CHAPTER FOUR

CULTURE PHILOSOPHICAL EMPHASES OF THEOLOGICAL THINKING IN THE ELCB

4.1. Holistic Perception of Life and the Ontology of Spiritual Monism

According to Robinson the church needs to present Christ to the people in Botswana in a way relevant to African existence.¹ This relevance is in connection to the culture philosophy, which determines people’s cultural identity. As a term, culture philosophy stems from Oruka,² and means the common ideas and systems of thought that underlie oral literature and people’s cultural way of living.³ According to Robinson the view of life in Botswana is first of all holistic.⁴

Holism has been mentioned above in relation to the reading of the Bible.⁵ Yet holistic as a concept means an approach which perceives the whole to be more than merely the sum of its separated fragments.⁶ A holistic reading of the Bible, in other words, does not deal with the particular texts or even with their relations to each other, but it approaches the message of the Bible as being more than the sum of its various texts. This holistic reading, according to Moenga, concerns the will of God for human beings.⁷

However, Moenga also emphasises holistic rereading of the Bible.⁸ According to him rereading needs to interfere with all spheres of life rather than leaving some areas excluded. It is actually the holistic approach

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¹ ROB93, 2.
² See chapter 2.2.
³ Robinson refers to culture as the heartbeat of the nation: “What is culture? One of several definitions of culture is that culture is the heartbeat, or the pulse of a nation. As the human heartbeat tells a lot about how the body functions, so does culture tell us how a nation, a people, go about its life in general; how its life is organised from the cradle to the grave and beyond” (ROB96a, 1).
⁴ ROB98, 2.
⁵ MOE05a, 16.
⁶ According to Korkman & Yrjönsuuri (2003, 447), an explanation which merely takes into account relations between the separated fragments of the whole, cannot be regarded as holistic.
⁷ MOE05a, 16; also ROB97, 2.
⁸ MOE05a, 16.
to life, which in Moenga’s theology takes into account the political, social, economic, physical, spiritual and cultural aspects of human life. These areas are not approached one by one, but holism simultaneously bears in mind people’s whole life context as the reality within theology is to be done. This idea is similar with respect to incarnation that is not seen to concern merely bodily existence of Jesus, neither it is restricted to the spiritual phenomenon or explained in a symbolic way, but incarnation is seen to attach the Divine One with all spheres of human life—socio-political reality, history and culture included. Since holism obviously underlies Robinson’s epistemic model, which considers intellect, cultural context and the experience of heart, one can speak of holistic theology as a whole.

In this regard Moenga criticises approaches which try to separate religion and politics from each other. Thus engagement in politics, according to Moenga, is part and parcel of human nature, neither is the Church apolitical. On the contrary, according to him, the prophetic nature of the Church and the commitment of Christians should affect changes especially concerning the position of poor and marginalised among societies. Also Robinson states that the church needs to focus on the traditional, cultural and social aspects of people’s life, which are also

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9 MOE97, 52.
10 E.g. when Robinson talks about strengths and weaknesses that are shared in the body of Christ, he refers largely to all spheres of human life, the intellectual sphere included: “There will always be the strong and the weak not only in the matter of faith in Christ but also in the economic, political, social and intellectual spheres of human life” (ROB02, 1).
11 MOE05/ 55, 59–60; MOE09a, 1, 7; also ROB93, 2–3.
12 See also Veikko Munyika’s *A Holistic Soteriology in an African Context* (2004). According to Maarman Sam Tshehla holism is one of the main emphasis in African theological scholarship in general, see “The Prophetic Vocation of the African Scholar: A Celebration of Wholeness” (Tshehla 2005).
13 MOE05a, 47–59. Taking Moses from the Old Testament as an example, he explains that in the Bible religion and politics are not separated from each other: “Was he not a politician? When you are told to free people from one country and flee with them to another country is that not politics? Who instructed Moses? Was it not God? If, indeed, it was God, then God instructed Moses to engage in politics” (MOE05b, 4).
14 MOE05a, 50; MOE05b, 4.
15 MOE05a, 48: “There is nothing like an apolitical church because by claiming to be politically neutral, the Church will be taking the side of the powerful.”
16 MOE05a, 52, 59; MOE05a, 47: “The Church cannot be neutral when it comes to the question of justice and injustice.” Also MOE05a, 49: “The Church can not afford to be silent while at the same time claiming to be the church [sic] of Christ.” MOE05b, 4: “If Christians are committed, they can have a positive and constructive effect on our society” (MOE05a, 58).