrs willingly availed themselves for the greater good of all to suffer and die. Weber calls it, "the *vicarious suffering and death of martyrs."* (*ibid*: 124 cf. 114, 123, 126). For example, he mentions a family that became martyrs. "The youngest of the seven brothers who died as martyrs declared before Antiochus IV Epiphanes: 'I, like my brothers give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation…, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our nation' (2 Macc. 7: 37f)" (*ibid*). Suffering and death were still seen as God's rightful judgement on the disobedience of the nation, but the martyrs voluntarily took this judgement upon themselves and entered the ultimate poverty of death. Thus, they suffered vicariously for the people to be free.

Another illustration of *anawim* is the militant *anawim* spirituality of this period, which is shown through the life of a woman called Judith who became a model of such a committed stance, "[t]he militant anawim spirituality of Judith was accompanied by an existential anawim style of life. This found its clearest expression in *the vows of poverty among Qumranites*. At a time when the Old Testament terms of poverty had been strongly spiritualized the members of the community of Qumran

combined once again the 'spiritual' with the socio-economic dimension. According to their 'Rule' humility ('anawah') included the readiness to 'bring all of their mind, all of their strength, and all of their wealth into the community of God' (1QS I, 11f.)" (*ibid*: 124 cf.123).

The above excerpt summarizes a theological attempt at explaining the concept of the poor. The different words used for the poor, (just/righteous; poor/humble; the martyrs) suggest how the idea of the poor has been used and interpreted. The question is how does God's power relate to this trajectory? Weber argues, that *anawim* spirituality described the poor as,

> "[t]he just/righteous ones who must suffer, but are vindicated by God; the powerless poor/humble ones whose lament and praise are heard throughout biblical history; the suffering prophets, rejected and persecuted by the people; and finally the martyrs who suffered vicariously as an expiation for others: these are unlikely agents through whom God's power works accordingly to the anawim spirituality" (*ibid*: 125).

In other words, unlike the monarchic tradition where the monarch, or those in authority, are the elected representative through whom God's power is demonstrated (showed), God's power in this tradition is at work through the least expected individuals. This enables everyone to carry out their responsibilities.

As stated by Weber, God manifests God's power through the weak, the "powerless poor" (*ibid*: 125). God does it in a way that might not be the popular paradigm. He uses the *anawim* in an unusual way to bring about circumstantial change as "these are the unlikely agents through whom God's power works according to the anawim spirituality" (*ibid*: 125). An example of this is the story of the Jewish midwives in Exodus, whose attitude in the narrative was to preserve the Jewish male children. The Hebrew midwives… "probably lied to save" their lives by not obeying authority. Another parallel Weber argues, is,

> "Moses' mother and sister used their practical intelligence and courage. The Egyptian princess simply followed the spontaneous instinct of her heart. The young David went to meet Goliath with his shepherd's staff, his string and five stones. Jeremiah simply became the transmitter of God's words, whether it announced devastating judgement or new hope, whether this announcement took the form of prophetic words like those of his temple sermon or the form of prophetic acts like smashing the potter's flask which he had just bought (Jer. 7 and 19). In Psalm 37 the anawim are called upon to 'be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him' (v.7). Judith planned with care every detail of the role she was going to play. In the stories of the Maccabees Eleasar and the mother with her seven sons confronted the cruel power of Antiochus IV with the surrender of their lives, choosing death to the denial of their faith" (*ibid*: 125).

This seems to suggest that God's divine power enabled people to be courageous to do something extraordinary as seen above. Thus, the manifestation of God's power does not always indicate the manifesting something "supernatural". Rather, it can also be argued that God uses "common" ordinary people who avail themselves to God to do what is acceptable to God to rescue humanity and creation.

Weber argues that "God's power works through the powerless *in a great variety of ways*" (*ibid*: 125) as such there are no,

> "clear-cut strategies — biblical programmes for 'the transfer of power from the powerful to the powerless'— *the anawim spirituality cannot be easily translated into action programmes*. Neither the submission nor the revolt of the anawim arise unequivocally out of this trajectory of faith. Neither a violent nor a non-violent strategy can be clearly drawn from it. The only element which is typical for all of the Israelite 'actors' mentioned above is their fear/awe of Yahweh and trust in him, the knowledge that God's power and not their own works through them" (*ibid*: 126).

The God whom they trust is often hidden. The *anawim* wholly submit to God, regardless of what the outcome would be. Their commitment is to God. In line with such reasoning, Mary in the New Testament belongs to the *anawim*. Weber says that Mary,

> "[t]ogether with the Old Testament poor and humble ones she trusts in the mighty God who will lift up those who are low. She has the same expectation that the present order will be radically changed and that the arrogant and the haughty will be put in their place. Her affirmation that God 'has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden' (Luke 1: 48) is a direct quotation from 1 Samuel 1: 11 where in Hebrew the term 'ani' is used. This is not simply a feeling of humbleness but indeed a 'low estate', in psalms often used for violent situations of oppression. Her Magnificat shows how deeply she was steeped in the spirituality of the anawim, and although the canonical Gospels tell us little or nothing about the education of the boy Jesus, his mother's spirituality must have deeply influenced him" (*ibid*: 130).

Moreover, Weber observed that "*the power of the Spirit came upon Mary* in a unique way" (*ibid*). "But like Judith, Mary is totally at the disposal of God's purpose: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord,'" (*ibid*: 129) the anawim "trust in the mighty God who will lift up those who are low" (*ibid*).

4. 7. God's power and the apocalyptic tradition

The apocalyptic tradition is the last faith tradition in Weber's book. This section uses apocalypses in its understanding of God's power in the apocalyptic tradition. Apocalypses as a genre, uses strange esoteric images, symbols, symbolic numbers, and visionary means to reveal God's activities in the world's state of affairs. Apocalypse, as stated by Weber, is a form of "a distinctive literary genre. They are disclosures of a transcendent reality both from another space (heaven) and another time ('eschaton', the end of time)" in demonstrating God's activities. "Usually an otherworldly being acts as mediator" (*ibid*: 140). The context of heaven and the end of times, invariably seems to indicate that both space and time are within the frame of God's control. The significance of the apocalyptic faith is focused on God, the end of history, judgment, it is an encouragement to cling to radical hope, and a warning as Weber states to "those who have eyes to see and ears to hear… By unmasking the evil powers, by naming the tyrants and announcing their downfall, the apocalyptic visionaries urged not defeatist submission but costly obedience to God's Torah while eagerly waiting for the day of the lord" (*ibid*: 148 cf. 146; 147; 162). A case in point is the book of Revelation the New Testament. It is an apocalypse written to the church universal here on earth (Rev. 1: 9-3: 22) (*ibid*: 162).

The distinctive features of the esoteric living creatures apocalypses describe, represent acts of God's power over the cosmos (*ibid*: 138 cf. 141). In other words, God's power is represented by using different esoteric images.

Apocalypses appear to be described in apocalypticism. Weber contends that *"[a]pocalypticism is a mood, a world-view and an attitude of faith which looks forward, with great longing, to the end of time when after cosmic catastrophes God or a Messianic figure will not only judge all things, but bring salvation and glory"* (*ibid*: 140). Apocalypticism is not limited to New Testament writing, it is also found in prophetic writing, wisdom writing, and all of these are connected one to another. For instance, the connection between prophecy and apocalypticism is in "the reinterpretation of unfulfilled prophecies" Weber argues (*ibid*: 142).

Apocalypses see God's activity through history as perceivably foreseen by exilic, post-exilic traditions, *anawim* spirituality, inter-testamental times, and the book of Revelation.

> "Apocalypses describe and evaluate what happened in the past and what is happening now *from the perspective of the end of times*. The earlier biblical surveys of history proceed differently – those by the Yahwist, the Elohist and the Deuteronomistic historians as well as those in the Priestly Document and the Chronicler's work. There an attempt is made to teach history's lessons for an obedient life in present and future times. The apocalyptic visionaries take their standpoint in God's future. This makes it possible to envisage world history in the full meaning of that term. The one end towards which the histories of all empires lead becomes the unifying factor and the criterion of judgment. Seen from this 'telos', from history's aim, purpose and end, all past and present events appear in a new light. They become significant, signs of final judgment and of God's kingdom. This means that past and present priorities and values are turned upside down" (*ibid*: 147 cf. 163).

The book of Revelation furthermore assesses history with dual emphases: (a) the first focus as stated by Weber "lies in the past where the decisive victory over the powers against God has been won through the incarnation and especially the sacrifice and vindication of Christ." (b) "The second focus lies in the future where God's kingdom will be established. The present time of testing is envisaged and evaluated from these two points of view. Such double perspective of the New Testament apocalyptic faith sheds new light on the other traditions of biblical faith which we explored in this study." (*ibid*: 163). Let's consider these points below.

4. 7. 1. Biblical Trajectories Reinterpreted

The renewed insight which the New Testament apocalyptic faith expresses (e.g., John's revelation), is the reinterpretation of the biblical trajectories (the exodus tradition, royal tradition, wisdom tradition, cultic tradition, and the anawim spirituality) and the centrality of Jesus Christ in all of these trajectories. By way of using images and symbols, apocalypsis "provides for constant reinterpretation in changing historical situations. Babylon can also be Rome. The 'little horn' may first refer to Antiochus IV and later to a Roman emperor. This essential openness of apocalypses points to the

different ways in which prophets and apocalyptic visionaries see the course of history" (*ibid*: 146). The light it sheds, for example, in the reinterpretation, liberation/salvation, Egyptian plagues, Pharaoh of the exodus tradition, is that liberation/salvation embraces not only, "freedom from the domination of socio-political and economic powers, but also from satanic forces at work behind all perverted power. The Egyptian plagues became universal plagues" (*ibid*: 163). Pharaoh, as John writes in the apocalypsis, "is now in the first place the Roman emperor Domitian, the revived Nero, but he stands for all rebellious and self-idolizing power." Christ is the resurrected lamb that was slain and the tent of meeting which was temporal thing in the exodus tradition is now placed in heaven and remains open forever (*ibid*: 163). It is unlike the Davidic authorities in the Royal tradition which had its limitation and failure in its responsibilities and service to God. Christ, the wisdom incarnate, the risen Lord, is, on the contrary, different. At present, he (Christ) "holds the 'key of David' … he will sit together with God on the same throne for the old Jerusalem was gone because it was shattered in the cataclysms of judgment and a new Jerusalem coming from God will take its place (21: 2, 10-27)" (*ibid*).

Worship experience in the cultic faith would be comparably unique, for in the coming kingdom, it will "be filled with the glory of the Lord" and "its temple 'is the Lord God the almighty and the Lamb.'" With "no intermediary priestly service needed any longer and God's servants shall see his face' (21: 22; 22: 4)" (*ibid*: 164). As the *anawim* spirituality eagerly awaits and looks forward to God's intervention, the question is how long in human life will they be forgotten? For "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more' (21: 3f.)" (*ibid*: 164 cf. 147).

4. 7. 2. The Resurrection Interpreted

Drawing from the above explanation, Weber understood that apocalypses "propose a new view of world history which encourages people in hopeless situations to cling to a radical hope." (*ibid*: 146). Apocalypse intends to strengthen hope in God. The belief in the coming of the Son of man, the messianic judge, and the resurrection of the dead was the pillar of courage for the believers living in apocalyptic times, and they withstood the power struggles of their time (*ibid*: 148 cf. 150). He says again, "[t]o face the power of death with the conviction of a future resurrection is to banish fear. It gives courage to those who are suffering from illness or undergoing persecution. Standing before the seemingly all-powerful Antiochus IV the seven brothers and their mother were not afraid. They challenged the king: 'You dismiss us from this present life, but the king of universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for this law!' (2 Macc. 7: 9)" (*ibid*: 151). The knowledge of the resurrection developed and transformed through the inter-testamental times and therefore changed how death was understood and interpreted.

The resurrection of Christ has become the redefinition of the apocalyptic tradition. "The resurrection was an event within history but *of the end* of history. It was God's kingdom breaking into our time, a truly apocalyptic event." (*ibid*: 157). The gospel interpretation of the resurrection events, above all, "*Matthew's interpretation* owes most to apocalyptic imagery and thought. According to him already during the crucifixion of Jesus cosmic-apocalyptic phenomena occurred. People wondered whether Elijah, the fore-runner of the Messiah, would come (so also Mark). There was the sudden 'darkness over all the land' and then the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom' (sign also reported by Mark and Luke though the latter explains the darkness as an eclipse of the sun" (*ibid*: 158). Matthew's cosmic-apocalyptic interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection continues this trend of thought. He interpreted "*the resurrection as a liberation story*, as an exodus from the prison of death to the freedom of life" (*ibid*). Viewing freedom as the resurrection of Christ nullifies the power of death.

"Matthew reported Jesus' resurrection along the pattern of such a miracle of liberation: God raises and vindicates him. With his resurrection the powers of death are broken. Here again Matthew anticipates what the later seer John developed in the visions, oracles and hymns of the book of Revelation which can be best understood as a universal exodus story." (*ibid*: cf. 159). In continuation the Pauline epistle (Rom. 4:24f.), "shows that for the New Testament witnesses Jesus' resurrection was not simply an example of the resurrection of all people. It was not only an apocalyptic sign, but marked *the crucial turning-point in the destiny of this universe and of humanity"* (*ibid*: 159). Christ's resurrection "changed the whole human condition" (*ibid*: 158) being the second Adam (Rom. 5; 1 Cor.15) human spiritual position changed; as a result there is an abundant grace, the free gift of righteousness, and human beings are now justified (Rom. 5: 17). Further Paul says that the total change in human spirituality would be at the resurrection (*ibid*: 159).

The confession of Christ's resurrection is implicitly identified *with the expected Messianic figure of the son of man*, (as the liberating son of man). This expanded the reinterpretation of the son of man concept of the post-exilic and inter-testamental writings with the following understandings of, and functions given to, Jesus: "*the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory"*. This refers to the second coming of Jesus which will happen suddenly and soon (Mark 13: 26; Matt. 10: 23, 24: 27; Luke 18: 8; Mark 14: 62) (ibid: 160-161). It also expresses that Jesus is "*the son of man who must suffer"* (Mark 8: 31; cf. Mark 9:31; 10: 33; 14: 41). It speaks of "the passion, death and the resurrection of Christ" (*ibid*: 161). "Jesus as the son of man during his earthly ministry 'has authority on the earth to forgive sins'; he 'is lord even of the Sabbath'; he 'has nowhere to lay his head'; he comes to seek and to save the lost' (Mark 2: 10; 28; Matt. 8:20, Luke 19: 10)" (*ibid*).

4.8. Conclusion

Weber placed his emphasis on God's divine power from a different biblical perspective than that of Migliore. By focusing on the different biblical traditions, as well as the different presentation of biblical faith, he highlights a variety of ways in which God manifest God's power. From historical faith, it is understood that God's power is sometimes manifested through a visible means and at other times it is not. In a variety of circumstances God's power is revealed. However, each situation is unique - none adequately or inadequately defines God's power. God's power is not something that will be restricted to only one people, one place, one time, or one event. All of the various biblical traditions provide perspectives on God's power.

Weber interpreted God's power from a different perspective and vantage than that of Migliore. They both draw upon biblical narratives in order to understand of God's power. Weber corresponds with Migliore in affirming and supporting the belief in God's power. However, his explanation of God's power does not limit itself only to God being mighty. Both scholars are of the view that being powerful does not mean God does everything – God acts through different events, mediums and aspects of God's creation. Weber and Migliore agree that human power has to do with doing something under God's power, but differ in the sense that Weber sees this power operating in human obedience in serving God as the *anawim* (the humble, the poor, the meek). In this sense, both support the idea of human powerlessness in relation to God's power. However, they do some from different perspectives.

Having discussed various understandings of God's power, as coming from these two notable contemporary Protestant theologians, we shall now move on to the final section of this thesis. In the section that follows we shall consider some ways in which these various understandings of God's power could serve as a foundation for inter-religious engagement and conversation.

CHAPTER FIVE - RIPPLES OF POWER? IMPULSES FOR INTERRELIGIOUS CONVERSATION IN NIGERIA AND CONCLUSION

5. 1. Introduction

This study sought to understand and engage notions of divine power. The concept as it has been explored in the study is a belief which is central to the Christian tradition as well as in other traditions. However, the particularity of the study is positioned in understanding the concept of God's divine power in the Christian tradition. The task was undertaken as it was examined in the various chapters as was proposed in the design of the study.

In the introduction of the topic it was argued that divine power is an attribute of an infinite God. This attribute, is associated with God's sovereign abilities, or God's authority. This presents God as the ruler of all, who is in control and has authority over all. Among other things, his power is normally seen in reference to his activities, such as creation. The creation for example, expresses his abilities in diverse forms, including human situations. Though, these activities in their entirety do not always demonstrate, describe, or quantify God's divine power. God's actions, can however, introduce who God is.

Though divine power is an indicative or an attribute of God which speaks of the distinguishing nature of God, it is an aspect of God's identity. It is argued that to understand what divine power is, the Christian Scripture is the primary source to examine in order to understand it. Therefore, to comprehend what the Scriptures say regarding what divine power is, the works of two Protestant representatives were studied. This is consistent with the design of the study (statement of the problem in 1.3, Research Question in 1.4, and the Research Process found in 1.6). From a theological standpoint, Daniel Migliore, one of the Protestant representatives argued in chapter two that God's power can be understood when God is known. The Scriptures present God as triune and as such divine power is to be seen from a Trinitarian position. It is the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a manifestation of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, divine power should be seen from the Trinitarian description.

The usual understanding that God is almighty, all powerful, has the tendency of not giving the appropriate meaning of what God's power entails. It is argued by Daniel L. Migliore that the understanding that God is almighty, and all powerful, has mistakenly suggested, God can do everything, including what is self-contradictory. He argues that God's divine power should be

understood to mean that God has the power to "accomplish God's creative and redemptive purpose in a manner consistent with God's character" (2004: 418 cf. 86). The distinguishing difference of God's power from tyrannical power is that God's power is demonstrated in love, this is demonstrated in the life, and ministry of Jesus Christ.

This was re-emphasized again in chapter three that "the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the salvation of the world challenges us to a thorough rethinking of what we understand to be the power of God and the way in which human power be exercised as a faithful witness to God's power" (2008: *x*).

In relation to the Scriptures (as a compendium of different books), Hans-Ruedi Weber the second representative, uses biblical theology to explore divine power by examining how the different biblical traditions (the Exodus tradition, the Royal tradition, the Wisdom tradition, the Cultic tradition, the *Anawim* tradition, and the Apocalyptic tradition) in the different books of the Scriptures described God's power. Each of the faith traditions expresses power in a unique and distinct way, which, reflectively, suggest each of the traditions is respectively different from the other. Though, occasionally, it appears the understanding of one biblical tradition tends to overlap from one tradition to the other. The different periods in each of the traditions seem to influence how the biblical tradition interprets power. All these interpretations of the biblical traditions suggest God's divine power points towards God. It is God working either directly or indirectly, while on the other hand it indicates human being availing, trusting, and "working" to the honour of God. The finding in the research suggests that divine power may not be described in one perspective to mean a single phenomenon. In any case, this is worth exploring in further research.

The objectives of the study, as argued above, were to examine the Christian religious understanding of divine power and to study what God's divine power means for the Christian tradition. In addition, it was anticipated that the understanding of this religious belief might provide an important key or insight in understanding the religious worldview of the faith tradition, as it applies to its spirituality and its relationship with everyday experiences, with major relevance for Christian faith and spirituality in Africa.

In addition to investigating and understanding divine power from the Christian perspective the other objective of the study was that in the future, the knowledge of power may hopefully be used as an avenue for engaging in inter-religious discussion particularly in Nigeria. This contribution might possibly deepen and enrich the conversations of the different religious

traditions with one another in deeply divided country and region by understanding and accommodating religious similarity and appreciating religious differences and diversities.

Nigeria is a country which is religious in nature, the dominant religions are Christianity and Islam. These monotheistic religions refer to the Abrahamic religions. Pim Valkenberg a Dutch scholar of Religion and Culture argues that the Abrahamic religions are "characteristic of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" and further states that the "most proper theological characterization of these religions should not refer to Abraham but to the God of Abraham who called him as a prophet" (2006: 69). In his description of these religions F E. Peters a historian of religion sees them as the "children born of the same father and reared in the bosom of Abraham," (2004: *xvii*). He further describes these religions as "scriptural religions, that is, they affirm the existence of a divine revelation in written form," (1982: 1 cf. Snyder, 2010: 185). Adams Dodd[27] in his article "The Abrahamic Faith? Continuity and Discontinuity in Christian and Islamic Doctrine." Published in Evangelical Quarterly, 2009 81(3) 230-253, evaluates the cognate term 'Abrahamic Faiths' and presents other levels of the usage of the terms, even though the scope of the article in certain instances is limited to Christianity and Islam. Firstly, he emphasizes the term is simply a "shorthand for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam". Secondly, the usage acknowledges significant theological and historical continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and Islam. Continuity he argues, are those similar beliefs found both in Christianity and in Islam, they look to Abraham as a model of faith; they also share the conviction of the unity of God. Discontinuity, on the other hand, refers to beliefs, which are also a discoursed in both Christianity and Islam both have contradictory differences. These include:

1. The person of Christ

2. The incarnation of Christ

3. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ

4. The Bible

5. The Triune God (cf. Durand, 2007: 64; 83; Migliore, 2008: 123; Snyder, 2010: 196)

Thirdly, he further states that the usage of the term Abrahamic Faiths, with the removal of the plural suffix, becomes "Abrahamic faith", it then, connotes a "unity of faith", which means

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[27] This article of Adam Dodd was written when he was a final year PhD student studying trinitarian theology and missiology in Lesslie Newbigin, University of Otago, New Zealand.

"belief in the same God, asserting substantial continuity of these two faiths" (2009: 230-253; cf. Albright, 2006: 142; Solomon, Harries, and Winter 2005, Volf, 2011)[28]. The above-mentioned inference of the Abrahamic traditions suggests the focal point connecting these traditions is centred on Abraham the patriarch, all claim lineal descent from him (Abraham) through either of his sons, Ishmael or Isaac. These religions seem to have certain similarities as well as differences in their perspectives on some personalities and other aspects that are paramount and relevant (Dodd, 2009: 234, cf. Albright, 2006: 111) in their doctrines. Vincent Brümmer refers the Abrahamic faiths a matrix of faith. He states that this matrix of faith

> "[i]n the course of history the children of Abraham have diverged into three separate traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these traditions developed its own ways of understanding the faith of Abraham. Judaism took its point of departure for understanding the faith in Moses and the Torah, Christianity in Jesus and the New Testament, and Islam in Mohammad and the Qu'rān," (2005: 115, cf. Migliore, 2008: 39).

As the children of Abraham emerge into three separate entities, the points of departure rest on different personalities and scriptural sources.

Speaking of these religions as traditions, Andrew Pippin, a specialist in Islamic Studies in his book "*Muslims beliefs and practices*" analyzed and established that what is referred to as tradition "is not a single entity, but rather something which has changed over time, has moved with the historical circumstances and has varied for reasons which sometimes are very obscure" (1990: *xi* cf. Mortimer, 1982: 50-55; Kenny, 1999: 162; Loimeier, 1997: 286). Brümmer on his side seems to share a similar view to Andrew Pippin. His observation of the three Abrahamic faiths further states that "[t]hey are *traditions* that have developed, changed and diversified in the course of time. In many ways the differences *within* each of these traditions are as great as those *between* them," (2005: 116). These differences are what Wybren de Jong of Utrecht University, says "distinguishes" (1999: 43) them and as well as it defines their distinctiveness. Furthermore, according to Jong "traditions are dynamic entities in which debates with regard to, and changes and reinterpretations in the traditional content are the rule rather than the exception to the rule," (2000: 150). The above proposition, on the one hand, infers that each of the religions can be categorised as a tradition, and on the other hand, it thus suggests it is a belief system of each of these three monotheistic religions, which has evolved through various processes. These processes have contributed to giving it the shape of its essence and identity all along its transmission. "It stands to reason that a tradition must retain a tradition- like shape

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[28] For further elaborations see, Timothy C. Tennent. *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way we think about and Discuss Theology* (2007) 32-49.

in order to persist. If the process of transmission comes to a halt, or if there is no longer any content which is transmitted, then the tradition has surely come to an end," says Jong. (2000: 114).

With the differences between each tradition, there are also things they seem to share. Shared tradition is a concept that does not negate the similarity they both share, but also reflects their differences; in a sense, tradition is a kind of identity that connects and distinguishes these three beliefs. These traditions believe in God's divine power, it is directly related to God. Therefore, divine power and its relationship to God cannot be disconnected. In their systematic study of the monotheistic faiths, Bruce Chilton, Jacob Neusner, and William Graham in their book "*Three Faiths, One God: The Formative Faith and Practice of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*" say,

> "[w]hether or not there is a God—the question addressed by philosophy of religion and answered with proofs for the existence of God——does not define the issue of God's personhood for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. That is because none of these cognate religions asks whether or not there is 'a' god. Each found all knowledge of God on God's own revelation of himself and his will for mankind. All three religions know God through God's self-manifestation, in the person of Jesus Christ, in the Torah, and to the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'ān, for Christianity, Judaism and Islam respectively, (*ibid*: 2002: 36 cf. Tennent, 2007: 31, 32).

Typically, as described by these faith traditions, God is all powerful, all knowing, all sufficient, almighty, who created the earth and everything in it out of nothing as such God is in control, omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, immanent, providentially active in the governance of the earth (Sharon, 1984; Pippin 1990; Nasr, 2002; Neuser, Chilton, and Graham, 2002; Plantinga, Thompson, Lundberg, 2010; Burrell, Cogliati, Soskice, Sotoeger (ed.) 2010).

It is, therefore, clear that these religions believe in God's power. These and other attributes of God and his activities are found in their religious books; Torah, Bible, and Qur'an. These religious books serve as the compass of their direction on principles influencing their faith and practice; they define the interpretive understanding of trends and realities. Thus far, divine power can be a unifying concept, but the rationalization from the different religious convictions attest divine power has a significant implication either on how God is being understood or on what is being expected of God.

Though Nigeria is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious society; there is no significant evidence of a large Jewish presence in the country, the majority of Nigerians are adherents of the Christian or Muslim faiths in terms of religious affiliation. It is most natural to summarize both Christianity and Islam as the "largest religious groups" in Nigeria. This is a view argued

by Thaddeus Byimui Umaru, a Nigerian Catholic Priest (2013: 23, 53 cf. Adogame, 2010: 479). In the context of the demographic population, Frieder Ludwig a one-time university professor in Nigeria concludes that "[m]ore Christians and more Muslims live here than in any other African country," (2008: 263; cf. Marshall, 2009: 219). When it comes to the African traditional religions, the numerical population is so small that the number is usually negligible[29].

The easily observable religious phenomena in Nigeria are religious structures, such as churches, seminaries, church schools, mosques, Islamic centres, Islamic schools (*madrassa*), it comes in many different shapes and sizes in most places. Religious activities are not limited to those within these confined religious structures; it is also evidently reflected in the devotion, passion, and enthusiasm shown when it comes to religious affinity and commitment. Generally, in most schools, from elementary to high schools, during the assembly where students would gather and be addressed by the school headmaster (primary school) or the principal (high school), it is normally preceded by a session of prayers by the Christians and Muslims representatives, followed by the singing of the national anthem[30] and the recitation of the national pledge[31].

These and other religious elements are ingrained in people's consciousness from early childhood. The influence and extent of religiosity have consciously or unconsciously become interwoven in most Nigerians' everyday lives. On the political scene John Paden, an expert in Nigerian affairs, further observes the impact of religion on the political scene of the nationhood of Nigeria. He observes that in "religion and military politics" the idea of "religious balance" (2007: 663) seems to be a critical factor for the occupier of the highest office of the presidency.

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[29] This is not say African Traditional Religion is insignificant, the context refers to their population in terms of the numerical number compare to the so called monotheistic religions may be few.

[30] Arise O compatriot
Nigeria call obey
To serve our father land
With love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes' past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound with freedom
Peace and unity.
NB. This is the dominant version used in most public school in the Northern Region of Nigeria.

[31] I pledge to Nigeria my country,
To be faithful loyal and honest,
To serve Nigeria with all my strength;
To defend her unity;
And uphold her honour and glory;
So, help me God.

When the president is a Christian the vice president would be a Muslim or vice visa. This appears to be the norm at the presidential level, from 1975 until now, with variations in some instances and at the state level (cf. Rothfuss and Joseph, 2012: 77; Grim and Finke, 2011: 89; Obadare, 2006: 671; Sicard, 1993: 273-278). Even though this is not enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, the reality is that religion is critical in the Nigerian psyche; it has an influential role in human, social, economic, and political domains, (cf. McGarvey, 2009: 272; Ifeka, 2006: 722).

It is typical to hear both Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria use this phrase "*Ikon Allah*!" (Divine power or God's power). One hears people exclaim this phrase when something "unique" happens, for example, when children are born after a long period of waiting or when people are protected from misfortunes, or disasters, or when people have "unique" religious experiences or when people are facing issues of life, they invoke or use this phrase. The perception of God's power seems to be much more than a customary expression; it is rather an acknowledgment, ascribing apparently inexplicable acts of wonder only to God, affirming God's power and might. This poses the question whether they understand the concept in a similar way and if that is the case, how, or, if they differ, how and why?

This shared belief seems to be a means for engaging in inter-religious conversation. Inter-religious discussions appear to be a dominant thrust being advocated not only in the modern enlightenment, but also in the postmodern context of religious pluralism[32]. Religious interaction in a pluralistic context has become a characteristic of the globalized society, among the purposes of these interactions as Robert Nash, an editorial board member of Journal of Religion and Education, has pointed out - in society a person is "not only a member of a particular community of belonging but also a citizen of the world," as such there is this need for commitment to others "beyond our kith and kin" (2008: 70 cf. Hospital, 2007: 357). Again, Nash argues that the commitment is "to be kind, even hospitable, to 'religious strangers' so that we might learn from them" (2008: 71 cf. Bevan and Schroeder, 2004: 383; Hospital, 2007: 356). The learning and the conversation as the Catholic theologian Peter C Phan further suggested is an avenue for discussion, discovery, evaluation, and development (2010: 173; cf. Swindler, 2004: *X;* McGarvey, 2006: 307), whereas David Windibiziri a one-time Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria thinks, religions, particularly "Christians and Muslims could meet to talk together, study together and generally have a forum for mutual

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[32] Quinn argues that "Religious pluralism is a descriptive term used to illustrate the persistent interaction of the world religions something that has long been happening though not as quickly as is happening now" (2012: 4).

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interaction and exchange of ideas to enhance peaceful coexistence" (2003: 158), and to equally strengthen their participation in theological deliberations. "From this perspective dialogue is important both to enrich the understanding of one's own and the other's faith and to help the other see that behind his or her own faith lies a reality that can bring what is already believed to full completion," says Bevans and Schroeder, the Missionaries of the Divine Word (SVDs) (2004: 380 cf. Hospital, 2007: 357). The above line of reason suggests, among other things, that it is believed that inter-religious conversation might open doors "into opportunities for deep and life changing inter-religious dialogue" Phan, concluded (2010: 173).

Different recommendations have been suggested for a meaningful inter-religious conversation. John Alembillah Azumah a Ghanian scholar believes religious history and accepting responsibility would become a stepping-stone for a quest for inter-religious dialogue (2001). The German Theologian Hans Küng further advocates for a global ethic, which also draws attention to a global responsibility. He believes that there would be no meaningful human life without a world ethic for the nation; no peace among the nations without peace among religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue among religions (1990: 138). The advocates for peace include Thaddeus Byimui Umaru (2013); Sunday Agang (2011); Kathleen McGarvey (2008); tolerance, (Abashia & Ulea, 1991); justice and ethics, (Hans Kung, 1991) to name just a few. These and other propositions underscore the essence of religious conversation. Since Nigeria is a multi-religious nation, the issue of inter-religious conversation is necessary, the next section tries to explore, comprehend, and to inquire how the inter-religious conversation in its multi-religious context has taken place with a particular focus on northern Nigeria.

5. 2. Religious Encounter

Historically, religious interaction from the earliest encounter in Nigeria was through migration, trade, jihad conquest, missionary's mission enterprise (Umaru, 2013: 33-34, 46, 51-52, 67; Onapajo, 2012: 44-45; Kalu, 2010: 15; Adogame, 2010: 481-483; Oloso, 1995: 160; Raji, 1995: 125; Trimingham, 1962: 230-232). Consequently, the means through which the religious encounter resonates has both witnessed problems and accomplishment (cf. Achebe, 2012: 7, 11-14; Gilliland, 1986: 2; Turaki, 2010: 127-130). The attributed explanations towards the encounter experienced are:

1. That the earlier religious encounter was perceived as interfering as well as a way of slimming down, of one religion over the other while on the other side, it was seen as an avenue of

liberation, transformation, and reformation, as well as an expansion of the "new" religion from others (O'Brien and William, 2010: 107; Turaki, 2010: 125-126; Falola, 1999: 36; 40-41; Onapajo, 2012:45; Umaru, 2013: 31, 38, 50). The (*mis*)understanding of the above phenomenon depends on how the narrative was perceived and understood. This perception to a certain extent seems to have continued to the present day.

2. Because some of the means through which some of the religious encounters came about, they have left an imprint such that some ethnic groups have a negative perception of one religion over the other. (cf. Gilliland, 1986: 64, 157; Paden, 1973: 34; Christelow, 2000: 381; Azumah, 2001: 173; Umaru, 2013: 173).

3. The colonialist among other things legitimized the residential segregation in some of the towns in Northern Nigeria. They promulgated a course of action which had an impact regarding religious integration. The colonial administration propagated a political policy as argued by Yusufu Turaki of non-interference of one religion over the other especially "of non-interference with Islam" (2010: 126 cf. Paden, 1973: 317). The fundamental reasons for the non-interference were that an alliance aimed at protecting of "the traditional Islamic institution of the northern societies". This pact was made between the British colonialists and the ruling class (Dudley, 1968). Hakeem Onapajo a post-doctoral fellow of University of Zululand presented additional reason for the non-interference, reciting Rasmussen he states that "[t]he British further nurtured the fear that Christianity would provide Western education to the people of the North which was capable of stimulating their political consciousness against the traditional institutions that obviously posed a threat to their unchallenged and successful indirect rule in the region (Rasmussen, 1990, pp.176-182)", (2012: 46, 49). Therefore, for considerably "much of the North, the British colonial administration ensured the non-integration of Muslim and non-Muslim through the creation of Sabon Gari (New Town) for the latter in the old Northern Nigeria towns such as Kano and Sokoto" McGarvey noted (2006: 148 cf. Trimingham, 1962: 229; Miles, 2000: 211-212; Watt, 1991: 104; Clarke, 1982: 193, 229; Clarke, 1988: 182; Kalu, 2010: 90; Meredith, 2011: 76 cf. Sanneh, 2003: 18-20) and in other places in Northern Nigeria. The distinction of *Sabon Gari* (strangers' quarters or literally new town), and the other towns, have contributed to the fact that settlements are poles apart. The impact and the absence of integration have considerably brought about social separations among the society even though population explosion and infrastructural development has now closed the gap between *Sabon Gari* and the other towns.

The above, and other different situations, that have engulfed Nigeria in the past years, and among the other overriding factors, are the intra-inter religious conflicts which might have ethnic and political undertones (cf. Umaru, 2013: 173, 187; Omotola, 2013: 172, 183; Onapajo, 2012: 57; Volf, 2011: 4; Adogame, 2010: 486-488; Marshall, 2009: 224; Gaiya, 2003: 95; Udoidem, 1997: 152-183; Loimeier, 1997: 286-307; Sicard, 1993: 274). Moreover, the limitations of religious discourse have generated and brought about the emergence of inter-religious conversation as an avenue through which bridges can be built (cf. Clarke, 1982: 244; Westerlund, 1997: 318; Oloso, 1995: 159; Umaru, 2013: 171), to foster cohesion in community relations and to come to a better understanding (Umaru, 2013: 164; Karim and Muhammed, 2010: 80) of one another's religious convictions and to address other social, cultural, and political issues (Umaru, 2013: 169). Again, having a better understanding of one another's religious convictions is important because it helps one to easily interact with people from other cultural and religious backgrounds (Oloso, 1995: 160 cf. Hospital, 2007: 357).

Over the years religious conversation has taken place in different forms which can be summarized as negotiation, inquiry, action, and of theological exchange (Umaru, 2013: 166; Watts, 2008: 201). The conversation revolves around a peaceful coexistence, religious harmony, religious tolerance; social justice and reconciliation, collaboration and cooperation, and cohesion among the various religions; which could be attributed towards nation building, and so forth. These have been initiated by different agencies: Government and non-government organizations as well as religious and non-religious associations. Peter B. Clarke suggest that "[t]he level of co-operation and interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims is much higher today, and this may be due to the fact that in the colonial era, when the initiative lay with others, both Muslims and non-Muslims in Nigeria could do little more than react to policies and decisions whereas in the present situation both hold the initiative and hence have the responsibility for the country' future" (1982: 254).

In relation to theological conversation, Kathleen McGarvey a Catholic Religious Sister[33] believes that theology is appropriate and relevant in the Nigerian context because even though Nigerians have been living together as neighbors for many years there is considerable ignorance in regard to their respective faiths (2009: 272). McGarvey argues that,

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[33] She is the founder of the Interfaith Forum of the Muslim and Christian women's Association which is based in Kaduna state in Nigeria.

> "[t]hroughout the history of Nigeria, ... religion has been quite fully involved in the daily, social, economic, and political lives of the people. Part of the ongoing tension is the secularisation of the state, its identification with a particular religion, or it's being moulded by values which are influenced by religious teachings. By their insistence on the *shari'a,* Muslim have made the separation of religion, politics and social issues quite *explicitly* impossible. Therefore, theology somehow does enter the equation. Whether or not religion's involvement in politics is due to a manipulation of religion is irrelevant: religion is undoubtedly a factor in the conflicts experienced in the region and must therefore be a factor in resolving the situation. The approach to the other religion and the respect which should be given to particular truth claims, such as the *shari'a*, must also be a factor" (2009: 272 cf. Onapajo, 2012: 42).

The means through which the inter-religious discussions take place include conferences, seminars, symposia, workshops, consultative meetings (cf. Watt, 1991: 125; Okpanachi, 2009: 15, 20; Suberu, 2010: 465; Umaru, 2013: 169, 182, 188-189; 194). The issues are most often deliberated through formal and informal meetings, (Sicard, 1993: 275-277; Umaru, 2013: 169).

5. 2. 1. Formal Encounter

Accordingly, McGarvey states that "formal encounters between members of the two faiths" (2009:247) have been organized as earlier mentioned above, by "Government bodies, academic institutions, faith bodies, and NGOs" (*ibid*). She continues as she explains that "although only a small percentage of the population have participated in these encounters they are often influential people, religious or political leaders and leaders of civil society bodies and non-governmental organizations" (*ibid*. cf. Umaru, 2013: 169, 172; Oloso, 1995: 167; Kung, 1990: 137). Official encounter seems to be limited to a concentrated few, mostly for the elites. The view of the conversation is to promote a better interaction and understanding among the leaders and the followers of the true teachings of the two faiths – Christianity and Islam – in addition to their distinctiveness and personal development through dialogue as well as to lay foundations for sustainable peace and religious harmony in Nigeria (Okpanachi, 2009: 15-17, 19; cf. Gregg, 2010: 196; Suberu, 2010: 465; Umaru, 2013: 187-188). Furthermore, Eyene Okpanachi, a Nigerian political analyst claims that "it aims to defuse interfaith tensions that may cause future conflict or derive from previous conflict" (2009: 15; cf. Suberu, 2010: 465). Inter-religious conversation becomes a means which resolves unnecessary pressures of one to another.

In addition, fairness is encouraged, supported and maintained where inequity seems to exist. Ogbu Uke Kalu the Nigerian Church Historian, however, highlight some concern, he argues that "[i]n a contested political space, less time is spent on cultivated dialogue". (2010: 95 cf. Loimeier, 1997: 286-307). The essence of Kalu's observation suggests, dialogue can never be undervalued.

Religious understanding, being an integral part in the formal encounter, not only serves as an avenue for knowing the religious beliefs of the other, but it also affects the perception which people from different religions have towards one another. Lack of this knowledge is the concern of David Windibiziri. He expresses that

> "[u]nfortunately, we must admit that ignorance about one another is not the prerogative of any one faith. On the whole, Muslims are ignorant about Christianity and Christians about Islam. In addition, many are ignorant about the teachings of their own faith. Educating the adherents of both faiths about their own religious teachings as well as about the main teachings in the other faith will help avoid blanket condemnations based on ignorance. Much remains to be done in this area. One result of this ignorance is reflected in the way in which preachers on both sides make provocative and abusive remarks about the other religion. This issue has been widely discussed, and it has been agreed that this should be avoided. Nonetheless, we still find zealous preachers who believe that they can convince people by using totally false arguments. Here there is little difference between Christian and Muslim preachers. Both groups succumb to the temptation of using provocative language which rather than winning supporters drives them further into a defensive position," (2003: 160 cf. Okpanachi, 2009: 18; McGarvey, 2009: 295).

On the other hand, to dispel and to correct such lack of knowledge of the other it is further argued by David Windibiziri that,

> "[o]ne way of dealing with this problem could be to emphasize the importance of Christians to preach and argue from the perspective of the Bible, and for Muslims to quote and argue from the perspective of the Qur'an. As Christians we do not have the authority to make use of the Holy Book of another faith because we have not learned the proper context and interpretation," (2003: 160 cf. Istifanus, 2007: 4).

The conversational experiences have demonstrated that doctrinal similarities, as well as differences, do exist in both religions, and some of these differences are somehow fundamentally exclusive. This suggests that some doctrines are essentially widely divergent, without consensus. Windibiziri being conscious of this reality, made the following propositions based on this understanding:

> "During our discussions we have found that it is necessary to accept certain basic facts. It is impossible for Christians to explain the Trinity in such a way that Muslims will understand and/or accept this doctrine. It is fundamental to our faith and cannot be changed. Similarly, while Muslims find it hard to understand that Christians cannot accept Muhammad as the final prophet, they have to comprehend that for Christians, revelation is final in Jesus Christ, while Christians have to accept that the prophethood of Muhammad is a basic Muslim doctrine. We have to agree and to acknowledge that in questions of doctrine there are certain issues that will have to stand and be accepted. But, we can also agree that if such doctrinal differences are not misrepresented by the other faith they need not prevent us from working and living together peacefully.
>
> Moreover, we need to learn that there are certain symbols that are precious to the followers of the two faiths. Whereas Muslims find the use of the cross offensive, Christians consider it a sign of the final revelation of God's love for humankind and God's plan for the salvation of the world, and a sign of God's victory over sin and death. Christians find it hard to accept the use of the sword because for them it indicates the opposite of peace and understanding. Nevertheless, we have found that as we discuss these issues and realize the

importance the other faith attaches to its symbols it is possible to acknowledge them as an expression of faith, and to continue dealing with areas where it is possible to agree and work together" (2003: 161 cf. Samartha, 1991: 21).

With limited doctrinal consensus attributable to religious beliefs, and the significance attached to their distinctive religious symbols, are realities that will not be discarded. We will live with it, however, there are other inevitable avenues for possible cooperation, collaboration and engagement for example, Windibiziri says,

> "on issues of ethics and social responsibilities we have the same needs and it should not only be possible, but desirable to work together. When people are sick they need medicine; when young people do not have work they need a job; when there is no safe drinking water people need a well. The first question asked by those who would help should not be what religious affiliation the needy have, but the donors should rather ask themselves whether they will be able to provide for these needs.

> Both Christians and Muslims agree that with regard to ethical issues there is a great need to fight immorality, corruption, bribery, gambling, drug addiction and other social ills. In fact, it was emphasized on several occasions that if Christians and Muslims were to put the teachings of both the Bible and the Qur'an into practice it would solve most of such problems. We can therefore conclude that there is a basis for cooperation towards tolerance and peaceful coexistence" (2003: 161 cf. Migliore, 2008: 116).

Commitment to all necessary collaboration, cooperation is a catalyst towards working together, as such; this may also dispel unnecessary suspicion that may arise.

5. 2. 2. Informal Encounter

Hans Kung refers to the above encounter as unofficial dialogue (1990). Agreeing with Hans Kung, Bevans & Schroeder call it a dialogue of life in which people are engaged in (2004: 383). Religious conversation in this sense can be an everyday ongoing activity, as Kathleen McGarvey has noted. She says that the informal discourse "between Muslims and Christians takes place daily in Northern Nigeria as people of different faiths interact in the market places, schools, hospitals, places of work and so on" (2009: 247; cf. Umaru, 2013: 172, Sicard, 1993: 273, 275, 277). The interaction in this public square or in everyday space suggests that the conversational exchange is more at a close range where a small number of ordinary citizens, in the general public, are engaged to "share insights from their respective religious traditions" says Sicard, (1993: 275), in the same vein also to discuss is their challenges. As this conversation engages on the principle of understanding the other faith tradition, the informal approach of conversational exchange to an extent operates at a deeper level. It can be compared to what can sometimes be obtained through formal encounter, which is often scheduled periodically, often have rules on its proceeding, and can be restricted by other factors such as funding, security reasons, takes a long time of planning, and the like.

People seem to freely express their feelings along with their challenges and fears, as stated by the Orientalist, and Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, William Montgomery Watts. He says the "[i]nformal meetings, however, have probably achieved more than these official occasions" (1991: 125). Watts' supposition above is supported by Fr. Joseph Kenny of Department of Religious Studies, the University of Ibadan, who adds that apart from being fruitful, with this kind of meeting people could be more honest in their conversation (1999: 6, 106).

Contrary to William Montgomery, Watts and Joseph Kenny's assessments, Sigvard Von Sicard, also an expert on Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, suggests that informal encounter is "often rather superficial" (1993: 275 cf. Hospital, 2007: 257). To substantiate why he regards it is as superficial, he suggests that the conversational process can offer a "lack of clarity or consensus about the wider frame for such communication" (cf., Hospital 2007: 357). Sigvard Von Sicard argues that "[m]any Christians and Muslim are not yet ready to discuss theological questions with one another in the open, unprejudiced way. At the same, time it should be remembered that particularly in Africa theological issues and questions are an integral part of life. Not to discuss these would be unnatural. As men and women of faith, Christians and Muslims are longing to share at this deeper level" (*ibid*: 278).

The challenges surrounding the aforementioned phenomenon in inter-religious discourse have to do with the adequate knowledge of the various theological beliefs of the various traditions by their adherents. In some cases the problem is suspicion (*ibid*: 126 cf. Clarke, 1982: 229; Umaru, 2013: 173-174). In other circumstances, the religious discussion in Nigeria raises mixed feelings of uncertainty. According to McGarvey,

> "[m]ost participants felt dialogue was a risky venture because both Christian and Muslims react aggressively to construct criticism. They also expressed their distrust of Muslims whom they saw as being largely insincere. However, they felt that to overcome distrust and grow in understanding and tolerance so as to bring about peace and progress, Muslims and Christians should come together in a dialogue of action to overcome social ills before dogmatic or theological dialogue." (2009: 261)

Other challenges associated with the informal encounter as well as the formal encounter, are that the participants and their intention for participation as Dickens, argues,

> "it may be useful to come at this contentious issue from a different direction. The motives with which participants approach dialogue are complex. Some come expecting conversion, others mutual understanding and respect, still others the resolution of needless disagreements grown stale, and others with the hope and justice. If my overriding concern were converting my dialogue partner-if that hope were to animate every concern I posed or every point I made— then it seems obvious that the conversation would be less fruitful than otherwise" (2006: 212).

The recent difficulty experienced due to inter-religious crises, has, however, made this dialogue of life a somewhat restricted interaction between the two faiths in the region and has created divisions that largely separate the lives of the two faith communities. McGarvey says "[i]n recent times, due to the violent conflicts, it has become even more limited" (2009: 247). In the light of this reality, the situation has strained the interactions. However, this has not totally stopped human interactions. McGarvey further says that: "[a]lthough Muslims and Christians go back to their enclaves when darkness falls, a certain level of interaction and cross-fertilization in common places of day- to- day experiences does exist. Unfortunately, in such daily interaction many people prefer to exclude religion from popular discourse because it is a highly volatile subject area" (*ibid*: 248).

The limited interaction between religions is attributable to the "[i]ncessant clashes between the two communities" which have now resulted in "a remarkable voluntary segregation, further highlighting the paralleling of Islam and Christianity in the region" (*ibid*: 248). McGarvey continues as she argues that in "[t]he environment of mutual mistrust that segregated ghetto existence nurtures does not facilitate even a dialogue of life and the prevailing attitude is that one religious community should not interfere in the life of the other" (*ibid*).

Despite the challenges of both formal and informal conversations, Sicard agrees that formal conversation has produced successful outcomes in tackling problems such as:

> "natural and other disasters. Others have come into being through the initiatives of some dedicated Christian and Muslim who discerned the potential value to people of faith to face challenges by sharing their respective religious insights through dialogue. Such groups meet on fairly regular basis, usually once a month or once a quarter to discuss and share their respective insights regarding an agreed topic. Most of them have discovered the need to begin with topics relating to economic, educational, political or social issues. Once the participants have come to know and trust one another, they move on to religious and theological issues", (1993: 278).

In pursuance of moving ahead beyond ethical problems, Sigvard Von Sicard reiterates that, "[m]embers of both traditions need to be better educated in their respective traditions so as to be able to share and discuss these in a meaningful and creative way as they relate together to common tasks and challenges facing them in their own specific situations" (1993: 275). This condition is necessary for productive discussions between all adherents of the two traditions.

From the above discussion, it is important to note among other things people are central to this process. Wherever people are, a conversation is inevitable. It is part of human reality; it is something that will continue. Inherently, an interreligious conversation is a strategic issue in a

pluralistic context that cannot be ignored. As this study argues for inter-religious conversation, it advocates for an inter-religious conversation on divine power.

It is argued that divine power is a religious belief that both Christianity and Islam share. It is an aspect that both religions are familiar with and can engage in. Engaging in a conversation hinges on the understanding of the subject at hand. Knowing what divine power means becomes the nature of the meeting. As such, the tasks of finding out the biblical meaning remains a key for unlocking the meaning of divine power.

The implication of inter-religious conversation has both theological and social impacts. On the theological side, it indicates a possibility of a space for learning about what people believe in from the tradition of the other. Learning from the tradition of the other points toward an opening for knowing the religious belief of the other, which will result in an understanding of their religious teachings, and the things that shape the views and direction of adherence to certain beliefs. Knowing what shapes the views of the other will foster inter-religious knowledge, not in the sense of religious conversion, or letting go of one's beliefs, but a fostering of understanding of religious worldviews and how they make sense out of it. This could remove wrong perspectives of the other. There is a probability of improving and having a better conversation.

However, an assessment of the research process also uncovered some limitations that could be addressed in future research:

The research did not address how the question of divine power may be incorporated in the dialogue, it only suggests divine power may be good for conversation since it is a shared concept in the Abrahamic religions. This research is limited to the research questions of the study, which suggest other research question may raise the necessity for future research and other projects that fall outside of the scope of this particular study.

5. 3. Conclusion

The study aimed to inquire into divine power, primarily as it is presented in the Christian tradition. All of the chapters in this study lean towards providing a reflective forum for a better inquiry into, and a deeper and more nuanced understanding of, God's divine power. One of the key purposes of this study was to examine, explore and to understand, the nature of God's divine power from the perspectives of two well regarded Protestant theologians.

Knowing who God is, is a requirement for understanding divine power. Knowing God depends on the source from which knowledge is obtained i.e., divine revelation. Divine power demonstrates God's activities i.e., that God is described as almighty, omnipotent, all-powerful, sovereign. The realization of these activities or actions have brought human beings to understand God to be comparably different from themselves. Essentially, the attributes of God serve as a means of indicating God's distinctiveness. Therefore, the attributes almighty, omnipotent, say something of God's power. However, what they says is also a limited set of information. These concepts do not represent the entire biblical picture for describing God's power. There are God's deeds that are not displayed in a spectacular way like those of a super hero. Still, these attributes are inherent in his person and nature. For example, this research suggested that an important Christian perspective describes God is triune. The Trinity is a point of departure to understand the nature of God. Christ reveals divine power, yet it is not as humans always how power is represented and what it is. Rather it is described in terms of love, hope, and faith - it is transforming and liberating.

Analysing God's divine power suggests that God's power is not supposed to be narrowed to the binary of what God can do or cannot do. Rather, it means that God's divine power is diverse and multifaceted, multi-dimensional. In this complexity, all illustrations to demonstrate God's power cannot be fully comprehended in terms of what and how human beings define power (i.e., when it comes to explaining God's divine power the common interpretation has been that God is almighty and is ultimately able to do abundantly what is impossible for humans in terms of saving or changing unbearably difficult situations for human beings). Human notions of power are described as "weak" (Migliore, 2008: 129). Intrinsically God's divine power, as it has been deduced from biblical history and theology, highlights means or components that God uses to emphasize or manifest God's power. Each of these components unveils different aspects of God's person, in God's all-knowing nature, this is to illuminate who God is and what God's power entails. Therefore, divine power emphasizes letting God be God, which invokes the notion of trust and having faith, love, and hope in a triune God.

Next we considered God's power in the monumental work of Hans-Ruedi Weber "*Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology*." Though Weber and Migliore both studied divine power, each of the main representative approaches was shown to approach it from a different vantage point. Nonetheless, the material strongly supports, complements, and it significantly adds to what each of the scholars expressed regarding God's power. Weber seems to compliment, and texture, much of what we learnt about God's power from Migliore's works.

It was discovered that using these two representative perspectives has enriched, and deepened, the understanding of God's power. As such, incorporating it into interfaith conversation may enrich and deepen the knowledge of the other and broadening one's perspective of the other. The beliefs in divine power among the two religious traditions highlighted at the end of this study, seem to provide a platform for interreligious conversation. In spite of some similarities, differences between the two traditions also need to be headed. It is suggested that these will emerge as a detailed study on their theological understandings about who God is in their different religious traditions is undertaken. However, these differences should not be a means of separation, but should be seen as an avenue for further and more honest interreligious conversation. Even where there is no consensuses in their doctrinal meaning of what God's power is, there are still possibilities for learning about what it means to each tradition.

Miroslav Volf, in his book "*Allah: A Christian Response",* suggests that his "interest here is the proper Christian stance toward the God of the Qur'an and what that stance means for Christians' and Muslims' ability to live together well in a single and endangered world" (2011: 1). Volf's proposition, is that having an appropriate attitude towards God and living harmoniously together in the world is possible. The practical implication of this study reaches a similar conclusion. It suggests that possible future discussions in Nigeria on shared beliefs in divine power and relating these to an understanding of God's sovereignty and human existence, with reference to providence, society, politics, economics and other existential realities may offer some possibilities for engagement (these may include problems such as the problems of evil, suffering, pain, and illnesses).

Hence, this study has shown that there is great value in understanding the depth, and nuance, of Christian understandings of divine power. It not only holds theological value for Christians, but it may also serve as a platform for religious conversation. It is a shared theological concept, or belief, between Christians and Muslims, and since divine power is closely related to the daily experience of religious persons from both faith traditions highlighted in this study, it could serve as a valuable theological concept for mutual discovery and fruitful engagement.

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