# Rereading Oliver O'Donovan's Metaphor of 'Waking' as the Structure of Christian Moral Experience: Implications for Syncretism and Public Corruption in the African Church

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ABSTRACT

This article engages Oliver O'Donovan's metaphor of "waking" as a constructive resource for African Christian ethics, arguing that it offers a disciplined account of moral consciousness capable of addressing key failures in contemporary African churches. Against the tendency to treat ethics primarily as a catalogue of prohibitions, O'Donovan's image of wakefulness is retrieved as the basic structure of Christian moral experience in which world, self, and time come into view together as a single, Spirit-formed act of awareness. The first part provides an analytical rehearsal of this triad: "world" as ordered creation that precedes and confronts the agent; "self" as a creature already addressed and entrusted with responsibilities; and "time" as the limited opening in which ends are chosen and obedience or disobedience is enacted, with a distinction between intended ends and unpredictable consequences. Scriptural contrasts between Old Testament appeals for God to awake and New Testament calls for believers to be watchful frame wakefulness as a distinctively Christian posture of alert obedience. The second part applies this framework to two interrelated moral failures in African Christianity—syncretistic accommodation to pre-Christian practices and passive

complicity in political corruption—showing how each embodies a threefold failure of wakefulness and how renewed moral consciousness might re-form African Christian agency

**Key Words**: Waking, Moral slumber, Syncretism, Awareness, Created order, African Church

## INTRODUCTION

Ethics, often perceived as a discipline preoccupied with prohibitions (e.g., debates on sexual morality or political corruption), risks reducing Christian virtue to a list of "bad things" to avoid. However, Oliver O'Donovan's metaphor of "waking" reorients ethics toward *moral consciousness*—a proactive awareness of one's role in God's created world. This paper asks: *How does O'Donovan's concept of "waking" provide a framework for addressing moral passivity and syncretism in the African Church?* By examining the interplay of self, world, and time, the study challenges African Christians to move beyond legalistic ethics and embrace a theology of active participation in divine order. This article argues that O'Donovan's metaphor of waking, rightly understood as a triadic attentiveness to self, world, and time, offers a critical resource for confronting two interrelated moral failures in contemporary African Christianity: syncretistic accommodation to pre-Christian religious practices and passive complicity in political corruption. Rather than surveying all "pressing ethical challenges," the discussion concentrates on these two illustrative sites—religious syncretism and public corruption—to show how moral wakefulness can re-form Christian agency within African churches.[303] To preserve a disciplined focus on syncretism and public corruption, this essay deliberately restrains the use of illustrative asides that are not directly ordered to those two questions.

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[303] See clear thoughts by J. David Moser, review of *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology; Volume 1: An Induction*, by Oliver O'Donovan, *Themelios* 39, no. 1 (April 2014): 172–73.

## WAKING AS A CHRISTIAN MORAL EXPERIENCE

There are moral experiences in this world that humans define and face as they live in the created world they have been created into; other experiences are similar, and others are different. Whatever the case, experiences are part of human endeavors. The call to wakefulness also exposes the limits of androcentric language and practice in African churches, since a truly awakened perception of world, self, and time must reckon with women's experiences of moral injury, exclusion, and agency within ecclesial and social life. Attentiveness to gendered patterns of vulnerability and responsibility thus becomes a necessary dimension of African Christian moral consciousness, and not merely a stylistic adjustment. In Ethics as Theology, O'Donovan treats "waking" not as a loose metaphor but as the basic structure of moral experience that holds self, world, and time together in a single act of consciousness. To be morally awake is to receive the world as a given order of creation, to recognize oneself as an agent already addressed and gifted by God, and to discern time as a limited opening in which action must be undertaken. Wakefulness, therefore, names a specific form of Spirit-enabled attentiveness: the believer becomes alert to an objective moral order, to his or her own responsibilities within that order, and to the concrete possibilities of obedience here and now. Read in this way, "waking" is not simply a call to general revival; it is a disciplined moral posture that resists both moral laziness and frantic activism by grounding Christian agency in God's prior act of creation and redemption.[304] It is clear from Oliver O'Donovan's work in his first instance that,

> Some psychologists of a world. When we say 'world,' there are many things we may mean, but we must at least mean this: our existence is framed within an order of things that stands behind and before it. The world was a reality before

[304] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Volume 1: Ethics as Theology: An Induction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2013)., 8.

> I was a reality, an object of attention to God, angels, and men before it was an object of my attention. It will, in all probability, persist after I am gone.[305]

O'Donovan's triad of world, self, and time thus describes the grammar of any responsible moral act. "World" designates an ordered creation that precedes and outlasts the agent, confronting her as a field of goods and limits already known to God. "Self" names the creature awakened by the Spirit to the fact of being addressed and entrusted with tasks that cannot be surrendered to anonymous structures or to "the church" in the abstract. "Time" marks the limited opening in which obedience or disobedience is enacted, a future moment that presses into the present as a summons to act. To be morally awake, therefore, is to refuse denial of the world's God-given order, evasion of personal responsibility, and postponement of faithful action into an indefinite "later."[306]

So for O'Donovan, wakefulness names the basic structure of Christian moral awareness in which world, self, and time come into view together as a single, Spirit-formed act of consciousness. To be morally awake is to receive the world as a created order already known to God, to recognize oneself as an addressed agent whose responsibilities cannot be delegated away, and to discern time as the limited opening in which obedience must actually be enacted. This wakefulness includes both clarity about the ends one intends by action and humility about the unpredictable consequences that lie beyond one's control. Scripturally, the shift from Old Testament cries for God to awake to New Testament calls for believers to be watchful gathers this structure into a distinctively Christian posture of alert, hopeful obedience in the present moment.

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[305] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time.*, 10.

[306] Maria Gwyn McDowell, "Ethics as Theology: A Moral Meditation on Modernity," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 2 (2019): 331–38, http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/101.2-McDowell.pdf.

Every aspect of a Christian's life in the world faces developments, changes, and adjustments of some sort. A Christian in the first instance must have the consciousness of being in a world. A Christian has a better chance to understand God's plan for man to live in the world, which he created, and therefore be conscious of his environment, since it is what he sees and what the mind builds into social consciousness.[307] Even if a man will not live forever in the world, which in the real sense is true, this gives them more reason why a man should be conscious of an already lived life that has a meaning. A truth cannot be repudiated. The truth is the reality of being created, living in a world of moral order, and the consistency and certainty of change.[308] Every active and conscious mind in this world should be able to ascertain the above as basic truths that a man (Christian) who is created should know. O'Donovan had earlier suggested with high ethical expectations that, "[f]irst, they must enter into the lived experience of practical deliberation for themselves, and inhabit it as residents, not as those visiting on occasional research trips. For myself, I now see that I embarked on Christian Ethics as I embarked on life and faith themselves, by being catapulted into it."[309] For self-consciousness in this world, one needs to go beyond the knowledge of the truth of the reality of being created in a world, but to practically make premeditation to make meaning of the world. Man is required to morally engage as an object in this created world, thereby reciprocating the act of creation that has been done; this too is part of the first step of man's attempt to be conscious of the world he is created into. In this instance, Man does not engage with every aspect of the world, but that aspect of life in the society which directly affects man as morally and lawfully assigned (see Gen. 1:28, 9:1, 7). Looking closely at

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[307] Oliver O'Donovan, "Morally Awake? Admiration & Resolution in the Light of Christian Faith.," *Waking*, Lecture 1, University of NSW, 2007, 1–9, https://newcollege.unsw.edu.au/downloads/File/pdf/Lectures_Summaries/Waking.pdf.

[308] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1994).

[309] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time.*, ix.

the above passages, the scripture has disclosed this basic truth, and many often engage these truths at some point unconsciously.[310] So being awake entails an individual consciousness of the created world in its order of things.

God, the creator, has created every man with a unique feature of memory, which makes every person respond to the environment and consequently the world from different perspectives. This gives clarity to the differences embedded in humans. But whether one is careless or careful in life, that is an experience that makes the world appear differently from person to person, and people with the will to act positively respond appropriately to it. O'Donovan's "world" encompasses not only creation's physicality but its moral structure—a concept resonant with African cosmology, where communal harmony and ancestral accountability shape ethical norms. For African Christians, "waking" involves recognizing how colonialism and urbanization have fractured traditional communal ethics, leading to a disjointed moral identity. For instance, in Nigeria, the conflation of prosperity theology with indigenous "blessing" rituals exemplifies a failure to awaken to God's holistic order. By grounding "world" in Africa's socio-historical context, the Church can address systemic issues like corruption through collective moral agency. Christians have better chances of responding positively in God's created world because of the awakening call from the scriptures. Only those who fail to listen may have challenges acting in response.

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[310] Oliver O'Donovan supported this position by clarifying the expected moral ends of those who wake into the world reality of struggling and those not struggling. He puts it that, "But neither the unconscious groaning of the world nor the conscious groaning of the spiritually aware achieves anything. They are formless aspirations towards an object that is neither envisaged nor realized. The salvation they look for is hidden behind the curtain of the future; it has no presence, and they can only wait." As O'Donovan later presented in this ethics as theology series (see page 6) that man can define his moral or immoral actions ends from the exertion of the human mind but cannot even imagine the consequences of the moral action ends. See Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking: Ethics as Theology, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2014). 1.

O'Donovan clarified the contrast between the call and human responses,

> At this point, the contrast between the Old Testament and the New could hardly be more striking. Nowhere in the New Testament do the faithful call on God to awake. God has already awakened, has already acted. All that remains now is for *them* to be awakened. But the call for human waking is not an indeterminate call for general mobilization, but has certain specific features.[311]

The Old Testament contains passages wherein poetry God is summoned to fight for his people, listen to their cry, interrogated on why he has abandoned his task. (Ps. 64, 69, 74, 22, etc.). God only seems to be inactive in a particular human affair, but does not need an awakening because he watches over all and answers all who call on his name. One's inactivity in God's created world keeps one from seeing God's activity and his call for human response. In the New Testament, Christ's apocalyptic warnings (e.g. Mk 13:33–37) and Pauline exhortations to vigilance (e.g. Rom 13:11; Eph 5:14; 1 Thess 5:6) gather wakefulness into a distinctive Christian posture of alert obedience.

One of the relevant verses, which is mostly used, is Revelation 16:15, which speaks about Christ's hopeful return to the world. A more specific call to a people (the Church in Sardis) in 3:23 is a call to strengthen all that is weakened, revive what is dying, remember what is received and forgotten, obey the truth, and repent of any hidden sin. All these entail the full spiritual and physical activeness of the self in a seemingly inactive world. "To be wakeful is to attend to *oneself.* If attentiveness means bringing the world into view, it means bringing ourselves into view together with the world." …. "To wake is to become aware, in the third place, of *time.* World and self are co-present only in

[311] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time.*, 7-8.

the moment, which is open to us for action."[312] O'Donovan presents the second and the third place of human consciousness, which not only calls for the consciousness of an existing world but also the consciousness of oneself as existing in that world, and also of Time, which defines the limits spelled out for an activity to take place and to seize. Self-consciousness in African Christianity must translate into communal action. For example, the *Ubuntu* philosophy ("I am because we are") aligns with O'Donovan's emphasis on relational ethics. Ubuntu, often summarized as "a person is a person through other persons," resonates strongly with O'Donovan's insistence that moral thinking is communicative and communal rather than purely individual. Yet Ubuntu's emphasis on harmony and consensus can also obscure the need to name and resist unjust arrangements that damage the common good. Read through the lens of wakefulness, Ubuntu may be received as a providential resource that trains African Christians in attentiveness to the neighbour and the community, while also being chastened by the gospel to recognize that genuine harmony sometimes requires prophetic conflict and refusal of corrupt solidarities.[313] Such concrete practices—whether communal projects that honour creation or forms of leadership that refuse corruption—are valuable precisely insofar as they arise from and reinforce this awakened perception of world, self, and time, rather than functioning as free-floating "activism."[314] Such actions reciprocate God's creative mandate, transforming abstract theology into tangible moral engagement. The fundamental question here is whether a man has made these truths the first

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[312] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time.*, 12,15.

[313] Pedro Chinedu Opara, "Ubuntu: A Trinitarian Linkage and Ethic of Life in African Christian Ethics," *VERITAS JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES* 5, no. 2 (2024): 294–304. See also Ramathate Dolamo, "BOTHO/UBUNTU: THE HEART OF AFRICAN ETHICS," *Scriptura* 112, no. 1 (2013): 1–10, http://scriptura.journals.ac.za.

[314] See Hassan Musa, "Eschatology as New Creation: A Reflection on Oliver O'Donovan's Perspective," *African Theological Journal for Church and Society* 4, no. 2 (2023): 75–92, https://atjcs.netact.org.za/index.php/netact/article/download/108/222/.

objective for life as a whole. If a man can think or ask himself this question, then responding to the objective for life in the created World, the Self, and the Time is given by the creator will be utilized. Hence, the Christian moral experience and obligation are not just to respond to a world, the self, and time, but to have a consciousness of this pre-existing knowledge as given by the Holy Spirit for the Church concerning the Christian life. –That man will not play ignorant to these truths when he is called to obey, but actively respond to the moral order of life as designed by the creator.

These responses in the above paragraph make the moral experiences of man within a created order true to the opening present Time for an active life. Actions can be bewildering at some point in human life, which is full of anticipated ends. The opening presents time widely leads one with anticipation devoid of faith to wild consequences. In Oliver O'Donovan's 3rd series on ethics as theology, he expounded on most aspects that relate to an action's possible end, either negative or with positive intent. He explored that,

> The end of action is what we *intend by* our action, not something else that we may intend, hope, or anticipate will *follow from* our action. It gives our exertion its purpose. It is not, then, a consequence. *We* decide upon the ends of our actions, but we do not decide upon the consequences that will follow them. We are immediately responsible for our ends, but the consequences can, at most, be anticipated, desired, or feared. Though we may be responsible for failing to anticipate something, not even the most clear-sighted anticipation can make things happen or not happen.[315]

What should human activity and life experience hope to realize? Many often use the proverb "the end defines the means," but

[315] Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, vol. 3, Ethics as Theology 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017). 24.

have given little or no thought to what it comprises. We can decide what ends would look like, but we will have to remain ignorant of the fact that the consequences may unfold. For O'Donovan, three things are imminent if people design their ends as they await the consequences: it can either be anticipated, desired, or feared, but one cannot, by any chance, define it. Defining the ends is what one does through purposeful actions, which is what makes every action an intended reality. One concrete reason why one cannot define but only anticipate the action ends is that only the self can be defined, even to some given extent, but the created world and future unfolding time can and must only be hoped for, admired, or dreaded. The above three may fail because we are unable to exert them (unintentionally) or because we think their absence would create different results, which is a deception of the mind, for all secrets of life actions are hidden by the Lord Almighty. Hence, human consciousness is inadequate as life is limited. This is a moral experience that Christians must adhere to as they wake into a world of the self and time, keeping in mind the kind of moral action ends they exert.

## MORAL AWAKENING IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

If wakefulness names the basic structure of Christian moral experience, then the African church must be asked not only whether it believes rightly but whether it is morally awake within its own concrete histories and institutions. Africa's churches share with all humanity the fundamental consciousness of world, self, and time, yet their wakefulness or slumber takes particular forms shaped by colonial legacies, traditional religious worldviews, and rapidly changing socio-political orders. The question, therefore, is not simply whether African Christians confess the Creator, but whether they perceive their world as a creation ordered wholly to God, receive themselves as undivided agents in Christ, and recognize the present moment as an urgent occasion for obedience rather

than a neutral interval to be endured or exploited.[316] The Old Testament's cries for divine intervention (e.g., Psalm 44:23) contrast with the New Testament's call for personal awakening (Eph. 5:14). African Christians navigate this tension by blending faith in God's sovereignty with grassroots activism. For example, during South Africa's apartheid, Desmond Tutu's theology of *Ubuntu* merged prayerful dependence with public advocacy, illustrating how "waking" bridges divine and human agency against corruption. In this light, appeals to African dignity and critiques of colonial narratives must be read, not as a free-standing survey of political and cultural grievances, but as part of the same question of moral wakefulness: whether African Christians perceive their *world* as ordered wholly to God rather than to the rival claims of empire, ethnicity, or market. Likewise, descriptions of the African church as one of the fastest-growing in the world only serve this argument insofar as they expose how numerical expansion can coexist with syncretistic accommodation and passive complicity in corruption, revealing a slumbering *self* that has not yet embraced an undivided identity in Christ. When these broader reflections are tethered directly to the twin failures of syncretism and political passivity, they function as concrete tests of whether the church is truly awake to its created world, its agency, and its time, rather than as programmatic claims about Africa in general. This balance counters fatalism and empowers communities to address injustices like land dispossession. About the Apostolic Creed that was first formulated in Nicaea and later affirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 381, O'Donovan exposes that,

> In the first words of the creed, before we have tried to sketch an outline of created order with the phrase 'heaven and earth', simply as we say 'I believe in God the Creator,

[316] Musa, "Eschatology as New Creation: A Reflection on Oliver O'Donovan's Perspective." See also Alfred Muli, "The Modern Quest for an African Theology Revised in the Light of Romans 1:18-25," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 16, no. 2 (1997): 137–47.

> we are stating that the world is an ordered totality. Because there is a Creator, there is also a creation that is ordered to its Creator, a world which exists as his creation and in no other way, so that by its very existence it points to God.[317]

The creed itself is a wake-up call not for those who do not acknowledge the creator, but as a statement of a mindful decision of the creature towards the creator for life. At that primitive stage of the creed's formulation for the early church, the order of all creatures is thought of as directed to a creator God. This indicates that if the world is an ordered totality, then men ought to morally acknowledge first, not the ordered totality, but that before the ordered totality, there exists a God of order (who creates everything into a given order). Now, for Africa as a people, there is no question of whether God is a creator or King; the only question lies in whether he had created the world within his forethought order. This kind of knowledge can give tremendous help to the moral character in African Christianity. There are several aspects one can consider or assess while presenting a basis for a moral character consciousness in Africa. By way of a recap, the paper considers three themes: first, one needs to ask a question that presents the African Church and Moral Slumber. Secondly, the paper considered the African Church and Christian Moral

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[317] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2. ed., reprint (Leicester: Apollos [u.a.], 1996). 31. He then clarified that, "just because it is ordered vertically in this way, it must also have an internal horizontal ordering among its parts (assuming, what we know to be the case, that it is not an undivided monad). It forms, over against the Creator, a whole which is 'creation'; and if there is any plurality of creatures within it, they are governed by this shared determinant of their existence, that each to each is as fellow-creature to fellow-creature." A created world has creations of different kind that are meant to live together within the created world as ordered by the creator. Man should not only have a vertical relationship with God but also a horizontal relationship with the creature, for an Africa, the horizontal relationship is old news, unlike an African only the horizontal relationship matters (The vertical relationship is engulfed into the horizontal). Though the vertical relationship in a general sense is sustained in the horizontal relationship within the creation.

Consciousness in the 21st Century, and finally gave a call for a wake-up call into Christian Moral Responsibility from the personal to a corporate inclination.

African Church and Moral Slumber

If people are thought to be given a moral awakening, then there must be a forethought that they are in a moral slumber or even sleeping.[318] The term "slumber" critiques *passivity*, not African spirituality. The African Church is known to be a growing church from the clutches of African Traditional Religion, and at some point, it lingers back into its past failures, which is seen as a Christian moral weakness (Slumber in this case). Turaki, while initiating a theological method for understanding and addressing issues in African tradition and world-view, presented the necessity of a proposed method to enable theologians to combat problems relating to Christian moral character in Africa. He suggested that

> this background is necessary for helping African Christians to sort out some of the traditional religious beliefs, practices, and behaviour that conflict with their Christian faith. Many African Christians have serious problems understanding how the Bible and the Christian faith relate and address their traditional African religious system (beliefs and practices), and also their modern context. Some still hold to some of the "precious" traditional religious beliefs, practices, and behaviour, even after becoming Christians.[319]

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[318] **N.B.** For instance, Ghanaian churches combating political apathy during elections exemplify "waking," while congregations ignoring gender-based violence remain "asleep." This distinction avoids homogenizing Africa's diverse Christian experiences and highlights context-specific ethical failures. This part of the paper is not advocating for an awaking in Africa but is presenting a preliminary thought on what it takes for a moral awakening to be initiated in Africa.

[319] Professor Yusuf Turaki and Ambassador Monday O. Ogbe, *Christianity and African Traditional Religion and Worldview: A Theological Method of*

The phenomenon that Turaki describes—baptized believers who retain "precious traditional religious beliefs, practices, and behaviour" incompatible with the gospel—can be interpreted, in O'Donovan's terms, as a failure of wakefulness at all three poles. At the level of the world, the created order is misperceived as a layered cosmos in which ancestral or occult powers must be placated alongside the Creator, rather than as a totality ordered wholly to God. At the level of self, the Christian refuses the identity of a creature reconciled in Christ and instead continues to act as a divided subject, belonging simultaneously to Christ and to pre-Christian loyalties. At the level of time, recourse to traditional ritual appears as a strategy to secure short-term protection or prosperity, postponing the risk of obedient trust in God's promise into an undefined eschatological future. Moral wakefulness disrupts this pattern by summoning African Christians to see their world as a single, Christ-ordered reality, to embrace an undivided selfhood in Christ, and to act now in practices that embody that confession.[320] How can Christianity in the 21st century ever wake from this slumber and be conscious of its ignored failures? We can only see the truth based on scripture as it presents God's moral character towards his creatures.

> Many other passages in Scripture show that God desires and approves of moral creatures who conform to his moral character. Just as God is loving, just, merciful, faithful, truthful, holy, and so forth, so he also desires that we act in loving ways, just, merciful, faithful, truthful, holy, and so forth. These are the qualities that God approves of in himself, and therefore, these are the moral qualities that he approves of in his creatures as well. Just as he delights

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*Engagement and Interaction with Religions and Worldviews Revised and Expanded Edition 2019*, 1st ed. (Midas Touch GEMS, 2023).

[320] See thoughts from Samson Musa, "Ontological Ideals for Christian Living in Nigeria: A Theological-Ethical Enquiry," in *Christian Living in Contemporary Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Rev. Prof. Bitrus Alkali Sarma*, 1st Ed. (Kagoro, Kaduna Sate, Nigeria: ETSK, 2024), 79–90.

> to contemplate his moral excellence, he delights to see his moral excellence reflected in the creatures he has made.[321]

An imitator does not consider his way from the beginning; he wakes every day with that consciousness. Christians are not just imitators of Christ but those who are living with Christ's spirit in them. To have any moral failure indicates an absence of Christ's presence in the life of the Christian, which further portrays that the Christian now has a new master. This can be because man failed to listen to the Holy Spirit's injunction concerning God's approval of love, justice, mercy, faith, truth, and holiness. African Christians face dilemmas where well intended actions yield unintended harm. O'Donovan's warning against overconfidence in moral outcomes urges humility. In a time of Christian moral slumber, there is a need for the African Church's built-in Christ-likeness to return to the moral consciousness designed from the scripture as it has received for a successful Christian character in modern society.

## African Church and Christian Moral Consciousness in the 21st Century

The 21st century is said to be the current modern era where morality should be in its updated standard, and particularly for Christians, because of the clarity of God's word. Any immoral act is considered a moral failure in God's standard. Wayne would then remind the church, "If God's moral standards flow

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[321] Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning,* Published by Crossway, Illinois, 2018, 75. Wayne contrasted that "Because the moral standards that God gives us are grounded in his moral character, he could not have made other moral standards for us than the ones that he made. He could not have commanded us that it was right to hate people rather than to love them, to lie rather than, to tell the truth, to murder rather than to protect life, to be unjust rather than just." This assertion connotes that, Light cannot be exemplified with darkness, hence, God who is light (good) cannot be associated with darkness (evil). In 1 John 1:5-10, men can physically claim God's attributes but live false lives but this shows that they are living outside God's command on Christ's example of true Christian moral character. The irony here is that we are rather deceiving ourselves not blackmailing God's word.

from his unchanging moral character, then it follows that these are the moral standards by which God will hold all people everywhere accountable."[322] The consciousness of being accountable for one's character could not only keep every Church awake to the reality of an imminent failure from God's standard of living as given in his word, but also of facing Christ's judgment seat. The African Church (a community of believers in Christ), as compared to Churches in other parts of the world, is said to be one of the fastest-growing Churches.[323] It is easy to make such an analysis when one has ventured 'outside the box.' Within Africa, one would be careful to make conclusions, though from the outlook it is true, the question is whether Christ sees the African Church that way. It is not about winning in human eyes; it is about standing the test of time allotted by the bridegroom. There must be a Christian moral consciousness, whether within a past or a future time, as we act in the 21st century. O'Donovan updates that, "But the only time of practical immediacy is this future moment offered to present wakefulness. It is a future moment because we must still act in it; it is not realized yet. But in a sense, it is also present, because it is now, before we act, that we confront it

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[322] Wayne Grudem, 2018, 77.

[323] Conrad Mbewe viewed that, "it is so refreshing to return to Africa and find churches meeting in every conceivable place as new churches sprout up almost every week. It is said that the number of Christians in Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century was about 9 million and that by the end of the twentieth century it was about 380 million. Church structures cannot cope with this kind of growth. So, churches are simply meeting in classrooms, in grass-thatched makeshift structures, and under trees—and yet they are still growing! It is also refreshing to see in attendance young parents with their toddlers, teenagers, and young adults, all the way to octogenarians. It speaks well for the future of the church in Africa." The challenge here is whether the churches in Africa are what they should be inside-out. Because the growth of the Africa church is not a new thing to the western church. The call of caution here is that the growth of the African church should not be synonymous with its fall because it lacked a foundational foothold as it was growing. Waking into the consciousness of one's early beginning can strengthen the future. See Conrad Mbewe, *God's Design for the Church; A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leader*s, Crossway publishing, Illinois, 2020.

and may deliberate about it."[324] The Christian life in 21st-century Africa should not be carried away by the fear of being accountable in the future because it is not God's desire for humanity, and the African Church should not be reluctant because of its past successes as the world's fastest-growing church, because that is only a human analysis. Rather, the African church should live as if the past and the future is in the present, because in the real sense, it is. This means that the 21st-century African church would be the reference for the past failures and future glory in Africa. This can be possible because there is a 'wakefulness' in the African Church that stems from shaping a much stronger future Church. It does not matter what is said about the African Church because only the present explains the past and simultaneously designs the future of the African Church. The 21st century is the only period that may define Christianity for more than 3000 years and further create a prolegomenon for the future of the African Church and world. The Creed's declaration of God as Creator affirms Africa's intrinsic dignity, countering colonial narratives of cultural inferiority. The life and experience of the African Church today (the 21st-century church) is the life that matters most to the creator than past successes or even future glories.

Now, in Ephesians 4:17 to 5:12, first, we notice that in this passage the Apostle Paul uses the word *Live* the King James version uses the word *walk* three times as a metaphor for the way we conduct ourselves daily: *that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do* (4:17). *Walk in the way of love* (5:2), *Live as children of light.* (5:8 NIV). These three exhortations are found in a passage that defines what the Christian standard of living should be. Our conduct should be different from other Gentiles who do not know God at all, as seen in 4:17. The Church cannot adopt the world's practices and local ethical and moral standards as its own.[325] What the world says about the church

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[324] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time.*, 16.

[325] See Charles Seet, *A Christian in a Non-Christian World*, Far Eastern Bible College Press, Singapore, 2000. 64.

is what the world thinks it is or how it is expected to be. Only God can give a true description of what the African church is or should be because he is the only true God who cannot be wrong in his judgment. In addition, since he is answerable to no one, the African Church should be morally conscious of the fact that only the groom knows who his bride is; hence, he will judge the past and shape the future depending on how the church responds to his call in the 21st century.

African Church and a Call for Christian Moral Responsibility

If the African Church is morally awake and conscious of the way it lives, then it has successfully answered the call of being responsible for its moral daily actions. Only humans (also part of God's creatures) are responsible to God because of their dependability,[326] but God is not responsible to anyone because he is the supreme God. This expression is old news for a Christian who has received a calling from Christ into a Christian moral responsibility. This is a call to incorporate moral responsibility with moral consciousness as a prolegomenon to a Christian moral living, which indicates that as a church, each person in Christ's family should be responsible for the life of their friend. While syncretism (e.g., consulting witchdoctors alongside prayer) risks moral slumber, ATR's emphasis on ancestral respect offers potential for redemptive engagement. For example, Nigerian theologian Yusufu Turaki reinterprets ancestor veneration as a call to honor the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1), transforming a

[326] C.f. what Rahner employed on "transcendental reflection" as a philosophical tool to show that the human being is by nature "spirit," by which he means "open to receive revelation from God who is spirit and holy." Humans are not only parts and products of the natural world; they are also oriented toward an infinite, mysterious horizon of being that Christians know as God. In other words, they are transcendent. See Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th century Theology; God & the World in a Transitional Age,* InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, USA, 1992. 241.

cultural practice into a Christian ethic of legacy.[327] Such nuanced integration resists dualism and enriches African moral consciousness. Mbewe gave a much clearer description of what the church is meant to be as presented by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:15. He exposed accordingly,

> This is what Paul had in mind when he referred to the church as the household of God. He meant that God fulfills the role of parents in the home. Church leaders fulfill the role of servants in the home, ensuring that each child knows "how one ought to behave in the household of God" (v. 15). The rest of us are the equivalent of children who are being raised in that home. We ought to participate actively in the household chores.[328]

Mbewe's description is essential because it is so easy even for a new Christian to understand the direction of the Christian life journey. This denotes that moral responsibility is key to every conscious Christian life. Many often misunderstand the concept of responsibility for accountability: while responsibility is in a general form of force binding one to courses of action demanded by that force, accountability is precise, as being answerable to someone. Therefore, moral responsibility best fits the Christian Church of Africa in the modern era. The body of Christ cannot grow if not all members of the same body know their responsibility for one another.[329] Every member of Christ's

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[327] Yusufu Turaki, *Tainted Legacy: Islam, Colonialism and Slavery in Northern Nigeria* (Chicago, IL: Isaac Publishing, 2010).

[328] See Ch. 6 of Conrad Mbewe, 2020.

[329] In reference to Karl Barth's Christian ethics on *Practical Wisdom and Integrity* William Werpehowski portrayed that "Christian moral action may be true or real insofar as it is *concrete.* One sense of "concreteness" in theological ethics refers to its basis in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Moral life is measured and directed by this revelation contained in the biblical narrative of God, Israel, and Jesus, as it applies to the divine activities of creation, redemption, and consummation. It responds to and expresses the will of God because all these activities have God's faithful love in Christ at the centre." The first sentence as quoted here present serious level of weakness if given a critical look. Christian moral actions cannot be true if they are concrete, they can only be correct base on the definition of the proposed action ends they are meant for. Again,

household must take his/her responsibility or role with high regard so that the family can be sustained. The failure of the servants (leaders) and the children (members) who are being raised in the home to take their responsibilities does not stop God, who plays the role of the parents, from running the affairs of the home. One could imagine a home where only the parents engage in the home chores while the servants and children watch; this cannot be a suitable illustration to exemplify for an African family. However, if it becomes the case for the African church because of its irresponsibility in the 21st century, then one can deduce that there is a Christian moral slumber that is not conscious of the self in a world limited by time. As it takes, a great time and space to give precise daily individual or corporate actions that exemplify traditional religious beliefs, practices, and behaviour that conflict with the African Christian faith, judging from the diverse Christian settings in Africa. Therefore, it is with the present-day African Church, which is to be an opening to a limited aspect of the future, not the whole.[330] The future here is the moment at which there is a possibility of an imminent encounter.

The African Church must wake up to (i.e., be morally conscious of) the present reality of life in Christ, which links the past to the immediate future and that which is still to come. Oliver O'Donovan will clarify that "[a]t the level of pure awareness, there is no fixed order in which world, self, and time come to consciousness. They are co-eventual. The world passes temporally and is thus patent to action; action is realized in world-engagement and thus in time; time is measured in action and so frames the objective world."[331] Even as the church lives

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it depends on what Barth would mean with the word "concrete." There is and can only be one truth and it is not from human consciousness except in situations where the divine is manifested in human likeness. See William Werpehowski, *Karl Barth and Christian Ethics Living in Truth*, Ashgate Publishing Limited Wey Court East Union Road Farnham Surrey, GU9 7PT England, 2014, 140-141.

[330] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time.*, 15-16.

[331] O'Donovan, 2013, 19. He also said in response later is his second series in 2015 that, "The thought we bring to today must be purposive. But

in an objective world where time is measured in a temporal world-engagement, which is patent to action, the Christian church ought to remember that they were connected from the beginning with the Christ who is King that redirects all moral actions. O'Donovan made the above statement when discussing the mishaps of ethics. The above thought shows that the failure to have a successful moral experience is caused by the inability to recognize (awaken to) the existential nature of the created world of which humanity (the self) is inclusive, in that way limited by the time to engage in moral actions. The Church as a family that takes responsibility as it is affirmed in God's words, each according to his/her role, will lead to the Christian moral experience, which bears bountiful fruits in the body of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

This study has argued that Oliver O'Donovan's metaphor of waking, rightly understood as a triadic attentiveness to world, self, and time, offers a theologically rich framework for diagnosing and confronting moral slumber in African Christianity, particularly in the interrelated areas of syncretistic accommodation and passive complicity in corruption. By rereading wakefulness as the basic structure of Christian moral experience—receiving the world as a creation ordered wholly to God, recognizing oneself as an addressed agent whose ends are chosen before God, and discerning time as the limited opening for obedience—the paper has shown how failures in each dimension deform the moral life of African churches: a misperceived world becomes a layered cosmos of rival powers, a divided self attempts to belong both to Christ and to pre-Christian loyalties, and a misused time postpones

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"today" is not instantaneous. It is an opening, and as we engage with it, we are extended in time, bending our attention futurewards — but always to this future, not to the speculative future of tomorrow. What makes "today" different from a tomorrow or yesterday is that its future is open before us; it is freedom's moment to realize itself in decision and action." See Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking; Ethics as Theology 2*, 2014. 145.

costly faithfulness in favour of short-term protections or institutional success. At the same time, locating African moral experience within this triad allows a more hopeful account of how the Spirit can re-awaken the church to its calling: by re-receiving creation as an ordered totality, by embracing an undivided identity in Christ, and by treating the present moment—not an abstract future—as the decisive site of obedience in public life. Scriptural images of waking, from the Old Testament's cries for divine intervention to the New Testament's summons to vigilance, reinforce this account by gathering moral consciousness into a distinctively Christian posture of alert, cruciform responsibility amid complex histories marked by colonialism, rapid social change, and enduring traditional worldviews. If the African church is to move beyond legalistic ethics and purely reactive activism, it must therefore cultivate a sustained moral wakefulness that integrates belief and practice, refuses both fatalism and triumphalism, and embodies in its worship, teaching, and public witness the ordered love that corresponds to God's creative and redemptive rule

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