

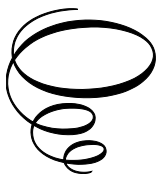
Archbishop Fulton Sheen,
the Contemporary
Humanist

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By

Emmanuel K. Ngwainmbi
and Rev. Fr. John Berinyuy

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book aims to identify and tackle the partial notions of man popularized by some modern scholars who challenged Fulton Sheen's position on current humanistic tendencies. We discuss the truth about man's nature. We interchange the terms 'man' and 'human being' in our arguments. Any gender or analytical reference to 'man' is, as such, a diversion from our intentions for the use of the term, and the paradox of frustration within man, drawing from Sheen's thoughts and vision and studies on the truth about man's drive to bring rational solutions to the ever-troubling question of human destiny. We then propose solutions to contemporary problems regarding the dignity and destiny of man. We acknowledge that our thinking may not present Sheen's perspective of humanity and his *modi cogitandi* to fine-tune our understanding of the supra-terrestrial man and help anyone construct basic and subliminal notions of our humanity based on Catholic teachings.

This book identifies nineteen theses on Fulton Sheen's use of rhetoric in preaching; it treats him as an optimistic Christian anthropologist. While scholars consider Sheen a historical figure, orator, philosopher, and marriage counselor, we examine how and why Sheen developed his ideas and what made him communicate them publicly. We exploit that perspective by analyzing discourses, tapes, and DVDs to explain man's historical and existential situation in the contemporary world. His description of human anthropology makes him particularly relevant to modern life.

We place Sheen's thinking in Thomistic Catholic theology and the 'new humanism' of the early 20th century together. The rise in Freudian psychology, communism, secularism, and a decline of interest in God are contradictions of Sheen's view of modern humanism, or what we describe in this book as 'Sheenism.' Throughout our description of Sheen's thinking, we pay attention to historical Catholic theology and the cultural context that contributed to his thought.

We propose that a remedy for the imperfections of the 21st century is embedded in Sheen's theological anthropology. Further, we interpret

contemporary humans as ‘frustrated,’ a practice that can be overturned by observing the Eucharist and Marian devotion.

Structure

The book is structured into five chapters. Chapter One briefly describes Sheen’s life and personality, and work. It also highlights his biography, significant writings, method and style of work, credentials as a Thomistic philosopher, reaction to Communism and modern psychology, electronic evangelism, the writers who influenced his thoughts, and participation in the Second Vatican Council. This chapter focuses on the factors that influenced his response to the paradox of frustration in man and his perspective on modern humanism.

Chapter Two studies the context and effects of modern materialistic humanism. It articulates the problem of understanding man’s nature, analyzing questions such as, what makes man human? What is it that gives man dignity and meaning in life? What is the purpose of his life and destiny? It highlights Sheen’s thoughts on how modern materialistic humanists tried to resolve the paradox of frustration in man.

Chapter Three Addresses Sheen’s response to modern materialistic humanism. It demonstrates how Sheen outlines a holistic and integral vision of man. It emphasizes that man is made up of the union of body and soul and has a social nature that opens him up to relationships. It also insists that man has an eternal destiny in God.

Chapter Four examines man in his historical and existential circumstances and analyses the dynamics of the paradox of frustration in man, bringing out principal sources of failure. Sheen employs the prodigal son's parable and the Gerasene demoniac's story to highlight his understanding of man’s failure and how man can turn failure into success. He thinks that man is frustrated because he has declared independence from God.

Chapter Five evaluates Sheen’s insights on the truth about man, highlights the lights and shadows of his Christian humanism, demonstrates how it can contribute to the regeneration of contemporary frustrated man, and examines its originality and uniqueness. The centrality of man’s cooperation in responding to the paradox of frustration in his life is stressed.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophers, anthropologists, and theologians reflect on how truth influences man's relationship with himself, fellow man, God, and the world. In the 20th century, three social revolutions compromised man's dignity: industrial, sexual, and technological. Therefore, it could be said that "the major problem of the world is the restoration of the image of man" (Sheen 1996, p152).

In this reflection on the truth about man or humankind, Archbishop Fulton John Sheen (1895-1979) was proclaimed Venerable by Pope Benedict XVI on June 28, 2012. Sheen's beatification process was re-opened in July 2019. He made a unique contribution through his discourses and writings. A prominent philosopher, theologian, writer, and scholar of the 20th century, Sheen left behind numerous writings and sermons in tapes and videos, later transcribed into books and DVDs. He believed that man must restore his dignity for the world to change. In his formative years, Sheen's thinking was influenced by Pope Leo XIII and two of his encyclicals; *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which supported and encouraged the scholastic revival in Catholic Philosophy and thought, and *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which demonstrated that Thomism offered the soundest means of combating modern errors and solving contemporary problems, especially in the social order, and answered the 'the social question'.

The negative consequence of understanding the reality about man and life has brought about the frustration, disillusionment, and unhappiness man experiences today. Before reconstructing society, we must ask about the nature of the man who is to live in it.

We want to classify and systematize Sheen's perception of man. In so doing, we stress that no one can analyze man using only scientific tools. Another objective is to discover why people are still unhappy despite the great affluence and advancements in science and technology today. Instead, there is more frustration, disillusionment, cynicism, and psychiatric issues, among all age groups in every nation.

Furthermore, by analyzing Sheen's conception of man, we intend to establish that economic, religious, and political crises cannot be resolved

by looking for causes only outside man. Sheen (2003) maintains that man, rather than economics or politics, should be blamed for man's failure today. He has failed because he has rejected God. Therefore, man can be saved by renewing his inner self by seeking God's kingdom and justice (Matthew 6:33) rather than making economic or political readjustments (p145).

We will propose a philosophy and theology of life that can enable contemporary man to know himself better through this understanding. Moreover, with this self-knowledge, man will better comprehend his destiny. We will outline what man can use to free himself from irrationalism and frustration. The 'fifth man', who will correct the 'fourth man', may emerge through this work (Morra 1992). Morra traces the course of man from the first man to the fourth man as follows: There is the first man identified in the Greek intellectual culture (*homo sapiens*); there is the second man found in the Judeo-Christian revelation together with religion (*homo religiosus*); the third man produced by science and the myth of progress (*homo faber*); and the fourth man present in secularism, the latter being without religion, philosophy, or history (*homo ludens*).

Man can become a better person with absolute dignity. He can also rediscover the purpose of his life. The major thrust of the argument is this: man cannot save himself from his present predicament. He needs a force beyond him to save him, a passion he has been convinced by modern materialistic humanism that he does not need (Sheen 2003). Materialistic humanism is a counterpart of Christian humanism. At this point, we must also understand, at least briefly, what Christian humanism means.

Christian Humanism: An operational definition

To understand Christian humanism, we must first understand what humanism in general means. Humanism deals with human values, potential, and worth. It is concerned with humanity's needs and welfare, emphasizes the individual's intrinsic worth, and sees human beings as autonomous, rational, and moral agents. There are sundry types of humanism. Classical humanism is associated with the Renaissance, emphasizing aesthetics, liberty or freedom, and the study of literature, art, philosophy, and Greek and classical Latin languages. Secular humanism emphasizes human potential and self-fulfillment without the need for God. This naturalistic philosophy is based on reason, science, and the 'end-justifies-the-means' thinking. The Christian apologist, and literary critic Gilbert Keith Chesterton (2007), in an introduction to Sheen's book, *God and Intelligence in*

Modern Philosophy, affirms that secular or atheistic humanists proclaim a “sentimental version of man's divine dignity” and “there is nothing particular about the objective anthropoid in a hat that anybody could be forced to regard as a sacred animal.”

Within Christian humanism, liberty, individual conscience, and intellectual freedom are compatible with Christian principles. The Bible promotes human fulfillment based on God's salvation in Christ. Like classical humanism, Christian humanism pursues reason, free inquiry, the separation of Church and state, and the ideal of freedom. Christian humanists are committed to scholasticism and the development and use of science and technology. They argue that advances in knowledge, science, and individual freedom should be used to serve humanity for the glory of God.

Christian humanists also maintain that humans have dignity and value because humanity was created in the image of God. This makes Christian humanism biblical. The extent to which human beings are autonomous, rational, and moral agents reflects their creation in the *imago Dei*. For them, human worth is assumed in many places in scripture: in Jesus' incarnation; his compassion for people; his command to “love your neighbor as yourself”, and his parable of the Good Samaritan.

Christian humanists understand that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3) and seek to grow into the complete understanding of every good thing for Christ's service (Philippians 1:9; 4:6; Cf. Colossians 1:9). Unlike secular humanists who reject the notion of the revealed truth, Christian humanists adhere to the Word of God as the standard against which they assess the quality of all things. The Word of God was very central in Sheen's thought. The Christian humanist values human culture but acknowledges the noetic (i.e., intellectual) effects of man's fallen nature (1 Corinthians 1:18–25) and the presence of sin in every human heart (Jeremiah 17:9). One of Sheen's worries about his generation was the loss of the sense of sin. Christian humanism states that man reaches his full potential only by having the right relationship with Christ. At baptism, he becomes a new creation and can experience growth in every area of life (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Christian humanism holds that every human endeavor and achievement should be Christ-centered. Everything should be done for God's glory, not for pride or self-promotion (1 Corinthians 10:31). We should strive to do our best physically, mentally, and spiritually in everything God wishes us to do and be. Christian humanists believe this includes intellectual life,

artistic life, domestic life, economic life, politics, race relations, and environmental work. The writings and discourses of Sheen covered all these aspects of human life and the world.

Christian humanism believes the Church should be actively involved in culture and that Christians should be a voice affirming the worth and dignity of humanity while denouncing, protesting, and defending all dehumanizing influences in the world. Sheen used the gospel to fight against the cold war and birth control, which he called birth patrol.

Christian scholars such as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Calvin are advocates of Christian humanism, although they do not call it such. Today, 'Christian humanism' describes writers' viewpoints as varied as Fyodor Dostoevsky, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. As we have seen above, and as we shall see in this work, we can comfortably add the name of Fulton John Sheen.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF SURVEY OF FULTON J. SHEEN'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

1. Sheen, as a public media personality

Through his media outings, Sheen played a pivotal role in the religious formation and education of millions of people of all religious persuasions. He enjoyed sixty years of public speaking and publication. He left approximately 66 books, as well as recorded tapes, to posterity. Sheen's influence is not limited to the church in America; it extends to Africa and the rest of the world. He spent 20 years on the radio program, *The Catholic Hour*, speaking to an estimated audience of 4 million people every Sunday, and through his television program *Life Is Worth Living*. The program drew an average of 30 million weekly viewers in the 1950s alone. Sheen was not the first Catholic priest to use the radio. Before him, there was Fr. Charles Coughlin, broadcasting in 1926. Though Coughlin was "a controversial figure whose theological talks could deteriorate into extremist personal views on political matters" (Rodriguez 2006), he attracted a far greater audience than Sheen, estimated to have been as high as 40 million (Riley 2004). It is also worth noting that the Protestants and Jews were very popular in radio broadcasting.

In 1952, Sheen received an Emmy Award for Most Outstanding Personality on Television. He cannot be left out when writing about the few individuals who have influenced the modern world religiously, philosophically, socially, morally, and academically. The Ecclesiastical historians of America write positively about him. However, there are still some relevant questions to answer if we want to understand and appreciate this great man. Pope Pius XII once described Fulton John Sheen as "a prophet of the times" (as cited in Sheen 2008, p232) because Sheen is America's all-time pre-eminent teacher and preacher.

Sheen was preoccupied with the dignity of the human person. He felt that man's pride was significantly and negatively affected by the various crises

rife in his time. Unsurprisingly, he emerges as an advocate for human dignity in his life and writings.

Sheen x-rays the modern distortions of the human person by modern humanism. To help us understand the dignity of the human person developed in Sheen's vision of the person, we cite Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). This text points out that the human being is more than the physical body - he has extra-terrestrial features. In his autobiography *Treasure in Clay*, Sheen laments "what *eros* has done to *agape*, what the 'I' has done to the 'Thou'" (Sheen 1993, pp2-3). This highlights that human relationships are a part of man.

The background of Sheen's life, his influential writings, method, style of work, credentials as a Thomistic philosopher, reactions to communism and modern psychology, electronic evangelism, participation in the Second Vatican Council, and the writers who influenced him can shed light on his thoughts.

2. Sheen's voice

We can categorically state that Sheen writes as he talks. Other scholars agree. D. P. Noonan holds that Sheen's style was influenced by G. K. Chesterton and Bernard Shaw, especially in the use of paradox. However, he thinks Sheen's poetic style diminished after the Second Vatican Council, compared with the prose-like and forthright presentations of 20th-century theologians like Eugene Kennedy, Hans Kung, Karl Rahner, and Yves Congar (Noonan 1972, p62). This opinion may be biased, given that most of Sheen's books have been reprinted many times and are still being reprinted today.

Furthermore, Sheen adopts a narrative style based on Christian truths and the contemporary environment. As a teacher, intellectual, populariser, and apologist, Sheen worked on two principles emphasized in an article entitled "Educating for a Catholic Renaissance" in *N.C.E.A. Bulletin XXV*: "Vitalization for the world of Peter and integration for the world of Pan (August, p7, Riley 2004, p21). The principle of vitalization means presenting Christian truth as an 'organic whole' and a practical adaptation of that truth to make it the very soul and unifying spirit" of the student's experiences. Sheen considered faith a living reality, the center of life, and Christian doctrine a "living body of truth" (August 1929, p8). For him,

faith must be more than mere sentimentality. Faith does not just involve believing the truths of the Christian doctrine but converting those doctrines and truths into deeds. Catholic education must enlighten the whole man, not just aspects of man. Consequently, in informing the integral man, education must adapt its wisdom to the reality of the modern world.

The principle of integration implies that Catholic truths and doctrines must be presented to the non-Catholic, not as a foreign or alien entity, but as something capable of developing the best in their system (August 1929, p11). Sheen called integration the new apologetics, a truth familiar to Catholics and non-Catholics. In his theology of mission, he recommended integration as the weapon for missionaries to use in their evangelical work. "One must look for the good in everything, as St. Paul did in Athens" (Riley 2004, p246). Sheen thinks a better approach would be to gather Eastern people's ethical and religious aspirations and point them as so many arrows converging on Christ, the world's savior. God would not be just a person proved to them but rather a satisfaction of the decent aspirations of the human heart. Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, is just as good for the Chinese mind as Aristotle is for Eastern reasons.

The purpose of missionary activity is not to bring Christ to others but out of them (Murphy 2000). To illustrate this point, Sheen advances the Confucian approach. For him, a missionary preaching in China must study how the Chinese think, primarily through Confucius. For Sheen, Confucius is the John the Baptist of China. For him: "It may be short-sightedness to impose the Aristotelian philosophy on the Eastern mind [...] Confucius is just as good for some minds as Aristotle is for others. Our missionaries should start with what is good in the religions they find in their countries" (Sheen 1993, p154). Sheen is convinced that each culture has something helpful to offer to Christianity.

Modern thinkers call it enculturation. Until the Middle Ages, the Western world accepted Aristotle, besides Plato. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote beautiful pages on Plato and affirmed his superiority over Aristotle, thus influencing the next seven centuries. Moreover, when St. Thomas Aquinas started studying him instead of Plato, he was seen as 'modern' or 'reactionary'.

Sheen uses integration principles to speak to Jews among his audiences on the radio and television, followed by Protestants and Catholics. This classification of his audience was taken from the number of letters he received from these groups of people after his broadcasts and telecasts.

Because of his spirit of integration, Sheen had more dialogue with Jews and Protestants following his appointment as the Bishop of Rochester. Ecumenism became one of the sources of his success in the Diocese of Rochester through this method.

In brief, the twinning of these two principles of vitalization and integration shaped Sheen's vision of Christian humanism. These principles were the fruit of many studies, teachings, and experiences of other cultures. He used vitalization and integration to address the problems of man and man as a problem in his time.

3a. Our position on African Humanism, Theology, and Spirituality

African humanism is an ideology that recognizes the coexistence of all humans, irrespective of their creed, religion, culture, tribe, nation, or race. Contrary to the widespread view, African humanism or morality has evolved from its experiences during the Euro-Asian slavery era through colonization and neo-colonization. Others have claimed that African responses to conquest, colonization, and various slave trades along the African coasts involving their engagements with Christians and European merchants and values that appeared through socio-cultural and military arrangements with Muslim empires in the Middle Ages, currently impacting lives, are the cornerstones of humanism in Africa. If we recall, much of eastern Africa is populated by Semitic peoples and their Coptic and Abyssinians--Ethiopian Christianity. Northern Africa has a history of humanism. For his part, Masolo (2019) argues that indigenous African worldviews have seen African philosophers and political visionaries reaching out to indigenous African modes of thought, whether secular or with some supernatural inclinations, as reservoirs of better concepts of human nature that will heal a world broken by unsound images of human nature that not only resulted in unsound epistemological and other philosophical theories, but also produced the injustices of domination, racism, and inequality across the globe.

Humanity in Africa is defined by ancient similarities in cultural practices and views on cosmology, not through a modern lens.

Our position about humanity is informed by our belief that human beings are created in the image of God and that humanity--human beings as a group, and humanity, or *Homo sapiens* are not separate entities. The oldest fossil of the human person and Darwinian position point to Africa as the

cradle of humanity. In his 1871 book *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin guessed that Africa was the cradle of humans because man's two closest living relatives—chimpanzees and gorillas—live there. Erin Wayman, biological anthropologist, science, and human evolution blogger for Hominid Hunting, has further uncovered that a fossil discovery in South Africa in 1924 challenged the view of a Eurasian homeland and revolutionized the study of human evolution and ancestry, leading scientists to see Africa as the origin of the human person (Wayman, 2011). That discovery cancels out findings by 20th century leading anatomists who have misled scholars into believing humans evolved somewhere in Europe where the Neanderthals had been found or in Asia, specifically Indonesia where Java Man or *Homo erectus*) had been erroneously discovered. Wayman (2011) reports that although these ancient beings were primitive, they resembled modern humans.

In contrast, European humanism considers secular naturalism as the only model of humanism, and the modern European humanist tradition uses Christianity as the model of religion. Its thinkers and scribes insist that Christianity discourages human beings from focusing on the value of human action and interaction on earth and favors redemption afterlife. Suppose humanism prioritizes the welfare, worth, and dignity of human beings over anything else. In that case, we can also situate traditions in which human beings do not seek redemption in an afterlife because, for them, punishment or redemption exists only on Earth. Let us revisit African mythology at this point.

From the African perspective, man's life on earth is not more or less secure, even if he has more or less than he needs. So, we cannot realistically highlight Sheen's contribution to African Theology, humanism, and spirituality by focusing only on what he said or did in Africa and without offering our understanding of what we call African humanism—seeing the human being through the African's value system. Some scholars, philosophers, and anthropologists consider African humanism and theology as a set of values brought into Africa by Europeans instead of emerging from sociolinguistic communities on the African continent. For us, the well-being of human and non-human reality depends on advancing and defending values of mutual dependency. We insist that theology is a construct of culture. However, Christians in Western and Eastern Europe, of Roman Catholic or various Protestant or Pentecostal extractions, are reluctant or unable to accept this truth. Our position is grounded in the relational nature of humans among themselves --human interactions--and their connections with nature.

African theology and spirituality are a two-fold phenomenon—a belief based on Kemet and Euro-Christian traditions. The former is premised on the notion that all things have "the quintessential essence (Spirit) of the Creator" within them, be they animate or inanimate in nature. Jacob Olupona, professor of indigenous African religions at Harvard Divinity School and African-American studies in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Science, in an interview published by the Harvard Gazette, says that "African spirituality acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane life" (Olupona, 2015).

African mythology manifests through rituals because the myth barely justifies a tradition adopted without any significant attempt to make a case for it. Ceremonies, festivals, and rituals embody, enact, and reinforce the sacred values communicated through an understanding of myths.

The premise that underlies rituals is the belief that the individual exists as part of a great stream of life that transcends the self and links the individual to a "chain of generations" (Asante and Mazama, 2014). This is a vital aspect of the cultural unity across Africa's diversity. Voodoo is an African-based religion and philosophy that complements the holy structure concept that confirms the interconnectedness between diverse spirits and powers.

3b. Sheen's contribution to African Theology, Humanism, and Spirituality

To understand Sheen's impact on African theology, humanism, and spirituality, we need a historical context of the origin of Christianity on that continent. The Christian faith spread throughout the Roman and Persian Empires and into India in the first and second centuries. As converts, believers in Jesus had to turn their thought processes toward Christ. They were then conditioned to think of Christ in the intellectual framework of their time and place. The eventual result was Christian theology as we know it (Walls, 2004, p6).

Sheen's spiritual impact in Africa begins with his role in the United States of America as the representative of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. In this role, he directed local offices in each diocese in fundraising to help spread the Gospel in Africa, Asia, and other places (Sheen 1993, p106). Here, Sheen may have influenced African theology and spirituality directly or indirectly. The funds he

gathered helped to build schools and health facilities in Africa, especially in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and other mission territories under the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

He visited Africa several times, assisting with education and health activities, and helped missionaries who came to Africa to preach the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments to people such as the White Fathers, the Mill Hill Missionaries, Maryknoll Sisters, and St. Patrick's Society for the Foreign Missions, etc. In this way, he honored Christ's command explained in these words: "Therefore ...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Moreover, surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Consistent with the above universal mission of the Church, the task of missionaries coming to Africa and elsewhere was to bring souls under the discipline of Christ (Sheen 1993). During this period, specifically from the 1920s onward, there was tension between working for personal salvation in a parish or community and showing concern for the social welfare of the people. This concern is further informed by the fact that African communities would struggle to balance African spirituality with Christology. Cognizant of the fact that Secular humanist assumptions lead to the absolutization or stigmatization of human beings, while the Church recognizes the Ultimate and Absolute as God and His Word (Phiri, 2014, p 124), we can gauge the difficulty situating African spirituality within the framework of Christianity or vice versa. Albert Mohler Jr. (2008, p90) has alerted that any accommodation to vague spirituality and New Atheism would jeopardize the future of Christianity.

4. African social justice as a context for understanding Christian spirituality

One cannot adequately discuss the relationship between Christian spirituality and social justice in Africa without considering traditional and non-indigenous religions, focusing only on the positive contributions of religion and tradition to social justice and neglecting the challenges in practicing those religions. All religious practices have productive and harmful effects on knowledge sharers (e.g., preachers, media, scholars) and knowledge consumers (educated and uneducated people, especially the latter). Practicing believers of religion can share practical and

circumstantial evidence about their experience. People who believe their God or deities are real, even if the existence of those supernatural beings has not been empirically proven, have fascinated and confounded scientists for centuries. Now the intersection linking profound religious faith to beneficial, scientifically proven practices like mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy has narrowed because anthropologists and Clinical Social Psychologists know faith can lead to positive mental benefits. In a book published by Princeton University Press in 2020 titled *How God Becomes Real*, anthropologist Tanya Luhmann, drawing on ethnographic studies of evangelical Christians, pagans, magicians, Zoroastrians, Black Catholics, Santeria initiates, and newly orthodox Jews, reveals that faith is resilient because it changes the faithful profoundly.

We introduce the role of religion in African social justice by saying unequivocally that human consciousness transcends rational thinking and is immensely informed by myth and mysteries in human life. This locus does not leave the premise that language and language use define and drive spiritual depth. Without verbal and non-verbal language, we cannot understand spirituality or adequately gauge its influence and potential in determining our psycho-social universe, the supra-physical realm. Molefi Asante and Ama Mazama agree. Language is the lever of myth; it identifies and defines the scope of our understanding of the physical and spiritual universe. The editors remind us that in the gigantic reference, *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, published by Sage in 2014.

Our experiences with African languages and myths convince us that there are thousands of ways of expressing the creation or establishing a proper ritual to recognize an ancestor. One escapes all mutilation of consciousness by appealing to these incredibly rich and varied entries on traditional African religion for a deeper, more profound understanding of African culture (Asante and Mazama, 2014).

Here, we see that African beliefs are shaped by linguistic expressions, what the distinguished Afrocentric scholar, Molefi Asante refers to as 'nommo,' the powers of the word to generate and create reality.

Consistent with that line of argument, we advance that the use of the word has shaped and will continue to shape social justice, civil rights, and human rights. Social justice in Africa can strengthen Christian spirituality, especially in traditional societies animated by community spirit. The African theologian could use that enthusiastic interest to introduce the teachings of the Church in African theology. To understand his role here, we must provide our historical perspective of the African people's

traditional African society and Indigenous religions. African conventional societies were passionately interested in supporting social justice. There were conventions or customs against killing, stealing, and other crimes. However, there was a distorted concern for the individual. Africans offered sacrifices to the gods and their ancestors out of fear and not out of love. Sheen elaborates on this position in the following text:

A mother from the Bantu ethnic group in Congo believed that the evil spirits were disturbing her child, although she only had whooping cough. It never entered the woman's mind to call on the name of God — although the Bantus had a reputation for God, *Nzakomiba*. God was utterly foreign to these people and was presumed to be disinterested in human woes. Their big problem was how to avoid evil spirits. This is the fundamental characteristic of missionary lands: pagan peoples are more concerned with pacifying devils than loving God. The missionary sister, a doctor who treated and cured the child, tried to convince the woman that God is love (Sheen 1996, p183).

We see the herculean and heroic task ahead of the African Christian theologian to persuade African Christians that God is all about love. Conversely, fear is causing mothers and fathers to seek help; thus, sticking to animist beliefs is a reality and poses a challenge for the individual in modern society. Fear and trust, here, are similar in that they are controlled and decided by faith. Belief refers to any claim or intuition—imagined or evidence-based—or a commitment to the thought that there is or might be a spirit. A sustained commitment to the idea that a spirit oversees or is involved with human existence—life in terrestrial space—is a human phenomenon. We do not have complete control of our living circumstances. It means the other—spiritual power-- is involved in our daily activities and experiences.

The African belief system is based on mystical, invisible, hidden, spiritual powers operating in the universe. God, identified in over one thousand languages, is the origin of this power. Still, it is hierarchically possessed by other divine sources, spirits, and the living dead, available to people at diverse levels. The beliefs encompass the worship of gods, ancestors, and spirits and are based on the understanding that the spiritual infuses every aspect of daily life. African traditional spirituality, albeit communitarian, centers on the union of God's love and neighbor's love. The centrality of love supersedes the fear of African orthodox spirituality—fear induces belief and trust in the gods and ancestors.

Further, investments in old beliefs only extend fear; they do not end it. Thus, African Christians must be transcendent in lifting the eyes and mind to heaven to experience fraternal love. For Sheen, authentic African spirituality has human liberation as an integral part of spirituality; “they are as united as creation and redemption” (Sheen 1993, p108). He further explains that authentic spirituality should have “the balance between the personal and the societal, between the vertical and the horizontal, between the human and the divine” (Sheen 1993, p109).

5. Sheen’s humanitarian work in Africa

One of the first places Sheen visited was a leper colony in Buluba, in Mayuge District, Uganda. He distributed crucifixes, the symbol of God’s identification with man, to the people with leprosy, furthering the belief that spirituality consists of total identification in love with suffering. He also visited Kenya on 20 November 1960 to ordain Bishop Joseph Brendan Houlihan, St. Patrick’s Society for the Foreign Missions priest. This visit convinced him that soul saving goes hand in glove with society saving (Sheen 1993). This conviction came because, shortly after the ordination, the new bishop invited him to survey the diocese’s territory and meet the people. They visited an area where the people were all naked, and the new Bishop told Sheen that he would start a clinic if he had six hundred dollars. Sheen assured him of the money, and today the people are evangelized. This made Sheen understand why Jesus called us not only to preach the Gospel but also to heal. This suggests that evangelization is not limited to the proclamation of the Word of God but can help liberate us from ignorance, poverty, and sickness.

Sheen also recounts that he traveled to Muslim parts of Africa, where he came face to face with the role of Christianity in the world. He describes the influence of Islam on Christianity in Africa. Muslim power practically destroyed the Church in North Africa. The number of bishops in this continent was reduced from 750 in the seventh century to five in the 11th century. This continent needs to be re-evangelized because of the Muslim invasion. “Many of our great missionaries in Africa have already broken down the bitter hatred and prejudices between the Muslims and the Christians through their acts of charity, schools, and hospitals” (Sheen 1996, pp200, 204, 268, Sheen 1963, p29).

Sheen’s experience in Africa changed him from thinking more about poverty to thinking more about people experiencing poverty. He recounts this change in his autobiography as follows:

On another visit to South Africa, I came face to face with the horrors of apartheid. I began to think less of the problem of poverty and more of the poor; less of the problem of crime and more of the criminal; less about age and more about service to a stranger who lives with all the slum dwellers who have no place to lay their heads (Sheen 1993, pp150-151).

Sheen supports the idea that the difficulties in Africa will be resolved if people love and forgive each other. African Christian theology and spirituality should focus on the oneness of humanity, love, and forgiveness. These solutions to the continent's problems are prophetic, reiterated by the two synods of the Church in Africa under Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In the appeal, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II sees: "Despite the modern civilization of the 'global village,' the spirit of dialogue, peace, and reconciliation is far from dwelling in the hearts of everyone. Wars, conflicts, racist and xenophobic attitudes still play too significant a role in the world of human relations" (John Paul II, September 14, 1995, no. 51). For his part, Benedict XVI scribbles the following lines in *Africae Munus*:

Africa needs to hear the voice of Christ, who today proclaims the love of neighbor, love even of one's enemies, to the point of laying down one's life: the voice of Christ who prays today for the unity and communion of all people in God (Cf. John 17:20-21) (Benedict XVI, November 19, 2011, nos. 12.13, 28).

6. Lessons learned from Sheen's contribution to African theology, humanism, and spirituality

Based on the analyses of Sheen's role in African humanism and spirituality supported by the two synodic proclamations, one of the great themes for African theologians should be the love of God, neighbor, and the enemy. Life based on love prevails over the power of death.

We can learn from Sheen's sense of the oneness of humanity, the power of love and forgiveness inspired by Father Albert Abble's poem, *The Black Virgin* – which opens with the following words: "I am looking for an African painter who will make me a Black Virgin." Moreover, it ends with the following words "Is it not true, Mother, that you are the Mother of the Black people, too? A Black Mother carrying the Infant Jesus on her back" (*Les Prêtres Noirs s'Interrogent* 1957). Sheen exploits the concept of motherhood and love in religion as the key to God's love and draws inspiration from a story from the Bantu ethnic groups of Congo (Sheen 1963). Sheen's writings and thoughts bring pertinent themes for the African theologian to develop African theology and spirituality. These

themes include individual and social justice, the conviction that God is love, love of God, love of one's neighbor, and even love of enemies.

7. Sheen as a Thomistic Philosopher

Sheen is a leading exponent of the Church's Thomistic revival, especially in America. William M. Halsey considers Sheen "America's most successful representative of every man's Thomism" (Halsey 1980, p156). Sheen distinguishes himself as a Thomistic philosopher through his association and works as a Catholic University of America lecturer. However, we looked at some political and religious figures a few centuries ago to understand Sheen's rise to the heights of a distinguished Thomistic philosopher.

Sheen's training in Thomism comes from the philosophy faculty at the University of Louvain in Belgium, under Désiré-Joseph Cardinal Mercier, who views the revival of Thomistic philosophy as the solution to false science. In 1882, the University created the chair of Thomistic Philosophy in response to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, published on 4 August 1879. The Pope provides a template for a program to restore the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. He harmonizes Thomistic philosophy with progress in modern science (Wyllema, cited in *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 1967, Vol.9, p671).

Thomistic philosophy was the epicenter of the curriculum in Louvain, which included the study of metaphysics, experimental psychology, rational psychology, cosmology, Aristotle, Plato, modern space and time, and American pragmatism. Sheen stresses that professors treated Aquinas as a contemporary figure. He finds Thomism as "the rock upon which to build his priestly vocation, as a secure refuge and point of origin for the multiple roads he would later follow" (Riley 2004, p246, Sheen 1996, p75).

Thomistic ideas permeate Sheen's publications. Mark S. Massa (1999) refers to this fact when he writes that "the not-so-hidden subtext of Sheen's message was relentlessly Catholic, Thomistic, and Neo-Scholastic" (Massa 1999, p97). Pride of place can be given to his doctoral thesis: *God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy: A Critical Study in the Light of the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, later published as his first book. This work was acclaimed in the academic community as a significant contribution to neo-Thomism. Sheen contends that the two great problems confronting modern philosophy were God's immanence, essential nature in the universe, and the subjectivity of human thought. Sheen calls it the

“anti-intellectualism assault” upon reason, logic, proof, and truth. For him, all religion hangs on the first and all science on the second. The answer to both problems is in Thomistic Intellectualism (Sheen 2009, pp13-14, 24). Other works marked by Thomistic philosophy included *Religion Without God*, *The Life of All the Living*, *Philosophy of Science*, and *Philosophy of Religion*. In *Religion Without God*, Thomas C. Reeves comments:

In 1928, Sheen brought out *Religion Without God*, a sequel to his dissertation published by Longmans-Green. Like *God and Intelligence*, it is a scholarly study of contemporary philosophy, decrying attacks on the traditional Christian understanding of God and employing the works of Thomas Aquinas to argue the truths of the Catholic faith (Reeves 2001, p61).

In another comment on *Philosophy of Science*, the biographer writes that Sheen tried to bring modern science, especially mathematics, and physics, into line with Thomistic philosophy (Reeves 2001). Sheen's fundamental purpose in writing this book was to demonstrate that science, the authority most widely trusted and respected in the modern world, needed St. Thomas's superior and timeless philosophy to explain the profound meanings of its findings. This is because science treats only reality based on abstraction and not the whole of reality. Nevertheless, metaphysics treats the whole of existence as “a being – whereas the particular sciences treat only an aspect of that whole” (Sheen 1934, p188).

Sheen does not deny that the other sciences contain some elements of truth about reality. However, he wants us to realize that they provide only a partial truth. Nevertheless, the science that seeks to understand the truth about reality can be found in the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. His lectures on themes like: “God and the Universe”, “God and Theology”, “God and Modern Philosophy”, “Modern Idea of God”, and “Humanism and Religion” (Riley 2004, p19, Reeves 2001, p74) at the Catholic University of America in the 1930s, manifest a great bent towards Thomistic philosophy. It bears repeating that Thomistic philosophy formed and shaped Sheen's Christian humanism. If he used Thomistic philosophy, as he admits, to seek solutions to contemporary problems, and if one of those problems at that time was the problem of the nature of man, then this Thomistic background is relevant to our topic. He used Aquinas' philosophy to correct the partial views of man's nature proposed by modern philosophy, science, and ideological systems. This is evident in his *Philosophy of Religion*, in the eleventh chapter, entitled “Man as a Problem” (Sheen 1952). Sheen was determined to advance the Christian faith, which had Thomism as a tremendous intellectual heritage, to address

the crises plaguing his time, which had enormous negative repercussions on man's dignity. A wounded pride of man sparks off concerns in society and affects the times people live.

8. Sheen on the crises of his time

These crises were political, economic, social, and religious. The major political crises were the two great world wars, demonstrating man-to-man's inhumanity. The Spanish Civil War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and other civil wars compounded the political atmosphere's turbulence. These battles convinced Sheen that a critical and objective analysis of war could lead to an enduring solution to the crises. That is why he spent an extraordinary time reflecting on the concept of war.

He tried in various broadcasts to give a theological interpretation of the wars. He sought to answer the universal question: "Whence Comes War?" (This question was the title of a series of broadcasts he delivered in the 1940s. These were later published as a book, like other broadcasts).

When the Second World War broke out, Sheen was convinced that the First World War had never ended since the peace the countries tried to forge did not last. According to Sheen, from God's point of view, there were two reasons for war: "War may be either something to be waged in the name of God or something to be undergone at the hands of God [...] either a vindication of Divine Justice or chastisement from Divine Justice" (Sheen 1940, pp1-13).

For Sheen, the irreligious attitude of the world and the denial of the principles of social justice were the foundational causes of the wars in the world. Therefore, Sheen was convinced that injustice triggered the war and that man had forgotten or ignored God. He taught that if the violence ravaging the world was due to a lack of justice, then international order could only be restored by returning to the principles of justice outlined in the wisdom of the Catholic Church. By this, he implied that justice and peace must not be separated.

While acknowledging that war could also be the judgment of God, Sheen saw in war the opportunity for restoring the world to its original order through a return to Christian civilization. In line with the Church, he argued that twinning the ideals of justice and peace would foster the growth of more Christian culture. Hence, we could say that in line with the Church in condemning the calamities of war, Sheen had a message of hope

for the people. Another way Sheen interpreted war theologically was to look at it regarding the cross and redemption. He asserted that before the resurrection, the symbol of the cross loomed. In *The Cross and the Crisis*, Sheen quoted Nicholas Berdyaev, who said, "Christianity is the religion of the Cross, and it sees meaning in suffering" (Berdyaev, cited in Sheen 1938, p17) to sustain this point of view. He saw the cross of Christ in the suffering brought by war, which he encouraged people to endure and embrace, for it was the way to peace and the world's redemption. For him, there was no reason for despair; many returned to God through war trials.

This theological interpretation of war by Sheen is legitimate. However, we agree with Kathleen Riley that it was simplistic, generic, and general and did not analyze the causes of conflict that begin with the individual (Riley 2004). This was probably because, as he stated in his autobiography, he believed that the struggle in the world was not economic or political but religious and theological; people were either for God or atheism. Another reason could have been that he was trying to show that American Catholics, through their support of the war effort, would demonstrate irrevocably that Americanism and Catholicism were compatible. Though his insistence on the ideals of justice and peace was agreed upon by most of his audience, they did not explain the complexities of the political, social, and economic causes of world crises and wars.

Experience today shows that wars result from the selfishness and egoism of man. Pope Francis recently alluded to this fact during a prayer vigil for peace in Syria when he said that battle begins:

When man, the summit of creation, stops contemplating beauty and goodness and withdraws into his selfishness. When a man thinks only of himself and his interests and places himself in the center when he permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power, when he puts himself in God's place, all relationships are broken, and everything is ruined. The door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict (Francis, September 7, 2013, www. the Vatican. va. Para. 1).

As a result of this human greed, many disregard human lives lost in the war to achieve their selfish aims. The money from arms and sought-after natural resources is valued more than human life. Sheen acknowledged this fact through his frequent journeys to third-world countries. Sheen agrees with Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn that "the lines separating good and evil passed not through states, between classes, or political parties either – but right through every human heart [...] It is impossible to expel evil from the world entirely, but it is possible to constrict it within each person"

(Solzhenitsyn 1975, pp615-616). This insight led Sheen to change from ideology to economics, politics, and social order. What stands out is that war was man's greatest enemy, threatening his dignity and freedom.

Additionally, totalitarian regimes of communism were growing in Russia on the political level, fascism in Italy, and Nazism in Germany. These regimes also created the significant racial and religious persecution problem that Sheen struggled to address. These crises significantly affected the dignity of man and humanity. Naturally, political instability breeds a fragile economic system and causes social problems.

In the 1920s, America experienced the Great Depression, negatively impacting its economy. A broken economic system creates harsh social repercussions and provokes the question of social justice. Sheen encountered these problems first-hand in his student years. He experienced them later when he started to work as a young lecturer at the Catholic University of America. Furthermore, in his work and experience as the National Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, he gained greater insight into the issues unsettling his time. He also had to grapple with the problem of civil rights and the situation of blacks in America. Thus, his years of studies, teaching, and experiences probably equipped him to address these crises.

He tackled the crises by trying to help people to discern the real meaning behind them. He understood the reasons to be both religious and theological. He sought answers from political, economic, social, and spiritual perspectives. In the years before, during, and after the Second World War, Sheen “tried to bring about the profound renewal of the Christian spirit that the Holy Father had called for as the only guarantee of lasting peace” (Riley 2004, p86). As a prophet of his time, he drew the attention of all to the reality that man has lost his purpose in life and has turned away from his creator, the creator who was supposed to be his goal and destiny. Sheen’s objective was to assist people in realizing that the solution to the current crises lay in the rediscovery of their creator or the rediscovery of the spiritual nature of man. In the attempt to address the crises posed by the political regimes in Europe, he frequently moved into foreign affairs and politics, professing patriotism and support for a just war. In elucidating this, Sheen shows the harmony between the principles of Christianity and democracy, albeit always guided by a theological perspective.

According to Sheen, war experience illustrated the perennial theological problem of evil. In this way, Sheen characterized the crises of his day as moral and religious. In his book *The Cross and the Crisis*, he propounds these ideas, an expanded version of an earlier radio series entitled *The Prodigal World*, broadcast in 1936. He thought that the crises in the world had their roots in the rise of dictatorships: Communism, fascism, and Nazism; the deficiency of social justice and ramifications of the Great Depression; and, religiously, in the denial of the true spiritual nature of man (Sheen 1938). Also, Western civilization (a prodigal world) had exiled itself from its Christian roots. The only means of restoration were sought in Christian principles and beliefs. Sheen predicted that “a day is fast coming when Christians will have to unite in real Christianity to preserve it against the anti-Christian [...] what is all-important is spiritual regeneration, for our ills will be cured by forces not involved in the crisis itself” (Sheen 1938, viii). This was because victory and peace could only come through the Christian spirit's profound renewal. His originality and uniqueness lie in that he presented this fact in a way that appealed to people of all faiths and those with no religious affiliation. He thought peace could return to the world by people listening to the Church. He saw the Church as the only moral authority in the modern world and the bulwark of human freedom. With this, Sheen recommended that a militant stand by the Church and an activist spirit of democracy could secure the triumph of good over evil.

Besides the political (especially the war), economic, social, and religious crises, one of the world's issues that Sheen addressed throughout his life and with all his strength was communism. What he said about it was also true of fascism and Nazism. Sheen believed communism was the greatest threat to the world, human life, human dignity, and human freedom. It was a cankerworm to be fought tooth and nail.

9. Sheen on communism

Pope Pius XI saw “atheistic communism” (March 19, 1937) as a great danger to social order and the foundation of Christian civilization. He urged Sheen to speak repeatedly against it, warning America of its risks to humanity. He saw atheistic communism as the greatest enemy and a mortal societal threat. Sheen did not miss any opportunity to speak against it in his life. Kathleen Riley says anti-communism was one of her greatest interests in Sheen (Riley 2004). Similarly, Charles P. Connor affirms that

“Bishop Sheen wrote extensively on communism throughout his career” (Connor 2010, p13).

Sheen’s critical and sound arguments against communism were inspired and enlightened by Thomistic Philosophy. Thomism embraces God, man, and society. However, Sheen would not have written and spoken against communism without a profound knowledge of this ideology. He did this through a keen and extensive study of the works of Karl Marx and the encyclicals of the Popes against atheistic communism. They were Pope Pius XI (*Atheistic Communism, Divini Redemptoris* (On the Divine Redeemer), and *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Bitter Sorrow)) and Pope Pius XII (*The Mystical Body of Christ*) (Murphy 2000). The reading of significant and popular communist publications and newspapers exposed the flaws of communism to him. For Kathleen Riley, “Fulton Sheen’s denunciation of communism stemmed from his quest to answer the errors of modern philosophy and to bridge the gap separating the Church and the modern world” (Riley 2004, p131).

Sheen attacked the fallacies of communism from ideological and practical perspectives. This is evident in his works. Some of these writings are *Communism Answers Questions of a Communist* (1937), *The Cross and the Crisis* (1938), *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* (1938), *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (1948), *Ideological Fallacies of Communism* (1957), and *The Church, Communism, and Democracy* (1964).

Sheen saw communism as a philosophy of life that mobilizes souls purely for economic and secular ends. The spiritual nature of man was denied. Marx even referred to religion as the opium of the people. Consequently, the persecution of faith and the denial of worship's freedom gave society a more incredible grip. The absence of God gave rise to Godless thought (Connor 2010). Communism threatened world freedom. The primary motive in Sheen’s fight was the defense of human freedom, especially religious liberty and the dignity of man. Thus, the communist philosophy of life propounded a distorted notion of man.

That notwithstanding, while condemning the evils of communism, Sheen, at the same time, acknowledged its slight advantages. This can be traced back to 1934 in one of his books, *Moods and Truths*. He asserts, “Bolshevism, too, is grounded on a very Catholic principle, which is the Brotherhood of Man, but it has exaggerated it so far as to leave no room for the Sovereignty of God” (Sheen 1950, p90). In 1937, he aptly expressed this in his *Communism Answers Questions of a Communist*,