

Emerging from the Akan Single-Tiered Unitive Perspective on Reality

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2018 Middlesex University PhD

ABSTRACT

My thesis proposes using the Akan single-tiered unitive perspective on reality in two ways: first, as a hermeneutical tool for reading and understanding African Christian theologies,* and second, as a means for opening up space in global conversations between African and western theologians on the relationship between the seen and unseen, the material and spiritual, and on the perceived fact-faith divide in the contemporary West. I have developed the term ‘single-tiered unitive perspective on reality’ to designate the idea, present in the literature under various other names, that the material and spiritual exist inseparably in an overlapping, permeable way that creates an interpretive landscape for the reading and writing of African Christian theologies.

In considering the interpretive landscape which emerges from this single-tiered unitive perspective on reality, two terms become especially useful. The first is Andrew Walls’ ‘maps of the universe’, and the second is Kwesi Dickson’s ‘religio-culture’. Within the context of the single-tiered unitive perspective, these conceptual frames of reference provide us with secondary interpretive tools for analysing the work of the mostly Akan scholars and ideas discussed in this thesis, —particularly Kwame Bediako and his three-pronged use of identity as a new theological category. The single-tiered unitive perspective also provides the interpretive landscape—and various categories that are important in the make-up of that landscape – for what I am calling ‘analogical continuity’, which takes advantage of particular analogical ‘landing places’, or ‘bridges’ between the primal Akan and biblical ‘maps’ or conceptions of reality. I suggest that ‘analogical continuity’ offers a new way through the continuity-discontinuity debate by locating continuity at the level of the single-tiered perspective. Finally, use of the single-tiered unitive perspective sheds light on the contribution Akan theologians are making to the global theological conversation in two important areas: Christology and biblical anthropology. In these two areas I bring various Akan scholars into conversation with each other, using the interpretive lens of the single-tiered perspective to demonstrate where and why they differ even as they work from a common interpretive perspective on reality.

*I use ‘African’ to refer to sub-Saharan Africa, with particular attention to Ghana.