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Towards a contextual theology of conviviality: Tutu, Bonhoeffer and living musical metaphors

ABSTRACT

Both Tutu and Bonhoeffer embraced conviviality as an attribute of Christian life, not only as theory, but also in practice. Both also drew from lived experience in an effort to articulate their respective theologies of conviviality. We discuss the experience of music and musical metaphors as a lens through which to explore this relationship between lived experience and an explicit theology of conviviality. Bonhoeffer's metaphor of the "polyphony of life" is a product of his milieu and does not fully capture the conviviality implicit in his Christology (being-for-others). We argue that African manifestations of conviviality such as ubuntu and gbenopo, when understood as lived realities rather than isolated abstract concepts, make an important contribution to theological discourse, in general. In this case in particular, utilising ethnomusicology to attend to the polyrhythm in Ogu music enriches our understanding of what it means to be-for-others.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the richest gifts that Archbishop Desmond Tutu gave us was his embrace of *ubuntu* theology. It goes without saying that this was not merely a conceptual exercise for Tutu; it was his practical application of *ubuntu* theology that afforded him the *gravitas* that he carried, and why it is particularly fitting to honour his legacy through a collection of articles such as this. However, it is important to note that Tutu's practical application was not the linear outworking of an abstract and systematic theology of *ubuntu* which he first developed. In

fact, it has largely been the work of others to conceptually systematise Tutu's *ubuntu* theology (Battle 1997; 2000). Rather, for Tutu, theoretical reflection on *ubuntu* theology was inextricably intertwined both with practice and with embedded cultural norms and values that precede individual ratiocination. In what follows, we would like to further probe this relationship between explicit (*ubuntu*) theology and the organic, lived realities that inform it, for the purposes of better understanding a uniquely African contribution to a theology of conviviality.[1] This inquiry also poses broader questions for the way in which artistic cultural expression can contribute to explicit African theological discourse more generally.

We will explore this relationship between lived reality and conceptual articulations of conviviality through the lens of music. As a manifestation of culture, music reflects and even creates conceptual paradigms. In reflecting and creating culture, it offers ways of viewing and ways of being in the world. The implication of this is that the aphorism – that, in Africa, theology is not thought, but danced or sung – is first, overly simplistic, and secondly, it does not somehow refer to an underdeveloped African theology, but rather what truth it holds is an invitation to reflect more explicitly on the implicit richness within these lived realities (Muzorewa 2000:83).

We will take Dietrich Bonhoeffer's this-worldly Christianity as our starting point, both because Bonhoeffer was striving to articulate the convivial nature of Christianity through his Christology (which he succinctly captured as "being-for-others"), and because he utilised his lived experience of music in this quest.[2] Bonhoeffer's this-worldly Christology was informed by his own context and culture, drawing from musical metaphors of his time. We will

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1   We will shortly explore the concept of conviviality in more detail, but to clarify, we are using the concept of conviviality as employed by social anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh. As Nyamnjoh (2017a:263) points out, the term has become popular in the social sciences with a wide array of associations, including "diversity, tolerance, trust, equality, inclusiveness, cohabitation, coexistence, mutual accommodation, interaction, interdependence, getting along, generosity, hospitality, congeniality, festivity, civility and privileging peace over conflict, among other forms of sociality". With Nyamnjoh (2017a:262), we are specifically using the term to refer to the recognition of incompleteness. This then requires embracing the reality that "one – in one's incompleteness – is part of a whole" (Nyamnjoh 2017a:263). Consequently, conviviality entails a commitment to "the spirit of togetherness, interpenetration, interdependence and intersubjectivity" (Nyamnjoh 2017a:263).

2   Bonhoeffer's existential commitment to conviviality is illustrated by noting the title of one of his most popular works, *Life together* (2005), which reflects the literal etymology of the term con-vivial. (*Life together* was, of course, much more than a title, but represented the communal life at the Finkenwalde seminary). Bonhoeffer's embrace of a theology of conviviality is sufficiently explicit to have drawn comparisons and contrasts between his own anthropology and that of *ubuntu* (Koopman 2005).

argue that Bonhoeffer's this-worldly Christology can be further enriched by considering it through the lens of African musical metaphors, particularly as they reflect the cultural phenomenon of conviviality. While Bonhoeffer's theology is deeply relational, it is the product of an individualistic milieu, as reflected by his musical metaphors, polyphony in particular. By contrast, the fundamental interdependence of particular expressions of African music reflect convivial concepts such as *ubuntu* and *gbenopo* and offer an enriching metaphor for understanding the nature of "being-for-others". We consider the example of Ogu rhythms, in particular, as an expression of *gbenopo*, and put forward that the metaphor of polyrhythm not only further enriches the Christian understanding of interdependence, of "being-for-others", but also reflects a cultural paradigm – a way of seeing – which can make a productive contribution to the explicit articulation of *ubuntu* theology, or, to put it more broadly, a theology of conviviality.

2.   TUTU, *UBUNTU* THEOLOGY, AND CONVIVIALITY IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

It is widely known that the concept of "*ubuntu*" played a pivotal role in Tutu's theology (Battle 1997; 2000; Tutu 1999; 2010; 2011). We acknowledge that the concept of "*ubuntu*" has been used for all manner of ends, not least political platitudes, and that a superficial or stereotypical treatment of the concept is unhelpful.[3] However, for the purposes of this article, our focus is not *ubuntu* itself, but what *ubuntu* reveals to us about the human condition and the broader need for conviviality. In this sense, we suggest that it is important to look past the clichés to better understand why Tutu's (2009:viii) prayer was that "*ubuntu* will not leave us alone".

As is now well-known, the Nguni concept of "*ubuntu*" epitomises communality. However, it is important to note that this and other similar philosophies did not first emerge as theoretical models to be actioned in society. Instead, African convivial concepts are time-honoured, lived practices that are now being theorised as indigenous knowledges. The decolonial discourse has benefited from these indigenous knowledges, as they have informed notable scholarly contributions, demonstrating their relevance in the 21st century (wa Thiongo 1987; Nyamnjoh 2017a; 2017b; Nnodim & Okigbo 2020). But apart from these theoretical exercises, in lived reality, African expressive practices continue to embody African values and serve as mediums for their intergenerational transfer. These expressive practices take many cultural forms, not least of which is artistic expression through music

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3   Nevertheless, we suggest that robust scholarly work on *ubuntu* still has value, as is illustrated by works such as *Ubuntu and the reconstitution of community* (Ogude 2019).

and dance; hence, the notion that, in many African contexts, "theology is not thought out but danced out" (Van Zyl 1995:425). We will shortly return to the question of how conviviality is expressed in music to better understand the insightful importance of exploring these expressive practices.

Ubuntu is, therefore, much more than a concept, which is why Tutu (2011:21) described *ubuntu* as part of the "African *weltanschauung*", when referring to the famous Xhosa phrase, *"umntu ngumtu ngabantu"* ("a person is a person through other persons"). For Tutu (2011:22),

> [*u*]*buntu* is the essence of being human. It speaks of how my humanity is caught up and bound up inextricably with yours … We are made for complementarity. We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation.

This "African *weltanschauung*" is marked by community, reciprocity, and interdependence, and expressed in various manifestations of conviviality (whether named *ubuntu* or otherwise). It is based on a shared moral compass, ensuring social stability in many precolonial African communities and small group settings across contemporary Africa (see Nnodim & Okigbo 2020).

Perhaps the reason for interdependence and reciprocity in these settings is best explained by Nyamnjoh's double-sided framework of incompleteness and conviviality. Nyamnjoh (2017a; 2017b) argues for the inevitability of interdependence. In his framework, Nyamnjoh points out that conviviality, acknowledged or not, is inescapable, as incompleteness is the natural order of things and way of being. Thus, human beings need others, not to be complete but in a perpetual state of interdependence. Nyamnjoh makes a case for incompleteness as the normal order of things, citing Tutuola's 1952 novel, *The palm-wine drinkard*, set in an African context with emphasis on blurred boundaries between the physical and spiritual worlds and the interrelatedness of these spheres. As a response to incompleteness, conviviality becomes the panacea. The lived expressions of awareness of incompleteness include the use of one's gifting and resources for the benefit of the larger group, without the "delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of completeness" (Nyamnjoh 2017a:262; 2017b:341). A recognition of incompleteness predisposes one to welcome conviviality. This is not a ploy to become complete, but to submit to a social order founded on interdependence, collaboration, reciprocity, active participation, and mutual enrichment (Nyamnjoh 2017a). Therefore, the attributes of *ubuntu* described earlier allude to Nyamnjoh's understanding of conviviality, albeit Africans do not think of a theory, as they live each day mutually supporting and collaborating. This is not to be misread as excluding Africans from the cognitive ability to

theorise their actions, thus making theorising the prerogative of researchers. As Agawu (1995) points out, Africans have always had ways of understanding what they do, and they communicate these concepts among themselves. However, in the lived format, each collaborating individual may not always consciously reflect on how their actions form part of a theoretical framework.

For the purposes of this article, then, two points are helpful to note. First, our reflection on cultural expressions of conviviality (such as *ubuntu*, or *gbenopo*, which we will discuss shortly) will be most productive when we do not delimit the discussion to theoretical abstraction. If we are to take this lived expression of conviviality seriously, we need to acknowledge that something is inevitably lost when we distil these various cultural manifestations solely into abstract conceptualisation. This means that careful listening and utilising multiple disciplines and tools at our disposal (such as ethnomusicology, in this instance) can offer important insights into better understanding the value and significance of *ubuntu*, *gbenopo*, and other cultural manifestations of conviviality.

Secondly, it should be patently obvious that conviviality plays a central role in Christian life. Interdisciplinary exploration of cultural manifestations of conviviality such as *ubuntu* and *gbenopo*, as described earlier, will, therefore, be an important resource in theological discussions on the nature of being human and consequent ethical life. This certainly was the stance that Tutu took in his integration of *ubuntu* with his theology. Mojola (2019:34) goes as far as to suggest that, in Tutu's understanding, "*ubuntu* and Christian theology are indistinguishable". Battle (2017:135) puts it differently, but captures the same point, when he suggests that "Tutu's heaven is *ubuntu*". Tutu (2010:109) succinctly stated that *ubuntu* theology "is an understanding of life that values community". At the heart of Tutu's *ubuntu* theology was the claim, which he anchored in the *imago Dei*, that "you and I are made for interdependency" (Tutu 1988:2). Being made in the image of the triune God necessarily defines human beings fundamentally as beings-in-relation, called to be persons in community (Battle 2009:28-29). For Tutu (2011:21-24), this then has implications for a Christian ethic, which again overlaps with

> our African worldview, [wherein] the greatest good is communal harmony. Anything that subverts or undermines this greatest good is *ipso facto* wrong, evil.

3.   TUTU AND BONHOEFFER'S MUSICAL METAPHORS

It is intriguing, and we would suggest that it is not merely coincidental, that Tutu reached for musical metaphors in an effort to communicate his *ubuntu* theology. For instance, Tutu (as quoted in Battle 2009:28-29) often utilised the term "harmony" in reference to *ubuntu*, pointing out that, while music performed by a single person is a good thing,

> it is glorious when it is a harmony, a harmony of different voices … God says, it is precisely our diversity that makes for our unity.

Tutu's musical metaphors were, no doubt, the product of his own love for music, a love apparent in his formative years, shaping the person he would become. As Maluleke (2015:n.p.) commented regarding this formative influence, Tutu's "overall style and mannerisms bear the influence of the 'happy' music of Sophiatown". Tutu's love for music continued throughout his life, as he enjoyed a wide range of musical genres (Gish 2004:12, 59, 75, 123). One notable snapshot, which captures this well, is the very day of Tutu's installation ceremony as Archbishop in 1986. His enthronement address to the 1 700 guests and dignitaries in St. Georges Cathedral centred on his *ubuntu* theology, with a call for everyone to recognise our interdependence and live "harmoniously" as God's family. That same evening, at a reception in his honour at the Cape Town City Hall, he ended up on the stage alongside the performing musical group, "dancing joyously to the music" (Gish 2004:122). Tutu's love of music was lived, and he drew from musical analogies because he understood that the explicit abstraction of language cannot carry all the meaning that lived experience holds. In this instance, we need metaphor, we need the arts, because

> there are other ways of looking at things. [We need] arts like music; you know the things that don't let you use too much of your cerebral part. The kinds of things that provoke our intuitive, emotional, spiritual [faculties] – the things that make those take off – and you say 'Now I see,' like an epiphany (Tutu 2006:n.p.).

Artistic expression can be epiphanic because it captures our experience of lived reality in ways that surpass the limits and abstraction of language. This is why Tutu turns to musical metaphors in an effort to capture the fullness of what conviviality means, as can be noted in another musical metaphor he used toward this end:

> Have you seen a symphony orchestra? They are all dolled up and beautiful with their magnificent instruments, cellos, violins, etc. Sometimes dolled up as the rest, is a chap at the back carrying a

> triangle. Now and again the conductor will point to him and he will play 'ting.' That might seem so insignificant but in the conception of the composer something irreplaceable would be lost to the total beauty of the symphony if that 'ting' did not happen (Tutu 1981, as quoted in Battle 2009:85).

Like Tutu, Bonhoeffer drew on musical metaphors in an attempt to capture the lived reality of Christian life. Perhaps even to a greater degree than in Tutu's life, Bonhoeffer's formative years were thoroughly immersed in musical experience, not only enjoying listening to music, but also performing proficiently as a pianist to the point that a career as a concert pianist was seriously considered (Bethge 2000:25). Music continued to play a significant role throughout Bonhoeffer's life, as he was exposed to new genres in his travels to America and England, in particular, with the shared enjoyment of music being a catalyst for his own experience of community (Bethge 2000:150, 328, 427). Regular references to music appear throughout his work, even in his prison letters, where he imaginatively re-experienced pieces "inwardly", hearing music "from within" (Bonhoeffer 2010:332).

In his prison letters, Bonhoeffer draws repeatedly on various musical metaphors in an attempt to adequately communicate his "new theology" of this period (Pangritz 2019; Coates 2021:87-91). Bonhoeffer's (2010:485-486) "this-worldly" theology sought to understand what it means to be Christian in "a world come of age", amidst the daily realities and responsibilities of our lives. His response to this is Christological: just as Christ incarnate was "the human being for others", the church is called to be Christ-like, to be-for-others (Bonhoeffer 2010:501). "Jesus's 'being-for-others' is the experience of transcendence!" (Bonhoeffer 2010:501). Christians embrace their relationship with God, which

> is a new life in 'being there for others,' through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation. God in human form! (Bonhoeffer 2010:501).

In other words, as always for Bonhoeffer, Christology implies an ecclesiology, the church exists for others. But how do we practically navigate this life of interdependence amidst the daily realities of our lives? Bonhoeffer employs multiple musical metaphors as he explores this "new theology" of his, most famously his metaphor of polyphony.

Bonhoeffer (2010:393-394) draws on the metaphor of polyphony in a letter to his close friend Eberhard Bethge, as the latter considers the rightful place of "earthly love". Bonhoeffer affirms that earthly desires are not to be shunned but should be brought into resonance with our love for God. Akin to polyphony

(multiple melodies integrated into one textured piece of music), there needs to be a base melody, or *cantus firmus*, which Bonhoeffer suggests is our love for God. This becomes a guide to navigating earthly reality, for "where the cantus firmus is clear and distinct, a counterpoint can develop as mightily as it wants" (Bonhoeffer 2010:393). In fact, the music is richest when these counterpoint melodies are given full voice. Polyphony is, therefore, the "musical image of [the] Christological fact … of the undivided and yet distinct" nature of Christ (Bonhoeffer 2010:394).

For the remainder of this article, we would like to probe two questions that this raises. First: What can we learn from the *process* of Tutu and Bonhoeffer's employment of these musical metaphors? In other words: Is the utilisation of these musical metaphors simply a pragmatic tool to help illustrate a point they could otherwise have made without using metaphor? Or is there more to this interplay? We suggest that it is important to take the interplay between cultural context and conceptual formation seriously. Secondly, and consequently: How were Bonhoeffer's musical metaphors influenced by his milieu? Specifically: Would it be fruitful to bring Bonhoeffer's metaphor of polyphony into dialogue with musical metaphors from the "African *weltanschauung*" of conviviality to further enrich the understanding of "being-for-others"? In this instance, we suggest that, despite Bonhoeffer's criticism of Western individualism, the metaphor of polyphony still betrays an individualistic culture, to a degree, and can be further enriched by placing it alongside the interdependent musical metaphor of polyrhythm.

4.   CONCEPT-FORMATION AND MUSIC

As Begbie (2015:206-211) points out, our conclusions regarding the relationship between music (as one form of lived experience) and concept-formation will depend on what we understand concepts to be. If we think of them as "isolated mental units" associated with specific things in the world, on the one hand, and particular words, on the other, then we are left with three distinct entities: words, concepts, and things (Begbie 2015:206). Concepts are then the bridge between words and our world. However, we suggest, with Begbie and Kathleen Callow, that concepts are better understood as "habits of thought that order human experience in various configurations" (Begbie 2015:206). In other words, concepts are not isolated units but "thought[s]-in-action" (Begbie 2015:206). This means that we do not thoughtfully attend *to* concepts, but rather that we "attend *with* them, by means of them" (Begbie 2015:206). The concept of "vacation", for example, is not an isolated mental unit, static and distinct, but organically shaped and dynamically connected to our sensory experiences of good food, relaxation, enjoyable time with friends and family, and so forth (Begbie 2015:206).

Begbie thus argues that Bonhoeffer's theology of the polyphony of life is the consequence of Bonhoeffer's own musical experience. Bonhoeffer's cultural context (with all of its associated values and norms) exposed him to a particular expression of music, which then played a role in his concept-formation as he attempts to articulate an understanding of the multidimensionality of Christian life (Begbie 2015:208-211). This implies that polyphony is not simply a useful analogy to draw from, in order to better articulate an isolated mental concept. Rather, the interplay between Bonhoeffer's lived experience and his thought-life have produced theological concepts that are the product of his culture and time. Before we consider musical metaphors from Africa, which can be fruitfully brought into dialogue with an understanding of the multidimensional and interdependent nature of Christian life, we need to consider the relationship between music and culture more closely, particularly in African contexts.

4.1   Music in and as culture

It may seem to be stating the obvious that music is an inseparable aspect of the vast majority of cultures (Herndon & McLeod 1982; Rice 2014; Nettl 2015). But what is considered music varies among different peoples. Many African languages, for instance, lack words that are analogous to the Western notion of music. However, most of the sub-Saharan African traditions feature musical practices in constellations of arts, including dance and drama (Agawu 1992; 2016; Stone 2005). And these arts run the gamut of functionalities, from artistic expressions to being essential aspects of religious rituals. To this end, many historical African musical activities are symbolic and entrenched with layers of non-musical meanings that may remain elusive without in-depth engagement. The point is that musical cultures (repertoires, accoutrements, instruments, and administration styles, among other components) are repositories of societal norms, values, beliefs, ethos, and aesthetics. Thus, musical cultures have often served as windows into people's ways and philosophies of being. For instance, music tends to be more participatory in communal societies as the performer/audience boundaries are blurred (Feld 1984). Audience members contribute to the music in several ways, including dancing, clapping rhythms, singing responsorial lines, and rewarding performers with gifts. The ethos of reciprocity in such communal settings may be accessed in call-and-response, musical structures and in the social practice of gifting performers to both reward and spur them on to more musical exploits. Frishkopf's (2021:26) remark sums this up succinctly:

> In West African societies, interactive musical performance, rooted in poly-melo-rhythm, is an important cultural system for expressing, creating, and maintaining social solidarity. Understanding that system is thus a means of understanding society, as well as its music.

True to Frishkopf's suggestion that music is a window through which society may be studied and understood, music in various contemporary African cities exhibits the eclecticism characteristic of postcolonial Africa. Popular African genres are not only more cosmopolitan but also embody postcolonial African sensibilities. A case in point is Afrobeats (a form of Africanised hip-hop originating from Lagos), which portends the spirit of Lagos. However, the other side of the proverbial coin is that Afrobeats also contributes to shaping Lagos' values, fashion, and ideology (Olusegun & Ayokunle 2011). Thus, this signals the social complexities in which a part (music), though informed by the whole (culture), is central in determining its (culture's) form. Therefore, as we analyse Ogu rhythms to access the practice of *gbenopo* in this article, we do not align with past synecdoche and reductionist views of "African music" as synonymous with rhythm. Much work has been done to critique and deconstruct this view (Agawu 1992; Frishkopf 2021). Conversely, we seek to understand an Ogu concept through an artistic model.

5.   MUSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CONVIVIALITY: *GBENOPO* IN OGU MUSIC

As mentioned earlier, conviviality manifests diversely in different cultural contexts. *Ubuntu* has parallels in various traditions in the global south, including the Shona *ukama*, the Indonesian *gotong yorong*, the Yoruba concept of *aro*, and the Ogu idea of *gbenopo*, among many others (Le Grange 2012; Bowen 1986; Usman & Falola 2019). However, these concepts are nuanced in their local expressions and adapted to the specifics of each sociopolitical, economic, and cultural context. Among the West African Ogu people, conviviality is articulated as *gbenopo*, a diminution of the expression *ogbe* (voices) *no* (to be) *po* (united), implying united voices, or simply put, unity. Moreover, the same expression is evoked to describe a few multipart but congruent phenomena such as synchronous music or rhythms. Thus, *gbenopo* strikes us as a suitable term to highlight the musical depiction of a convivial concept.

Ogu people are indigenous to different West African countries such as Ghana, Togo, Republic of Benin, and Nigeria. Moreover, like Shona and Yoruba, Ogu is a cover term for people who are culturally similar and speak languages belonging to the same cluster known as *gbe*. With Fon and Alladah as the most widely spoken, *gbe* languages may be mutually intelligible, sharing only a few words. However, *gbe*-speaking people share certain concepts and philosophies reinforced through a trans-state loop of cultural exchange and social formation. These include shared beliefs, artistic practices, values, and philosophies, among other things. As a result, Badagry's Ogu musical groups,

nested within an Ogu ethnic minority group in a Yoruba-dominated Southwest Nigeria, have maintained their *gbe* sensibilities, despite Lagos' modern musical sways. Furthermore, Badagry's Ogu bands continue to reference the Porto Novo (in the Republic of Benin) Ogu music scene, thus strengthening the retention of Ogu concepts in 21st-century Badagry. We examine an aspect of Badagry's Ogu music next – its polyrhythm – as a window into the artistic performance of conviviality (*gbenopo*, in this instance), animated in Ogu ensembles.

5.1   Ogu polyrhythm as a metaphor to complement polyphony

Ogu polyrhythm can function as a metaphor that further enriches our theological understanding of being-for-others and Bonhoeffer's polyphony of life. As noted earlier, Bonhoeffer's metaphor of polyphony is a product of his own milieu. Despite his criticism of individualism, the metaphor of polyphony only partly critiques it. First, Bonhoeffer's (2010:393) employment of the metaphor is in the context of individual Christian practice (the question of how *one* person – his friend Eberhard Bethge – should handle his various loves and desires). In essence, the employment of the metaphor is intrapersonal. Secondly, the constituents of polyphony (the individual melodies), as Bonhoeffer explains it, are able to exist on their own. They are certainly more complete together, but individual existence is possible – each melody is self-sufficient, in a sense, even if enriched when brought together. The metaphor (and cultural paradigm) of polyrhythm challenges both these counts: we employ the metaphor interpersonally (as opposed to intrapersonally) and point to the fundamental interdependence it requires. In particular, we turn to Ogu polyrhythm to illustrate these points, with multiple, interdependent players hocketing a single rhythmic unit.

As noted, polyphony is the musical texture of layering multiple non-parallel melodies to form a larger whole (Locke 1992; Oluranti 2012). Polyrhythm is similar to polyphony, except that the latter consists of sounds of indefinite pitches (Locke 1992; Frishkopf 2021). Ogu polyrhythm, like many of its West African counterparts, is typically made up of different lengths of ostinato patterns played on various drums, bells, shakers, bamboo clappers, and handclapping. Each ostinato part may be varied from time to time, while maintaining the broad rhythmic role within the ensemble. In other words, Ogu polyrhythm is essentially, and by definition, played in ensembles. This contrasts with specific iterations of polyphony, as in Bach's work, from which Bonhoeffer drew, such as Bach's Fugue in G minor which may be performed on the organ by an individual with each hand contributing a different melody and both feet combining to add another layer of melody. Citing the organ, in

this instance, is not to be understood as implying that polyphony can only be realised on a single instrument played by an individual, as it may also be achieved with multiple individuals singing different parts or playing various instruments. However, the point to be made is that an individual melody contributing to the polyphony can exist by itself. By contrast, in the polyrhythmic example described in this article, rhythmic units (comparable to melodies in polyphony) are often hocketed in ways that require the interdependence of the players. While polyphony, so construed, does indeed help us better understand Christ as *cantus firmus*, the metaphor (and cultural paradigm) fails to fully capture the interdependence of individuals. The *imago Dei* implies that individuals are in themselves incomplete. Ogu polyrhythm, split among two or more drummers, thus offers a rich metaphor and cultural paradigm for better capturing conviviality.

In a typical Ogu ensemble, there are lead and auxiliary percussions. Lead drums improvise, taking breaks from time to time. By contrast, auxiliary drums, in collaboration, produce a composite pattern that serves as a percussive understructure for the improvised lead parts. Some Ogu genres derive their names from their lead drums. Hence, the *hungan* genre is performed with the *hungan* drum as the lead instrument. Conversely, the auxiliary instruments contributing to the percussive understructure are the same for most of the genres. A typical understructure section includes a few small drums (a pair of *kle* and a pair of *apesi*), shakers (*aya* and *saya*), clappers (*apalun*), and bells (*ogan*). They produce several interlocking motifs that blend to form a complex rhythmic whole. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate the individual parts of the percussion that produce the interlocking motifs in Ogu music.

The *apesi* drums collaborate to produce an ostinato pattern, which is heard as one rhythmic unit in the ensemble. In essence, the *apesi* pattern, consisting of two tones, is achieved through the collaboration and interdependence of two individuals. Thus, a seamless *apesi* pattern exemplifies mastery of interdependence, careful listening, and mutual respect between the two *apesi* players. The same goes for other players in the ensemble, particularly those playing other paired instruments such as the *kle* drums. Thus, good Ogu music (one that animates *gbenopo*) is not simply a function of the proficiency of the individual *apesi* players. Instead, mastery is judged based on the ability to blend in an ensemble, which alludes to depending on, listening to, and respecting other musicians. Summarily, in this context, a band, a section, or a unit within a section is only as good as the ability of its members to interdepend.

The interdependence required when collaborating players hocket a rhythmic unit is such that when one player is missing, it becomes difficult for

the others to play their parts. In other words, it is challenging, if not impossible, to play one's part of a rhythmic unit in isolation (Stone 2005). This lived experience of interdependence among Ogu drummers is akin to Nyamnjoh's idea of conviviality. Nyamnjoh (2017a:261, emphasis added) notes that

> individuals maximise their interests best when these are pursued in recognition and respect for the incompleteness of being and *being interconnected with incomplete others* and in communion with collective interests.

Similarly, each part of a rhythmic hocket sounds meaningless when performed outside its context. However, when placed within the context of the rhythmic unit (what we perceive as the musical equivalent of Nyamnjoh's "being interconnected with incomplete others"), what results is a unit of an infectious dance pattern. Therefore, we submit in keeping with Nyamnjoh that incompleteness is not negative. Instead, it is "a source of potency" because it is an acknowledgement, as Tutu's *ubuntu* theology reminded us, that essential to being human is the fundamental interdependency implied by the *imago Dei* (Nyamnjoh 2017a:262).

6. CONCLUSION

For both Tutu and Bonhoeffer, theology was not an other-worldly exercise, but a mandate for this-worldly Christian life. As they both sought to express this adequately, they drew on their lived experience, informed by their respective contexts and cultures, expressing themselves not via "isolated mental concepts" but by way of "thought-in-action". We have drawn on their use of musical metaphors to illustrate this, not only to highlight the richness that lies waiting in such interdisciplinary explorations, but also to bring the lived expression of *ubuntu* into dialogue with Bonhoeffer's polyphony of life. While the metaphor of polyphony beautifully captures this-worldly Christian life, encouraging it to flourish and anchoring it in vertical relationship to God, it does not sufficiently portray the richness of the horizontal – human, interdependent relationships that contribute to this symphony. Or, to put it differently, polyphony was Bonhoeffer's response to Bethge's question of the rightful place of "earthly love", emphasising the grounding of individual desires in the *cantus firmus* of the vertical love for God. The metaphor – or perhaps better, the cultural paradigm – of polyrhythm would add that "earthly love" is utterly interdependent, that the transcendence involved in the vertical relationship is part of the very same symphony as the transcendence to which Bonhoeffer refers in "being for the neighbour within reach" (the horizontal).

Tutu's imposing legacy will remain an important reminder of the significance of *ubuntu* theology. However, his prayer that *ubuntu* will not leave us alone does not rest on this, but on our willingness to listen carefully to the nature of being human, and the Christian call to be-for-others. While the focus of this article was not *ubuntu per se*, *ubuntu* reminds us of the need to better understand that conviviality is a necessary component of being fully human.[4] This is why it is important for theological endeavours to be more than merely exercises in abstract conceptualisation. While we have provided speculative forays into the subject, it is apparent that a robust contextual theology of conviviality will benefit richly from interdisciplinary efforts and close listening to lived experience. We suggest that this holds true for practising theology in Africa more generally. There is much richness to be gained from attending to the lived experience, the "dancing" out, of theology in Africa.

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4   It is important to note that we are not arguing for a recovery of some idealised form of *ubuntu*. We live in a complex, globalised society, and retrieval of a "pure" ethic of *ubuntu*, as once practised, should not be the focus of our attention. Rather, as Louw (2019:126) pointed out, we should reject *ubuntu* romanticism: "[The] original version of *ubuntu* [is beyond our reach, and our contemporary reconstructions are] coloured by our postmodern values, beliefs and biases". In terms of our engagement with the notion of *ubuntu*, we suggest, with Louw (2019:126), that surely the most important question is forward-looking: "How *should Ubuntu* be understood and utilized for the common good of *all* Africans and of the world at large?". We need to collectively grapple with what resembles conviviality in our contemporary milieu, reflecting, as Metz (2014:212) suggests, on what it means to implement principles of *ubuntu* "refurbished for a modern context".

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