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The concept of Κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 and its contextual application in Africa

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The interpretation of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 has been widely approached using the historical critical method, which is mostly western oriented, but a contextual approach of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 from the perspective of African Christology in relation to African leadership style is lacking. Therefore, using the African biblical contextual approach, the article reinterprets the term κένωσις based on African christology with the aim of reinterpreting κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 in the context of African leadership style, and also with intension to critique the African model of leadership. It argues that Jesus as a leader figure as represented in the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 is a model of selfless leadership which is lacking in African leadership figures. The article also intends to show how the description of Jesus' attitude in Philippians 2:6–7 reflects humility, selflessness and servant-leadership as against African leadership style, which is characterised by self-conceit, selfishness, ostentations, splendour and bossiness.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This essay reinterprets the concept of kenosis in Philippians 2:6–7 in the context of African Christology and how it resonates with selfless leadership as exemplified in Pauline description of Jesus Christ in the text. From observation, leadership in various spheres of the society in Africa, such as ecclesiastical, political and traditional, lack selflessness as indicated in this article. This article, therefore, cuts across the field of biblical theology, historical theology, political science and African cultural studies.

Keywords: concept of Kenosis; Philippians 2:6–7; African Christology; contextualisation; African leadership style.

Introduction

Theological interpretation of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 has been widely approached by Western scholars using western-oriented methods. Such scholars include Beare (1959:1–163), Kasemann (1968:45–88), Lieb (1970:342–360), Sanders (1971:73–74), Jowers (2006:739–766), Bertschmann (2018:235–254) and many others too numerous to mention here. However, a contextual approach of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 from the perspective of African Christology in relation to African leadership style is lacking. This article intends to reinterpret κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 in the context of African Christology and leadership style. This does not mean that African scholars have not contributed in this aspect of research but very scanty when compared to the West. For instance, from a South African perspective, Msiza (1999:134) submits that 'Africans expect leaders to have a vision and to lead; and that this is not dictatorship but a way of affirming leaders'. However, this expectation has often been chattered by the style of leadership being exhibited in religious, traditional and political spheres of African societies. Whilst this may be typical of some African countries, the reverse is the case in some other settings. Episcopalism in some church communities and Monarchism in some political or cultural settings are sometimes being abused by those to whom power has been given to lead. This article, therefore, argues that the Jesus model of selflessness in Philippians 2:6–7 is lacking in African leadership style and as such seeks to re-interpret the term κένωσις within African context of power and leadership and to critique African leadership style. This amounts to reading the Bible into African socio-cultural situation or reading African socio-cultural situation into the Bible. Whatever way we see it, this type of reading aims at making biblical lessons relevant to African situations. This is generally being referred to in African biblical scholarship as African contextual reading of the Bible or African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH). African scholars have come to terms with this method of biblical scholarship. For instance, Nyiawung (2013) succinctly puts it thus:

> [C]ontextualisation of biblical interpretation in Africa refers to an approach in biblical criticism, which takes the African worldview into consideration. As a hermeneutical and contextual approach,

> it emphasises a move from what the text meant to its original audience to what it means to Africans in their context. (p. 1)

Another African scholar, David Adamo did not differ in this line of thought when he states that 'African biblical hermeneutics is a methodological resource that makes African social cultural contexts the subject of interpretation' (Adamo 2015a:59). This method of reading the Bible, therefore, puts into consideration the African context depending on what aspect that is being considered at a point in time. In particular, this article will explore the model of inculturation hermeneutics. The inculturation hermeneutics according to Justin Ukpong is an approach that seeks to treat the religious and secular aspects of culture as interconnected (Ukpong 2002:17–32, 2006:23). Hence, this present reading of Philippians 2:6–7 focuses mainly on reinterpreting the concept of κένωσις in the context of African Christology and leadership style. Leadership here will be treated from the ecclesiastical, cultural and political points of view as the same. This is why Msiza's definition of 'church leadership or pastors does not differ so much from that of community leaders, because after all they are all community leaders'. This article will be situated in the context of existing literature such as the works of Williams (2004:623), Dunn (1989:31, 116), Martin (1983:170), Feinberg (1980:21), and others will form the theoretical framework.

Conceptual framework

The interpretation of κένωσις has taken several dimensions of arguments over the years. Philippians 2:6–7 suggests that Jesus emptied Himself of His deity to become a man to give man salvation. In this line of thought, Williams (2004:623) argues that 'Philippians 2:7 describes the kenosis of Christ as Christ's free choice to limit himself for the sake of human salvation'. This implies that Jesus' act of emptying Himself of His deity is an act of personal choice. This is called selflessness or humility. It could also be seen as an explanation of the incarnation. Although the idea of Christ's kenosis is an explanation of the incarnation, it has generated considerable controversy and has largely seemed inconclusive and confusing. Irrespective of any apprehension of inconclusiveness in the argument of kenosis in Philippians 2:5–8, it is clear that in this process, Christ did humble Himself (Williams 2004:623–624). Scholars are not also in the dark in this understanding. For example, in the views of Dunn (1989:31, 116) and Martin (1983:170), they argue that Christology without divinity is metaphorical and as such, it should not be viewed from a metaphysical interpretation. Whether Philippians 2:3–11 is viewed from a metaphysical or metaphorical point of view, there is still the element of true humility and selflessness in the passage. Therefore, the concept of kenosis in all its ramifications points to deliberate self-denial and ego resignation. This type of attitude negates the African style of Church leadership which is predicated on ego and power.

For the purpose of further explanation, the passage was also predicated on incarnation theology. The incarnation is described as a humiliation or emptying (κενόω) in Philippians 2:7. The whole passage (2.5–11) is important because it is one of the great Christological texts of the New Testament and because it has been cited in support of a modern theory on the Incarnation known as *kenoticism* (Carmody 2003:article-1G2). Feinberg (1980:21) contributes that the Person and work of Jesus Christ are at the heart of Christian theology. Historically, this has led the theologian to an investigation of the incarnation and humiliation of the saviour. Thus, a consideration of the kenosis has been thought to be unavoidable in Christology. Feinberg (1980:21) explains further that 'kenosis' comes from the Greek verb in Philippians 2:7, and it is translated variously as He 'emptied Himself' or 'made himself of no reputation'. Moreover, the concept of kenosis is first found in Patristic literature and is used thereafter almost as a synonym for incarnation and as such, the central concern is with the nature of Christ's condescension and humiliation whilst he was in the flesh and clearly the most important biblical text on this topic is Philippians 2:6–11. It has a parallel reading in 2 Corinthians 8:9 and John 17:5. Atkinson (2015:115–121) also showed in his work that the personhood of Jesus is evident in the New Testament. For Atkinson, the Godhead is expressed in three personalities but the Son is both divine and human when He emptied Himself.

In the same point of view, Murphy (2012:157–165) states that Philippians 2:7 refers to the kenosis (the self-limitation) of the Son of God and how he became human. This raises the question of how the omniscient God could become a man without loosing His full deity. Murphy explained that God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ in the sense that the one who is 'true God from true God' became fully human. Murphy's (2012:157–165) central argument is predicated on the *dome* and water above theory. More important than the *dome* and the waters above theory is the fact that the biblical accounts of cosmic and biological origins are from today's scientific stand-point, obsolete. On this note, Miller (ed. 2003:1–5) points out that a wall of difference exists between scriptural account of human origin and biological evolution theory. This suggests that there is a clear-cut difference between biblical text and scientific postulations, especially when it applies to the bible. It is, therefore, safer to arrive at something more reasonable when theological and biblical interpretation principles are used in the interpretation of the kenosis, especially as presented in Philippians 2:5–8. Some scholars do not differ in this line of thought. This could be why Williams (2004:623–640) sees the concept of kenosis as striking, especially in the context of the affirmation of the full deity of the second Person of the Trinity, which has attracted a vast amount of scholarly attention as to its meaning. Just like others in this line of argument, he opined further that kenosis implies that Jesus divested Himself of the full attributes of deity; he in fact 'emptied' Himself of his Godly attributes in order to become fully human and ultimately die on the cross. This act has been seen as part of the process of atonement by which human salvation was achieved. William cited the influential scholar, Dunn

(1989:116), in regard to keeping with his advocacy of an 'Adam Christology', which has rejected such a metaphysical interpretation in favour of viewing the kenosis as explained by the next phrase in the hymn. According to this explanation, Jesus accepted the powerlessness of a slave. William citing Martin (1983:170) also supports this view, believing that the emptying must be interpreted metaphorically. Such an approach would be consistent with 2 Corinthians 8:9, which is often cited to support the idea of kenosis. It may be commented that this 'powerlessness' is indeed part of Christ's kenosis, and in fact crucifixion was a punishment reserved for slaves and for insurrectionists, even if the accusation of the latter was the official justification for Jesus' execution. If, however, a more traditional Christology is accepted, especially in keeping with Chalcedon, such an idea can be a part of the whole picture.

Drawing on existing literature in this domain of research, the concept of Κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 will be understood to mean humility and selflessness because viewing the concept from a metaphysical or metaphorical point of view does not eliminate the element of true humility and selflessness in the text. It is, therefore, plausible to interpret or recognise the concept of Κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 as something that has to do with deliberate self-denial and ego resignation in all its ramifications. The attitude of deliberate self-denial or ego resignation or selflessness is lacking in the African leadership system both in the Church, political and customary cultures. This is the aspect this article intends to explore in terms of applying the description of Jesus' kenosis in Philippians 2:6–7.

African Christology and contemporary context of interpretation of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7

Here, two perspectives will be explored. First is the concept of African Christology as a domain of contemporary theological study in the light of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7. Second is the African leadership system which will be explored as a contemporary context of the interpretation of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7.

African Christology in the light of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7

Theological studies from African perspective are mostly contextual in approach such that African cosmology and cultural understandings are brought to bare in the construction of theology. This is done to make theological or biblical interpretation to become congenial with the Church in Africa. Moreover, the construction of African theology or methodology of biblical interpretation is also done to bridge the gap that has been created by cultural distance between the culture of bible time and African culture. By doing so, it intends to make biblical or theological interpretation congenial with the Church in Africa and its society. This is why the focus and method of biblical research differ between the West and Africa because Western audience, to whom theological studies and biblical interpretation are done, are more of professionals in the field of biblical or theological studies, than that of African cuts across professionals and the ordinary readers including catechumen or Church people (Adamo 2015b:31–52; Anum 2008:143–165; Gifford 2008:203–219; West 2008:37–64; Wielenga 2010:699–721). As such, doing theological or biblical studies that has no relevance to African life and thought will create more gap, and this becomes irrelevant to the Church in African cultural milieus. Furthermore, it will make Jesus Christ a foreign personality if He cannot be connected with the Church and the people. African method of biblical or theological interpretation is very young when compared to other climes where biblical and theological research studies have been in existence for centuries. Scholars have shown that the search for indigenous African Christian theology has been on ground since the 1950s (Tiénou 1990:73–74). Whilst attempting this aspect of research, African scholars have also acknowledged the complexity that is involved in African theological construct, especially as it concerns the description, definition and accurately assessing African theology (Magezi & Igba 2018:4590; McGlory 2016:204–224; Tiénou 1990:73–77). The reason for this was also given by Magezi and Igba (2018:4590) by stating that 'this arises from the fact that the quest for a definitive African theology is a fairly recent pursuit, as well as the vastness and diversity of the African continent'. A preposition of this nature seemed to discourage further African contextual theology and biblical interpretation in the sense that his submission seemed straitened. However, such narrative has been put straight by African scholars as well. Nwuzor (1997) has shown that

> [*I*]n current-day African theology, probably the most developed area is that of Christology, which treats the Person and the identity of Jesus Christ. This is logical, because evangelisation in Africa is centred on the Person of Christ. (p. 1)

African Christology is therefore about the 'Incarnation of Christ-genuine and definitive divine intervention in human history, apex of God's self-communication to man in space and time' (Nwuzor 1997:1). This has become the nucleus of African Christianity in the sense that 'the Son of God became incarnate within the context of the Jewish people, assuming their mentality, customs, and traditional ways of life' (Nwuzor 1997:1). This is an aspect this present article is exploring from the perspective of the Concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 and how such understanding is relevant in African context. The resonance of such theological enterprise is to put into consideration how Christ is relevant to religious and secular aspect of the African society. Here, a pentagonal domain of African life will be used to situate validity of African Christology.

Firstly, the domain of personality cult and ancestorship. In African culture, personality cult in this context simply refers to human figures who are great leaders at the family or societal level and have genuinely become successful such

that they show others the way and as a result have become very popular and respected in the society and beyond. In Africa, those who have proven to be leaders indeed in their family circle or societal responsibility are eventually venerated in the society. These sets of people are almost being deified by those who respect them. Even at their death, the living still venerates them through certain rituals, especially in sacrifices and pouring of libations. Those who venerate them try to make out of them a deity (apotheosis). This is where ancestral veneration also comes in. Africans believe in the living dead (Idowu 1991:179; Mbiti 1990:81–83; Ukwamedua 2018:24–40). The status of an ancestor is not automatic, and the individual must merit such status before such dead person can be venerated because

> [*T*]he ancestors are certain individuals of the past generations of a lineage who are said to have distinguished themselves in many ways and in particular, those who have led virtuous and exemplary lives worthy of emulation by succeeding generations of the lineage. (Ukwamedua 2018:26 citing Gyekye 1996:162)

Generation to generation is encouraged to take a cue of the veneration of such dead individuals. This domain of knowledge has a resonance with the personality of Jesus Christ in Africa, especially amongst Christians. When the missionaries brought to Africa the εὐαγγέλιον (Good News) about the Lord Jesus Christ, it was easier for Africans to understand. The narrative of the Gospel as it concerns Jesus in His immediate Jewish cultural setting was relatively similar to African folklores but the difference is that Jesus' personality goes beyond a normal African personality myth. The Jesus Christ presented in the Gospels was a perfect man with high level of morality and integrity. As such, He is a worthy ancestor of the African Christianity whose moral probity surpasses others (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:144). Also, the man is seen as both human and superhuman who performs miracle and directs people to the Supreme Being. He is seen from the narrative as a good man who is worthy of emulation though, not an indigene of Africa by birth. This type of personality can easily draw the attention of Africans. They eventually studied about Him and accepted Him, His teaching and His claim as God as genuine.

Secondly, the domain of incarnation. The concept of incarnation in Christian theology refers to the belief that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, also known as God the Son or the λόγος (Word), was made flesh by being conceived in the womb of a woman called the Virgin Mary and was born. This theological understanding is more rooted in Johannine literature and Pauline corpus, especially in John 1:1–14 and Philippians 2:5–8, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Romans 8:3–4, Galatians 4:4–6. In Christian orthodoxy, Jesus Christ is being understood, as the Son of God, as *homoousios*, that is, as someone who is of the same substance as the Father, and both fully human and fully divine (Eaglen 2006:1). This theological understanding was drawn from the Council of Nicaea, 325CE and Council of Chalcedon 451CE. In African Indigenous religion, incarnation is understood from the view point of reincarnation. It is believed for instance amongst the Urhobo of Nigeria that when a person dies without fulfilling his *urievwe* (destiny), such person goes back into the womb of the mother or another family member to be reborn in order to come and fulfil his or her *urievwe*. Also, the concept of an ancestor being reincarnated is also present in African indigenous religion. This is quite different from the Christian understanding of incarnation. However, the knowledge of reincarnation is useful in African understanding of incarnation theology. Apart from the colonial intention of the missionaries, when they came to Africa, they preached Jesus Christ who is the son of God. It was explained further by the missionaries that Jesus is the son of God in the sense that He is God who came in human flesh to save men from their sins. African Christians believe this because they know that this narrative is true. In their reading of the Bible, they accepted the narrative because of its ability to dialogue with African life experience. As such, Jesus is being seen as the incarnate Word of God. The narrative as shown in the Gospel convinces the African Christian, thereby making him or her to accept Jesus Christ as personal Lord and saviour. This is what is being referred to by scholars as flesh and blood experiential theology in the sense that African Christians see Jesus as God incarnate in human flesh and their saviour from sin and eternal death (Tshehla 2015:293). The acceptance of Jesus Christ by African Christians on the basis of His deity and humanity is a manifestation of the Gospels which are written 'record of the way the earthly Jesus impressed himself upon the early Christians' (Ukpong 1994:43).

Thirdly, is the domain of messianic figure. Messianic figures are highly respected in African life experience. Such figure could be human, animal or abstract. A messianic figure in African life or folklore experiences are people who in the past have helped in one way or the other in saving the community from being annihilated or from being invaded by her enemies. A messianic figure maybe someone who had sacrificed something for the good of the entire people. In some cases, such heroic figure is respected by way of creating an effigy in commemoration of such individual. In African folklore, animals could be seen as messianic figure. Such animals are believed to have helped in saving the people of a community during war. For instance, amongst the Orogun people of Delta State in Nigeria, it is believed that the iguana was once their helper during war and as such, the iguana is to be respected and preserved. It is locally called *inenerode* (big mama) and must not be killed. The spirit of the ancestor is also believed as helper of the living and as such, spirits are being respected and consulted in time of trouble. So, when Jesus was presented in the Bible as the Messiah of the world, it was easier for Africans to understand because the narratives which were recorded in the Bible were true and could be validated in African life experience. For instance, the African people, especially amongst the southern Nigeria of West Africa, believe that there are places referred to as evil forest where evil spirits and other bad things reside. No one enters and comes out alive. But to the surprise of the people, when the missionaries came to Africa, the community gave them such land with the mind that the Missionaries and their

followers will be killed by such evil spirits but that did not happen when they (the missionaries) built their Churches. The location of some of the mainline Churches in Southern Nigeria today were built in such places. Besides showing the power of Jesus over evil spirits, the healing of diseases in the name of Jesus also showed Jesus' power over sicknesses. These types of scenario open up the curiosity that led many to Christianity in Nigeria. They came to the realisation that salvation in Jesus surpasses all others. Amongst Nigerian Christians, it is believed that Jesus is the saviour of the whole world including Africa. At this point, the focus of worship is God through Jesus Christ. It is no more animal or spirits or juju-idol.

Fourthly, is the domain of Leadership. Africans believe in leadership because it is an essential aspect of African life. It is expected that parents, especially the father, take the leadership role in the family. In African traditional settings, leaders are also selected to lead the people. The selection could emanate from a dynasty or rotational elections. These leaders are given several titles or designations depending on the community. The traditional leaders are referred to as monarchs and chiefs. Various African communities have a traditional name for their traditional rulers. For instance, amongst the Urhobos of Nigeria, the traditional ruler is called *Ovie*. Also amongst the Yoruba and Edo people of Nigeria, their kings are traditionally known as *Oba*. Whilst the monarch is seen as ruler, the people are referred to as subjects. The monarchs are usually powerful, thereby making them wade excessive powers over the people. They are expected to lead with integrity, justice and fairness. The concept of Jesus Christ as a leadership figure in Africa is also present in African Christian theology. The acceptance of Jesus as the greatest leader ever seen in the history of humanity is because of the narrative of the Gospels. He was a leader because He had disciples who learnt under Him. He was called teacher or master by those who He was leading. He led by example and not as a ruler (see Jn 13). In African Christianity, Jesus is accepted as the Head of the Church. He was a leadership figure who is worthy of emulation. As such, Christians in leadership position whether in the sacred or secular domain are expected to lead like Jesus Christ, but this is however missing in the African leadership system.

Fifthly, the domain of Communalism and relationship. Africans live together as a community despite the land space that separates them. The validity of their living is further heightened by their cultural similarity and ideology. An African is expected to see a fellow African as brother or sister and should be helped in time of need. Friends and family members visit each other uninvited. Moreover, in Nigeria's indigenous religion, it is believed that there is a relationship between the living and the dead. Whilst the living relates with each other and their environment, the living also relates with their ancestors through veneration or animism. The relationship between the living and the dead is maintained by the animistic belief that their departed hero is a living dead who is also needed to help the living in certain circumstances beyond human control. As a result, the living consults the ancestor through spiritual means for help. The appearance of the spirit of the ancestor could mean approval or disapproval depending on the circumstances that warranted the appearance. However, in African cultures, the livings are expected to live together in the bond of brotherhood. They are expected to share material things with one another. This resonates with the tenets of Christianity as recorded in the New Testament. Jesus facilitated the bond of brotherhood during His life on earth with the disciples. The bond of brotherhood manifested in the early Church community. Paul also maintained this teaching in his corpus. In African theological thought, Jesus is seen by African Christians as not only the saviour but also the brother of Africa through whom all Christians in Africa bond together. The African Christian also understands his or her relationship with Jesus Christ by faith. Even though, he or she does not see Jesus in the physical realm, he relates with Him in the spiritual realm.

Contemporary context of interpretation of the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7

The contemporary context of reading Philippians 2:6–7 here is the situation or culture of egotism which is being manifested in Episcopal, monarchical and political system of African leadership. There is a thin line between Episcopalism, monarchism and dictatorship in African system of leadership. Episcopalism has to do with the system of Church polity in which there is hierarchical arrangement from bottom-up. The issue is not the hierarchical arrangement but the problem is the lack of institutions of check and balances which eventually leads to abuse or misuse of power. This type of church leadership style and its abuse is not peculiar to Africa alone. However, the focus here is Africa. In this system, the Bishop at the apex position speaks ex-cathedral and when he speaks, no one challenges him or questions him. This system emanated from the papacy in the Roman Catholic Church. Although, some are of the view that the emergence of conciliarism has some tendency of weakening the power of the papacy as observed by Beretz (2010:43), we cannot deny the almost absolute authority of the Pope or bishop. Today, in Africa, the Roman Catholic and some protestant Church denominations such as Anglican Communion, Methodist, etc., and the African Initiated Churches (AICs) practice this system of Church polity. All of these emanated from the West but were copied with some extremism, especially amongst the AICs. The African Independent Churches are Churches founded by African Indigenes either in protest against the mainline churches for marginalisation or lack of freedom to worship in African ways. For example, the African people like dancing along music rhythms, unlike the Western-oriented churches that believe in the singing of hymns and strict liturgy. The African Independent Churches are also being referred to as AICs, African Instituted Churches or African Indigenous Churches. As the name implies, this category of Churches in Africa refers technically to those churches that began in the 20th century and they either broke away from mission churches or missionary/mainline

Churches or were founded independently (Ottuh 2015:183–198). This implies that they were free from European missionary activities, aids and leadership. The AICs are being headed by Africans. This movement is said to have started in South Africa in 1884 as a result of political issues and indigenous identity of which the first group was called Ethipianism (Venter 2004:13). This name was probably derived from Psalm 68:31 which reads: 'Let Ethiopia hasten to raise its hands to God'. Just as it has been pointed out above, this was a protest against Euro-American domination in the 'colonial churches' (Ukah 2005:317–341). The AICs are characterised by self-governance, self-financing and self-propagating. It was also aimed at recovering indigenous leadership roles and traditions and, as such, are also completely African in ecclesiology, emphasising autonomous Christian life and administration (Ottuh 2015:183–198). By the nature of the AICs, the founder becomes the president and founder and becomes the man at the apex position just like those mainline churches that are practising Episcopal polity. They assume the position of a bishop or archbishop who oversees the entire affairs of the church. They are not accountable to the congregation or anybody. As a result, their decisions are final on issues like the congregational churches. Closely related to Episcopalism in Africa is Monarchism. Monarchism is a traditional system in Africa in which in some climes, the King is the head of political and traditional affairs. Some countries in Africa have imbibed democracy and as such, the traditional rulers take charge of the traditional and cultural affairs of their kingdoms. In some cultural milieus, the monarch is also the head of religious affairs of his kingdom. Examples of such countries are Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. The monarchs in pre-colonial Nigeria, for example, were very powerful leaders, hence they were used by the colonial master through the policy of indirect rule. In those African countries where monarchy still holds sway, they rule like dictators. Examples of such countries still practising monarchical system of government includes Swaziland, Chard, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Tanzania, etc. Episcopalism and Monarchy in Africa are built around ego, power and authority. It has to do much with splendour, authority and near-absolute powers. Such leaders seem to assume the position of a despot who must be feared and obeyed in all ramifications. An example of despotic leadership in Africa is Idi Amin (1925–2003) of Uganda. These types of leaders do not have any mind of sacrificing or dying for the people, rather they want the people to sacrifice and die for them. That is why, they do not recede their decisions even when it is obvious that such decisions are making lives difficult or causing the death of innocent people in their community. Many African leaders hold to power so strongly that they do not care about the feelings of the people they are leading. This has caused a lot of ecclesiastical and political crises in Africa, leading to the destruction of lives and properties. The aspect of leadership system is called political leadership. This has diverse models depending on what a sovereign nation decides to adopt. There is the monarchical political leadership system. Also, in the political system, there is the model of democracy which has been defined by the former renounced American president Abraham Lincoln as the government of the people, by the people and for the people (Epstein 2011:819). In many African nations, this is true only in terms of election which is even characterised in most cases with irregularities. Even the democratically elected political leaders are also neck-deep in egotism. They are very selfish and greedy. Some of them are enshrouded in nepotism, intrigue and secrecy because they employ or involve family members, allies and Cronies in state affairs. Some of them convert state resources for personal and family use. For example, late Sani Abacha of Nigeria and Jacob Zuma, a former president of South Africa were corrupt leaders who abused power. The political class destroys state institutions and builds its powers so that it can dominate economically and politically. Many African leaders do not care about the welfare and security of the people. They do not act unless the issue concerns those being referred to as very important person (VIP). The poor has no voice. Therefore, Jesus' kenosis in Philippians 2:6–7 is a suitable lesson for those African leaders who are selfish and lack servant-leadership style.

Socio-historical context of Philippians 2:6–7

Philippi was founded in 360 BC by and named after Philip II of the kingdom of Macedonia. It is located in the Macedonian Province under the Roman Empire (Jeffers 1999:282). Hence, Paul's Philippians' church community was familiar with Roman imperialism and its inherent despotism because political officials in Paul's day were for the most part descendants of the original Roman colonists (Jeffers 1999:283). Roman authority held sway in the Roman province where the early Church was situated. Paul was said to have planted the church in Philippi during his second missionary journey, probably around the year AD 49 or 50. This letter is one of Paul's Prison epistles. The Philippians' church community was faced with three problems amongst others which Paul intends to address (Birmingham Theological Seminary 2012):[1]

> [*F*]irst, they appear to have faced persecution from those outside the church; second, they were threatened by the possibility of false teaching similar to that which had infiltrated other churches and third, they struggled with conflicts between one another in the church.

Paul wrote from the prison when he heard about how members of the Church were striving because of selfish reasons. Even the authority that persecuted the church did it for selfish reason. The emperor demanded to be worshipped by his subjects and as such, those who pay allegiance to Jesus Christ were seen as committing treasonable felony. It has been confirmed by scholars that the divinity of the Roman emperor and the worship paid to the emperor caused problems for the early Christians (Kahlos 2016:1–9). The mythology of Roman emperors being regarded as gods

1.Refer to section 'Problems for the Church'.

was addressed by Janneke de Jong and submitted that the inscriptions of emperors on coins and other important places or ornaments in ancient Roman history depict such claim (De Jong 2016:24–25). These assertions no doubt must have created a rivalry between those who pay allegiance to Jesus and Emperors. Hence, the Philippians' Church community was faced with persecution just like other Churches in the Roman Empire.

Paul's Jesus in Philippians 2:6–7 was presented as messianic figure in the Pentateuch and as a suffering servant in Psalms and the prophets. In Genesis 3:15, He was pre-figured as a Messianic figure. In Psalm 22, He was presented as a suffering messiah. The concept of 'self-emptying and taking on of a servant position' in Philippians 2:6–7 also has a parallel reading, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah. For Carmody (2003), Paul was probably quoting a hymn sung in the Palestinian Churches. The hymn depicts the suffering and glorified Servant of the Lord in Isaiah. The Servant Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1–9, Isaiah 49:1–13, Isaiah 50:4–11 and Isaiah 52:13–53:12. The suffering servant also has a parallel reading in Psalm 34 and 1 Peter 3:10–12 (Christensen 2015:336). The suffering servant was an innocent man who had the interest of his master and the people at heart. He willingly followed his persecutors to the slaughter to be killed for a purpose. Isaiah's suffering servant was the pre-figured personality of Pauling Christology in Philippians 2:6–7.

The immediate context that prompted Paul's Christology of Kenosis in Philippians 2:3–11 was the situation of strive, vainglory and self-centeredness being exhibited by some members of the Church (Reule 1971:81). The socio-religious class rivalry between the Jews and the Gentiles was also present in the Philippians' Church in the sense that the Jews see themselves to be superior to the non-Jews. This created a social class structure in the Church community. This type of behaviour was also present in Paul's Corinthian Church community, thereby causing Schism. Paul was consistent in addressing this scenario of socio class in all the early Churches he related with. The Philippians' Church was not an exception. Paul intends to call these people to order by pointing them to the humility and selflessness of Jesus when He came to this world to die for sinners. Paul wanted the Philippians' Church community to emulate the humility and selflessness of Jesus instead of creating a socio class. This was summarised by Lawrence Feingold (2009), thus:

> This text forms part of a larger section in which St. Paul is exhorting the Philippians to unity and humility. He urges them to be of one mind in charity, and tells them always to think better of others than themselves: 'Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others'. (Phil 2:2–4). (p. 2)

The socio-historical context of Philippians 2:6–7 helps to show the real human nature of the Church community which Paul addressed with the Jesus figure of humility and selflessness.

The text

The text in Greek and English

6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ 7 ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men [RSV]).

Exegetical analysis of Philippians 2:6–7

The passage presents to us various phrases that are linking or relating to a particular subject matter. Both the preceding text and the texts in view connect to κένωσις. The Greek word κένωσις is from the etymology κενόω meaning empty. The Greek verb κενόω appears in the New Testament and particularly in Pauline writing in which the word literally means to make empty. It is the antonym of πληρόω [*pléroó-* to make full, to complete] (Lattke 1990: New Testament [NT] 2758). Its normative singular form κενός is 'often used in a figurative sense and for the emptying, depriving, or destruction of various spatial or spiritual-psychic entities' (Lattke 1990:NT 2758). The term κένωσις is an ancient Greek term found primarily in Christian writings, such as the Epistle to the Philippians 2:7, where Jesus is described as having ... ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (He emptied himself). The root word κενοω and its cognates:

> [*A*]re used more frequently in the New Testament in their everyday sense of 'to empty', or metaphorically in the sense of 'emptying of content', which helps to establish the meaning of the single theological use of the word. (Colyer 2013:1–2)

Scholars have argued that the Greek word κένωσις was not found in the New Testament but was frequently used in the era of the fathers (Lattke 1990:NT:2758). When κένωσις is viewed from the theological background of Isaiah 53:12, it does not refer to the incarnation but to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Lattke 1990:NT:2758). Moreover, scholars have also shown that the meaning of the phrase ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν in Philippians 2:7 was not attested to in the New Testament but later had an influence on the discussion of kenosis (Lattke 1990:NT:2758). However, if one argues that κένωσις or the phrase ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν does not refer to the incantation of Jesus but His death on the cross, then how did it find itself in Pauline theology? If we agree that Church fathers made use of the word, it means that it probably existed in oral tradition. Scholars have argued that oral tradition existed amongst the Hebrews and some of the canonised scriptures existed in the domain of oral tradition before their canonisation. Culley (1963:113–125) further boosts this argument when he attested to Hermann Gunkel's

submission of the existence of earlier oral tradition in the Old Testament. This argument leads to question of Paul's source. Whatever the meaning mighty be, Nicholas V. Sakharov sees the concept of κένωσις as something propelled by love, and this love led to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Sakharov 2002:93). This text has been referred to as pre-Pauline New Testament hymns. David Black has revealed that 'in recent times the balance of opinion has sided decisively against Pauline authorship of the hymn on the basis of an absence in it of Pauline words and ideas' (Black 1988:270). If we go by this argument, then a vacuum or the problem of anonymity has been created. Black (1988) has further cleared this argument, thus:

> This problem is alleged to be overcome by the theory that the apostle incorporated into his letter an early hymn written by another author. Who this person may have been is never clearly stated, nor is there any unanimity on the question of the exact structure of the hymn before Paul took it over and gave it its final form. Nevertheless, the bewildering variety of proposals in these areas has not lessened belief in the pre-Pauline origin of the passage. (p. 270)

Whilst some authors dispute Paul's origination of the hymn, others argue that Paul wrote it. Black has attested further that:

> [*R*]ecent studies have concentrated their efforts on attempts to isolate these verses and arrange them into strophes or on conjectures that reconstruct the setting and theology of the originally independent hymn. (p. 271)

In the final analysis, Black argues for Paul's authorship of the hymn. Most scholars according to Reumann (2008:8) agree that Paul wrote the letter to Philippians, but this particular verse is under serious scholarly contentions. In my opinion, other phrases connect the word κένωσις in the passage. Being that Paul was a lover of hymn and has once admonished his church community elsewhere to sing ὕμνοις (humns) καὶ ᾠδαῖς, especially in Ephesians 5:19, the plausibility of him doing the same in Philippians 2:6–7 is not out of place. Moreover, if we agree that Paul used the hymn or imported the hymn from the Old Testament, it is obvious that in Pauline usage of the phrase ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (He emptied Himself) suggests that the hymn was contextualised in the sense of weaving a lesson of humility and selflessness. Paul should be seen from the text as giving a new meaning to the text rather than just allowing it to remain in the domain of singing or chanting. It also calls for meditation and application.

One of the connected words to κένωσις in the text is μορφῇ. Μορφῇ means something like a form or 'essence', or οὐσία. For if (1) the Bible always speaks consistently and truthfully, (2) God is simple (as theologians of all Christian confessions have traditionally conceded) and (3) Christ is ἐν οὐσία Θεοῦ; then (4) controversial terms such as ἁρπαγμός (something to seize or hold), κενόω and ὑπάρχω in Philippians 2:9, at least in this context, can assume only a narrow range of meanings (Jowers 2006:739–7340). Paul begins verse 6 via a discussion of the Son's 'existence', though it is better contextually to view Paul's words as 'pre-existence'. The apostle uses the word ὑπάρχων which means to speak about the 'eternality' of the Divine Son, a present active participle denoting, to be in a state or circumstance. James R. White (n.d) explains that (Krause 2012:6 citing White 1999):[2]

> [*T*]he first phrase of verse 6 sets the tone for the theological discussion to follow. Paul says that Christ was 'existing' (ὑπάρχων) in the 'form of God' (Θεοῦ Θεοῦ) … The participle is again 'timeless' in that it does not point to any moment when Jesus 'started' to exist … Christ has always been in the form of God.

Moreover,

> [*T*]he use of 'timeless' terms in reference to Christ's 'being' is not unique to the Epistle to the Philippians and is not limited to Pauline authorship. Rather, in the Fourth Gospel, the apostle John uses ἦν the imperfect form of the verb εἰμί (*eimi*) to denote Jesus' timeless existence. (p. 6)

Therefore, μορφῇ confirms self-emptying of Jesus Christ as a deliberate action taken for a purpose. That is, Jesus has been existing as a deity but decided to take up human form without being forced.

Another word in the passage that is affirming κένωσις is ἁρπαγμὸν. The Greek word ἁρπαγμὸν means 'plunder or booty, or a chance occurrence, lucky break, or blessing' (Trilling 1990:NT725). In the active voice, it means to steal something by force (robbery), to snatch at (spoil), to take something wrongfully (plunder); in the passive sense, the word can still be categorised into whether the thing is already in one's possession (positive) or not (negative); in the positive sense, it refers to a thing to be retained (treasure), a thing to be exploited (advantage) and in the negative sense, an object of eager desire (prize). Philippians 2:6 calls for the usage of the passive sense since ἁρπαγμός in Greek is a noun and it requires the positive meaning since the text speaks, not of the decision, but of the attitude (ἡγήσατο) of Jesus Christ towards his being God's equal. In the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:6–11, ἁρπαγμὸν it is said 'of the preexistent one (who "was in the form [μορφῇ] of God") that he did not ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο "equality with God"' (Trilling 1990:NT:725; Paul 2005:251). Roy Hoover (1971:105,118 cited in Martin 2016:176) explains further that:

> ἁρπαγμός is an idiomatic expression that means 'something to seize upon, to take advantage of, … something to use for [one's] own advantage'. (pp. 105, 118)
>
> However, the negation οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν gives the meaning of something not to be seized.

The concept of the equality of the Godhead is being showcased by this phrase οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν (not something to be grasped). Although He was from the beginning in the same infinite glory with the Father, He took the lane of humility. Agreeing with Wright's submission, Youngbom Lee gives the understanding that 'οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο has to be understood in the form of a Greek idiom ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγείσθαι τὶ

2.Refer to section 'Exegesis of Principal Passages'.

which means to consider it something to take advantage of' (Lee 2012:35). Rodney Decker explains that the idiom involved includes the following: (1) When ἁρπαγμός occurs as a predicate accusative with νομίζω, ἡγέομαι, ποιέω or τίθημι, it is an idiomatic expression. Here the relevant phrase is ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο. (2) When ἁρπαγμός occurs in this combination as an idiom, it does not have the same sense as the ἁρπαγμός word group in other contexts; that is, there is no connotation of theft or violence. (3) ἁρπαγμός and ἅρπαγμα are interchangeable forms in this idiom. That is, Jesus did not take advantage of His true personality. This shows that there is no difference between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and if the Son decides to rid Himself of this right to equality with the Father, it shows deliberate humility.

Moreover, the phrase εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ (to be equal with God) seems to suggest that Jesus being God did not consider retaining His status when He decided to duel amongst humans and die for them. If we agree to this, we will have problem with the theology of Jesus being simultaneously God and man when on earth. In my view, the correct interpretation should be that Jesus retained His deity whilst at the same time, on His own decided to put on man at the same time. Grammatically, Albert Barnes suggests that ἴσα is used in accordance with a known rule of the language. Barnes also agreed with and adopted Buttman's submission, thus:

> When an adjective as predicate is separated from its substantive, it often stands in the neuter where the substantive is a masculine or feminine, and in the singular where the substantive is in the plural. That which the predicate expresses is, in this case, considered in general as a thing. (Barnes 1870)[3]

The phrase 'equal with God', or 'equal with the gods', is of frequent occurrence in the Greek Classics. When the phrase 'Οὐχ ἴσα Θεῷ' is used, it gives the intended meaning (not equal with God). This makes Paul's theological concept of κένωσις (self-emptying) in Philippians 2:6–7 clearer in the sense that the one who emptied Himself of His Deity was coeternal with God but decided to adopt the aspect of man in addition to His nature at this point in time. This concept has birthed the Christological controversy. This period of Christological controversy, which followed the Nicene Council, has also posed another problem having successfully repelled the Arian controversy. Basically, 'the attention of the church had logically shifted to another problem, that is, how to reconcile proper Deity and true humanity in the Person of the historic Saviour, Jesus Christ' (McClain 1967:3). McClain (1967) also attempted to resolve the problem when he submits that:

> Those who recognized Him as divine solved the inevitable Christological problem by having recourse to some form of kenosis theory. In becoming man the Logos 'emptied himself' in some respect. Thus, the divinity was made to yield, or rather was adjusted, to the humanity in adopting this principle of a kenosis as a point of departure in attempted explanation of Christ's Person, men were on safe and Biblical ground, for the New Testament writings undoubtedly teach a kenosis of some kind in their doctrine of the Incarnation. (p. 4)

3.Refer to section 'To be equal with God'.

Pauline concept of κένωσις presents to us a challenge that scholars will continue to contend with from generation to generation, especially those doing contextual study on the subject matter. One of such challenges is how to appropriate the text in such a way that will be appreciated by the ordinary church person and the scholar in academia. However, the church, especially the church in Africa, has come to terms with the meaning of κένωσις, that is accepting a meaning that is congenial with their Christian faith. Jesus' κένωσις can be interpreted in Africa to mean the saviour who humbled Himself to death even though He has the power to save it.

After Jesus ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (He has emptied Himself), He then put on μορφὴν δούλου (the form of a servant). The Greek δούλος means bond-servant, bond-servants, bond-slave or bond-slaves. The bond-lave or servant has no saying of his own. It originated from the word δέω meaning to tie or bind. This gives the idea of bond. In a sense, it means to serve especially when the cognate δουλεύω is used. In this case, in the passage, δούλου was used and it gives the idea of reducing someone to servitude. This also has a parallel depiction in John 13:16 where δούλος (servant) was used in contrast to κυρίου (master or lord). In both contexts (in John's Gospel and Pauline), service is paramount. The concepts of δούλος in Philippians 2:7 and John 13:16 denote the understanding of servant-leader. Therefore, Jesus ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (emptied Himself) to become a δούλος (a servant) to serve mankind. The phrase λαβών means ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (having taken in the likeness of men having been made). In other words, having being made in the likeness of men, He ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (emptied Himself) of His right to remain a Deity (Lord, God) and put on δούλος (servant or slave). This is the point this article is making.

Jesus as leadership figure as represented in the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7

Here, the question of how Jesus as a leadership figure as represented in the concept of κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 can be seen as a model of selfless leader and such character can be applicable to African leadership figures. In the text, Jesus was described with a major phrase ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (He emptied Himself). This phrase, further raises a question: He emptied Himself of what? He emptied Himself of His pride or dignity. We will determine this from the text. In the text, the phrase ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ (who being in the form of God) shows that Jesus is God. Also, in verse 6, the clause οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ (not something to be considered equal with God) also suggests that Jesus is not different from God. In verse 7, the phrase ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (but Himself emptied), in verse 7, suggests that the self emptying is deliberate. At this point, it is logical to agree that He emptied Himself of His pride or dignity. By pride, we mean someone with a proper sense of own value, someone who really belongs to his correct level of respect or rank. The next question is what does His deity entails. It entails royalty, sovereignty, absolute power, dignity,

eternity, the object of worship, the grand commander, the Almighty, the supreme Being, the Divine, *et cetera*. When the text reads 'ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ… οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν' (who being in the form of God… not something to be considered equal with God but He emptied Himself), it implies that Jesus Christ emptied Himself of His pride. This metaphorically means that Jesus humbled Himself. He decided not to consider His personality in dealing with humans in His sotoriological mission. This is also called self-denier in a parallel reading in the Synoptic Gospels especially Luke 9:23. In Luke 9:23, the concept of self-denier is also present. The phrase ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν (let him deny himself) is used in the sense of willingness and deliberate action. Second, in Philippians 2:6, the phrase ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (He emptied Himself), also, further raises another question: how did He empty Himself? He emptied Himself by deliberately taking the position of human servant-leader. This can also be shown from the text. In verse 7b, the clause μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων (having taken the form of a servant in the likeness of men), shows that he took upon himself the form of a human servant-messianic figure. Despite being in the form of God, at the same time took upon Himself the form of human being. Stooping low to take the nature of man and accepting to suffer for the salvation of man is humility and selflessness. This has been referred to as the suffering servant in the prophet especially the prophet Isaiah.

The above characteristic trait of Jesus Christ in the text is lacking in African leadership culture in the Church, state and traditional institutions. Multifarious reasons abound for this submission. One of the reasons is the mentality of a boss. This mentality brings about self-conceit. Leaders at this level do not have adequate relationship with the lower cadre of the ladder. There is usually a disconnect and distance between the leader and the led. They feel that they are not responsible to the people. Another reason is the mentality of material reward. This leads to greed which manifests in selfishness, ostentations, splendour oriented kind of lifestyle. This has made some of them to be corrupt morally and economically. Another reason is the mentality of power and control. This makes them to build the system around themselves. They do not build strong institutions which will guide them and the people. They live as if they are above the law. They hate being challenged or criticised. Another issue is greed. Those in this category love to gather wealth for themselves and future generation. For this reason, they use their position and powers to carryout some shrewd deals and soil their hands with evil. The greed for wealth makes some of them diabolical just to get what they want.

Implication for African Christology and leadership

Jesus as a selfless personality in African Christianity

Jesus is a well-known messianic personality in Africa. The Africans knew this from the Bible. The missionaries brought the Gospel to Africa and we believed. We read the Bible with them and for ourselves and discovered that Jesus is a selfless personality. The concepts of κένωσις (*kenosis*) and ἁρπαγμός (*harpagmos*) in Philippians 2:6–7 confirm this selfless Jesus. The word ἁρπαγμός (*harpagmos*) in the text refers to something that a person has in his possession but chooses not to use it to his own advantage. This underscores the fact that Jesus really was equal with God when he determined to become a human for the sake of mankind. The Christ of Africa is the Son of God and the brother of all. He is the Greatest of all the gods and all men, yet he is the servant of all. He is the richest in Africa, yet he took the position of poverty. He is the most hated by the enemy, yet he is the lover of all. He is the King of kings, yet the Servant-leader. He is the Most High, yet he stooped low to help the lowly. He is the most powerful, yet He took the position of weakness. He is divine, yet He took upon Himself human nature. He is the one with the Highest power and authority, yet He gave all humans responsible and accountable freedom. He is the Archbishop of the Church yet took the position of the servant-leader of the church. He ascended to Heaven having completed the work of salvation, He is above and the just Judge of all, yet He still forgives sinners. In the eschatological age, He will judge all with justice and fairness. In African Christianity, we know all the above about Jesus, but the need for African leaders to imbibe this leadership quality is not being emphasised adequately. Pauline concepts of κένωσις and ἁρπαγμός in Philippians 2:6–7 have left us with the above interpretations. To those African leaders who see leadership as a means to self-conceit, selfishness, ostentations, splendour and bossiness, Jesus' selflessness is a perfect model for their life and leadership styles. African leaders are, therefore, being challenged here to be selfless. The tendencies or acts of corruption, exploitation of the people and amassing of affluence by African leaders are being discouraged by Jesus' character of selflessness.

Jesus as a humble Lord and brother of Africa

The Greek κένωσις in Philippians 2:6–7 is a prototype of a humble great man who has decided to do away with his splendour, power and status for a chosen course. This self-emptying of Jesus for the sake of others implies humility. His status as God did not stop Him from stooping low to help the lowly. He who has no sin was able to come to the aid of sinners. The holiest one came down to rescue those who are filthy and unworthy. He left His exalted Throne to the ghetto of sinners just to save them. He came to those who are not even worthy to come to Him. In this line of thought, Williams (2004) submits that

> [*A*] major reason for the questioning of the idea of kenosis might be that it is so contrary to the reigning ethos, where people are constantly being urged to promote themselves ... (p. 632)

Self-conceited African leaders create a socio class for themselves. They form the aristocrats of the day and as such the poor and the less privileged are being neglected to die. For example, in Nigeria, public schools and hospitals have been left for the poor. The leaders go abroad for medical

treatments and send their wards to the best schools abroad. The poor go to dilapidated hospitals and schools for medical treatments and education, respectively. Pride has eroded their good sense of reasoning. It is very difficult for the ordinary person to meet them in their offices. Pride makes many African leaders to be very ostentatious and become tempted to steal public resources to maintain their ostentatious lifestyle. We lack infrastructural development and social amenities because African leaders do not care much about the poor and the future. They create such amenities around their immediate environment of abode and the vast majority of the people are left to suffer in squalid. If Jesus was to be imitated by African leaders, things will change for the better. Jesus' humility made Him to see the need of man and came to his rescue. The hope of an average African Christian is the eschatological kingdom of God which has been brought to them by Jesus' work of salvation. This is why Jesus has been accepted by those who believe in Him as Lord and saviour. Africans also see Jesus as their good brother and friend because it takes a good brother or friend who loves his fellow brother or friend to do what He has done. The communal lifestyle of the African people makes them to see their neighbours as brothers and sisters and as friends. This is why Jesus can never be forgotten by those who have accepted Him as Lord and saviour. This is a challenge to African leaders. They need to humble themselves before God and the people by listening to them and finding ways to meet their needs. No matter how exalted a position might be, the occupant should learn to relate with the people in terms of meeting their needs and respect the feelings and opinions of the people also.

Jesus as a portrait of servant-leader in Africa

The Greek δοῦλος was also used in the text and it means slave or servant. Jesus took the position of a servant instead of the master that He was. He willingly denied Himself of His splendours and became a servant for the sake of mankind. The description of Jesus Christ by Paul in the text as μορφὴν δούλου (form of servant) corresponds to the Johannine concept of servant-leadership in John 13 where the master or leader is expected to be servant of all and be a leader by example. Paul's presentation of Jesus' character of humility and selflessness is expected to serve as reference to reshape the mentality of selfishness, bossiness and arrogance in the Church and beyond. African leaders who will take time to learn this lesson will lead well because this leadership character and personality trait of humility and selflessness will help in building the character of humility and selflessness in African leaders across board.

Jesus as man and God in African Christianity

The Greek ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων (likeness of men) shows that Jesus is God before He became a man. He decided to humble himself by becoming man and servant in order to save humans. Man did not come to Him to negotiate or to sell the idea of salvation to Him. He willingly took the decision to save man. He was never under compulsion to do that. He laid down His life for His friends without cohesion. He initiated it all and made the task to be accomplished. African Christianity is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, African Christianity is Christ-centric. The lesson here is that African leaders have to reflect a balance between master and servant in their leadership style. That realising the fact that one is a leader but at the same time, willingly relating with the people as a servant-leader. By implication, the leader becomes a leader and at the same time a servant. Paul has shown to us in Philippians 2:6–7 that Jesus is God and at the same time man; He is master and the same time servant. This he demonstrated in John 13.

Conclusion

The study of Philippians 2:6–7 could be very challenging in modern Africa, especially when such study is also having the western scholar in mind as part of the reader of the work. African and Western approaches to Biblical Studies are distinct, yet the Historical Critical method cannot be avoided in African biblical studies. Ukpong and Holter have attested to this reality in African Biblical Studies (Fadeji 1990:29–36; Holter 2011:377–389; Ukpong 1994:40–61). On the other hand, Ukpong (2002:23) has also seen the need to do African Biblical Studies with an exclusive approach that should be peculiar to African Biblical Studies, especially Inculturation Hermeneutics. However, this study has chosen to adopt the duo (historical and contextual methods) in approaching Philippians 2:6–7.

Consequently, the study has shown that the concept of kenosis in Philippians 2:6–7 is relevant in the African context because of the Pauline portrait of the major character in the text. Sequel to the main argument of the article that 'the Jesus model of selfless leadership is lacking in African leadership style', it has also shown that Jesus' attitude in Philippians 2:6–7 exemplifies humility, selflessness and servant-leadership. Moreover, Jesus' approach of selflessness negates the characteristics of self-conceit, selfishness, ostentations, splendour and bossiness. This is a challenge to both the Church in Africa and the State. If reading about the life and writings of classical Philosophers have been a worthy exercise for modern people, I therefore think that Jesus Christ's character and teachings are worth more emulating by all. As such, I recommend that all Church and political leaders in Africa should read about and imbibe Jesus Christ's approach of selflessness and servant-leadership style.

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Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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