



“TheVictim as Culprit” Re-appropriating Herman Beseah Browne's Conceptualization of Negative Experiences in African Traditional Religion

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Abstract

In Africa, the attribution of negative experiences to the 'attack' of spiritual forces is common. A car crash or medical condition is seen as caused in the 'spiritual realm' through the manipulation of occult powers by a malevolent neighbor, relative or colleague. Reckless driving, mechanical failure of a critical system in the vehicle, genetic endowment and lifestyle of the patient are often glossed over. In a broader framework, this interpretive scheme raises questions as regards the flow of history. What is the place of intra-worldly causes, specifically human agency, vis-à-vis the flow of history? As starting point in the reflection, we engage the thoughts of the Liberian Anglican theologian, Herman Beseah Browne, who speaks of “Africa's anthropology of impotence.” He argues that in the traditional African understanding, human beings are not agents or architects of history. He distinguishes between sources and causes of events. He claims that in African Traditional Theology (ATT), spiritual forces are agents of history and causes of events. Human action is inefficacious. Human action has effect only in the spirit world – courting or alienating the ancestors and their protective mantle. Those who alienate the ancestors suffer negative experiences. Thus, though victims, they are also culprits because they made themselves vulnerable to the manipulation and attacks of other spirit forces by alienating the ancestors. This is what he calls the victim as culprit thesis. In this article, we shall evaluate this thesis which in my view is one-sided and non-representative of the best of the traditional conception as well as plagued by an internal contradiction. We shall then give indications as to how possibly to re-appropriate it into Christianity for a more balanced view through a reflection on the incarnation as representative of dual agency.

Introduction

Africans are notoriously religious. This is the opening words of John Mbiti in his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*.¹ Although written almost half a century ago, this assertion still seems valid today. The sacred, the supernatural, the spiritual looms very large in the consciousness of the people and in the interpretation of events and processes. One may even say that presently such religious interpretations overshadow the personal, socio-cultural, economic and political processes that shape life and events. Such interpretations also give legitimacy to lines of response, of which spiritual warfare is one of the most prominent. This has given rise to the many so-called 'power-full' men and women of God who claim the capacity to mobilize divine power against personal, socio-cultural, economic and political processes and harness them to people's benefit. For example, it is common in the communities to attribute medical conditions, joblessness, challenges in personal relationships, downturn in business, etc., to the evil machination of a neighbor or relative. These are feared to have brought about the situation through the manipulation of occult forces. Such interpretation abstracts from all personal, socio-cultural, economic and political processes. Without denying these intra-worldly processes, these are seen as inconsequential to the phenomena and certainly irrelevant for their remedy. It is in the light of these emphases that one understands the submission of the Liberian Anglican theologian, Herman Beseah Browne, who claims to have also studied Igbo culture, that there is an 'anthropology of impotence' in traditional African theology which is the basis of what he calls the "victim as culprit thesis."

In the first part of this article, I will expose the interpretation of Herman Beseah Browne. In the second part, I will engage his interpretation. It is my view that his scheme not only misunderstands the traditional African conception but also that it is counter-intuitive and at bottom, a dangerous ideology that obfuscates reality. There is evidence of the efficacy of human agency and to convince those at the underside of history not to deploy their agency in an effort to change their situation is disingenuous. In sum, in as much as he captures some elements of the traditional understanding, he fails to take cognizance of the nuances that makes it possible for intra-worldly processes and dynamics that shape history to be taken seriously. It is this nuanced perspective that needs to be recaptured and put into dialogue with the Christian scheme in order to have a balanced view in which human agency towards socio-cultural, economic and political transformation is valorized.

¹John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heineman, 1969) 1.

Africa is used in this write-up in a very loose sense and pertains more to Sub-saharan Africa in so far as there are similar patterns in cultures of the different peoples that inhabit this geographical area.

The Victim as Culprit Thesis –An Exposition

Herman Beseah Browne writes that the "victim as culprit thesis" is basic to the African traditional anthropology.² To explicate this, Browne argues that this traditional anthropology distinguishes between sources and causes of misfortune. Human beings can be sources of misfortune, misery and suffering, but they cannot be the causes. Only supra-human beings, spiritual beings can be causes. As sources, human beings through their actions and omissions disrupt the cosmic equilibrium and thus provoke the ancestors to retreat and withdraw their shield of protection. Such human beings render themselves vulnerable to the attacks of other spiritual beings. It is in this sense that the victim is a culprit because if one had not alienated the ancestors or the protective spirit forces, one would have been spared of or defended from such attacks.

Browne writes, that in traditional anthropology, "the evil we suffer are never really caused by human agency, but by supra-empirical agency: though human agency may be the medium by which suffering is wrought." In other words, human actions are "inefficacious."³ "Action is the preserve of divinity."⁴ "Human action is, in reality, the empirical result of divine agency."⁵ "Historical events are the effects, having their source of explanation in the spiritual realm, despite human agency and intentions."⁶

What stands at the background of Browne's articulation is the African traditional cosmology in which there is a spirit world different from but in constant exchange with the physical or human world. This gives rise to the challenge of coordinating these worlds. For Browne, the spirit world is more powerful and determinative of what happens in the physical or human world. The determination is one directional. The spirit world determines what happens in the physical or human world and not vice versa. At best, what happens in the physical or human world provides the occasion or the signal for effective action by the spirits.

Browne is aware of the wide ranging and sometimes counter-intuitive implication of his interpretation of the traditional anthropology. However, he does not seem to grasp the implied contradiction. For example, he notes that 'the victim-as-culprit [thesis] serves to excuse the liability of others, and effectively denies the phenomenon of an unjustified

²Herman Beseah Browne, *Theological Anthropology: A Dialectic Study of the African and Liberation Traditions* (London: Avon Books, 1996) 59.

³*Ibid.*, 56-62.

⁴*Ibid.*, 82.

⁵*Ibid.*, 91.

⁶*Ibid.*, 84.

sufferer.”⁷ What I understand from this cryptic statement is that the one who suffers has himself or herself to blame. There is justification for his or her suffering. One is responsible for the withdrawal of the protective shield over oneself. Yet, Browne is not ready to recognize the agency implied by one's responsibility.

A narrative approach will highlight the internal tension in Browne's scheme. An old lady in the village is held responsible for a car crash while the driver and other passengers are responsible in so far as they alienated the ancestors. The reckless driving and the lack of maintenance of the vehicle are irrelevant to the explanation of the event. This raises the question as regards what gives the action of the old lady efficacy. Conversely, one can inquire into that which is absent in the recklessness of the driver which renders it impotent. If the answer is that the old woman is a witch and achieved the car crash through a manipulation of spiritual forces, one is forced to acknowledge that human action is very efficacious in so far as it can manipulate spirit forces. Similarly, human action has to be reckoned with to be able to alienate the ancestors and positive forces in the universe that makes the victim a culprit. To be a culprit means that one is responsible, that is, blameworthy. For one's action to alienate the spirits implies that the action is efficacious. In sum, while Browne was striving to undermine the efficacy of human action, while he was busy constructing his theory of anthropological impotency, in order to back up his view of a unidirectional influence of the spirit world on the physical/human world, the efficacy of human action is being highlighted all the more.

The inner tension in Browne's reflection stems from a lack of rigor as regards his distinction between a cause on the one hand and a source on the other. There is an overlap between these concepts. In line with Aristotle, a causal investigation is a search for the answer to the question 'why' of a thing.⁸ Causes are the way in which elements of the natural world explain other things. Seen this way, the source of any event or thing is a kind of cause of that thing. But not all causes are sources. Browne's separation of cause and source is therefore artificial. Consequently, his dismissal of human agency as inefficacious on the basis that human agency is the source and not the cause of events is unsustainable. Human agency is efficacious. The challenge is to articulate a framework to account for dual agency in which there is a coincidence of divine and human agency.

Browne's denigration of the efficacy or potency of human action is in the service of a particular theology of history. According to Browne, “God acts through us and by us, but not with us. Divinity effects historical change without human consent and help.”⁹ This is a way of emphasizing that God is the Lord of history. This sounds religiously uplifting. But it can lead to disastrous consequences because it disables human agency by labelling it inefficacious while socio-politically, the world is shaped and reshaped by human (in)

⁷Ibid., 102.

⁸Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book A, I. trans. W.D. Ross, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/-384_-322,_Aristoteles,_13_Metaphysics,_EN.pdf accessed July 2, 2019.

⁹Herman Beseah Browne, op. Cit., 101.

actions. One is curious as regards the blinkers that constrict Browne's vision so much so that he fails to see that even his argument against human agency is an exercise of a potent and potentially efficacious agency.

Engaging Browne's Conceptual Scheme

In spite of Browne's claim to be reconstructing African Traditional Theology, it seems to me that his reflection is beholding to two related concerns – the effort to undermine liberation theology and enthrone what he calls a theology of hope. These concerns provide the pre-understanding that guides his reconstruction of the traditional worldview. This articulation in my mind ends up being an "invention"¹⁰ of tradition.

Before exploring Browne's alternative to liberation theology to which his victim as culprit thesis provides a background, let us draw attention to a possible experiential basis of his reflection in the African Initiated Churches that have a following in Ivory Coast and Liberia. This could be the remote and unacknowledged source of the victim as culprit thesis. In these Churches, especially those deriving from the foundation of William Wade Harris, the Liberian who received his call to preach the Gospel in Ivory Coast, the victim of witchcraft is seen as the culprit. This is a huge departure from the usual response to witchcraft scares. Instead of accusing anyone as the cause of the illness or misfortune that has befallen one, the patient is held responsible for his or her illness on the ground that only evil people (witches) are vulnerable to witchcraft.¹¹ This practice resonates with what Browne presents as the victim as culprit thesis. I do not claim that he was influenced by such practices. But one can imagine that this example could have made him attribute such a scheme, though counter-intuitive, to African tradition because it underlay the practice in an African Initiated Church.

Browne presents the victim as culprit thesis as the outcome of a socio-cultural analysis on the basis of which he argues against the appropriateness of the liberation theological scheme in Africa and foregrounds what he calls a theology of hope. But this interpretation, in my view, is widely off the mark. He claims to have studied Igbo culture and by implication, that anthropological impotence as well as the victim as culprit thesis can be read out of the worldview of the Igbo. But misinterprets the Igbo worldview.

In the Igbo worldview, it is expected, all things being equal, that health, wealth, fertility and longevity will be the lot of people. For example, sickness, especially when protracted give rise to self-questioning (*gịnị ka m mere?* – what have I done?) and protestation of innocence (*aka m dīkwaỌcha*). Such questions and protestations imply that

⁹Herman Beseah Browne, op. cit., 101.

¹⁰For the sense of the use of 'invention' see Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 211-262; also V.Y Mudimbe's *Invention of Africa, Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana: Indiana Press, 1988).

¹¹This practice was prevalent in the church led by Albert Atcho at Bregbo in Ivory Coast. See Colette Piaulet, et. al., *Prophétisme et Thérapeutique: Albert Atcho et la Communauté de Brogbo* (Paris: Hermann, 1975).

the loss of these values, health, wealth, fertility and longevity inspire the suspicion of an interference (*Ogbaghí aka!*) by spiritual forces occasioned by the breaking of the precarious cosmic balance between the spirit and the human world¹² through the wrongdoing of the sufferer or his or her forebears (*ihe nna nna metere*). Through the services of the diviner,¹³ the offended spirits are identified and pacified in order to restore the cosmic balance.¹⁴

The above vision from the Igbo cosmology resonates with Browne's victim as culprit thesis in so far as victims harbor the fear of their inadvertent complicity in bringing about the negative experience that has befallen them. This is where the convergence ends. Victims can be culprits but to generalize that every victim is a culprit overstates the case and gives rise to an understanding alien to the culture. On another note, the recognition of the contribution of one's forebears gives insight into the traditional anthropology which is communal as well as opens up a way of factoring in constraints from the past to the present. Above all, there is recognition of inner-worldly causality as well as human agency. For example, there is a distinction between *dibia afa* and *dibia mgborogwu*. While the former is mainly concerned with detecting the infraction of the cosmic order, the latter provides herbal remedies to ailments.¹⁵

In the light of Browne's emphasis of the anthropology of impotence, it is important to focus a little bit on human agency. The remark of Onuora Ossie Enekwe with regard to the symbol of *ikenga* is pertinent in this context. According to him, *ikenga* symbolizes a person's talent and strength and "conceptualizes the dependence of man on his own individual effort."¹⁶ The above emphasis on individual effort notwithstanding, there is also a recognition of destiny – *akala aka*. While NkwoNnabuchi¹⁷ interprets this in a deterministic way because of his use of the idea of karma as interpretive key, the phenomenological approach of Onwuejeogwu captures the intricacy better. According to Onwuejeogwu, *akala aka* captures the dialectic between predictability and unpredictability, freedom and limitation of human action within the triadic time frame of past, present and future.¹⁸ Thus, the Igbo can say *onyekwe*, *Chi yaekwe* (if one says 'yes',

¹²Ogbu K.U., (1993) Ethical Values in Igbo Tradition of Politics, In Anyanwu U.D & Aguwa J.C.U (Ed) The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1993) (9-19)

¹³Emefielkenga-Metuh, God and Man in African Religion (Enugu: Snaap, 1981, 1999) 107-108).

¹⁴For a more elaborate exposition see Lawrence Nwankwo, "OluEzinauno' and Neo-Christianity: A Critical Reflection on a Practice in Igboland" The Return of the Gods, Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Jude Emeka Madu, ed. B.A.C Obiefuna, P.E Nmah & I.L Umeanolue (Onitsha: Coskan, 2018) 401-410.

¹⁵For an elaboration see John Anenechukwu Umeh, After God is Dibia (London: Karnak House, 1999).

¹⁶Onuora Ossie Enekwe, Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre (Lagos: Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 1987) 47-48.

¹⁷NkwoNnabuchi, "Akala Aka n'Ani Igbo," Keynote Address to the Ogirisi Igbo Lectures (Awka: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2004) 7-14.

¹⁸M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, "Akala Aka among Ndigbo of Nigeria – Destiny among the Igbo," Ogirisi-Igbo Annual Lectures (Awka: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2004) 15-58; also chapter one of M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, Afa Symbolism & Phenomenology in Nri Kingdom and Hegemony: An African Philosophy of Social Action (Benin City: Ethiopie Publishing Co., 1997) 7-26.

one's Chi also says 'yes') to emphasis freedom, creativity and openness of the future. There is also the saying *o mekatara Chi ekweghĩ, ndi Ụwa atanaya Ụta* (whoever fails after making genuine efforts should not be blamed). Thus, while *Chi* is the principle of creativity, it is also true that the creativity of the actor takes place within parameters which structure and limit the outcome of action. These parameters are not set by the actor. There are thus givens in life that structure the individual and the outcome of his or her creativity.

In the light of this exposition about the Igbo, it is clear that Browne's 'anthropology of impotence' and victim as culprit thesis is not a true reflection of African cultures. One is therefore compelled to look elsewhere for the concerns that fed his reflection. These relate to his desire to foreground a theology of hope by subverting the liberation theological tradition. According to him, "the hope for effective change and for power to effect the change of misfortunes, acute and persistent as they might be, understandably reside not in confidence of human ability, but of divine efficacy. The inefficacy of direct human action in the face of misfortune is a *fait accompli*. The value of this stance resides in the hope it gives to misfortunated persons, that despite appearances to the contrary, God is still in control and will transcend and change their circumstances in his time." He also argues that those who suffer are laden with a destiny which should be "a cause not for resignation but of trust that the Divine power (creator) who deemed it fit to reckon to me a bitter and disadvantageous set of circumstances in life, will enable me to endure it for its appointed season, and grant me the means of alleviating my misfortunated condition." In a footnote, he adds that, even if the alleviation does not come, one should believe that "the prolongation of my situation will eventually redound to my benefit, if not in this world, certainly in the next."¹⁹

Browne's articulation of a theology of hope mirrors the Old Testament prophets encouraging the Israelites to trust in God's salvific power while reforming their ways. Turning to the Lord through faithfulness to the covenant guaranteed divine intervention on their behalf to usher in peace and prosperity. With a more robust understanding of the afterlife as life with God beyond the shadowy existence in *Sheol*,²⁰ the reward for covenant fidelity was extended to include an afterlife with God. Thus, the faithful of God, although deprived in this world, can still receive the reward in the afterlife. This is the key elements that have been recast in the articulation of Browne. One can also read his victim as culprit thesis as a re-articulation of the prophetic indictment of the Israelites of covenant infidelity as the reason for their exile and the other misfortunes that befell them. Yet, it does not seem to me that one can extrapolate the notion of anthropological impotence from the prophetic tradition. God always worked with human beings – Cyrus of Persia, Nehemiah,

¹⁹Herman Beseah Browne, *Theological Anthropology: A Dialectic Study of the African and Liberation Traditions*, 87-88.

²⁰See for example the lament of Hezekiah and his characterization of the afterlife in *Sheol* (Is 38:10-15) and the confidence and assurance in the book of Wisdom about life with God (Wis 3:1-9)

Zerubbabel etc. This brings us to the hermeneutical key to Browne's reflection which turns around the defence of divine sovereignty in a scheme that has resonance with elements in the Reformed tradition.²¹

For Browne, "*God acts through us and by us, but not with us. Divinity effects historical change without human consent and help.*"²² This view is italicized by Browne himself, for emphasis and it shows the core conviction behind his reflection. Anthropological impotence is another way of presenting this conviction. If historical change is the preserve of God, then human agency has to be inefficacious and the liberation tradition has to be rejected because it counsels the opposite. Karl Marx states that "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."²³ The potency of human agency for good and for ill is an assumption of the liberation tradition. Present socio-cultural, economic and political circumstances are the resultant of the interaction of decisions, personal and institutional actions and inactions. The deployment of human agency guided by a vision can transform society and move history in a direction that breaks with the past. This emphasis is very important in the contemporary Nigerian and indeed African situation of dysfunctionality and widespread misery among the people.

The Rehabilitation of the Efficacious Human Agency

We have seen Browne's foisting of a theological anthropology of impotence on Africa. On account of this, he dismisses the liberation tradition as inappropriate for Africa. He proposes a theology of hope in which all agency is ascribed to God. A critical engagement of Browne's reflection however shows that his interpretation of African cultures is tendentious. In spite of the belief in the world of spirits and the influence of these on the human world, the potency of human agency is not lost on Africans. Even Browne's victim as culprit thesis surreptitiously bears witness to this efficacy since human action can affect the spirit world as to alienate the ancestors. This shows that Browne's romance with anthropological impotence is derived from and in the service of something else. Critical engagement with his thought shows that the problematic he is struggling with is how to coordinate divine and human agencies. Unfortunately, he places these agencies in a relation of inverse proportionality to each other when what is needed is a scheme of

²¹Reformed tradition refers to a major branch of Protestantism that follows the theological tradition and forms of Christian life enunciated by John Calvin. One of the main elements of this tradition is the belief in the sovereignty of God which translates into the view that salvation is an unmerited gift which God gives to those God chooses without any consideration of any qualities in those chosen.

²²Herman Beseah Browne, *Theological Anthropology*, op. cit., 101.

²³Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/index.htm> accessed July 8, 2017.

duality. In his scheme, an affirmation of human agency would detract from divine agency and vice versa. Thus, divine sovereignty would translate into human impotence. But this scheme of inverse proportionality is faulty. It denies the ontological difference and loving relatedness of the creator and the creatures. It places creator and creatures on the same pedestal and in opposition so much so that the agency of one takes away from the efficacy of the agency of the other.

The incarnation underlines thickly the openness to and union between the human and the divine. This was the subject of protracted controversy in the early centuries of Christianity. After the pronouncement on the divinity of Jesus at the Council of Nicea (325), the question of the relationship between the divine and the human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ arose. Two theological schools – the Alexandrine and the Antiochene – emerged with emphases on the divinity and the humanity of Jesus respectively. After acrimonious debates, a formula was worked out at the Council of Chalcedon (451) in which it is acknowledged that in Jesus Christ, the divine and the human natures are one without mixture, confusion, separation or division.²⁴ The Council established a linguistic protocol for speaking about Jesus Christ, for one to remain orthodox. Further theological development in line with orthodoxy sought to deepen or shade light on this definition. It is in this regard that the reflection of Leontius of Byzantium using the Aristotelian category speaks of the *enhypostasis* of the Word, in an attempt to throw light on the *hypostatic* union.²⁵ Without going into any great detail, all these efforts try to clarify that in Jesus Christ, there is a union of the human and the divine in one single person so much so that in all the expression of agency of Jesus Christ, the divine and the human are involved except in those that do not pertain to the divine nature or go beyond the capacity of the human nature.

An implication of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ is that while Jesus was in the flesh, the omnipotence of his divine nature did not swallow up the limited potency of his human nature. Although one cannot exhaustively explain the physics of the synergy between divine omnipotence and human limited potency in Jesus Christ, one can extrapolate from it a scheme of relationship between the divine and human that is marked by complementarity. In the light of our reflection, one can therefore conclude that divine agency and human agency can be conceived as complementary and not in inverse relationship to each other. In the deployment of human agency, there is a possibility of divine involvement. Conversely, the divine can associate the human with itself in the deployment of any action. In Jesus, one sees a union of the divine and the human.

²⁴For a brief history of these councils, Justo L. Gonzalez, *The History of Christianity*, Vol. I (New York: HarperCollins, 1984).

²⁵Leontius of Byzantium, *Three Books Against the Nestorians and Eutychians in Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954) 375-377.

One final objection to be considered stems from the desire to preserve the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. From this perspective, the unicity of the incarnation counsels against deriving a pattern therefrom. While this effort to safeguard the mystery of Jesus Christ is to be applauded, it has to be noted that Jesus Christ is the first-born (*prototokos*) of all creation (Col 1:15). This means that He is pre-eminent over the whole of creation. Through Him and for Him were everything created. About all, He is the *Logos* (Jn 1:1). This among other things, situates Him in a cosmic context. In the original Greek context, *Logos* means more than “Word.” Indeed, the epistemic distance between the Greek context of the meaning of the *Logos* and the contemporary times is one of the reasons why reference to Jesus as Word of God sounds strange to the modern ear. Ordinarily, persons speak words. To refer to a person as word is not usual even if the speaker, in this case, is God the Father. The deficit is ameliorated if references are made to the Greek context of the use of the concept and to the Wisdom tradition of the Old Testament. Wisdom is praised as the “breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty... a reflection of the eternal light,” pervading and permeating all things (Wis 7:24-26). This role in creation is highlighted further in the original Greek use of *Logos*. Simply put, *Logos* is conceived as the divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering and giving it form and meaning.²⁶ By applying the concept *Logos* to Jesus Christ, the gospel writer and the early Christians, made a claim that Jesus gives intelligibility to creation; he represents the new creation which is creation in its originality.²⁷ It is therefore legitimate to see in Jesus Christ, the divine reason or plan for creation. In the context of our reflection, the hypostatic union can thus present us a scheme for conceptualizing the interrelationship between divine and human agencies.

Victim as Culprit – Concluding Reflection

We have seen among other things that the victim as culprit thesis gives the lie to Browne's anthropology of impotence. If human agency could alienate the benign spirits thus rendering human beings vulnerable to the attacks of other spirits, it can only be a deceitful play on words to speak of anthropological impotence. We also saw that the anthropology of impotence is at the basis of Browne's theology of hope.²⁸ This theology recommends waiting on God to turn things round because human agency is accounted for as inefficacious. Yet in his writing, Browne set out to exercise efficacious agency aimed at changing the way his readers think, feel and act. These show that there is no escaping human agency. Reckoning with human agency gives rise to a different way of

²⁶Jean Vanier, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*, trans. Kathryn Spink (Toronto, ON, Anansi, 2001, 2005) 15-19.

²⁷Pope St. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Redemptoris Hominis* (Vatican: LibreriaEditrice, 1979) no. 8.

²⁸For a more balanced presentation of theology of hope see, Lawrence Nchekwube Nwankwo, “Theology of Hope and Value Orientation in Nigeria: Towards a Shift in Everyday Practice,” *Journal of Inculturation Theology* 16 (2019) 73-87.

conceptualizing Christian hope. The incarnation shows that divine agency and sovereignty are not in any way threatened or attenuated by humanity. God associates Godself with humanity in the transformation of circumstances. Human beings become culprits by their failure to cooperate with God. This intensifies their victimhood.

In the light of the above, the victim as culprit thesis is retrieved with new meaning brought about by the valorization of human agency. The driver involved in a car crash is thus both a victim and culprit. But this needs to be properly analysis rather than the simplistic explanation that the car crash was 'sent' through occult means and the 'attack' became successful because those involved had alienated the spirits. A more discerning evaluation would note that the driver could be a culprit if the crash was caused by human error on his or her part or by negligence that resulted in a mechanical failure. Yet the driver and the passengers could also be seen as victims of the Nigerian system that has made it possible, for example, to obtain a driver's license without the requisite competence to drive, a system that has failed to check substandard products even of those critical to the safety of the lives of people; a system that tolerates dead traps on the road, etc. In sum, all Nigerians can be said to be victims of the dysfunctional Nigerian system as well as culprits who are criminally responsible, some more and others less, in reproducing and even strengthening this system. God is inviting all to cooperate with God in the transformation of the Nigerian system by taking the road less traveled and doing the right things in spite of pressures to the contrary. As long as this transformation has not taken place, we are all both victims and culprits.

Browne's victim as culprit thesis tries to make sense of the common explanation of events as caused through occult powers. In this regard, one dares to recall that even in the traditional setting, occult power is seen as opportunistic. Like the opportunistic diseases that set in when the immune system has been compromised, occult powers have a field day when they have been invited in by socio-cultural and political decadence marked by institutional weakness and failures. These occult powers are not to be feared²⁹ but are to be unmasked and checkmated through genuine self-abandonment into God's hand and active engagement in the transformation of the socio-cultural, economic and political space in line with the vision revealed by God. I can imagine that the number of car crashes 'sent' by witches through occult means would be drastically reduced, if not eliminated, if professional training of drivers and observance of the codes for highway safety become second nature to Nigerians. This can come about if we recognize that we are both victims of our dysfunctional society and culprits for its continued reproduction.

²⁹St Paul writes to Timothy, "God has not given us a spirit of fear" (1 Tim 1:7).