

The Concept of Person in Some African Tribes in The Light of St. Augustine

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Abstract:

The whole of the paper secures understanding of person in the African context, but guided by St. Augustine's philosophy. The work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will deal with the general notion of the human person focusing on the etymological foundation of the word, aided by various definitions of the notion 'person'. High consideration will be paid on the Augustinian definition of person; included in it will be composition of person as well as the Augustinian ideas of freedom. The second chapter will talk about the Bantu notion of 'muntu' 'mndu' (person). This concept of muntu will be discussed in connections with other realities and under the notion of finality. The third chapter deals with the evaluation of these two lines of thought with an aim of seen their area of convergence of and divergence. The method used to write this work is philosophical hermeneutic whereby through the accumulation of readings from both sides, interpretative method is applied. It is my hope that this work is going to be one of the salient contribution in all the

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attempts to nourish and expound the Bantu notion of person in view of fostering the peoples understanding of the dignity and value of human person.

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Introduction

In most of the African tribes especially the Bantu tribe, the concept of person prevails and is part of their life. The whole concept of person in Bantu perspectives, manifests itself in the idea of 'muntu.' How this African (Bantu) conception of person can be integrated into Augustinian trend of thought.? This is the central question in this work. Related to this central question, are sub questions such as: What is the African conception of person in relation to other realities of life? What is the finality of the person? Many thinkers have attempted to deal with the issue of the person. St. Augustine's definition of the person is one of them. The way St. Augustine proceeds in his thought, tells many things about his conception of the person, though sometimes not in a direct way. Augustine's treatise on the person can provide us with a light and new insight that will help us to elucidate authentically the Bantu understanding of the person.

In most case this work is limited on the African tribes and particularly the Bantu tribes. The writer has opted to deal with the issue of person because of its due importance, the understanding of the person depends much on the clear conception of the human person ontologically and in his given situation. Thus a rightful understanding of the human person results to a clear apprehension of human value and dignity, the dignity that allows one to approach another meaningfully. It is my conviction that inequality, mistreatment and oppression of other person by the others, is rooted on the ignorance, on the dignity and values of human person, another as an 'I'.

1. ON THE NOTION OF THE PERSON

The term person can be defined differently based on the specific field of concern. For example, a person can be said to be a living human being with his rational capacity and intelligence. On the religious (Christian) point of view a person is regarded as a special creature of God created in the image and likeness of the Supreme Being. In this way, human person has a high value and dignity.

Also the term person can be found on the field of languages, where it can be said about, "first person 'I', second person 'YOU', and third person 'HE' 'SHE' 'IT'". In this trend of linguistic analysis, first, second and third person can be in singular or in plural form. So in this aspect (linguistic aspect), person can be said to be an individual human being with distinct characteristics. But still other things, which are not human persons constitutes personhood, and they are included into the third person. Thus for example the word like 'IT' is said to be a pronoun of the third person singular, which can be an animal or anything.

In philosophical usage the term person has been defined differently by different philosophers. But in order to get the critical understanding of the term; it is better to focus our attention on the original of the word and its origin understanding.

1.1 Etymology of the Term Person

Etymologically the word 'person' comes from the Latin word 'persona' whose meaning is equivalent to the Greek word 'prosopon'. According to both Latin and Greek languages there are two main meanings implied by term person. First person means 'masks' of which ancient Greek and Roman actors used to wear in Drama. Second, "person can also mean, face, usage, character, on perfection that an actor presents in a Drama".¹

Both meanings have actor as their referential point. This is very important as far as the subject matter is concerned. This is because, in reference to the etymology of the term person we can argue that, only a person is said to be an actor or acting. Thus being the actor the person becomes the doer as well as the subject of the action.

1.2 Various Definitions of the Notion of Person

Many philosophers who worked on the notion of person had described the term as follows: In Platonic Philosophy especially in the Book of Laws, Plato puts forward the story of the human race, which either had no beginning or began long time ago,²

In giving accounts of the physical world, Plato writes as though human race had a beginning. He describes the formation of the souls and that of bodies. However, he admits that a human person is composed of both the body and soul. He calls the body, as the prison of the soul for it is the one, which makes the soul forget all the perfect knowledge it had when it was in the ideal world.

¹ Cf. J.M. OKEMWA, *Self Determoination*, 62.

²Cf. PLATO, *Laws*, 718E.

And by the term soul, he understands it as something divine in us, which is either corrupt or virtuous.³ But corruption spoken here is not that of a drive to nothingness, rather it is a moral corruption.

During the Middle Ages Boethius gave a definition of person, which up to this day seems to be appealing to many. According to him, person is individual substance of rational nature. Thomas Aquinas too had a very big contribution on the notion of person. St. Thomas says that human person is composed of soul and body. The soul is not identical with the body. Soul is self-subsistent. Different with/from the body soul is incorporeal. Souls of brute animals have no intellectual operation while souls of men have intellectual operation and this makes man as person distinct from mere animals.

So for Thomas, a human person is composed of body and soul. The soul and body are distinguishable realities. He calls them incomplete substances but together they form one substance the human person. So for Thomas the term person signifies a complete substance of rational nature that is man composed of body and soul, which is endowed with rational capacity.

Leaving this Thomistic understanding of human person, we come now to the understanding of person according to Descartes. In his methodical doubt, Descartes starts by doubting and to accept nothing more than what is presented to his mind so clearly and distinctly.

Proceeding forward in his method, that is doubting anything which is doubtful, he comes to the point of truth, which cannot be doubted. This is the truth, which is certain. This truth which can't be doubted is the fact of his existence as a thinking person 'cogito ergo sum' (I think therefore I exist). So Cartesian conception of person, is the one who exists as thinking being. A being who is rationally conscious of his/her existence and his/ her ability to think.

We can then say that 'cogito ergo sum' is Cartesian discovery of his personhood as existing and thinking being. In his treatise about mind body relation, Decartes says that, human being must be some kind of union between mind and body. There is close union between soul and body but the union is in fact primitive and un-analyzable notion.

1.3 Augustine Definition of the Person

In his psychology Augustine defines man as soul using body. The soul is an image of trinity and has a direct knowledge of it. In his definition, Augustine has an influence of Platonism, somewhere he defines soul as substance endowed with reason and fitted to rule the body (De quant, anim. 13,22).

This understanding of soul provides for Augustine a strong ground upon which he defines human person as a soul using body. It is from this basis that Augustine sees man as the peak of material creation. Consequently, he recognizes the dignity and value of human person over other material creatures.

³Cf. BRADY, *A History Of...*, 97.

1.4 Composition of Person According to Augustine

According to Augustine, 'human person is composed of body and immortal soul. Man is the union of soul and body. This union of soul and body is that of opposition' and not of composition. He says that the soul in possession of the body does not make two persons, but one man. He speaks of the soul, as a substance on its own right. It is a rational soul using mortal body.

A sensation is one of the activities of the soul using body as an instrument rather than as an activity of total psychophysical organism. The soul is what animates the body. So as it can be seen, from the composition of man, for Augustine the soul is a principle of life. And due to its immateriality and substantiality, the soul is immortal. Thus, Augustine attributes to the soul, the life after death.

1.5. On the Idea of the Freedom

Talking about freedom, Augustine shows that Freedom is joined together with obligation. He says that the will is free, but the will is subject to moral obligation. The necessary basis of obligation is freedom. The will is free to turn away from God and to attach itself to immutable goods of the soul without reference to God or to the goods of the body.

It is necessary that, the will seek happiness and satisfaction. But man can direct his will against God voluntarily. Man is free and his nature is set to move towards the Supreme Being freely. There are principles, which are perceivable by man, which can direct free will of man. So Augustine says that man is free in as much as his turning to or turning away from God is not forced, but is voluntarily actions.

Augustine links freedom with obligation, and he discusses Freedom of man in relation to God the highest good of man. The human mind must recognize the truth that not only that what it seeks "happiness" can be found only in possession of immutable goods. He argues that the direction the will to God is implanted and willed by God who is the creator, yet without violating the freedom of man. The way Augustine precedes shows that, to him freedom is the big constitutive aspect in the whole notion of person.

1.6 On the Idea of Finality

Augustine in his book 'City of God' speaks in man's last end in two states. He said; "by definition, our supreme end is that good which is sought for its own sake, and on account of which all their goods are sought".⁴ Again according to Augustine, the human life, which is called happy, is the one which enjoys both virtue and other goods of the soul, and body without which there can be no virtue.⁵

Moreover Augustine speaks of a happy life as being also social: "the happy life is social, further to be social when the goods of one's friend are loved for what they are as one loves one's own goods and when one wishes for ones friends what one wishes for one self".⁶

⁴AUGUSTINE, *City Of God*, 127.

⁵ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *City Of God*, 435.

⁶AUGUSTINE, *City Of God*, 436.

2. ON THE NOTION OF PERSON (MUNTU)

2.1 Bantu Understanding of Person (Muntu)

Person (muntu) is a compound term constituted of the singular personal prefix 'M' and the general root 'UTU' to mean intelligent person.⁷ Different tribes have their tribal names of muntu. For example Chagga; *mndu*, Sukuma; *mhunu*, Luguru; *munu*. He/(muntu) is an open whole, who posses the rational capacity and intelligence in order to meet his daily needs, desires and demands. On the other hand, a person is viewed or defined as an individual of the human kind who possesses the faculty of intellect capable of utilizing the contents provided by his sense perception. Later on, such senses are expanded and explained in details into his knowledge and goes on to ideas, judgments and reasoning. "It is in the context of freedom as privileged more of acting that person (muntu) is to be defined".⁸

In Africa each ethnic groupings have their own way of describing a person. Nevertheless, the basic assumption on the notion of the person remains the same all over the Bantu world. There is no prior definition of a person in Bantu world. Each definition of a person is a relational definition. A person is defined in relation to the function he/she plays in the community. The community plays a very significant role in the description of a person. In Africa "man is defined by reference to the enviroing community".⁹ Mbiti captures this concept when he says, "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am".¹⁰

In Chagga society, the recognition of a person is not so much entirely based on the fact of biological organism, but in the order and manliness in activity. The more hard working, creative, courageous and such other qualities, the more a person is respected and recognized.

In Bantu view, it is the community which defines a person. In the process of his/her definition, a person is supposed to grows up in the community where he/she is taught through imitation the values of the community such as socialization, moral values, and duties.

To become a person in the strict sense of the term is not a facile achievement. An individual becomes a person only after a cultured process of incorporation known as mundu. To become mundu one has to acquaint to the rituals, social and economic like as well as other moral value definitive of a person.

The African concept of person emphasizes the necessity to learn social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain selfhood, that is becoming a person with all the built excellencies. However, the full person hood is acquired with respect to time. The more one ages the more one becomes person. In Tanzania there is a saying; *penye wazee hapaharibiki neno*(where there are old men no mess can occur).

After birth the individual goes through the different rites of incorporation, including those of initiation at puberty before becoming a person. Among Chagga circumcision is the most important rite of initiation to adult hood or rather person hood. In the years past when it was

⁷CfT. RUWA'ICHI, *ConstituionOfMuntu*, 43.

⁸T. RUWA'ICHI, *Constitution OfMuntu*, 238.

⁹I. A. MENKITI, "Person And Community", 171.

¹⁰J.SMBITI, *African Religious AndPhilo...*, 106.

done traditionally (at the age of 18 to 20), an individual would be trained hard so as to be courageous for the rite. After the rite, an individual would be taught by the elders how to behave like an adult, conduct himself, care for a family, wife and other important things expected of him by the community. In fact, this was a preparation to a personhood.

It is however essentially in action that man realizes himself and is realized by others as a person. A person must then express himself in order to be realized as a person. Morality is one of the essential thing that the Chagga consider in expressing and upholding the idea of personhood. When an agent violates the moral conduct of the community is considered as not grown to personhood.

Community value is one of the essential features in Chagga notion of person. Every Chagga member is supposed to uphold this truth. It is in view of this, that every Chagga member is supposed to go home for a reunion with his/her relatives during Easter or Ex-mass.

Like the Chagga people, the Sukuma also give primacy to the concept of the community in their process of defining a person. Community in the Sukuma people is viewed from the basic idea of the organization of a family. It begins with the family and later on grows into larger unity. As persons make up the community, the Sukuma then see community as composure of persons.

The Sukuma people like any other Bantu people a person is defined by the community. His Ml integration into personhood is prescribed in the process of socialization whereby he/she embodies the ideas of personhood as G. Segun states, "The process of socialization that begins from childhood, family as well as the house hold compound eventually reach the larger family of society in which a person is further exposed fully to the display of selfless effort to uplift the society".¹¹ Sukuma have a ritual that incorporates a Child into a personhood as Healer states, "several months after the child's birth, the grandmother shapes the infants head to indicate that the responsibility for raising the child with now be shared with large family of the community"!¹²

In Bantu view, "personhood is something which has to be achieved and is not simply given because one is born of human seed."¹³ If person hood is not simply achieved by birth, it follows that there must be a gradation of personality. In Africa a distinction is made between a man of a middling importance and a powerful man with a great deal of force.

Following this view, Charles nyamiti describes a person as; an ego that enjoys the plenitude of life, or adulthood, implying procreative and non-procreative fecundity, ancestral wisdom, social responsibilities and rights, mystical vital power, fulfilled openness to the outer world, sacredness, liberty understood as emancipation from exploitation and natural evils or as consciousness of self-giving to her and of being accepted by the community members.¹⁴

So the word muntu or mndu that we may translate as person includes an idea of excellence, of plenitude of force at maturation. It is not enough to have before us a biological organism with

¹¹G. SEGUN, *African Philo...*, 63.

¹²J. HEALER, *Towards African Narratives*, J14.

¹³I.A. MENKITI, "Person And Community", 171.

¹⁴ Cf. J.MKAMUGISHA, "African Proverbs" 1-16.

whatever psychological characteristics. There must be a process of social and ritual transformation for an individual to attain a full person hood. Africans emphasize the rituals of incorporation into the community as far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individual could fail to be competent.

2.2 Constitutive Elements of Person

A person is made up of body and soul. As a body, person lives with time and space. In African thought the notion of the person can be sought out through languages, customs and myths. Africans believe that a person has two aspects. This dualists' concept of the person can also be found in the Chagga tribe.

The Chagga though believe in the presence of mrima (soul) and mmbi (body) as constitutive elements of the person, there is however no clear distinction between soul, body and spirits. Chagga language gives us an inferred or indirect notion of soul, body and spirit. While the term mmbi (body) is definitely defined, the term soul is alternatively used as mrima, will or muu, life. For the Chagga mndu (person) is both body and soul. To demonstrate that idea, they usually say mmbifoko, which means my body. This phrase gives the idea that a speaker is something more than his body, it is logically that a speaker is immaterial being unseen and he posses a material body which can be seen. In addition to this preposition, Chagga people declare the death of somebody by saying somebody 'x'-may be still in his house, but we say there is no somebody; referring the dead in that house. Actually there is only his body.

2.2.1 The location of the Soul in the Body

This has been the philosophical problem as many philosophers have tried to establish the location of the soul in the body. The Chagga and Sukuma on the other hand have it as resides in the heart. The probable reason for this position might be due to the experience that when a person dies the heart ceases to work, because the power that enables the heart to function has gone. This power is what is considered to be the soul.

2.2.2 Stages in the Development of the Person

In the African/Bantu society the rhythm of life of a person is arranged in stages; from birth to death as Mbiti states, "on the level of individual, this rhythm includes birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and entry into the company of the spirit."¹⁵ This means that according to Mbiti there is in African society a range of stages in the development of the person from birth to the entry into the company of the spirits. Each stage that a person enters symbolizes a passage from lower to higher ones. Rituals always accompany one's entrance to a new stage. This ritual symbolizes change external and internal. It is in this ritual acts that a person feels different psychologically. Certainly in entering a new higher stage a person feels more important than before as he/she builds up a new status. The whole journey culminates in the entrance into the company of the spirits (ancestors). It is in this entrance that one attains the end of his journey. For the Chagga people the whole journey culminates into the union with Ruwa (God) who is the end of everything.

2.3 The Concept of Free Will (Freedom of Choice)

The question of freedom as an essential element of a person is widely treated in the world of Philosophy. Freedom of choice is noted to determine¹⁵ an ethical person in the society. Freedom is what enables a person to be fully who he/she is. It enables a person to be a full human.¹⁶

In the Bantu society the concept of person is rather limited to the traditional ways of doing things even though personal freedom is not denied. Ties to traditional customs and royalty determine the extent to which an individual can exercise his/her freedom. Normally social pressure blocks the individual to exercise his personal freedom in fear of isolation or rejection.

2.4 Ancestors and the Personality of a Person

According to Ruwa'ichi, being is divided into human world, the world of the departed and finally and above all, God.¹⁷ In African society, ancestors play a central role in molding the personality of a person. They belong to the world of the spirits. They, in virtue of their nearness to God, can grant either fortunes or misfortunes depending on the descendants categorical adherence to the customary laws. This means that these ancestors have the power of granting life or denying life to their descendants. In the final analysis, all life and existence flows from God through the mediation of the ancestors as Magesa states: "All life and power that is life or existence, flows from God. It follows that, by the rite of their primogeniture and proximity to God by death, God has granted the ancestors qualitatively more powerful life force over their descendants. It has to be kept in mind that the ancestors consist of the founder of the clan. These are the pristine men and women who originated the lineage, clan or ethnic group and who provide them with their names."¹⁸

These ancestors as they are regarded to be the founders of the clan, they occupy an important place in the Bantu/African society. People approach them with high respect and are used as mediators when people communicate with the Supreme Being. It is through them that people approach the Supreme Being. Thus due to this mediation role, people respect them very much. The act of respect that people give to the ancestors is known as veneration. This veneration has been always misinterpreted as an act of worship. To this Mbiti says: "They (people) simply use them(ancestors) as conveyor belts, as helpers or assistants. By speaking through intermediaries they feel that they show more respect, esteem, honor and courtesy towards God, who must be approached with reverence and humility".¹⁹ Geoffrey Perrinder explain the relation between God and ancestor and the living in the triangular form as follows:

At the apex is the sky, which symbolizes the Supreme power from whom all life flows and to whom all returns. The base is the earth, sometimes personified as a goddess but important to man as the producer of his food and the burying place of his dead. On one side of the triangle are the ancestors, rising up in the hierarchy by their increased powers. Dead kings and chiefs

¹⁵J. S. MBITI, *African Philosophy And Religion*, 24

¹⁶ Cf. L.MAGESA, *African Religion*, 74.

¹⁷T. RUWA'ICHI *Constitution Of Muntu*, 69.

¹⁸L. MAGESA, *African Reli...*, 51.

¹⁹J. S. MBITI, *Introduction To African Rel...*, 69.

are leaders and potent to help or harm. On the other side of the triangle are the gods and natural forces, which must be proprietor lest they become angry at the neglect and cause the season to fall.²⁰

The full circle of personality formation in an African/Bantu society does thus, involve the ancestor mediation. It is through the ancestor's -mediation that ones, action is sanctioned, rewarded or punished. In the final analysis, it is the ancestors who mould one's personality and sanctioning a person to act in this way and not in that way. Generally speaking, they either reward or punish all our human acts. That which reward enhances our positive attitude towards it and in the process, it forms our criterion for action.

2.5 The Finality of the Human Person

As it is in other African tribes, the purpose of the Universe and the various processes, that is, the interactions between beings are for the good of man. Man is at the centre in the hierarchy of earthly beings. This implies that man is above all other, material beings, animated and unanimated and also is below spiritual beings. This could mean that in the process of interaction, man has a greater chance in using all these beings for his own sustenance of life. Man needs crops and animals in order to have life here on earth. His earthly survival depends on these things. He uses all these things to communicate with the spiritual beings in the invisible world. These spiritual beings are those who could be called by the Chagga people as Ruwa, warumu and waku.

The idea of finality of life is always connected to the idea of death. By definition death is the separation of the two constitutive principles of man, body and soul in which case the body decomposes while the soul acquire a new life. Bantu people such as Sukuma people do not conceive death as the end of life, actually they perceive it as the entrance into a new form of life, a spiritual or ancestor hood form of life.

Death though is not a desirable phenomenon, it is however conceived by the Bantu people as a gateway to the entrance of the spirit world, the world of ancestors and God. There are however, various causes of death among them are:

Sorcerers: When a person dies, people immediately look for someone who has caused the death of their family member. The cause of death is attributed to the outside factors, which is most popular to most of African people.

Spirits: There are those who had an ill- will against the person, or of those people who were not properly buried due to lack of respect in their family while they were alive.

The most important cause of death is God. It is very common among Chagga people to attribute the cause of death to God (Ruwa). It is believed that Ruwa has a power to call everyone as He wishes. In its positive sense death is regarded as a returning home, going away, answering the summons, disappearing, departing and saying goodbye. For this reason, the Chagga people consider death as not a complete destruction of the individual human being. Thus life for them goes beyond the grave. All these assumptions are sustained on the basic belief that the soul of human being survives after death.

²⁰ Cf. G. PARRINDER, African Philo, 24

Both Sukuma and Chagga hold the view that there is a continuation of conscious personal existence after death. The Chagga uses the term *mlungana* (continuation of life) and they say: *Mrimanyiklirinjemrufuwomoo*, (the spirit, the soul or the breath of life continues to survive). It is from this basic view that the veneration of the ancestors has a sustainable ground.

The Chagga hold the belief that during death, the soul comes out of the body and goes to the source of life *Ruwa* (God) the source of all ancestors, they then say *mkumlungasokanamndofumvulyamkuu*. The place of the dead is believed by the Chagga to be the underground known as *kowarumu*. It is this *kowarumu* (underground) where according to the Chagga people, the ancestors live. The belief in the existence of *kowarumu* provides the Chagga people with a hope for the future life provided that they live the earthly life in accordance with the norms prescribed in their tradition. The journey to *kowarumu* is believed by the Chagga people to belong. Such idea is also held clearly by the Sukuma people and in general the whole Bantu world as Mbiti states:

People anoint the corpse with fats, pour, milk and fat into the mouth and wraps the corpse in hide believing it will protect the soul from hot sun on the way. They sacrifice a bull to the grandfather of the deceased and petition him to help in assisting the new comer.²¹

Chagga believe that after death the spirits goes either to the sky, *kowarumu* (the dwelling place for bad spirits) or *koruwa* (the place for the good spirits). The trip to *kowarumu* is not only long but has also a lot of obstacles as Mbiti again states, it takes eight days to cross this desert; arriving on the ninth day. There are guards at the entrance of the spirits' residence and these bar the soul from entering the chiefs residence until its grandfather has paid a bull of admission.²²

The difficulties entailed in entering *kowarumu* manifest the difficulties entailed for the human community live an ideal life pleasing to God and ancestors. The more one takes the pains to live an earthly good life, the more the chances for one to join the companionship of God and ancestors in a happy heavenly life known by the Chagga people as *koruwa*. It is believed by both the Chagga and Sukuma people that after death, the soul meets God's messengers who him/her asks where he/she is going. And after examining his/her worthness, the messengers allow him/her to go to *koruwa* (heaven) as in the case of Chagga people or deny him/her. So the merit of earthly life is the only criterion for the admission or rejection to *koruwa*. This is what is known as retribution.²³ as heaven and hell,

In other tribes, the question of the place of hereafter life is not well defined for life is perceived the same whether on earth or out of the earthly circumferences as professor Mbiti exclaims: On the whole, African religion has neither heaven nor hell and neither rewards nor punishment for the people in the hereafter.²⁴

Perhaps that is the reason why the deceased are buried with their belongings. However, God does not seem to take a direct part in this judgment though he steps into the picture when the

²¹Cf. J.S .MBITI, *Concepts...*, 255.

²²Cf. J.S MBITI, *African Religion AndPhilo...*, 163.

²³Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction To African Religion*, 123-124.

²⁴Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction To African Reli...*,124.

wicked plead for and puts an end to their sufferings. The just are rewarded for eternal life while the wicked and unjust deserve eternal domination. In the book written by P. Van Pelt, on customs in mainland Tanzania, believes on some kind of retribution and life after death is ascertained. What we did on earth, we shall account for, and kneeling in heaven we shall state our case at the feet of God.²⁵

Therefore, in order to attain the immortal life each one should live well here on earth. The earthly life is viewed as only a journey and preparation for the next world. The belief in the existence of the next world presupposes the notion of the new life with New World. Chagga custom of shaving heads and mourning for three days when they resume normal duties connotes some kind of belief on the beginning of new life. Such sayings as I am ready for home designates a kind of new life after this earthly life.

3. EVALUATIONS

3.1 Similarities

The African (Bantu) understanding of person as we have seen, is different from Augustinian understanding of person. However, if it is going to be carefully examined, it can be found that with all the differences, there are certain aspects in which both African and Augustinian trend of thought have similar understanding.

In the composition of person as we have seen before, the African (most of the tribes) hold that man is composed of body and soul. It is the soul, which gives life to the body, whereas death is the separation of soul from body. This understanding about the composition of person sound similar to that of St. Augustine. Augustine says that man is composed of body and immortal soul. To him also it is the soul, which gives life to the body, for he says that, the soul is immortal whereas body is mortal.

Augustine holds that, man is the peak of all material creation. This tells of his recognition of value and dignity of human person over other material creation. This is quiet similar to the attitudes which prevails in most of the African tribes as we saw in the case of Chagga, whereby person occupies a central position in the cosmos and other creatures are there to maintain the life of a person to reach an end.

St Augustine regards the soul as a substance endowed with reason and it is fitted to rule the body. So to say reason the ability of person to think is an activity attributed to the soul. In Africans, especially referring to the Chagga people, we find in them the view that, a person is essentially his soul. This is implied in their belief on the continuation of the personal life after death whereby the body decomposes. This means that soul provides the core of human life. It is true that after death, one's state of existence is no longer the same as that of earthly life, nevertheless people still believe that the soul of the dead carries with him/her all the human qualities that one had during his/her earthly life. This could then mean that even after death the humanity of human life continues. Thinking in this way all goodness, which are attributed to person, be virtues or certain abilities are essentially attributed to the person in value of his soul. It follows thus even reasoning ability, which is one of the abilities of man has its origin in

²⁵Cf. J.S MBITI, *African Religion And Philo...*, 163.

the soul of the person. Thus we find people saying 'huyu ana roho nzuri', (this man has a good spirit).

In both aspects we have seen that the issue of the person is discussed in relation to the idea of freedom. Augustine says that a person is free but in as much as his will is free. That is the will is free to turn away from God and attach itself to mutable goods. He says that the will is free, but is subject to moral obligation. The necessary basis of obligation is freedom. In African perspectives as we have seen, it is also that, freedom of person is not without obligation. As far as one becomes a person in and through the community, his freedom is bounded by certain communal obligations. But here again we find that all depends on the individual choice either to fulfill the communal obligations and be part of community or not to do that and so to bear consequences of being separated

Furthermore, Augustine discusses freedom of person in relation to God and the highest calling of man. The same is true in African (Bantu tribes), whereby now the highest calling of man is determined in the communitarian aspects, and the conception of God is also oriented in the community.

Concerning the finality of person, St. Augustine is so theocentric. He talks of the Supreme end as the Good, which is sought for its own sake. Yet Augustine is very clear that the Supreme end is the attainment of the supreme good which is none but God. But still those who do not make effort to follow God (Those in love of themselves) will be put to eternal punishment. So to Augustine finality of person is either the attainment of supreme good (God) or eternal domination.

The idea that there is a reward and punishment in the life after death as we have seen is not only Augustinian but also African, as we saw that Chagga and Sukuma believes that death is not the end for the soul survives death. As we saw in some tribes, there are specified places for the good and bad spirits of the dead, and so there is different reward to each of them.

3.2 Differences

It cannot be taken that Augustinian understanding of person is having only similarities with the African understanding, there are also some differences in these two trends of thoughts as far as the issue of person is concerned.

One of the differences is that, though both Augustine and Bantu people agree on the basic composition of a person, they differ in their basic definition of the person. The former defines person ontologically while the later has no well-definite definition of person. Bantu views, personhood is something which is to be achieved, and not that one becomes person simply because he has been born as human. Personhood is thus a good, which is realized through distinctive stages of life. That is as it was said before, there are processes of social and ritual transformation for an individual to attain full personhood.

Again in his definition about person, Augustine lays emphasis on the person as man composed of body and soul fitted to rule the body. This is man defined, as he is, on his own autonomy. But Bantu conception of person is communitarian defined, not only as he who is

composed of body and soul, but more than that, is he who exist, and understood in the context of the community. That is, he is the one who is, because the community is. Concerning the finality of person, St. Augustine is very much clear about the destiny of person as the eternal life of reward, meaning the attainment of the Absolute good (beatific vision of God) or Eternal domination. On the contrary as we have seen, for the Bantu people there are disparity of ideas on how this end is going to be attained. For example, the Chagga say the place for the bad spirits Kowarumu, whereas the place for the good spirit is Koruna. But how the reward and punishment is given is not explained.

The issue of freedom in relation to person in the Bantu is not discussed outside the context of community. Theirs is the communitarian aspect of freedom. A person is not free outside the society, for it is in the context of society freedom can be defined. But Augustine explained freedom in terms of the human will capacity to turn from God to immutable things.

Also as it can be noted in a previous chapter, the African conception of soul as one of constituents of human person is so materialistic one. For example, as we saw in the case of Chagga, that people can pour milk and fat into the mouth of the corpse, believing that this will protect the soul from the sun on the way.

4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

4.1 Findings

This is library research. Qualitative method was applied throughout my paper. My paper based to St. Augustine as core author and other secondary author such as St. Thomas Aquinas, where data used to link to African nature. St Augustine as the basis of my paper guided me to African understanding of Muntu or person. Ideas were obtained from library where finally I gave my own knowledge.

4.2 Results

Rich data were generated from library where various sources were gathered. St. Augustine treated a lot on the concept of person, man thought he also treated the personality of God, but it was not my concern to write on that. A little resource also obtained from Thomistic on person. The idea of person from western literature guided me writing on African basis. In African the term person refers to Muntu in Bantu understanding, tribe wise mndu, mhunu, muru, and so each tribe has their own way of naming person. My paper was successful in as much as I devoted myself reading, surveying and also interviewing some people on the same issue.

Conclusion

The knowledge about person is so essential. The understanding of person is a determining factor on how one is going to live with other persons. As far as interactions between person are an actual reality of any society, the conception of person that one has will affect his relation in the society.

As we have seen before, African understanding of person is the communitarian understanding. It is the community and in the community one becomes person, and not outside. The highest community in African traditional society is tribe. So frequently it is within the context of tribe a person is found and defined. This way of defining the person is so limited. In most cases it tells that, outside my community, (which means tribe) there is either not at all, or there is no full person. This can be explained by the fact that in most of the African tribes there are inferior names, which are attributed to the outsiders, which signifies them as peoples of the secondary important.

Limiting the scope of understanding about person only in the community has led to the mistake of treating the people outside the community as men with no dignity. Such mentality leads to frequently conflicts between different tribes (eg. the Hutu and the Tutsi). Another thing to note about Bantu understanding of person is the way of personhood is acquired, that is not through the fact of being born as human, but by fulfilling the required rituals and other social prescriptions. If this is the case, it follows that at a certain time, even inside the community, there will always be persons who are not regarded as person or regarded as not full persons. Think about the Children. Thus it does not mean that they are being born as not persons? Then here their dignity and rights can be ignored. This is the evident fact in some African tribes whereby a Child who has been born with physical deformity is normally killed for he is incapable of developing to a full personhood. Somewhere else women are being put to the category of children as not full persons.

Concerning the idea of freedom, in Bantu understanding one is free in community and freedom is communitarian defined. There is also some deficiency. This deficient is the fact that the individual person does not stand on his own autonomy, and his personal integrity is completely ignored. I don't deny the truth that in any society freedom cannot be discussed without considering the context of community that prevails. What I deny is the total subordination of individual integrity to the community, in the issue of individual freedom.

Again the communitarian aspect of freedom carries in it a temptation of blinding people that outside their community say tribe, all people are not free. To anyone who can think well, this a narrow mindedness, which in another way enslaves man in his own cave called tribe, and closed his ability to come into the external world outside his tribe.

Augustinian understanding of person can bring solution to most of deficiencies, which prevails in Africa, especially Bantu conception of person as we have seen above. Augustinian thought can complement Bantu conception about person.

The way Augustine treat the issue of person especially by putting emphasis that what constitute personhood is a fact of being made of body and rational soul, leads one to see that all human being are person with equal dignity from when they start to exist as human. This definition of person thus includes all human being without separation. This can be used to purify all limitation and bad effects that result from communitarian understanding of person.

Augustine discussed about freedom of person basing on the capability of person to direct his will either to God, or to transitory goods of the world. So he put form the integrity of persons will to choose as the base to the issue of freedom. This view can be used carefully in solving the problem of identifying the freedom of person with his act of conforming and subordinating himself to the views of community, as we have seen in Bantu.

So in general one can find many things in Bantu conception of person, which can be enlightened by Augustinian thoughts about person, besides this, which has been treated in this work.

There many problems of mistreatment of humanity, the cause of which I believe to be that people are lacking attention of the pre-modal value of human person. Thus I found that there is still need of developing study of the ontological structure of the reality of the person. But still good aspects of thought of some philosophers like Augustine, can be a beautiful aid to correct the deficiencies, which exist in Bantu African thought about person. This has been the concern of my work.

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