

Jesus of Africa:
Voices of
Contemporary African Christology
from
Selected Textual and Oral Sources

Diane Barbara Stinton

To the African Christians

**theologians, church leaders and laity,
with gratitude
for willingly and joyfully relating to me
their understanding and experience
of Jesus Christ**

I hereby declare that this thesis constitutes my own research and writing, and it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished and the source of information acknowledged.

Diane B. Stinton

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Abstract

This thesis explores and analyses voices of contemporary African christology, integrating selected textual and oral christologies from sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa. The critical concern for African Christians to articulate their perceptions of Jesus' identity and significance has spawned a proliferation of written christologies during the past few decades. To date there is little substantive analysis of these creative christologies, which prompts the present study. Christological texts from the following six theologians provide a cross-section of reflections from Catholic and Protestant traditions: Bénézet Bujo, Jean-Marc Ela, J. N. K. Mugambi, Mercy Oduyoye, Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, and John Pobee. Given the vitality of Christian experience in Africa today, informal expressions of theology warrant serious consideration. Oral christologies are therefore gained from personal interviews with the six theologians, plus qualitative field research in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. Individual interviews and focus groups capture the voices of urban, educated Christians including men and women, Catholics and Protestants, and clergy and laity. Christological investigation is also enhanced by informal christologies gleaned through participant observation in a variety of Christian settings in the specified contexts.

Following an introduction to the subject and methods of study, the main body of the thesis examines central themes which emerge from the christological data. The research process configures current christologies in four broad categories intrinsically related to one another. Each category represents a cluster of christological images: (1) Jesus as Life-giver, with special reference to the images of healer and traditional healer, (2) Jesus as Mediator, developing the image of Jesus as ancestor, (3) Jesus as Leader, focusing on the images of king / chief and liberator, and (4) Jesus as Loved One. Only the first three categories are presented within the confines of this thesis, while the fourth—Jesus as Loved One—is referred to briefly in relation to overlapping themes. Analysis elucidates the rationale, sources, methods, and meaning of emergent African christologies. Research findings indicate that the selected African Christians reveal confident, contextual engagement with the fundamental question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). That is, responses to this question are formulated not only in light of biblical revelation and Christian tradition, but also in terms of African realities both past and present. These contemporary African christologies thus represent an important landmark in the development of African theology. Their significance to the ongoing shaping of Christian tradition is noted in view of Africa's prominent place in world Christianity at the turn of the third millennium, with implications for christological reflection and praxis.

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Initial impetus for the present research stems from conversations with Professor Kwame Bediako in Nairobi in 1994. Since then, attending his lectures here at the Centre and continued dialogue have stimulated new thinking and deepened my understanding of contemporary African Christianity. In addition to his incisive supervision, I am especially grateful for his “Come and see” approach to studying christology in the Ghanaian context. The generous welcome I received from the Bediakos and the community at the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre remains a highlight of my Ph.D. experience. More recently, Professor John S. Pobee has shown keen interest in the research project, offering penetrating responses and providing personal affirmation through the process. I particularly appreciate the critical feedback from these African scholars concerning the christologies arising across their continent.

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Ghana. These experiences have served to deepen the esteem I have for the many African Christian women who have touched my life.

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List of Abbreviations

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AEAM	Association of Evangelicals of Africa & Madagascar
<i>AFER</i>	<i>African Ecclesiastical Review</i>
<i>AJET</i>	<i>African Journal of Evangelical Theology</i>
The Circle	The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
EAAT	Ecumenical Association of African Theologians
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
NCKK	National Council of the Churches of Kenya
PACWA	Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance
WCC	World Council of Churches

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PART I

**INTRODUCTION TO
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES**

CHAPTER 1

THE RISE OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

A. Introduction

At the heart of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the very core of Christian theology is christology, as acknowledged by one of the pioneers of modern African theology, John Mbiti: “Since His Incarnation, Christian Theology ought properly to be Christology, for Theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ, at a given Time, Place and human situation.”¹ Other African theologians have likewise recognised the centrality of Jesus to African Christianity, and the critical need to articulate the reality and significance of Christ in relation to the faith and life of African Christians. For example, an ecumenical symposium was held in Karen, Nairobi, in 1989 to investigate christology from an interdisciplinary perspective. In their introduction to the findings from this symposium, J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa write:

Christology is, in the final analysis, the most basic and central issue of *Christian* theology. The faith, the hope and the praxis of love that Christian theology attempts to explicate, and which Christians endeavour to witness to by their life, must have Christ as their foundation and goal. Without Jesus Christ as this cornerstone and final aim, nothing in Christology counts; nothing in theological thought is of any significance from the Christian point of view. In fact, to be precise, theology is not Christian at all when it does not offer Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the answer to the human quest, and as the answer to people who ask the reason for the hope that all Christians hold through faith (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).²

In the ongoing development of Christian theology, African accounts of christology warrant careful consideration in view of Africa’s prominent place in Christian history at the turn of the third millennium. According to leading mission scholar Andrew Walls, one of the most important events in the whole of Christian history has occurred in the twentieth century:

¹ John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 190.

² J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, “Introduction,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, Ltd., 1989), x. Throughout this thesis, all italics and bold emphases in quoted material are original to the material cited.

It is nothing less than a complete change in the centre of gravity of Christianity, so that the heartlands of the Church are no longer in Europe, decreasingly in North America, but in Latin America, in certain parts of Asia, and, most important for our present purposes, in Africa.³

As a result of this remarkable shift in world Christianity, plus the observation that theology which endures is that which affects the minds and lives of a significant number of people, Walls asserts that the theologies presently arising in Africa will have a determinative effect in shaping church history for centuries to come.⁴ Thus it is imperative to examine current christological trends in Africa in their own right, and to enhance comprehension of Christian tradition as it unfolds worldwide.

B. Contemporary African Christologies: Crisis Or Confidence?

Recent reflections on African Christianity often identify a “christological crisis,”⁵ with various explanations as to why it is considered problematic for African believers to appropriate Jesus Christ authentically. The need is repeatedly voiced for African Christians to perceive and respond to Jesus in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their own mentality and experience. For example, in 1963 missionary John V. Taylor spoke passionately of “a sense of urgency in the search for the true meeting-place where Christ is conversing with the soul of Africa.”⁶ Elaborating on the significance of Christianity being perceived in Africa as a “white man’s religion,” Taylor pinpointed the heart of the problem in a most penetrating way:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church Universal? And if Africa offered him the

³ A. F. Walls, “Towards Understanding Africa’s Place in Christian History,” in *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. J. S. Pobee (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 180.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵ See, for example, Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 78.

⁶ John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 7.

praises and petitions of her total, uninhibited humanity, would they be acceptable?⁷

More recently Anselme Sanon, citing Ernest Sambou, emphasises that “in most African countries, the prime theological urgency consists in discovering the true face of Jesus Christ, that Christians may have the living experience of that face, in depth and according to their own genius.”⁸

On the other hand, christological confidence abounds in the perceptions of Jesus Christ “through African eyes” which have been operative among indigenous believers for as long as Christianity has been on the continent.⁹ The concept of looking at Jesus through African eyes can be seen, quite literally, in the iconography of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Ethiopia, where the ‘Ethiopianism’ of the figures is established through the use of very prominent eyes.¹⁰ In more recent history, the South African prophet Isaiah Shembe is renowned as the founder of the independent church, the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, and as the composer of many hymns. A non-literate man himself, he is said to have heard the songs in his head and to have sung them to his followers. Later his son, J. Galilee Shembe, compiled over one hundred and fifty of his father’s hymns and published them along with several of his own. Among Isaiah Shembe’s hymns is a verse composed early in the twentieth century which illustrates long-standing indigenous expressions of christology:

Umuhle wanangwe yethu	Beautiful are you [our] leopard ...
Umuhle wena Krestu wethu,	Beautiful are you our Christ,
Sukuma wena Nkosi yethu	Stand up you [our] iNkosi ...
Uchoboze izitha zethu.	That you may crush our enemies. ¹²
Amen, Amen, Amen. ¹¹	

⁷ Ibid., 16. Where non-inclusive language occurs in quoted material, here and elsewhere, the author’s original language has been maintained in recognition of different conventions employed in other times and cultures.

⁸ E. Sambou, “Une voie réaliste pour l’ecclésiologie,” in *Lumière et Vie* 159, p. 32; quoted in Anselme T. Sanon, “Jesus, Master of Initiation,” in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 85.

⁹ The point is made by Charles Nyamiti, among others, as follows: “Indeed, if African theology is the understanding and presentation of the Christ-event in accordance with African needs and mentality, then African christologies must have existed since the beginning of evangelization on the Black continent (although mainly in a latent, oral, and unsystematic form).” Charles Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), 35; reprinted in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 3-23.

¹⁰ For example, see the early 14th century illumination of the Evangelist Mark, from the Gospel book of Emperor Amda Seyon I (1314-44), Ethiopia. Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Immanuel: The Coming of Jesus in Art and the Bible* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 8-9. I am indebted to supervisor T. Jack Thompson for drawing this insight and this illustration to my attention.

¹¹ J. Galilee Shembe, *Izihlabelo zaManazaretha* (Durban: Elite Printers, 1940), 75.

Even more recently, striking images of Jesus have been voiced by a non-literate Ghanaian woman, Afua Kuma, one who worked her fields and served as village midwife. In the vivid language and poetry of the Akan people, she expressed the presence and power of Jesus in her everyday life and that of her community. Examples include the following:

Obirempɔn Yesu a woyɛ kramo
 kɛsɛ,
 owia ne ɔsram na eyɛ wo
 batakari,
 ɛho rehyerɛn sɛ anɔpa nsoromma.
Sɛkyerɛ Buruku a
 woyɛ bepɔw tenten;
 amansan nyinaa hu
 w'anuonyam.¹³

O great and powerful Jesus,
 incomparable Diviner,
 the sun and moon are your
batakari [robe].
 It sparkles like the morning star.
Sɛkyerɛ Buruku,
 the tall mountain,
 all the nations see Your glory.¹⁴

Yerusalem mmpɔw
 atwa yɛn ho ahyia;
 Sion mmpɔw ntam na yɛhyɛ.
 ɔbonsam, wo tuo renka yɛn.
 Sɛ ɔbonsam sɛ ɔresɔre yɛn so a,
 yɛyɛ Yesu nkurɔfo.

The mountains of Jerusalem
 surround us
 We are in the midst
 of the mountains of Zion.
 Satan, your bullets can't touch us.
 If Satan says he will rise up
 against us
 we are still the people of Jesus!

Yesu Kristo, wo na woyɛ
 saremuseɛ;
 wo na wo bowerɛw yɛ nnam;
 yi ɔbonsam nsono gu fam
 ma nwansanapobi ne no nni.¹⁵

If Satan troubles us,
 Jesus Christ,
 you who are the Lion of the
 grasslands,
 you whose claws are sharp,
 will tear out his entrails
 and leave them on the ground
 for the flies to eat.¹⁶

¹² Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen, *The Theology of a South African Messiah: An Analysis of the Hymnal of "The Church of the Nazarites"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 37. It must be noted that considerable controversy surrounds the interpretation of Isaiah Shembe's hymns, as well as the historiography of the independent church he established in 1911, the Ibandla lamaNazaretha. In addition to Oosthuizen's work, see Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1940); Jack Thompson, "Shembe Mismanaged?: A Study of Varying Interpretations of the Ibandla Lamanazaretha" *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 70, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 185-196; and Absolom Vilakazi, with Bongani Mthethwa and Mthembeni Mpanza, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986). The purpose at present is not to enter into the debate concerning the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of this particular movement, but simply to highlight one expression of indigenous perceptions of Jesus which illustrates countless such expressions in vernacular across the continent of Africa.

¹³ Afua Kuma, *Kwaeberentuw Ase Yesu: Afua Kuma Ayeyi ne Mpaebɔ* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1980), 6.

¹⁴ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, trans. Jon Kirby (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1981), 6.

¹⁵ Kuma, *Kwaeberentuw Ase Yesu*, 46.

Yesu a wagye ahiafo
ama yɛn anim aba nyam.
Damfo-Adu,
wo na yɛredan wo
sɛ tɛkrɛma redan abɔgye.¹⁷

Jesus, Saviour of the poor,
who brightens up our faces!
Damfo-Adu: the clever one,
we rely on you as the tongue
relies on the mouth.¹⁸

The recent recording and publishing of her prayers illustrates an important point, that African Christians have inevitably understood and responded to Jesus in light of received biblical teaching *and* their own cultural heritage.¹⁹

In spite of the long history of these indigenous, oral christologies, it is only in the past few decades that christology has risen to a prominent position in the writings of African theologians south of the Sahara. In this regard, the “christological crisis” refers to a lack of critical and systematic reflection on Jesus Christ by Africans in light of their own cultural inheritance and identity, including ontology, cosmology and epistemology. For example, in 1968 John Mbiti claimed that “African concepts of Christology do not exist.”²⁰ Although he proceeded to delineate those aspects of Jesus which do indeed correspond to an African conceptualisation of the world, Mbiti is quoted as an early spokesperson for the crisis in textual christologies.²¹ In 1982 Aylward Shorter affirmed that “[f]olk Christianity in Africa is alive and well,” while academic theology “is dying of theological neglect,” specifying its “failure to provide a convincing African or Black Christology.”²² Likewise a 1987 publication recorded Kofi Appiah-Kubi’s verdict that “whereas there are volumes written on

¹⁶ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 46.

¹⁷ Kuma, *Kwaeberentuw Ase Yesu*, 5.

¹⁸ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.

¹⁹ Charles Nyamiti explains this point further, in relation to the origins of African theology, as follows:

[I]t is clear that missionaries, native priests, and catechists have regularly, in one form or another, endeavoured to adapt the Christian teaching to the requirements and dispositions of their hearers. It is also natural that African converts have, up to a certain degree, always understood and lived their Christian faith as Africans, i.e. according to their cultural make-up. One may rightly presume, therefore, that a careful investigation will reveal an old, latent form of African theology among the African communities. But the conscious systematic efforts to build up such theology are of recent origin. Charles Nyamiti, “Approaches to African Theology,” in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World*, ed. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 32-33.

²⁰ John S. Mbiti, “Some African Concepts of Christology,” in *Christ and the Younger Churches*, ed. Georg F. Vicedom (London: SPCK, 1972), 51; published earlier in German as “Afrikanische Beiträge zur Christologie” in *Theologische Stimmen aus Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika*, Vol. 3, ed. Georg F. Vicedom (München: C. Kaiser Verlag, 1968).

²¹ See Martey, *African Theology*, 78; Raymond Moloney, “African Christology,” *Theological Studies* 48, no. 3 (Sept. 1987): 505.

²² Aylward Shorter, “Folk Christianity and Functional Christology,” *AFER* 24, no. 3 (June 1982): 134.

African ideas of God, surprisingly, there is a very thin literature on African Christology.”²³

In contrast to these assessments, striking confidence has been expressed in the field from the late 1980s. In 1989, theologian Charles Nyamiti identified christology as the most developed subject in African theology to date.²⁴ He reiterated this assessment in a 1994 publication, adding that writings had progressed beyond simply voicing the need or suggesting methods for what should be done, to actually formulating christologies.²⁵ Nyamiti noted that aside from certain academic dissertations, many of the writings remained on a rudimentary level. Nonetheless, his assessment signalled a shift in perspective on the status of contemporary African christologies. Moreover, in 1994 historian John Baur also highlighted christology as the central theme in African theology.²⁶ Although he mentioned having only found four elaborate treatises on the subject, he drew attention to the proliferation of christological titles being explored in essay form.

The marked rise in christological reflection is attested in the emergence of key anthologies, journal articles, and monographs over a short period of time. Francophone theologians contributed to a 1986 anthology edited by Joseph Doré, entitled *Chemins de la christologie africaine*.²⁷ Anglophone theologians published a corresponding collection in the 1989 work edited by Mugambi and Magesa, *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*.²⁸ In 1991, selected essays from these two volumes were republished, with English translations of the French contributions, by Robert Schreiter in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*. Then in 1992, John Pobee edited a further anthology entitled, *Exploring Afro-Christology*, based on papers from a 1988 consultation held by the World Council of Churches on “Confessing Christ in Africa Today.”²⁹ African writers also contributed to the increase in journal articles on christology in the late 1980s. For example, two editions of *Voices from the Third World*, the semiannual journal of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), were devoted to christology,

²³ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “Christology,” in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987), 69.

²⁴ Charles Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” 17.

²⁵ Charles Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994), 70.

²⁶ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), 304.

²⁷ Joseph Doré, ed., *Chemins de la Christologie Africaine*, Collection <<Jésus et Jésus-Christ>> no. 25, ed. Joseph Doré (Paris: Desclée, 1986).

²⁸ Mugambi and Magesa, *Jesus in African Christianity*.

²⁹ John S. Pobee, ed., *Exploring Afro-Christology* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992).

in 1985 and in 1988.³⁰ African christologies featured significantly in both of these editions. Finally, key christological monographs also emerged in the 1980s, to be illustrated below. Far from exhaustive, this brief sketch of the rapid flowering of African christologies illuminates a recent assessment of African christologies as the “centre-piece” of African Christian theology.³¹ Thus the current field of study appears strikingly different from a few decades ago.

C. Historical and Theological Context

How is this shift from crisis to confidence to be explained? Why do African christologies proliferate at this point in the history of African Christianity? While various scholars have traced the rise of recent African theologies and christologies, this section focuses particularly on the historical and theological significance of this creative outburst of christological reflection across the continent from the 1980s onwards.³² For as Kwame Bediako observes, these emergent christologies are especially significant since they are conspicuously absent or minimal during the first phase of modern African theology (1950s to 1980s).³³ So how is their apparently late arrival to be interpreted?

1. Phase One (1950s - 1980s): Latent Christologies

Christology was certainly inherent in African theology from the outset, as indicated by Mbiti’s quote above concerning the centrality of christology to theology.³⁴ Furthermore, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) had been

³⁰ See “Christology,” *Voices from the Third World* 7, no. 1 (March 1985); “Christologies in Encounter,” *Voices from the Third World* 11, no. 2 (Dec. 1988).

³¹ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, “African Christologies: The Centre-Piece of African Christian Theology,” *Zeitschrift Für Missionswissenschaft Und Religionswissenschaft* 82 (1998): 3-23.

³² Regarding the rise of African theology, see for example Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 288-306; Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O’Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 37-73; Martey, *African Theology*, 7-35; John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 1-13; Young III, Josiah U., *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, *Bibliographies and Indexes in Religious Studies*, no. 26, ed. G. E. Gorman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 13-42. Accounts of the rise of African christology are less common. For one example, see Ukachukwu Chris Manus, *Christ, the African King: New Testament Christology*, *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*, Band 82 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 49-70.

³³ Kwame Bediako, “The Significance of Modern African Christianity—A Manifesto,” *Studies in World Christianity* 1, Part 1 (1995): 58-59; see also “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 3, no. 2 (June 1996): 6.

³⁴ Interpreters of Mbiti have noted the importance of christology to his thought. For example, following his in-depth analysis of Mbiti’s works, Kwame Bediako concludes, “Christology has been close to the centre of Mbiti’s concerns throughout his theological career. He has also achieved remarkable clarity on the importance of Christological understanding in the overall theological consciousness of the Christian Church.” Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum

constituted in Kampala in 1963 with the chief objective of achieving selfhood for the African church, and it was to become a mainspring of inspiration for African theology. When an Assembly was held in Abijan to explore indigenous liturgies and African expressions of Christian doctrine, it was firmly declared that “Christ must be the centre of this theology.”³⁵ Hence christological concern was definitely present, yet not prominent during the early stages of African theology in the twentieth century.

Several factors contribute to this state of affairs. On the socio-political scene, African theology as an intellectual discipline arose during the 1950s when the struggle against colonialism led to several newly independent states. For example in 1955, shortly before Ghana became the first African nation to attain independence in 1957, the Christian Council of the Gold Coast sponsored a conference in Accra on “Christianity and African Culture” which proved to be instrumental in forging new theological directions.³⁶ Due to the widely perceived collusion between Christianity and colonialism, with the consequent critique of Christianity by African intellectuals, African theologians were challenged to establish their credentials as truly African and Christian.³⁷ Thus a first priority lay in formulating an apologetic for African theology in the face of nationalist critique and missionary domination of the church in Africa.

Along with the political “wind of change” came the “cultural revolution” which swept across the continent.³⁸ In opposition to the disdain with which African culture had generally been held during colonial times, intensive efforts were made to reaffirm African identity and integrity in many spheres of life including names, dress, music, dance forms, architecture, and other indigenous expressions which necessarily affected church life and practice.³⁹ On the intellectual level, the African Renaissance was induced prior to the 1950s by literary writers, particularly the

Books, 1992), 328. Likewise John Kinney notes the “elevated christological perspective” in Mbiti’s theological thought. John W. Kinney, “The Theology of John Mbiti: His Sources, Norms, and Method,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3, no. 2 (April 1979): 66.

³⁵ Quoted in Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 292-293.

³⁶ On the importance of the Accra conference, see Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 291; Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation*, *Studia Theologica Lundensia* 42 (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1988), 14.

³⁷ John Pobee, Personal Conversation, Pretoria, South Africa: Jan. 25, 2000. See also John S. Pobee, “I am First an African and Second a Christian,” *Indian Missiological Review* 10, no. 3 (July 1989): 268-277. For examples of the critique of Christianity by African intellectuals, see Mongo Béti, *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Collection Ecrits (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976); Okot p’Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970).

³⁸ See Adrian Hastings, “Cultural Revolution,” chap. in *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976), 37-59.

³⁹ Justin S. Ukpong, “Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 505-506.

francophone movement known as *la négritude* initiated by Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire, plus anglophone writers including Nigerians Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe and Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Cultural revival was further reinforced by writers on African philosophy, whether foreigners like Belgian Franciscan missionary Placide Tempels or Africans like Rwandan Alexis Kagame.⁴⁰ Given the ferment of revitalising local cultures, efforts to indigenise mission churches took place and took priority within this wider context of African reformation in literature, philosophy and history. Once again, christology was evidently not granted immediate attention.

Parallel to the African Renaissance was a more widespread theological renaissance from the mid-twentieth century. On the international scene the Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965, with its theology of *aggiornamento*, sanctioned a radical reappraisal of Christian liturgy, catechesis, pastoral practices, theology and ecclesiology, plus more positive re-evaluations of non-Christian religions and cultures. Justin Ukpong summarises the significance of Vatican II as follows: "In these documents, therefore, we find the first steps towards the realization of a 'world church' in which the universal is present in the particular, and in which there might be room for the development of autochthonous forms of Christian expression."⁴¹ Further exhortation to cultivate local African expressions of the Christian faith is often associated with Pope Paul VI's visit to Kampala in 1969, when he urged the bishops, "You may, and you must, have an African Christianity."⁴² New initiatives in Catholic and Protestant theologies coalesced and fostered growth through African participation in the wider context of Third World theology. In particular, Africa hosted the first Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians in Dar es Salaam in 1976, resulting in the foundation of EATWOT.⁴³ The significance of EATWOT, as well as the corresponding foundation in Accra in 1977 of the Ecumenical

⁴⁰ Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 290-291.

⁴¹ Ukpong, "Current Theology," 508.

⁴² For example, Jean-Marc Ela quotes these words at the outset of his "Preface" to *My Faith as an African*, remarking that the challenge has not been forgotten. He comments further, as follows:

And, indeed, this demand somewhat satisfies the deep hopes that now appear throughout research, colloquia, and diverse publications from Africa. In certain churches, the desire to root the gospel in local realities is becoming a fundamental option demanded by the proclamation of the Good News. It is the major concern that inspires the entire episcopate of Africa, and the motivation underlying numerous studies in theology, religious life, liturgy and catechesis. Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xiii.

⁴³ See the conference proceedings recorded in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., *The Emerging Gospel: Theology from the Developing World* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978).

Association of African Theologians (EAAT), will emerge throughout this thesis.⁴⁴ Finally, on the continental scene, theological fermentation was further stimulated by the remarkable rise in African initiated churches. Fears of the exodus of African Christians from mission denominations to these indigenous churches encouraged theologians and church leaders to reformulate their faith so as to be more meaningful to their members.⁴⁵

Thus the academic discipline of African theology was born midst crosswinds of socio-political, cultural, and theological change. Fairly early in its development, Desmond Tutu affirmed African theology in its attempt to “rehabilitate Africa’s rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness.” He viewed it as “the theological counterpart of what has happened in, say, the study of African history. It has helped to give the lie to the supercilious but tacit assumption that religion and history in Africa date from the advent in that continent of the white man.”⁴⁶ In spite of Tutu’s strong validation of African theology, Bediako rightfully notes that “it still remains important to appreciate why this effort has been made as a self-consciously *theological* endeavour, and in a specifically *Christian* interest.”⁴⁷ And it could be added, to return to the issue at hand, within this specifically Christian agenda, why the seeming neglect of christology initially?

Clues appear in various writings. For example Kwesi Dickson, a pioneer in the scholarly examination of the Bible in relation to African life and thought, notes that several expatriate and African writers highlight the cultural continuity between Israel and Africa. On this basis, he explores “the African predilection for the Old Testament” in order to discern possible theological developments from this source.⁴⁸ While such investigation does not preclude christological inquiry,⁴⁹ the evidence that the Old Testament has commanded attention from African Christians might provide some explanation of why christology does not feature more prominently before the 1980s. Alternatively, John Parratt suggests that one reason for the initial neglect lies in the discontinuity between views of history inherent in Christianity and African

⁴⁴ See the conference proceedings recorded in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology en Route* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

⁴⁵ Ukpong, “Current Theology,” 509.

⁴⁶ Desmond Tutu, “Whither African Theology,” in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978); quoted in Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 2.

⁴⁷ Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 2.

⁴⁸ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 145ff.

⁴⁹ For example, following the reference above concerning the continuity between the Old Testament and African culture, Dickson’s next chapter forms an important milestone in African christological reflection. See “The Theology of the Cross in Context,” chap. in *Theology in Africa*, 185-199.

religions.⁵⁰ Since African religions are not “historical” in the sense of originating from a historical founder or having a tradition of “sacred history,” the historical founder of Christianity arguably exacts less regard from African believers. It is a moot point, but one which registers the inattention to christology during the first phase of modern African theology.

As early as 1976, Adrian Hastings, a leading interpreter of African Christianity, drew attention to what he found perplexing. Assessing the initial developments in African theology, he noted that African traditional religions had assumed “the very centre of the academic stage” for first generation theologians, whose chief task became “something of a dialogue between the African scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa.”⁵¹ Hastings then identified the central concern of this “first flowering of ‘African Theology’”⁵² in the late 1960s as follows: “The religious authenticity which is being sought by current African theology is beyond all else an authenticity of continuity, first and foremost the continuity of God.”⁵³ As a result, he voiced “a danger that areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalized, and this includes almost anything specifically christological.”⁵⁴ Hence for Hastings, the preoccupation with the African past, apparently at the expense of christology, was cause for concern.

In contrast, Bediako asserts that the inevitable theological concentration on Africa’s primal religions actually lay at the heart of the achievements of first generation theologians.⁵⁵ Far from being a diversion from interpreting the gospel in Africa, the very process of reassessing primal religions—previously declared by the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh to contain virtually no preparation

⁵⁰ John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 78.

⁵¹ Hastings, *African Christianity*, 50-51.

⁵² Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 231.

⁵³ Hastings, *African Christianity*, 52.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ It must be noted that the term “primal religions” is a matter of debate regarding appropriate terminology. In short, it has gained widespread acceptance in some circles, through the writings of John V. Taylor, Harold Turner, Andrew Walls and others, as a replacement for more pejorative classifications such as “animistic,” “pagan,” or “primitive” religions. However, objection to the term has been raised by some religious phenomenologists on the basis that it is a non-empirical construct designed for theological purposes. See James L. Cox, “The Classification ‘Primal Religions’ as a Non-empirical Christian Theological Construct,” *Studies in World Christianity* 2 (Apr. 1996): 55-76; Rosalind Shaw, “The Invention of African Traditional Religion,” *Religion* 20 (1990): 339-353.

for Christianity⁵⁶—together with the profession of Christian faith enabled these theologians to demonstrate “the true character of African *Christian* identity.”⁵⁷ In other words the need identified above by John Pobee, that is, to be “African and Christian,” has been met through the profound discovery of conversion to Christianity coupled with cultural continuity. According to Bediako, it was precisely “the missionary presumption of the European value-setting for the Christian faith,”⁵⁸ which excluded Africa’s religious past from serious theological reflection, that produced the *problematik* voiced by Mbiti concerning the lack of theology in the post-missionary African church. Thus the first generation of African theologians concentrated primarily on the pre-Christian religious heritage in an attempt to clarify the nature and meaning of African Christian identity, and their achievements have been duly noted.⁵⁹

2. Phase Two (1980s - Present): Emergent Christologies

If the initial phase of theological endeavour focused on the gospel in relation to the African heritage, thereby delaying intensive christological inquiry, strong evidence suggests that the groundwork laid by the first generation has proved foundational for progress since then. The 1980s mark an important shift in theological development. A new generation of scholars explores additional themes in theology by employing genuinely African categories, legitimated by the first generation, to articulate new insights. Christology has been foremost in this transition, now formulated in categories derived directly from the worldviews of African primal religions, such as Christ as healer, as ancestor, as master of initiation.⁶⁰ Other expressions, such as liberation and women’s christologies, address contemporary realities in African life. Without undertaking an extensive survey, brief introductions to four early christological explorations may illustrate the creative outburst which spanned geographical and confessional lines.

With the year 1980 forming an approximate watershed between the first and second phases of modern African theology, the shift from crisis to confidence becomes apparent in christological reflections. In the preface to his important work published in 1979, *Toward an African Theology*, John Pobee made the stark

⁵⁶ *Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions: The World Missionary Conference 1910—Report of Commission IV*, (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), 24; quoted in Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 2.

⁵⁷ Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹ See Bediako, *Theology and Identity*.

⁶⁰ See Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 2.

statement that it was time to stop criticising the work of early missionaries and to adopt a more positive and constructive approach to African theology.⁶¹ Shortly after Pobee's initial volume, to be considered later in the thesis, noticeable progress occurs in the proliferation of christological writings throughout the 1980s as previously outlined. One historical moment, 1983-1984, saw the publication of a succession of monographs, marking the emergence of African christologies.

a) Enyi Ben Udoh

One early work was Enyi Ben Udoh's doctoral dissertation presented to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1983 and later published as *Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa*. A Nigerian Presbyterian minister, Udoh recounts that his experience as a refugee in the Biafran war triggered the question of "the image, status and role of Christ in Africa."⁶² The notion of "crisis" looms large in Udoh's thought. He initially states that "the traditional way in which Christ was introduced in Africa, was largely responsible for the prevailing faith schizophrenia among African christians."⁶³ The problem is defined further as a "*religious double-mindedness*," or "the dilemma of combining the Christian principles with African traditional religion without being fully African or completely Christian."⁶⁴ The first third of Udoh's work develops the hypothesis that this African "faith pathology" is "fundamentally Christological," the origins of the problem lying in the nature of nineteenth century European mission. Analysing the Church of Scotland's mission to Calabar, Udoh concludes that "Christ entered the African scene as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant. He was presented as invalidating the history and institutions of a people in order to impose his rule upon them."⁶⁵ Udoh therefore deduces that many Nigerians view Christ as "merely a stranger," "an illegal alien," "a refugee, a dissident or a fugitive who in desperation

⁶¹ John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 9. Pobee later reiterates the danger of African theology being simply a matter of reaction, as most of it to date had been in his estimation. Instead, he states that in order to be truly useful, both African and Black theologies "must move from lamentation and reaction to a positive authentic [*sic*] and engage the African in his diversity in a dialogue which convicts and confirms him in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." John S. Pobee, "Black Theology: An Interpretation," in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, ed. John S. Pobee and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1986), 65.

⁶² Enyi Ben Udoh, *Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, Band 59 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), Preface, n.p.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2, 10-11.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 64.

has come to Africa for sanctuary,” or as “the most visible and publicized symbol of foreign domination ever.”⁶⁶

Against this backdrop of crisis, Udoh explores three recent proposals for African christologies: *Bongaka* (doctor), liberator, and *Christus-Victor*. He argues that these promise genuine theological alternatives to any received christology. Further confidence is reflected in his own proposal of a guest christological paradigm. In order to overcome Africans’ sense of Jesus as stranger, Udoh urges that Jesus be welcomed first as a guest, according to indigenous concepts and norms of honour. Only after he resides intimately among them on this basis will the “faith schizophrenia” of African Christians be resolved by “recognizing Jesus’ presence in our midst, no longer as a guest but as our kin....”⁶⁷

b) Kwame Bediako

Contemporaneously, another Presbyterian minister, Ghanaian Kwame Bediako, identifies the christological problem and offers new insights in response to it. Although his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Aberdeen in 1983 provides in-depth treatment of the first generation of African theologians, referred to above, his christological reflections were also published that year in essay form and subsequently reprinted as *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*.⁶⁸ Like Udoh, Bediako attends to the historical and theological dimensions of missionary engagement in Africa, underlining that the quality of contact between Christian proclamation and traditional religious life had a profound impact on present understandings of Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ Bediako’s analysis of that encounter outlines factors which contributed to the generally negative attitudes missionaries adopted towards African religious life. He further exposes “the missionary misapprehension of the Gospel” in the failure to adequately appreciate the “fundamental and primary universality of the Gospel, of Christ, and hence of his intimate relevance to all our

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74-75.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 266.

⁶⁸ Bediako’s Ph.D. thesis is later published as *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992). Among his christological reflections are the following publications: Kwame Bediako, “Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions,” in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Bangalore: Partnership in Mission-Asia, 1983), 115-175; *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990); “Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective,” in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 93-121.

⁶⁹ Bediako, “Biblical Christologies,” 116-117.

human contexts.”⁷⁰ As a result, according to Bediako, the western missionary enterprise did not achieve a genuine encounter between the Christian faith and, for example, the worldview of his own people, the Akan.⁷¹ One “ominous implication” of the missionary shortcomings was that Africans’ reception and articulation of the Christian faith was often restricted to models from the Christian traditions of Europe. On this basis, “Christ could not inhabit the spiritual universe of the African consciousness except, in essence, as a stranger.”⁷² Here Bediako concurs with Udoh’s identification of the christological crisis. Thus the concomitant problem of African Christian identity, summed up in the question, “must we become other than African in order to be truly Christian?” becomes fundamental to Bediako’s theological project.⁷³

In contrast to Udoh’s approach, however, Bediako emphasises that “the negative side of missionary history in Africa must not be exaggerated.”⁷⁴ Despite his incisive analysis of shortcomings in the modern missionary enterprise, Bediako establishes confidence in African christologies on the basis of the theological and cultural continuity inherent in African Christian conversion, indicated above. He also highlights the far-reaching implications of the Bible being translated into vernacular languages.⁷⁵ Furthermore, he adopts a markedly different stance from Udoh in stating, “I also make the Biblical assumption that Jesus Christ is not a stranger to our heritage.”⁷⁶ His fundamental premise is that Jesus is “the *Universal* Saviour and thus the Saviour of the African world.”⁷⁷ Without downplaying the particularity of Jesus’ Jewishness, Bediako emphasises his incarnation for all of humanity and for all times. Consequently he distinguishes “our natural past” from “our adoptive past,” in which

⁷⁰ Ibid., 132. For more extensive treatment of Bediako’s analysis, see “Christianity as ‘Civilisation’: The Legacy of ‘The Third Opportunity’ and the Making of a Modern Identity Problem,” chap. in *Theology and Identity*, 225-266.

⁷¹ In this estimation, Bediako follows the assessment of a long-time missionary who examined the impact of Christian mission, including mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic church, upon the life of Akan people. See S. G. Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith, A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965), 168-175; quoted in Bediako, “Biblical Christologies,” 133-134.

⁷² Bediako, “Biblical Christologies,” 125.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture*, 5.

⁷⁵ This emphasis is a recurrent theme throughout Bediako’s writings and teaching, in which he builds on insights from Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh regarding the significance of the translatability of the gospel to Christian mission. For example, see Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989); Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

⁷⁶ Bediako, “Biblical Christologies,” 143-144.

⁷⁷ Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture*, 5; see also 13.

through faith in Christ African believers now share in all the promises made to the patriarchs and Israel and the Good News becomes “*our* story.” So while Bediako’s christological point of departure is located more in “confidence” than in “crisis,” like Udoh he acknowledges that “[a]ccepting Jesus as ‘our Saviour’ always involves making him at home in our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings.”⁷⁸ For this reason, Bediako interprets the gospel in light of Akan traditional religion. Since the “spirit fathers” or ancestors are central to the Akan heritage, Bediako develops the image of Jesus as ancestor, concluding that “Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors.”⁷⁹

c) Charles Nyamiti

The proposal of Jesus as ancestor also appears in a 1984 publication by Charles Nyamiti, a notable Tanzanian Catholic theologian. While paying less attention to any sense of crisis stemming from the missionary transmission of the gospel to Africa, Nyamiti shares with Udoh and Bediako a deep confidence in the African religious heritage as fertile ground for theological construction. In his elaborate treatment of the christological image, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Nyamiti begins straight from the African religious heritage, calling for deeper analysis of the ancestral beliefs and practices in order to employ these more profitably for theological purposes.⁸⁰ Consequently, he seeks to explicate the entire Christian message using the African category of ancestor as a point of departure for dogmatic theology, Christian morality and spirituality, liturgy, canon law, and catechesis. Within this overall scheme, the concept of Christ as ancestor is pivotal. Specifically, he delineates Jesus as “brother-ancestor,” based on “the type of ancestorship which exists between a dead individual and his fellow brothers and sisters in a nuclear family.”⁸¹ He concedes that this is a rarer ancestral relationship than parent-ancestors, yet contends that it provides the closest analogy for Christ, though not the only one. He then develops the analogy both in relation to the Trinity and in relation to humanity. Adopting a comparative approach, he first juxtaposes Jesus and the African brother-ancestor figure, and then compares this ancestral paradigm with both traditional and contemporary christologies.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 41-42.

⁸⁰ Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Mambo Occasional Papers - Missio-Pastoral Series No. 11 (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984), 9.

⁸¹ Ibid., 16.

Certainly Nyamiti articulates new insights regarding the identity and significance of Christ from an African perspective. However, his attempt to develop an African scientific or systematic theology, favouring metaphysics and philosophical speculation over socio-cultural analysis, diminishes the impact of his ancestral christology in the contemporary context.⁸² Although Nyamiti provides some reflections on pastoral implications, he draws criticism for writing abstract reflections without adequately addressing the contemporary situation in keeping with current priorities for contextual theologies in Africa.⁸³

d) Takatso Mofokeng

A fourth christological work to emerge at this time is Takatso Mofokeng's *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*.⁸⁴ Originally submitted as his doctoral thesis at the Theological Seminary, Kampen, Netherlands, and published in 1983, it was soon acknowledged by John Mbiti as "the first major study of christology by an African theologian of our time."⁸⁵ Mofokeng begins with poignant expression of the conditions in his first parish ministry in South Africa which prompted his central christological question: "[H]ow can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation?"⁸⁶ An introduction to the socio-political and economic factors which gave birth to Black Consciousness and its "twin sister" Black Theology elucidates the deep existential crisis inherent in his approach of christological praxis. In Mofokeng's words, "[T]his praxis starts with a crisis at the level of consciousness as well as that of the politico-economic." The crisis is "contained in questions like: 'Who am I?; How long shall the black Christian wait before he realizes true humanity which the gospel has promised him?' ... 'How can I be liberated to become my authentic self?'"⁸⁷

In opposition to "the oppressiveness of the situation" and "the oppressiveness of the traditional language of faith as spoken in South Africa," Mofokeng advocates an epistemological break in a new praxis of liberation and a new theological

⁸² See Charles Nyamiti, "African Theology: Which Directions? Which Methodologies?" *African Christian Studies* Occasional Paper no. 3 and 4 (Nov./Dec. 1985): 3-7; "My Approach to African Theology," *African Christian Studies* 7, no. 4 (Dec. 1991): 35-53.

⁸³ For example, see Martey, *African Theology*, 124. See also Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 67-68; Aylward Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," *AFER* 25, no. 4 (Aug. 1983): 197-203.

⁸⁴ Takatso Alfred Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1983).

⁸⁵ John Mbiti, "Apartheid, Revolution and Christology," review of *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*, by Takatso A. Mofokeng, in *International Review of Mission* 75 (July 1986): 332-333.

⁸⁶ Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers*, x.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

language.⁸⁸ Christology is central to this project, and hence he seeks “fraternal assistance” from Jon Sobrino’s christology, particularly his dialectical interpretation of Jesus’ life, and further insights from Karl Barth’s “high” christology, especially its Trinitarian grounding and its emphasis on the resurrection. Assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses in the christological reflections of these two theologians paves the way for his own expression of Black Christology. “Black” goes beyond colour to signify the commitment of the poor and marginalized who seek to realise their humanity through humble dependence on Jesus Christ and obedience to his radical demands for establishing true humanity. Praxis is based on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, for as the lord of history, Jesus continues to live in community and in solidarity with them, suffering in every way with them but also inspiring the victory of resurrection as oppressed peoples are empowered to become agents of their own history.⁸⁹

e) Conclusion

This brief glimpse at four works published in the early 1980s illustrates the rapid rise of christologies across the sub-Saharan continent and across confessional lines. It also introduces various approaches taken by African theologians, with points of departure and conclusions ranging across a spectrum of expressions representing crisis to confidence. Furthermore, the christological issues which surface provide directives for later analysis, namely, in the key questions posed, sources and methods employed, and central themes proposed. Whatever the precise contribution of each of the above authors, their combined witness confirms what Pobee asserted in 1979 and what Bediako reinforces as follows:

The era of African theological literature as reaction to Western misrepresentation is past. What lies ahead is a critical theological construction which will relate more fully the widespread African confidence in the Christian faith to the actual and ongoing Christian responses to the life-experiences of Africans.⁹⁰

D. The Analysis Of Contemporary African Christologies

In view of the relatively recent entrance of these christologies onto the stage of African textual theology, it is not surprising that there has been relatively little in-depth theological analysis of them. Critical reflection is indeed taking place by African theologians themselves. For example, Nyamiti has written two essays in

⁸⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 234-235.

⁹⁰ Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 6-7.

which inculturation and liberation christologies are surveyed and assessed, and directions for future christological models are suggested.⁹¹ Likewise, Emmanuel Martey has examined contemporary christologies in terms of the two foci of inculturation and liberation around which he structures his analysis of African theology. He also acknowledges the new dimension brought to African christological discourse by women theologians, yet his discussion regarding christology is nonetheless only a small section within the wider scope of his work.⁹² Many other African theologians provide mutual critique in the course of elaborating upon their own christological reflections.

In addition, several non-African historians and theologians have been following the development of African christology with interest and some degree of assessment. John Baur's work on the history of Christianity in Africa includes a section on African theology that briefly summarises its main achievements including christology.⁹³ Robert Schreiter offers an introductory article to his edited work, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, in which he states his aim as follows: "This collection of essays has been assembled to show not only the problems that christology in Africa is facing, but also the stunning contributions it is making to the world church."⁹⁴ More substantially, John Parratt outlines the problem of christology and various approaches taken by African theologians, including the feminist perspective. However, his discussion is limited to one brief section within the larger project of analysing African theology today.⁹⁵

On a wider scale, Pope-Levison and Levison's survey, *Jesus in Global Contexts*, introduces African christologies in one chapter.⁹⁶ While developing a constructive model of conversations in christology from various parts of the globe, the overview of African contributions is primarily descriptive and necessarily restricted due to the scope of the wider work. Likewise Antoine Wessels' work, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*, includes chapters entitled "The Black Christ" and "The African Christ."⁹⁷ Wessels' overall aim is to discern to what extent Jesus has been faithfully conveyed or

⁹¹ Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today." See also "Contemporary African Christologies."

⁹² Martey, *African Theology*, 78-94.

⁹³ Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 304-305.

⁹⁴ Robert Schreiter, "Introduction: Jesus Christ in Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ix.

⁹⁵ Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 77-91.

⁹⁶ Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, "Jesus in Africa," chap. in *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 89-127.

⁹⁷ Anton Wessels, "The Black Christ" and "The African Christ," chaps. in *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 83-93; 94-115.

lamentably betrayed in the missionary transmission of the gospel into non-western cultures. In the process, he portrays the historical context in broad strokes and introduces selected African christologies that have recently emerged. He thus provides a valuable introduction to the topic, but again his aim in exploring several non-western cultures limits the depth of analysis given to any single context. The same limitation applies to Volker Küster's recent compendium of Third World christologies, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology*.⁹⁸ Küster advances the critical assessment of contextual christologies by offering sound hermeneutical frameworks for analysing representative christologies. He also extends discussions of intercultural christologies by pointing out areas of convergence and divergence, as well as implications for ecumenism. However, his sources are restricted to the texts of male "first generation" contextual theologians, and the African materials are confined to a few chapters.⁹⁹

While these examples are not exhaustive, they suffice to show the dearth of scholarly works assessing contemporary African christology. Despite the critical reflection which is taking place among proponents and observers of African theology, at the present time there has been little substantial analysis of African christology *per se*. This thesis therefore seeks to redress this lacuna in the current field of non-western theologies.

E. Thesis Statement

This thesis addresses the crucial issue, as identified by contemporary African theologians: "From the African Church, a clear and convincing answer is demanded to this question: Who is Jesus Christ for you, Africa? Who do you say that He is?"¹⁰⁰ The inquiry essentially concerns how African Christians today respond to the fundamental question of Jesus Christ, "Who do you say I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Critical analysis focuses on central themes which emerge in textual and oral christologies, their sources and shaping influences, and their significance to African and world Christianity. The underlying argument is that the African Christians selected for consideration do indeed reveal confident, contextual engagement with the key christological question highlighted above.¹⁰¹ That is to say, responses to this question

⁹⁸ Volker Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 2001).

⁹⁹ See Küster, "Models of African Christology," "Christology in the Context of African Ancestor Worship: Charles Nyamiti (Tanzania) and Bénézet Bujo (Zaire)," and "The Black Messiah—Christology in the Context of Racism: James H. Cone (USA) and Allan A. Boesak (South Africa)," chaps. in *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*, 58-69; 70-76; 137-151.

¹⁰⁰ Mugambi and Magesa, "Introduction," in *Jesus in African Christianity*, 10.

¹⁰¹ The African Christians selected for this study are introduced in Chapter 2.

are articulated not only in light of biblical revelation and Christian tradition, but also in terms of African realities both past and present. In so doing, these contemporary African christologies represent a significant landmark in the development of African theology.

This is not to suggest that the current christologies are either static or *faits accomplis*. Rather, the following analysis seeks to discern the present shape of christologies in their ongoing development. They are therefore configured here in four broad categories intrinsically related to one another. Each category represents a cluster of christological images: (1) Jesus as Life-giver, with special reference to the images of healer and traditional healer, (2) Jesus as Mediator, developing the image of Jesus as ancestor, (3) Jesus as Loved One, and (4) Jesus as Leader, focusing on the images of king / chief and liberator. Critical engagement with the expressed christologies proceeds on the basis of criteria specified by the selected African Christians for their own theological agenda. Assessment acknowledges strengths, or conscious appropriations of Jesus in keeping with their stated priorities. It also recognises areas of controversy that are as yet unresolved. Increased awareness of contested issues then invites further investigation to discern what prompts and what constrains the more controversial christological reflections. The outcome, then, does not reveal a tidy, systematic progression, but a continued process of forging christologies in the furnace of contemporary African realities. Strikingly, it is in confronting these contextual realities that the African christologies take on particular urgency and potency. The very conditions which spawn the current christological reflections are also redressed by the creative images of Jesus as these are appropriated in Christian praxis. Significance thus emerges in their shaping of African Christianity and their importance for world Christianity.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

A. Rationale For Theological Analysis

The methodological framework for this study builds upon the fundamental premise set forth by Harold Turner, that “the nature of the field of study must provide the major control over the methods employed.”¹ Turner asserts this priority in the context of seeking methodological advances in the study of African primal religions, yet the principle applies likewise to the study of Christianity in Africa. Since religion is a human activity which affects all aspects of life, Turner argues that the study of religion must be polymethodical, drawing upon all the human sciences. Various models employed in studying religion—cultural, anthropological, psychological, sociological and political—are valuable in elucidating aspects of any given religion in its milieu. However, Turner underlines that religion cannot be reduced to any of these particular categories, and therefore calls for “‘interpretative depth’ in the religious dimensions.” He concludes, “We need therefore a religious model for the study of the ‘religion’ of African religions....”²

In a parallel way, if the field of study is African christology, as introduced in Chapter 1, then there is need for an essentially theological approach that is appropriate to the subject at hand. Thus various disciplines necessarily contribute to the present inquiry, but the overriding method is that of theological analysis according to certain presuppositions and procedures to be outlined in this chapter.

B. Methodological Presuppositions

1. Definition of Terms

a) African

An examination of African christology faces certain problems posed by the term “African.” Attention is often and rightfully drawn to the danger of generalisations about Africa that lack sufficient regard for the vastness of the continent and the diversity of its peoples, languages, cultures, and histories. Some African intellectuals go to the extent of questioning whether there is any intrinsic

¹ Harold W. Turner, “The Way Forward in the Religious Study of African Primal Religions,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, no. 1 (1981): 1.

² *Ibid.*, 13.

meaning in the term “African” in expressions like “African philosophy,” “African literature,” or “African Christianity.”³ Others, however, grant the danger of generalisation, while cautioning that the recognition of diversity in Africa must not overlook “the reality of and aspiration for a commonality and homogeneity in the African experience.”⁴ Furthermore, contemporary African theologians often reveal awareness of the problem and seek to guard against it by specifying the particular people group to which they refer. Hence Tinyiko Maluleke notes that generalisations are still made, but they are normally grounded in context-specific research so as to avoid clichés about, for example, “African culture” and “African traditional religions.”⁵ If these precautions are exercised by those constructing African theologies, they are equally required of those analysing the theologies. Therefore this thesis endeavours to give due attention to the matter.

b) African Theology

“African theology” is widely recognised as a legitimate discipline on the basis of the apologetic established by the first generation of African theologians, indicated in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to clarify its precise meaning as employed in the present study. Theology in its broadest sense is assumed to mean human reflection on divinity, however divinity is conceived, and the articulated human response to the experience of the transcendent. Theology is further defined as “systematic discourse about God,” with the important qualification that the discourse may be expressed theoretically, as it generally has been in the history of Western Christianity, or lived out practically without extensive verbalisation, as it has been in the indigenous African religious heritage.⁶ On the basis of this wider definition, “African theology” cannot automatically be associated with Christian theology since other theologies, traditional and Islamic, exist on the continent.⁷ J. N. K. Mugambi

³ For example, see V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). See also Tinyiko Maluleke’s discussion of the critique by African philosophers like Mudimbe and Anthony Appiah in “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (Nov. 1997): 6-7.

⁴ J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), 5. Aspects of commonality outlined include certain sociological and cultural factors, such as family and kinship as a social institution, the extent of rural societies which are generally not impacted by the cultural and religious values of urbanisation, and politico-economic factors in a shared sense of modern political and economic history and destiny.

⁵ Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies,” 10-11.

⁶ Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 7. Mugambi further explains that “Africans in their religious heritage express their experience of God practically, without much theoretical expression. They live rather than verbalize their theology.” *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vi-vii. See also Charles Nyamiti, “African Theology: Which Directions? Which Methodologies?” *African Christian Studies Occasional Paper* no. 3 and 4 (Nov./Dec. 1985): 3.

argues that “African theology” is distinct from “Christian theology” articulated by Africans, and he suggests that different terminologies be employed to distinguish them. However, he concedes that “the phrase ‘African Theology’ is almost always presupposed to refer to African Christian theology.”⁸ Since this presupposition is widespread in the field of African Christianity, it is also adopted in this study.

Within the sphere of Christianity, theology is generally associated with “systematic, critical and scholarly analysis.”⁹ In keeping with this approach, “critical African theology” is stated succinctly to be “the organized faith-reflection of an authentically African Christianity.”¹⁰ Once again, however, African theologians tend to expand the bounds of definition, as indicated for example in the following statement by Mugambi:

I do not associate theology with literacy and high academic learning, even though such skills may greatly enhance theological expression. Rather, I associate it with systematic reflection and systematic articulation. ... In Africa, there are numerous excellent theologians who cannot read or write.¹¹

Both approaches are reflected in Charles Nyamiti’s definition of African theology in its broad sense as “the understanding and expression of the Christian faith in accordance with African needs and mentality,” and in its narrow sense as “the systematic and scientific presentation or elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs and mentality of the African peoples.”¹²

c) African Christology

Corresponding to his definitions of African theology, Nyamiti defines “African christology” more broadly as “discourse on Christ in accordance with the mentality and needs of the people in the black continent,” and more narrowly as the systematic and scientific elaboration of reflections on Christ in keeping with African concerns and thought forms. While a preliminary definition provides orientation to the field of study, the meaning of African christology represents the intent of the entire thesis. For as Bénézet Bujo points out, “[Y]ou cannot define christology as

⁸ Ibid., 9. Mugambi makes the observation based on the use of the term in the context of Christian organisations including the World Council of Churches, World Student Christian Federation, All Africa Conference of Churches, and the National Council of Christian Churches of Kenya.

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Rosino Gibellini, “Introduction: African Theologians Wonder ... and Make Some Proposals,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994), 6.

¹¹ J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 19.

¹² Charles Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994), 63.

such in Africa unless you *describe* it.”¹³ He explains further that “you can describe, but you cannot *define* it as in classical philosophy, because I think African christology is not yet shaped like that in Europe. We are trying to open many ways for African christology or African understandings of Christ.”¹⁴ Therefore the attempt to discern the current shape of African christologies requires an initial delineation of the subject, which in turn determines the methods employed in interpreting the field.

2. Definition of the Subject

The subject of this study is African christology, signifying the general field of inquiry concerning reflections on Christ by African Christians.¹⁵ Already, however, the plural form “christologies” has entered the present discussion, requiring brief explanation. Rationale for a plurality of African christologies is grounded in biblical and theological precedence. First, the critical question of Jesus, “Who do you say I am?” (Mk. 8:29), is understood by Christians to be addressed to every individual and generation in every context. As John Pobee explains, christology pertains to

people’s attempt to articulate and portray the Christ who confronts them or whom they have experienced or met on a Damascus Road. And they do that articulation from their being and as they are. So one ... can expect different and varying emphases in that articulation, differences determined by one’s experiences, by one’s heritage, by one’s gender, by one’s race. The encounter on the Emmaus road is not identical with the encounter on the Damascus road.¹⁶

Just as the gospel writers provide different portraits of Jesus, along with the interpretative statements of other New Testament writers, so too diverse christologies arise in Africa today. In addition to the factors noted by Pobee, the pluriformity of christologies stems from differences in denominational, political, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, personal differences among theologians in academic training

¹³ Bénédet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg, Switzerland: Oct. 29, 1998.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In certain academic discussions of christology, it is appropriate to maintain distinctions in terminology between “Jesus” and “Christ.” However, for the purpose of this study the two terms are used interchangeably and in conjunction, in accordance with the research data from written and oral sources. For example, in the oral interviews I sought to be consistent in asking about “Jesus,” but responses indicate an alternation of terms employed in general usage. In addition, scholars often draw a distinction between the person and the work of Christ, and also between christology, soteriology and ecclesiology. While such distinctions may serve certain purposes, “they may not be kept in watertight compartments. For the person of Christ is made known by what he has done and continues to do.” Therefore this thesis focuses primarily on christology, yet in recognition that “Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology must be held together.” John S. Pobee, “In Search of Christology in Africa: Some Considerations for Today,” in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9-10.

and individual temperament, and in the variety of theological approaches to be introduced in Chapter 4.¹⁷

Second, rationale for a plurality of christologies is found in a major shift in the theology of mission which occurred in the mid-twentieth century. David Bosch explains a clear contrast between the “era of noncontextualization” in Protestant and Catholic missions and the new approach. The former method, lasting until approximately 1950, entailed theology (in the singular) being defined once and for all and then “indigenized” into Third World cultures without losing any of its essence. Hence Western theology, as the dominant theology, was regarded to have universal validity and was exported in its “unaltered—and unalterable—forms” to the younger churches overseas. In contrast, “contextualization” assumes “the experimental and contingent nature of all theology.”¹⁸ Instead of writing “systematic theologies” which attempt to construct comprehensive and eternally valid systems, contextual theologians seek an ongoing dialogue between “text and context” which necessarily remains provisional.¹⁹ Given the diversity of contexts in Africa, it is natural to expect African christologies as “[e]ach cultural context has come up with its own understanding of who Jesus Christ is for them in their given cultural, religious and political reality.”²⁰ Pobee thus concludes, “No one christology may encompass all the aspects of the subject. So as many, if not all, of christologies emerging from Africa need to be assembled and engaged in dialogue among themselves as well as with the church universal.”²¹ Moreover, Pobee is representative of many African theologians who call for the dialogue to take place in “an ecumenical arena for mutual challenge, correction, affirmation.”²² These expressed priorities therefore lend shape to the methodological procedures outlined below.

The new era of contextual theologies not only acknowledges a plurality of christologies, but also signifies new ways of doing christology in accordance with priorities emerging in the wider field of African theology. A landmark document in this regard is the “Final Communiqué” of the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, held in Accra, Ghana. The concluding section entitled “Perspectives for the Future” sounds a clear call for how theology is to be done: “The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the

¹⁷ Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies,” 64.

¹⁸ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 427.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, “Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context,” *Propositum* 3, no. 1 (June 1998): 18.

²¹ Pobee, “In Search of Christology in Africa,” 11.

²² Ibid., 19-20.

approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. ... Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.”²³ This new way is termed “*contextual*” theology, or “accountable to the context people live in.”²⁴ The priority of contextuality resounds throughout the works of African theologians, including Bujo who warned in 1986 that African theology to date had been too academic and therefore largely irrelevant to contemporary African society.²⁵ Instead, a widespread methodological presupposition is that “genuine Christological reflection cannot be separated from Africa’s socio-political, religio-cultural and economic contexts—this is the real and concrete everyday experience within which we Christologise.”²⁶

With daily, concrete experience a vital component of African christology, the concept of community, so central to African experience, is integral to christological formulation. Pobee and Amirtham put it succinctly: “People need theology and, more particularly, theology needs people. Theology needs the reflection of people committed to Christian practice to preserve its vitality and wholeness.”²⁷ This crucial priority is explained further, as follows:

Thus, ‘theology by the people’ is neither a new fad nor a new creation. ... It is a necessary corollary of the rediscovery of the biblical affirmation of the priesthood of all believers. ... (1 Pet. 2:9-10). The church as the whole people of God has a duty to proclaim the good news and, to that extent, they need faith and praxis, both of which involve levels of reflection. ... It is not only that everyone has a duty to theologize but that that is best done in community and while living together in faith. Theologizing is possible, nay, a duty even, outside the elitist group of professional theologians.²⁸

²³ Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, “Final Communiqué,” in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 192.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁵ Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O’Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 70; originally published in German as *Afrikanische Theologie in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag GmbH, 1986).

²⁶ Akintunde E. Akinade, “‘Who Do You Say That I Am?’—An Assessment of Some Christological Constructs in Africa,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (April 1995): 184. The priority of contextual christology is likewise well established among other non-western theologies. For example, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Prologue and Perspective,” in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1993), ix; C. René Padilla, “Toward a Contextual Christology from Latin America,” in *Conflict and Context: Hermeneutics in the Americas*, ed. Mark Lau Branson and C. René Padilla (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 81.

²⁷ Samuel Amirtham and John S. Pobee, eds. *Theology by the People: Reflections on Doing Theology in Community* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), ix.

²⁸ Amirtham and Pobee, *Theology by the People*, 5-6.

It must be stressed, however, that the reference to “professional theologians” does not preclude them from theologising within the community of faith. On the contrary, it is stressed that “[i]n the context of ‘theology by the people’, the phrase does not seek to exclude the professional theologian—he/she is among the people. What the theologian does is *in the context of* and *with* the people, not *for* the people gathered as a community of faith.”²⁹

One prime example of theologising in community is demonstrated by Jean-Marc Ela, one of the selected theologians to be introduced below. Ela’s christological reflections are clearly rooted in his experience as a parish priest in rural northern Cameroon. He describes the role of the theologian graphically as follows:

A theologian must stay within earshot of what is happening within the community so that community life can become the subject of meditation and prayer. In the end, a theologian is perhaps simply a witness and a travelling companion, alert for signs of God and willing to get dirty in the precarious conditions of village life. Reflection crystallises only if it is confined to specific questions.³⁰

Although theology entails reflecting upon specific issues of faith in the particular community, Ela notes that it must also be related to what is happening elsewhere. Mugambi concurs, stressing the historical dimension of theological discourse unfolding as theologians respond to ideas from previous and contemporary generations and in turn influence future generations of theologians.³¹ Thus the “community of faith” extends beyond that of the particular context to encompass other times and places of christological expression. For this reason, Bediako underlines the following methodological presupposition:

The study of Christianity in Africa should not be isolated from the study of Christian presence elsewhere in history. In other words, one must guard against making the African field (or any non-Western field of reference) so unique in the features it presents that it ceases to have any relation to what happens to Christianity elsewhere. Rather the African phenomenon must be seen within the wider setting of the general history of the transformations of Christianity.³²

Further with respect to theology and community, it is common knowledge that women form a very significant sector within African Christianity. Not only do

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 11. See also Ela’s discussion on “Ending the Tyranny of the Clergy,” 56ff.

³¹ J. N. K. Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections Based on an African Experience* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36.

³² See “Thesis 4” in Kwame Bediako, “The Significance of Modern African Christianity—A Manifesto,” *Studies in World Christianity* 1, Part 1 (1995): 59.

they make up the strong majority of many Christian communities, as amply attested in this research, they also carry out a great deal of the pastoral work in their respective churches. Despite this reality, women's perspectives have not featured prominently in African theology until recent times. Two leading African women theologians, Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro, express the dilemma as follows:

African women theologians have come to realize that as long as men and foreign researchers remain the authorities on culture, rituals, and religion, African women will continue to be spoken of as if they were dead. ... Until women's views are listened to and their participation allowed and ensured, the truth will remain hidden, and the call to live the values of the Reign of God will be unheeded.³³

Likewise Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, another important African woman theologian, laments that very few women's christologies have been written. Speaking from her own experience of theologising in community, she states, "Therefore, in order for a thorough investigation on christology and the African woman's experience to be carried out, some oral interviews have to be part of the study."³⁴

Nasimiyu's comment leads to another important aspect of African christology which has been introduced in Chapter 1, yet which requires further elucidation.³⁵ It was noted that Christians in Africa have always theologised, if not formally, at least informally, for example in singing, praying and preaching. As Kwesi Dickson emphasises,

This is a point which cannot be made forcefully enough, for with the blossoming of theological exposition in recent years, particularly in the so-called Third World, there is the possibility—yea, a real danger—that Christians in Africa, and elsewhere, might come to associate theology solely with a systematic articulation of Christian belief.³⁶

Pobee verifies that while the term "christology" conjures up ideas of formal theses and discourses, the propositional style of expression is only one cultural mode of christological formulation. He emphasises that "[i]t does not always have to take the

³³ Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, "Introduction," in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 1.

³⁴ Nasimiyu Wasike, Anne, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 123.

³⁵ See pp. 4-6 above.

³⁶ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 109. See also Bénédet Bujo, "African Theology: Which Direction to Take and What Methodology to Use?" *African Christian Studies Occasional Paper no. 3 and 4* (Nov./Dec. 1985): 9.

form of articulation by word, whether written or oral.”³⁷ Rather, on the basis of his in-depth study of martyrdom in the New Testament as one form of christological confession, Pobee concludes that “Christology may sometimes have to be gleaned and articulated from the being and doing of people.”³⁸ For example, what Henry Okullu states about African theology applies equally to African christology:

[W]hen we are looking for African theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church, to Christian homes to listen to those spontaneously uttered prayers before people go to bed. ... We must listen to the throbbing drumbeats and the clapping of hands accompanying the impromptu singing in the independent churches. We must look at the way in which Christianity is being planted in Africa through music, drama, songs, dances, art, paintings. We must listen to the preaching of a sophisticated pastor as well as to that of the simple village vicar. ... Can it be that all this is an empty show? It is impossible. This then is African theology.³⁹

The search for African christologies thus extends beyond formal written expressions to include informal expressions, for example in worship, prayer, preaching, artwork, drama, gestures and symbols.⁴⁰

An initial delineation of the subject of African christology is foundational to the methods employed in analysing the field. Painted in broad strokes, the key features which have come to light include the plurality of African christologies emerging in ecumenical dialogue, their contextual nature, the importance of the community of faith in their formulation with particular reference to the need for historical and women’s perspectives, and their dual dimensions of formal and informal expressions. On the basis of these introductory observations, methodological procedures are now set forth.

C. Methodological Procedures

1. Research Rationale

In view of the two dimensions of African christology identified above, namely, the formal and the informal, or the written and the oral, Kwame Bediako provides important methodological guidelines which are relevant to christological analysis. First, he makes an important call for African Christianity itself to be

³⁷ Pobee, “In Search of Christology in Africa,” 11.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974), 54.

⁴⁰ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 45-50; Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 5.

distinguished from the scholarly literature on it.⁴¹ He proceeds on Mbiti's distinction between the oral theology which already exists in "the living experiences of Christians," and the academic theology which can only arise afterwards in attempt to "examine the features retrospectively in order to understand them."⁴² Looking to the origins of theology in the New Testament, Bediako argues that "an authentic tradition of literary Christian scholarship" cannot exist apart from the "spontaneous or implicit theology" located in "a *substratum* of vital Christian experience and consciousness."⁴³ While the two elements of theology are not to be confused, Bediako underlines, the informal theology must be granted due significance. Consequently, in order to seek interpretative depth in the scholarly penetration of African Christianity, serious attention must be given to "the observation and study of the actual life of African Christian communities."⁴⁴ Bediako explains that the intention is not to set the study of the "lived" theology off against the written theology, since both are obviously important. Rather, it is because the informal expressions of theology cannot be fully circumscribed within the formal expressions that the former warrant particular attention. He thus asserts the following crucial directive for African Christian scholarship:

If it retains and maintains a vital link with the Christian presence in Africa, and with the spontaneous and often *oral* articulation of Christian faith and experience that goes on, it will be in a position to contribute significantly to understanding, as well as shaping Christian thought generally for the coming century.⁴⁵

Other theologians corroborate this methodological priority. For example, Charles Nyamiti voices the need for christological investigation that is thoroughly grounded in the lived experience of African believers. He contends that "serious scientific research of this subject in African Christian communities would reveal authentically African christologies from which all could profit in many ways."⁴⁶ Likewise Kenneth Ross points out that scholarly discussion

can make little headway until we have a clearer picture of 'grassroots' Christology, i.e. of how ordinary people understand the identity and meaning of Jesus Christ. The life

⁴¹ See "Thesis 1" in Kwame Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity," 52-55.

⁴² John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 229; quoted in Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity," 52.

⁴³ Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity," 53.

⁴⁴ See "Thesis 3" in Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity," 58-59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), 35.

and worship of the people of God is always an important formative factor in theological reconstruction.... It is a necessary source for the theological task required in Africa today.⁴⁷

Ross has sought to redress the dearth in such “serious scientific research” by conducting field research on popular christology in Northern Malawi. He offers his study as “an early foray”⁴⁸ into the field, and presents his findings based on quantitative methods of questionnaire and interview. He thereby provides an important pioneering work, identifying key issues and exploring leading christological trends in the specified context. Certainly there is value in opening up the field in such a manner. Yet Ross himself acknowledges the weakness of his methodology with the following disclaimer: “The study was conducted in full awareness that only quite limited results may be expected from such a crude approach to so profound a subject as Christology.”⁴⁹ The main methodological problem is that quantitative research is not the most conducive approach to achieve the objective stated above, of discerning “how ordinary people understand the identity and meaning of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ So having made initial inroads into the field of informal African christologies, Ross invites more refined and more revealing research.

The previous polarisation between quantitative and qualitative methods of research is increasingly questioned, especially given the current impact of computers in field research.⁵¹ However, in view of the expressed aim of interpretative depth in

⁴⁷ Kenneth R. Ross, “Current Christological Trends in Northern Malawi,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27 (May 1997): 160.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁰ For example, questionnaire methods that introduce predetermined options of christological titles for response and limit the number of responses allowed both preclude respondents from defining their own categories of thought and impede a comprehensive understanding of the range of respondents’ views. The approach thus cuts across the fundamental axiom of the plurality of christologies outlined above. Further limitations of Ross’ study stem from inattention to the role of vernacular in christological expression. Given the limitations of quantitative research in obtaining in-depth meanings of respondents’ perceptions, Kathryn Tanner concludes that

the commonly employed external perspectives of quantitative social science are inappropriate for the study of popular theology and religion; indeed, any method that merely tallies up or classifies aspects of popular theology and religion is inappropriate to the extent that it extracts them from the field of cultural operations, the historical context.... Kathryn Tanner, “Theology and Popular Culture,” in *Changing Conversations: Religious Reflection and Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 1996), 107.

⁵¹ For example, see David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 1-12. In the context of discussing rigour in qualitative research, Clive Seale states that “the days of a great divide between qualitative and quantitative research work have now largely passed.” Clive Seale, “Using Computers to Analyse Qualitative Data,” in *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*, by David Silverman (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 157.

christological investigation, this study favours qualitative approaches. Since qualitative research is not commonly associated with theological analysis, a brief explanation of rationale and procedure is requisite. While “qualitative research” is used as an umbrella term for a variety of research strategies, certain characteristics are shared which make this approach most conducive for exploring a topic such as people’s perceptions of Jesus Christ. Bogdan and Biklen outline these characteristics as follows.⁵² First, qualitative research is especially concerned with context, so that the researcher enters the natural setting of the subjects to collect data and he or she is the key instrument for data collection. Second, it is descriptive, with more emphasis on words than numbers, both in recording the data and disseminating the findings. That is, more attention goes to capturing the respondents’ experiences and interpretations than to measuring the statistical frequency of responses. Third, qualitative research is concerned with process over products or outcomes. In other words, it allows room for probing the underlying perceptions and reasons rather than simply the stated conclusions. Fourth, analysis of data proceeds inductively, which is summarised as follows: “[Qualitative researchers] do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together.”⁵³ Finally, qualitative research is fundamentally concerned with “meaning,” or the way in which people make sense out of their lives. Hence the researcher is interested in “*participant perspectives*,” and seeks to discover “what *they* are experiencing, how *they* interpret their experiences, and how *they* themselves structure the social world in which they live.”⁵⁴

This last characteristic is of paramount importance to the present study. In view of the long history of interpretation and misinterpretation of Africans by non-Africans, this research seeks to capture and express the “African voices” as authentically as possible, relating their words, discerning their meanings, and conveying these through extensive illustration. Their voices are not lost in the analysis, but rather feature prominently throughout the thesis. Thus, after immersing myself in particular contexts of African Christianity, my central aim is to present new data on present understandings of Jesus according to the African theologians, clergy and laity selected for this study, and from their perspectives as far as possible.

⁵² Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1982), 27-30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30, quoting G. Psathas, *Phenomenological Sociology* (New York: Wiley, 1973).

The characteristics of qualitative research outlined above contribute to its chief strength, that is, the depth of understanding it allows.⁵⁵ In addition, one of the three most common and useful purposes of qualitative methods is exploration. Marshall and Rossman advocate this approach when there is need “to investigate little-understood phenomena, to identify/discover important variables, to generate hypotheses for further research.”⁵⁶ They give an example of a research question as follows: “What are the salient themes, patterns, categories in participants’ meaning structures?”⁵⁷ Babbie concurs that such an approach is typical “when the subject of study is itself relatively new and unstudied,” and he concludes that “[e]xploratory studies ... are essential whenever a researcher is breaking new ground, and they can almost always yield new insights into a topic for research.”⁵⁸

The point is pressed for its direct relevance to the present research. Since the field of African christology is comparatively new and relatively unstudied, this thesis is primarily *exploratory* in purpose. Considering the significant progress made in the development of contextual theologies in recent decades, it is surprising that advanced qualitative methodologies have rarely been utilised in christological analysis.⁵⁹ This study therefore seeks to fill a serious gap, for to date there exists a definite dearth in empirically based, qualitatively designed research on African christologies. It is hoped that the methodological procedures undertaken, as delineated below, will advance current thinking in this field.

2. Research Design

In response to the need outlined above for intensive investigation of formal and informal expressions of African christology, the present research integrates the analysis of written or textual christologies with that of oral christologies gained

⁵⁵ Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 5th ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), 285.

⁵⁶ Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1989), 78.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 81.

⁵⁹ A few African theologians have employed written questionnaires or oral interviews as part of the process of their own christological formulation. These examples provide some analysis of contemporary christologies which are operative in their respective contexts. However, to the best of my knowledge there is no study that concentrates entirely on the analysis of African christologies, employing qualitative methods to this extent. For example, see P. N. Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (Ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agikuyu Understanding of Elder* (Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers Ltd., 1992); John M. Waliggo, “African Christology in a Situation of Suffering,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989); Anne Nasimiyyu Wasike, “Christology and an African Woman’s Experience.”

through qualitative field research. The research design is explicated according to data collection, data analysis, and issues in qualitative research.

a) Data Collection

(1) Sources for Data Collection

The methodological approach combines data selected from three major sources: (a) African christological texts, (b) the authors of those texts, and (c) African Christians from various church traditions.

(a) African Christological Texts

With the recent surge of creative christologies across sub-Saharan Africa, many theologians warrant consideration for their christological reflections. However, within the confines of this study, six theologians were selected as leading representatives in the field. Given the extensive theology arising from the particular historical context of South Africa, theologians from this region lie beyond the scope of the present inquiry. The selection seeks to provide a cross-section of men and women from various contexts across tropical Africa and from Protestant and Catholic traditions. Whether or not christology is foremost in their theological works, these particular theologians were chosen on the basis of their published reflections on christology and their significant contributions to the development of contextual African theologies.⁶⁰ The theologians, plus their writings most relevant to this research, are introduced briefly as follows:

i) Bénézet Bujo

Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaïre), Bénézet Bujo has gained widespread recognition as a creative and respected theologian. A Roman Catholic priest of the Diocese of Bunia (East Congo), he taught for many years at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Kinshasa. Since 1989 he has held the Chair of Moral Theology and Social Ethics at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. His most significant works concerning christology are *African Theology in its Social Context* (1986; translated 1992) and *Christmas: God Becomes Man in*

⁶⁰ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike may not be as widely known as the other theologians. However, she was selected for the following reasons: (1) the desire to include an additional woman theologian, (2) the fact that her article, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," was selected for publication in both Mugambi and Magesa, *Jesus in African Christianity*, and Schreiter, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, and (3) at the time of my selection, she was the acting co-ordinator of the East African Chapter of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, a group of significance to my overall research project as indicated below.

Black Africa (1995). He has also written many pertinent articles including “Nos ancêtres, ces saints inconnus” (1979), “Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique” (1981), and “The Two Sources of Life: The Eucharist and the Cult of Ancestors in Africa” (1986).

ii) Jean-Marc Ela

A Roman Catholic priest from Cameroon, Jean-Marc Ela’s theology has been profoundly influenced by a decade of pastoral ministry to the Kirdi people of northern Cameroon. Ela is widely acclaimed as an African liberation theologian, although his concerns cannot be confined to such categorisations. Having completed doctoral degrees in both Theology and Social and Cultural Anthropology, his teaching career has taken him from Cameroon to France, Belgium, and Canada where he currently lectures at l’Université du Québec à Montréal. Ela has produced substantial works, the main ones under consideration here including *African Cry* (1980; trans. 1986) and *My Faith as an African* (1985; trans. 1989). Certain articles shed further light on his christological reflection, primarily “Ancestors and Christian Faith: An African Problem” (1977), “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ” (1994), “Christianity and Liberation in Africa” (1994), and “Globalisation et Paupérisation: Un défi à la théologie africaine” (1998).

iii) J. N. K. Mugambi

J. N. K. Mugambi is a Kenyan theologian whose background lies in the Anglican tradition. A leading scholar in Religious Studies and Philosophy, he now lectures at the University of Nairobi where he has devoted himself for most of his professional career (e.g. former Chairman, Department of Religious Studies; Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts; and Academic Registrar). In addition, he has been a senior consultant for several ecumenical organisations including the All Africa Conference of Churches. Mugambi has written numerous works himself as well as co-editing additional ones which reflect various consultations of East African theologians. Key materials for christological investigation include *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), a co-edited volume entitled *Jesus in African Christianity* (1989), *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (1995), and an edited work entitled *The Church and Reconstruction of Africa* (1997) which includes his contribution, “Social Reconstruction of Africa: The Role of Churches.”

iv) Anne Nasimiyu Wasike

Anne Nasimiyu Wasike is a professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Kenyatta University, Nairobi. A Kenyan, she has also lived in Uganda and studied in the United States. From 1993 to 1998 she served as the General Superior of her Roman Catholic order, the Little Sisters of St. Francis. In addition to her doctoral thesis, *Vatican II: The Problem of Inculturation* (Duquesne University, USA, 1986), she has authored many articles on feminist theology. Her christological reflections are concentrated primarily in “Christology and an African Woman’s Experience” (1989) and “Witnesses to Jesus in the African Context” (1998). Nasimiyu has also been an important leader in the East African Chapter of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, an organisation of importance to the present study.

v) Mercy Oduyoye

Mercy Oduyoye, a Methodist scholar, is widely recognised as a leading woman theologian in black Africa. Originally from Ghana, she has travelled extensively throughout her professional career of lecturing and working for several ecumenical organisations. For example, she has held such positions as President of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). She is also the founding director of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and has recently founded the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity Theological College, Legon, Ghana, where she is presently based. Among her publications, those of most immediate relevance to christology include her main work, *Hearing and Knowing* (1986), her work co-edited with Virginia Fabella, *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (1988), and certain articles such as “An African Woman’s Christ” (1988).

vi) John S. Pobee

John S. Pobee is a well-known theologian from the Anglican church in Ghana. He was formerly Head of the Department for the Study of Religions and Dean of the Faculty of Arts for the University of Ghana, Legon, and is currently Professor Emeritus. He also worked for many years in Geneva, Switzerland, as the Co-ordinator of the Programme on Theological Education of the World Council of Churches. He recently returned to Ghana as the base from which he travels extensively in continued academic and church ministries. Pobee has written

prolifically throughout his career, the most significant works for the present research including the following: *Toward an African Theology* (1979), *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African Context* (1992), his edited work, *Exploring Afro-Christology* (1992), *West Africa: Christ Would Be an African Too* (1996), and several key articles including “Jesus Christ—The Life of the World: An African Perspective” (1983).

(b) African Authors of the Christological Texts

In addition to a comprehensive reading of the christological texts outlined above, I have conducted in-depth interviews in person with each of the six theologians selected for this study, with one consultation taking a slightly different format.⁶¹ The interviews were semi-structured, allowing room to deviate from the prepared questions, and they ranged in length from approximately one and a half to three hours. The intention was to probe aspects of the authors’ own theological formation, to clarify the contexts from which and for which they have written their theology, and to allow for further elucidation of their christologies, including any current concerns not yet published and any anticipated priorities for the future. After fully transcribing the taped interviews, I sent the transcripts to the theologians and received verification of accuracy from each one.

(c) African Christians in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana

The sites for field research were selected for reasons of their specific significance for the overall project. First, my own context of ministry in post-secondary theological education in Nairobi, Kenya, provided contacts with the University of Nairobi, various theological colleges, and Christians from a wide

⁶¹ Interview questions were sent to the theologians in advance to maximise the time for conversation together. All interviews were conducted in English except for the one with Jean-Marc Ela, which was done in French with partial translation assistance by Darla Sloan. I also had assistance from Tharcisse Gatwa in transcribing the interview in French, and from Martine Price in checking my translation of it. I then sent the transcript and the translation to Ela for verification. In addition, special acknowledgement goes to Bénézet Bujo for kindly agreeing to the interview being conducted in English when he would have preferred it to be in German. Bujo suggested that I make minor editorial revisions to clarify his English expression, but otherwise all quotations from the theologians are directly from the interview transcripts.

The one consultation which followed a different format was with J. N. K. Mugambi, who readily complied with my request but preferred to write answers to the questions in lieu of an oral interview. He then spent three hours with me in person, elaborating on his written responses. During this time I took notes but did not tape record the conversation. Material quoted from this consultation is from the script which Mugambi kindly prepared for me.

Finally, a slight variation took place in the interview with Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, in that she invited her fellow religious sister, Mary Savio, to join us for the conversation. While Savio’s participation enlivened the interview, the analysis isolates the perceptions of Nasimiyu Wasike. Given their close personal relationship and the invitation being extended by Nasimiyu Wasike herself, it is doubtful that Savio’s presence inhibited Nasimiyu Wasike’s expression in any significant way.

spectrum of church traditions. Thus in 1998, following a preliminary trial of interviews and analysis with African Christians in Edinburgh, I spent approximately three months researching in the city of Nairobi.⁶² I first conducted pilot interviews to test the interview questions in the context of research, and then completed the remainder of the fieldwork.⁶³

Second, my Ph.D. programme at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, New College, Edinburgh, allowed effective contacts with Christians in Ghana through supervisor Kwame Bediako, Founding Director of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology in Akropong-Akuapem. I therefore spent an additional three months in Ghana, based in Akropong but travelling to other urban centres such as Accra, Legon, Koforidua, and Kumasi.

Finally, field research requires flexibility. Hence at the personal invitation of Nasimiyu Wasike, following the interview with her in Nairobi, I travelled to Uganda for the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Little Sisters of St. Francis. The week spent with the Little Sisters, in their mother convent at Nkokonjeru and at their more recent administrative centre in Jinja, allowed significant time with Nasimiyu Wasike and deeper exposure to her current context of ministry and theology. It also increased the degree of participant observation and the opportunities for individual interviews, both within that religious community and beyond it.

It must be stressed, however, that although these specific sites contribute significantly to the study, the overall aim is not to conduct a comparative examination of African christologies according to geographical contexts. Certainly similarities and differences among the sites arise in the course of analysing the

⁶² I undertook this preliminary study in order to test the interview questions, to refine the analytic procedures, and to learn the computer software for qualitative data analysis, QSR NUD*IST 4, mentioned below. Interviews with the following 4 respondents were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analysed: (1) Catherine Nyaki Adeya, Feb. 19, 1998; (2) Mukami Akiri, Feb. 25, 1998; (3) Charles Makonde, Mar. 3, 1998; and (4) Sam Prempeh, Jan. 13, 1998. Respondent profiles are summarised as follows:

Document	Gender	Age-group	Nationality	Church	Work	Theol. Ed?
Adeya	female	20s	Kenyan	Pentecostal	student	no
Akiri	female	30s	Tanzanian	Anglican	housewife	no
Makonde	male	40s	Kenyan	Methodist	minister	yes
Prempeh	male	40s	Ghanaian	Presbyterian	chaplain	yes

⁶³ I completed pilot individual interviews with one theologically educated person, Joseph Mutuuki, April 16, 1998, and one lay person, Mary Ariviza, April 21, 1998. I also conducted one pilot focus group comprised of 7 post-graduate students from Daystar University: Faida Emery, Henry Kyeyune, Irene Mondo, Faustin Ntamushobora, Helen Akoth Omolo, Emmanuel Sibomana, and Peterson Wang'ombe, April 24, 1998. Pilot interviews are not entered as data in the study, but rather function as a pre-test, indicating potential problems that can then be dealt with before the research proper.

various christological perceptions, and these are noted accordingly. However the central christological focus is not primarily geographical but rather thematic, as indicated in the thesis statement in Chapter 1.⁶⁴ In the same vein, the overriding purpose of the study is not to “test” the christologies of the selected African theologians against the Christians on the ground, legitimate as such an enquiry might be. Again, areas of convergence and divergence are highlighted where significant, yet this is not the central thrust of the thesis. Instead, this study concentrates on major themes in emergent African christologies, their sources, substance and significance.

(2) Strategies for Qualitative Data Collection

(a) Research Sample

In order to advance the empirical research currently being called for, as outlined above, a range of research approaches are necessary. On one hand, it is crucial to articulate the christologies of particular homogenous Christian communities in Africa. Such research is best undertaken by those with sufficient expertise in the historical and cultural context, including the mother tongue and worldview, of a particular community.⁶⁵

On the other hand, it is vital that research be conducted in the burgeoning urban centres where a *mélange* of cultures and languages exist, and which equally comprise the reality of contemporary Africa. This latter context is more appropriate for the present study, since I am an expatriate researcher and my usual context of ministry is at Daystar University in Nairobi, where students from over twenty African countries study and worship in English. Therefore, instead of concentrating on a particular community of Christians, I seek a broader overview of christological perspectives. The interview respondents selected in my research sample consist of urban, educated African Christians, both clergy and laity. All interviewees are fluent in English and many of them, as the research reveals, are functioning spiritually (i.e. reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping) as much or more in English than in their own vernacular.

Certain aspects outlined above in the definition of the subject influence the sample selected for qualitative research. In light of the African christologies

⁶⁴ See p. 21 above.

⁶⁵ For examples of this approach, aside from that of Kenneth Ross mentioned above, see Thomas G. Christensen, “The Gbaya Naming of Jesus: An Inquiry Into the Contextualization of Soteriological Themes among the Gbaya of Cameroon,” (Th.D. thesis, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1984); A. O. Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in the African Context,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (Apr. 1991): 87-103; P. N. Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (Ideal Elder)*.

emerging in ecumenical dialogue, this research focuses broadly on the African church in its Protestant and Catholic expressions arising out of the modern missionary enterprise. Due to the necessity of selectivity, the African Initiated Churches and the neo-Pentecostal churches are excluded since both warrant christological investigation in their own right. Furthermore, various denominations within the Protestant sector are represented, but denominational differences are not central to the present investigation. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Protestants are grouped together and any notable distinctions that arise among them are indicated in the analysis.⁶⁶ All respondents identify themselves as committed followers of Jesus Christ who participate regularly in a local church. They are not necessarily theologically educated through any formal programme, but they are theologically literate, or able to understand and engage personally with the questions posed to them. While women are included in the confessional categories (except, necessarily, Catholic clergy), they are justifiably granted their own forum for discussion in light of their particular christological concerns. Consequently, two groups of women are considered, representing transcontinental organisations already established: first, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (“the Circle”), who identify themselves as being ecumenical and inter-faith in composition, and second, the Pan-African Christian Women’s Alliance (PACWA), who are under the umbrella of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). In sum, both individual interviews and focus groups were conducted according to the following categories:⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For example, several Pentecostals are included among the interview respondents. Again, for the purpose of this study, they are grouped with the Protestants, while any significant differences that emerge between them and other mainline Protestants are noted in the discussion.

⁶⁷ While most respondents could be readily distinguished between clergy and laity, a few cases were problematic. Therefore the criterion adopted for the purpose of this study was whether or not the respondent had undergone a formal programme of theological education, regardless of religious ordination (since this practice varies among churches) and current ministry. For example, Peter Kiarie in Kenya had completed 5 years of philosophy and theology in his training for the priesthood, when he left the seminary. He was subsequently employed by the Catholic Secretariat for over 20 years, implementing Vatican II teachings in the Dept. of Lay Apostolates, Dept. of Religious Education. At the time of the interview, he was retired but pursuing an M.A. in Religious Studies at the Catholic University of East Africa. Therefore despite being a “lay leader,” his background education and experience are clearly more closely aligned with other clergy than with other laity.

In another case in Kenya, Sheny Kassam was a recent convert (1993) from Ismaili Shiite Islam. Until a year prior to the interview, she had worked in the fashion industry, owning several designer dress shops. She then became a full-time pastor and counsellor at the Solid Rock Church in Nairobi. However, when asked if she had completed any programme in theological education, she responded negatively, saying only “the school of the Holy Spirit.” Given this background, she has been placed in the category of laity despite her current ministry as a pastor.

Also, the two categories of women include both women who are theologically educated and those who are not. Here the intent was to tap into women’s perceptions in particular, although the analysis can distinguish between those women with or without theological education, as necessary.

- i) **Catholic clergy**
- ii) **Catholic laity**
- iii) **Protestant clergy**
- iv) **Protestant laity**
- v) **The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians**
- vi) **Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance.**

An additional category then emerged during the course of fieldwork in Ghana, namely:

vii) Local traditional leaders.

Although the sample is discussed further in the section below on issues in qualitative research, a brief indication of sample size will enhance the overall picture of the interviews undertaken during field research.⁶⁸ Aside from the pilot interviews in Kenya, I conducted 30 individual interviews in Kenya and 35 in Ghana, making a total of 65 individual interviews. In addition, I conducted 1 focus group in each of the 6 main categories in Kenya and in Ghana, making a total of 12 focus groups. The principle advocated in qualitative research is that sample size is intended to help the researcher “*understand the process*, rather than to represent (statistically) a population.”⁶⁹ That is to say, the size is to be large enough to enable meaningful comparisons regarding the subject under consideration, while not exceeding the bounds of feasibility within the research project. Two main criteria are outlined as follows: first, “sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it,” and second, “saturation of information,” referring to the point at which the interviewer begins to hear the same information from respondents.⁷⁰

In general, I sought to select a roughly equivalent number of respondents in each corresponding category, insofar as this was possible. However, it will be noted that the number of respondents in the “clergy” categories exceeds those in other categories. The justification here rests on the concept of “elite interviewing,” which refers to a specialised treatment focusing on a particular type of respondent. As Marshall and Rossman explain, “Elites are considered to be the influential, the prominent, and the well-informed people in an organization or community. Elites are

⁶⁸ Individual and focus group respondents are listed in the bibliography.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 97.

⁷⁰ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 47-48.

selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research.”⁷¹

Finally, I conducted all the interviews with these African Christians in English. Yet within the discussions I purposely elicited vernacular expressions, such as titles for Jesus and favourite songs about Jesus, and later translated them with the help of African research assistants. The importance of these vernacular expressions comes to light in the thesis.

(b) Individual Interviews

An interview has been defined as a “purposeful conversation” in which descriptive data is gathered “in the subject’s own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world.”⁷² Certainly semi-structured individual interviews proved to be very effective in gleaning perceptions of Jesus from contemporary African Christians.⁷³ The interview questions were designed in such a way as to elicit the respondents’ own views about Jesus as far as possible.⁷⁴ Then, if a respondent had not initiated comments on a particular issue of interest to me, I generally raised it for discussion in the later stages of the interview.⁷⁵ Therefore, analysis considers the extent to which a particular christological image is initiated by the respondents rather than being raised for discussion by the interviewer.

(c) Focus Groups

Since focus groups are not commonly conducted in theological research, a brief introduction provides rationale for their use in this study. Focus groups, or group interviews, are increasingly acclaimed as a cost-effective technique in bringing together a number of people at one time to provide data on highly focused topics. They are widely accepted within marketing research, since they produce believable results at a reasonable cost, and they are commonly used by others seeking information such as social scientists, evaluators, planners, politicians and educators.

⁷¹ Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 94.

⁷² Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education*, 135.

⁷³ Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer leeway to follow the respondent’s leading in discussion to a considerable extent, while also sticking loosely to pre-set questions in line with the research design. For further information on different types of individual interviews, see Robert G. Burgess, *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*, Contemporary Social Research Series 8, ed. Martin Bulmer (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1984), 101-103; Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 230-231.

⁷⁴ See the Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews in Appendix I.

⁷⁵ Most individual interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours, although a few were as brief as half an hour and a few as long as three hours.

Richard Krueger notes, "It is a particularly appropriate procedure to use when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea, or event."⁷⁶ He then defines a focus group as

a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is relaxed, comfortable, and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion.⁷⁷

It is this social dimension which strengthens focus groups, since talking with other people can be very stimulating. As Alan Hedges observes,

There is more to react to, more food for thought, more diversity of opinion expressed than in a typical individual interview. This often helps people to analyse their own attitudes, ideas, beliefs and behaviour more penetratingly and more vividly than they could easily do if just alone with the interviewer.⁷⁸

Like the individual interviews, focus groups contributed significantly towards meeting the aims of the present research. The advantages outlined above were definitely witnessed in the course of field research. Despite the logistical challenges in organising the groups, particularly among the clergy, participants regularly expressed gratitude for the opportunity and gratification in the process. Given the advantages and disadvantages of focus groups, they are best employed in combination with individual interviews, as they have been in this study.⁷⁹

(d) Participant Observation

With respect to the data collected in field research, the interview materials feature most prominently in the thesis. However, participant observation in a variety of natural settings for christological expression further informs the investigation. For

⁷⁶ Richard A. Kreuger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1988), 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁸ Alan Hedges, "Group Interviewing," in *Applied Qualitative Research*, ed. Robert Walker (Hants, England: Gower Publishing Co. Ltd., 1985), 73.

⁷⁹ In addition to the relatively low cost and the social dynamics of interaction, other advantages include speedy results, increased sample sizes of qualitative studies without significant increases in the time required, flexibility in allowing the researcher to probe unanticipated issues, and high face validity. That is to say, "The technique is easily understood and the results seem believable to those using the information. Results are not presented in complicated statistical charts but rather in lay terminology embellished with quotations from group participants." Kreuger, *Focus Groups*, 44.

Disadvantages include the increased logistics in organisation, the potential for certain group dynamics to inhibit respondents' participation, less control for the interviewer than in the individual interview, and greater difficulty in analysis. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

example, I attended a broad spectrum of Christian worship services, taking note of liturgy, hymns and songs, preaching, prayers, iconography, dance and other physical expressions in worship. I also took part in various Christian conferences, Bible studies, and informal discussions about Jesus Christ. Finally I enhanced my exploration through extensive photography, recording visual evidence of people's working christologies as these appear in homes, churches, and marketplaces, on clothing and on roadways.

b) Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of ordering and interpreting the mass of data which qualitative research generates. In general, it involves discerning significant categories of data, relationships among them, and developing coherent descriptions and explanations of them in accordance with the fundamental questions and concepts fuelling the research. Central to the analytic process is the discernment of themes and patterns, a task which Marshall and Rossman explain as follows:

Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis and one that can integrate the entire endeavor. Through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework, the researcher engages the ideas and the data in significant intellectual work.⁸⁰

This goal of qualitative analysis is clearly in line with the central aim of this thesis, to discern coherence, meaning and significance in the christological themes currently flourishing across sub-Saharan Africa.

While there is no set of conventions established for qualitative analysis corresponding to those observed in quantitative analysis, there is increasingly a call for qualitative analysis to be correspondingly systematic and rigorous.⁸¹ Analytic strategies, roughly parallel to those in quantitative studies, are summarised briefly as follows: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions.⁸² The main qualitative data in this study were generated by the individual and group interviews. All interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed, and data reduction was accomplished through various levels of analytic coding applied to the

⁸⁰ Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 116.

⁸¹ For example, see Robson, *Real World Research*, 370-383.

⁸² The literature on qualitative analysis reflects various approaches to the task, yet Miles and Huberman are especially lucid in this regard and their recommendations have largely informed the present research. See Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 10-11.

transcripts.⁸³ The important point here is that my methodological approach is primarily inductive, moving from the particular to the general, with the salient categories and theoretical explanations emerging from the data.⁸⁴ This approach is consistent with the nature of exploratory research.

Data display refers to organising and compressing extensive information (usually text) into a compact form which enables the analyst to discern overall findings and to justify conclusions.⁸⁵ Accordingly, diagrams, charts and matrices are generated throughout this study, some of which are presented in the thesis text and others in Appendix 1. Observations begin to be formulated from the outset of data collection, when the analyst interprets meaning by noting regularities, patterns, explanations and possible configurations of data.⁸⁶ As the observations gain clarity throughout the research, conclusions are formed which must then be tested for their plausibility and “confirmability,” to be addressed below.

⁸³ With a few exceptions, primarily for reasons of language facility where some interviews yielded more vernacular expressions than others, I personally transcribed the interviews. Where transcription was undertaken by others, I edited the transcripts while listening to the interview tapes.

Coding refers to the practice of applying a “code” or “symbol” to a section of text in order to classify it according to concepts and themes typically related to research questions. Codes therefore function as organising and retrieval devices which enable the researcher to find and collect all instances of a particular kind. See Robson, *Real World Research*, 385.

Miles and Huberman enlarge on the analytic task by differentiating three types of codes. First, descriptive codes are those defined above which simply label the segment of text according to its subject. Second, interpretive codes go beyond mere description to a deeper interpretation of the material, for example establishing comparative or causative relationships. Third, explanatory codes are “even more inferential and explanatory” in illustrating “an emergent leitmotif or pattern that you have discerned...” See Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 57.

⁸⁴ For example, see Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 116; Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 141-142. Many qualitative researchers advocate “grounded theory,” first put forward in a seminal study by B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967). The term refers to a “general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed.” Theory thus evolves during actual research through the “constant comparative method,” or continuous interplay between analysis and data collection. See Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, “Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 273.

While remaining broadly within this tradition of qualitative research, in seeking coding categories which emerge from the data, I also followed Miles and Huberman in their suggestion to work from a provisional “start list” of codes derived from the conceptual framework and research questions guiding the study. In other words, my approach was more in keeping with the hermeneutical circle commonly presupposed in contemporary theology. I came to the analysis with some pre-understanding or anticipation of the categories to emerge from the data, for there were certain subjects I expected to find as a result of my overall research design and interview questions. Therefore I began with an initial coding summary sheet of central categories derived directly from my research aims, including “Context,” “Sources and Shaping Influences,” “Methods,” “Central Themes,” and “Significance.” However I then proceeded in an open-minded fashion of adding new categories and revising the coding scheme as additional categories emerged from the interview materials. See Appendix 1 for the final version of the “Revised Coding Scheme for Interview Transcripts.”

⁸⁵ Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Finally, it must be noted that the computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data is currently revolutionising the ways in which qualitative research is done.⁸⁷ Methodological debates continue over the strong advantages and inevitable disadvantages of employing computers in analysis. While aware of the limitations, I have nevertheless found the use of one software package, QSR NUD*IST 4 (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising), to be invaluable to the present research.⁸⁸ Despite the advantages of computer-assisted analysis, however, strategies for analytical questioning, interpreting, and drawing conclusions definitely remain with the researcher, so that the software programme is merely a tool to enhance thoroughness in analysis.

c) Issues in Qualitative Research

(1) Trustworthiness and Transferability of the Research

The need for rigorous approaches to christological investigation has been highlighted above. As part of the precision required, any systematic inquiry into human sciences must address four key issues: the “truth value,” the consistency, the applicability, and the neutrality of the research findings.⁸⁹ The conventional criteria employed in quantitative experimental and survey research are generally deemed to be inappropriate for qualitative analysis. Four alternative constructs have been proposed to reflect more accurately the assumptions of qualitative researchers in establishing trustworthiness: “internal validity” transfers to “credibility,” “external validity” or “generalizability” to “transferability,” “reliability” to “dependability,” and “objectivity” to “confirmability.” Each construct is spelled out briefly in relation to the present research.

⁸⁷ For example, see Clive Seale, “Using Computers to Analyse Qualitative Data.” The impact of computers in qualitative research was further confirmed and demonstrated by Clive Seale and others in an international conference entitled, “Strategies in Qualitative Research: Issues and Results from Analysis using QSR NVivo and NUD*IST,” London, Sept. 29-30, 2000.

⁸⁸ For example, the software enables rapid storage, categorisation and retrieval of voluminous amounts of textual (and non-textual) data, allowing the researcher to manage increased sample sizes and to concentrate more on the intellectual tasks of analysis than the routine tasks. Additionally, the rigour of analysis is greatly enhanced by sophisticated capacities for text searching and counting, and for generating tables to explore possible relationships between the textual data and the variables recorded concerning the respondents. That is, a database contains certain information I recorded about each individual respondent including nationality, gender, marital status, age, church affiliation, language(s) employed in personal Bible reading and prayer, and whether formally theologically educated or not. The software then facilitates in-depth analysis of a single category of coded text, such as a certain christological theme. It also allows the analyst to probe possible relationships between, for example, positive responses to a particular christological theme and church affiliation.

⁸⁹ Y. S. Lincoln, and E. G. Guba, *Naturalist Inquiry* (London: Sage, 1985), 290; referred to in Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 144-148; Robson, *Real World Research*, 403-407.

First, the goal of “credibility” is to demonstrate that the research accurately identifies and describes the subject of inquiry, in this case African christologies. Validity is often acknowledged to be the strength of qualitative research, since “being there” is considered a powerful means for gaining insights into the human setting.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, credibility cannot be assumed; rather, it must be established through indicating the quality of the methods selected in relation to the research questions, and also the route and the rigour of analysis. Certain strategies enhance the credibility of a study, particularly in light of the problem of “anecdotalism.” That is, qualitative analysts are rightfully criticised if their findings do not reflect critical investigation of all their data, and instead rely on a few “telling” examples which support the analytic argument.⁹¹ Measures taken to strengthen the credibility of this study include “comprehensive data treatment,” meaning that, for the findings on christological themes developed in Part II, “all cases of data ... [are] incorporated in the analysis.”⁹² Moreover, this comprehensive approach entails “deviant case analysis,” in which the analyst actively seeks and addresses negative or contradictory cases to ensure that all data is accounted for.⁹³ Furthermore, the appropriate use of numbers and tabulations increases the trustworthiness of the research, not by suggesting empirical generalizability, to be discussed below, but by granting the reader a sense of the data as a whole.⁹⁴ The computer-assisted analysis highlighted above improves precision in the strategies outlined here, thereby deepening credibility.

Closely related to credibility is “reliability” or “dependability.” In quantitative research, there are conventional measures to establish the consistency with which the same methods for collecting data produce the same results. Since qualitative researchers assume that the social world is always changing, and that researchers are not entirely neutral, they eschew expectations for research to be

⁹⁰ Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 286. Babbie points out the “superior validity of field research” as follows: “The kinds of comprehensive measurements available to the field researcher tap a depth of meaning in our concepts ... that are generally unavailable to surveys and experiments. Instead of defining concepts, field researchers will commonly give some detailed illustrations.” *Ibid.*, 287. Marshall and Rossman concur, adding that “[a]n in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid. Within the parameters of that setting, population, and theoretical framework, the research will be valid.” Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 145.

⁹¹ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 175-176.

⁹² H. Mehan, *Learning Lessons: Social Organization in the Classroom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 21; quoted in Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 180.

⁹³ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 180-184. This strategy is related to processes widely employed in sociology known as “analytic induction” or “negative case analysis,” which are held to correspond to statistical analysis in quantitative analysis. See Robson, *Real World Research*, 379-381; Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 94, 155.

⁹⁴ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 184-185; Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 155-156.

precisely replicable.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the researcher to demonstrate the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their treatment of the data, so that research results are viably traced if not duplicated. Once again, the computer software enables greater consistency, for example by text searches which allow the analyst to ensure that all cases of a christological theme are located and analysed appropriately. Following the example of auditing in business and finance, qualitative researchers advocate an “enquiry audit” for the assessment of qualitative research. Academic auditors are called to perform the two tasks of a financial auditor: to examine the processes employed and to examine the product. As Robson concludes, “[i]f the processes followed are clear, systematic, well documented, providing safeguards against bias, and so on, this constitutes a dependability test.”⁹⁶

A third key issue is the “generalizability” or “transferability” of the research. The fundamental concern is how applicable the research findings are to another setting or group of people. Two possibilities exist for determining the wider resonance of research findings. The first is empirical generalization characteristic of quantitative research. The logic here is that generalizations are made from the analysis of one empirical population (i.e. the research sample) to another wider population on the basis of the research sample being statistically representative of that wider empirical population.⁹⁷ This approach is inapplicable to most qualitative research, and so a second possibility is pursued: namely, theoretical generalization. Since the logic of generalization is intrinsically related to the logic of sampling, a brief synopsis of sampling theory is necessary to explicate theoretical generalization.

Sampling refers to “the process of selecting observations” in research.⁹⁸ The most commonly understood form of sampling logic is “probability” sampling. This refers to precise, scientific procedures for researchers to select a sample which is statistically representative of the total empirical population. That is to say, the “variables” or characteristics defined (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, class) occur in the same proportions within the research sample as they do within the wider population

⁹⁵ Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 146-147. For example, Bogdan and Biklen explain that “two researchers studying a single setting may come up with different data and produce different findings. Both studies can be reliable. One would only question the reliability of one or both studies if they yielded contradictory or incompatible results.” Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education*, 44.

⁹⁶ Robson, *Real World Research*, 406. In the present study, the primary qualitative data is available in the form of interview tapes, transcripts, fieldnotes and photographs. Likewise analytic procedures are documented in the form of notes and charts.

⁹⁷ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 153.

⁹⁸ Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 163.

under study.⁹⁹ In some situations, however, probability sampling is either impossible or inappropriate. Researchers then employ various strategies of “non-probability” sampling, in which non-representative samples are selected “with the aim of making key comparisons and testing and developing theoretical propositions.”¹⁰⁰

“Theoretical” or “purposive” sampling is a common strategy in qualitative research, determined by the purpose of the study and defined as follows:

[T]heoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position and analytical framework, your analytical practice, and most importantly the explanation or account you are developing. Theoretical sampling is concerned with constructing a sample (sometimes called a study group) which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory and explanation.¹⁰¹

This does not mean that sampling is entirely *ad hoc* or unspecifiable in relation to the wider universe. Rather, the sample may be designed to provide a “*meticulous view of particular units*,” such as categories or cases (e.g. persons or organisations) which are relevant to or found within the wider universe. Or, it may be designed “to encapsulate a *relevant range* of units in relation to the wider universe, but not to represent it directly.”¹⁰² The main point is that the sampling procedure is neither statistical nor purely personal, but rather theoretical or grounded in the conceptual framework of the overall research design.¹⁰³

Since the logic of generalizability flows from the logic of sampling, it is stressed from the outset that no claim is made for the research findings on African christologies to be generalized empirically to some wider population of African Christians, say in Kenya or Ghana. Instead, theoretical generalizations are made on the combined grounds that (1) the sample selected is not atypical of what is found in

⁹⁹ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 91. Mason notes that this requires that the parameters of the total population are known as well as the population’s key characteristics. These pieces of information thus constitute a sampling frame from which the sample can be drawn. The aim is to achieve a representative microcosm of the population, so that the researcher “can claim that the patterns discovered within the microcosm are likely to appear in similar shapes and proportions in that total population.” Again, “[s]tatistical conventions are used to calculate the probability that patterns observed in the sample will exist in the wider population.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* The two terms “theoretical” and “purposive” are generally treated as synonyms. See Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 104-105. Babbie adds that in purpose sampling, “you select a sample of observations you believe will yield the most comprehensive understanding of your subject of study, based on intuitive feel for the subject that comes from extended observation and reflection.” Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 269.

¹⁰² Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 92.

¹⁰³ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 105.

the wider population, (2) it includes the perspectives of many significant church leaders who have special expertise in the subject, (3) it incorporates a relevant range of data allowing for meaningful comparisons to be made, and (4) the detailed and holistic analysis of extensive data produces explanatory factors which have a wider resonance within the field of African Christianity. In this respect, some qualitative researchers question the terminology, asserting that

[g]eneralization is ... [a] word ... that should be reserved for surveys only. What can be analysed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand ... *extrapolation* better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research.¹⁰⁴

This statement represents the approach taken in this study which seeks to extrapolate from the data the significance of these African christologies to the wider field of African Christianity.

One last point must be noted with respect to transferability. That is, qualitative researchers insist that “the burden of demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context rests more with the investigator who would make that transfer than with the original investigator.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, the responsibility of the initial researcher is to provide a full specification of the theoretical framework for the study and the information or the “*data base* that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers.”¹⁰⁶ The onus then shifts to the subsequent researcher to build the case for the new context of research being sufficiently similar to the original context to warrant the transfer being proposed.

A fourth issue in research is “objectivity” or “confirmability.” The concern is for the research findings to be determined by the respondents and their context and not the interests and biases of the researcher. It must first be underlined that this issue is common to all research, since experimental studies and questionnaires necessarily reflect the interests of those who construct them. It is therefore a matter of limiting researchers’ biases and not eliminating them.¹⁰⁷ Strategies employed toward this end in this study include acknowledging the personal and methodological stance adopted in research, to be further indicated below, seeking negative instances in the data, enabling an “enquiry audit” outlined above, and verifying my developing

¹⁰⁴ Pertti Alasuutari, *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 1995); quoted in Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 145.

¹⁰⁶ Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 316; quoted in Robson, *Real World Research*, 405.

¹⁰⁷ Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education*, 42-43.

interpretation with selected respondents, including theologians and church leaders, and other experts in the field. Furthermore, this study proceeded on the epistemological assumption that the qualitative data are contextual and interactional, so that knowledge is generated in the interaction between the researcher and the respondents. In other words, social interaction is inherent in the qualitative research and not “bias” which can potentially be eradicated.¹⁰⁸ Therefore I sought to be both active and reflexive in generating data rather than a neutral data collector in the research process.

Finally, a brief statement on research ethics is required. All participation in the interviews was voluntary, and after explaining the nature of the research project and how the interview would contribute to it, I obtained the informed consent of each respondent for the interview to be tape-recorded and used for academic and ministry purposes.¹⁰⁹ I also asked permission to use the respondent’s name in publication. Since the topic is not highly sensitive politically or personally, as, for example, a subject such as sexuality might be, respondents consented freely and willingly to this request.

¹⁰⁸ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 40-41.

¹⁰⁹ I first contacted the six theologians and some of the church leaders by letter, introducing myself and the research, and then followed up on the interview request by telephone or in person. For the remainder of the respondents, the research project was explained both at the time of requesting the interview and again in introducing the interview when asking for personal consent.

Whereas informed consent often takes the form of a signed contract, on the basis of advice from Kenyan colleagues in the Research Department at Daystar University, I decided that verbal consent was sufficient for the purpose of the present study in its selected contexts. That is to say, since the topic of discussion was not highly sensitive, and since social interaction in the selected contexts in Africa is highly relational, the written contractual approach was felt to be an imposition culturally and therefore a potential hindrance to the rapport sought in the research process. Only one respondent expressed any reservation whatsoever in being interviewed. Having been misrepresented in the press, Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki of the Catholic Church in Kenya agreed to the interview but requested that I verify with him any references to him before publication. This request has been honoured. Additionally, on a few occasions respondents asked me to switch off the tape recorder when discussing issues of some sensitivity politically. I complied with these requests, taking notes on these discussions but not making any explicit references to the respondents in this regard.

(2) Hermeneutical Framework

The research design indicates that a variety of approaches have been taken in the exploration of contemporary African christologies. The main sources and strategies for data collection and analysis are summarised in diagram form. Fig.1 portrays the hermeneutical framework, with the triangular design intended to confirm findings and to increase the breadth and depth of information.¹¹⁰

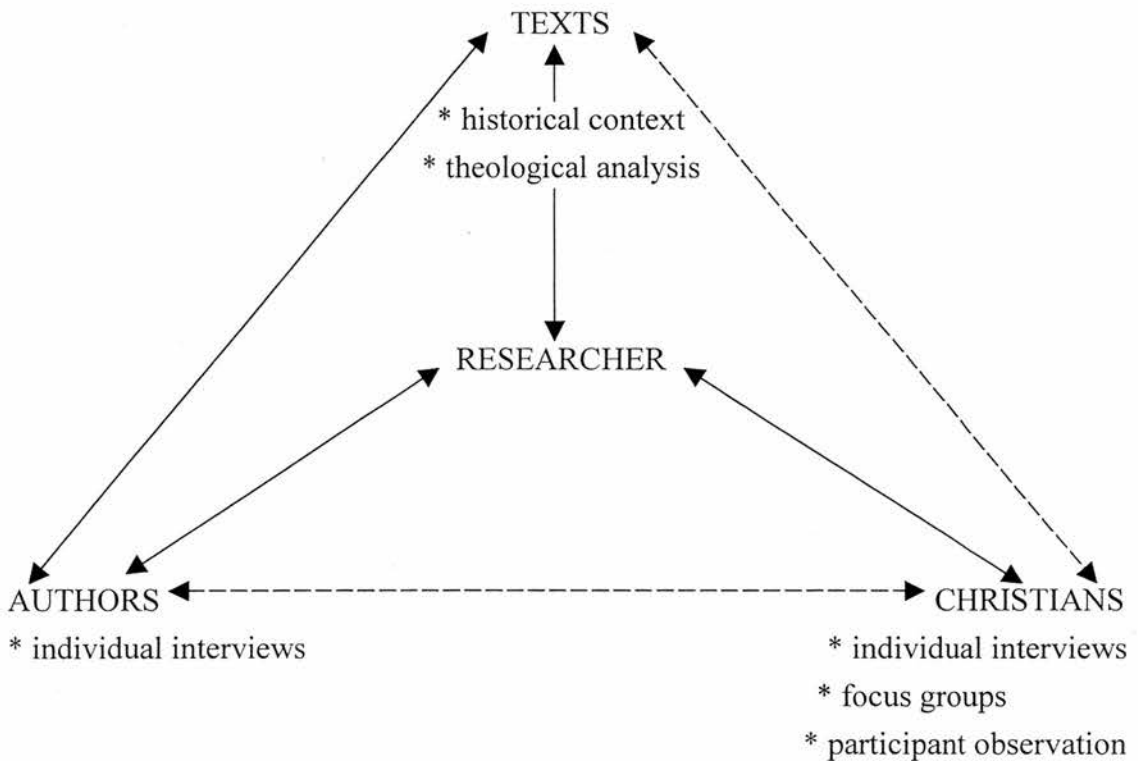


Fig. 1. Hermeneutical Framework With Triangular Research Design

The dotted lines indicate a possible, though not presumed, direct relationship between the African Christians selected for this study and the six theologians. In

¹¹⁰ I devised this framework on the basis of an important concept in research design, namely “triangulation.” Borrowed from navigation and military strategies, the term was coined by Norman Denzin in 1978 to refer to a combination of methods employed in studying the same phenomenon for the purpose of cross-checking results. Creswell explains, “The concept of *triangulation* was based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods (Jick, 1979).” John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 174. Marshall and Rossman add that “[d]ata from different sources can be used to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research in question.” Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 146. Despite some debate about the concept, it continues to be upheld as one strategy to enhance a study’s validity and generalizability. For example, see Robson, *Real World Research*, 383; Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 25, 42, 148-149.

other words, I did not assume that the respondents were familiar with the textual christologies. Nor did I mention the theologians or their works unless respondents volunteered such awareness on their part. Some respondents knew the theologians personally, others knew their works, while still others did not voice any such awareness. Once again, however, the primary purpose of the interview was not to discern the respondents' knowledge of these particular theologians, but to probe their *own* perceptions of Jesus Christ.

(3) Role of the Researcher

The hermeneutical framework also reflects the central role of the researcher in the process of investigation. This is in line with the general consensus across academic disciplines today, that “who you are has a central place in the research process because you bring your own thoughts, aspirations and feelings, and your own ethnicity, race, class, gender, ... occupation, family background, schooling, etc. to your research.”¹¹¹ Consequently, I offer in brief the perspective from which this research is undertaken, with the strengths and limitations that are necessarily entailed. I come to the investigation as a Canadian with many years of childhood and adult experience in Africa, primarily in Angola and Kenya.¹¹² As a woman, I share particular concern for the issues raised by African Christian women. I also proceed as a confessing Christian from a Protestant background, and therefore situate this study in the sphere of Christian theology; that is, it is written from a standpoint of “faith seeking understanding.” The stance adopted in research has been that of an open and engaged learner: a learner in approaching the subject and the interviews in particular by stressing to respondents that my aim was not to quiz them on their

¹¹¹ S. Kirby and K. McKenna, *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (Toronto: Garamond, 1989), 46; quoted in Robson, *Real World Research*, 22.

¹¹² The question of expatriate involvement in the field of African theology arises in the literature. Some African theologians, like Charles Nyamiti and Justin Ukpong, allow room for non-African theologians to do African theology provided they are involved in African Christianity and well informed about the African socio-cultural context. See Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies,” 64; Justin S. Ukpong, “Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 512. However, other scholars restrict such theological formulation to Africans. For example, Mugambi vehemently states that

the norm of *African* Christian theology ... cannot and should not be determined or defined by anyone else but *Africans* who have experienced the power of the gospel. Foreign missionaries and theologians cannot articulate African theology. As only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches, Africans are the only people who can in the end define and articulate their priorities and experiences with regard to the gospel of Jesus and to the other aspects of life. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 11.

The debate concerning who is competent to construct African christology is important but secondary to the present study, since my own entrance into the subject is by way of theological interpretation rather than construction.

theological orthodoxy, but to learn from them their own experience of Jesus Christ. At the same time, I seek to engage critically with the christological materials and to exercise some degree of methodological reflexivity.

d) Limitations

While various limitations of the thesis have been mentioned throughout this chapter, the main ones are recapitulated briefly here.

(1) Theologians Represented

This thesis is necessarily selective in its presentation of contemporary African theologians, those publishing from approximately the 1980s to the present. However, the voices selected represent some of the most significant developments within current contextual christologies from men and women of different confessional traditions. The treatment focuses on the most salient christological contributions of the work of the selected theologians, rather than attempting a comprehensive treatment of their work as a whole.

(2) Geographical Contexts

The organising principle of the study is primarily thematic and secondarily geographical. Only certain areas of sub-Saharan Africa feature by way of contextual grounding for the christological investigation. South Africa, with its extensive theology arising out of the historical context of apartheid, lies beyond the scope of the present inquiry. While the christologies of the African theologians cannot be restricted to their own particular localities, the foci for field research have been specified as major urban centres in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana.

(3) Church Affiliations

This research focuses primarily on African Christianity in its contemporary Protestant and Catholic expressions arising out of the modern missionary movement. African Initiated Churches and neo-Pentecostal churches exceed the bounds of the present inquiry, since these represent major areas of research in themselves.

(4) Christological Inquiry

Christology is a vast subject, often sub-divided into categories such as biblical, classical and modern, or into particular doctrines like soteriology. The present inquiry concentrates on emergent christological images in contemporary African Christianity according to selected textual and oral sources. Even within this restriction, not all of the images unearthed in the research can be developed within

the confines of this study. Therefore, more christological themes are exposed than explicated, and more christological issues raised than resolved. The research design has emphasised the exploratory nature of the present inquiry. Thus the thesis reveals aspects of the current moment in theological development, and represents an initial stage of ongoing inquiry into the field of contemporary African christologies.

D. Conclusion

This chapter has indicated that the overriding method of this study is theological analysis of African christologies. In order to facilitate this process, I have used various approaches to collect and analyse the christological data. In addition to the theological analysis of texts, I have undertaken qualitative research for the purpose of exploring, documenting, interpreting and illustrating African experiences and perceptions of Jesus Christ. Methodological priority is given to capturing and expressing the “African voices” throughout the study, in order to convey the respondents’ meanings as clearly as possible. Since the christologies emerge in particular contexts and in relation to a wider community of faith, the study also entails critical engagement with the christological materials on the basis of criteria to be set forth in the next chapter. Critical reflection focuses on aspects of conscious appropriation and areas of unresolved controversy in their contemporary expression, plus the significance of these christologies to the ongoing development of African Christianity.

Just as this chapter opened with a methodological directive from Harold Turner, so it closes with another guideline he offers for the study of religion in Africa. In reference to “the endeavour to study a religious tradition set within a culture quite different from one’s own,” he maintains that “one of the basic principles is that these studies should, in the end, be acceptable to at least some of the people involved, and even in spite of their being presented, perhaps, with another way of looking at their own religion.”¹¹³ Thus if some of the African Christians involved in this study identify their own insights and experiences in these pages and recognise “Jesus of Africa” in their midst, even if in ways previously unperceived, the endeavour on my part will have been worthwhile.

¹¹³ Turner, “The Way Forward,” 3.

CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL ISSUES PROMPTING CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

*As long as one people is in the image and likeness of another, we do not reach the real purpose of being Christian, namely to be human in the image of Christ.*¹

- John Pobee, Ghanaian theologian

A. Introduction

Part I provides background to the contemporary African christologies in order to enhance understanding of their current expression. Besides the historical and theological contexts delineated thus far, it is essential to appreciate the issues that elicit these emergent christologies. The first section of this chapter addresses the sources and methods of christological formulation, while the second section attends to issues regarding contextual relevance. Examining the expressed priorities of the African Christians provides the criteria for critical engagement with the current christologies, as set forth in the conclusion to this chapter.

B. Critical Issues Regarding Sources And Methods

The sources for christological discourse were clearly delineated from the outset of African theology in recent decades. In Mbiti's 1968 essay lamenting the lack of African concepts of Christ, referred to in Chapter 1, he likewise stated that the African Church was "without a theology, without theologians, and without theological concern."² He therefore urged his fellow Africans to develop theological reflection on the basis of four rich sources of material. The first of these "four pillars" was the Bible, which he asserted to be the final authority on religious matters. The second was the theology of the older Churches, referring to the scholarship and tradition of especially the Church in Europe. The third pillar was the traditional African world, which he insisted must be taken seriously since "[i]t is within the traditional thought-forms and religious concerns that our peoples live and try to assimilate Christian teaching. These traditional thought-forms strongly colour

¹ John S. Pobee, *Christ Would Be An African Too*, Gospel & Culture Studies Vol. 9, West Africa (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), 8.

² John S. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology," in *Christ and the Younger Churches*, ed. Georg F. Vicedom (London: SPCK, 1972), 51. See p. 6, no. 20 above for details of earlier publication.

much of their understanding of the Christian message.”³ Finally, the living experience of the Church was to be an important source of theological reflection. In this regard, Mbiti showed openness to further investigation of the African Independent Churches as an authentic expression of African Christianity.

Looking back over the development of African theology since Mbiti’s appeal, it is evident that these four pillars have indeed supported the theological endeavours of Africans thus far. While the relative weight given to each source will differ among theologians, the potential for drawing upon all categories has certainly been tapped. A clear indication of wider assent regarding these sources is set forth in the “Final Communiqué” of the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, held in Accra, Ghana. Like Mbiti before them, these theologians point to *The Bible and Christian heritage* as the first source, emphasising that “[t]he Bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture.”⁴ Second, they point to *African anthropology* and include cosmology in addition, stressing that the salvation of the human person is inextricably bound to that of the cosmos. Third, *African traditional religions* are appealed to on the basis of the fundamental premise that “[t]he God of history speaks to all peoples in particular ways. In Africa the traditional religions are a major source for the study of the African experience of God. The beliefs and practices of the traditional religions in Africa can enrich Christian theology and spirituality.”⁵ The fourth source identified is the *African Independent churches*, and the final one is *Other African realities*, a broad category covering everything from cultural forms of life and arts, to family and communal life, to the struggles against racism, sexism, and any other form of economic, political, social, and cultural oppression.

Given the rich variety of sources potentially drawn upon in the formulation of African christologies, a corresponding array of methods can be detected in emergent African christologies. Preliminary observations are confined here to identifying possible approaches which are then illustrated in the christologies examined throughout Part II. Within Charles Nyamiti’s typology of inculturation and liberation christologies, to be discussed in the next chapter, two main methods are summarised with respect to the inculturation approach: (1) “From the Bible to African Reality,” or starting from the biblical material about Christ and moving to the African cultural

³ Ibid., 52.

⁴ Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, “Final Communiqué,” in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 192.

⁵ Ibid., 193.

context to discern relevant christological themes, and (2) “From African Reality to Christology,” or drawing upon the African cultural background as the point of departure for christological elaboration.⁶ Regarding the second category, Nyamiti explains that “[i]n this approach the author examines the mystery of Christ from either the perspective of the African worldview, or from the angle of some particular theme taken from the African worldview or culture.”⁷ This latter “thematic” approach is said to be used most frequently and to represent the area in which African christologies have especially flourished. Liberation christologies likewise find points of departure in (1) the Bible, particularly reflecting a “christology ... from below,”⁸ beginning with the man Jesus of Nazareth and highlighting the liberating dimensions of his ministry, and (2) the contemporary context as the locus for christological formulation. For example, Magesa summarises these methodological considerations in outlining the need for Christians to commit themselves to following “Jesus Christ the Liberator” in this historical experience:

Drawing on the experience of the general mass of the African peoples, and also on the work of the various social sciences which have analyzed the codified experience, a theological examination of the socio-economic and political situation prevalent in Africa brings to the fore numerous ethical and moral questions. ... All of these are questions of suffering, issues of lack of freedom in its various aspects. Further problems to be seen all over the continent—problems of ignorance and preventable disease, of famine and ethnic wars, of class antagonisms and racial persecutions—are the direct consequence of

⁶ Charles Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), 17-18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18. Elsewhere Nyamiti presents a similar synopsis according to two “schools” of inculturation christologies: (1) the philosophical or speculative school, and (2) the sociocultural and biblical school. The first school is “characterized by a critical and philosophical approach to African religions or sociocultural realities, as well as to biblical and traditional teaching.” The noetic aspect of theology is stressed in this approach, which is said to be found especially among Catholic theologians. The second school emphasises the direct correspondence between the biblical message and African traditional teaching. It is generally more pragmatic in approach, with little sympathy for speculative problems. More emphasis is given to the Bible than to church tradition, and it is found especially among English-speaking Protestant theologians. See Charles Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994), 64-65; “African Theology: Which Directions? Which Methodologies?” *African Christian Studies Occasional Paper no. 3 and 4* (Nov./Dec. 1985): 4-5; “Approaches to African Theology,” in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World*, ed. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 31-32.

⁸ Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” 28.

ignoring this basic question of ‘unfreedom.’ They are a result of not confronting it in time with the active, liberating word of God.⁹

In addition, Nyamiti makes passing reference to “African feminist theology (centred on the emancipation of women)”¹⁰ within this category of liberation, and John Parratt likewise refers to feminist theology as a “second-generation” liberation theology.¹¹ While Nyamiti’s typology is by no means exhaustive, it is perhaps the simplest and most lucid overview of the complex subject of christological methodology.¹²

With only an outline thus far of potential sources and methods employed in African christologies, it remains to examine how these possibilities take shape in the selected christologies under consideration. Instead of undertaking analysis of these factors in isolation, attention is drawn to the use of sources and methods within the context of investigating the central themes in Chapters 5 to 7. Nonetheless, this brief introduction raises criteria for consideration in engaging critically with the African christologies. For the sake of cohesiveness with additional criteria, plus ease of future reference, the criteria regarding sources and methods are set forth in the conclusion to this chapter along with those of contextual relevance.¹³

C. Critical Issues Regarding Contextual Relevance

Recent trends in contextual theologies highlight the need to discern the questions arising in a particular context of the gospel and to develop theological formulations in response to those questions. Certainly the African theologians under consideration are cognizant of this methodological priority. For example, Oduyoye introduces the liberation of Christian theology by summarising the shift in perspective as follows:

⁹ Laurenti Magesa, “Christ the Liberator and Africa Today,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), 82-83.

¹⁰ Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” 28.

¹¹ John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 51. Parratt’s overview of theological method is similar in structure to that of Nyamiti, though more detailed in elaboration and critique. He introduces African and Black theology, then explores the former category by way of Catholic and Protestant contributions. Feminist perspectives are granted a brief separate section, and are highlighted anew in later contexts of discussing Christian dogma. Methods of liberation theology are presented in a chapter on political theologies, before a final chapter raises incisive questions concerning methodological issues yet to be resolved.

¹² For an alternative typology which is also instructive, see Justin S. Ukpong, “Christology and Inculturation: A New Testament Perspective,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994). Ukpong outlines five different approaches, namely the *incarnational approach*, the *Logos Spermatikos (Seeds of the Word)*, the *functional analogy*, the *paschal mystery*, and the *biblical approach*. While he claims to take a different approach himself, his method does not differ markedly from the biblical approach.

¹³ See pp. 90-91 below.

Theologians throughout the world who felt a call to speak more relevantly to their age and generation freed themselves from traditional dogmatic and systematic theology and focused on life issues. Instead of telling people what questions to ask and then furnishing them with the answers, theologians began to listen to the questions people were asking and then seek the answers.¹⁴

Moreover, Ela demonstrates his commitment to such a contextual approach in his practical ministry and his theological reflection. He insists, “Notre réponse au Dieu qui a parlé par son Fils doit se formuler à partir des luttes de notre peuple, de ses joies, de ses peines, de ses espoirs et de ses frustrations aujourd’hui.”¹⁵ He further comments,

Personnellement je ne voudrais pas faire la christologie fermée sur elle-même. ... Il faut voir comment la christologie s’inscrit dans une réflexion d’ensemble, de ministères chrétiens vécus en Afrique ou ici, compte tenu des questions que les gens se posent.¹⁶

Likewise Pobeë stresses the need for current christologies “to be open to the *questionings* of this time and this place.”¹⁷

What, then, are the central questions being asked across the selected contexts in Africa today? The purpose of this section is to introduce key christological issues regarding contextual relevance, as identified by the selected African Christians in the textual and oral christologies.

One succinct expression that captures the multi-faceted complexity of theological issues is Pobeë’s description of African Christianity in terms of “the North Atlantic Captivity of the Church.” Representing widespread conviction, he explains the predicament in relation to christology as follows:

Christianity in Africa starts with an assumed definition of the Christian faith which is definitely North Atlantic—intellectually, spiritually, liturgically, organisationally. Missionary preaching in Africa has been so shaped by the North Atlantic cultures and contexts, that the African is unable to see beyond that picture of Christ of the

¹⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 3.

¹⁵ Jean-Marc Ela, “Le motif de la libération dans la théologie africaine,” *Les nouvelles rationalités africaines* 2, no. 5 (oct. 1986), 46.

“Our response to the God who has spoken through his Son has to be formulated from the struggles of our people, from their joys, from their pains, from their hopes and from their frustrations today.” All translations in footnotes are mine.

¹⁶ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal, Canada: Jan. 8, 1999. “Personally I would not want to do christology simply for its own sake. We must see how christology is written in a reflection together, of Christian ministries actually experienced in Africa or here, taking account of the questions that the people ask themselves.”

¹⁷ John Pobeë, Oral Interview, Geneva, Switzerland: Oct. 28, 1998.

biblical faiths. This is what I have elsewhere called ‘the North Atlantic Captivity of the Church.’¹⁸

He also laments that “[s]ome have misused the Christian faith to oppress Africans. In the name of bringing ‘Christian civilisation’ to the so-called benighted Africans they have oppressed Africans intellectually, physically, spiritually, economically, and culturally.”¹⁹

Pobee’s summary statements reflect the fact that most of the christological issues are intrinsically related to one another. Nonetheless, for the present purpose of analysis, the major critical issues are distinguished under the following headings: (1) Historical and Missiological Issues, (2) Theological Issues, (3) Issues of African Christian Identity, (4) Gender Issues, (5) Issues of Contemporary Christian Witness, and (6) Issues regarding Language. Many of the points raised echo matters outlined in Chapter 1 concerning the initial emergence of African christologies this century. However, the present discussion traces the continued development of christological reflection by highlighting the specific concerns voiced by these current representatives. In view of their experience of “the North Atlantic Captivity of the Church,” it is especially important that African Christians articulate their own perceptions of the christological issues. For this reason, extensive direct quotes are purposely employed throughout this thesis and particularly in this chapter. African perspectives are further elucidated through autobiographical reminiscences of the selected theologians. Finally, the most vital problems are identified, but neither developed at length nor engaged with critically in this chapter. Rather, these christological concerns form the backdrop against which the models of contemporary African christologies are interpreted and assessed in later chapters.

1. Historical And Missiological Issues

The ills Africans have suffered through contact with Europeans are well known. Yet, according to Ugandan Catholic priest John Waliggo, for anyone seeking to truly grasp contemporary African christologies, it is fundamentally necessary

to understand the African experience, if you can, before and during the one hundred years of Christianity or even five hundred years of Christianity. What has really happened, ... the episode of slave trade is very important. The episode of colonisation is very important. The episode of neo-colonisation and the betrayal of the real Christian

¹⁸ John S. Pobee, “Jesus Christ—The Life of the World: An African Perspective,” *Ministerial Formation* 21 (Jan. 1983), 5. See also *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

¹⁹ Pobee, “Jesus Christ—The Life of the World,” 5.

people who did take on power at independence. The *suffering ...* we have passed through is very important.²⁰

Granting the veracity of Pobee's observation that "all theology is biography,"²¹ it is not surprising that the historical and missiological issues are expressed most poignantly by those with first-hand experience of Christianity during the era of colonialism and western missions. Thus Mugambi gives forceful expression to a central christological issue of ongoing struggle:

I am wrestling with a contradiction: The Gospel proclaims Good News in specific cultural and historical terms (Luke 4:16-22). Yet missionary Christianity has reached Africa as terribly *bad news*, in which people have been taught in church to despise their culture, their ancestry; their history and their knowledge. How can Jesus the Son of God, Who created Africans in His own Image, condone such dehumanization? Either this negative teaching is theologically erroneous (heretical); or it is imperialist ideology rather than theology; or the God this teaching proclaims is an idol created in the image of its proclaimers. The implications of this concern are far reaching and it is too early to predict the outcome.²²

The intensity of Mugambi's assertion is best appreciated in light of his autobiographical reflections on influences that have shaped his theology. Recalling how part of his childhood was spent at a mission station, he recounts,

This was during Kenya's war of independence from British colonial dominion. The conduct of missionaries in that war was, in my view, inconsistent with the Gospel. The Gospel proclaims liberty to the captives, but we were taught to acquiesce in our oppression and aspire for 'freedom in Christ'. This was hypocritical, because they were free, and we were captive. They seemed not to mind about the loss of African lives, including devout Christians, during that war. There was a great deal of emphasis on 'new life in Jesus-Christ'. But there was hardly any willingness to talk publicly about the necessity to end colonial rule. In their public profile they portrayed hardly any difference between themselves and the colonial oppressors. This conduct had a lasting impact on me, and helped me to distinguish between the Gospel, and missionary appropriations (or misappropriations) of it.²³

Therefore the close association between Christianity and colonialism, as well as missionary attitudes and actions, have had a decisive influence upon emergent

²⁰ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja, Uganda: May 7, 1998.

²¹ John Pobee, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

²² J. N. K. Mugambi, Written Interview Response, Nairobi: June 10, 1998. Quotes from Mugambi's interview are taken from the script he prepared in advance and then discussed with me. See Chapter 2, p. 39, n. 60.

²³ Ibid.

African theologies. Attention is drawn especially to missionary practices like uprooting converts from their home environment and denigrating African culture. Hence in Mugambi's estimation, "The Christian missionary enterprise has had the greatest impact in the disintegration of African cultural and religious heritage."²⁴

As a result of these historical and missiological factors, some Africans in recent times, especially intellectuals, have rejected Jesus as a foreign "white" god and Christianity as a European religion.²⁵ While acknowledging the reality of such twentieth century intellectual criticisms, it must also be noted that these views are contested by African Christians today.²⁶ However, for the present purpose of identifying christological issues, it remains indisputable that the history of colonialism and the modern missionary enterprise have had a deleterious effect on some Africans' perceptions of Christ. Both church leaders and lay people attest to this. For example John Gatu, the Former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, speaks candidly to the issue, admitting,

That was my experience before my conversion. *That* indeed was ... the *one* reason why I did not want to belong to the church. Because for *me*, the introduction of Jesus which more or less came at the time to *destroy* probably *everything* else which was African, and that all

²⁴ J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 77.

²⁵ See, for example, Mongo Béti, *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Collection Ecrits (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976); Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970); Ali M. Mazrui, *The African Condition—A Political Diagnosis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).

²⁶ For a penetrating investigation of this matter, see Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

In addition, interview respondents expressed a wide range of responses regarding the western missionary inheritance and any adverse effects it has had on current perceptions of Christ. For example, Pobeë reflects on mission history and comments,

[S]ee this is fashionable, to abuse earlier missionaries. But when I think, somebody left the cold comfort of Europe, left all sorts of securities back home, *went* out to a people he or she didn't know, a people of whom all sorts of strange stories had been told, *lived* among them, *effected* through the message *some* reconciliation, so that the Fanti and the Ga belong to one church, *were prepared to die* for this gospel! And they were not my people! I do believe the gospel has power. So I'm learning from history. John Pobeë, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

Ugandan Catholic laywoman Mary Kizito acknowledges that some Africans, notably the educated intellectuals, still see Jesus as a foreign god. However, in contrast she remarks,

I don't think the everyday people ever think of Jesus as a white person, or anything. They relate to a *person*, rather than relating to colour. Because for them, they don't even sit there and start analysing, 'The white man brought us this religion, therefore we have to adopt it.' For them, they accept Jesus and they say, 'Whether he's white or red or yellow, he's still Jesus!' I think for the ordinary person, that's what it is. Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

that mattered was what the *mzungu* ['white' or 'European'] would say, *that* was a concept that I could not perceive.²⁷

Likewise Kenyan Catholic layman Gerald Wanjohi, a retired philosophy professor from the University of Nairobi, voices the common complaint that Christianity was brought to Africa "in the garb of the white man, you know?"²⁸ He then relates his own conviction, plus a commonly known story, as follows:

But the main problem is the way Christianity was introduced, especially coming in and banning *so* many of our cultural practices ... [and] values. ... [T]he most serious of these complaints is how the missionary and colonialist worked together to deprive the African of his heritage, especially of his land. The story goes like this, that the missionary would come and preach to the people, and then tell them, 'Now, we close our eyes to pray.' And they closed their eyes and started praying, alright. But at the same time, another *mzungu*, especially the colonialist is now *busy* taking away the African land!²⁹

In view of this strongly perceived historical collusion between missionaries and colonialists, plus the association between Christianity and western culture, African Christians are compelled to question their own appropriation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A Ugandan religious sister, Mary Savio, puts it this way:

But the problem was that when we got it [the gospel], it had changed so much that it had a different culture. We were absorbing it through many cultures that had touched it. But now [it is] for us Africans ... to think, ... which is the *real Christ*? And which is the other *culture*? Where do I fit in? Should we be going for *everything* that came with this gospel? *How* can we make this our own? Or *how* can we really belong to *Christ*? And not to the Canadians! And not to the French! And not to the British, you know! *That* is the game. And it is not easy, it needs a lot of *discernment*, and *faith*.³⁰

Hannah Kinoti, professor of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi and Kenyan representative of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, explains further,

²⁷ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998. Again, this view must be balanced by a further comment made later in the conversation. After denouncing missionary shortcomings in the spread of the gospel in Kenya, particularly with respect to the crisis regarding female circumcision among the Gikuyu, Gatu ends more charitably by acknowledging seventy years of hindsight in examining the conflict. He then concludes,

Therefore I don't think we could *totally* blame missionaries in *that* very negative sense. But before I came to know the Lord in a *personal* way, I used to blame missionaries very strongly for that kind of *lack* of understanding and appreciation of the local culture and tradition. But now that I know who Jesus is, and I know also our human limitations, I take probably a much more positive view of the situation, and not be too critical in the sense that I was at one point.

²⁸ Gerald Wanjohi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Mary Savio, Oral Interview, Nairobi: April 21, 1998.

[W]e have been struggling to see Jesus with an African face, and that is a struggle that we have to continue. ... [T]he kind of face that Jesus has been given, to me, is a white face. A white face, Jesus or God—even the images we see of Jesus, and it becomes a struggle.³¹

Salome Okeyo expresses similar sentiments in the focus group of Kenyan Catholic laity, for she recalls, “[A]t first there was something which I kept on wondering when I was a child. Why is it that whenever I see the picture of Jesus, it is in a European form? So at first I used to think, did he come for only these Europeans and not the Africans?”³² Finally, among the many respondents who lament the proliferation of white images of Jesus in Africa, Kenyan pastor J. B. Masinde states the problem in this way:

I’m coming from a situation whereby the Christ that we have to present now, ... we have to peel off ... some clothes that he’s been packaged in. I don’t mean it in a bad way, but those who presented Christ to Africa, say in my area, they presented him packaged in the western kind of model, in the sense that the perception many people got was not even that Christ was a Jew! ... The drawings they had in their churches, the pictures they had in their homes—so small, not even looking like Jewish men! ... ‘[C]ause most of them were drawn in the Italian [fashion] So the perception was, ‘Oh, he must have been a white man! Ah, like the white missionary! He must have been closer to God than we are!’³³

A whole complex of issues thus arises from the missionary transmission of the gospel to Africa during colonial times. While many other related concerns are evidenced in the theological texts and oral interviews, attention has been restricted to the main historical factors prompting contemporary christological questions: namely, the close association of Christianity and colonialism, and missionary attitudes and practices, particularly the denigration of African culture. Like chisel and hammer, these two aspects of recent African history have together helped to carve the “disfigured” face of Jesus in Africa today: as white, as European, as consequently alien, as marred with suffering yet submissive to those upholding the status quo. Catholic layman George Hagan, Director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, observes,

The early missionaries were not about preaching Christ, even to heal our bodies, preaching Christ to liberate us. They were preaching Christ who made us able to accept our position in life. *Not* Christ as the *agitator*. *Theirs* was a Christ of *submission*, that would enable the

³¹ Hannah Kinoti, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

³² Salome Okeyo, Focus Group, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

³³ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

African to *accept* leadership from the Church, leadership from the colonial masters.³⁴

Finally, Nasimiyu Wasike's conclusion provides an apt summary of the historical and missiological issues, as follows:

Therefore, the Jesus that the Africans received from the western European missionaries was a Jesus who had been clothed in many layers of cultural realities. He was imagined as [an] imperialist, racist, cultural and ... religious colonialist, and as hierarchical and patriarchal in his relationships with people.³⁵

2. Theological Issues

"The North Atlantic Captivity of the Church" has also created a cluster of overlapping issues that are theological in nature. For Africans have endured not only political, economic and cultural imperialism, but also the domination of western theology and church polity. Despite much effort and progress in cultivating African Christianity, according to Kwesi Dickson, the current President of the All Africa Conference of Churches, "[C]olonial theology is very much in place still. There's no question, even though people have gone to seminary and all that. The colonial theology is alive and well."³⁶

The defect here is not merely ecclesiastical hegemony nor western ethnocentrism and paternalism, however much these symptoms violate the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rather, the root problem is much more pernicious, for it raises the very theological question of missionary misapprehension of the gospel itself. Mugambi's explanation is worth quoting at length for its clarity:

Christian missionaries came as agents of western civilization which, they believed, was the 'Christian civilization'. They went out to Africa and Asia in the name of 'Christendom' rather than in the name of Christ. The modern missionary enterprise in Africa was founded upon an erroneous theological presupposition. By identifying the Christian faith with western 'Christendom' the missionaries ignored or overlooked one of the most important theological affirmations of the Christian faith since the time of Jesus—that *conversion* to Christianity did not necessarily demand *acculturation* into the culture of the missionary. Interestingly, this issue of demanding converts to denounce their cultural heritage and accept that of the missionary precipitated the first great controversy in the history of Christianity. It led to the significant theological conflict between Peter and Paul.

³⁴ George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 28, Aug. 6, 1998.

³⁵ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, "Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context," *Propositum* 3, no. 1 (June 1998): 18.

³⁶ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

One of the most disturbing ironies of the modern missionary enterprise, was that the missionaries were biblical literalists, yet they did not take cognizance of the resolution of the first ecumenical council of Jerusalem which declared that it was not necessary for a Gentile to become an 'honorary' Jew in order to become a Christian. Most missionaries insisted that an African must become an 'honorary white', as a precondition for becoming a Christian. This was a gross theological error.³⁷

Thus the missionary association of Christianity and European civilisation went beyond a mere cultural blunder to evidence a theological misconception.³⁸ As a direct legacy of the missionary enterprise, African Christians face the fundamental problem of appropriating Christ as Africans despite the "judaising" tendencies of western missionaries to fashion Christian faith according to their own image. This challenge surfaces in the autobiographical reflections of the selected African theologians and contributes significantly to the agenda voiced regarding African christologies. Reminiscing about his own theological formation, Bujo comments,

It is difficult to say, but maybe what has influenced me is that I grew up in the colonial period, and I saw how the African culture was not taken seriously into account. And how we didn't understand many things in our prayers, or in our life in the school, and so what we were taught was not according to our African life. It was strange for us. So that has been the starting point. ... Then, when I was studying theology at seminary, what we learned was all western philosophy, western philosophy. And especially in the ethical problems—all the problems were concentrated on the western life. But nobody took into account our own problems in Africa.³⁹

In contrast to the estrangement from African life he experienced at school, Bujo explains, "Then at home, my parents taught me the African way of life. So, I wanted to know Christ, to understand Christianity in my culture—to find the roots of my culture also in the Christian faith. That has been the starting point."⁴⁰ Consequently, assessing how his background in Africa and his experiences in the West have shaped his present understanding of Jesus, Bujo concludes, "*Jesus Christ, the Risen Christ, no longer belongs to one culture. So Europe cannot impose on us a model from Europe. Everybody has to understand Christ in his own culture, so we have the right to understand Christ in our culture.*"⁴¹ All these experiences and convictions

³⁷ J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), 56.

³⁸ See Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 239.

³⁹ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

therefore elicit the key christological question which stands at the heart of Bujo's agenda for African theology: "In which way can Jesus Christ be an African among the Africans according to their own religious experience?"⁴²

Discussing this agenda for African theology, Bujo underlines an important observation:

Christian theology in the African context ... entails *not* only the problem of culture as ethnology, but also the *new* problems which came to Africa with colonialism and with the new civilisation—the technology and *all* that makes up the African context today. We have to understand the gospel in this context today, and not be one-sided, considering only the *old* culture. We *have* to take into account this *new culture* in Africa, and build a *new dynamism* for this new culture—maybe go out from the old culture, because there are some elements in the old culture ... surviving today.⁴³

Elsewhere he concludes that indeed, "The future of Christianity in Africa depends on getting the right balance between the old and the new."⁴⁴ In keeping with this stated priority, the theological issues confronting African christologies can be set forth as follows: first, Jesus in relation to the African heritage; second, Jesus in relation to contemporary realities in Africa; and third, fundamental christological questions arising from the biblical witness concerning Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The paramount priority of relating Jesus to the African heritage rings clear across the continent from Catholics and Protestants, theologians, church leaders, and laypeople alike. Beginning with the latter, Catherine Mwangi from the focus group of Kenyan Catholic laity points out the particular problem of relating Jesus to the traditional understanding of God. She states,

The problem is that ... when you talk about ... the two entities, that is God and Jesus, I think God is more pronounced in [the] African setting, in the form of mountains, in the ... particular names in different languages, like 'Nyasai' in Luo and Luhya, you see? 'Ngai' in Kikuyu. So, it looks like God the Creator was more pronounced, and for a long time Jesus remained like somebody from *out*.⁴⁵

In neighbouring Uganda, Catholic priest John Waliggo explains further,

I think the *figure* of Jesus Christ was not brought out clearly from our cultural milieu. God the Father we *knew*, everybody knew who *God* was. But the Son was something ... *new*. And they tried to present it

⁴² Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 9.

⁴³ Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

⁴⁴ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 69.

⁴⁵ Catherine Mwangi, Focus Group, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

as new, and as such, ... it has really had very little impact. So I always say that our people have a religion of *God. God.* It's a God-centred religion, and then Jesus Christ just appears, *somehow, appears*, and he's the *one* more repeated by preachers. ... But the interaction does not really carry as much [weight] as when you talk about God, ... because *God* is the centre of African religion and African culture. But *now*, how to bring in a new person inside that, through whom salvation is made, you had *very much* to know the culture, and then see, ... how do I present it, which is the question most theologians and preachers have ... never solved.⁴⁶

Waliggo stresses that when Jesus is introduced in this way, as a “new person” unrelated to the God previously known in Africa, “the notion of *christology* can only come in when you *unite* them in such a manner as they did in the *Trinity*. But there is a big question there, a problem.” Peter Bisem, Deputy Secretary General of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, concurs in establishing that

if in our teaching, our emphasis of Jesus is as if he is distinct from the Father, as if he's *not* one in action as the Godhead, that has created something of a problem. But when we understand God in Christ, then that is not a crisis at all. In *fact*, when you speak to people, surprisingly they don't find it as something *new*! They say, ‘Yes, what we're hearing from the gospel message is what *our* people have always believed.’⁴⁷

Across the continent in Ghana, Protestant leader Kwesi Dickson attests to the same dilemma and sets it in historical perspective, as follows:

The way that Christianity was presented, and it still is in some cases, Christ didn't seem to fit in too well. Because we had God, we talked about *Nyame* the whole time, God, everybody understood that. But *Christ* didn't seem to fit in so well. It was in the 18th century, around 1751, that one missionary, Thomas Thompson of the SPG, ... wrote that whenever he preached about God, the people were very happy. When he turned to Christ, they lost interest and started to wander off,

⁴⁶ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 7, 1998. Waliggo goes on to give a striking example of the perplexity some African Christians face in appropriating Jesus as the son of the God they have traditionally known. He recounts, with slight laughter in places,

I think when you try to ask people and talk to them, especially who is Jesus Christ to them, ... you really get that. You get ... *prayers* which in the European sense would be *heretical*.... I remember one very *vividly*, although it didn't happen here, but ... among the Clique people in South Africa. When they were surrounded—they had been Christianised before, but then this time when the Boers were surrounding the kingdom and came to *defeat* them, ... the king called them together and said, ‘Now let us pray. God our Father, we are under danger. *This time*, don't send your Son. This is not *business* for sons—you *come* yourself and save us.’ So I mean, that hierarchy there! Call it Arianism, you know! The feeling that ... there is some business for the Father, there is some business for the Son. But when you are really in a *big* problem! ... ‘*This time you come!*’

⁴⁷ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

because Christ didn't *seem* familiar. Didn't *fit*, and this was apparently the result of the way the church, the missionary preaching, went. But *Christ* matters, because he makes clear to us who God truly is. So without that *knowledge*, we get a very attenuated understanding of God. And that's why I take Christ so seriously. He makes God *clearer* to me, than otherwise he would be, without Christ. So, we've had this problem from the very beginning, of Christ not fitting in. And the evidence is quite clear from the 18th century. And I'm afraid that we have not *always* done the right sort of preaching or teaching on the matter. So I feel strongly about Christ being *understood* better so that we would understand God better.⁴⁸

As these voices indicate, one of the most critical theological issues in the transmission of the gospel to Africa concerns the very nature of the Christian God and his self-revelation in Christ to African peoples. In other words, what concept of God was imparted through missionary preaching and received by African Christians? How faithful was this concept of God to that of the biblical witness? Peter Kiarie, former Director of Education at the Catholic Secretariat in Nairobi, emphasises,

Jesus Christ came as part of the Bible. In the sense of where does Christ fit in [i.e. to the African heritage], Christ does not come to replace the African God because the Africans, especially—I am a Kikuyu, and the people here have a *very* strong faith in God the Creator. And they did not worship *images* or any idols.⁴⁹

He continues by explaining how the missionaries “presented Jesus as the Son of God who created heaven and earth,” and taught the creed referring to “*one* God, Creator of heaven and earth, God the Father Almighty.” Therefore in addressing the relationship between Jesus and the Father and how best to communicate this understanding of God to the African context, Kiarie insists upon beginning from Genesis and the creation story. He explains,

So Jesus is seen in context. There is no Jesus, just a Jesus—you bring him in. No! You have to go back even to the pre-existence, the Jesus even before Christmas. You come first of all from the Old Testament about God, because you don't tell the Africans about Jesus before you tell them about God. If Jesus is not rooted to God, then he's nowhere. So, it *must* be about God, and Jesus must be seen *active* and related to this God—there must be evidence. So that's why Jesus, his *name* and his very presence, then becomes meaningful.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998. “SPG” refers to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, an Anglican missionary society established in Britain in 1701.

⁴⁹ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru, Kenya: June 5, 1998.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Locating the presence of Jesus in their pre-Christian past thus becomes a central concern for many African Christians. Gatu has been a leading proponent of this endeavour within Kenyan Christianity, yet he relates the opposition he still encounters when doing so. For example, referring to the East African Revival movement, he describes how

one time, when I was trying to talk about the *images* of God in the African setting, and what God has done and *how* God has revealed himself through *all* nations, I found it very difficult to put it to the Revival brethren, particularly when I was trying to use traditional tunes to convey Christian messages. They were challenging me and in fact *accusing* me of taking the church back to heathenism. And I said, 'Brethren, now *look!* If the God that I believe in, who is the Father of Jesus Christ, *did not reveal himself in any way* to my people of Kikuyu-land, I will have *nothing* to do with that kind of God! Because I believe *if he is* that kind of God, he must have *revealed* himself in a certain way to my Kikuyu people, in preparation for the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ.' And I said, 'This is why, for *me*, he's such an important person in *my life*. And this is why this God is so important, because he never left my people without any witness, *even* before the coming of missionary Christianity, as it were.'⁵¹

Gatu goes on to cite examples of traditional Kikuyu religious rites, such as selecting a goat or sheep with "*no blemish at all*" and cutting the animal vertically and horizontally in "a sign of the cross" when sacrificing it, which he interprets as follows:

Those for me are signs that *God* gave to *my* people of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And for *that* reason, I believe *all the more*, that while the Kikuyu people may not have seen *Jesus*, the *cross*, as it were, they already had *enough* to prepare them for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And my *criticism* of missionaries is that they sort of *degraded* all that, or even *rubbed away* all that, and more or less said, 'Let us start on a clean slate.'⁵²

In contrast to this *tabula rasa* approach commonly taken by early missionaries, the selected African theologians locate the crux of their christological questioning in the interface between the biblical revelation of Christ and the African context. Hence Ghanaian Protestant Pobee asks the crucial questions: "Who is Jesus Christ? What manner of man is he? How does he affect my life? Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth, who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe, and

⁵¹ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

⁵² Ibid.

nation?”⁵³ Kenyan Catholic Nasimiyu Wasike agrees, for when asked to identify the key christological issue for Africans today, she replies,

[I]t stems out of the whole theological formation that we have received. It was the way the western theology interpreted who Christ is, and that’s what we received. But then, now we have to look at Christ ... as he is in the Scriptures. Who is he for us? And I think, that is the crucial, crucial kind of point.⁵⁴

Another aspect of missionary preaching that did not adequately consider the traditional African worldview it encountered concerns the nature of Christian salvation. While a vast topic in itself, the specific focus here is the present and future dimensions of Christ’s saving work. It is now widely acknowledged that African ontology is essentially anthropocentric and the focus of life is decidedly “this-worldly.”⁵⁵ Yet mission Christianity tended to present the gospel of Christ as primarily “other-worldly.” Speaking of the legacy of western missions, Amoah and Oduyoye explain,

The eschatology that accompanies this Christology has, however, focused almost entirely on ‘the end of the age’ and often on a supramundane realm where all is well. African Christians have had to support this Christ with spiritualities from their own traditions, which assure them of immediate well-being in the now and in the near future.⁵⁶

Likewise Africans are known for their holistic view of life, yet the missionary transmission of the gospel, marked as it was by the effects of the European Enlightenment, often separated the material from the spiritual. Hence these same authors conclude,

This [mission] Christology, we suggest, is not up to the task of empowering Christians for life in Africa today, with its material and spiritual demands. It masks the relevance of Christ in the business of living today and in the immediate future. Africans require a holistic view of life. This demands a Christ who affects the whole of life and demonstrates that there is nothing that is not the business of God.⁵⁷

⁵³ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 81.

⁵⁴ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Oral Interview, Nairobi: Apr. 21, 1998.

⁵⁵ For example, see John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), 92; *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 201-202.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 37.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Thus a number of significant theological issues arise in the attempt to relate Jesus to the African heritage, from the very nature of God and his self-revelation in Christ, to the eschatological dimensions of salvation and the relevance of Christ to life today.

The second dimension of theological issues concerns the relation of Jesus to contemporary realities in Africa. While the subject is broad, two aspects are introduced here: the socio-economic and political context, and the religious context. Regarding the current socio-economic and political context, Ghanaian Protestant clergy member Margaret Asabea echoes the preliminary comment above by Waliggo concerning the need to understand Africa's present situation in light of her former suffering under the impact of Europe. Asabea remarks,

[T]his African-European *struggle*—economic disorder, slave trade and things like that, they are a problem, *real* problem which happened, *historic*. And we can't change the history. The atrocities that came about through this trade, they are there. They are landmarks there.⁵⁸

Bujo concurs, emphasising the following:

In fact, the catastrophic economic situation that prevails in Africa today cannot easily be isolated from the long-lasting oppression which foreign powers once imposed on it. Besides the loss of human potential and without considering the physical and moral sufferings of slavery, the colonial period initiated and ruthlessly carried out a large scale exploitation of Africa's natural resources. The transfer of capital towards the North is just one aspect of this unpleasant reality.⁵⁹

However, it is Ela who comes to the fore in denouncing contemporary economic and political injustices from a theological perspective. Hence he places his fundamental christological issues squarely in the current contexts of neo-colonialism and globalism. For example, he queries,

Comment croire en Jésus-Christ dans un contexte où les pays nantis refusent de reconnaître aux peuples noirs un statut de sujet historique? **C'est dans le monde de ce temps que nous avons à répondre à la question que nous pose Jésus de Nazareth: 'Africains, pour vous, qui suis-je?' ... Comment exprimer notre appartenance à Dieu dans un continent qui ne s'appartient pas à lui-même? Devons-nous nous laisser enfermer dans un univers religieux à trois dimensions qui sont le péché, les sacrements et la grâce au moment où, sous couvert de coopération, des groupes économiques et financiers se disputent librement les terres, les plages, les mines de bauxite et de cuivre, de diamant, le commerce**

⁵⁸ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: July 2, 1998.

⁵⁹ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 7.

et le tourisme, sans oublier l'uranium et le pétrole, et, bien sûr la conscience même du peuple africain. Car, la pénétration économique se double toujours d'une domination culturelle. Il sera de plus en plus difficile de séparer les questions de la foi en milieu africain des questions posées par tout un processus de recolonisation en cours dans les pays d'Afrique qui apparaissent comme une sorte de paradis fiscal des multinationales qui exigent un climat de stabilité et de sécurité indispensable au pillage des ressources nationales.⁶⁰

Further explication of these economic and political challenges awaits the exploration of christological responses to them. However, the point underscored here is the crucial need for contemporary christologies to address life's current realities in addition to the African heritage.

Another aspect of the contemporary context which arises in christological discussions is that of denominationalism and religious pluralism. These concerns are voiced less frequently than other issues, and in general are raised by those who are theologically trained. For example, Mugambi warns that "[t]he plague of Christianity in Africa is its internal division and rivalry, not external threat."⁶¹ Likewise Oduyoye calls for African theologians "to face the scandal of the divisions and competition within the church, as 'original tribalism' is being replaced by the Christian 'tribes'—Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Baptists."⁶² In this setting, Pobe questions, "Are we preaching the same Christ—Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics? If so, why are we at each other's throats?"⁶³ He also illustrates such inter-denominational tensions from his own experience of recently marrying a Catholic woman and facing criticism for not having married an Anglican. Stressing yet again

⁶⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, "De l'assistance à la libération: Les tâches actuelles de l'église en milieu africain," *Foi et développement* 83 (jan.-fév. 1981), 5.

How can we believe in Jesus Christ in a context in which the rich countries refuse to grant to the black peoples the status of historic subject? **It is in today's world that we have to respond to the question which Jesus of Nazareth asks us: 'Africans, for you, who am I?'** ... **How can we express our belonging to God in a continent which does not belong to itself? Should we allow ourselves to be enclosed in a three dimensional religious universe of sin, sacraments and grace at a time when, under cover of co-operation, economic groups and financial groups freely dispute over land, beaches, bauxite, copper and diamond mines, commerce and tourism, and of course uranium and petrol, and, certainly, the very conscience of the African people.** For, the economic penetration is always coupled with cultural domination. It will be more and more difficult to separate the questions of faith in the African environment from the questions asked everywhere about the process of re-colonisation currently underway in the countries of Africa which appear to be a sort of fiscal paradise of multinationals which demand a climate of stability and security essential to the pillage of national resources.

⁶¹ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, viii.

⁶² Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 9.

⁶³ John Pobe, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

that “*all* theology is biography,” he ponders, “So what does it mean now, in this Roman Catholic/Anglican family, to affirm one and the same Christ?”⁶⁴

Pobee goes on to address the christological concern in the wider context of religious pluralism in Africa. He observes,

When I get to West Africa, it becomes, as in the case of Nigeria, ‘Who is this Christ in this pluralistic society?’ Because you have your Muslim tackling you, your traditionalist. So you have to *define* your christology in a pluralistic context—*unlike* in the North, in the early church, when it was the Christian ideology, as *if* the others didn’t exist.⁶⁵

In light of this reality, a critical issue which emerges is that of the uniqueness of Christ midst religious pluralism. As Oduyoye emphasises,

*It is important for us that we are able to state who Jesus is. Because we are living in a multi-religious context, we recognise the multi-religious context, and there’s a big challenge that comes to us out of the Johannine exclusivist christology. You know, the Johannine passages about Jesus alone, way, truth. You take that, and you take your multi-religious community, and you have a task on your hands. Now how do you work out the Christ in that context? It’s one of the challenges that I hope more people will work on.*⁶⁶

This concern is especially acute for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, since their members represent not only different denominations within Christianity, but also other faiths such as Islam and African Traditional Religions. For example, Ghanaian member Elizabeth Amoah voices her quandary as follows:

[M]y background from a religiously pluralistic community, and then now the Circle too is religiously pluralistic, has made me *question* myself when we say Jesus is the only way, the only answer, or the *one* and *only* name. I have been trying to struggle with that, to question, how do I understand that? How do I talk to my colleague, Rabiātu Ammah, who is a Muslim, a *very* nice person.... How do I ... boldly stand in her face and say, ‘Now Rabiātu, you are lost! Come to Jesus who is the only way.’ So it’s really helping me to struggle with my theology, with the exclusiveness that Christianity claims, the exclusivist position.⁶⁷

Besides these challenges of relating Jesus to the African heritage and to the contemporary realities, there are certain christological questions deemed quintessential to the Christian faith. Main concerns can only be identified at present,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Amoah, Oral Interview, Edinburgh, Scotland: Nov. 16, 1998.

and these include understanding Jesus as human and divine, his relation to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the meaning and significance of his death and resurrection. A vital question from Ela not only reflects this latter issue, but also serves to sum up the previous sections regarding historical and theological issues concerning christology. For in pointing out the problem of theological ethnocentrism that has dominated Christianity for centuries, Ela explains,

For the 'irruption of the Third World' is shaking up theology. It is necessary to underline here the extent of the 'shift' that is taking place in a turnaround of history where theology elaborated in the West is less assured of remaining the official theology of the entire church. The rupture with North Atlantic theology is henceforth imperative if we want to rediscover God from the 'periphery.' ... In short, a critical and responsible reappropriation of the scandal of Jesus obliges us to remain faithful to the places where the irruption of the poor in history questions our understanding of the faith.⁶⁸

In this process of reappropriation which Ela advocates, the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection in relation to the African experience of suffering is absolutely central. For this reason his questioning is quoted in full, as follows:

If Christianity wishes to avoid the temptation of the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 20:31-32), it must assume the tragedy in Africa of those whom Frantz Fanon has called 'the wretched of the earth.' In this situation, the return to Jesus makes it absolutely necessary that our Christian reflection becomes incessantly suspicious toward any God-talk that attempts to 'pass on the other side' of the actual situation in Africa. How can we rediscover God from the perspective of 'a crucified messiah' (1 Cor. 1:23) while at the same time covering up the other scandal that is at the center of the human adventure of our era? Here is this scandal: for five hundred years, the West has chosen the Christ without the cross, while the people of Africa live the cross without the Christ. It is this passion without redemption in which Africa continues to live that must question our understanding of Jesus Christ. Taking into consideration such a basic situation, how can we articulate the crucifixion of Jesus and the historical suffering of our people? In other words, how can we reread in our own way the narratives of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ taking into account the stations of our memory? Such is the question that comes out of the black continent where—if one really dares to admit it—God speaks to the world and to the church.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Jean-Marc Ela, "The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ," in *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, trans. and ed. Yacob Tesfai (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

3. Issues Of African Christian Identity

For many African theologians, the problem of African Christian identity lies at the epicentre of African theology.⁷⁰ At the confluence of the historical, missiological and theological issues delineated above, issues of identity run deeply and personally in the lives of African believers. Reflecting upon it historically, Bujo affirms, “In offering us fullness of life, Jesus offers to the people of Africa true development. After the traumas of the slave-trade and colonialism, and now the horrors of the refugee situation, the African people are searching for a new identity.”⁷¹ This quest for a new identity, according to Pobee, concerns what it means to be human “as nuanced by African identity and Christ.”⁷²

Examining the issue missiologically, Bisem explains,

But it is now plainly understood that ... the *style* of *mission* and *approach* [i.e. the missionary practice of uprooting converts from their traditional environment] ... sometimes tended to create, you could say, an identity crisis in the hearer of the message. Because the presentation was ... as if God is speaking to this person, [and] *now*, *cuts* him off or cuts her off from his *initial* identity—*uproots*, if you like.⁷³

Various expressions emerge to describe this duality often experienced by African Christians. For example, Ela speaks of “the split personality that one observes in the Churches in which the cultural and symbolic universe of indigenous Christians has never been taken seriously in the manner in which the Gospel has been presented to them,” or “the dichotomy in the life of certain Christians,” or “their spiritual schizophrania.”⁷⁴

Considering the issue theologically, Protestant laywoman Irene Odotei, a history professor at the University of Ghana, Legon, puts it succinctly as follows:

Christianity came to us *wrapped* in a cultural garb. And the *Bible* is within a certain cultural context, that’s the Jewish context. So now, *how* do *we* bring it within the Ghanaian context? Does it mean by being a Christian, you have to stop being Ghanaian? Or, is it by being

⁷⁰ For the most in-depth and incisive treatment of this subject to date, see Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*. See also Kwame Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 3, no. 2 (June 1996): 1-11; A. F. Walls, “Africa and Christian Identity,” *Mission Focus* 6, no. 7 (Nov. 1978): 11-13; *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

⁷¹ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 94.

⁷² Pobee, *Christ Would Be An African Too*, 22.

⁷³ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

⁷⁴ Jean-Marc Ela, “Globalisation et paupérisation: Un défi à la théologie africaine,” in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, no. 135, ed. G. de Schrijver (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 159.

Ghanaian, you *cannot* be a Christian? So *how* to be *very* Ghanaian and *very* Christian is the problem.⁷⁵

Her questioning resonates with that of Nasimiyu Wasike, who articulates from her own experience this fundamental issue of African Christian identity. Recalling her sense of utter bewilderment in discovering “*ethnic* affiliation churches” in America, she recounts,

I began to think, then, we ought to be *African Christians*. There has to be something like that! Otherwise, who am I? I’m not Polish, I’m not Irish, I’m not English, I’m not German. And so, how do I affiliate myself with this church, then? Because I saw it *there*, and ... all of a sudden I was convinced, I have to go back to my roots! What were they? ... [B]ecause for my whole traditional upbringing, actually my father and mother had nothing to do with the traditional rituals and worship, and they would *never* allow any of us to participate. So I was *totally* brought up in a culture I believed was Christian. But then the Christianity which I received from my formation was not bringing me to where I want to be or who I want to be. I ... suddenly [had] to think, who am I? *Who am I really?* What kind of Christian am I? That question became very powerful and strong, and that is the moment I said, I *have* to think like an African. I have to believe like an African. And how do I begin?⁷⁶

She goes on to explain how, despite misunderstanding and opposition from her parents, she went to her grandmother, a diviner, to begin researching her own traditional culture. She then concludes, “So from that moment, I am really going to get into inculturation now. I want to really see myself as an *African Christian believer*.”⁷⁷ This priority thus influences the shape of contemporary christology for Nasimiyu Wasike and Odotei and many other African believers like them.

4. Gender Issues

While the issues outlined thus far indicate further developments in the matters covered in Chapter 1, the subject of gender in relation to emergent African christologies is relatively recent. To illustrate, Oduyoye traces the “irruption within the irruption” of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, when the 1981 Fifth International Conference in New Delhi confronted the challenge that “[t]he irruption of women in church and society is an integral part of the voice of the

⁷⁵ Irene Odotei, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

⁷⁶ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Oral Interview, Nairobi: April 21, 1998.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

earth's voiceless majority" in need of attention.⁷⁸ From this challenge stems the fundamental methodological stance: "The concerns and experiences of women as women are yet another *locus* for liberation theology."⁷⁹ Therefore EATWOT was called to expand its borders from doing theology based on experiences of classism and racism in the socio-economic and political realms, to include sexism anchored in religio-cultural perceptions. Some Third World representatives maintain that issues of sexism are not indigenous to their contexts, arising instead from "a minority of disgruntled, leisure-saturated, middle-class women of the capitalist West."⁸⁰ Yet Oduyoye retorts, "The fact is that sexism is part of the intricate web of oppression in which most of us live, and that having attuned ourselves to it does not make it any less a factor of oppression."⁸¹ The feminist claim that women are oppressed in male-dominated structures of church and society is thus said to challenge not only "the dominant theology of the capitalist West," but also "the maleness of Christian theology worldwide, together with the patriarchal presuppositions that govern all our relationships."⁸² The goal of feminism, according to Oduyoye, is for women and men from the northern and southern hemispheres to join in the common search for what it means to be fully human. In her words, "The way forward is a 'new community of men and women,' not reversal; participation, not takeover or handover. Feminism in theology springs from a conviction that a theology of relationships might contribute to bring us closer to human life as God desires it."⁸³

Towards this aim, African feminist theologians seek to discover the sources of their oppression. Three main sources come to light which in turn evoke christological questions. First, aspects of Christian tradition are deemed to conceal Jesus' "revolutionary" approach to women in granting them equal status to men and thus restoring the original relationship God established between the sexes at creation.⁸⁴ Nasimiyyu Wasike traces the origin of the problem to the early church era

⁷⁸ Amba Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies," in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 247.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁸⁰ Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective," 249. Examples of this view are found among a few male interview respondents in the present research.

⁸¹ Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective," 249.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 250.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 254. See also Oduyoye, "The Roots of African Christian Feminism," in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, ed. John S. Pobee and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1986), 32-47; "Feminism: A Precondition for a Christian Anthropology," chap. in *Hearing and Knowing*, 120-137.

⁸⁴ Anne Nasimiyyu Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 126.

when christological formulations were being forged in the context of Jewish and Hellenistic categories of thought. As a result of the patriarchal realities of the time, the term “*Logos*” applied to Christ as creator also became associated with the rational principle of the human soul presumed to be male. Therefore theological references to Christ became heavily androcentric, reinforcing the assumption that God was male. Only male metaphors were considered appropriate to speak of God; moreover, “Christ had to be male in order to reveal a male God, and this was taken literally.”⁸⁵ While man was understood to be made in the image of God, woman was only seen as the image of man and only saved through man. Such concepts about God and Christ in relation to man and woman coloured the development of theology in Europe for centuries, and consequently tainted perceptions of Christ brought by modern European missionaries to Africa. Nasimiyu Wasike summarises the problem as follows:

The African church has inherited the misinterpretation of woman and her relation to God and Jesus from the European church. Therefore, the African woman, in addition to being under her cultural bondage and oppression, also experiences the socio-economic oppression of neo-colonialists in the church.⁸⁶

Further regarding Christian tradition, feminist theologians lament the fact that until recent decades, most critical reflection on christology was written by men and from a male perspective. Not only was the female perspective left unarticulated, but also “[t]he theology on the person of Jesus tended to be much more philosophical and abstract than that of the existential Jesus of the Gospels who calls people as individuals and as a community to authentic human existence.”⁸⁷ As a result of this historical neglect, African women now pose basic questions such as those of Amoah and Oduyoye: “What have women to do with the concept of Christology? What do women say about Christology? Is there such a thing as a women’s Christology? Do the traditional statements of Christology take into account women’s experience of life?”⁸⁸

The concern for reflection upon women’s experience leads to a consideration of additional causes of oppression. The second source identified is sexist cultural orientations, such as the appeal to blood taboos from African traditional religion in protest against women’s ordination to the priesthood. Theology is said to arise from women’s painful experiences of the structural and domestic violence enshrined in

⁸⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 129-130.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁸ Amoah and Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” 35.

religio-cultural traditions.⁸⁹ Then a third related source which compounds women's oppression is the contemporary socio-political context. Women are noted to be the easiest targets and the worst victims of suffering across Africa today. As Oduyoye describes it, "This politico-economic machinery of death, with its militarism, arbitrary arrests and so-called popular democracy, also promotes the abuse of women. This is the situation out of which third world women do their theology."⁹⁰

As women reflect on Christ from these contexts of oppression, "Jesus" is considered to be "no swear word but a cry. It says, 'save me, save us, save them.'"⁹¹ Oduyoye stresses further that the answer to who Jesus is, is neither a historical quest nor a probe into his being. In contrast to traditional christology's presentation of Jesus' two natures and consubstantiality with God, she states that women seek "the immediate quest—what does all this mean to our ailing world with its ailing people?"⁹² It is questions like these, elicited by situations of suffering, that fuel the efforts and inspire innovative methods and fresh insights in contemporary women's christologies.

Finally, the need to address gender issues in contemporary African christologies is increasingly recognised to extend beyond the domain of women's concerns alone. Thus Ela affirms,

Je pense que la question de sexe interpelle nos christologies. Ce n'est pas seulement l'affaire des femmes. Cette christologie, ce n'est pas l'affaire des femmes. Tout théologien doit pouvoir porter un regard sur Jésus-Christ en tenant en compte du fait que l'humanité est à la fois masculine et féminine.⁹³

⁸⁹ Mercy Oduyoye, "The Passion Out of Compassion: Women of the EATWOT Third General Assembly," *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 322 (1992): 314-315. Regarding the need to discover the sources of oppression in religio-cultural traditions and in western Christianity, Oduyoye argues strongly for discerning the interaction between the two both negatively and positively, or what she terms "the crossroads factor." She states,

We have to identify the religio-cultural sources of our oppression, whether they are western, African or a combination of the two. We have to discover what is liberative in both, so that we can see to their mutual reinforcement. The African women theologians' focus on religion and culture in Africa reveals specific beliefs and practices that are used by the patriarchal culture, whether fuelled by western Christianity or African beliefs and practices. The studies have also unveiled elements in traditional African cultures which, if practiced, would have been liberative to women and the whole community. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture," *International Review of Mission* 84, no. 332/333 (Jan./Apr. 1995): 80.

⁹⁰ Oduyoye, "The Passion Out of Compassion," 314.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

I think that the question of gender challenges our christologies. It is not only the concern of women. This christology is not the concern of women. Every theologian must be able to show regard for Jesus Christ in taking account of the fact that humanity is at the same time masculine and feminine.

Pobee concurs, for when asked about critical issues regarding African christologies in future, he responds,

[I]n the next century, I think, how women articulate their experience of Christ will become very important. They are more than one half of the world. More than one half of the population of the church. ... I have heard loud and clear, women have been smarting under all kinds of oppression in society and in the home. So, what they say about Christ as 'the hope and fears of all the years,' as we sing at Christmas, will be one of the crucial things....⁹⁴

It is interesting to note the extent to which both these male theologians attribute important aspects of their theological formation to significant women in their lives, particularly their mothers. However, further exploration of gender issues in relation to theology awaits the explication of the christological models in Part II.

5. Issues Of Contemporary Christian Witness

If christological concerns arise out of past experience, as indicated by the issues discussed thus far, they also originate in present witness to Jesus Christ. For as Mugambi and Magesa stress,

No Christological discussion in Africa today can avoid the question of the credibility of Christ. ... It is the question not only of effective evangelization but also of the praxis of faith of the followers of Christ. It is the question of how we can present Christ to the African world as truly its Lord and Saviour in a convincing manner. Even more important, it is the question of how this conviction can be lived out.⁹⁵

What threatens "the credibility of Christ" in contemporary Christianity in Africa? Numerous challenges surface in this respect, only two of which will be summarised briefly.

Oduyoye introduces the first factor succinctly in highlighting "the gap between 'Christianity preached' and 'Christianity lived.'"⁹⁶ The cry echoes across the continent. For example, Kenyan Circle member Hannah Kinoti laments, "Well, I must admit there is a lot of disillusionment ... to any thinking African. There ... are some who are very disillusioned because of the many discrepancies of the message and the reality of life."⁹⁷ What are these discrepancies? B. Y. Quarshie, lecturer in the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Ghana, Legon, and former Chairman of a Presbytery observes,

⁹⁴ John Pobee, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

⁹⁵ Mugambi and Magesa, "Introduction," in *Jesus in African Christianity*, xiv.

⁹⁶ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 9.

⁹⁷ Hannah Kinoti, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

[T]he way ... I look at the Christian scene, vis-à-vis *all* the difficulties we face, as a nation—the fact that when you go into government circles you encounter people who say they are Christians. You go into businesses they are there! ... [P]rivate enterprise and so on, you will find people who claim to be Christians, ... who therefore claim to know Christ. And yet by what they do day in and day out six days of the week, apart from Sunday going to service, there is no indication that they have met this Christ or that he means anything to them. And *that* is what I find rather disturbing. In other words, I don't think Christians are making a difference. And you have to ask whether they actually know this Jesus Christ at all.⁹⁸

Similar regret is expressed about the contemporary scene in Kenya, for in the Circle focus group Emily Choge remarks,

[T]o analyse the life of Christ in our situation here in Africa, and leading that life [in] which he will be seen as relevant, I think is the issue here. There is a lot of superficiality, ... a lot of lack of understanding of what it really means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. ... It has been estimated that Kenya is supposed to be eighty percent Christian, and yet it is also *third* in the corruption ... hierarchy in the world. So how do the two go together? ... How can we be Christian and yet this corruption?⁹⁹

As a result of such discrepancies, African Christians ask themselves serious questions. For example, after stressing the historical factors which cannot be overlooked, as noted above, Ghanaian Protestant clergy member Margaret Asabea continues,

But the question I *ask*, what are we doing to ourselves? Why are we so religious, and yet we are not *transforming*—our lives have not been *transformed*. ... *How* can we blame *all* our problems on the other person? ... *How* is Christ *working* at this, with *me*? So! I mean it's a big question. It's a big question in my mind.¹⁰⁰

Likewise Marie Gacambi, lecturer at the Catholic University of East Africa in Nairobi, queries, “*Does our belief really touch our concrete life situation? Or is the Christian belief something put on, which we can discard at any moment?*”¹⁰¹ She then presents the problem as follows:

I *do* believe that *somehow*, we may not completely have been able to *help* the believer to *grasp* the *message*—*who Jesus is*, ... the kerygma and not the Jesus that ... is given out there as an *ideal*. Otherwise, if we really have *grasped* who Jesus is, and the *values* that Jesus lives,

⁹⁸ B. Y. Quarshie, Oral Interview, Accra: July 29, 1998.

⁹⁹ Emily Choge, Focus Group, Nairobi: May 15, 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

¹⁰¹ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

then *somehow* once we *embrace* the Christian *life*, a *complete* transformation, a conversion, a change of heart and mind and attitude should take place. This is one of the questions.¹⁰²

Accordingly, Protestant layman Alex Glover-Quartey concludes with a common criticism that “Christianity in Ghana is skin-deep. You know, once you scratch the skin, what you see is not actually what *ought* to be Christianity.”¹⁰³

A second issue related to the credibility of Christ is the appropriateness of certain expressions of Christian witness as currently found in these African contexts. There is no intention to single out a particular sector of Christianity; nonetheless, the movement generally described as “charismatic” comes under particular fire by these selected Protestant and Catholic Christians.¹⁰⁴ For example, concern is expressed about witness to Christ being marred by undue stress on the “health and wealth” gospel. As Quarshie remarks, “The trend is now towards all the charismatic churches and I think that has even made things worse. Now you go there to become prosperous, you know? So the pursuit of materialism, with the church as a front, is just what is going on.”¹⁰⁵ Or, without referring specifically to any church, Protestant layman John Muriithi, a fruit-hawker on the streets of Nairobi, observes frankly, “Well, my colleagues [i.e. fellow fruit vendors], ... some of them don’t go to the church. They believe church people cheat, they just want money. Church is a kind of business, something like that.”¹⁰⁶

Oduyoye calls attention to another challenge regarding appropriate witness to Christ. Once again, certain charismatic Christians are denounced as a new generation of “cultured despisers” impeding the cultivation of African christologies. In Oduyoye’s words:

We are using cultural symbolisms that are being *deliberately* eroded by some Western charismatics and neo-Pentecostal Christianity. So, for *how* much longer will this language communicate? You know, in the *theology* that we are doing in Africa, ... we’re using ancestors, we’re using the carrier, we’re using *what we know*. But there’s a generation that’s going to some of these newer churches, and they are being told, ‘Forget it. You can’t even do a naming ceremony, let alone pour libation. When you’re getting married, it doesn’t matter if you don’t do the traditional marriage, just come to church.’ ... [T]here’s a

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Alex Glover-Quartey, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 18, 1998.

¹⁰⁴ The present purpose is not to attack, nor even to assess the charismatic movement in these African contexts. Indeed, several interview respondents identify themselves with this movement and aspects of its positive impact are verbalised. However, the concern here is to identify issues affecting African christologies, and in this regard, certain problems are raised with respect to some of these churches.

¹⁰⁵ B. Y. Quarshie, Oral Interview, Accra: July 29, 1998.

¹⁰⁶ John Muriithi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 12, 1998.

whole generation that is being *deliberately* alienated from the African culture. So I'm asking myself what kind of a theology will communicate with this generation? And ... where are we going to find that theology? Or are we going back to the colonial western situation where you just *imbibe* the theology that was brought to you from somebody else's context. That for me is a challenge.¹⁰⁷

These few examples, intimating hypocrisy, nominalism, superficiality, prosperity preaching and deliberate alienation from African culture, therefore illustrate the range of issues that contemporary African Christians must address in order to render credible and appropriate witness to Christ.

6. Issues Regarding Language

Finally, the impact of language in shaping various expressions of the Christian faith has long been recognised. For as Pobee emphasises, language is symbolic, going beyond syntax and morphology to being "the vehicle for assuming a culture, a civilisation. It is the vehicle for possessing the world-view."¹⁰⁸ He points out the problem, however, that African languages were considered barbarous in the 19th and into the 20th century. Hence Africans were taught colonial languages to redeem them from their barbarism and these colonial languages have continued to dominate in the African context, including African theology, to the present. Given this reality, Pobee highlights the following challenge:

Convenient and useful as these established foreign languages may be, their symbolism is different from the one an African naturally appreciates through his vernacular. The result is that often there is no harmony of his intellectual perception with his emotional needs. This cannot lead to wholeness, to total salvation. So I see much soundness in the Reformation principle that all must hear the word of God in their mother-tongue or vernacular. There is need to use the vernacular to communicate the scriptures and for the administration of the sacraments, for prayers, music etc.¹⁰⁹

Other theologians and interview respondents corroborate this view. Ela in particular stresses the centrality of language in doing theology in Africa today. He emphasises, with slight laughter, how the language of Western creeds means nothing to rural Africans, and then states his own methodological priority as follows:

¹⁰⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

¹⁰⁸ John S. Pobee, "African Symbolism and the Interpretation of Christianity," in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, ed. John S. Pobee and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1986), 53.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

Voyez comment quand on reprend ces formules, Jésus-Christ, une seule personne unie en deux natures de manière épostétique. Ça c'est la formulation des occidentaux. Pour moi, Africain, ça ne veut rien dire. ... Si je dis ça aux gens dans mon village! Si je reprends ces formules, je ramène ça aux Kirdis, de la montagne! Ils disent, 'Quoi! Quoi!' Et je crois si je repose la même question à Jésus lui-même, il va me dire, 'Quoi! Tu me dis quoi!' Il ne comprends pas, Jésus lui-même, ce qu'on dit de lui, en l'Occident. ... Si je ramène cela de l'Occident et je veux dire en Afrique, ça va être un obstacle. Le langage que je veux dire sur Jésus-Christ ne passe pas. Voilà pourquoi je veux être obligé, moi, de faire le *retour* au Nouveau Testament pour essayer de procéder à une intelligence, à une herméneutique du message du Nouveau Testament, afin de trouver une *réponse* qui va satisfaire ce que les gens attendent lorsque je vais mettre l'accent sur ce qui me semble être plus parlant pour eux quand je dis Jésus-Christ. Qui est-ce qui est parlant, pour ces gens? ... Alors, c'est ça le problème! Tout le problème de la théologie est là. Trouver ce qui est le plus parlant pour eux.¹¹⁰

Ela then illustrates this priority with respect to the use of vernacular in his ministry among the Kirdi of northern Cameroon. He recounts that, in preparing for Christmas celebrations, people were asking how they might present Jesus. Ela therefore held meetings with his catechists, and in his words,

[J]e leur disais, 'Ecoutez-moi, vous connaissez votre langue mieux que moi'—j'ai appris la langue, mais ils la parlaient mieux que moi. Je leur dis, 'Nous voulons trouver un langage pour parler de ce qui est dit là dans les Evangiles, l'Evangile de Luc, l'Evangile de Matthieu, l'Evangile de Jean, etc. Quel langage on va trouver pour parler aux gens qui viennent de la montagne?' Et c'est le travail qu'on faisait, *tous* les samedis. Pendant quatorze ans, tous les samedis on fait ce travail. A partir de l'Evangile, quel langage on va trouver en sachant

¹¹⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

See how when we take these formulas, Jesus Christ, a single person united in two natures in a hypostatic manner. That is the formulation of Westerners. For me, an African, that means nothing. ... If I say that to the people of my village! If I take these formulas again, I bring that to the Kirdis, of the mountain! They say, 'What! What!' And I believe that if I ask again the same question of Jesus himself, he will say to me, 'What! What are you saying to me!' He does not understand, Jesus himself, what one says about him, in the West. ... If I bring that back from the West and I want to speak in Africa, that will be an obstacle. The language that I want to speak about Jesus Christ doesn't work. This is why I want to be obliged, myself, to make a *return* to the New Testament to try to proceed to an understanding, to a hermeneutic of the message of the New Testament, in order to find a *response* which is going to satisfy what the people expect when I place the emphasis upon what seems to me to be the most meaningful for them when I speak Jesus Christ. What is it that speaks meaningfully for these people? ... Indeed, that is the question! All the problem of theology is there. To discover what is the most meaningful for them.

que voici les mots des gens, voici les images. Comment on peut présenter les choses?¹¹¹

Consequently, the villagers were urged to draw upon their local language and thought forms and thus were able to meaningfully connect their own context with that of Jesus' birth, saying, "[P]our nous, Jésus, sa naissance, c'est comme les enfants de la montagne. Il *naît* comme des enfants de chez nous."¹¹² In a later context of conversation, Ela returns to this central conviction regarding language and its use in the formulation of African christologies. He concludes with this challenge:

J'ai voulu que les christologies africaines prennent en compte le langage que les gens *disent* Jésus, eux-mêmes. ... Parce qu'ils *parlent* de Jésus! ... [E]t moi j'ai vécu une situation *concrète*, où les femmes *chantent* Jésus.... Elles se mettent à chanter Emmanuel comme on berce un enfant, vous voyez, les femmes africaines elles ont leur bébé, elles chantent.... Il y a des *berceuses* autour de Jésus, l'enfant de Marie. ... Elles chantent *Dieu* comme ça, Emmanuel. ... Donc je dis, ces femmes sont saisies par quelque chose en Jésus-Christ comme ça. Donc ces chants de femmes c'est un langage qui est *dit* à propos de Jésus-Christ. Quelle est la *portée* de ce langage, quelle est sa *densité*, quelle est sa richesse? Et donc comment *articuler* un discours théologique cohérent sur Jésus-Christ en me remettant à l'écoute de femmes qui chantent l'Évangile?¹¹³

Issues related to language as expressing worldview therefore warrant careful consideration in constructing African christologies, as is further revealed in the exploration of christological models in Part II.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

I said to them, 'Listen to me. You know your language better than me'—I learned the language, but they spoke it better than me. I said to them, 'We want to find a language in order to speak of what is said there in the Gospels, the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of John, etc. What language are we going to find in order to speak to the people who come from the mountain?' And it is the work we did, *every* Sunday. For fourteen years, every Saturday we did this work. From the Gospel, what language will we find knowing that here are the words of the people, here are the images. How can we present these things?

¹¹² Ibid. "For us, Jesus, his birth is like the children of the mountain. He was *born* like the children in our homes."

¹¹³ Ibid.

I have wanted the African christologies to take into account the language that the people *speak* Jesus, themselves. ... Because they *speak* of Jesus! ... [A]nd I myself have seen an *actual* situation, where the women *sing* Jesus.... They start to sing Emmanuel like we rock an infant, you see, the African women have their baby, they sing.... There are lullabies about Jesus, the child of Mary. ... They sing God like that, Emmanuel. ... Therefore I say, these women are captured by something in Jesus Christ like that. Therefore these songs of women are a language which is *spoken* about Jesus Christ. What is the *significance* of this language, what is its *depth*, what is its richness? And therefore how do we *articulate* a coherent theological discourse on Jesus Christ in listening in to the women who sing the gospel?

D. Conclusion: Criteria for Critical Engagement with African Christologies

An initial investigation into the critical issues prompting contemporary African christologies brings to light a number of inter-related concerns. Whether stemming from Africa's past history or present realities, the questions raised are fundamental to the perceptions of Christ articulated by African believers today. Consequently, the issues introduced in this chapter do not recede in the following chapters. On the contrary, they remain foundational to the interpretation and assessment of the christologies articulated. For in identifying the matters of utmost concern to them, the African Christians accordingly voice the priorities they seek in forging their own experience and expression of faith in Christ. These stated priorities therefore form the basis for critical engagement with the contemporary African christologies.

On the basis of their own assertions, then, what indicators have emerged which may function as criteria for assessing the current christologies? The first part of the chapter dealt with issues regarding sources and methods of christological formulation. The criteria derived from the field of African theology in recent times are now set forth in this section.

1. Appropriateness of Sources

Do the African christologies draw upon the recommended sources outlined in the first part of the chapter, which may be conflated as (a) the Bible and Christian heritage, (b) the African heritage, including history, religion and culture, (c) the living experience of the Church, and (d) contemporary realities in Africa? Are some sources evidently favoured above others? If so, what impact might this have upon the current configuration of contemporary African christologies?

2. Appropriateness of Methods

While attention is paid to the ways in which all the selected African Christians reason in arriving at their perceptions of Christ, two main methodological questions are addressed primarily to the African theologians under consideration. The first query stems from the call made by African theologians, recorded in the "Final Communiqué" from the 1977 conference in Accra, for "a new theological methodology" which would serve to produce the kind of contextual theology being advocated for Africa.¹¹⁴ The question, therefore, is what contributions have been

¹¹⁴ Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, "Final Communiqué," 193.

made toward this end by those who have articulated more formal expressions of African christology? Or, more precisely, are the christological methods effective in pursuing the priorities expressed regarding contextual relevance?

The second main question is related to the first, and it arises from Mugambi's assertion that "African Christian theology is in a methodological crisis, owing to the lack of methodological consciousness."¹¹⁵ Contending that "[t]he African Church will only come of age when it becomes self-critical," Mugambi calls for a thorough critique of theological method as part of the overall theological introspection recommended.¹¹⁶ In view of this assessment, the question arises as to whether the selected African theologians evidence the methodological "introspection and self-criticism" which Mugambi urges.

3. Factors of Contextual Relevance

The second part of the chapter has examined critical issues regarding contextual relevance attested in the theological literature and the oral interviews. A number of factors have been distinguished in this regard, and are outlined as follows:

- *Historical Relevance*: Is Jesus understood meaningfully in relation to Africa's history, particularly in relation to the suffering of Africa?
- *Theological Relevance*: How is Jesus understood in relation to (1) Africa's pre-Christian heritage, (2) the contemporary context of religious pluralism, and (3) fundamental biblical affirmations regarding Jesus' identity, life, death, and resurrection?
- *Cultural Relevance*: Is Jesus presently perceived as a "foreigner" (e.g. "white," "European") to African Christians, or, in the memorable phrase of Welbourn and Ogot, has he found "a place to feel at home" in Africa?¹¹⁷
- *Contemporary Relevance*: Do African Christians view Jesus as being significant to the contemporary realities of life in their own context, for example, politically, economically, and socially? In particular, do the emergent christologies bear witness to the liberating dimensions of the gospel? The "Final Communiqué" from the EATWOT conference in Accra stresses that "African theology must also be *liberation* theology."¹¹⁸ Therefore, do the contemporary African christologies meet this expressed directive?

¹¹⁵ J. N. K. Mugambi, "Theological Method in African Christianity," 5. Mugambi supports his claim by recounting how the problem became "glaringly evident" in various gatherings of the Ecumenical Symposium of East African Theologians throughout the 1990s.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹¹⁷ F. Welbourn, and B. M. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹¹⁸ Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, "Final Communiqué," 194.

- *Gender Appropriateness*: Are the contemporary African christologies adequately addressing the concerns outlined in this regard?
- *Credibility of Witness*: Do the African christologies lend credible and appropriate witness to Jesus today?
- *Linguistic and Conceptual Relevance*: Do the current christologies capture and incarnate the existential realities of life and African self-understanding? How far is the concern for language actually translating into the whole worldview? In other words, do the christologies reflect indigenous perceptions that indeed “the gospel has become *our* story,” and not simply a foreign story transliterated into local languages?

Thus the criteria regarding sources and methods and the seven factors of contextual relevance serve to guide the critical examination of contemporary African christologies now presented in Part II.

PART II

**MODELS OF
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES**

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS

A. The Prevailing Paradigm: Inculturation And Liberation

African theology is commonly introduced according to two main trends which emerged from the late 1950s to the late 1980s: “African” or “inculturation” theology, and “Black” or “liberation” theology.¹ The former category entails theological exploration of African indigenous cultures in attempt to integrate the African pre-Christian religious heritage with the Christian faith so as to “ensure the integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood.”² The latter category has been further subdivided into South African Black theology, arising out of the particular context of apartheid in that country, and African liberation theology, found throughout independent sub-Saharan Africa and broader in scope. Its intention is summarised as follows:

Liberation theology in independent Africa endeavors to integrate the theme of liberation in the rest of the African cultural background. Liberation is not confined to modern socioeconomic and political levels but includes emancipation from other forms of oppression such as disease, poverty, hunger, ignorance, and the subjugation of women.³

African christologies are naturally presented in keeping with the two-fold classification of inculturation and liberation, as in the case of Charles Nyamiti’s simple typology.⁴ Defining christologies of inculturation as an effort “to incarnate the Gospel message in the African cultures on the theological level,”⁵ Nyamiti maintains that these christologies are “on the whole, more numerous and in many

¹ See Kwame Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 3, no. 2 (June 1996): 1; Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 25; Desmond M. Tutu, “Black Theology and African Theology—Soulmates or Antagonists?” in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987), 46-57.

² Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 1.

³ Charles Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994), 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 64-66; “African Christologies Today,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), 17-29. See also Martey, *African Theology*, 80-84, although Martey further distinguishes African women’s christologies within the category of liberation christologies.

⁵ Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” 17.

cases relatively more profound” than those of liberation christologies.⁶ However, Mugambi criticises Nyamiti’s categorisation for being too sharp, contending that commitment to one approach does not necessitate inattention or opposition towards the other approach.⁷

While in-depth analysis of the relationship between inculturation and liberation theologies lies beyond the scope of the present discussion, the contrasting views above reflect an extended debate within the field of African Christianity.⁸ Certainly the broad two-fold classification has served an important purpose in distinguishing the various contexts eliciting African theologies, plus the sources favoured and the methods employed in their construction. It thus retains instructive value for an overview of theological development in Africa.

Nonetheless, despite qualifications made that inculturation and liberation theologies are not mutually exclusive⁹ and that they are best viewed in terms of concentric circles,¹⁰ the tendency remains to perpetuate a false dichotomy between the two trends. As a result, African theologians have increasingly objected to sustaining such a dubious division. For example, Ela decries “Les pièges de l’Africanisation” in the proliferation of research whose centre of gravity lies in the confrontation between the gospel and the vast domain of African authenticity, and “The Dead-end of Ethnotheology.”¹¹ Against any such one-sided approach, Ela protests with his central thesis that “*liberation of the oppressed must be the primary condition for any authentic inculturation of the Christian message.*”¹² Bujo strongly concurs, and these two theologians express mutual acknowledgment in this regard.¹³

⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁷ J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 9-10; “Theological Method in African Christianity,” in *Theological Method and Aspects of Worship in African Christianity*, ed. Mary N. Getui (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1998), 9.

⁸ For example, see Martey, *African Theology*; Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 25-28, 193-194; Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 12-15; *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 116-117; Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 247-250; Desmond Tutu, “Whither African Theology?” in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), 364-369.

⁹ Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 1.

¹⁰ Tutu, “Black Theology and African Theology,” 54.

¹¹ Jean-Marc Ela, “De l’assistance à la libération: Les tâches actuelles de l’église en milieu africain,” *Foi et développement* 83 (jan.-fév. 1981): 4; “The Traps of Africanisation”; “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ,” in *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, trans. and ed. Yacob Tesfai (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 19-20.

¹² Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), vi.

¹³ For Ela’s acknowledgement of Bujo’s view, that the Africans’ historical experience of suffering forms the theological *locus* for understanding the crucified Jesus as the prototype of the African, see

Building upon his initial premise that true African liberation is impossible “without rediscovering deeply rooted traditional cultural values,”¹⁴ Bujo denounces any theology of inculturation focussing on “anthropological poverty”¹⁵ without adequately addressing the ills of the post-colonial context which inculturation alone cannot remedy. He accuses this theology of being too academic and “a pompous irrelevance, truly an ideological superstructure at the service of the bourgeoisie.”¹⁶ Further charge is levelled against theologians promoting such “*bourgeois religion*” when Bujo questions,

How can a theology done in and for Africa so persistently close its eyes to the immense wretchedness and misery which is all around us? Can a nation develop culturally, while being politically oppressed and economically exploited to such a horrifying degree, while its people, faced with starvation and many other catastrophes, is struggling for its very survival?¹⁷

He then concludes, “We cannot take pride in the fact that our theology has *such a onesided interest in culture* that it is little concerned with the liberation of the People of God from their misery.”¹⁸ Instead, a synthesis of the two approaches is required,

“The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 28. For Bujo’s acknowledgement of Ela’s influence, see Bénézet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990), 126.

¹⁴ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O’Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 7.

¹⁵ The phrase originates with Cameroonian theologian Engelbert Mveng referring to the violence of colonialism, but it has been adopted by many other African theologians. According to Mveng, “It consists in despoiling human beings not only of what they have, but of everything that constitutes their being and essence—their identity, history, ethnic roots, language, culture, faith, creativity, dignity, pride, ambitions, right to speak ... we could go on indefinitely.” Engelbert Mveng, “Third World Theology—What Theology? What Third World?: Evaluation by an African Delegate,” in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 220.

¹⁶ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 71.

¹⁷ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126. Here Bujo acknowledges Ela’s work, “Comment vivre notre foi dans l’Afrique des années 80,” in *Voici le temps des héritiers: Eglises d’Afrique et voies nouvelles*, ed. R. Luneau and J. M. Ela (Paris: Karthala, 1981), 207ff. Elsewhere, Bujo explains with regard to inculturation and liberation theologies,

D’ailleurs au fond les deux doivent aller de pair: il n’y a pas de vraie inculturation si cela ne contribue pas à libérer l’homme dans sa dimension socio-politique; par contre pas de vraie libération sans faire retrouver à l’homme sa propre identité dans le plus profond de son être y compris la dimension anthropologico-culturelle. La culture africaine par exemple devra être insérée dans le contexte socio-politique que traverse le continent au 20^e siècle. Nous n’avons pas besoin d’une pure archéologie culturelle.... [Q]u’elle [l’Eglise] soit sans cesse à la recherche de la vérité évangélique bien comprise qui conduise dans le pluralisme vers la plénitude du Christ. Bujo, *Le diaire [sic] d’un théologien africain*, Spiritualité du Tiers Monde no. 1 (Kinshasa: Editions de l’église d’en bas, 1987), 54-55.

Moreover, fundamentally the two must be on an equal footing: there is no true inculturation if this does not contribute to liberating man in his socio-political dimension; on the other

for as Nasimiyu Wasike comments, “[L]iberation and inculturation are like two sides of the same coin.”¹⁹ Or, as Nyamiti himself declares in the end, “In fact, all true and integral inculturation christology must also be one of liberation, and vice versa.”²⁰

Once it is established that inculturation and liberation are intrinsically related, the “theological dilemma” of one approach versus the other is acknowledged to be a “false dilemma.”²¹ Limitations on both sides of the debate stem from deficiencies in understanding what constitutes culture in the African context, as Emmanuel Martey ably demonstrates.²² In opposition to those assuming that culture is past-oriented and static, Martey stresses that Africa is currently marked by “*both cultural continuity and change*.”²³ As a basis for further penetrating African theological realities, he advocates the re-examination of African culture as follows:

A thorough study of African culture cannot take place unless the power structures in African societies and the forces that offer resistance to these powerful structures are well understood. Analysis of contemporary African culture cannot therefore be limited to ‘traditionalism.’ It must include the whole totality of African existence—politics, economics, religion, precolonial worldview and thought forms, philosophy, language, ethnicity, music, arts, sexuality, and changes brought about by modern science and technology that have had an impact on African people. These are not separate parts of the whole African existence, but, rather, they are *intersecting dimensions* of the African experience and African existence.²⁴

He sums up that “[i]n point of fact, culture to the African is *life*; therefore our perspective on culture must be holistic.”²⁵ Finally, he explores the implications of this understanding of culture for theology in Africa and concludes with the necessity of a unified interpretation of the two foci of inculturation and liberation, outlined in this way:

hand there is no true liberation without making man rediscover his own identity in the deepest part of his being including the anthropologico-cultural. For example African culture must be inserted in the socio-political context that crosses the continent in the 20th century. We do not need a pure cultural archeology.... May she [the Church] always be in search of the truth of the gospel thoroughly understood which leads through pluralism towards the fullness of Christ.

¹⁹ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Oral Interview, Nairobi: April 21, 1998.

²⁰ Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today,” 32. The same point is made by Martey in *African Theology*, 124, and similarly in Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 248.

²¹ Martey, *African Theology*, 130.

²² Thorough analysis of culture cannot be undertaken here but the reader is referred, for example, to Schreier’s works, *Constructing Local Theologies* and *The New Catholicity*, where the subject is central to the author’s insights regarding contextual theologies.

²³ Martey, *African Theology*, 125-126.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

A relevant, contextual and authentic theology for Africa must have a unitary perception of inculturation and liberation. Such a dynamic definition of inclusive theology would lack *neither* an appreciation for traditional religious culture—the context from which the overwhelming majority of Christians in Africa come, and in which many of them still continue to live—*nor* refuse engagement in dialogue with the crucial issues raised by contemporary political and economic factors—factors that are the main reasons for Africa’s crisis and backwardness in world affairs. ... It is when both the liberationist and inculturationist analyses of African reality are integrated that we arrive at a new perspective in the creation of a unified theology of cultural and political liberation.²⁶

Thus most African theologians clearly call for an integrative approach to constructing contextual theologies. Accordingly, an attempt is made in the following section to utilise a synthesizing approach in the analysis of contextual christologies.

B. A Current Configuration of African Christologies

In seeking to attain the “unitary perception of inculturation and liberation” highlighted above, an alternative configuration is proposed in order to portray the findings of the present research. Since the “model” approach is now familiar not only in the physical and social sciences but also in theology, it is adopted here for the purpose of interpreting contemporary African christologies.²⁷ In his classic work, *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles notes that theology depends heavily on images in order to faithfully communicate the Christian experience of God. He then provides the following definition: “When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one’s theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a ‘model.’”²⁸ It is in this sense that the present models are offered as one way of interpreting the highly complex realities evidenced in the textual and qualitative research, without precluding other possible interpretations of the data. Since some theoretical framework is required for representing the christological data, the configuration set forth in Fig. 2 serves as an abstraction of the concrete evidence collected, and it is therefore derived directly from the data. Its main strength thus lies in that it is firmly grounded in the context of christological investigation in Africa.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁷ For example, see Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 6; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Faith and Cultures Series, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

²⁸ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 21-22. Dulles suggests two types of models as used in theology: explanatory models which synthesise what is already known or believed, and exploratory or heuristic models which lead to new theological insights. The latter category applies to the models proposed here, corresponding to the exploratory nature of the research undertaken.

MODELS OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

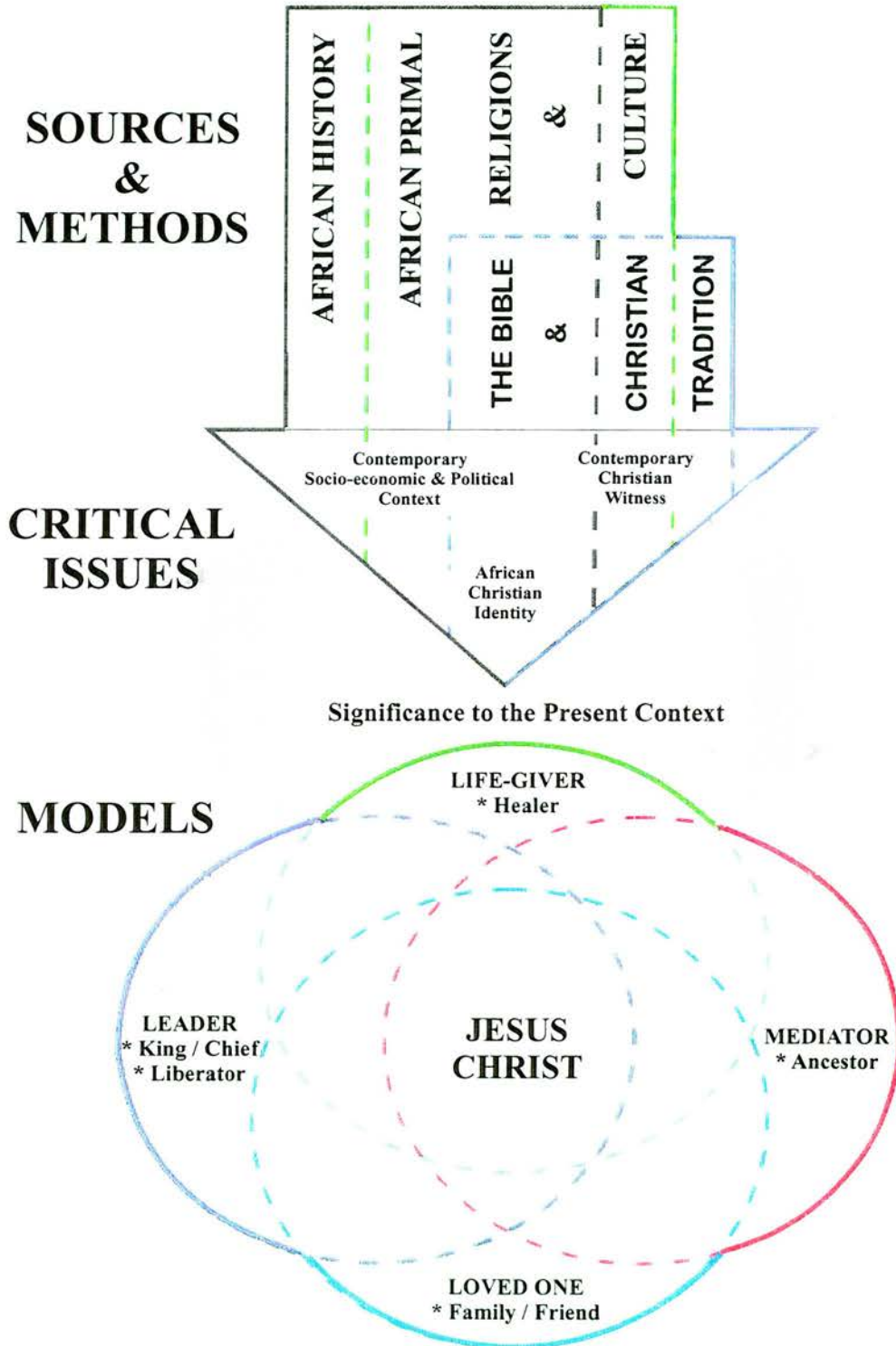


Fig. 2.

This configuration seeks an appropriate balance of simplicity and complexity in displaying the most significant aspects of the present research. Hence a meta-model portrays the overall investigation, setting forth its major components: sources and methods, critical issues, central themes, and the significance of the contemporary African christologies to African Christianity. Within that overarching structure, distinct models corresponding to the central christological themes are depicted as interlocking circles. While the thematic titles are placed in the outer spheres for clarifying distinctions, the dotted lines indicate the significant overlap which occurs among christological images. The main body of the thesis explicates these christological models in Part II. Only three of the models can be delineated within the confines of this thesis. However, aspects of the fourth circle are briefly introduced in relation to overlapping images, thus providing some indication of remaining material which completes the overall picture from the research findings.²⁹ The arrows indicate that the current christologies both emerge from the critical issues identified in Part I, and are also significant in redressing those very issues, to be discussed in Part III. Rationale for this particular design lies in the convergence of two goals: (1) the integrative approach to theological realities as advocated by the African authors, and (2) the need for complementary models which allow various aspects of the christological perceptions to be teased out without losing sight of the overall view of the material. Both priorities are in accordance with the holistic nature of African ontology and epistemology, which comes to light throughout this study.

One final point concerns the problem of verification in theology. Dulles notes that “[r]eligious imagery is both functional and cognitive,” so “[r]eligious experience, then, provides a vital key for the evaluation and interpretation of symbols.”³⁰ Consequently, verification of the christological models ultimately depends upon corporate discernment by those whose perceptions they portray. The extent to which the models resonate with the understanding and experience of the selected African Christians will determine their value as a contribution to the study of African Christianity.³¹

²⁹ The fourth model emerges from the research undertaken, but cannot be fully reported in the thesis due to limitations of space. It is, however, referred to briefly in relation to other models. See pp. 208, 266.

³⁰ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 18; see also 23-25.

³¹ Initial approval of the christological models was granted by John Pobee, in personal consultation at the International Association for Mission Studies Conference held in Pretoria, South Africa, January 21-28, 2000. Further verification awaits future submission of the models to the wider Christian community in Africa.

CHAPTER 5

JESUS AS LIFE-GIVER

*“[W]hat do you think is the **main** or the most significant contribution that **African** christology has to offer world Christianity?”*

*“I would think that one of the **main** things would be **Christ**, the giver of life. ... I feel that the idea of Christ as the source of real life, the **giver** of life, is extremely vital to us....”¹*

- Kwesi Dickson, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches

*“[T]he concept of Jesus as a **life-giver**, a **life-promoter**, I would say, ... comes out very, very significantly.”²*

- Mary Getui, The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

A. Introduction

The first christological model to be explored is that of Jesus as life-giver. Arising from the data of textual and oral christologies, this central theme is fundamental to all other themes and therefore provides the appropriate starting point. So essential is the African estimation of life that Bénézet Bujo selects it as the basic conceptual framework for his theological and ethical investigations.³ When inquiring into the compatibility of the Christian message and the black ethos, he notes that Christianity encountered many values in Africa, the chief of which is introduced as follows:

Among those values we have to underline life, which was the cardinal point for all the rest. Life is, of course, that to which all humanity aspires, but the way in which the African systematically centres community and ethos around life deserves particular attention. The Christian message cannot ignore this fact without exposing itself to failure.⁴

Hence how Jesus is perceived in relation to life, with respect to traditional thought and contemporary realities in Africa, features prominently in African Christianity and thus comprises the focal point of this chapter.

¹ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998; when quotes are in italics, bold indicates original emphasis.

² Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

³ See Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 17-37; *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990), 74-81.

⁴ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 103.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The introduction considers concepts of life in traditional African thought as interpreted by selected African Christians, and their conviction of Jesus as life-giver or the one who fulfils African aspirations for life. Textual and field research has unearthed various images of Jesus in relation to life, such as creator, preserver, protector, provider, and architect or planner.⁵ The central image in this respect is undoubtedly that of Jesus as healer, or one who restores life. Therefore the second main section explores this theme. The related image of Jesus as traditional healer warrants close scrutiny which is undertaken in the third section. A final section of conclusions offers critical engagement with the African christologies, and more extensive treatment in this chapter allows briefer conclusions in Chapters 6 and 7. The overall aim of the present chapter is to examine the rationale for this christological model in terms of African thought and biblical witness, to interpret its meaning in contemporary Christian reflection and practice, and to offer critical assessment regarding its significance to African Christianity.

1. Concepts of Life in Traditional Africa⁶

“Life is so central that it must be characterized as sacred.”⁷ Thus Bujo introduces the life-concepts of African clan society as the starting point for his theology. He delineates several characteristics of life, some of which require further elaboration in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The first point Bujo underlines is that pre-Christian black Africa, assumed to be largely monotheistic, recognised God as the source of all life and the one who alone possesses fullness of life. Citing previous studies by Vincent Mulago, Bolaji Idowu, and John Mbiti, Bujo explains that African tradition views God as the creator and sustainer of all life, culminating in human life.⁸ He then notes that a crucial point concerning life is its hierarchical ordering, defined as follows: “Life is a participation in God, but it is always mediated by one standing above the recipient in the hierarchy of being. This hierarchy belongs

⁵ For a detailed outline of the main concepts which emerged in the oral christologies, see the Final Coding Scheme in Appendix 1.

⁶ The use of the term “traditional” throughout this thesis in relation to aspects of African culture is not intended to be derogatory in any way, as it might be considered in other contexts. The aim is to discern those beliefs, customs and values, derived from African realities prior to the coming of Europeans and Christianity, which exert enduring influence upon African worldviews. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that in reality, the traditional and the modern intermingle in contemporary Africa and cannot be separated. However, they are distinguished in this thesis for purposes of analysis.

⁷ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-19; *African Christian Morality*, 74-75. The works cited include V. Mulago, *Un visage africain du christianisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1965); E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM, 1973); and J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

both to the invisible and to the visible world.”⁹ In tracing the hierarchy of invisible and visible powers, from God through deceased clan and family members, through royalty, chiefs and elders, to heads of households and family members, Bujo acknowledges Mulago’s influence. For Mulago had previously studied three Bantu peoples, the Bashi of the Congo, the Rwanda and the Barundi, and on the basis of this research established his main thesis that participation in a common life is absolutely foundational to their family, social, political and religious customs.¹⁰ Mulago spells out this concept in terms of “unity of life” or “vital union,” which he defines as “[a] relationship of being and life between each individual and his descendants, his family, his brothers and sisters in the clan, his antecedents, and also with God, the ultimate source of life.”¹¹ After specifying that it also extends to inanimate life-resources, Mulago concludes, “What is this life? It is a whole life, individual inasmuch as it is received by each being which exists, and communal or collective inasmuch as each being draws from a common source of life.”¹²

Mulago’s statement reflects two additional characteristics of life in traditional African thought, in being holistic and communal. Again Mulago’s thought is echoed in Bujo who stresses that life goes beyond the biological to embrace “the whole of human existence, life understood as the totality of the dimensions which constitute the human as a person.”¹³ Elsewhere Bujo specifies further that “to an African there is no dichotomy between private, social, political and religious life.”¹⁴ Likewise John Pobee affirms this fundamental perception of life in the ontology and epistemology of many traditional African societies: “[B]eing and existence are seen very comprehensively—they are as physical as they are spiritual, as external as internal. They have a wholistic view of life.”¹⁵ Finally, Mulago points out the significance of life being communal in Africa, as follows:

The Bantu believe firmly in a vital communion or life-bond which creates solidarity between members of the same family or clan. ... [T]he family, clan or tribe is a whole, of which each member is only a part. The same blood, the same life which is shared by all, which all receive from the first ancestor, the founder of the clan, runs through the veins of all. Every effort must be directed to the

⁹ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 20.

¹⁰ Vincent Mulago, “Vital Participation: The Cohesive Principle of the Bantu Community,” in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 21.

¹⁴ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 78.

¹⁵ John S. Pobee, “Life and Peace: An African Perspective,” in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, ed. John S. Pobee and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1986), 17.

preservation, maintenance, growth and perpetuation of this common treasure. The pitiless elimination of everything which hinders this end, and the encouragement at all costs of everything which further it: this is the last word in Bantu customs and institutions, wisdom and philosophy.¹⁶

Several aspects of traditional African concepts of life thus emerge in the writings of these theologians: its centrality as the focus of many African religions and worldviews, its origin and fullness in God, its hierarchical ordering and demand for participation, and its comprehensive character in encompassing all realms of existence and incorporating the individual and communal dimensions. These facets of life then influence African Christians' perceptions of Jesus and the life he brings, according to the data from textual and oral christologies set forth in the next section.

2. Jesus as Life-giver

Akin to Mulago's concept of "vital union" as the unifying principle of Bantu thought is Placide Tempels' notion of "life-force" proposed in his work, *Bantu Philosophy*.¹⁷ Bujo refers to both writers in explicating black African concepts of life.¹⁸ In particular he states that one of Tempels' most important findings is this vital force or "life-force" reckoned to be at the heart of African worldviews and religions. He notes that Tempels went to the extent of claiming that "for the African, 'to be' was the same as 'to have life-force.'"¹⁹ He further points out Tempels' conviction that the African quest for life in its most comprehensive sense was not restricted to Africa, but rather signified a fundamental human instinct. So this was one area, according to Tempels, that an understanding of the African view of life could make a contribution beyond the continent of Africa. Tempels linked the African search for life to Jesus' claim in John 10:10 that he had come to bring life and to bring it more abundantly. Bujo relates this insight as follows: "If Jesus is truly

¹⁶ Mulago, "Vital Participation," 139, 140

¹⁷ Originally published as *La philosophie Bantoue* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1949); translated by Colin King (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959). Mulago refers to Tempels having reached the same conclusion as himself, although he criticises Tempels' method. See Mulago, "Vital Participation," 137, n. 2. Tempels' work preceded Mulago's, and Kwame Bediako suggests that despite Mulago's denial that his own work is based on Tempels' study, the latter may have provided a literary and missiological precedent for Mulago's achievement. For further discussion of these two works, their relationship to each other and their significance, see Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 357-361.

¹⁸ Bujo acknowledges Placide Tempels, a European Franciscan missionary in the Belgian Congo, as "the Father of African Theology" and Vincent Mulago, a Catholic priest from the Belgian Congo, as "[t]he first African who can be called an African theologian." *African Theology in its Social Context*, 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

the Way, the Truth and the Life, then he is the final answer to the aspirations of the whole human race and not only of Africans. All human cultures manifest the human longing for fullness of life.”²⁰

Bujo clearly concurs with Tempels’ approach in this regard, for in another publication Bujo reiterates that “[w]hat is most sacred in the negro-African tradition is life which must be encouraged in all its dimensions.”²¹ He then makes the following affirmation concerning Jesus Christ: “[H]e is the unique manifestation of the life of God, he is source and proto-model of all life. It is he who teaches us what ... is the true life, what is to live. He has come that we might have life and have it in abundance (*Jn 10:10*).”²² Elsewhere, the convergence of the traditional African concept of life with the biblical witness concerning Jesus as life-giver is explicit. Having again quoted John 10:10 and summarised additional Johannine texts on Jesus and life, Bujo declares Jesus to be “the true vital force and energy *par excellence* which flows into all his descendants.”²³ The import of this observation is further elucidated with respect to Jesus as ancestor in the following chapter. The stress at present is upon the significance of “Jesus as new source of life,”²⁴ understood and conveyed through African and biblical concepts.

Pobee takes a similar tack in reflecting as an Akan Christian upon life and peace. Like Bujo, he begins by examining these two concepts in traditional African thought, emphasising their holistic and communal character. Before turning to the biblical sources, however, he clearly asserts the priority of the biblical revelation in stating his methodological approach as follows:

[T]he traditional African concept of well-being can only be the *starting point*. In any case, as a Christian I believe Christ adds a new dimension, challenging the traditional culture. The task before us then is to attempt to construct a view which has for its elements the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the traditional African insights with regard to a wholistic view of life, at once vertical and horizontal, and the realities of today’s world.²⁵

Pobee then looks to the Fourth Gospel for relevant metaphors of life, including bread of life, water of life and light of life, all of which he states Africans are seeking. Dwelling particularly on the bread image, he undertakes exegesis of Jesus’

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Bénézet Bujo, *Christmas: God Becomes Man in Black Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 32.

²² Ibid., 33.

²³ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 83.

²⁴ Bujo, *Christmas*, 33.

²⁵ John S. Pobee, “Life and Peace,” 19.

miraculous feeding of the multitude in John 6. From this he concludes, “Of that life Jesus of Nazareth, now Lord, was and is the example *par excellence*. Jesus is the bread of life in the sense that what he represents is absolutely necessary for a genuine life and peace, in short for well-being.”²⁶

In another example, Pobee explores the meaning and significance of Jesus as the life of the world, drawing upon biblical evidence and aspects of traditional Akan culture. Again he stresses that “the Bible is of crucial importance for the statement of the African’s vision of Christ; the Bible remains the charter document of the church.”²⁷ Working from the Fourth Gospel, he first defines the two Greek words translated as “life”: “*psuche*” referring to biological or physical life, and “*zoe*” used metaphorically for religious or spiritual life, especially in relation to Christ. Following a discussion of death in biblical terms, Pobee draws parallels between the biblical and Akan concepts of life and death. For instance he outlines the Akan view of life as going beyond biological life to represent all the material prosperity and spiritual values which constitute well-being, summed up in the “seven graces.” As Pobee explains,

The Akan prays for the seven graces: life and good health (*nkwa*), God’s grace (*adom*), peace of society and mankind (*asomdwee*), potency and fertility of sex (*abawotum*), powerful eyesight (*anihutum*), good hearing power (*asotatum*), and rainfall and general prosperity of the clan and tribe (*amandoree*).²⁸

Having juxtaposed the biblical and Akan materials, Pobee then concludes,

The Akan concept of life outlined in the seven graces is a welcome starting point for evangelism. For all the coalescence Christianity goes further to make the unique claim that life is found in its fullness in Christ, e.g. John 1:4: ‘In him (i.e. Christ the Logos) was life.’... Thus the biblical faith affirms the centrality of Christ to and for the life of human beings; the basic necessities of life are to be sought and found in Christ. In our context we can assert that the seven graces for which the Akan prays are met in Christ.²⁹

African concepts of life as met in Christ are also evidenced in the oral christologies. The central preoccupation with life is manifest in the extent to which African Christians speak of Jesus in relation to the life he brings. In the individual interviews, 30 out of the 65 total respondents (46%) in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana initiated perceptions of Jesus specifically related to the image of life-giver as

²⁶ Ibid., 21.

²⁷ Pobee, “Jesus Christ—The Life of the World,” 6.

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

expounded above. That is to say, no set question was asked in this regard, yet respondents volunteered comments to this effect, and these comments were aside from those concerning Jesus' relevance to life or even Jesus giving his own life to accomplish salvation. For example, representative expressions include the following: "Jesus is life to me,"³⁰ "Jesus is *life, life* itself,"³¹ "Jesus, the source of our life,"³² "he's your *life-giver*,"³³ "he is the giver of life—not only now, physical life, but even eternal life,"³⁴ and he restores "the wholeness of life"³⁵ or "the fullness of life."³⁶ Equivalent findings occur in the focus groups, for 7 out of the 12 groups (58%) convened in Kenya and Ghana reveal similar perceptions.

Biblical influences in shaping such perceptions are certainly evident. For example, 5 out of the total 65 individual respondents (8%) either quote John 10:10 directly or allude to the "abundant life" Christ brings, making this one of the verses referred to most often in the interviews. Other respondents quote Jesus' claims, "I am the bread of life"³⁷ in John 6:35, or "I am the way, the truth and the life"³⁸ in John 14:6. For instance Florence Y. B. Yeboah, National Director of the Ghana Congress on Evangelisation Women's Ministry and a PACWA representative, responds as follows when asked who Jesus is to her:

Jesus, for me, is the one who is the creator of the universe. He holds the universe together. In fact, the *whole* scripture revolves around him. *He* is life, and the Bible says, 'The life,' *his* life, 'is the light of men.' ... He has said in John 14:6 that he *is* the way, the truth, and the life.³⁹

So the Bible is definitely highlighted as a key source for understanding Jesus as life-giver. Yet the biblical witness concerning Jesus has clearly taken root in local idiom. To illustrate, during the same interview, Yeboah spontaneously sang the following Twi hymn:

³⁰ Juliana Senavoe, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 18, 1998.

³¹ Sheny Kassam, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 9, 1998.

³² Samuel Ackah, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 16, 1998.

³³ Sheny Kassam, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 9, 1998.

³⁴ David Kamau, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

³⁵ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

³⁶ David Gitari, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 19, 1998.

³⁷ S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview: Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998; Florence Y. B. Yeboah, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

³⁸ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998; Samuel Ackah, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 16, 1998; S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview: Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

³⁹ Florence Y. B. Yeboah, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

So Yesu mu yie	Hold fast to Jesus
Na mma wanfi wo nsa	Do not lose your hold on him.
Sε wonya no a, woanya nkwa	If you choose him, you have life.
Sε wopa no a woafa owuo	If you avoid him, you meet death.
Nti so Yesu mu yie,	So hold on fast to Jesus,
Na mma wamfi wo nsa.	and do not lose your hold on him. ⁴⁰

In another example from the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant clergy, Joseph Lamptey offers this image of Jesus derived from the Bible yet expressed in vernacular hymns, in this case in Ga:

Jesus is perceived as ... the fountain of life, ... an idea taken from when Jesus talks with the woman at the well. This idea of fountain of life can be seen in some hymns and songs that we sing. That Jesus ‘*wela bubu*,’ is the fountain of life. He provides ... our needs, both physical and spiritual. We see him as a *well* of life, a fountain that is always there.⁴¹

Not only are biblical images of Jesus translated into local idiom, but also African vernacular terms related to life are ascribed to Jesus. For example, Ghanaian Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Superintendent Minister for the Methodist Church—Dansoman Circuit, explains how a Twi term traditionally referring to God is now extended to Jesus:

One of them is the ‘Oyε, Oyεadeεyie.’ That is, ‘he does things well,’ ‘he makes things well,’ ... or ‘he brings life into things.’ ... [W]hen you use it in the context of human well-being, it means ‘he makes them whole,’ ‘he brings the whole’—like the shalom. He brings wholeness.... So that’s one of the things sometimes you hear people, in their prayers, they will refer to Jesus like ‘Oyεadeεyie.’⁴²

The same Twi term is introduced by Grace Sackey in the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant laity, and defined as “[r]estoration, someone who restores life or health, everything that ... is lacking in your life, Jesus is able to do it. ... To renew your *life*, your *faith*, your sickness, deliverance—anything.”⁴³ Strikingly, this traditional concept seems to resonate in the perceptions of Jesus voiced by some Ghanaian Christians. Although no vernacular term is used, when asked who Jesus is to her, Protestant clergywoman Margaret Asabea immediately replies,

⁴⁰ Ibid.; Twi lyrics and English translation provided by Yeboah following the interview.

⁴¹ Joseph Lamptey, Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998.

⁴² Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

⁴³ Grace Sackey, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

He is the one who, as it were, brought me from nothingness to *life*. What do I mean? It's like, something which has been disintegrated, *shattered* ..., and then he brought the wholeness of life back to me. And ... the process is not completed. He still goes on and on and on and on with me.⁴⁴

According to these African Christians, then, a coalescence is evidently formed between African and biblical traditions concerning life. The centrality of life is certainly manifest, and the source of life traditionally acknowledged in God is now extended to Jesus. Ghanaian clergyman Quarshie provides a clear summary statement regarding this convergence of African and biblical thought, for in response to the question of who Jesus is to him personally, he replies that no single symbol can capture all of it. Yet in attempting to synthesize central truths concerning Jesus' identity, he focuses on the single concept of life, saying, "Probably to put it very simply, I would say ... he is *life*."⁴⁵ He continues by explaining that to elaborate on specific aspects, he would speak of Jesus as saviour, as Lord, and as king, yet these biblical categories are all placed within the overarching framework of the concern for life. Hence he concludes, "I say I have life.... Without him, there is no life. That's how simply I would put it, if you ask me in a nutshell."

The implications of African and biblical life concepts merging in Christ are manifold, yet many surround the central notions of life being holistic and communal. For example, in a later context of conversation, Quarshie returns to the fundamental view of Jesus as life-giver and relates it to the critical issue of African Christian identity as identified in Chapter 3. In Quarshie's words,

[I]t's precisely what I referred to earlier on as the personal or the identity crisis. And I think that is something that we *need* to address, in terms of Christ *making us whole*, in terms of eliminating this identity crisis that we have. And in so doing, once again, affirming the life that he offers to us. ... I think that probably for me, for us so-called theologians, that should be the greatest challenge. Because ... I don't think we are really doing it, at least for the average Ghanaian Christian or African Christian. That crisis is still there.⁴⁶

It becomes apparent, then, that the contemporary African christologies not only emerge from the critical issues in the current context, but also provide a response to those very issues. In this case, the issue of African Christian identity arises from the historical and theological context outlined in Part I, yet according to Quarshie, the

⁴⁴ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

⁴⁵ B. Y. Quarshie, Oral Interview, Accra: July 29, 1998.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

discovery and affirmation of Jesus as life-giver potentially overcomes that identity crisis.

The same aspect of holistic life in Christ is emphasised by the Circle women especially, though not exclusively, with the implications for gender issues in Africa. Ghanaian representative Elizabeth Amoah describes the importance of the traditional religious heritage to the women in Ghana and what influence this background exerts when these women convert to Christianity. She explains, “So they will take Jesus! Because they see him as ... a powerful, miraculous healer—*everything*. They will even say, ‘Jesus is my *everything*’—the *holistic*, the totality of ... life that you get in Jesus.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Kenyan representative Mary Getui quotes John 10:10 in both her individual interview and in the focus group of Circle women.⁴⁸ In the former, when asked about images of Jesus that resonate specially with her as an African, she underlines the perception of Jesus as life-giver and its significance for African Christians today. Just as Jesus gives life physically and spiritually, so women give life physically, through conception, pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding, and spiritually, through their many “mothering” roles in the community regardless of biological motherhood. Therefore the image of Jesus as life-giver potentially enhances the position of women in the community, a theme she explores elsewhere. Explaining how the Circle women reflected upon what nature reveals about women for an earlier publication, *Groaning in Faith*,⁴⁹ Getui states, “[W]hat personally I came up with was that life needs both male and female. So if we are going to look at Jesus as *life* or as *life-promoter*, then we need to bring in this contribution of [the] place of men and women.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Amoah, Oral Interview, Edinburgh: Nov. 16, 1998. Certainly the response, “Everything,” in relation to Jesus is widely attested in the interviews, particularly among the women.

⁴⁸ Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998; Focus Group, Nairobi: May 15, 1998. This focus group on christology took place during a working seminar of the Kenyan Circle, May 15-16, 1998, in Nairobi, with 16 participants from various locations in Kenya. Chaired by Grace Wamue, the seminar entailed each participant presenting a paper on the theme of “Women and Conflict” and receiving constructive criticism prior to publication. Papers addressed various topics from women and political, family, and ethnic conflicts, to women with disabilities resulting from violent conflicts. It was in the context of discussing the need for theological responses to these problems that Getui stressed the concept of Jesus as life-giver and life-promoter being very significant, as quoted at the outset of this chapter. Special acknowledgement goes to the Circle for allowing me time to conduct a focus group while they worked under very strict time constraints.

⁴⁹ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge, eds., *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996). For an incisive, in-depth analysis of the Circle and their theology in relation to other feminist theologies, an analysis which also acknowledges the significance of this theme of women as life-givers, see Carrie Pemberton, “Feminism, Inculturation, and the Search for Global Christianity: An African Example, The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1998).

⁵⁰ Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

The founder director of the Circle, Mercy Oduyoye, also expresses deep concern for holistic and communal life in Christ. One particularly poignant example is found in her poem, “Reflection on Wholeness,” featured in her address to the World Council of Churches’ Sixth Assembly in 1983 on “Jesus Christ—The Life of the World.”⁵¹ Oduyoye begins her address on wholeness of life in Africa by stressing that Africans have ways of viewing life that differ from the prevailing perspectives in western societies. She laments that Christianity in Africa has not adequately absorbed, or even considered, the primal worldviews it encountered. Instead, the Euro-American expressions of the faith have dominated. She maintains that “African Christians, however, whether Anglican, Protestant or Roman Catholic, see life basically as Africans,” and hence their sympathy and appreciation for the life exhibited in the African Independent Churches.⁵² Oduyoye then offers the poem as her own personal reflection on the theme of wholeness. This poem reflects the integration of African and biblical concepts of life discussed above, as well as the contemporary realities and the call for liberationist theology introduced in Chapter 3 and developed further in later chapters. It also demonstrates the conviction of African theologians that theological reflection need not be expressed in the same format as the systematic exposition associated with western theology.⁵³ For Oduyoye unequivocally brings a theological as well as an African perspective to what she introduces as “the challenge of Christ to an Africa that thinks whole, preaches wholeness and yet is riddled with divisiveness and brokenness.”⁵⁴

Finally, Oduyoye makes the important point, echoing Bujo in the introduction to this chapter,⁵⁵ that the yearning for wholeness and the problems which hinder its realisation are not exclusively African. Yet she asserts that the African worldview is

⁵¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Wholeness of Life in Africa,” in *An African Call for Life: A Contribution to the World Council of Churches’ Sixth Assembly Theme: “Jesus Christ—the Life of the World,”* ed. Masamba ma Mpolo, Reginald Stober, and Evelyn V. Appiah (Nairobi: Uzima Press for the World Council of Churches, 1983), 114-16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵³ For example, Bujo’s assertion about the format of African theology in relation to western theology would undoubtedly encompass poetry, for he states,

Doubtless, it must be remembered that theology in Africa need not take a systematic form as it does in Europe, but that it can emerge from below, from the experience of God’s People, and in particular from its liturgical experiments which seem to be the places where a new theological vocabulary is worked out, realist without being abstract. We should perhaps also be alive to the more narrative style of Africa and even its story-song technique of transmitting a message. It seems to me that this type of theology already exists among African people, without being recognized as theological in the western sense of the word. Bénézet Bujo, “African Theology: Which Direction to Take and What Methodology to Use?” *African Christian Studies Occasional Paper* no. 3 and 4 (Nov./Dec. 1985): 9.

⁵⁴ Oduyoye, “Wholeness of Life in Africa,” 114.

⁵⁵ See p. 101 above.

nevertheless an asset in developing a holistic approach to life. In response to the gap between the ideal and the actual, as outlined in Chapter 3 on critical issues concerning contemporary Christian witness, Oduyoye stresses that this very gap is the crucial point where the cross of Christ is placed. Hence she concludes,

To heal this sinful human condition, Christianity claims, ‘Christ is the Answer’. Jesus Christ is presented to the world as its very Life. In Africa where religion is still taken seriously and is accepted as filling the whole of life, the claim ‘Jesus Christ, the Life of the World’ is of crucial consequence.⁵⁶

Once again, then, the very issues arising in context are addressed and potentially redressed by the appropriation of Jesus as life-giver.

B. Jesus As Healer

1. Introduction

Oduyoye is not alone in expressing the yearning for wholeness of life in Africa and lamenting the “litany of brokenness.”⁵⁷ Bujo also queries, “In Africa the importance of life has always been underlined for the family, the clan, and the community of the ancestors. But what has happened to this life today? Is there still the same respect for life in this post-colonial world?”⁵⁸ Apparently not, according to his reflections on how life is “scoffed at in Africa.”⁵⁹ He levels sharp castigation against the political leaders in many countries across Africa whose dictatorial regimes radically contradict widespread ancestral traditions regarding chieftaincy. These leaders thereby violate the sacredness of life entrusted to their oversight. Yet culpability does not rest with such leaders alone, for Bujo continues,

But not only the political chiefs, much more in a general way, we are all colonized by the new might: money, power... That leads us to pooh-pooh life: this has only value for us in the measure that it concerns our person alone. Today there is killing in Africa like killing snakes, like removing weeds...⁶⁰

He therefore contends that while “[t]he whole of Africa is pregnant with the life of God,” it must be defended in combating injustice, ethnocentrism, regionalism, and racism, and in establishing human rights and solidarity with the marginalized.⁶¹ In a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁸ Bujo, *Christmas*, 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 32-33.

⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

similar vein, Pobe highlights what a daring assertion it is for Christians to proclaim Jesus as the life of the world when that world is wracked by increased intolerance and violence, moral corruption and greed, famine and poverty.⁶²

By expressing such concerns, these theologians confirm the predicament voiced by Appiah-Kubi as follows:

Jesus Christ is thus conceived by many African Christians as the great physician, healer and victor over worldly powers *par excellence*. To many, Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. But the perturbing question is, where is this abundant life, when all around us we see suffering, poverty, oppression, strife, envy, war and destruction?⁶³

In view of this dilemma, Cécé Kolié raises the legitimate challenge: “To proclaim Jesus as the Great Healer calls for a great deal of explaining to the millions who starve in the Sahel, to victims of injustice and corruption, and to the polyparasitic afflicted of the tropical and equatorial forests!”⁶⁴

Another crucial dimension in exploring the image of Jesus as healer concerns its relation to traditional concepts of health and illness. For as Jean-Marc Ela emphasises, a primary task of Christian reflection in black Africa is to reformulate the faith so as to allow the gospel to speak to Africans through their primordial symbolism.⁶⁵ To illustrate, Ela addresses sickness and notes that in black Africa it is generally “not experienced as an objective fact,” but rather as “a scandal that belongs in the anthropological realm of evil and misfortune.”⁶⁶ For illness is viewed as a calamity which not only strikes the particular individual, but also indicates a disruption of social relationships, thereby making it a family and communal concern. Where health is viewed as more than biological, to encompass physical, mental, spiritual, social, and environmental well-being, illness signifies a misfortunate disruption of harmony in these factors. Organic causes may well be recognised, yet the overriding belief attributes sickness to spiritual or supernatural causes such as

⁶² Pobe, “Jesus Christ—The Life of the World,” 8.

⁶³ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “Christology,” in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987), 76. This observation is reiterated in Akintunde E. Akinade, “‘Who Do You Say That I Am?’—An Assessment of Some Christological Constructs in Africa,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (April 1995): 188.

⁶⁴ Cécé Kolié, “Jesus as Healer?” in *Faces of Jesus In Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 128.

⁶⁵ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 44.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 50. The African perspective regarding illness as scandalous recurs in Kolié’s article, in the striking statement, “‘We proclaim a crucified Messiah, a scandal to the Jews, madness to the Greeks’—and sickness to the Africans. For the person of black Africa, ... the presence of someone ill in the family is a scandal.” Kolié, “Jesus as Healer?” 145.

offending God or ancestral spirits, possession by evil spirits, witchcraft, breaking taboos, or curses from offended family or community members.⁶⁷ Illness is therefore inextricably linked to human relationships with one another and with the universe. Since “the African universe of sickness is inseparable from the universe of spirits,” Ela underlines that “the techniques of healing cannot be separated from the symbolic universe from which they emerge.”⁶⁸ He thus challenges the church with the vital importance of providing answers to the questions of life and death for which Africans still seek out marabouts, diviners and healers.

The problem here, as Pobee points out, is that the early missionaries tended to deny the reality of malevolent powers at work in the community and to dismiss belief in witchcraft as superstition and heathenism.⁶⁹ Instead of attending to the needs within the African worldview of spirits and sickness, missionaries often reproached or ignored African approaches to illness and denounced African medicine and medical practitioners as devilish.⁷⁰ Moreover, while some western medical missionaries adopted a holistic approach in preaching Christ as a healer-saviour who redeems humanity from sickness, sin and all forms of dehumanisation, in general the proclamation of the gospel was skewed towards a “spiritual salvation” of the soul. As Philomena Mwaura explains, “The healing and evangelical missions directed to the Africans did not have a holistic impact but were seen as directed to different parts of the same person, the body and the soul, whereas in Africa this dualistic view of the person is not existent.”⁷¹

As a result of the dissonance between aspects of mission Christianity and traditional views regarding health, ambiguities and contradictions often arise in the African experience of Christian faith. Hence the notorious characterisation of African Christians adopting forms of piety from the missionary enterprise while still

⁶⁷ Philomena Njeri Mwaura, “Healing as a Pastoral Concern,” in *Pastoral Care in African Christianity: Challenging Essays in Pastoral Theology*, ed. D. W. Waruta and H. W. Kinoti (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1994), 67-68.

⁶⁸ Ela, “My Faith as an African,” 50-51.

⁶⁹ John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity*, Risk Book Series no. 83 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 29. Pobee is among many African Christians who now look to the so-called African Independent Churches for the lead in this regard, since these churches are acknowledged to promote healing ministries more in keeping with biblical teaching and African traditional culture than the western-initiated churches. See also John S. Pobee, “Healing—An African Christian Theologian’s Perspective,” *International Review of Mission* 83 (April 1994): 247-255; “Health, Healing and Religion: An African View,” *International Review of Mission* 90, nos. 356/357 (Jan./Apr. 2001): 55-64.

⁷⁰ Mwaura, “Healing as a Pastoral Concern,” 70. See also Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976), 64-69.

⁷¹ Mwaura, “Healing as a Pastoral Concern,” 70.

maintaining their traditional beliefs and practices, especially during sickness or critical life stages.⁷² Ela expresses the dilemma as follows:

‘Chrétiens, vous voilà malheureux! Le matin à la messe, le soir chez le devin! Amulette en poche, scapulaire au cou!’ Cette chanson zaïroise révèle le drame de la majorité des chrétiens négro-africains. ... [P]our un grand nombre de baptisés, la conversion à l’Evangile est une véritable ‘Aventure ambiguë’.⁷³

The extent of this problem leads Kolié to pose a grave question: “The bipolarity of the religious loyalties of our baptized who carry a rosary in their hand and a ‘fetish’ under their clothing leads us ... to ask whether Jesus can honestly be present in Africa as a healer.”⁷⁴ This quandary is intensified by Kolié’s recounting of how, over the previous year, he had asked various catechists and community leaders of villages and quarters to list their own personal names for Jesus. Pointing out that Christ had come to his region sixty years earlier, and that customarily within a year black African communities grant newcomers a nickname expressing the type of relationship held with them, Kolié relates his findings as follows:

They all gave titles taken from the Bible or missals. Not one of them came out with a term that translated his or her personal relationship to Christ. ... They all told me that Christ is the Saviour, the Son of God, the man of peace, and so on. Certainly none of them told me that Jesus is a healer. And they would certainly not have been able to tell me why.⁷⁵

Following this report, Kolié raises the critical question as to whether this is not what the majority of African theologians do. He voices the challenge in this way:

Since their communities cannot name Christ personally without going to the Bible or catechisms, they do just the opposite, and attribute to Christ the traditional titles of initiator, chief, great ancestor, and so on, that they would *like* to see him given in the communities. Once more we impose on our fellow Africans the way of seeing that we have learned from our Western masters. Shall we be followed by our communities, when we have finally gotten the prayers of the missal

⁷² See Mbiti’s criticism of mission Christianity for not having penetrated deeply into African traditional religiosity, in *African Religions and Philosophy*, 236-239. See also Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 107; John S. Pobee, “Health, Healing and Religion,” 60-61.

⁷³ Jean-Marc Ela, “De l’assistance à la libération: Les tâches actuelles de l’église en milieu africain,” *Foi et développement* 83 (jan.-fév. 1981): 2.

‘Christians, there you are unfortunate people! In the morning at mass, in the evening at the diviner’s! Amulet in your pocket, scapula around your neck!’ This Zaïroise song reveals the tragedy of the majority of black African Christians. ... [F]or a great number of baptised people, conversion to the Gospel is a veritable ‘ambiguous Adventure.’

⁷⁴ Kolié, “Jesus as Healer?” 141.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

translated into these titles for Jesus whose real effectiveness has not really been tested in Africa?⁷⁶

Thus contemporary realities and traditional worldviews pose serious challenges regarding Christ as healer in Africa. In a continent of massive suffering, is Jesus truly known as healer? Or, as Kolié suggests, is this concept yet another foreign imposition on Africa? The question warrants careful consideration, particularly in light of Kolié's observation that these titles have not been adequately tested in Africa. Toward that end, then, the image of Jesus as healer forms an important component of the present research design.⁷⁷ The findings, however preliminary in the overall field of contemporary African christologies, enable further consideration of Kolié's question whether Jesus can honestly be perceived in Africa as a healer. First the qualitative data are set forth, followed by close analysis of the rationale for the image, its meaning, and problems with it.

2. The Data Regarding Jesus as Healer

The image of Jesus as healer is indeed operative among the selected African Christians, as demonstrated conclusively in the oral interviews conducted in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. The overwhelming majority of individual interview respondents attest to this image being meaningful to them, with 57 out of the 60 with whom it was discussed (95%) responding positively.⁷⁸ Not a single person denied or rejected the image, although 3 voiced certain reservations related to how it is understood or practised in contemporary Christianity. In contrast to Kolié's informants, none of whom identified Jesus as healer, it is significant that 4 out of the 27 Kenyan and Ugandan respondents with whom it was discussed (15%) and 10 out of the 33 Ghanaians (30%) volunteered the image themselves in various contexts of conversation. For example, a few respondents voice the image of healer in response to the fundamental question of who Jesus is to them personally.⁷⁹ More notably, several raise it when asked for images of Jesus that resonate especially with African

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

⁷⁷ As indicated in Chapter 2 on research methodology, p. 44 above, the interview questions were designed in such a way as to elicit the respondents' own views about Jesus as far as possible. Then, if a respondent had not initiated comments on a particular image of interest to me, I raised it for discussion in the later stages of the interview. This was the approach taken with the image of Jesus as healer and also the related one of Jesus as traditional healer. See the Interview Guide in Appendix 1, pp. 344-345 below.

⁷⁸ The section on individual interviews, p. 44 above, explains that in a semi-structured interview, the questions planned serve only as a general guide to conversation. The result is that not every question is necessarily addressed to every respondent. In the present case, the image of Jesus as healer was not volunteered by 5 respondents, nor was the question asked due to time constraints in the interview.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Martey, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 24, 1998; Yeboa Amoa, Oral Interview, Accra: July 28, 1998.

Christians. Often in this context it is the first idea offered, as in the following two cases. Religious sister Marie Gacambi, lecturer at the Catholic University of East Africa, immediately replies,

Obviously for *any* African, the image of healing—healing is a ministry within the African tradition, ... because our *understanding* ... is that a person is *whole*. So anything that is a *hindrance* to the wholeness of an individual, ... they *try* to *alleviate* anything that interferes with the wholeness of *life*. So, when we speak of Jesus as a healer, that is an image that touches an African very much. And you will see this even with these ministries where people come in *big* numbers, so Jesus as a healer is an image that is powerful.⁸⁰

Likewise Catholic layperson Mary Kizito, lecturer at Daystar University in Nairobi, straightaway speaks of Jesus as healer and explains why it is a meaningful category as follows:

[Y]ou read it in the Bible, but because Africa is so much plagued with disease, ... today we talk of AIDS, but malaria and all these many other diseases which kill everybody. So, I look at him as a healer, and I think many Africans do.... [T]he most powerful image of Jesus is Jesus the healer. He can take away our diseases.⁸¹

Noteworthy here is not only that the image of Jesus as healer is the first to be expressed, but also that the reasons given reflect the issues discussed above. That is to say, Jesus is perceived both in relation to traditional concepts of life and health, as Gacambi indicates, and in relation to contemporary realities, as Kizito attests. Then finally, those who volunteer this depiction of Jesus also do so in the context of discussing Jesus' relevance to life in their country, or in the context of discussing vernacular songs.

The same pattern holds true in the focus groups, for all 11 of the groups with whom it was discussed (100%) agree that the image of Jesus as healer is appropriate and meaningful. Even more significantly, the concept is volunteered by various members within 6 out of the 11 groups (55%), in the same contexts as those outlined above. Interestingly, in the focus group of Kenyan Protestant clergy, John Gichinga challenges the question itself about the image of Jesus as healer, insisting that it is not an "image" but a reality in Nairobi Baptist Church where he is senior pastor. In his words, "It's beyond a perception, it's beyond an image. It is really recognising that some of the things that were happening in Jesus' time, they are possible in our day through his name."⁸²

⁸⁰ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

⁸¹ Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

⁸² John Gichinga, Focus Group, Nairobi: May 18, 1998.

Thus the data generated from the individual interviews and focus groups unequivocally show that these African Christians identify Jesus as healer. Likewise the textual christologies lend strong support for the image, and their contributions will be discussed in the following sections. Additionally, there is widespread contextual evidence which corroborates that Jesus is viewed as healer. For example, confirmation was gained through participant observation in various forums for the expression of African Christianity, such as church services across a range of mainline denominations, conferences, Bible studies, prayer meetings and informal conversations. Particular attention was paid to liturgy, preaching, prayers, hymns and choruses, and testimonies reflecting belief in Jesus as healer. From the extensive materials gleaned through this informal research, only one textual illustration is offered from each of the main contexts of field research. First, the following song, reflecting the intrinsically related images of Jesus as life-giver and healer, was sung in Nairobi Chapel on April 26, 1998:

JABULANI AFRICA

Jesus, Life and Hope to heal our land
Saviour, reaching out with Your mighty hand

Sing for joy O Africa
The Lord your God is risen upon you
Sing for joy O Africa
The Lord your God is risen upon you now
Jabulani, jabulani Africa (4x)

Jesus, River of Life to our thirsty land
Saviour, meeting our needs with Your might hand.

Then from Ghana, the following Twi hymn is found in *Legon Praise*, a collection of hymns published for use in the Legon Interdenominational Church in Legon, Accra:

Finally, the photographs in Figs. 3 to 6, taken in Kenya and Ghana, provide visual indicators which further substantiate the widespread perception of Jesus as healer.⁸⁴ Two examples are included from each country. In Fig. 3, the Kikuyu inscription on the *matatu* or public vehicle translates as “Jesus is a miracle worker” or a “wonder worker.”



Fig. 3. *Matatu*, Nairobi

⁸⁴ All of the photographs presented in the thesis were taken myself.



Fig. 4. Church Front, Nairobi

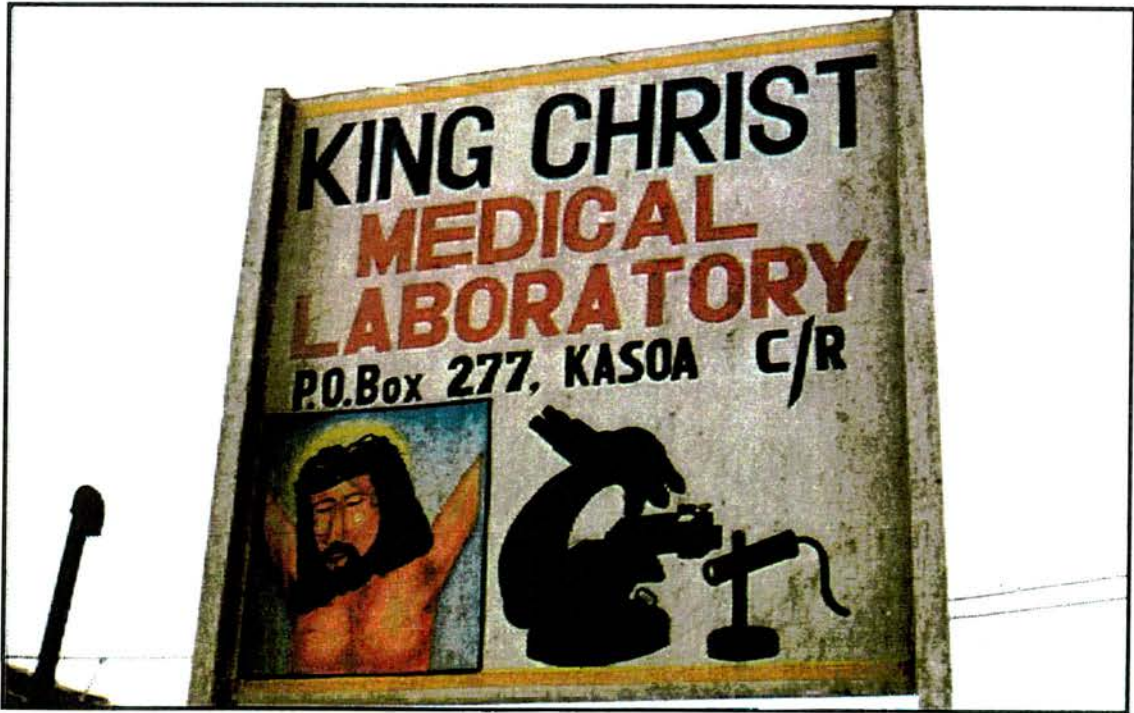


Fig. 5. Signboard for Medical Clinic, Kasoa, Ghana

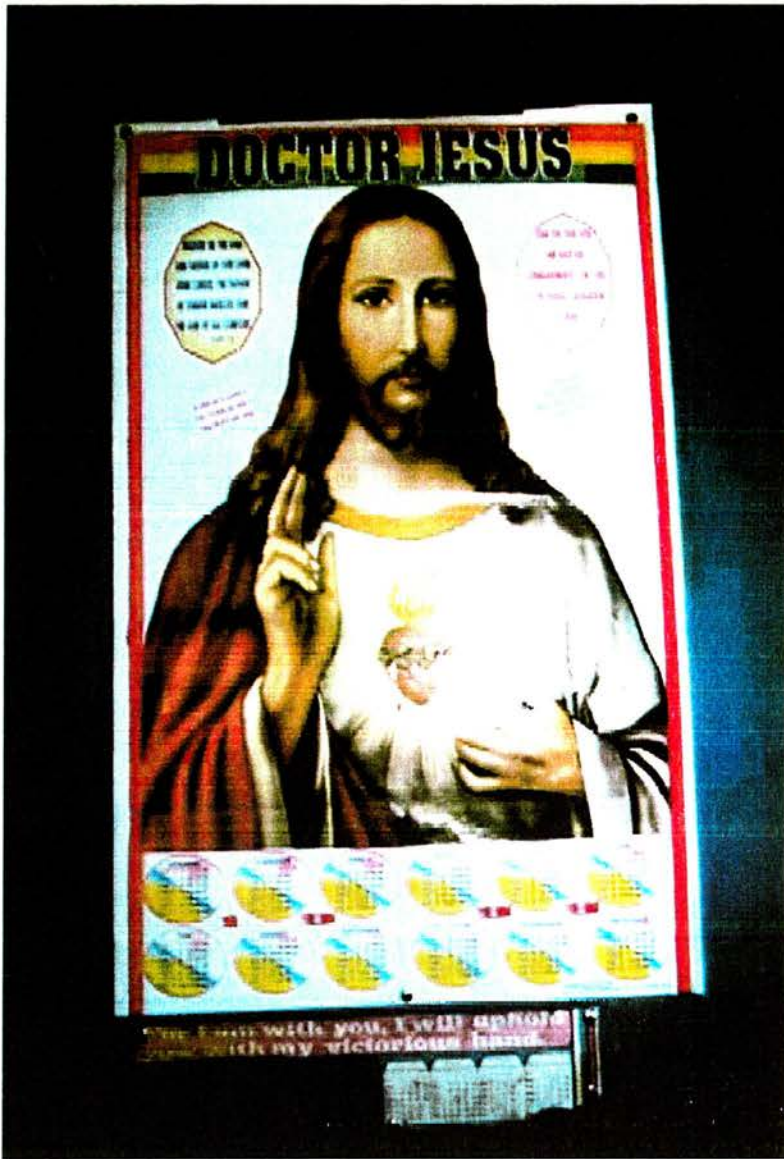


Fig. 6. Wall Calendar in a Small Shop, Accra

3. The Rationale for Jesus as Healer

It is not enough to establish that the image of Jesus as healer is indeed pervasive in the contexts specified for field research. It is also necessary to determine the substance of this image, including its rationale, meaning, and significance. For unlike the informants of whom Kolié writes, the African Christians interviewed in this study not only name Jesus as healer but also indicate why they consider him so. The main reasons given may be summarised as first, biblical and theological rationale, and second, contemporary experience, although often these two aspects of the rationale are combined in the interviewees' responses.

a) Biblical and Theological Rationale

Biblical precedent features significantly in the reasons stated for understanding Jesus as healer. Often the gospel evidence of Jesus' healing ministry is cited first, with its application to the contemporary context either stated explicitly or assumed. For example, Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Kenya, gives the firm, positive response to the question of Jesus as healer: "I am convinced myself. Absolutely." He argues first from the Bible, pointing out that there is not a single instance of Jesus turning away anyone in need of healing, except for the Canaanite woman whose faith he tested by delaying the healing. After recounting the latter story, he continues, "And even now, today, he heals! The problem with the people is we don't pray for healing. We are embarrassed to pray for somebody who is sick to be healed. Personally I have no problem with that."⁸⁵ He then speaks from personal experience of having prayed for people who were subsequently healed. Similar witness comes from Kenyan Catholic priest Vincent Kamiri, who affirms, "So, Jesus is really a healer ... [i]n Kenya as much as in the gospels."⁸⁶

Beyond the gospel record of Jesus' healing ministry, respondents reason on the basis of wider biblical evidence. For example, Kenyan Protestant J. B. Masinde, pastor of the Deliverance Church in Umoja, Nairobi, elaborates on the rationale for understanding Jesus as healer in this way:

He *is* a healer. Because he is God, and God says, 'I am Jehovah Rapha, I am the Lord your God that heals you.' And lots of times in the Gospels, we see Jesus as a healer. The summary that Peter gives of him in Acts chapter 10, verse 38, it says that 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and because of that he went about doing good and *healing*.' He himself, Matthew 8:17, 'bore our sin, in his own body, bore our infirmities [...].' Prophecy of Isaiah 53: 'He himself in his own body, he was wounded for our transgression, bruised for our iniquity.' And so by his stripes we are healed. So you *cannot* separate God from that. And you can't separate Jesus from that.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

⁸⁶ Vincent Kamiri, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 28, 1998. Similar findings occur in the data from Ghana. For example, Protestant clergyman Dickson responds enthusiastically to the question of Jesus as healer, agreeing, "Oh absolutely, yes! And that's one thing that stands out in scriptures, Jesus the healer." Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998. Ghanaian Catholic layman Hagan explains more matter of factly, stating that "Jesus as healer is not an extraordinary thing. The image is a biblical one. You know, Jesus heals our souls, and he heals our bodies too. And in *fact*, during his sojourn on earth, he used the healing of the physical body to *point* to the healing of the soul. So, *that* is not surprising." George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 28; Aug. 6, 1998.

⁸⁷ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

It is noteworthy that Masinde is among 4 of the total 65 individual respondents (6%) who either quote or allude to Isaiah 53:5, understood to be fulfilled in Jesus whose “stripes” accomplish healing for his followers, making this verse another of the biblical texts most frequently referred to in the interviews.⁸⁸ For instance Naomi Gathirwa, a consultant in gender and development and the Coordinator of PACWA – Kenya, responds immediately to the question of Jesus as healer, “Yes, we are healed by his stripes. The Bible says that.” Probed further she explains, “The Bible tells us that Jesus was beaten, he shed blood, and it was those stripes that he was given that heal our stripes, that heal our illnesses. And it’s true—by trusting, by having faith in Christ, that he will heal you.”⁸⁹ Hence interviewees appeal primarily to the gospel accounts of Jesus’ healing ministry, but also to the wider context of Old Testament and New Testament materials to justify their belief in Jesus as healer.

In addition to citing specific biblical texts, Masinde’s quote above reveals more general theological grounds also found elsewhere in respondents’ reasoning. Kenyan fruit-hawker John Muriithi reckons that because Jesus is God, he can do anything however big or small. Therefore, “Jesus is a *real* healer. He can heal!”⁹⁰ Across the continent, a traditional Akan leader and third generation Christian combines biblical and theological justification in reaching the same conclusion. Nana Addo Birikorang, *Apesamakahene* or official spokesman of the traditional Council of Akropong-Akuapem, reasons as follows:

Well, the Bible provides examples of Christ healing. But I think that whatever Christ has done is an extension of the power of God. ... [I]n

⁸⁸ The fact that all 4 respondents who cite the verse are Protestants, (including 2 Pentecostals among the 1 clergyman and 3 laywomen) raises the question of whether the statement, “By his stripes we are healed,” has entered the conventional vocabulary of Protestant Christians more than Catholic Christians. No firm conclusion can be reached on the basis of the present data, but it might be worth flagging for future research.

Further evidence for this interpretation of Jesus’ healing is found in the following Twi hymn recorded in *Legon Praise*, p. 5:

YESU MBOGYA NO
 Yesu mbogya no
 Na ama manya nkwa
 Nepirakur mu na
 Menya m’ayaresa
 Ne mbogya no mu na
 Wahor me bone.
 Yesu wu yi agye me kra
 Nsti mema no mbo
 Mbo, mbo, mbo (2x)
 Yesu kristo mbo
 Medze mema wo mbo

IT’S THE BLOOD OF JESUS
 It’s the blood of Jesus
 That has given me life
 By his stripes I am healed
 His blood has washed away my sins.
 Jesus died to save my soul,
 So I’ll give Him thanks
 Thanks, thanks, thanks (2x)
 Thank You Jesus Christ,
 I will give you thanks.

⁸⁹ Naomi Gathirwa, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 13, 1998.

⁹⁰ John Muriithi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 12, 1998.

our concept of God, ... God [is] omnipotent. Now, the spiritual attributes of God can be quite safely accredited to Christ. So I do not see any problem with accepting Christ as a healer. He was both a *physical* and *spiritual* healer.⁹¹

Another example holds special interest due to the background of the respondent. Kenyan layman Morompi Ole Ronkei, Associate Director of Communications for Compassion International—Africa, is a Maasai who had virtually no encounter with Christianity until he attended Starehe Boys' Secondary School in Nairobi. His particular clan of Maasai are set apart as "the spiritual leaders of the community," a role which encompasses "political," "prophetic," and "medicinal" functions. Now a self-confessed Christian, Ole Ronkei responds to the question of Jesus as healer, stating, "Yeah, absolutely." He interprets the image in terms of physical healing, affirming, "I see him healing all the time, whether it's just from a headache to physical deformities of one sort or another. I think that is quite applicable." He then connects this conviction to the traditional healing practice of the Maasai, explaining, "Does God heal? Yes, God does. The Maasai herbalists, the spiritual leader, will give you medicine, and he says, 'Well, my friend, I want you to know you're in the hands of *God*. You're *not* in my hands.' Oh yes, and he says that all the time!" Thus it becomes apparent that Ole Ronkei's firm conviction of Jesus as healer is partially informed or at least coloured by his background in traditional Maasai culture. Stating explicitly elsewhere that the God of the Bible is "*really* identical" with the God of the Maasai, *Enkai*, and that there is "virtually no difference" between them, Ole Ronkei has no hesitation in ascribing the healing powers of that God to the person of Jesus.⁹² Thus there are clear theological grounds for perceiving Jesus as healer according to the witness of these African Christians. Biblical teaching is certainly central to the justification given by the respondents. Yet in some cases, like Ole Ronkei's, the healing power assumed in relation to the traditional concept of God converges with the biblical affirmation of God as healer, and is then extended to Jesus.

b) Contemporary Experience

If the biblical and theological rationale is fundamental to the interviewees, contemporary experience of Jesus as healer is even more prominent in the

⁹¹ Nana Addo Birikorang, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 27, 1998.

⁹² Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998. This does not suggest that all African Christians assume that the traditional concept of God among their ethnic societies is identical with the God of the Bible, for the research clearly indicates that this is not the case. However, Ole Ronkei represents those African Christians who do find such continuity in their understanding of God, and what impact this has upon their view of Jesus as healer.

perceptions articulated. Many of the respondents, at least 16 of the 60 individuals with whom the issue was discussed (27%) plus additional focus group members, bear witness to Jesus having healed them personally. Nana Dokua I, *Okuapehemmaa* or Queenmother of the Akuapem traditional area since 1966, offers striking testimony when volunteering the image of Jesus as healer. Seventy-six years old at the time of the interview, Nana Dokua recounts how one time she had become so sick she could no longer walk. She then relates with considerable animation, “[H]e’s my healer, my doctor. ... Formerly, I couldn’t walk properly. Now I can run! *Yes!*” She further narrates how she had suffered gall stones requiring an operation abroad, which eventually took place unexpectedly and for free in a top hospital in the United States which normally costs one thousand dollars per night. After narrating her experience enthusiastically, she exclaims, “Thank you Jesus! He is Lord. He’s Lord. So when I call him ‘my healer, my daddy, my husband’—my [deceased] husband used to do that, but he hasn’t got enough money to pay one thousand dollars a night! Only *Jesus* can do it!” Then, even more poignantly, Nana Dokua speaks candidly of her own experience of childlessness and the intense suffering this situation creates for women in the traditional culture. Yet she identifies Jesus as the one who has enabled her to transcend this grief.⁹³ Hence she concludes by speaking joyfully, with laughter, of Jesus’ impact “[i]n everything! In all my ways. Jesus has been a good friend. A doctor, a healer! My protector! My fortress! My shield! Everything.”⁹⁴

Ghanaian Protestant laywoman Irene Odotei also initiates the observation that Jesus is perceived meaningfully as healer by African Christians. She speaks honestly about her own experience of healing in this way: “I reached a point where I was *breaking*. And it was when I committed my life to Christ, I saw healing in my own life: ... *physical* healing, and even my mind, you know, emotional and all that. ... So I see Jesus a lot also as a *healer*, as a *repairer*....”⁹⁵ The most dramatic witness to personal healing, however, is voiced by religious sister Marie Gacambi, mentioned above as a lecturer at the Catholic University of East Africa. In response to the central question of who Jesus is to her personally, she spontaneously speaks of Jesus as a friend and the impact this has had upon her own life. To explain, she recounts having been in a serious car accident in 1973, in which the driver was killed and she was hospitalised for almost a year. She describes how unexpectedly to her, Archbishop Milingo, the Catholic Bishop from Zambia renowned for his gifts of

⁹³ The significance of Jesus to childless women is noted here, for women’s acceptance of this condition goes against traditional African views of human wholeness requiring fecundity. Jesus’ significance in this regard is reiterated in Chapter 8.

⁹⁴ Nana Dokua I, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 18, 1998.

⁹⁵ Irene Odotei, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

healing, came to pray for her. Her experience is well worth citing, despite its length, for the extraordinary outcome and for her conclusion regarding Jesus as healer. She recounts,

And he *prayed* over ... me. And all that I remember, he would say—you know, I had a broken pelvis. The bottom part and the top were separated, and so even after I had stayed in the hospital, I could never be able to walk. I could never *stand*—if I stood, my leg would swell like a balloon. And I had a *big* lump here at my back. I used to go every month to the International House for ... physiotherapy with a machine, so that the liquid can be.... So I had all those disabilities. When he came, and after we had spoken, he said, ‘Can I pray? Let us pray.’ So I just sat on a chair like this, and he stood next to me. And he put his hand on my face and he said, ‘Mamma, go to sleep.’ And I literally went to sleep! That type of sleep where you can hear what is happening, but you are not able to, you know—I was *so* comfortable where I was that I can’t open my eyes! ... [B]ut I could hear him saying, ‘In the name of Jesus, *pelvis* go back to your place. In the name of Jesus.’ And literally, I felt the bones moving, moving! Then he would order the blood, he would say, ‘Heart, pump the blood to all parts of the body in the name of Jesus.’ And I literally felt a *current*! So, at the end of it, he said, ‘Mamma, wake up. The Lord has healed you.’ When he said those words, ‘The Lord has healed you,’ is when I came to realise something has happened! So, for me, the whole question of Jesus being a friend to me, it is *not only* intellectually; I have *experienced* it. I’ve experienced his healing power, not only physically ... but also psychologically. I’m able to cope with things that previously I could not. ... [S]o that’s why it is not only physically but it’s also psychologically and it’s spiritually which is a *wholeness* of healing.⁹⁶

These accounts thus typify the witness of many African Christians in the oral interviews concerning their own experience of Jesus healing.

An even greater number of individuals attest to their experience of seeing others healed by Jesus. Examples are akin to those previously cited, reflecting healing in various dimensions of life including physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual. Still others, though far fewer in number, speak of their own personal involvement in healing ministries, as did Nzeki above. For example, Ghanaian S. S. Quarcoopome, Senior Research Fellow in Modern History and Politics at the Institute of African Studies, Legon, and also resident pastor of a charismatic church, gives a succinct summary of the components of rationale discussed thus far: “Yes, Jesus is a healer. He healed when he was on earth and he’s still healing now. I can testify to this, because I have used his name, ‘In the name of Jesus be healed,’ and

⁹⁶ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

things have taken place. Simple—just on faith. He *is* a healer.”⁹⁷ Masinde, the pastor of a charismatic church in Nairobi, concurs on the basis of his ministry experience. Yet he also stresses that God does not heal everyone, for he concludes,

See, you’ve got to realise, physical healing is not our aim. Our aim is to serve God with our lives and glorify him in our death. And if God’s going to take someone home through the way of sickness and disease, I won’t question him. That doesn’t stop him from being a healer. I still preach him as a healer.⁹⁸

Contemporary experience therefore plays a crucial role in determining Christians’ perceptions of Jesus as healer, whether the healing is experienced personally, witnessed in others, or sought on behalf of others. Additional evidence arising from the current context includes the proliferation of healing ministries depicting Jesus in this role. Respondents refer to healing masses and church services, as well as large evangelistic crusades or rallies which incorporate prayer for healing such as those held in Nairobi’s Uhuru Park or Kasarani Stadium.⁹⁹ Kenyan Circle member Mary Getui points out further indications of widespread interest in Jesus as healer, including crowds flocking to evangelists from Kenya, the West, and from the Far East who advertise for people to “Come for a Miracle,” or to the powerful healing ministry of Kenyan Mary Akatsa. She also notes the centrality of healing among African Independent Churches, plus the close connection between healing and evangelism in hospital and prison ministries.¹⁰⁰ While problems related to these manifestations have yet to be addressed, all these factors confirm the extent to which contemporary experience fortifies African Christians’ identification of Jesus as healer.

4. The Meaning of Jesus as Healer

Various aspects of the meaning of this christological image have already emerged in the discussion thus far. Yet four main affirmations serve to summarise the interpretations of African Christians in this regard. First, the image of Jesus as

⁹⁷ S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

⁹⁸ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

⁹⁹ For example, Kenyan Catholic priest David Kamau is the Vicar at Holy Family Basilica in downtown Nairobi. He relates how people attend the healing mass services in great numbers and explains, “So, they take Christ as a healer.” He further testifies that he has seen healings take place during these services. David Kamau, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998. Likewise Ghanaian Protestant pastor Theophilus Dankwa describes the healing ministry conducted in the Accra Chapel, concluding that the fact that people come forward to request prayer and to testify of being healed “shows that we have confidence in Christ as a healer.” Theophilus Dankwa, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 16, 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

healer corresponds to that of Jesus as life-giver, for it asserts that Jesus restores life where it has been diminished, that he repairs life where it has been broken. Bujo draws a fundamental connection between the healings which Jesus performed in his earthly ministry and the fullness of life he brings, expressed as follows: “Et même les guérisons que Jésus a opérées ne doivent pas être vues uniquement sous l’aspect de la révélation de sa divinité, mais le Christ veut par ailleurs souligner qu’en tant que Messie il vient donner la vie en plénitude à tous les niveaux.”¹⁰¹ In addition, Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Aboagye-Mensah is among those whose first suggestion of christological images meaningful to Africans is that of Jesus as healer. He claims, “It’s one of the major ones,” and describes “Jesus as the healer, one who heals not only our sicknesses but our *deep*, deeply wounded souls. One who puts us together, as it were....”¹⁰² Similarly Kenyan Protestant laywoman Marcy Muhia offers her understanding of Jesus as healer in terms of “one who is able to restore the *inner* man, to create wholeness in the inner man.” She elaborates further, explaining that

when Christ comes into your life, something fundamental happens within you, and he begins a process of restoration. Your body disintegrates—that’s fine—and I think as life has gone on, I’m more and more accepting that, because we live in a fallen world, disease is a must. Loss is a must. But, more and more, I think I’m understanding what it means for Christ to *really* heal, that there’s a restoration of the inner man that is taking place as well. We’re *broken*, we’re broken in our sinfulness, *broken* in our relationships because of that sinfulness, *broken* in our emotions because of unhealthy patterns of life.... Those things have brought about a brokenness in us. And I think *Christ* is able to heal that, to heal *very* completely.¹⁰³

The second major affirmation is closely related to the first, in that the African theologians, church leaders and laypeople alike emphasise Jesus’ healing as the re-creation of wholeness in all aspects of life. Pobee encapsulates the notion, stating, “[H]ealing is at base a quest after wholeness of being and person, body, soul and mind.”¹⁰⁴ Attention has already been drawn to the holistic approach to healing

¹⁰¹ Bénédet Bujo, “Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique,” in *Combats pour un christianisme africain: Mélanges en l’honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*, Bibliothèque du Centre d’Etudes des Religions Africaines, no. 6, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1981), 27. “And even the healings that Jesus performed must not be seen only under the aspect of the revelation of his divinity, but Christ wants to stress besides that in his role as the Messiah, he comes to give life in fullness at all levels.”

¹⁰² Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

¹⁰³ Marcy Muhia, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

¹⁰⁴ John S. Pobee, “Healing—An African Christian Theologian’s Perspective,” 251. See also Pobee, “Health, Healing and Religion.”

generally characteristic of African peoples, and certainly the textual and oral christologies depict Jesus as healer in this light. Approximately one quarter of the 60 individuals with whom this image was discussed stressed that Jesus' healing goes beyond the physical to encompass, in combined responses, the spiritual, emotional, moral, psychological and relational dimensions.¹⁰⁵ Kenyan Protestant laywoman Mabel Correa adds further facets in stating that Jesus heals not only diseases but also "situations of finances because Jesus is an *all-round healer*. He's opened up doors for jobs, for marriage, for a husband and wife to get together, things like that."¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the holistic interpretation of healing extends beyond the individual to incorporate the communal dimensions of life. For example, Nasimiyu Wasike underlines that Jesus' healing in the gospels was both physical and spiritual, and she concludes, "Jesus inaugurated the restoration of individuals and societies to wholeness and he invited the disciples to participate in this re-establishment."¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere she outlines the significance of this interpretation of healing for the African context, in referring to an editorial from the *Daily Nation* in Kenya (Tuesday 3/12/96) which lamented that Kenyan society was becoming increasingly immoral, sick, corrupt and in a state of total decay. In response, she voices the call of liberation theologians for "a spirituality of justice" to permeate all the activities of Jesus' disciples both as individuals and as communities.¹⁰⁸ Bujo underlines the same point. While full explication of the ancestral paradigm for Jesus awaits the following chapter, the integral relationship between the images appears when Bujo remarks,

Jesus Christ as a *healer*, for example, ... is very actual here in our society. ... [T]his healer is *not only* for sickness, but he has to heal all the misery in society, if we believe ... he is a new Proto-Ancessor, because the Proto-Ancessor is the one who is giving life in *all* the areas—not only the biological life.¹⁰⁹

Thus the portrayal of Jesus as healer signifies the restoration of life in its various dimensions, both for individuals and for communities.

Within this comprehensive view of life, one area requires particular attention in explicating a third affirmation concerning Jesus as healer in Africa. Given Ela's

¹⁰⁵ This figure includes 5 out of the 27 Kenyan respondents (19%) and 9 out of the 33 Ghanaian respondents (27%), making a total of 14 out of 60 (23%) individuals who made comments to this effect. Similar perceptions occur in 4 out of the 11 focus groups (36%) with whom it was discussed.

¹⁰⁶ Mabel Correa, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 80.

¹⁰⁸ Nasimiyu Wasike, Anne, "Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context," *Propositum* 3, no. 1 (June 1998): 28-29.

¹⁰⁹ Bénézét Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

insistence that the African universe of sickness is inseparable from the spirit world and that consequently healing must be addressed within this symbolic universe, the ongoing propensity for Christians to seek out traditional priests is acknowledged as a serious challenge to the Church of Africa. Ela therefore urges Christians to consider carefully the role which such traditional healers play in the life of local populations, and he questions, “En milieu africain, l’Eglise ne devrait-elle pas prendre Jésus au mot en son Evangile en mettant à profit le pouvoir qui lui a été donné d’imposer les mains et de guérir les malades? (Mc. 16, 18).”¹¹⁰ He emphasises the importance of such healing ministries, and again calls for the Bible to be reread in such a way as to relate the African person to the invisible world, thereby assuming the symbolic universe of sickness and healing in order to effect the salvation power inherent in the gospel. He then concludes,

Dans un contexte où l’Africain est affronté aux forces de l’invisible à l’œuvre dans l’univers, l’Eglise doit trouver une manière adéquate de proclamer la primauté du Christ (Col. 1, 15-20) en se rappelant que saint Paul ne condamne pas les puissances et les principautés, auxquelles les nouveaux convertis du monde grec accordaient encore une grande importance. Car, il s’attache surtout à préciser la position capitale du Christ de qui vient tout salut. En Afrique Noir, **le monde de la Nuit ou de l’Invisible est peut-être le lieu privilégié où il nous faut entendre la Bonne Nouvelle de la Descente de Jésus aux Enfers (1 P. 3, 19-20) afin d’annoncer la libération à l’homme africain menacé par le pouvoir occulte.**¹¹¹

Oduyoye concurs, for she also points out what is at stake in this way:

It is therefore not strange that if relief from evil influences, from the spiritual oppressors, is not felt by members of Christian churches, they move from church to church as well as to-and-fro between the church and the *Odunsini*, the traditional healer of body and soul.

¹¹⁰ Ela, “De l’assistance à la libération,” 3. “In the African environment, should not the Church take Jesus at his word in the Gospels in putting to profit the power which has been given to it to lay hands on and to heal the sick? (Mk. 16:18).”

¹¹¹ Ibid.

In a context in which the African is confronted with forces of the invisible at work in the universe, the Church has to find an adequate manner of proclaiming the primacy of Christ (Col. 1:15-20) in remembering that Saint Paul did not condemn the powers and the principalities, to which the new converts from the Greek world still accorded a great importance. For, he applied himself above all to specifying the paramount position of Christ from whom comes all salvation. In Black Africa, **the world of the Night or of the Invisible is perhaps the privileged place in which we must understand the Good News of the Descent of Jesus into Hell (1 Pet. 3:19-20) in order to announce the liberation to the African man menaced by occult power.**

Nevertheless, Jesus, ‘the Great Physician,’ is the anchor of their faith, for he is preached as the healer par excellence....¹¹²

The image of Jesus as healer prevailing over evil powers features very prominently among the African Initiated Churches. Hence reference must be made to them, despite the fact that they lie beyond the scope of the present study, for the challenge they bring to the historic churches. Amoah and Oduyoye observe the remarkable growth of these churches and note, “Christ, the great Healer, is seen as the center of the Christology of these charismatic churches.”¹¹³ Pobe also draws attention to the importance of healing within the African Instituted Churches. He cites researchers including Appiah-Kubi who have demonstrated that healing forms the most important reason for people joining these churches.¹¹⁴ Pobe’s emphasis is that the healing and exorcism practised therein accords well with African ontology and epistemology, and that such ministries often arose in reaction to the attitudes of the mission churches. Following his own examination of the biblical evidence concerning Jesus as healer, Pobe concludes as follows:

Evidently, the gospel’s healing and exorcism by the Spirit of God were a significant part of the ministry of Jesus and his followers, even if he did not overplay it. It accords well with the contemporary worldview in which ailments were not just matters of cause and effect but also have spiritual ramifications, if not origins. That whole world

¹¹² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 44.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 39. Note 7, p. 46, clarifies that the “charismatic” churches referred to are indeed African Indigenous Churches and not western Pentecostal charismatic churches. The point made by these women theologians is confirmed by Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Thomas Oduro, formerly from an African Independent Church himself and currently Principal of a theological college comprising mostly students from these churches. When asked about any distinctive christologies characteristic of these indigenous churches, he responds immediately with the image of Jesus as healer, stating,

Well, in fact they have a lot of perceptions.... The first one is Jesus as a doctor, as a medical doctor. They go to church and they expect Jesus Christ to heal them of all their diseases. One, because they may not have money to go to these western medical centers. And two because they consider Jesus Christ as being [more] knowledgeable and being [more] powerful than any other medical doctor they know. So that is a very important factor in their christology. Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

¹¹⁴ This observation is widely recognized in the field of African Christianity. For example, Bujo emphasises the following point:

One of the most important aspects of christology today is also this ... *healing*. ... I say that because there are *many* churches, Independent churches in Africa for example. Why people are going to these churches is that the official churches—Protestant and Catholic—they didn’t elaborate the aspect of *healing*. And *Jesus Christ* is a *healer* for the Africans. Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

Furthermore, the point is reiterated in the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant clergy. Joseph Lamptey, Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998.

now accords well with the African story even today. On the other hand, the churches founded by missionary bodies in Europe and America have been reluctant, if not unwilling, to accept this healing and exorcism by the power of the Spirit, especially if it is through Africans.¹¹⁵

While acknowledging the positive role of medical missions and granting that there is a growing awareness of the importance of healing within the historic churches,¹¹⁶ Pobee nonetheless calls for rehabilitation of the healing ministry as a significant part of mission in Africa today.

The combined proclamations of these theologians, together with the witness of the African Initiated Churches, indicate the third main point regarding the meaning of Jesus as healer. That is, the image conveys Jesus' supremacy over every form of evil operating in the universe, whether it is manifested in the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, or any other sphere of life. In this sense, Jesus as healer overlaps with closely related images like "victor," "conqueror," and "warrior," or the one who defeats all that is life-negating instead of life-affirming. That Jesus is indeed perceived in this role emerges in the oral interviews, in which 12 out of the total 65 individual respondents (19%) initiate comments to this effect, such as Jesus having conquered all enemies including disease, evil spirits, and death itself.¹¹⁷

Strong evidence for this perception emerges particularly in the Ghanaian context, as the following three respondents demonstrate. It was pointed out above that in response to the question concerning images especially meaningful to African Christians, Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Aboagye-Mensah immediately suggests Jesus as healer. He then continues,

[R]elated to this, is Jesus as the *victor*, one who is victorious over the spiritual *forces*, whether it's in the powers of darkness, principalities and powers and so on. ... [T]hese are some of the areas that most

¹¹⁵Pobee, "Healing—An African Christian Theologian's Perspective," 250. Pobee outlines several reasons for western missionaries' suspicion regarding healing ministries, including (1) the Reformation tendency to spiritualise sickness and healing, thereby downplaying their factuality, (2) the influence of the Enlightenment, which separated the body from the mind and thus reduced healing to the physical realm, (3) a changed anthropology which sharply distinguished the physical and spiritual, creating a dualistic view of humanity in contrast to the scriptural view of humanity as integrated beings, and (4) the age of science and technology which has attempted to exorcise the universe of the supernatural or extra-ordinary, and to reduce sickness and healing to cause and effect.

¹¹⁶ This observation is confirmed through participant observation in a variety of church services attended in Kenya and Ghana which included healing prayers and testimonies. It is further attested by Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Bernard Marbell, who reports, "We used to have mainline denominations who did not have much healing services. Now they *all* have because their members were going to other places where they can have, as it were, healing services." Bernard Marbell, *Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem*: Aug. 13, 1998.

¹¹⁷ It is noteworthy that 11 out of the 12 occurrences are voiced by Ghanaians, inviting further exploration of possible significance in this pattern.

people, when they come to you, will want solace and prayer for, because they believe that Jesus has overcome these powers of darkness and therefore can set them free from those.¹¹⁸

Another Ghanaian clergyman Peter Kodjo, Chairman of the Ga Presbytery, responds to the same question by referring to the prayers of Afua Kuma, a non-literate Christian woman introduced at the outset of this thesis.¹¹⁹ On the basis of these vernacular prayers, Kodjo explains that “*Jesus* is seen as ... the *victor*. They use the African literary language to show that Jesus is the conqueror, the person who *destroys* the devil, evil forces, all that militates against our humanisation.”¹²⁰ Later in the interview Kodjo returns to the image of conqueror, stressing that “[i]t’s *real* for many people,” and that the imagery is much richer and more vivid in vernacular than the English translation can convey. Additionally, Ghanaian clergyman Dan Antwi, Principal of Trinity Theological College, confirms the importance of the vernacular in this regard. He responds enthusiastically to the image of Jesus as healer, underlining its importance to the Ghanaian context and citing three vernacular titles as corroboration. He replies,

Ah! That one? It’s an amazing and *powerful* one especially ... because you see, we are in a society where we are exposed to ailments and so on. Saviour, the expression ‘saviour,’ in the vernacular ‘*ogyefo*,’ ‘one who really rescues you’ and he may rescue you not only from danger but from disease.... ‘**[O]***sa osahene*,’ ... you can have ‘*osahene*’ who is the *conquering king*, the one who leads in battle and so on. You can also [have] ‘*ɔɔɔfu Yesu*,’ the one who heals. And we have those categories, and sometimes you hear people praying in those categories: ‘Jesus, a healer who heals and who doesn’t accept down payment for healing. But he heals and heals completely.’ ... [W]hen people are praying and addressing him you *hear* those categories. Yes. So, it’s there.¹²¹

Thus despite the reluctance of the modern missionary movement in general to portray Jesus as healer in the light of African concepts of healing and sickness, many African Christians today nonetheless view him in this traditional role as triumphing over the powers of darkness, disease and death.

Jesus as healer, then, means that he restores life, and life in all its dimensions encompassing individual and communal aspects. The image further signifies that Jesus is perceived as supreme over every life-diminishing force. The vernacular titles introduced above lead to a fourth and final affirmation regarding the meaning of

¹¹⁸ Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

¹¹⁹ See p. 5 above.

¹²⁰ Peter Kodjo, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

¹²¹ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

Jesus as healer; namely, that the image is intrinsically related to other significant roles such as saviour, liberator and redeemer. For example, Oduyoye makes the fundamental assertion that “[t]he cry for salvation/liberation in Africa is primarily a cry for health and wholeness.”¹²² Likewise Nasimiyu Wasike sets forth the premise that “[h]ealing is part and parcel of liberation and inculturation,”¹²³ which she argues on the basis of Jesus’ healing ministry and its significance to Africa today. The interrelatedness of the concepts of saving, healing, conquering and protecting comes through in discussions of vernacular terms employed for Jesus. For example, in speaking of Ghanaian Christians, Protestant laywoman Irene Odotei explains,

They see him as a *protector*, like a *saviour*. ... ‘*Agyenkwa*,’ ... he’s given you *life* ... the saviour. And they see him as a *warrior*, ‘*Osa, Osa-berima Yehowa*.’ ... [T]hey see God as an ‘*Osa-berima Yehowa*.’ And protector, the big *rock*, ... the big *fortress*, fortress.¹²⁴

Finally, Ghanaian Catholic layman George Hagan spells out how Jesus is understood as healer not only in line with biblical teaching, but also in accordance with cultural expectation. With respect to the latter he explains,

Now in the African cultures too, healing is a holistic thing. It is always seen as having a spiritual dimension, you see. So you would *expect* a charismatic figure, a spiritual figure, in fact our healers were *all* spiritual figures, you see. Our herbalists were supposed to know things physical and things spiritual. Our fetish priests and priestesses were operating in the realm of the spiritual, they were supposed to have powers of healing. So ... the association between spirituality and healing is already there in the minds of our people. And *if* you have come to say that Christ is a redeemer, and yet a redeemer who did not have the power to heal, it would have sounded very odd ... in the ears of an African. So the *healing* image of Christ is a very vivid one, something that is *very*, very important, strikes a chord in the mind of an African.¹²⁵

5. Problems with the Image of Jesus as Healer

According to many voices in this study, the image of Jesus as healer is especially important to African Christians. However, some express alternative views. For example, Ghanaian Protestant clergyman B. Y. Quarshie certainly affirms Jesus as healer, yet he rules against seeing this as anything specifically African. He admits, “[W]hen I think about healer, what comes to mind is *not* strictly speaking a typical

¹²² Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 44.

¹²³ Nasimiyu Wasike, “Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context,” 13.

¹²⁴ Irene Odotei, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

¹²⁵ George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 28; Aug. 6, 1998.

... African healer or anything of the sort.” Instead, he makes the point that “it’s *really* a matter of trying to see that yes, Christ is the answer to *every* situation, *every* matter pertaining to any given context. So *if* in that given context, the issue is one of disease, *then* Christ can be presented in that context indeed as a healer.” Yet his overall contention relates back to the central concept of Jesus as life-giver, for he concludes, “[I]f we talk, for example, about Christ being life, and therefore everything that life is, we would do away with things that negate *life*. I would see Christ’s affirmation as meaning that indeed he can *heal*. But that would only be one aspect of it.”¹²⁶

The contrasting perspectives are not necessarily contradictory, but they do reflect certain tensions inherent in depicting Jesus according to traditional African categories. On the one hand, African concepts of healing and healers inevitably influence the interpretations of African Christians regarding Jesus as healer. Often this background serves to enhance the understanding of Jesus in this role, as clearly manifest in the textual and oral data presented thus far. On the other hand, however, such cultural constructs can potentially diminish one’s apprehension of Jesus, as Quarshie, among others, intimates. Again, the issue is not so much diametrically opposed views, but more a matter of balance and proportion as certain voices seek to guard against the reduction of Jesus to any role defined too narrowly. Hence Protestant clergyman Abraham Akrong, Research Fellow in African Religions and Philosophy at the University of Ghana, Legon, voices both a ready acceptance and a certain extension of the concept of Jesus as healer:

Yeah, Jesus as healer, too. You see, in the traditional society, the *healer* is not just a herbalist. The healer combines prophecy or divination. He will combine *wisdom*, insight—they are very good counsellors—... so that when Christ also becomes a healer, he combines all these things. He does not only heal, he counsels you, he brings fullness into your life. So in that sense, Christ as a healer is also part of the *wider* scope within which we want to understand the nature of Christ.¹²⁷

Further challenges regarding the image of Jesus as healer emerge in the oral interviews. In line with these cautions about narrowly skewing perceptions of Christ, Ghanaian Catholic priest Joseph Aggrey voices the danger of parochial thinking about Jesus, or fashioning him according to one’s own understanding and current needs. Although Aggrey volunteers the image of healer for Jesus, he warns,

¹²⁶ B. Y. Quarshie, Oral Interview, Accra: July 29, 1998.

¹²⁷ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

So sometimes what Jesus is to somebody can be seen by what the person is going through. You get what I mean? There are some people who see Jesus ... *only* as a healer, because maybe they are *sick*. There are some people who because they are poor, they want Jesus to change stones into bread for them. So if you don't take care, you will be kind of parochial in your thinking about Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ embodies *everything*. ... So there is that danger, of losing sight of who Jesus is. You're only thinking of who Jesus is in reference to your problem, the situation in which you find yourself.¹²⁸

Additional problems can only be summarized briefly at present. Ghanaian Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle relates his experience of parishioners who come to him expecting instantaneous, miraculous cures, some of whom are "shattered" when he not only prays with them but also advises them to go to the hospital. As indicated at the outset of this section on Jesus as healer, problems are voiced not with the image *per se*, but with how it is portrayed in contemporary healing ministries. In this case Palmer-Buckle regrets that "most of our preachers present slambang miraculous healing as the only form of healing Jesus presented, but that's not true from the scriptures."¹²⁹ Likewise Kenyan Peter Gichure, lecturer at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary and at the Catholic University of East Africa, laments that "the emphasis on Jesus the healer can be another euphoria" with evangelists openly exploiting Africans "in *very* desperate situations," unable to afford drugs or medical care. He objects to the widespread healing ministries which in his mind distort the true meaning of Jesus' healing as related to "the kingdom, or the reign of God."¹³⁰ Furthermore, Ghanaian Bishop Peter Sarpong is among those who decry the undue stress on Jesus' physical healing.¹³¹ For as Juliana Senavoe, Ghanaian Protestant clergywoman and Principal of Christian Service College, Kumasi, explains,

He heals, because he's involved in the totality of life.... But his primary intention is not to heal the body, because I believe that after you have healed and healed and healed, this body is—healing is just a postponement of death, for a while. Then it will have to succumb to death, and therefore healing is not the primary thing. Yes, he does heal. He heals me, I definitely saw that with my cancer, earlier on. So yes, he does heal, but that's not his primary task.¹³²

Kenyan Protestant Bishop Titus Kivunzi concurs, underlining that physical healing is secondary to the spiritual healing which Jesus as saviour accomplishes.¹³³ Finally,

¹²⁸ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

¹²⁹ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua, Ghana: Sept. 10, 1998.

¹³⁰ Peter Gichure, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹³¹ Peter Sarpong, Oral Interview, Kumasi, Ghana: Sept. 7, 1998.

¹³² Juliana Senavoe, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 18, 1998.

¹³³ Titus Kivunzi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

Kwesi Dickson is among those who criticise unwarranted focus on the human minister of healing, remarking that “in many instances, *Christ* plays second fiddle to these human leaders, I suspect.” He further points out the problem of inadequate teaching regarding Jesus as “the one who overcomes all,” citing his experience with particular church leaders who feared that a certain sick person would be “finished off” by his enemies through witchcraft.¹³⁴ Thus various challenges definitely emerge with respect to the image of Jesus as healer in Africa, primarily stemming from its portrayal in the practice of certain healing ministries.

Yet the most incisive critique of the image comes from Ela. While in no way denying that Jesus is healer, Ela criticises the way in which African theologians commonly depict the image through the approach of christological titles, the results of which are not sufficiently serious and rigorous. In his opinion African christology has only begun, and he expresses his desire to write “une théologie de Jésus-Christ en Afrique. Essayer de rejoindre Jésus-Christ en Afrique, dans notre histoire, à travers notre mémoire.”¹³⁵ With regard to his own christological reflections thus far, Ela explains his approach as follows:

[C]’est de *resaisir* toute la richesse des *sens* du Nouveau Testament, le noyau d’essence du Nouveau Testament, à partir de ce que j’appelle les gens d’en-bas. Comprendre Jésus-Christ, Dieu en Jésus-Christ à partir des gens d’en-bas. Je sais bien que c’est important de présenter Jésus-Christ comme l’ancêtre, comme le maître initiateur, comme le guérisseur, c’est bien tout. Mais dans le contexte où moi j’ai essayé d’élaborer, de regarder Jésus-Christ (...), je suis parti des gens d’en-bas.¹³⁶

Ela’s methodological priorities and his stance towards Jesus as healer emerge in his reflections upon health issues in “The Health of Those without Dignity.”¹³⁷ His point of departure clearly lies in the contemporary context, for he begins with the presupposition that faith must intersect with “the totality of existence and all of its problems,” and that in Africa “it must begin with the people’s struggle to escape

¹³⁴ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

¹³⁵ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1998; “... a theology of Jesus Christ in Africa. To try to meet with Jesus Christ in Africa, in our history, through our memory.”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

It is to *recapture* all the richness of meanings of the New Testament, the core essence of the New Testament, from what I call the people at the bottom of the heap. To understand Jesus Christ, God in Jesus Christ, from the people at the bottom. I know well enough that it is important to present Jesus as ancestor, as the master of initiation, as the healer, it’s all fine. But in the context in which I myself have tried to elaborate, to look at Jesus Christ (...), I start with the people at the bottom.

¹³⁷ Ela, “The Health of Those without Dignity,” chap. in *My Faith as an African*, 67-86.

from the hellish circle in which they risk being permanently imprisoned.”¹³⁸ Hence he focuses on the structures of daily life and examines the social problems, citing recent research which indicated that “health is their priority (75%)—even before family (48%) or job security (33%).”¹³⁹ His central question then challenges the churches to consider their response to this general concern and whether an alternative health care system ought to be developed.

In examining health issues in the contemporary context, Ela traces their roots first through the medical systems established under colonialism, in which health facilities and treatment became integrated into an overall system of domination and exploitation. Since independence, the situation has only worsened with the increasing disparity between the rich and poor and the perpetuation of a socio-economic system in which health care is the privilege of the wealthy minority. In brief, Ela sums it up as “‘class’ medicine” and again calls for the churches to respond to this form of social injustice. He then inquires into the relationship between Christian missions and health programmes in Africa. He points out certain ambiguities in that missionaries provide solid medical care, yet sometimes “the connivance of evangelization with medical work arouses the mistrust of various African sectors,”¹⁴⁰ particularly among Muslims. In light of the historical collusion between Christianity and colonialism, Ela highlights the ensuing problem as follows: “Thus the salvation of the soul and efforts to heal are both interpreted as consolation within a system of oppression and domination.”¹⁴¹ From this contemporary context, then, with the complex health issues arising from colonialism, neo-colonialism and Christian mission, crucial questions arise concerning health care in relation to salvation and the kingdom of God.

Having set forth the critical issues regarding health in Africa today, Ela then tackles the emergent questions in light of biblical teaching. Jesus’ healing ministry is explored within the wider context of sickness and sin in the Bible. On this basis, Ela draws out the theological significance of Jesus’ healings in terms of salvation and liberation. That is to say, the healings are not merely proofs of Jesus’ divinity, but rather they reveal the inauguration of a new age, the fulfilment of messianic hope in the presence of God’s kingdom in the world. So Jesus is not simply a miracle-worker, but “one who roots salvation in the web of history.... Whenever a person is reborn to life by the force of the gospel operating through the words and actions of

¹³⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹³⁹ Ibid.; quoting *Jeune Afrique* (March 12, 1980).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 76.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Jesus, salvation is available in ‘bodily’ form.”¹⁴² Salvation is presented in its communal, cosmic and eschatological dimensions, the latter summarised from Romans 8:20-24 as follows:

In this context, human health appears as one dimension of the salvation whose fullness we await in a glorious future. Strictly speaking, to be healed—that is, to be delivered from evil—is in itself to be saved. Humanity is invited to enter into that state of creation marked by the saving power of the Resurrection.¹⁴³

However, Ela’s acknowledgement of the eschatological dimension of healing is not prey to the tendency of some forms of mission Christianity which have condoned present suffering in hopes of future bliss in heaven. On the contrary, Ela takes a strongly liberationist approach, first depicting Jesus’ healing ministry as indication that he is the “new Moses (Acts 3:22; 7:37; Deut. 18:15), the Messiah announced by the prophets and awaited by the poor and oppressed.”¹⁴⁴ Ela thus concludes,

The many forms of deliverance signified by healing in the gospels define the liberation of humanity through Jesus Christ. They allow us to hear and see the liberating activity of the Messiah on behalf of the poor and oppressed. The incarnation is the time when God decisively announces the gospel and frees the captives (Luke 4:18-19). How can this time of God be actualised in contemporary African society, apart from reference to questions of health? What’s the use of a ‘medicine’ coopted for the benefit of wealthy minorities, when the ‘*lives*’ of those neglected by its progress are stuck in structures of inequity and injustice?¹⁴⁵

The theological interpretation of Jesus as healer therefore informs the agenda Ela advocates: first, exposing the structures which contradict God’s will for humanity and the world; then analysing the socio-economic factors which imprison humans in sickness and misery; and finally, participating in active resistance to current socio-economic structures which are incompatible with the gospel as an essential feature of Christian practice. Ela thus challenges Christians to examine the roots of sickness in the unjust organisation of African societies, and to live the gospel by totally restructuring the living conditions within those societies.

Ela’s contribution to the discussion underlines the fact that although the image of Jesus as healer may be widely held among the selected African Christians, it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion that Jesus fulfils this role in the

¹⁴² Ibid., 78.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 79.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 79-80.

contemporary context. Critical issues regarding the image were raised in the introduction to this second section, including the challenges inherent in relating Jesus to contemporary suffering across the continent and to traditional concepts of illness and healing. These complexities led to serious and legitimate questions concerning whether Jesus can truly be interpreted as healer in Africa today. In response, the data have shown conclusively that the image is indeed operative in the understanding and experience of the vast majority of African Christians under consideration in this study. However, acknowledging manifestation of the image does not approve any sense of triumphalism. For analysis of the substance of the image has brought to light not only positive affirmations concerning its meaning, but also problems hindering its realisation more adequately in the lives of Africans today. Affirmatively, respondents have interpreted Jesus as healer to mean that he restores life wherever it has been diminished, that his healing extends to all aspects of life and encompasses the individual, communal, and cosmic spheres, that it signifies Jesus' supremacy over all powers, however evil, and that its content overlaps with other images such as saviour, liberator and redeemer. Yet contrasting views also emerge, calling for caution against any undue restriction of Jesus by fashioning him according to human cultural constructs or personal needs. Further reservations stem from certain healing ministries considered detrimental to a sound portrayal of Jesus as healer. Ultimately, though, the most acute criticism comes from Ela who, in opposition to the common approach of developing christological titles, champions a much broader methodology of interpreting Jesus as healer in terms of his liberating activity on behalf of the poor and oppressed and his ongoing establishment of the kingdom of God among those who suffer today.

C. Jesus as Traditional Healer

1. Introduction

The centrality of life and healing in African thought underpins the portraits of Jesus as life-giver and healer. As Cécé Kolié asserts, "For the black African person, the aspiration to *life*, to eternity, is so primary that the persons called to administer it hold a place of eminence. Soothsayers and healers, medicine persons of all kinds, are the pillars of social life."¹⁴⁶ Kolié further points out that while other traditional leaders such as chiefs and masters of initiation are on the wane, traditional healers are not. The consequent question is whether the traditional healer provides a salutary image for African Christians to apprehend Jesus.

¹⁴⁶ Kolié, "Jesus as Healer?" 132.

The suggestion of interpreting Jesus in relation to the traditional healer finds early attestation within African theology. Buana Kibongi's 1969 essay, "Priesthood," outlines four main roles of the "*nganga*" or "priest" in the Congolese cultural context: (1) mediator against evil forces, (2) healer, (3) magician, and (4) prophet or visionary.¹⁴⁷ Kibongi goes on to compare this notion of priesthood with that found in the Old Testament, and with Jesus as the high priest of the new covenant. Despite drawing a significant contrast between Jesus and *nganga*, Kibongi nonetheless states,

However the activities of *nganga* throw into relief the idea of salvation or deliverance. *Nganga* is certainly the saviour or the liberator of *Muntu* ["human, person"]. *Nganga* has undoubtedly contributed to the maintenance of the idea of salvation or deliverance. The desire for salvation or deliverance is fully satisfied by the Son of God, the Saviour and Lord of the World.¹⁴⁸

Kibongi thus distinguishes their roles in concluding that "*Nganga* willed to save man, but did not succeed in doing so; Christ did so fully once for all. Christ has therefore accomplished the work of *Nganga*."¹⁴⁹ He nevertheless highlights the significance of the traditional healer by elucidating how African Christians interpret both Jesus and Christian priests, including missionaries and Africans, in light of their prior experience of *nganga*.

Ten years later, Gabriel Setiloane proposed the image of Jesus as traditional healer in an article entitled "Where Are We in African Theology?" Yet he recounts that

[s]ome German theologians were scandalized when I suggested that I would look for the Messiah-*Christos* idea in African thinking somewhere in the area of the African *Bongaka** and in the possession of individual persons by Divinity. I still believe that an authentic African Christology lies in that direction, and the future of African theology lies in digging it out and presenting it to the world.¹⁵⁰

Most African theologians, however, have been conspicuously reticent about recommending the image of Jesus as traditional healer. Matthew Schoffeleers questions why it has not been acknowledged and utilised by African theologians, with the exception of a few like Kibongi and Setiloane who he states have not been

¹⁴⁷ R. Buana Kibongi, "Priesthood," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 50.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ Gabriel M. Setiloane, "Where are We in African Theology?" in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 64.

* Setiloane notes at the bottom of the same page, "This term [in the Tswana language] refers to an African traditional doctor, often derogatively called 'witch-doctor' or 'jujuman'."

treated seriously with respect to this point. He offers two reasons by way of explanation: first, the *nganga* paradigm is viewed as an intrinsic part of indigenous African religion and therefore “tainted too much with syncretistic connotations,” according to the official church; and second, both missionary and African Christian ministers tend to view the *nganga* as a rival with whom they must compete for the same clientele.¹⁵¹ Hence Schoffeleers concludes that most Christian leaders evidently consider it improper to construct a christology on the basis of the *nganga* paradigm.

Certainly the observation of relative silence on the topic is borne out by the textual evidence considered in this study. Of the six theologians selected, I found no explicit reference to Jesus portrayed as a traditional healer.¹⁵² In contrast, Schoffeleers maintains that “at the level of folk theology—at least one christological paradigm exists that is used over large areas of sub-Saharan Africa. That paradigm is the medicine person, known in many Bantu languages by the noun *nganga* or one of its cognates.”¹⁵³ In view of the dichotomy Schoffeleers posits between professional theology and folk theology, questions arise which are germane to this study.¹⁵⁴ First, to what extent does the image of Jesus as traditional healer function either explicitly or implicitly among the selected African Christian respondents? What meaning is ascribed to it? And what rationale is expressed either for supporting or for rejecting the image? Findings from the field research are presented first from Kenya and Uganda, then from Ghana, before conclusions are drawn from all the materials considered together. Since no distinct pattern emerges from the field data to suggest that individual respondents’ views may be correlated to variables such as nationality, age, gender, church affiliation, favoured language for Bible reading and prayer, or theological education, analysis concentrates on the expressed meanings and rationale, as indicated above.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Matthew Schoffeleers, “Christ in African Folk Theology: The *Nganga* Paradigm,” in *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, ed. Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. van Beek, and Dennis L. Thomson (London: James Currey, 1994), 74.

¹⁵² Pobee includes a brief comparison of Jesus and the Akan healer, both of whom are “ensouled” with God when wielding God’s power in performing cures. Yet Pobee stresses that the parallel “can backfire.” As a result he is careful to explain what being “ensouled” with God means and to distinguish the Akan traditional healer’s occasional experience of this state of holiness and Jesus’ perpetual experience of it. Hence the comparison is drawn in the context of conveying the divinity of Jesus, and not by way of suggesting the image for Jesus. See John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 92-93.

¹⁵³ Schoffeleers, “Christ in African Folk Theology,” 74.

¹⁵⁴ While no formal definition of “folk theology” is provided, the author identifies it as being derived from “the population at large” as distinct from the “intellectual elite” or “professional theologians.” This interpretation will be adopted for the present purpose.

¹⁵⁵ Analysis of these variables displayed in matrix tables reveals a roughly equal divide in the case of each variable between those who support and those who reject the image. Therefore no clear correlation may be suggested on the basis of this data.

2. Jesus as “*Mganga*” or Traditional Healer in Kenya and Uganda

a) The Data

Responses from individual interviewees to the question of Jesus as *mganga*¹⁵⁶ or traditional healer are best portrayed as a continuum ranging from an enthusiastic, “Yes! I would have no problem with Jesus as *mganga*. He *is mganga*,”¹⁵⁷ to a firm, “No. No. No. Jesus has no comparison with *mganga*. ... I would say that’s an insult to Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁸ Most responses fall in between these extremes. While some respondents voice only positive or only negative responses, others weigh the pros and cons in presenting Jesus this way. Therefore, if the weight of the evidence or the overall verdict expressed by each person is considered, 14 of the 22 respondents with whom the question was discussed agree that *mganga* is a meaningful way to depict Jesus.¹⁵⁹ Of the remainder, 7 disagree that the image is suitable for Jesus, and one concludes neither positively nor negatively, but stresses that it depends on the geographical context (i.e. acceptable in Tanzania, not so in Kenya). Thus approximately two thirds or 64% of the available responses are favourable towards Jesus as *mganga*, while approximately one third are not. These figures are displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Individual Responses in Kenya & Uganda to the Image of Jesus as *Mganga*¹⁶⁰

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	8 / 22	36 %
Negative Responses Only	5 / 22	23 %
Positive and Negative Responses	9 / 22	41 %
Overall Verdict Positive: 6 / 9		
Overall Verdict Negative: 2 / 9		
Overall Verdict Neutral: 1 / 9		
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	14 / 22	64 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	7 / 22	32 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEUTRAL	1 / 22	4 %

¹⁵⁶ “*Mganga*” is the Swahili noun form equivalent to “*nganga*” in other Bantu languages. The question was posed using the term “*mganga*,” since most educated Kenyans speak Swahili as the national language. However, the phrase “or traditional healer” was added in apposition, to allow respondents to discuss the equivalent figure in their own ethnic society and vernacular.

¹⁵⁷ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

¹⁵⁸ Judy Mbugua, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁵⁹ The “Total Responses Overall Positive” figure of 14 is derived from adding the 8 “Positive Responses Only” with the 6 “Overall Positive Responses. The same method applies for totalling the negative responses, and this forms the pattern for the tables presented throughout this thesis.

¹⁶⁰ See Chart 1 in Appendix 1, p. 354, for the interpretive analysis on which this table is based. Each subsequent table likewise corresponds to the Chart with the equivalent number.

A similar pattern holds true for the focus groups in Kenya with whom the image was discussed.¹⁶¹ Their responses are set forth in Table 2.

Table 2. Focus Group Responses in Kenya to the Image of Jesus as *Mganga*

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	1 / 5	20 %
Negative Responses Only	0 / 5	0 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 1 / 4 Overall Verdict Negative: 1 / 4 Overall Verdict Neutral: 2 / 4	4 / 5	80 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	2 / 5	40 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	1 / 5	20 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEUTRAL	2 / 5	40 %

b) The Meaning of “*Mganga*”

One of the major problems with presenting Jesus in the image of the traditional healer(s) is the confusion surrounding these figures in terms of their definitions and roles.¹⁶² Perceptions have become clouded through colonial and mission history in East Africa, as respondents verify. For example Peter Kiarie, former Director of Education at the Catholic Secretariat in Nairobi who has done extensive research among his own Kikuyu people, points out the anachronism of African medicine men being referred to as “witchdoctors,” a term which “is actually a contradiction because ‘witches’ are ‘witches,’” that is, as distinct from “doctors.”¹⁶³ Before further clarifying the distinction between various terms employed, it must be noted that some respondents attribute the negative connotations associated with the traditional healer to false assumptions and teaching on the part of Christians. Catholic religious sister Gacambi accounts for the negative connotations of the term *mganga*, “because that’s the way we were taught in our catechism, you see? ... So it’s that Christian dimension that really put *everything* that is done by the African as bad. So it *gave* that negative connotation....”¹⁶⁴ Consequently, rather than seeking to clarify definitions from anthropological or religious studies literature, the present aim

¹⁶¹ No focus groups were conducted in Uganda since the research undertaken in this country was an unexpected extension of the original research design focusing on Kenya, as explained in the methodology section in Chapter 2, p. 40.

¹⁶² Regarding “healer,” the optional plural ending “(s)” signifies that “*mganga*” and its vernacular equivalents may be used in reference to more than one religious specialist, as the data reveal. To avoid the cumbersome use of “(s),” the singular “traditional healer” is used as a generic term encompassing the variety of roles and individual specialists delineated in the ensuing discussion.

¹⁶³ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru, Kenya: June 5, 1998.

¹⁶⁴ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

for the purpose of this study is to discern how the term “*mganga*” functions in the thinking of these selected African Christians. For it is in this arena of religious understanding and imagination that the image of Jesus as *mganga* rises or falls.

In defining the terms as traditionally understood, many respondents make a clear distinction between two kinds of figures conveyed. The first is “*mganga*” referring to “the *healer*, the one who *heals*, ... the best *doctor*,”¹⁶⁵ “*daktari*,”¹⁶⁶ “medicine man,”¹⁶⁷ “a spiritual *mganga*” or “herbalist” who mixes herbs to administer to the sick,¹⁶⁸ or “a *seer* who can convey good messages to you.”¹⁶⁹ Masinde points out that the root meaning of the Swahili verb “*kuganga*” is “to treat,” so that the *mganga* is essentially a doctor who treats people.¹⁷⁰ Returning to the observation above concerning the anachronistic term “witchdoctor,” Kiarie explains that Africans distinguish “the witch, the sorcerer,” from “the healer, for the medicine man, or the diviner, ... a herbalist, where you use herbs.” He stresses that in the traditional African context, there was no single individual who could diagnose and deal with all the social problems; hence there were “*mganga* or *waganga*—medicine men—they are of different kinds.” He further identifies two main roles of the medicine man: (1) divination, to discern why someone is sick, for example if a taboo has been broken or a demand by the ancestors is unfulfilled, and (2) prescription, to remedy the situation through actual medicine, sacrifice, or “praying for healing directly from the spiritual powers, from the divine powers.”¹⁷¹

Kiarie then distinguishes these “*experts*” who have learned some trade, such as the herbalists, from the second kind of figure “who would also be very suspicious.” He continues, “Some *waganga* claim to have other superior powers—they are not divine powers.” In this category he places people dealing with “*majini*,” or power from “the evil spirits or the demons,” and also “*astrologers*, ... the people who are reading your palms and claiming to have power, you see these kind of magical powers.” He summarises that “there are people who are out there to *control*, and even make a lot of money. And they survive also on people’s enmities.” Again, in contrast, he stresses that “in the positive African context, people respected very

¹⁶⁵ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

¹⁶⁶ John Muriithi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 12, 1998. “*Daktari*” is a modern Swahili adaptation of “doctor.”

¹⁶⁷ Gerald Wanjohi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

¹⁶⁸ Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁶⁹ Njoroge Mwangi, Focus Group, Ruiru, Kenya: June 7, 1998.

¹⁷⁰ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998. This definition is supported by the focus group of Kenyan Catholic laity. Gervase Kariuki observes, “What does a *mganga* do? ... He cures.” Charles Otieno further specifies, “So if you talk of *mganga*, *mganga* can also be someone who can treat you when you are sick.” Focus Group, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹⁷¹ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

much the medicine man.”¹⁷² Likewise in the focus group of Kenyan Catholic clergy, Njorogi Mwangi distinguishes the positive role of the “*mganga*” or “medicine man” from its negative counterpart, “*mchawi*” in Swahili, defined as “a sorcerer,” “a witch,” “a wizard,” or “somebody who can bring *bad* things.”¹⁷³

Additional respondents further confirm the negative connotations which they or others associate with the term “*mganga*.” Kenyan Catholic Archbishop Nzeki speaks of how it has become blurred in Kenya with “the *mganga* witchcraft” or the “one who puts fear into you.”¹⁷⁴ The former chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Nairobi, Gerald Wanjohi, explains that *mganga* is also understood as “a wizard, who is actually a *sorcerer*, who actually finds ways to eliminate people, ... one who practices black magic, so to speak.”¹⁷⁵ Additional descriptions include “a person who practices superstition,”¹⁷⁶ who “is associated with evil,”¹⁷⁷ and “a kind of seer, in a negative way,” or someone who uses spiritual power in a malicious way.¹⁷⁸ The term “witchdoctor” continues to be used, as evidenced in the oral interviews. For example, Masinde employs it referring to one who “doubles in the spiritual underworld, the dark world, devil worship. And his powers are not from God, *or* from herbs—it’s actually demonic.”¹⁷⁹ Various members of the focus group of Catholic laity also speak of “witchdoctor” as, for example, “one who kills.”¹⁸⁰

Given these contrasting interpretations of the same term, *mganga*, it is not surprising that the application of the term to Jesus is controversial. To illustrate the extent of the confusion regarding terminology, it is notable that Catholic priest Kamau volunteers the image of Jesus as “the greatest African medicine man.” He explains why this image is so significant to African Christians in light of the context of widespread African belief, and his summary is worth citing in full for its recapitulation of the meanings delineated above. He states,

Yeah! Yeah, it is *there*, in the sense that Africans believe in witchcrafts, sorcerers, wizards, and these affect our lives even today.
... In the sense that, according to African cosmology, worldview, it

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Njoroge Mwangi, Focus Group, Ruiru: June 7, 1998. Mary Koinange in the focus group of Kenyan PACWA women makes a similar contrast, as follows: “[T]here is much difference between *mganga* and *mchawi*. *Mchawi* kills ... but *mganga* heals and makes good. They are two different words ... so, *mchawi*, a killer. It would be a killer, would be a witchcraft.” (Focus Group, Nairobi: June 13, 1998)

¹⁷⁴ Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁷⁵ Gerald Wanjohi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

¹⁷⁶ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

¹⁷⁷ Leah Obwa, Focus Group, Ngong Town, Kenya: June 12, 1998.

¹⁷⁸ David Kamau, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁷⁹ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

¹⁸⁰ Focus Group of Catholic Laity, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

starts with God, then the spiritual beings. Below the spiritual beings, you have man. And below man, then we have the living and non-living beings. Now, within this penetrates a mystical power, and this mystical power gives life [according] to this worldview.... Now, there are people who have the knowledge of this mystical power, and they use this mystical power to *harm* the people. And these are the witchcrafts, sorcerers, and wizards. But again, there are also other people who use this power to do good *to* the people. And these are African medicine men. So they confront the other group that want to harm the people. Now, ... Jesus is the greatest African medicine man. He can use that *power* to heal, to help the people. So as an African, I would say Jesus is the greatest medicine man who *fight*s the witchcrafts and sorcerers. And therefore we should not be afraid of these people....¹⁸¹

While advocating that Jesus be understood in these terms, Kamau nevertheless rejects the image of Jesus as *mganga* because of its negative connotations. Hence he concludes that Jesus is a medicine man but not a *mganga*, despite the fact that his interpretation of the “medicine man” correlates closely with what others attribute to “*mganga*.” Hermeneutical complexities of this nature thus underpin the ambivalence African Christians express in relation to the image of Jesus as *mganga*, as delineated in the following sections.

c) Rationale for the Image of Jesus as *Mganga*

The data findings presented above disclose that approximately two thirds of the individual interviewees and almost half of the focus groups with whom the image of Jesus as *mganga* was discussed were by and large favourable in response. Three main reasons are given in support. First, it is argued that the term “*mganga*” has been condemned, or has gained negative connotations, without adequate investigation. Hence there is need to recover traditional terms and concepts which may enhance African Christians’ understanding of Jesus and their practice of healing ministries. As Catholic lecturer Gacambi puts it, “I feel it would be good to *start reclaiming* those titles and showing the positive element. Yes, because as long as we keep away from them, then you know, we lose this element that we are trying to enhance.”¹⁸² The basis for recovering traditional terms is the conviction that Jesus fulfils the role that the traditional healer plays in many African societies. For example, Bonifes Adoyo in the focus group of Protestant clergy takes a somewhat pragmatic approach, expressed as follows:

¹⁸¹ David Kamau, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁸² Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

Healing is healing! If somebody is *sick*, ... as long as he knows there is a place for healing ... *that's* where they go. And that is the context in which we are saying if people would go to a *mganga* for healing—they have a need, maybe that ... medical science has not been able to resolve, and they will *come* to Jesus to heal! In that sense, that is why we are saying that he is perceived in that role, that if you are sick, he will cure you!¹⁸³

The main reason developed in support of the image, however, concerns the parallels between the ministries of Jesus and those of the traditional healer. These parallels are believed to provide grounds for interpreting Jesus in this light and to allow African Christians to appropriate Jesus in a more meaningful way. One clear correspondence is the power to heal and to confront and conquer evil powers. In addition to Catholic priest Kamau's statement above to this effect, Protestant laywoman Sarah Nabwire speaks of the human *mganga* as merely a "photocopy" of "the big *mganga*, Jesus."¹⁸⁴ A second parallel concerns special powers of knowledge attributed to traditional healers and to Jesus. Kiarie draws the comparison, yet intimates that Jesus supersedes the traditional healer, for he states,

So in that context, you can see Jesus comes out very powerfully as *the healer*, because ... he demonstrates he knows people. He doesn't have to have a gourd, and do things to diagnose what is wrong. He looks at Nathaniel, and says, 'Here is an Israelite without guile.' And he says, 'I saw you while you were there under the tree.' This kind of approach, that Jesus had that knowledge of persons. He *knew*, you don't have to tell him. So this is something that Africans admire—they liked the medicine men.¹⁸⁵

A third parallel is drawn in that like the traditional healer, Jesus uses many different ways to heal. Again Kiarie provides lucid explanation as follows:

And when it comes to healing, he uses so many ways. He can touch you, he can put mud or saliva on our eyes, he can *command* these spirits. He has got all manner of healing: by his *word*, he can even heal at a distance, like this Roman soldier, 'You just go, your son is healed.' ... [H]e can even speak to forces, so he is a real miracle worker.¹⁸⁶

It is noteworthy in this regard that Kiarie is among 3 of the 22 individual respondents (14%) and 1 of the 5 focus groups (20%) who find justification for interpreting Jesus as *mganga* in recalling the particular example of Jesus healing the blind man by mixing mud and saliva and placing it on his eyes, an action considered akin to certain

¹⁸³ Bonifes Adoyo, Focus Group, Nairobi: May 18, 1998.

¹⁸⁴ Sarah Nabwire, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 20, 1998.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

practices of traditional healers. So in light of these parallels, some African Christians contend that Jesus may be understood through the image of the traditional healer for he, and the healing ministry extended through his followers, provides the healing which was formerly sought through the human *mganga*. Thus Kiarie concludes,

Jesus is actually the *supreme mganga*. You see, with Jesus you don't have to go to the *mganga*. And this is where with the church, when it comes now to offer the healing services, either through prayers or through the sacrament or through medical, hospital services, it is an extension of the same healing.¹⁸⁷

Finally, further support for viewing Jesus as *mganga* or traditional healer is found in contextual evidence. First, the existence of “Christian herbalists,” or Christians who practise healing ministries which blend the Christian faith with traditional African healing practices, supports the notion of understanding Jesus in this same light. Getui mentions having seen a sign in Kisii advertising “Christian herbs.” While admitting that “many Christians will not go for that kind of a *mganga*,” she insists, “but when this one is written ‘Christian herbs,’ it’s like it is going to be along Christian lines.” She also speaks of a pastor she knows who “simply got this gift of using herbs.” Following a brief description of his ministry of healing which incorporates such herbs, she concludes that “Jesus can actually be seen as a *mganga* if you look at it from that perspective.”¹⁸⁸ In a focus group discussion, Kenyan Catholic priests confirm this perception based on their own experience as priests. They discuss parishioners coming to them with various requests for healing, including those “seeing snakes” sent by others to harm them. The priests interpret such “symptoms” as indicators of personal problems like jealousy and rivalry, and describe the “Christian rites” they perform in praying for each person with oil and holy water. Njoroge Mwangi then concludes, “So, if you can try to bring those qualities, try to cultivate that attitude, like Jesus Christ as a healer, it’s going to bring a lot of impact.”¹⁸⁹

A second aspect of contextual evidence is Swahili songs about Jesus as healer. While the songs may not portray Jesus specifically in the role of traditional healer, two individual respondents introduce songs in the context of discussing Jesus in this role. For example, Kiarie cites and interprets one Swahili song which he

¹⁸⁷ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998. Circle member Mary Getui also explains that the majority of the hospitals in Kenya are run by missions (adding that most of the government ones are run down), and states that these mission hospitals “are seen as healers of the people’s illnesses. So, in that way then, I would say that there is a lot that can be looked at Jesus ... as a *mganga*, but not the one who is going to counter life...” Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

¹⁸⁸ Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

¹⁸⁹ Njoroge Mwangi, Focus Group, Ruiru: June 7, 1998.

reports is frequently played on the radio: “‘*Nataka uguzo—uguzo wa Yesu,*’ ‘I want to be touched, to be touched by Jesus.’ You see, if Jesus touches me, I’m okay. I am healed, you know, ‘I want to be touched, to be healed.’”¹⁹⁰ Also fruit-hawker Muriithi mentions and sings, “*Daktari, Yesu daktari,*” which is one verse of a Swahili chorus commonly sung in Kenya. When probed as to whether “*daktari*” means the same as “*mganga,*” he replies, “It’s almost the same. It’s just a similar word, but there’s a slight difference, because nowadays people go to doctors, they don’t go to *mganga.*”¹⁹¹ So these African Christians bear witness to some current perceptions of Jesus as traditional healer in the contemporary context, from their experience of the confluence of biblical and African traditions plus the process of modernisation.

d) Problems with the Image of Jesus as *Mganga*

Not surprisingly, the most common reason given for rejecting or cautioning against the image of Jesus as *mganga* is the negative connotations associated with the term, as outlined above. John Gatu responds favourably to the image himself, in keeping with his leading role in interpreting Christianity from African perspectives. However, he notes the main problem with this particular image as follows:

The only problem is that in our *own* concepts today, *mganga* is seen as a person who practices superstition. We don’t see him as the *healer* in the sense that you’re talking about Jesus now. And so, if you say to somebody, “*Kristo Yesu ni mganga,*” the immediate concept—because of the *distortion* that has been made in some of our concepts—you’re talking about that fellow who plays juju.¹⁹²

Furthermore, strong objection is voiced by Catholic lecturer Peter Gichure on the theological grounds that it places Jesus on par with evil, or the devil, rather than adequately acknowledging his omnipotence over all forces of evil. While conceding some instructive value to Jesus as the *mganga* or traditional healer who works good for the community, he nonetheless warns, “But it’s the mentality, it’s what you instruct the people, that is very dangerous.” He elaborates with an example that if you tell an African that Jesus is *mganga*, he or she will conceptualise it as a competition between two *waganga*, like the story of Moses confronting the wise men of Pharaoh in the contest of powers. In contrast to this approach, Gichure insists, “But the evil has *no power*. His [i.e. the devil’s] power is so limited that it’s incomparable! The mere presence of Jesus—without telling people he’s a *mganga*—

¹⁹⁰ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

¹⁹¹ John Muriithi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 12, 1998.

¹⁹² John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

the mere presence of Jesus should be able to say ‘No’ to the evil.” Hence Gichure concludes, “So, the emphasis should not be on the *mganga*, ... but should always be on Jesus’ presence” and his ultimate power over all evil, for “Jesus Christ stands against all evil.”¹⁹³

Finally, the image is refused on additional theological grounds as compromising the divinity of Jesus. In light of his role as Bishop of the Africa Inland Church, a large denomination planted by the Africa Inland Mission which was generally negative towards African traditional religions, it is not surprising that Kivunzi vehemently opposes Jesus as *mganga* and its equivalent term in his vernacular, Kikamba. He explains, “I’m looking at Jesus as God himself, the creator of the world, so to look at him as *mganga* is really minimising his divinity.”¹⁹⁴ Interestingly, Ole Ronkei, the Maasai Christian from a clan of spiritual and medicinal leaders, argues along similar lines that the image will reduce Jesus to being lower than God and thereby create confusion for traditional Maasai. He advises,

If you ... introduce Christ as God, you’re going to put Christ in exactly the *same* position, *same capacity* as God—*no* difference. And then you have to start being *careful* how you’re going to *refer* to that, that you’re not *lowering* God to the level of the *healer* that God uses.¹⁹⁵

With respect to the traditional Maasai context, Ole Ronkei emphasises that God is understood to be the healer, and that he can heal either directly through prayer or through people such as a medicine man or herbalist. Like Gichure above, he grants that there may be room to understand Christ in this capacity. However, he cautions against it, stating, “[H]e could be presented as a healer, but overall as a healer who *heals*, but not reducing [him] down to the person who has to go to the bush and cut a branch and show you that it’s a branch from that tree and a leaf from this one that will heal you.”¹⁹⁶ So whether from contexts of conservative Christianity or traditional Maasai culture, respondents voice theological grounds for objecting to Jesus as *mganga*.

e) Conclusion

Approximately two thirds of the individual respondents with whom the image of Jesus as *mganga* or traditional healer was discussed in Kenya and Uganda conclude that they would support its usage, provided the term is adequately qualified

¹⁹³ Peter Gichure, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹⁹⁴ Titus Kivunzi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

¹⁹⁵ Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

to mean a “healer” and not a “witch” or “sorcerer.” However, primarily in view of the negative connotations already associated with the *mganga* or traditional healer, the remaining third either discourage the image or reject it outright. Focus group findings corroborate that the image is controversial, with 40% concluding positively in support of it, 20% concluding negatively in rejecting it, and 40% expressing pros and cons without reaching a consensus. Summarising perceptions from the individual and focus groups combined, some interviewees voice strong opposition on the theological grounds of compromising the divinity of Christ. Yet others display openness to portraying him in this way, arguing for the need to recover and purify traditional terms which may enhance Africans’ understanding of Jesus. One major aspect pointed out in this regard, in accord with the previous discussion of Jesus as healer, is that both Jesus and the *mganga* reveal a holistic approach to healing. For example, when asked if he would recommend the image of Jesus as *mganga* for Kenyan Christians, Gatu makes the striking assertion, “Oh yes! And I would say, like, this word that I was using now, ‘*murigiti, murigiti*’—it has a *very deep* Kikuyu meaning, that ‘he comes to *doctor*.’ ‘He comes to, not only *cleanse*, in the sense of cleansing, but in terms of *total healing*.’”¹⁹⁷

One last witness warrants full citation, for she both summarises key aspects of the preceding discussion and provides a compelling example of African Christians re-appropriating aspects of traditional culture in light of Jesus’ ministry and that of the Bible. It is especially striking coming from one who was raised in the East African Revival and therefore considerably cut off from her roots in traditional culture. Yet after intensive study of the African heritage, Hannah Kinoti, former chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi, responds to the question of Jesus as *mganga* as follows:

It *would* be meaningful. Yes. In this country, both *waganga* and the witchdoctor, ... are healers, they are traditional ... *healers*. ... [Y]ou had herbalists, you had diviners, you have bone-setters, ... you have even just seers who gave advice. With the coming of Christianity, and mission Christianity, they all went underground because there was a lot of *hostility* against them. So ... my own ideas of who a *mganga* is, from my own studies, show me yes, Jesus is a *mganga*! Because a *mganga*, traditionally, is not one who will run to give you some concoction or do some magic. Okay, they had their paraphernalia, as modern doctors have their stethoscopes and white coats and all that. It’s a question of which situation you are [in]—they behave in the same way. But a *mganga* would really question you, to try and place your problem. And often the problem was *not* just here which is

¹⁹⁷ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

hurting, but the relationships in your own social setting, family setting. And the *mganga* ... took your mind back to your social setting. How are your relationships? And I see Jesus doing the same, because you are having a problem. Through the Bible, reading the word, ... the words of Jesus or whatever else—take the whole Bible—it will pinpoint some other things that you should put right. And in that sense I see Jesus as a *mganga*, yes.¹⁹⁸

3. Jesus as “*Odunsini*” or Traditional Healer in Ghana

a) The Data

Like the data presented from Kenya and Uganda, individual responses to the question of Jesus as *odunsini*¹⁹⁹ or traditional healer in Ghana are best conveyed on a continuum ranging from a positive acceptance, “Yes, Jesus is *odunsini*, that’s a healer. Yes,”²⁰⁰ to a vehement rejection, “Christ could *never* have been an *odunsini*.”²⁰¹ Most responses fall in between these two poles, with many interviewees weighing the positive and negative factors in depicting Jesus this way. A summary of the views expressed indicates how controversial the image is to these Ghanaian Christians. Table 3 displays the responses of the 28 individuals with whom the question was discussed.

Table 3. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as *Odunsini*

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	6 / 28	21 %
Negative Responses Only	12 / 28	43 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 6 / 10 Overall Verdict Negative: 4 / 10	10 / 28	36 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	12 / 28	43 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	16 / 28	57 %

Once again, data from the focus groups with whom it was discussed further confirm that the image is disputable, as evidenced in the following summary:

¹⁹⁸ Hannah Kinoti, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

¹⁹⁹ “*Odunsini*” is the Twi word for “traditional healer,” and it was selected for use in the interview since Twi is a major language in Ghana and therefore widely understood. Again, however, it was placed in apposition to “traditional healer,” allowing respondents to discuss this figure in their own vernacular and ethnic society.

²⁰⁰ Emily Harlley, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 26; Aug. 28, 1998.

²⁰¹ Nana Addo Birikorang, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 27, 1998.

Table 4. Focus Group Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as *Odunsini*

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	3 / 5	60 %
Negative Responses Only	1 / 5	20 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 0 / 1 Overall Verdict Negative: 1 / 1	1 / 5	20 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	3 / 5	60 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	2 / 5	40 %

b) The Meaning of “*Odunsini*”

That the image of Jesus as *odunsini* is contentious in Ghana is primarily due to the different interpretations of the term, particularly in light of modern mission history in Ghana. As in Kenya and Uganda, respondents express various denotations and connotations of “*odunsini*.” The first range of meanings clusters around the perception that “*odunsini* is a healer.”²⁰² Samuel Aboa, former Principal of the Presbyterian Teachers’ College in Akropong-Akuapem and a resident expert in the Twi language, points out that the root word refers to cutting the bark of a tree and on this basis concludes, “So I understand *odunsini* as someone who uses plants to heal.”²⁰³ Further corroboration of this interpretation of the “herbalist” is voiced by others, including Catholic layman Samuel Asubonteng who explains,

[M]y understanding of *odunsini*, has nothing to do with *fetish*, with the worship of *lesser gods*. My understanding of *odunsini* is ... a *herbalist*, somebody who has been *trained* or been *gifted* to *heal* or *cure*, with the admixture of *herbs* and the earth. Maybe we can relate him to an *alchemist*, that’s *odunsini*.²⁰⁴

The term “medicine man” is also used synonymously, with a few respondents describing their own experience of treatment by this kind of traditional healer. For example, despite being raised in a Christian home, Kwesi Dickson has no hesitation in relating how he grew up being treated by “the local medicine person, who would apply herbs and things to cure us.” Asked if these healers were understood to draw upon other spiritual powers, he replies, “No, no. no. They’re someone who has the expertise to cure.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, members of the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant laity interpret *odunsini* in relation to Jesus as “the great physician.”²⁰⁶ Finally,

²⁰² Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

²⁰³ Samuel Aboa, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998.

²⁰⁴ Samuel Asubonteng, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

²⁰⁵ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

²⁰⁶ Focus Group of Protestant Laity, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

Catholic priest Matthew Edusei adds the further dimension that “*odunsini* provides protection against witches and other evil forces.”²⁰⁷

A second range of meanings, however, conveys more negative connotations surrounding the term “*odunsini*.” Dickson clearly contrasts his understanding of the *odunsini* as herbalist, delineated above, to “the charlatans who would ask you to go and bring the left ear of a crow and that kind of thing.”²⁰⁸ Others interpret *odunsini* as “the fetish priest,”²⁰⁹ “people who will consult oracles, consult their *deities*,”²¹⁰ or “*odunsini* might have reference to other things apart from God. And intermediaries that ... can be described as *idols*.”²¹¹ Another respondent speaks of “a typical Akan *odunsini*, which we used to use the word ‘*obosomfo*,’ ... the fetish priest who worshiped an idol is regarded as *odunsini*.”²¹² Further descriptions include “a *spiritualist*,”²¹³ a “witchdoctor,”²¹⁴ a “medicine man” who incurs spirits in healing,²¹⁵ or “a juju man.”²¹⁶ According to Yeboah, “[*O*]dunsini is one who heals ... with evil powers,”²¹⁷ a perception confirmed by Oduro, who sums up,

Well, the plural for *odunsini* is *adensiufow*. The *adensiufow* work through some spirits. They *consult* spirits to heal. It’s something like an occultic practice, depending on the spirits to know what herbs to use, and also to know the cause of the disease and the prescription for the disease.²¹⁸

Thus the selected Ghanaian Christians clearly express contrasting interpretations of the term “*odunsini*,” and this accounts significantly for the ambivalence regarding the image of Jesus as *odunsini*. Before exploring further reasons for the mixed reactions, it is worth noting alternative suggestions for vernacular expressions considered more constructive for portraying Jesus. For example, Nana Dokua I counters the idea of *odunsini* with another Twi term, saying, “‘*Oyaresafo*,’ that’s how we call him, ‘*Oyaresafo*.’” She states that this term means “a healer,” and admits that she associates *odunsini* with “fetish.” Probed further for the difference between the two terms, she explains that “he [Jesus as *Oyaresafo*] doesn’t do with the roots and the leaves and so on. He just speaks one [word] and

²⁰⁷ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

²⁰⁸ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

²⁰⁹ Samuel Asubonteng, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

²¹⁰ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

²¹¹ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

²¹² Stephen Antwi, Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998.

²¹³ Kingsfold Amoah, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 18, 1998.

²¹⁴ B. Y. Quarshie, Oral Interview, Accra: July 29, 1998.

²¹⁵ Virginia Dankwa, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 16, 1998; see also Opare-Saforo.

²¹⁶ Felicia Opare-Saforo, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 3, 1998.

²¹⁷ Florence Y. B. Yeboah, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

²¹⁸ Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

you are *healed*.”²¹⁹ Another vernacular term recommended for Jesus is “*oduyefoo*.” Catholic layman George Hagan explains it as “someone who treats us. Someone who makes us whole, heals us.”²²⁰ Likewise Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle suggests the same term meaning “somebody who makes healing or ... medicines,” and he differentiates it slightly from *odunsini* as “somebody who deals with herbs, roots, and the rest of it.”²²¹ Finally, Catholic Bishop Peter Sarpong delineates the same term in an article entitled “Asante Christology,” and outlines its significance in relation to Jesus as follows:

... Jesus as *Oduyefoo*, the doctor or the medicine man. Jesus is the answer to all ailments—ailments of the body, ailments of the soul, ailments of the mind. He is the only one who has the power to unite human beings so that there is no friction between one individual and another, one group and another. Jesus does not only heal, he enables the healed to heal. After making you whole and sound, Jesus is able to empower you to be the transmitter of this wholistic healing to others.²²²

c) Rationale for the Image of Jesus as *Odunsini*

The three main reasons put forward in support of Jesus as traditional healer in Kenya and Uganda are similarly expressed in Ghana. Hence, where perceptions overlap, the discussion of the Ghanaian material is minimised. First, a few Ghanaians assert that Jesus fulfils the role which the traditional healer plays in African society. Therefore it is meaningful to portray Jesus in this way in order to inculturate the gospel. For example, of the voices cited above regarding the spectrum of responses, Catholic priest Aggrey represents the positive pole. He equates “*odunsini*” with “healer” and fully agrees with its application to Jesus. Probed further as to whether he personally thinks of Jesus as *odunsini*, he responds, “Oh yes. Because he *heals*, he cures sickness.”²²³ More significantly, Catholic priest Edusei initiates the following perspective on Jesus’ relevance to life in Ghana, that is, before any question of Jesus as *odunsini* arose in discussion:

And *because* people have a sense of *fear*, given by the cultural milieu, Jesus now becomes, if you want, almost the role that the traditional witchdoctor was playing. Because the traditional witchdoctor was *protecting* those who came under him, from the influence of the devil, or witches. *Now*, Jesus provides that. So some commentators are

²¹⁹ Nana Dokua I, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 18, 1998.

²²⁰ George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 29; Aug. 6, 1998.

²²¹ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.

²²² Peter K. Sarpong, “Asante Christology,” *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 203.

²²³ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

saying, they are performing the same role as the traditional witchdoctors, and the methods can be the same. So, for a lot of these people, that is what is happening.²²⁴

Later in the conversation he responds to the question posed regarding Jesus as *odunsini*:

*Oh, yes! Odunsini, that's what I was saying about the role of Christ in our traditional context—how the tradition is shaping our understanding of Christ, and the emphasis. Odunsini provides protection against witches and other evil forces. They believe that Jesus can do that. There are two ways that is done: one is prayer, with nothing involved, just prayer. The other one is using all kinds of things, it can be blessed water, or a candle, or something. But people do ... have faith in these things!*²²⁵

It must be noted that Edusei voices serious reservations about the image of Jesus as *odunsini*, aspects of which are incorporated in the next section. However, the observations underlined here include, first, his recognition of how the image meets people's felt needs through concepts they understand, thereby inculturating Christianity in a meaningful way. Second, he explicitly acknowledges that the traditional context "is *shaping* our understanding of Christ." And finally, despite admitting "a lot of reservations," he calls for dialogue "because through dialogue we can *purify* the concepts, we can educate ourselves, we can learn from others...."²²⁶ It is this openness to inculturation, then, which fuels the motivation for some Ghanaian Christians to consider depicting Jesus as *odunsini*.

The main reason expressed for accepting the image of Jesus as traditional healer, akin to the situation in Kenya and Uganda, is the correspondence found between the ministries of this figure and of Jesus. Parallels are voiced regarding their respective powers to heal and to confront and conquer evil forces. On this basis Anthony Kornu, in the focus group of Ghanaian Catholic clergy, volunteers the image of Jesus as medicine man.²²⁷ Similarly Raphael Avornyo, in the focus group of Ghanaian Catholic laity, draws the correspondence explicitly as follows:

What the *odunsini* does is to try to help that particular person, to draw him out of ... sickness.... And he uses *all* his strength, all his power, all his faculties to try to help that person. And that is just exactly what Jesus Christ does. He is there to help us out of the situations which we have, and so ... they are the same, it's the *same* thing.²²⁸

²²⁴ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Anthony Kornu, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998.

²²⁸ Raphael Avornyo, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998.

Ghanaian Christians also draw attention to seemingly parallel methods employed for healing. It is again striking that 4 out of the 27 individual respondents with whom it was discussed (15%) single out the story of Jesus mixing saliva with mud in healing the blind man as biblical rationale for viewing Jesus as *odunsini*. One example of this reasoning comes from Protestant layman Darmani, who wrestles with the image partly on account of a negative personal experience with a traditional healer. In his words,

If I call Jesus ‘*odunsini*,’ ... I have to sieve a few things out of that name in my mind, and I’m capable of doing that. I would see the end result of it. I will see him as a person who is ‘*odunsini*’ who eventually does the healing. Fortunately I have ... concepts like Jesus spits onto the ground and makes some mud, and then you know, heals somebody by putting it on the eyes, and the person is healed. Now, that’s very *helpful* for me to see him as ‘*odunsini*’ because he *used* something. He *used* some object, and then smeared it on the eyes of this blind person, and then says, ‘Go and wash,’ and then the person is healed. ‘*Odunsini*’ is somebody like that! Somebody like that, you see. So yes, I *can* see Jesus as ‘*odunsini*,’ in *that* respect.²²⁹

Finally, a few respondents bear witness to contextual evidence for Jesus being perceived as *odunsini* or traditional healer. Catholic priest Aggrey in Mampong-Akuapem not only attests to the image being operative for him personally, but also responds with some degree of surprise in his voice when asked if he speaks of Jesus as *odunsini* to his parishioners: “Yes, I do! Yes! Because *odunsini* cures sicknesses, and Jesus also cures sicknesses. So, Jesus can be compared to the *odunsini*.”²³⁰ Moreover, members of the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant laity confirm, when probed, that the image of Jesus as *odunsini* is already part of their own Christian experience and that it is used in public ministry, although they do not apparently differentiate “*odunsini*” from “healer.”²³¹

Furthermore, a few respondents refer to vernacular songs which employ terms for Jesus as the traditional healer. Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle cites an example of a vernacular song referring to Jesus as “*oduyεofɔ*,” the term suggested as an alternative to “*odunsini*.”²³² Anthony Kornu of the focus group of Catholic clergy explains that the Twi term “*odunsini*” is equivalent to “*doyola*” in his vernacular, Ewe. He cites a song employing the term which he paraphrases as “Cure me. Cure

²²⁹ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

²³⁰ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

²³¹ Focus Group of Protestant Laity, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

²³² Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998. Palmer-Buckle stresses that “You would *hardly* ever refer to Jesus as ‘*odunsini*.’”

me of my illness. When I am well, I will follow you.”²³³ Lastly, Johnson Asare of the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant clergy adds, “And I think in our songs, we sing something like ‘*odunsini*,’ ‘He is a healer who doesn’t use herbs.’ So I think we got it right—he’s *odunsini*, but one who doesn’t use herbs or stones.”²³⁴ Hence the contextual evidence for Jesus being perceived as *odunsini* or traditional healer is not widespread in the present research findings, yet there are some indications that the image is operative among Ghanaian Christians.

d) Problems with the Image of Jesus as *Odunsini*

Like in Kenya and Uganda, the most common reason given by the selected Ghanaian Christians for rejecting the image of Jesus as traditional healer is the negative connotations associated with “*odunsini*” or its equivalent in other vernaculars. For example, Protestant clergyman Dan Antwi stresses the importance of Jesus as healer and offers vernacular titles to that effect. However, when asked about *odunsini*, he replies, “*Odunsini*? That one would be getting to the pagan expression. People wouldn’t take that one.”²³⁵ Similarly Hagan concludes, “There *must* be a Twi word which is useful, but *odunsini* can *only* refer to Christ metaphorically, and in a very weak way, most inadequate way.”²³⁶

Next, if some of the Ghanaian interviewees find support for Jesus as *odunsini* in light of parallels drawn between the healing ministries of the two figures, other respondents equally point out contrasts in this regard. Traditional leader Nana Addo Birikorang was cited at the outset of the discussion as representing the negative pole on the spectrum of responses. After defining the term through its root derivation, he is forthright in objecting, “There is no example of Christ ever having used herbal medicine or anything for *anything*, in the Bible. And therefore Christ, to me, could *never* have been an *odunsini*.” Probed further on the topic, he again insists that he would not think of Jesus this way “*at all*,” and concludes, “I don’t accept it.”²³⁷ Likewise Oduro, who was quoted above regarding the traditional healers consulting with spirits to effect cures, continues by pointing out,

But that is different from Jesus as a healer. He does not depend on any spirit to tell him, ‘This is the *cause* of the sickness,’ and also, ‘Use this and use that.’ No. The moment you approach him he knows what

²³³ Anthony Kornu, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998.

²³⁴ Johnson Asare, Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998. It must be noted that this forms the only positive affirmation of Jesus as *odunsini* in this focus group, and it comes with the qualification that Jesus does not use herbs.

²³⁵ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

²³⁶ George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 29; Aug. 6, 1998.

²³⁷ Nana Addo Birikorang, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 27, 1998.

is wrong with you and he tells you. He does not wait to be possessed by any spirit for the prescription or for the cause. So that is the basic difference between Jesus as a healer and then *odunsini*.²³⁸

Thus juxtaposing the healing ministries of Jesus and the *odunsini* can potentially work positively or negatively in assessing this image for Jesus, according to the witness of these Ghanaian Christians.

Other dangers evidently emerge in drawing close correspondences between Jesus and the traditional healer. Despite the openness to inculturating Christianity which Edusei expresses, he adds, “I also see a lot of dangers with that, of people not making a complete distinction between the two. Because as you know, *odunsini* might have reference to other things apart from God. And intermediaries that ... can be described as *idols*.” He further notes people’s propensity for “personalising the power” and locating it in the Christian minister rather than in Christ himself. He warns, with slight laughter in places,

‘A powerful minister,’ they would say, you know? ... You’re not a powerful minister! You’re an *instrument*. And a tendency to then see individuals as—I don’t know, it stops them from going to Christ themselves. They run to him [i.e. the minister], they might not have the basics to sit down and pray themselves, the confidence. The person just leads you to Christ; he is not Christ, he cannot be.²³⁹

Related to this factor of human engagement in healing ministries, Dickson expresses caution on the basis of personal experience encountering “bizarre practices” employed in healing by certain church members. On this basis he concludes, “So one has to be careful how one uses *odunsini* and things. You have got to qualify them very carefully, in order not to give very strange misunderstanding.”²⁴⁰

Finally, a few Ghanaian respondents express the equivalent concern voiced by Kenyans and Ugandans regarding the image of the traditional healer reducing Jesus in such a way as to jeopardise his rightful status. For example, Protestant laywoman Virginia Dankwa, a medical doctor, interprets *odunsini* as “medicine man.” When probed for her understanding of the term, she replies, “*Odunsini*? Well, medicine man, I mean these people, they usually incur some spirits in their practices and so on. I think the name is a bit, as far as I’m concerned, *below* the status of Jesus.

²³⁸ Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

²³⁹ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998. Other clergymen voice the same danger, including Kwesi Dickson, Charles Palmer-Buckle, and Oscar Muriu in the focus group of Kenyan Protestant clergy. This evidence corroborates Kibongi’s assertion, mentioned above, regarding Africans viewing Jesus and Christian ministers as *nganga*. See Kibongi, “Priesthood,” 52-53.

²⁴⁰ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

I wouldn't describe Jesus as *odunsini*.”²⁴¹ Another Protestant laywoman, Grace Nartey, responds in similar fashion. She explains from her vernacular, Dangme, the equivalent term for traditional healer:

Tsofatse, yes, I actually see him even bigger than that. Because unfortunately, for me, *tsofatse*, when you talk about *tsofatse*, it refers to the traditional healer. And I see the traditional healer in a very small light. And therefore for me, Jesus is much, much, much, much bigger than that. But *he* is a healer, I mean he is the ultimate healer and the all-embracing healer.²⁴²

e) Conclusion: Jesus as *Odunsini*

The controversial nature of portraying Jesus as *odunsini* is clearly evident in the almost equal split between those who favour its usage and those who do not: 45% of the individual respondents with whom it was discussed express either full support or an openness to the image, while 55% reject it. Among the focus groups, 60% voice support while 40% express disapproval. Most of those who accept the image stress that their support is conditional upon the image being communicated with appropriate qualifications. For example, Darmani was cited above with respect to the biblical rationale he finds for employing the image and the “sieving” process required in doing so. He then stresses,

But it's very, very *important* for those of us who have grown out of our traditional set-up, that when we are assigning certain traditional names or ascribing certain traditional titles to Jesus Christ, that we are careful to *explain* the details—especially to even understand the concept behind the use of certain names, and then apply it to the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴³

He elaborates further on how he has the scriptures to guide him in discerning what correspondences may be drawn between Jesus and the *odunsini*, while a person from traditional background “hearing about Jesus for the *first* time, as an *odunsini*” would need “a lot of explanation.” For that reason he emphasises the need for Christian teaching, and as the founding editor of Step Magazine – Ghana, he concludes,

And for those of us who write about these things, ... it is very, very crucial that we go back and try to explain the reason for certain names given to certain people within the society. And *how*, when we are

²⁴¹ Virginia Dankwa, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 16, 1998.

²⁴² Grace Nartey, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

²⁴³ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

going to later on use that name, ... we understand that we are not picking all the moss together with the good thing, you see.²⁴⁴

Related to this observation, a few respondents note that the image might be meaningful within academic contexts, but perhaps not elsewhere. For instance when probed for her overall verdict on Jesus as *odunsini*, Protestant clergywoman Asabea replies, “Yes, yes. To the academia, yes. But I wonder how the typical traditional Christian would take it? Because there might be some confusion.”²⁴⁵ This point was also made by Stephen Antwi, a member of the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant clergy which was conducted during an extended seminar on “Gospel and Culture” at the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology. While the views expressed within this group about Jesus as *odunsini* are largely negative, Antwi admits, “Actually a seminar like this will make me accept it, you know, but *if* I want to go by the way the traditional *odunsini* does his method of healing, then you have to be careful.”²⁴⁶

A further complication emerges with respect to language(s) employed in ministry, a point which illustrates the critical issue outlined in Chapter 3 concerning the continued domination of colonial languages and its impact upon African Christianity. In this case, Kwesi Dickson had agreed that the image of *odunsini* fits with Jesus conceptually. Yet when queried about the term experientially, whether he had spoken of Jesus this way in his own ministry, he responds as follows:

I *have* spoken, not used the word, I must say. See, part of the problem is that usually as I travel around, I have to use English. But occasionally I will use the word—‘*odunsini*’ is the Twi; Mfantse is ‘*nensini*’ but it’s *close*. We’ve used it but unfortunately the word tends to be understood also in the sense of the mystical, you know, using concoctions or strange things and that kind of charlatan I’ve been talking about. It tends to be understood also in that sense. So one has to be careful how one uses it. One has to be careful.²⁴⁷

Thus linguistic factors can seriously impede the use of *odunsini* or its vernacular equivalents, either conducting ministry in colonial languages or, once again, the negative connotations surrounding the term(s). The result is that several respondents confirm that they have not or would not employ the image in their own ministry, even when they have affirmed that the image fits conceptually. For example, although Darmani is most positive about the potential for understanding Jesus as *odunsini*, and he acknowledges the stress on Jesus as healer in the ministry of Step

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

²⁴⁶ Stephen Antwi, Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998.

²⁴⁷ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

Magazine – Ghana, he admits they have never used the term “*odunsini*” in Step. He sums up, with slight laughter,

As healer, yes. Not as ‘*odunsini*’ the way we have seen him, ... ‘*odunsini*’ in our traditional set-up. The old man who sits there, who people go to and then he concocts things and then he heals them. But it’s a term that can be used—we have not used that term in Step, nor even the concept of it. ... [T]he other side of the ‘*odunsini*’—we are careful especially because in Ghana we have a lot of traditional ... practitioners.²⁴⁸

Thus a number of factors contribute to the ambivalence with which these Ghanaian Christians respond to the image of Jesus as *odunsini* or traditional healer, yet the expressed reservations evidently cluster around the nucleus of negative connotations surrounding the term.

4. Conclusion: Jesus as Traditional Healer

The central question addressed in this section is whether or not Jesus as traditional healer is a constructive image for contemporary African Christians. Despite the fact that it has been propounded by a few African theologians, such as Kibongi and Setiloane, most African theologians to date have been reluctant to promote the image. Observing this hesitation, Schoffeleers poses a dichotomy between the views of professional theologians and those representing folk theology, or the population at large in sub-Saharan Africa where the *nganga* christological paradigm is said to be widespread. Consequently, the aim of the present discussion has been to discern to what extent the image functions either explicitly or implicitly among the selected African Christians in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana, how the image is interpreted, and the rationale expressed for supporting or rejecting it.

On the basis of the findings set forth above, all four of Schoffeleers’ conclusions may be corroborated, yet with some nuancing. First, Schoffeleers’ main conclusion is that “[i]n large parts of Black Africa the medicine person [*nganga*] provides a framework within which to conceptualise the person of Christ and the role of the Christian minister.”²⁴⁹ Data from the qualitative research undertaken in this research certainly confirm that the image of Jesus as traditional healer is functioning at least implicitly and to a considerable degree explicitly for significant numbers of the selected African Christians, that is to say, a minimum of almost half of those

²⁴⁸ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

²⁴⁹ Schoffeleers, “Christ in African Folk Theology,” 85. Schoffeleers explores how not only Christ but also the Christian minister is perceived as an alternative *nganga*. While data from my research provide further corroboration of this perception of the Christian minister, the constraints of the present project restrict discussion to the central focus on christology.

interviewed. Given that this particular sample represents Christians from mission churches, presumed to be subject to “the Christ of the established churches” or “a Westernized image of the Savior” in Schoffeleers’ terminology, the extent to which the image is operative is all the more striking.²⁵⁰

Notwithstanding this evidence, it remains questionable whether the image functions as widely as Schoffeleers intimates. Further research, particularly integrating quantitative methods, would be necessary to ascertain the degree of usage more precisely. However, concern stems from the premise upon which Schoffeleers constructs his case for the *nganga* paradigm. Introducing his research by way of the “christological crisis” said to exist in African theology to date, he states,

Although several christological studies have appeared since (e.g., Udoh 1983; Christensen 1984; Kabasele et al. 1986), a feeling of crisis persists because those involved in christological research have been unable to reach even a modicum of consensus about a suitable African paradigm for Christ. Some prefer to cast him as Victor, others as Chief, yet others as Ancestor, without any party being able to establish a convincing claim (Shorter 1982; Kabasele et al. 1986).²⁵¹

From this basis, then, the *nganga* paradigm is purported to be an image already widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa and therefore, presumably, to warrant such a convincing claim.²⁵² The question arises, however, as to the rationale for insisting upon a consensus regarding a suitable African paradigm for Christ, when this contravenes the current call for cultivating a plurality of christological images.²⁵³ Therefore, insofar as the *nganga* paradigm is advocated as one image for Jesus currently operative among African Christians, the data from this research definitely provide substantiation. However, in view of the serious reservations voiced by respondents with respect to the image, the present findings would not support any suggestion, whether explicit or implicit, that the image of traditional healer is in any way primary or the most prevalent christological paradigm.

²⁵⁰ Once again, no claim is made that the statistics presented based on this sample are proportionately representative of the wider population at large. See the discussions of sampling strategies and generalizability in Chapter 2 on Methodology, pp. 50-52.

²⁵¹ Schoffeleers, “Christ in African Folk Theology,” 73.

²⁵² For example, Schoffeleers states elsewhere, “Although one occasionally hears African Christians refer to Christ as ‘Chief’ or ‘King’, I have not been able to find evidence that the chief’s role has led to an elaborate christology the way the *nganga* role has.” Ibid., 87, n. 15. The findings from this research provide an alternative view in this regard, presented in Chapter 7 on Jesus as Leader.

²⁵³ See p. 27 above, particularly the quote from Pobe, “In Search of Christology in Africa,” 11. See also Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 67-68; Nasimiyu Wasike, “Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context,” 1, 3; Akinade, “‘Who Do You Say That I Am?’,” 184; Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies,” 64.

Schoffeleer's second conclusion is that "[t]he *nganga* is a folk paradigm, not a paradigm consciously constructed by professional theologians for the purpose of 'indigenizing' the person of Christ."²⁵⁴ He further suggests a possible contrast on this account between the *nganga* paradigm and other christological images, such as victor, chief, and ancestor, which are likely not rooted in folk theology. In so doing, he apparently concurs with Kolié's contention, which he notes elsewhere, that African theologians are attempting to introduce christological paradigms which are unknown to the people at large.²⁵⁵ Once again, the present data clearly confirm Schoffeleer's second conclusion as quoted above. For in this case, a definite divergence emerges between the absence of the image in the textual christologies of the professional theologians under consideration, and the presence of the image in the oral christologies articulated in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana. Thus there would be no grounds for any claim that this image is created by African theologians and imposed on African Christians, as Kolié suggests with respect to other traditional titles.

However, according to the present research findings, the clear-cut distinction Schoffeleers posits between so-called "elite theologians" and "folk theology" cannot be sustained. For analysis of the oral christologies reveals that there are respondents who would rightfully be classified as "the intellectual elite," that is, highly educated experts who have published in the field of African Christianity, who do express considerable support for the image of Jesus as traditional healer.²⁵⁶ Conversely, there are significant numbers of those representing "the population at large," at least of the urban, educated Christians specified in the research sample, who voice strong opposition to the image. The simple dichotomy proposed, then, is not borne out by the evidence.

Perhaps a more helpful avenue for interpretation is offered by Kwame Bediako in his insistence upon the need to distinguish African Christianity from the literature on it, as discussed in Chapter 2.²⁵⁷ Examining the birth of theology in the New Testament and its implications for African theology today, Bediako concludes, "An authentic tradition of literary Christian scholarship can exist only where a living reality of Christian experience is, and is felt to be, relevant to daily life."²⁵⁸ If the

²⁵⁴ Schoffeleers, "Christ in African Folk Theology," 85.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. Schoffeleers refers to Kolié's view on p. 86, n. 3.

²⁵⁶ For example, John Gatu, Mary Getui, David Gitari, and Hannah Kinoti in Kenya; Kwesi Dickson and Emmanuel Martey in Ghana.

²⁵⁷ See pp. 31-32 above.

²⁵⁸ Kwame Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity—A Manifesto," *Studies in World Christianity* 1, Part 1 (1995): 53.

image of Jesus as *mganga* or *odunsini* is considered in light of this process of theological development, the oral christologies demonstrate that Jesus undoubtedly functions correspondingly to the traditional healer in the living experience of many African Christians. As to why the image is not often found in written or academic theology, two possibilities may be suggested. Perhaps it is a matter of time, for as Mbiti points out, "African Christianity cannot wait for written theology to keep pace with it."²⁵⁹ In other words, if the image truly functions meaningfully for Africans in the "substratum of vital Christian experience and consciousness,"²⁶⁰ it may yet emerge more significantly in academic theology. On the other hand, and especially in view of the three decades since Kibongi suggested the image in writing, if it has not progressed in academic theology, perhaps there are significant reasons to account for this state of affairs. Hence the concerted effort made in this study to ascertain those factors which prompt and those factors which constrain the image.²⁶¹ Before further consideration of these factors, the point underlined here is that the complex issue concerning the presence or absence of Jesus as traditional healer within various expressions of African Christianity cannot be adequately explained on the basis of a simple dichotomy between "professional" and "folk" theology. Instead, any divergence between manifestations of "living" and "academic" theology calls attention to the precise nature of the image and to the very process of theological development itself.

Schoffeleer's third conclusion may again be confirmed, yet slightly nuanced on the basis of this research. He underlines that precisely because the *nganga* paradigm is inherently part of folk theology, it allows privileged access to African conceptions of Christ, of sin and of redemption. Since Schoffeleers' research is largely informed by anthropological literature on the role of *nganga*, his christological interpretation of the traditional healer is shaped accordingly.²⁶² So while details of his interpretation may vary somewhat from the views expressed by the selected African Christians in this study, the present findings concur with Schoffeleers' observation: "Christ is often referred to as the one true *nganga* because

²⁵⁹ John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 229; quoted in Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity," 52.

²⁶⁰ Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity," 53.

²⁶¹ Due to the necessary time constraints of the interviews with the professional theologians, I was unable to pursue the question of why they have not written about Jesus as traditional healer. Further research would invite probing along these lines.

²⁶² Schoffeleer's approach is broader in that he examines anthropological literature on the *nganga* role, exploring not only its impact upon African perceptions of Christ and the Christian minister, but also the reverse process of how Christianity has influenced the role of *nganga*. The present research is necessarily restricted to the impact of the *nganga* paradigm on African perceptions of Christ, and is primarily informed by the views of the selected African Christians.

this is an image that the audience intuitively understands and at the same time is seen as rooted in scripture.”²⁶³ The point highlighted here is that in the juxtaposition of these two figures, Jesus and the traditional healer, new horizons of understanding are potentially opened for interpreting Christ and his relation to the existential realities of Africans today. Accordingly, the witness of many of the selected African Christians affirms that the image does indeed enhance their apprehension of Jesus and his significance to their lives.

In his final conclusion, Schoffeleers returns to the initial question, “Why has this *nganga* paradigm, which is so tangibly and extensively present in folk theology, not been exploited by the professional theologians?”²⁶⁴ The first reason he offers by way of explanation is more tenable, according to the data from this study, than the second.²⁶⁵ He first suggests that there may be “a conscious or unconscious fear of introducing syncretistic notions and practices.”²⁶⁶ Close inspection of the present research data reveal that only two respondents actually use the term “syncretism,”²⁶⁷ one Catholic priest and one Protestant layman, and only one employs it in the context of discussing the image of traditional healer. Catholic priest Edusei is quoted above with respect to his call for dialogue in order to purify traditional concepts and to promote further learning. Yet despite his openness to inculturation, he voices his own reservations about the *odunsini* image and concludes, “I fear it is easy to fall into

²⁶³ Schoffeleers, “Christ in African Folk Theology,” 79.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶⁵ The second reason suggested can only be referred to briefly at present, since it deals more with ecclesiastical polity and practice than christology *per se*. Yet Schoffeleers places even more weight upon ecclesiastical relations, contending that official adoption of the *nganga* paradigm would require the established churches to acknowledge the objective existence of witchcraft and evil spirits and to implement pastoral ministries to deal effectively with them. To do so, according to Schoffeleers, would mean condoning a theological system fundamentally different to that of the mother churches, thereby threatening church unity and the authority of the mother churches. In his words, “I must therefore conclude that the *nganga* paradigm will remain officially inadmissible as long as the established churches in Africa want to retain links with their mother churches. These churches thus harbor two very different christologies, which stand in a dialectical relation to each other.” *Ibid.*

Present constraints do not allow full engagement with these assertions. Suffice it to say that on the basis of the oral interviews and participant observation, evidence from this field research does not bear out these factors as being primary considerations. The theological positions of the mother churches have undoubtedly contributed to the present controversy surrounding the image of Jesus as traditional healer. However, on the basis of my experience of the contemporary context, even these African Christians from established churches by and large profess the reality of malevolent spirits. In addition, many churches have extended their pastoral ministries to address needs for healing in all dimensions including those related to the realm of spirits. There is open acknowledgement in this regard of the influence of African independent churches and Pentecostal churches upon mainline denominations. Therefore, it is not so much the mother churches constraining the image of Jesus as traditional healer as other factors related to the image itself.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998; Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998. No occurrence is found in the focus group discussions.

syncretism. Or ... just merging two things that need to be *carefully* brought together.”²⁶⁸ Even where the explicit term is not used, the implicit concern undergirds considerable opposition to the image. In the preceding discussion, attention has been drawn to the enduring negative connotations, the warnings about possible confusion and the consequent need for care in employing the image, the emphasis on the contrasts between Jesus and the traditional healer, and the genuine concern about reducing Jesus to a level below his rightful status. Moreover, even when the image is accepted, very often support is only granted on the condition that adequate instruction accompanies its usage in order to differentiate Jesus from the traditional figure. Thus, for example, Samson Obwa in the focus group of Kenyan Protestant clergy concludes from his own ethnic society, “The Luos argue that he is a *mganga waganga*—they differentiate Jesus, that one they know. He is more than *just a mganga*. He is a *mganga waganga*, so with that one they can refer to Jesus.”²⁶⁹ Thus Schoffeleers is accurate in identifying the fear of syncretism as a major cause for neglecting the image of Jesus as traditional healer in written theology, for such apprehensions evidently account for many of the reservations expressed by the selected African Christians.

What, then, can be concluded about this controversial image for Jesus? The relatively equal weighting of acceptance and rejection are abundantly clear from the numbers represented and the reasons cited. The range of possible responses is well summed up by Jane Mathu in the focus group of Kenyan PACWA women, and her explanation serves to recapitulate central points of the preceding discussion:

I think it would depend on the community ... that you have come from. Like, I think in my community there are no *wangas*, ... [or] not many. But there are some communities where actually almost everybody depends on the *waganga*, especially those who have not come across Christianity. And if you told them Jesus is a *mganga* they would be really excited. But for those people who ... have learned about the love of Jesus, it will be almost a heresy, I mean an insult to ... Christianity, because a *mganga* is not somebody you would be proud to be identified with. It's somebody, you know, I would associate him with a lot of satanism, demonic kind of life. The kind of things I have heard of or read about *waganga*, I don't think I would associate *Jesus* with the *mganga*. But as I have said, it depends on the *people* you are talking to, the community, where they have come from and ... how much they have heard about Jesus or Christianity.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

²⁶⁹ Samson Obwa, Focus Group, Nairobi: May 18, 1998.

²⁷⁰ Jane Mathu, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 5, 1998.

Given this spectrum of potential perceptions regarding Jesus as traditional healer, strict conclusions are inadvisable. However, a brief consideration of the critical issues prompting African christologies and the criteria set forth for engaging critically with them sheds light on current complexities concerning the image.

On the one hand, negative factors constraining this depiction of Jesus are clarified in the light of certain critical issues concerning the christologies. For example, historical and missiological factors, specifically colonial and missionary practices, account significantly for the hostility toward the African traditional healers, for the distortions in terminology describing these figures, and for the consequent alienation of African Christians from traditional healing practices. As a result, linguistic factors feature prominently in restricting the use of the image, primarily due to the negative connotations but also the continued domination of colonial languages. In addition, the present discussion has not allowed for full elaboration, but concern has been expressed about contemporary Christian witness where certain “bizarre practices” encountered in some healing ministries hinder further promotion of Jesus as traditional healer.

On the other hand, positive factors supporting the image are more comprehensible when considered against the criteria African Christians have set for their own christological agenda. Certainly the aspects of theological and linguistic relevance form crucial factors, as the evidence has shown that this portrait of Jesus may potentially deepen African Christians’ understanding of him in relation to concepts from the African heritage. The findings have definitely confirmed Kibongi’s suggestion in 1969 that Jesus is perceived to accomplish the work of *nganga* in terms of healing, protecting from evil powers, and restoring community relations where disruption has occurred in the social fabric. Not only may Jesus’ role be understood to fulfil that of the African traditional healer, but also the role of this healer may serve to enhance Africans’ understanding of the biblical affirmations regarding Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. That is to say, the holistic approach to healing in African tradition may foster insight into biblical affirmations regarding Jesus’ healing ministry as signifying the inauguration of the kingdom of God in all its individual, corporate and cosmic dimensions. Aylward Shorter builds a strong case for this observation in his in-depth analysis of Jesus in relation to the “witchdoctor.”²⁷¹ After a close comparison of their respective healing ministries, he makes the following conclusion concerning how the African traditional healer may point to larger tenets concerning Jesus:

²⁷¹ Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 11.

Jesus, therefore, used the techniques of popular healers and exorcists of his time, and to that extent, at least, he was like a traditional diviner-healer or witchdoctor. Scientific medicine was not a possible option in his lifetime, or for many centuries afterwards. Nevertheless, in antedating medical science, Jesus also escaped its limitations, notably its comparative lack of interest in the environmental, social and moral aspects of healing. Jesus shared the integrated approach to healing which characterizes the so-called witchdoctor, but he carried it infinitely further in every dimension. In his own life he offered a comprehensive redemption for the world's sickness, and in his own person he offered a release for the sick, the sinful, the sad, the aliens, the outcasts, the poor and the ritually unclean. In Jesus' message there was no condition of diminished humankind, no sickness, disability or guilt which was impervious to the liberating and restorative power of God's love encountered in his own life and person.²⁷²

Therefore the image bears potential theological relevance for Christians today, not only in Africa but for those from different medical traditions as well.

Further consideration of the criteria for assessing the African christologies awaits the conclusion to the chapter. For the present, it is tentatively suggested that the positive factors which may ensue from portraying Jesus as traditional healer allow room for the cautious promotion and the judicious employment of this image for Jesus, provided it is accompanied with adequate instruction. Part of that educational process will require an honest reassessment of "the despised witchdoctor," which Shorter emphasises as follows:

For the image of the traditional doctor to become respectable enough to be applied to Christ, we must not only renounce the exaggeration which turned him into an agent of Satan, but we must purify and transform the concepts of healing and divining with which he is factually associated.²⁷³

At the same time, however, negative connotations surrounding the traditional healer may be accounted for significantly, but not entirely, by colonial and missionary influence. Whatever the source and the legitimacy of such reservations about this traditional figure, as long as negative associations endure, African Christians will rightfully resist making facile comparisons between this healer and Jesus if to do so would create confusion.

²⁷² Ibid., 12, 13. For further discussion of the tensions between western and traditional African approaches to healing and their theological significance, see Gerard Jansen, "Western Medicine - Secularised and Secularising: A Medical Missiological Problem," *Missionalia* 25, no. 3 (Nov. 1997): 344-359.

²⁷³ Aylward Shorter, "Folk Christianity and Functional Christology," *AFER* 24, no. 3 (June 1982): 136-137.

Presenting the negative and positive factors together does not entail contradiction; rather, the two must be held simultaneously in creative tension. For issues of gospel and culture inevitably require honest and careful assessment of the potential for creating understanding or misunderstanding, for opening or obscuring horizons for understanding Jesus. Nor is such a dialectical approach without precedent. A return to the witness of Kibongi indicates that, following his explication of Jesus as *nganga*, he nonetheless concludes, “Our attitude towards *nganga* in particular, and negro-African culture in general, or any other value, is both negative and positive. This double attitude seems to be dictated by revelation itself.”²⁷⁴ Citing examples from Abraham, Israel and Paul, he underscores how any point of contact between human culture and biblical revelation necessitates the dual process of being “continually called both to leave our world behind, and to take it with us, so that Christ may become more and more our Saviour and Lord.”²⁷⁵ Or, as one of the African voices above graphically puts it, to ensure that “we are not picking all the moss together with the good thing....”²⁷⁶

D. Conclusion: Jesus as Life-giver

This first christological model emerges from the centrality of life in black African thought. Traditional concepts of life, as interpreted by selected African Christians, form the intellectual constructs which converge with biblical affirmations to formulate the image of Jesus as life-giver, or the one who fulfils the aspirations for life in black Africa. The corresponding image of Jesus as healer adds further signification that Jesus restores life wherever it has been diminished, and that he upholds life against any powers which threaten it. Both of these associated images are well attested in the oral and textual christologies under consideration. Attention has also been extended to the related but controversial image of Jesus as traditional healer.

The focal point of interpreting Jesus in relation to life is certainly not original to this thesis. On the contrary, the concern is fundamental to the birth and growth of African theology in recent times. It is especially noteworthy that the closing words of the “Final Communiqué” from the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians in Accra, Ghana, in 1977 encapsulate the stated aim in forming EAAI, as follows: “[W]e undertake this journey of service through theology so that all the women, men, and children of our lands may be able ‘to have life and live

²⁷⁴ Kibongi, “Priesthood,” 55.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. 56.

²⁷⁶ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

abundantly.”²⁷⁷ In attempt to pursue this aim, these theologians specify their task as addressing the needs of post-independent Africa from the standpoint of their belief in Jesus Christ. To do so, they call for “an interdisciplinary methodology of social analysis, biblical reflection, and active commitment to be with the peoples in their endeavors to build a better society.”²⁷⁸ In view of this overall aim, then, the question that arises in the present research is what progress has been made toward this end with the particular images of Jesus as life-giver, healer and traditional healer. The interrelated images are considered together in light of the criteria set forth in Chapter 3; namely, the appropriateness of sources and methods, and the seven factors of contextual relevance.

Analysis of the sources underlying these images of Jesus reveals that the African Christians draw upon all four of the recommended sources, but to different degrees. First, the Bible and Christian heritage find strong attestation in the textual and oral christologies, primarily in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life-giving and healing ministry, but also in wider biblical sources and theological affirmations. The primary place of the Bible has been highlighted through quotes from Pobee which are representative of the expressed views of other respondents. Second, the African heritage also features prominently, in the African concepts of life and healing which shape contemporary views of Jesus, and especially in the image of Jesus as traditional healer. Third, the living experience of the church has been appealed to as grounds for both promoting and for curbing the portrayal of Jesus as healer. That is, strong justification for this image is claimed on account of contemporary experiences of healing. Furthermore, the import of widespread healing ministries has been underscored, including how the historic churches have been influenced by the African Initiated Churches and by the Pentecostal movement. However, certain cautions arising from some healing ministries have also been voiced, which seek to restrain distorted images of Jesus as healer.

The fourth source recommended for constructing African theology is contemporary realities in Africa. Here, the extensive suffering in Africa is acknowledged as reason for approaching Jesus as life-giver and healer, and certainly this contributes to the effectiveness of the image as a lived reality for many African Christians. However, the predominant perspective voiced in the oral christologies concerns Jesus healing through prayer, or through medicine, or sometimes a combination of the two. While in no way disparaging these perspectives, it must be stressed that relatively few of the selected African Christians articulate the need for

²⁷⁷ Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, “Final Communiqué,” 195.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

socio-political analysis of the contemporary realities related to health as a starting point for understanding Jesus as healer. Nor do they generally address the structures which significantly account for people's suffering ill health, nor advocate theological commitment to challenge such unjust structures. Ela is the obvious exception in this regard, followed by Bujo, Nasimiyu and Pobee who move in the same direction. Granted, more of the interview respondents' views along these lines will be brought to light in Chapter 7 on Jesus as Leader. Nonetheless, further theological reflection upon current issues related to health across black Africa would enhance the understanding and experience of Jesus as healer and help to guard against undue emphasis upon "faith healing." For example, given the scale of devastation wrought by AIDS in Africa today, it is surprising that relatively few respondents referred to this crisis in relation to Jesus as healer or in relation to his significance to life in their context.²⁷⁹ Clearly the ongoing scourge of AIDS calls for much greater attention by way of orthopraxis than the present research data reveal. Thus the main point here is the present imbalance between the first three sources as grist to the mill of christological formulation, and the relative neglect of the fourth source.

A variety of methods have been exemplified in employing the sources delineated above. Drawing upon Nyamiti's typology of inculturation and liberation christologies, there is evidence for each of the main approaches he outlines. With respect to inculturation methodologies, clear substantiation is found for movement from the Bible to "African Reality," or applying biblical teachings about Jesus to the contemporary African situation. Conversely, there is ample demonstration of movement from "African Reality" to christology, in traditional concepts of life and healing being used to open new avenues for understanding Jesus. Moreover, the data

²⁷⁹ Of the individual respondents, only 2 out of the 65 total (3%) mention AIDS as an example of current suffering, without elaborating on the crisis. Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998; J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998. Of the focus groups, AIDS is mentioned in 4 out of the total of 12 groups (33%), with members from 2 groups discussing the significance of Jesus in relation to the pandemic. For example Ghanaian Raphael Avornyo, who works as an AIDS Co-ordinator for the National Catholic Secretariat in Accra, states the following:

Christ is so relevant in Ghana and particularly ... in the work I do. There are so many cases of AIDS in Ghana today, and we know that AIDS has no cure. ... So if we can help people to repent, or avoid catching HIV-AIDS, then we are doing the work of Christ, and for that matter the work of God. We also have many people who have gotten AIDS already. What do we do with them? Because of our Christian faith, we *need* to help them so that they live positively in the congregation. And therefore Christ is for us very relevant. Raphael Avornyo, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998.

In addition, two participants in the focus group of Kenyan PACWA women speak of the significance of Christ with respect to the AIDS pandemic: Elizabeth Gitere describes her ministry among AIDS victims and orphans in rural Kenya, and Mary Koinange speaks of ministry among urban commercial sex workers among whom the disease is rampant. Elizabeth Gitere; Mary Koinange, Focus Group, Nairobi: June 13, 1998.

show that personal experience of Jesus as healer features prominently in shaping these African Christians' views about Jesus. Their combined witness thus attests to the vitality of Christian experience that marks African Christianity. Then with regard to liberation methodologies, the discussion above indicated the limited evidence of methodological departure in the contemporary context as the locus for christological reflection. Again, more concentrated efforts in these directions will deepen the efficacy of African christologies.

Further considerations regarding christological methodology stem from the two questions raised in Chapter 3 and addressed specifically to the African theologians under consideration. The first question concerns what contributions have been made towards a new theological methodology which will produce the kind of contextual theology being advocated for Africa. Here the combined efforts of various theologians drawing upon their respective fields of expertise do indeed signal new gains in creative methodologies. For example, from his background of New Testament scholarship, Pobe has modelled in-depth biblical exegesis integrated with intensive analysis of aspects of Akan culture, resulting in fresh christological insights for Christians in Ghana and beyond. Similarly, Oduyoye's extensive knowledge of African cultures and religions has provided a firm foundation for elucidating the significance of Jesus in relation to the African heritage. She further exemplifies new modes for expressing theology, as illustrated by reference to her poem on wholeness of life. In addition, Ela's expertise in sociology fosters acute analysis of the contemporary health-related issues which, together with incisive biblical investigation, enhances his approach to understanding Jesus as healer. There is no doubt that these theologians have paved new directions for christological inquiry and expression in Africa today. They further reveal varying degrees of self-assessment, as concerns the second question derived from Mugambi's call for "introspection and self-criticism." For the present, Ela may be singled out for his achievement in this regard, as he clearly distinguishes his theological approach from the common trend of developing christological titles and stresses his priority of beginning with the people "at the bottom." Thus distinct methodological advances are detected in the textual christologies of these selected theologians.

Finally, the seven aspects of contextual relevance are briefly summarised, underlining various points made in preceding discussions. Perhaps the greatest strength of these particular images lies in their theological relevance. The evidence has shown that Jesus is understood effectively in relation to the African heritage, in terms of his fulfilling the aspirations for life in traditional black Africa and providing the healing previously sought from traditional concepts of God and through

traditional healers. This study thus provides strong confirmation of Mbiti's assertion decades ago that the portrait of Jesus as *Christus Victor* is of utmost significance to African Christians. In Mbiti's words,

The Christian message brings Jesus as the one who fought victoriously against the forces of the devil, spirits, sickness, hatred, fear, and death itself. In each of these areas he won a victory and lives now above the assault of these forces. He is the victor, the one hope, the one example, the one conqueror: and this makes sense to African peoples, it draws their attention, and it is pregnant with meaning. It gives to their myths an absolutely new dimension. The greatest need among African peoples, is to see, to know, and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces from which Africa knows no means of deliverance.²⁸⁰

Not only is Jesus understood in light of African traditions, but these traditions concerning life and health have enhanced African Christians' grasp of biblical affirmations regarding Jesus' life, death and resurrection. For example, attention has been drawn to the holistic, communal and cosmic dimensions of life and healing according to African and biblical traditions. Furthermore, grounds have been established for interpreting Jesus' healing in light of his comprehensive ministry encompassing healing, salvation and liberation, an observation to be further elucidated in later chapters.²⁸¹ Once again, the selected African Christians corroborate Mbiti's earlier insight concerning the integral relationship between healing and salvation in African Christianity. With healing said to be the highest ministerial office in many African contexts, Mbiti observes, "Consequently this is the peak of the Christian experience of God and Jesus as 'our Saviour'. Divine healing is an extension of the 'saving' benefits of God and Jesus." Hence he concludes,

Healing brings or increases life. ... This is a major, if not central, outcome of coming into a faith relationship with 'our Saviour'. The question is not so much one of 'salvation from what', as it is 'salvation into what'. The answer is clearly that Christians are

²⁸⁰ John S. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology," in *Christ and the Younger Churches*, ed. Georg F. Vicedom (London: SPCK, 1972), 55.

²⁸¹ Ela provides one especially graphic illustration of this comprehensive interpretation of Jesus' healing. He draws upon a biblical text which he says has marked him personally, Revelation 22:2, which refers to the vision of the new Jerusalem and speaks of the tree of life whose leaves "are for the healing of the nations" (NRSV). Ela associates this tree first with the tree of the cross, stressing that salvation comes to us by the Crucified One who transformed that tree of death into a source of life. He then relates the heavenly tree back to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil introduced in Genesis. Setting forth the imagery of these three trees, Ela finally focuses on the central tree of the cross and concludes, "Il y a là comme un aboutissement où l'on retrouve tout le dessein de Dieu, tout le grand projet de Dieu." Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999; "It is there like a successful conclusion in which we find the whole design of God, the whole grand project of God."

rescued or saved into a life, a life whose source and sustainer is God or Jesus 'our Saviour'.²⁸²

Herein lies the rationale for the first christological model being that of Jesus as life-giver and healer, for certainly these concepts are fundamental to salvation from the perspective of African Christians.

The degree of cultural relevance flows from the theological relevance, combined with the vernacular or conceptual relevance of the images. This study has clearly shown that these christological portraits do capture the existential realities of life for the overwhelming majority of the selected African Christians, thereby reflecting indigenous perceptions of Jesus operating at the level of religious experience. Thus to the extent that Jesus is comprehended in light of African concepts of life and healing, to that extent is any sense of his foreignness diminished. Even where African traditions may be waning, Jesus is nonetheless hailed as the one who can revive the former ideals, like wholeness of life. As Oduyoye concludes:

[M]uch of what we pride ourselves in has become a mirage, hence the relevance of the Christ-event for Africa. In him we see the pattern of life that is capable of resuscitating these ideals and empowering us to gain the wholeness of life that comes out of being taken into his sphere of influence in which we shall live under the rule of God. In Jesus we see the life of one for whom the spirit world is a reality and the reign of God over all, the operative dynamic of life. Jesus becomes for the African, the Finisher of our Wholeness.²⁸³

Oduyoye and the Circle, among others, also articulate the life-giving and healing images of Jesus in relation to gender issues. For example, the significance of Jesus as life-giver is developed in association with women as life-givers. Also, implications for gender relations stem from the recognition of life being communal, and humanity being made up of male and female.

Certain aspects of the contemporary relevance of these christological images may be added to the strengths outlined above. Research findings certainly manifest the importance of Jesus as life-giver and healer to African Christians today. However, weaknesses have emerged with respect to both historical and contemporary relevance. That is, insufficient attention has been paid to the history of health-related suffering in Africa, and to the church's role in alleviating the current misery ensuing from that history of suffering. Again, Ela has paved the way in this direction, and other theologians follow suit, thereby strengthening the case for

²⁸² John S. Mbiti, "ὁ σωτήρ ὑμῶν as an African Experience," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, eds. Barnabus Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 403.

²⁸³ Oduyoye, "Wholeness of Life in Africa," 121.

African Christianity.²⁸⁴ For as Kolié accurately points out, Christians “have, and will continue to have, credit with the African only to the extent that they share, side by side with the African person, *the struggle for life*.”²⁸⁵ So further christological reflection and action concerning the liberating dimension of the gospel in relation to health issues, such as corrupt health systems, the AIDS pandemic, the lack of potable water, the scandalous proliferation of preventable diseases, and politically-induced famine, would fortify African Christianity on the continent. Hence Bujo’s call for the church of Africa to become a community of healing, for “*Jesus Christ has healed us. He heals all the members of the community, ... giving life to ... everybody*. And this is a very important aspect of christology.”²⁸⁶

Finally, the criterion regarding credibility of witness reinforces key strengths and enduring challenges within African Christianity. Again, this study has patently demonstrated the vitality of Christian witness to Jesus as life-giver and healer. However, certain reservations regarding the efficacy of the christological images stem from some contemporary healing ministries and from current realities in Africa. Thus, by way of conclusion, there is need to highlight Pobee’s exhortation that the healing ministry is a significant part of the mission of God’s people, and his proposals for Christian involvement in enhancing health education and medical work.²⁸⁷ No African Christian would likely disagree with Pobee on this account, yet it appears that Christian witness through the ministry of healing needs to be understood and actualised far more comprehensively.

In view of the serious issues that make the images of Jesus as life-giver and healer contestable today, it is crucial that African Christians address the enduring challenges that threaten to distort perceptions of Jesus. For Kolié rightfully insists that “it can only be from the experiential advent of Christ in the vital problems of our communities that a coherent theological discourse will arise and not remain superficial.”²⁸⁸ He further emphasises, after raising the question of whether Jesus can truly be present in Africa as a healer, that “to give Christ the face of the healer in Africa (even though this was his principal activity in Israel) will not be feasible until the manifold gifts of healing possessed by all of our Christian communities have begun to manifest themselves.”²⁸⁹ Thus Kolié makes the vital point that it is not

²⁸⁴ See for example Kolié, who acknowledges Ela’s influence in “Jesus as Healer?” 149, n. 19, and Mwaura, “Healing as Pastoral Concern.”

²⁸⁵ Kolié, “Jesus as Healer?” 132.

²⁸⁶ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

²⁸⁷ Pobee, “Healing—An African Christian Theologian’s Perspective,” 251; “Health, Healing and Religion,” 61-64.

²⁸⁸ Kolié, “Jesus as Healer?” 128.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

simply a matter of naming Jesus or ascribing African titles to him, but rather of witnessing that Jesus actually fulfils these important roles in the lives of African Christians today. So in spite of the strong evidence in this chapter for the significant presence of Jesus as life-giver and healer in Africa, there is need to attend to the legitimate challenge Kolié voices as follows:

We must bring it about that Jesus be named precisely by those who will have received and welcomed him. This Jesus will be Healer, Grand Master of Initiation, Ancestor par excellence, or Chief of Chiefs, not because I shall have declared him to be such, but because he will have wrought cures, presided over initiations, and given birth to a free person. His hosts will believe in him no longer on my word, but because they will have seen and heard them themselves, because they will have experienced the liberation he brings, the exodus he works.²⁹⁰

With this sober challenge in mind, further facets of Jesus' identity and significance are investigated in the next model of Jesus as mediator.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 148.

CHAPTER 6

JESUS AS MEDIATOR

Jesus Christ is the ultimate embodiment of all the virtues of the ancestors, the realization of the salvation for which they yearned. Further still, Jesus Christ is the Proto-Ancestor, the proto-life-force, bearer in a transcendent form of the primitive 'vital union' and 'vital force'.¹

An African ecclesiology can no longer dispense with a christology based on Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor and as the source of proto-ancestral vital force. ... [A]n ecclesiology incarnated into this African world of thought will produce unheard of prophetic consequences in society and community life in modern Africa.²

- Bénédet Bujo, Congolese theologian

*I think ... the **strongest** profile of Jesus that comes through ... which I find helpful for my own life, is that of a **living** companion on your life's journey. ... The **closeness** of Jesus, for **me**, it's like the way we appropriate the presence of our ancestors. Jesus functions for me as an ancestor functions for any Akan—an invisible companion, a person whose **presence** you can sense very keenly, mentors you in your life and he's just **there** ... he's **around**. So it's this **lively presence** ... that I think is most useful for me.³*

- Mercy Oduyoye, Ghanaian theologian

A. Introduction

In the interface between biblical and African traditions, concepts of mediation are central. The second christological model investigates how Jesus is understood and experienced as mediator in selected contemporary African contexts where these traditions meet. The chapter is divided into three main sections: first, a brief introduction to intermediaries in the African heritage, according to selected African Christians, and how these believers view Jesus as mediator. Textual and field research reveal numerous images of Jesus in relation to mediation, which overlap with one another and with those from other christological models. Some of these images include Jesus as mediator, prophet, priest, lamb, sacrifice, reconciler,

¹ Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 81.

² Bénédet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990), 83.

³ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

advocate, and peace-maker. One of the more significant images to emerge in this category is that of Jesus as ancestor. Attention therefore focuses on this image in the second section of the chapter, before conclusions are drawn in the final section. In keeping with the previous chapter, the aim of this chapter is to outline the rationale for the second christological pattern in the convergence of African and biblical traditions, to interpret its meaning in contemporary African usage, and to consider its significance for contemporary African Christianity.

1. Intermediaries in African Religions

The first christological model began with concepts of life in Africa, since the very foundation and purpose of African religions, as Laurenti Magesa notes, “is life, life in its fullness.”⁴ Magesa goes on to explain,

The logic of the moral/ethical orientation of African Religion is unmistakable: wherever and whenever there is a diminishment or a destruction of the force of life, something must be done to restore it; whenever there is a breach of order in the universe as established by God through the ancestors, humanity must see to it that harmony is restored. Failing this, humanity will suffer.⁵

When afflictions occur within a community, such as wrongdoing, illness, or witchcraft, African religions recognize various means to discover the reasons for the disharmony in the universe and to prescribe measures for rectifying the problem, thereby restoring the force of life. Intermediaries are those beings who function in these roles of discernment and mediating reconciliation.

Mbiti introduces the concept of intermediaries in Africa as being found “almost everywhere” and derived from common social and political custom in which people of higher status are approached indirectly through a third party. In his words, “It is a widespread feeling among many African peoples that man should not, or cannot, approach God alone or directly, but that he must do so through the mediation of special persons or other beings.”⁶ He identifies two types of intermediaries. Some are human beings, including “priests, kings, medicine men, seers, oracles, diviners, rain-makers and ritual elders.”⁷ Elaboration upon the precise roles of these religious specialists lies beyond the present scope.⁸ However, Mbiti summarises the main

⁴ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), 68.

⁷ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 62.

⁸ For further information, see Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 54-64; *African Religions and Philosophy*, 166-193.

functions of these human mediums as helping humanity to maintain liturgical contact with God and the spiritual world, and attending to the needs of the community. That is, when people relate their needs to the appropriate religious specialist, it is the medium's duty to approach God or the spirit world through prayers, sacrifice, offerings, divination or dream interpretation according to the need presented.

The second type of intermediary, according to Mbiti, includes spiritual beings believed to assist people in approaching God.⁹ He distinguishes between divinities, or "spiritual beings of a relatively high status" such as the so-called "nature spirits" or the spirits of deified heroes, clan founders, kings, and chiefs, and the "common populace" of spiritual beings.¹⁰ While human relationships with the spirits vary among different societies, Mbiti emphasises the powerful place which many societies grant to the "living-dead," or the spirits of those who have died recently. These are considered to be the closest links that humans have with the spirit world. They are also regarded as the best intermediaries since they know the needs of humans, from whom they have only recently departed, and they are "bilingual" in speaking the language of humans and the language of the spirits and God. Consequently, they are approached more often than God for minor needs in life.¹¹ While people are certainly free to approach God directly and do so often, according to Mbiti, they nonetheless feel the need for a bridge between themselves and God. Hence the spiritual intermediaries are seen as "windows and channels through which people may come closer to God." As Mbiti explains,

The idea of intermediaries fits well with the African view of the universe, which holds that the invisible world is in some ways higher than that of man, but God is higher still. In order to reach God effectively it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person.¹²

2. Jesus as Mediator

With concepts of mediators so important in the African heritage, African Christians have inevitably interpreted Jesus in relation to such notions. For example, Appiah-Kubi observes that the idea of a mediator or intermediary is common among

⁹ Certainly concepts of intermediaries vary among different ethnic societies in Africa. While Mbiti has sometimes been criticised for overgeneralizing about African traditional religions, his analysis is drawn upon here for the purpose of providing a concise introduction to key concepts of intermediaries in Africa.

¹⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 78; see also 75-91; *Introduction to African Religion*, 65-76.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83-84.

¹² Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 63-64.

most African societies and asserts that Christ plays the role of the traditional intermediary, approaching God on behalf of the people.¹³ Contextual evidence is furnished by François Kabasélé, who observes that “[m]ost of the movements of spiritual awakening in black Africa are marked by an acute sense of the concept of the intermediary.”¹⁴ He cites two examples: first, the *jamaa* movement within the Catholic Church in the Belgian Congo during the 1950s, which posited Christ as the new male ancestor and Mary as the new female ancestor.¹⁵ Second, certain catecheses arose during the era of “adaptation” which sought to relate the worship of Christ to the ancestral concepts widespread throughout Bantu-speaking Africa. In view of the natural association of Jesus with traditional intermediaries, and in particular the ancestors, the question thus arises: Can the category of African ancestors function meaningfully as a hermeneutical key for interpreting Jesus Christ in Africa? The remainder of the chapter addresses this central question by introducing ancestors in traditional African thought, raising critical issues surrounding the image of Jesus as ancestor, exploring the image as expressed in the textual and oral christologies, and arriving at conclusions regarding its significance for African Christianity.

¹³ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “Christology,” in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987), 71. Appiah-Kubi then develops what he considers to be an important difference between the classical Christian concept of Christ as mediator, not only in terms of providing communication but also removing barriers of sin and guilt which separate humanity from God, and the African understanding of God and therefore of Christ. Insisting that this does not mean that the African has no notion of sin and guilt, Appiah-Kubi contends that “the African does not see the mediatory functions of Christ as being that of pleading for him before God for forgiveness of sin.” Ibid. In other words, the ways in which Africans interpret sin necessarily influence their understanding of Jesus’ mediatorial role. Such questions of soteriology are vital to a comprehensive investigation of African christologies, but exceed the present scope of inquiry.

¹⁴ François Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” in *Faces of Jesus In Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 117.

¹⁵ This movement surfaced around the figure of Placide Tempels, although it developed as a non-clerical campaign. In opposition to the authoritarian, paternalistic form of Catholicism which assumed a *tabula rasa* approach to converting Africans, Tempels sought to cultivate Christian faith on the basis of deep encounter with African concepts and worldviews. *Jamaa* (“family”) thus emerged as an informal renewal advocating “love” as the means for establishing a spiritual family, with Jesus and Mary serving as ancestors and archetypes for increasing love within the home. For further information, see Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 116-118.

B. Jesus As Ancestor

1. Introduction

a) Concepts of Ancestor in Africa

The vital role of the ancestors in traditional African thought lies beyond dispute, with clear attestation in the literature on African religions and on African Christianity.¹⁶ Among the primary sources in this study, Bénézet Bujo asserts that the notion of communion with the dead is central to the worldview of African peoples, citing evidence from funeral rites, initiation rites, hunting ceremonies and other rituals among the Bahema of Congo.¹⁷ Likewise Jean-Marc Ela notes that veneration of the ancestors takes different forms in different societies, yet he concludes,

In many traditional societies, the cult of the dead is perhaps that aspect of culture to which the African is most attached—the heritage clung to above all else. Indeed, the cult of the ancestors is so widespread throughout Africa that it is impossible to avoid the questions this practice raises for Christian life and reflection.¹⁸

Offering examples from various contexts across Africa, from the formal recognition of the ancestral cult by some governments, such as the Congolese, to African art including statues and masks, Ela reserves his explication of the ancestral cult for the Kirdi peoples of Cameroon among whom he ministered. He acknowledges the threat which increasing urbanisation poses to belief in the ancestors, pointing to research conducted in Abidjan which revealed that young people distance themselves from

¹⁶ In addition to Bujo and Ela cited below, see J. N. K. Mugambi, *The African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd., 1989), 66-67; Anne J. Nasimiyu, "Vatican II: The Problem of Inculturation," (Ph.D. diss., Duquesne University, 1986), 249; Vincent Mulago, "Vital Participation: The Cohesive Principle of the Bantu Community," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 137-158; Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 33; and Aylward Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," *AFER* 25, no. 4 (Aug. 1983): 199. See also Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956); Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Ltd., 1978); Daniel Wambutda, "Ancestors: The Living Dead," in *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, ed. E. A. Ade. Adegbola (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1983), 128-137.

¹⁷ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 25-26; Bujo refers to "Zaire," which has since changed its name to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

¹⁸ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 14. The chapter containing this material is largely comprised of an earlier article, "Ancestors and Christian Faith: An African Problem," in *Liturgy and Cultural Religious Traditions*, ed. Herman Schmidt and David Power (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 34-50.

traditional customs or are even unaware of them. In response, Ela questions how the traditional cultural inheritance can be maintained in Christian practice as society changes. He underlines that what is at stake is “an African vision of humanity” enshrined in honouring the ancestors, and even urges the church to consider how Christianity in the West could benefit from studying black Africans’ communion with their ancestors.¹⁹ Hence he undoubtedly concurs with Bujo’s observation that ancestral veneration is one of the fundamental pillars of religion for many ethnic groups in black Africa, and Bujo’s consequent conviction expressed as follows:

In reality, anyone who would propose e.g. an ecclesiology, a christology or a sacramental theology from the point of view of African ancestral veneration, would have to pay particular attention to those living dead, whose commemoration is regarded by their descendents as indispensable and beneficial or even salvific for their earthly existence.²⁰

If this is the case, then what is the place and role of the “living dead” in black Africa? While elaboration by the theologians whose texts are primary for this study awaits a later section in the chapter, other writers in the field provide appropriate introduction. For example, Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti begins his brief survey of African ancestral beliefs with the important observation, already indicated, that “[t]here is no uniform system of beliefs on ancestors in black Africa.”²¹ Divergences may be found even within the same social or tribal group, and not all African peoples practise ancestor veneration.²² Despite such differences, Nyamiti contends that there are enough beliefs shared by most societies to affirm certain common ancestral beliefs in black Africa. He outlines five common elements as follows:

- (a) *Natural relationship* between the ancestor and his or her earthly relatives, usually based on parent-hood or, more rarely, on brotherhood. The basis for such a relationship may be consanguineous or non-sanguineous, such as membership in a secret society, and these ties are believed to continue existing beyond death.
- (b) *Supernatural or sacred status* acquired through death, and understood in terms of super-human powers and nearness to God. Ancestors are often presented as

¹⁹ Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 24-26.

²⁰ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 73.

²¹ Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Mambo Occasional Papers - Missio-Pastoral Series no. 11 (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984), 15.

²² Sarpong also notes that relatively few African peoples are said to lack organised veneration of the dead such as he describes regarding certain ethnic groups in Ghana. As examples he cites the Nuer of Sudan and other Nilotic peoples like the Dinka, the Shilluk, and the Anuak. See Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 33.

ambivalent in character, for they can be benevolent to their earthly kin but can also intervene in human affairs to bring harm, particularly as punishment for relatives who have neglected them or committed some offence within the community.

Consequently the ancestors are sometimes feared, although the living normally expect care and protection from them plus various benefits like long life, children, and wealth. Angry ancestors are generally appeased through prayers and various rituals involving food or drinks.

(c) *Mediation* between God and humanity, on account of their supernatural status and proximity to God.

(d) *Title to regular sacred communication* with earthly relatives, with whom the ancestors long to maintain contact.

(e) *Exemplarity*, as models of good behaviour.²³

Ghanaian theologian Peter Sarpong provides further considerations regarding African concepts of ancestors. One central conviction frequently noted by commentators is that not everyone becomes an ancestor, but only those who fulfil specific conditions. In Sarpong's overview, the first condition is to pass through the critical stages of life to attain adulthood, which is generally determined by marriage rather than age and which assumes procreation. An unmarried person, however old, is disqualified from ancestorhood on account of not having transmitted life to another person and is therefore considered "a useless person whose name should be blotted out of memory."²⁴ A second requirement is to die a "natural" death, excluding tragic deaths such as those by accident, suicide, unclear diseases or in childbirth. Thirdly, qualification for becoming an ancestor requires an exemplary life by tribal standards, demonstrating good character and behaviour according to traditional morality.

Finally, in summarising the role of ancestors in Africa, several main points emerge from the literature. Aylward Shorter draws attention to one approach in which ancestors are very often understood as no more than liturgical companions of the living. He explains that the spirits of the dead are not always invoked as those to whom veneration is addressed. Rather,

The worshipper prays in solidarity with them to the Creator, using prayer-formulas or sacred places which they have bequeathed to him. These are regarded as pledges of divine favour, since the dead are held to stand in a close relationship to God, even if they are not invoked themselves.²⁵

²³ Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 15-16.

²⁴ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 35.

²⁵ Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," 199.

According to Shorter, this approach is found among numerous African peoples including a cluster of those in central Kenya. A second key role, noted above, is that of mediators between God and humanity, whether the ancestors are interpreted as intercessors or plenipotentiaries.²⁶ A third function of the living-dead is summarised by Mbiti as “guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities.”²⁷ They are said to be the makers and custodians of tribal law, and the conviction that the ancestors are watching over the human community to regulate daily life and behaviour serves as a potent sanction to morality.²⁸

Much more than spiritual law-enforcers, however, the fundamental role of the ancestors is as invisible participants in the ongoing life of the human community. One vital component here is that they continue the ties of kinship beyond death, linking together family and clan members in the visible and invisible worlds. Thus kinship lies at the very heart of ancestral concepts, for as Magesa explains, “Kinship is what in large measure constitutes life itself and its mystique. And kinship is most intensely and most meaningfully realized and expressed in and by the ancestor relationship.”²⁹ Ancestral communion therefore entails acts of remembrance which actualise the presence of the departed for the living with whom they are in continuity. Moreover, ancestral communion is marked by a reciprocal relationship of mutual action that enhances life for the community in human and cosmic solidarity. Magesa notes further, “The ancestors and their descendants are in a constant state of

²⁶ Shorter raises the question of whether the role of African ancestors as intercessors is not of Christian invention or at least inspiration. He cites research from Tanzania which concludes that the Christian concept of intercession was imported into the *muzimu* (“ancestor”) cults. Further research among the Kimbu people indicates no concept of the *imilungu* (“ancestors”) as intercessors, but rather God is approached as an intercessor with the spirits of the dead, asking him to guarantee that they fulfil their duties to their descendants. Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” 200.

A parallel occurs among the Creoles of Sierra Leone, of whom Harry Sawyerr states, “In spite of the long Christian tradition, or perhaps because of it, the Creole ancestors are thought to be close to God. One would say here that the two lines of pagan belief and Christian teaching seem to have crossed and the distinctions have become completely blurred.” John Parratt, ed., *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 45.

The better attested form of ancestral mediation, according to Shorter, is the concept of the deceased as plenipotentiaries from whom requests are made for all the blessings that come from God. Citing the Kimbu people as an example, Shorter states that this model is to be found throughout Africa. He further points out the “Luguru model,” typified by the Luguru of Tanzania and summarized as follows:

In this model, both Creator and spirits of the dead are invoked together, with the implication that certain departments of divine providence are delegated to the dead, while other areas are reserved to God himself. I would suggest that this departmentalisation of providence within a basically theistic system of belief is very common indeed in Africa. Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” 200.

²⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83.

²⁸ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 41.

²⁹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 78.

exchanging gifts and favors. This is what communion requires; it is what remembrance means. This dialectic strengthens the life force of the world for the sake of living humanity.”³⁰ Thus the ultimate goal of ancestral veneration in Africa, encompassing ancestral communion as well as rituals of preventing and redressing harm in the community, is to seek balance and harmony among all aspects of the created order: between the living and the dead, among the living, and with creation. It is this harmony which constitutes the abundant life the ancestors received from the founders of the clan, lineage, or ethnic group, which they observed themselves, thereby becoming ancestors, and which is to be transmitted from generation to generation.³¹

b) Critical Issues Regarding Jesus in Relation to African Ancestors

Before considering how this brief overview of ancestral concepts bears upon the image of Jesus as ancestor, certain critical issues must be raised regarding Jesus in relation to African ancestors. Methodological concerns begin with the problem of terminology, for the word “ancestor” is one of many attempts to translate various African vernacular terms. For example, Mbiti objects to the terms “ancestors” and “ancestral spirits” being used generally for the departed since not all spirits are ancestors; instead, he advocates simply “spirits” or “the living-dead,” whichever is applicable.³² Shorter concurs, yet calls for further clarification to justify the apparent paradox of “living-dead.” After weighing other English translations such as “ghost,” “shade,” and “those who are dead,” he suggests the clumsy phrase “spirits of the dead” as a way out of the terminological difficulties.³³ The concern extends beyond the lack of terminological agreement, however, for as Shorter observes, “It is very instructive to note the difficulty African Christians have in translating the English term ‘ancestor’ back into an African language.”³⁴ Citing an example of Swahili words under consideration for use in the All-Africa Eucharistic Prayer, he underlines how certain vernacular terms carry associations deemed incompatible with a Christian attitude to the departed. Therefore, akin to the situation with the image of

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 79-82. See also Sawyer’s explanation of harmony as the *raison d’être* of ancestral rites in Parratt, *The Practice of Presence*, 48-50.

³² Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 85. Mbiti’s terminology breeds confusion, however, for he does not specify the relationship between “ancestors” and “the living-dead.” While attributing to the living-dead those attributes and functions normally associated with the ancestors, the two terms are clearly not equivalent for he states that “there are spirits and living-dead of children, brothers, sisters, barren wives and other members of the family who were not in any way the ‘ancestors.’” Ibid.

³³ Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” 198-199.

³⁴ Ibid., 202.

Jesus as traditional healer, the connotations surrounding vernacular terms and their English translations will necessarily influence the interpretation of Jesus as ancestor.

Related to the linguistic concern of translating vernacular terms is the deeper issue regarding the theological interpretation of African ancestral spirits. For one's view of these spirits will patently affect one's receptivity towards the use of this category for depicting Jesus Christ. For example, in contrast to the delineation of ancestors summarised above, Richard Gehman, a leading evangelical missionary in Kenya, builds on the premise that "[t]raditional African belief in the ancestral spirits is one of those items in ATR which is totally incompatible with the Christian faith."³⁵ Given this starting point, he draws radically different conclusions which warrant citation for the degree of dissension expressed:

Divinities, nature spirits and ancestral spirits in various ways have detracted from the glory of God. These spirits have promoted an unlawful relationship with men and women contrary to the will of God. These spirits have possessed and enslaved human beings. In biblical perspective these are none other than the unclean spirits, the fallen angels who serve their master, even Satan. Nothing could be plainer in the Bible than the divine abhorrence and active opposition to any contact, communication or relationship with the ancestral spirits, divinities or other spirits. The living God created us for Himself and He alone is to be our hope and confidence and refuge. From God and His Word alone should we obtain guidance.³⁶

In addition to divergent interpretations of African ancestral spirits, theological problems concerning the image of Jesus as ancestor are multiplied by three critical questions intrinsically related to one another. Despite the importance of these questions to recent debates within African Christianity, they can only be outlined briefly here as bearing upon the discussion at hand and noted for further research. The first is the long-standing question of whether the African ancestors are actually worshipped or merely venerated. In earlier discussions of African theology in the twentieth century, Harry Sawyerr pointed out the difficulties manifested by the opposing views of those who consider ancestral cults as "abominable idolatry" and those who deny that real worship takes place.³⁷ These contrasting interpretations

³⁵ Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe, Kenya: Kesho Publications, 1989), 184.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

³⁷ Parratt, *The Practice of Presence*, 43. Among those who claim ancestors are not worshipped, Sawyerr places Idowu and Kenyatta on the basis of their respective writings. Among those who believe ancestors are worshipped, he places Ulli Beier's findings on the Yoruba, various authors in reference to the Akan, as well as his own conclusion expressed as follows:

We would therefore maintain that Africans do offer prayers to their ancestors and for the purpose of this work, such prayers constitute a form of worship. ... Africans do worship their

likewise emerge in the present research and undoubtedly colour perceptions of Jesus as ancestor, as evidenced in the analysis to come.

A second, closely connected question is the place of the African ancestors in the Christian faith. Ela forms a key witness here, for in accordance with his criticism of a titular christological approach referred to in the discussion of Jesus as healer, he dissents from those enthusiastically endorsing Jesus as ancestor. In conversation, he acknowledges the image as a prominent theme at present and commends Bujo's contribution in this regard. Nevertheless, he argues that the christology of the ancestor Christ is not new, being essentially Pauline christology, and that it has not yet been examined at a sufficiently systematic and critical manner in Africa. Instead he asserts, "Pour moi le question centrale qui doit être reconsidérer c'est celle de la place des ancêtres dans une christologie africaine. On n'a pas élucidé ce problème."³⁸ Elsewhere he has indeed tackled the issue, identifying it as of crucial importance to any discussion of the Christian faith that takes into account an existing culture, in order for the gospel to purify and liberate it. After highlighting the pervasiveness of honouring ancestors in Africa and explicating one example of it in Cameroon, he pinpoints the real issue for Christians as follows: "Is there any place in our life in Jesus Christ for maintaining a relationship between the living and the dead? Or must Africans break their relationship with their ancestors if they are to be converted to the gospel?"³⁹ Varying responses to these questions surface in written and oral discussions of African christology, particularly in relation to the veneration of saints in Catholic tradition, and again influence receptivity to the image of Jesus as ancestor.

A third question stems directly from the second, as clearly indicated in the conversation with Ela. Immediately following the statement above regarding the place of the ancestors in African christology, he raises the fundamental question of ancestral mediation in light of New Testament claims for Jesus as the only mediator

ancestors as they do their divinities. This worship consists of prayers, sacrifices, and divination on communal occasions or prayers and divinations on private occasions. ... The prayers themselves consist of petitions related to the welfare of the worshippers, their children, their harvests, peace and goodwill in the country. Dare we say that these rites we have been discussing do not constitute worship? *Ibid.*, 55.

For further expressions of the theological problem and various views towards it, see Fergus J. King, "Angels and Ancestors: A Basis for Christology?" *Mission Studies* 11, no. 1 (1994): 12-15; Damian Lwasa, "Traditional and Christian Community in Africa," in *African Christian Spirituality*, ed. Aylward Shorter (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), 146; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 8-9; and Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 42.

³⁸ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999. "For me the central question which has to be reconsidered is that of the place of the ancestors in an African christology. We have not elucidated this problem."

³⁹ Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 18. See also Ela, "Ancestors and Christian Faith," 38.

between God and man. If Jesus is the universal saviour, then what is the role of the ancestors in the history of salvation?⁴⁰ Certainly questions regarding the uniqueness and normativeness of Jesus amidst contemporary religious pluralism are pivotal in the field of global christologies today.⁴¹ Treatment of the controversy exceeds the present bounds, though its importance is recognised in respect of Jesus and the African ancestors.

Thus important questions arise regarding the African ancestors in connection with christology: the theological interpretation of their identity, their place within African religions including whether they are worshipped or venerated, their place within the Christian faith, especially in light of Christian saints, and their role as mediators in relation to Christian claims of the sole mediation of Jesus Christ. While in-depth inquiry into these issues lies beyond the present scope, they are introduced here as aspects of the theological matrix in which the image of Jesus as ancestor has developed.

⁴⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999. The intensity of the questions stands out in the oral interview. For this reason, the following quote is included to indicate that these are not merely academic questions, but rather issues of deep personal impact:

La question est posée dans la mesure où le Nouveau Testament présente Jésus-Christ comme le médiateur unique entre Dieu et les hommes. ... Ça c'est, pour le Nouveau Testament, pour St. Paul, pour les Evangiles: 'Je suis le chemin,' *le, le chemin!* ... Alors, si vous dites ça, ... [q]u'est-ce que je vais faire de mes ancêtres? ... Est-ce qu'ils ne sont pas une médiation? Ça c'est le grand problème qui nous reste à examiner sur le plan théologique. ... La question christologique fondamentale, est celle de la place d'autres médiations compte tenu de nos ancêtres qui sont là, que nous considérons comme les chemins vers Dieu. Ils nous ont laissé quelque chose que Dieu leur a donné. Qu'est-ce que je vais faire de ces gens là? Est-ce que je vais les éliminer? Pour dire, maintenant Jésus-Christ c'est lui seul? ... Donc il faut reprendre le débat christologique à partir de l'affirmation de l'universalité de Jésus comme médiateur, afin d'examiner la *place* des ancêtres dans l'histoire du salut. Est-ce qu'ils sont inutiles? Est-ce qu'ils préparent Jésus-Christ? Est-ce que Dieu leur a confié un rôle important? Quel est leur rôle? Et comment je peux me référer aux ancêtres quand Jésus-Christ est là?

The question is posed insofar as the New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the only mediator between God and men. ... That is, for the New Testament, for St. Paul, for the Gospels: 'I am the way,' *the, the way!* ... Now, if you say that, ... [w]hat am I going to do with my ancestors? ... Are they not a mediation? That is the great problem which remains for us to examine on the theological plane. ... The fundamental christological question is that of the place of other mediations taking account of our ancestors who are there, that we consider as paths towards God. They have left us something that God gave them. What am I going to do with these people there? Am I going to eliminate them? In order to say, now it is Jesus Christ alone? ... Therefore it is necessary to take up the christological debate from the affirmation of the universality of Jesus as mediator, in order to examine the *place* of the ancestors in the history of salvation. Are they useless? Do they prepare for Jesus Christ? Has God entrusted to them an important role? What is their role? And how can I refer to the ancestors when Jesus Christ is there?

⁴¹ For only one recent example in an extensive field of literature, see T. Merrigan and J. Haers, eds., *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 152 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2000).

The stage is set, then, for exploring how the image of Jesus as ancestor fares in the selected textual and oral christologies.

2. Jesus as Ancestor in Selected Textual Christologies

With the exception of Ela, as previously noted, all six of the selected African theologians lend varying degrees of assent and priority to the image of Jesus as ancestor. Present elaboration centres upon the two leading proponents in this regard, namely, John Pobee and Bénédzet Bujo. The fact that these two represent, respectively, a West African Protestant anglophone and a Central African Catholic francophone reflects the widespread appeal of the image throughout the continent.

a) John Pobee

Pobee was among the earliest advocates of the ancestral image for Jesus in modern African theology, as expressed in his key work, *Toward an African Theology* (1979). The stated aim of this volume is to translate the Christian faith into genuine African categories and thought forms.⁴² Among the main aspects of the Akan worldview on which he focuses, Pobee explains, “Perhaps the most potent aspect of Akan religion is the cult of the ancestors. They, like the Supreme Being, are always held in deep reverence or even worshipped.”⁴³ He then delineates the beliefs about their identity as departed clan members, their qualifications for ancestry, and their ongoing participation in the community in terms similar to those outlined in the introduction above. He later returns to this traditional category of the ancestors in his concentrated reflections on christology. In light of the fundamental role of ancestral veneration within Akan thought and society, Pobee poses his critical christological questions as follows: “Who is Jesus Christ? What manner of man is he? How does he affect my life? Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth, who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe, and nation?”⁴⁴ The answers to these questions, in his view, will largely determine the rooting of Christianity in Africa.

Before tackling the questions directly, Pobee highlights the problem that the Nicene Creed, ratified and expanded by the Council of Constantinople, became the plumb-line of orthodoxy for western Christianity. However, that Creed was forged in a predominantly Hellenistic society and articulated in the language and concepts of the time, such as “substance” and “hypostasis,” which are now alien to the language and thought forms of both Europe and Africa. Yet due to the enduring impact of

⁴² John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 17-18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

Greco-Roman culture, the tendency remains to discuss christology in metaphysical terms. Emphasising that the Creed was itself an attempt to “translate” biblical faith into contemporary idiom, Pobee asserts his methodological priority of getting behind the Creed to the biblical faith which constitutes the plumb-line for assessing any subsequent christology. Consequently, the question for him is “what has the biblical tradition to say on Christology?”⁴⁵ In contrast to metaphysical speculation, Pobee argues that biblical faith presents christology in very functional terms, depicting Jesus in terms of his activity, and that this approach fits well with Akan thought. He therefore advocates and models the use of proverbs, used for serious discussions in Akan society, as a more apt approach for an Akan christology than the process of philosophical abstraction from biblical texts which has governed western theology.

Having established his methodological rationale, Pobee attends first to the biblical presentation of christology. He notes the diversity of christological formulations within the New Testament, based on different writers’ experiences and cultures, yet arrives at his central thesis, expressed as follows:

[T]he diverse Christologies converge and agree on two points: ‘Jesus is truly man and at the same time truly divine.’ It is these two ideas that any Christology, whether African or European, American or Chinese, Russian or Australian, Akan or Ga, Ewe or Dagbani, Yoruba or Igbo, is concerned to capture, even if the imageries or terminologies may change. All the christological titles come back to these same two ideas. The humanity and the divinity of Jesus are the two nonnegotiables of any authentic Christology.⁴⁶

These two components, the humanity and divinity of Jesus, thus form the twin foci of Pobee’s christological reflections as condensed in this particular work on African theology.

It is within this context that he formulates the image of Jesus as ancestor. As he seeks to relate aspects of biblical teaching about Jesus to the Akan worldview, Pobee returns to the concept of ancestors to explicate Jesus’ divinity in terms of his authority and power as judge of people’s deeds. He explains,

In Akan society the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanctions for the good life and punish evil. And the ancestors hold that authority as ministers of the Supreme Being. Our approach would be to look on Jesus as the Great and Greatest Ancestor—in Akan language *Nana*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 94.

He immediately stresses that “even if Jesus is *Nana* like the other illustrious ancestors, ... he is superior to the other ancestors by virtue of being closest to God and as God.”⁴⁸ He also points out that as *Nana*, Jesus has authority not only over the human realm but also over all spirit beings including the ancestors. Additionally, Pobee recounts how reflecting on the term “*Nana*” as used for Jesus, the ancestors, and the Supreme Being, triggered the intrinsically related idea of Jesus as chief.⁴⁹ The two images thus dovetail in his conclusions regarding the implications of “*Nana Yesu*” for Christian life:

To say Jesus is *Nana* is to let his standards reign supreme in personal orientation, in the structures of society, in the economic processes, and in political forces. It means in practical terms personal and social justice and re-creation. An African who affirms that Jesus is *Nana* also should relate that message to the issues of human and social justices in African countries as in the rest of the world.⁵⁰

Pobee addresses his initial christological questions concerning the identity and significance of Jesus for Akan Christians through the image of Jesus as ancestor as only one possible christological portrait intended to speak to the hearts of Africans. In its formulation to date it remains regrettably limited, as Pobee himself laments in conversation. For example, inadequate attention is given to the thorny issue of how Jesus can be linked with African lineage ancestors, a concern inherent in Pobee’s own christological query. Doubtless further consideration of Jesus’ role as ancestor, beyond functions of power and authority to judge, would enhance his presentation of the image. Nonetheless, by drawing upon his personal experience of the ancestral motif, Pobee portrays Jesus as ancestor “[b]ecause it’s the language the Akan of Ghana would use. It’s a way of saying, *what* is the living connection between me and this Jesus Christ?”⁵¹

b) Bénézet Bujo

This “living connection” between the African believer and Jesus Christ also lies at the heart of Bujo’s theological agenda, as may be recalled from his central question introduced in Chapter 3: “*In which way can Jesus Christ be an African among the Africans according to their own religious experience?*”⁵² To address this challenge, Bujo begins, like Pobee, with the historical precedent of early Christians bestowing upon Jesus titles from contemporary culture. These have remained

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The image of Jesus as chief is explored in Chapter 7, *Jesus as Leader*, pp. 229ff.

⁵⁰ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 98.

⁵¹ John Pobee, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

⁵² Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 9; see p. 70 above.

throughout Christian tradition despite their meanings becoming obscured, and the consequent need for reinterpreting christology in today's changing cultural contexts. Given the centrality of ancestral beliefs throughout black Africa as outlined above, Bujo develops an entire ancestral theology on the presupposition of "ancestor-preoccupation as a typical, anthropocentric, African 'mode of thought.'"⁵³ Present elaboration is confined to the most salient features of his christological formulation, including his interpretation of ancestral veneration, its connection with Jesus, and the significance of the ensuing image of Jesus as ancestor.

If the first christological model presents life as fundamental to African worldviews, the second model reflects how life is inextricably bound up with the ancestors according to widespread African belief. Ultimately life comes from God, as indicated in Bujo's thought conveyed in the previous chapter, yet the ancestors play a vital role in mediating that life-force to the living.⁵⁴ For this reason, Bujo asserts both eschatological and salvific dimensions inherent in ancestral communion, expressed as follows:

Here we begin to understand the supreme importance of the past for the African: for the secret of life is to be found above all in the hallowed attitudes and practices of the ancestors. In their wisdom is to be found the key to a better and fuller life, and it is therefore crucial that the rites, actions, words and laws which the ancestors have bequeathed to their descendants be scrupulously observed: they are the indispensable instruments of salvation. The way a person treats this inheritance is decisive, for life or for death. The ancestral traditions are gifts of God, they have a truly sacramental character. The life-giving traditions of the past must determine the present and the future since in them alone is salvation to be found.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 76-77.

⁵⁴ Bujo explains further, as follows:

However, if life and especially human life comes from God, the African also knows that God uses his ancestors to communicate this to him. The original ancestor continues to live in his descendents, and is, after God, at the origin of the existence of the present generation. He had transmitted his own vital force to those of his descendents who in their turn have already joined the dead, but remain nevertheless responsible for the welfare and sustenance of the life in their clan. This is the reason why every surviving clan member must be in close contact with the departed members of the family, of the clan, or of the tribe or nation. It will be, accordingly, the father of the family in the case of a family, in the case of the clan the senior elder of it, for the ethnical group, the chief or a similar person, for the nation, the king as the case may be, who will be the constitutional representative of the respective ancestors, and are, as such, empowered to transmit life to their respective communities, and to enforce the moral order established by the fathers. Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 75-76.

⁵⁵ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 27; cf. "Nos ancêtres, ces saints inconnus," *Bulletin de théologie africaine* 1, no. 2 (juillet-déc. 1979): 165-166; "Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique," in *Combats pour un christianisme africain: Mélanges en l'honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*, Bibliothèque du Centre d'Etudes des Religions Africaines, no. 6, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1981), 23-24; *African Christian Morality*, 76-78.

The African heritage is thus interpreted as having sacramental meaning and efficacy, for only in honouring and appropriating the traditions of the past can the human community secure life for the present and the future. Through the acts of ancestral remembrance, states Bujo, Africans are seeking not just earthly prosperity but “salvation in all its fullness.”⁵⁶

In order to relate the African heritage to biblical sources, Bujo draws a striking parallel between ancestral beliefs and “narrative theology” rooted in the Bible. In other words, he likens African traditions of remembering and re-enacting the deeds of the ancestors as a “memorial-narrative act of salvation” to “Exodus Theology.”⁵⁷ Thus the ancestors are models for the living, not simply to be imitated, but the recalling of ancestral traditions is thought to actually bring into effect the fullness of life they signify. So the African traditions do not function in a deterministic way, but rather as a potency which the individual decides whether or not to actuate. By recalling the life-giving words and actions of the ancestors, a person chooses life; by neglecting them, one chooses death. Hence personal responsibility lies with each individual to follow the path of the ancestors which is known to bring life.

It is on this basis that Bujo proposes the image of Jesus as the “Ancestor Par Excellence” or the “Proto-Ancestor.” Due to the anthropocentric nature of African thought, Bujo stresses the importance of “ascending christology” or “christology from below” for the African context.⁵⁸ He therefore employs Jesus’ earthly ministry as a point of departure and interprets it in terms of those virtues and actions which Africans attribute to their ancestors, as follows:

If we look back on the historical Jesus of Nazareth, we can see in him, not only one who lived the African ancestor-ideal in the highest degree, but one who brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfilment. Jesus worked miracles, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead to life. In short, he brought life, and *life-force*, in its fullness.⁵⁹

As Bujo’s words indicate, the analogy drawn between Jesus and “ancestor” by no means suggests that Jesus is merely one founding ancestor among many. On the

⁵⁶ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 78.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 80. In the literature, the term “christology from below” sometimes denotes a methodological approach departing from the historical Jesus, or from his humanity rather than his divinity (i.e. “christology from above”). Other times it refers to a methodological approach meaning “from the people” or the grass-roots context, rather than from the theological academy. In the present context, Bujo employs the term in the former sense, while the latter sense appears elsewhere in the thesis, particularly in relation to Ela’s work.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

contrary, he specifies the title “Proto-Ancestor” to signify that Jesus “infinitely transcended” the “authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors.”⁶⁰ He further clarifies in conversation that the term “*Proto*”-Ancestor does not only mean “first,” as some African and European critics have construed it, but also “*model*.” It is akin to the biblical imagery of Jesus as the “new Adam,” for just as Adam revealed sin and brought death, so Jesus reveals sinlessness and brings life. Hence, as Bujo explains, “‘Proto’ can mean ‘model.’ So we have somebody from whom we can learn how to be a *human being*, how to be perfect and so on. That is a ‘Proto-Ancestor.’”⁶¹ Elsewhere he provides the following succinct summary statement: “In this sense, Jesus Christ is the Proto-Ancestor for the Africans. The law for living as good and wise Africans came to us by the intermediary of the ancestors, the divine grace and wisdom to clothe us with the new man have come to us by Jesus Christ.”⁶²

Complementing a “christology from below,” Bujo also emphasises “the supraterritorial Christ, who by his death and resurrection was established by the Father as our Proto-Ancestor.”⁶³ This, he underlines, is a thoroughly biblical thought which is at the centre of Paul’s christology and soteriology. For example, the parallelism between the “first Adam” and “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:12f.) is interpreted along these lines, as indicated above. Further rationale for the proto-ancestral image is found in Christ being portrayed as the head of the body in Pauline ecclesiology and cosmology (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:23), the first-born in all creation (Col. 1:15), the beginning and first-born from among the dead (Col. 1:18), the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20), and the one in whom the fullness of divinity is to be found and through whom reconciliation is accomplished (Col. 1:19f.; cf. 2:9). Bujo thus concludes that Jesus as proto-ancestor in no way contradicts New Testament thought. Rather, the image reflects the belief that he is the “firstborn among all the ancestors,” not on a biological level but on “a soteriological level of re-birth to a mystical and supernatural life and mode of existence.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid., 81.

⁶¹ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

⁶² Bénézet Bujo, *Christmas: God Becomes Man in Black Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 66.

⁶³ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 82.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 83. Bujo distinguishes his own thought here from that of Nyamiti. Whereas Nyamiti stresses the biological link, that through Jesus’ biological origin he becomes in Adam also the ancestor of all Africans, Bujo argues on the basis of Christ’s transcendence, expressed as follows:

For our part, the main argument for his proto-ancestrality seems to us to be the fact that Christ, this man born of God, makes irrelevant any racial or tribal or any other barrier; and also the fact that all those who believe in him, by conforming to the will of the Father, are not generated by blood or by the desire of the flesh or by the will of humans, but by God Himself. In this sense, Jesus Christ is Proto-Ancestor to the most eminent degree! Ibid., n. 21.

It is important to note that Bujo's explication of the proto-ancestral image forms a key context for his reflections on Jesus as life-giver presented in the previous chapter. His rationale for employing the African category of "a great founding ancestor" to portray Jesus is thus summarised in this way:

If the vital force emanating from God actually passes through our ancestors, and, in particular, through the proto-ancestor of a clan, the Christian believer is convinced that God is similarly communicating His own divine life to us by means of His Messiah and Son, whom He thereby constituted as our Proto-Ancestor.⁶⁵

Again, he stresses that "this is not just a question of imitating prior examples, but as Proto-Ancestor, He is the one who invites men to take part in his life-giving, creative activity. Jesus Christ is thus the life-giving, proto-force of the whole black ethos."⁶⁶ So the image has vital significance for a number of areas within African Christianity to which Bujo attends, besides theology and christology, including pneumatology, ecclesiology and especially ethics. While the subject is vast, attention is confined here to certain christological issues already raised, which may be profitably addressed through considering the image of Jesus as ancestor.

First, Bujo's response to his own christological query highlighted above is to set forth an African interpretation of the incarnation which takes cognisance of the role of the African ancestors in God's saving activity. He asserts that Christ as proto-ancestor has to do "with the very essence of the Word's becoming man,"⁶⁷ for in revealing both God and true humanity, Jesus identifies fully with humankind and thereby encompasses all of the ancestors' striving after righteousness. Bujo then voices an important conclusion as follows:

Above all, Jesus Christ himself becomes the privileged locus for a full understanding of the ancestors. The African now has something to say about the mystery of the Incarnation, for after God had spoken to us at various times and in various places, including our ancestors, in these last days he speaks to us through his Son, whom he has established as unique Ancestor, as Proto-Ancestor, from whom all life flows for His descendants (cf. Heb 1,1-2). From him derive all those longed-for prerogatives which constitute Him as Ancestor. The African ancestors are in this way forerunners, or images, of the Proto-Ancestor, Jesus Christ.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁷ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 82.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 83; cf. Bujo, *Christmas*, 66. The extension of Heb. 1:1-2 to include God's revelation through the African ancestors affirms the premise established by EATWOT theologians that the African heritage is a vital source of God's saving activity, as outlined in Chapter 3. See p. 59 above.

Thus Jesus becomes the saviour whose passion, death, and resurrection must be remembered and retold down the generations, for he is the one who opens up the future which the ancestors had sought to secure. By exegeting Jesus in relation to the African ancestors reinterpreted in this fashion, Bujo not only reverses the negative estimation of the ancestors characteristic of much of the modern missionary enterprise, but also demonstrates an openness to acknowledging them within the mystical body of Christ and including them in Christian liturgy.⁶⁹ So Bujo, along with Ela and others, offers a positive contribution to the question of the place of African ancestors within Christianity.

Furthermore, Bujo insists that the christological title “proto-ancestor,” when translated into a corresponding theology and catechesis, will be far more meaningful to Africans than titles such as “*logos* (Word)” and “*Kyrios* (Lord).” He explicitly denies any wish to suppress these latter titles. He simply underlines that they are derived from a particular culture far removed from the African’s experience and therefore may not effectively touch African sensibilities. Consequently, he argues for the legitimacy of granting titles to Jesus which are more deeply rooted in the culture of those to whom the gospel message is being addressed. The significance of this approach is then stated clearly in terms of the critical issue of African Christian identity, for he concludes,

It is important that Christianity show the Africans that being truly Christian and being truly African are not opposed to each other, because to be a true Christian means to be a true human being, since it was Jesus himself who was truly human and who humanised the world. Once however we have established that the legitimate yearnings of the African ancestors are not only taken up in Jesus Christ, but are also transcended in him, can we not use the concept of

⁶⁹ For example, Bujo concludes,

Il nous semble qu’une interprétation théologique du culte des ancêtres est valable dans ce contexte, et ici nous insistons sur la christologie narrative qui se laisse résumer comme suit: Si le souvenir libérateur des ancêtres est, depuis l’Incarnation de Dieu, passé dans le souvenir libérateur de l’Histoire de la souffrance de Jésus-Christ, qui est devenu réellement un morceau de notre terre et s’est ainsi identifié avec les ancêtres craignant Dieu, alors notre attitude révérencielle envers ces ancêtres est l’expression de notre solidarité dans le *corps mystique* de Jésus-Christ, lequel est seul notre avenir. Bujo, “Nos ancêtres,” 177.

It seems to us that a theological interpretation of the cult of the ancestors is valuable in this context, and here we insist upon the narrative christology which may be summarised as follows: If the liberating memory of the History of the suffering of Jesus Christ, who has truly become a part of our world and has thus identified himself with the ancestors fearing God, then our reverential attitude towards these ancestors is the expression of our solidarity in the *mystical body* of Jesus Christ, to whom alone is our future.

On this basis Bujo suggests, for example, incorporating in the canon of the mass the African ancestors who feared God, and celebrating the ancestral heroes who left proof of a virtuous life on All Saints Day. Ibid.

Proto-Ancestor as the starting-point of a Christology for which the enthusiasm of the African will be more than a passing fashion?⁷⁰

It becomes apparent once again, then, that the critical issues which prompt contemporary African christologies are addressed and potentially redressed by those very christologies. In this case, Bujo's voice was presented in Chapter 3 regarding Africans' search for a new identity after the traumas of the slave trade, colonialism, and the present plight of refugees across the continent. In response, he proposes the proto-ancestral image as a means for communicating to Africans that the identity, the true humanity they seek, and the fullness of life that their ancestors sought, are ultimately found in the person of Christ. Hence his summary statement:

Jesus Christ the Proto-Ancestor wants nothing more than full life and the total and comprehensive development of the new People of God in Africa who, setting out from a remote past, and the drama of the masses of refugees in so many places, continues on its way to eternity, searching for greater autonomy and true identity. To present Jesus Christ in this tragic situation as Proto-Ancestor is of the greatest significance. It amounts to saying that he is the new Moses who, through so many obstacles, sufferings, tears and oppression of all kinds, is steadily leading his African people to the waters of life.⁷¹

The latter statement leads to the final point regarding the significance of Bujo's proto-ancestral image to African Christianity. For whatever contribution Bujo makes to inculturating the gospel through employing the indigenous category of ancestors, by juxtaposing the images of Jesus as proto-ancestor and the "new Moses," he paves the way for developing further liberative dimensions of the gospel in the contemporary context. Indeed, Bujo writes primarily on Christian ethics, yet the foregoing discussion introduces his proto-ancestral christology as the nucleus for what he terms a "Christocentric-black-African morality."⁷² While his application of christology to ethics lies beyond present exploration, suffice it to stress his

⁷⁰ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 84.

⁷¹ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 83.

⁷² Parratt finds it somewhat problematic that Bujo develops the proto-ancestor image to such an extent as to neglect formulating other christological models. While commending the way in which Bujo relates its significance to the totality of the traditional thought system, Parratt nonetheless emphasises the plurality of symbols employed in the New Testament to express Jesus' identity. He therefore questions whether the proto-ancestor model runs the risk of "encasing christology in a straitjacket." John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 134.

Certainly one would welcome further christological reflections from Bujo. However, it would seem that the advantages of having cultivated an image so authentically indigenous, so integrally related to the African context, and so comprehensive in scope would outweigh any disadvantages of singularity, particularly from one whose primary aim to date has not been formulating christology.

fundamental assertion that “[t]o understand Jesus as Proto-Ancestor means accompanying him on the way of the Cross.”⁷³ This means, among other things, to enter into solidarity with the poor, the feeble, and all those marginalized in society, and “to declare a merciless struggle against the many ills which rob modern Africa of its vital force and lead its nations, slowly but surely, to a premature death.”⁷⁴ So the strength of Bujo’s christological contribution lies not only in the content of his proto-ancestral model, but also in the method advocated therein. As he points out, “It is in the line of orthopraxy that our considerations of Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor and source of life could become a veritable ferment for the transformation of a post-ancestral and post-colonial Africa.”⁷⁵ Here, then, is an African theologian who supersedes the inculturation-liberation divide. For in contrast to any such artificial dichotomy, Bujo concludes his christological reflections as follows: “I believe that a truly dynamic Christianity will only be possible in Africa when the foundation of the African’s whole life is built on Jesus Christ, conceived in specifically African categories.”⁷⁶

3. Jesus as Ancestor in the Oral Christologies

After introducing the image of Jesus as ancestor through a consideration of its derivation in African traditions, various critical issues it elicits, and its emergence among selected African theologians, the question remains as to how this image fares among African Christians today. Is it operative in the lives of individuals and Christian communities? How is it understood? What factors either encourage or restrain its usage? And what significance is it perceived to have for contemporary African Christianity? These questions will be investigated by setting forth data findings from the interviews, the rationale expressed for the image, problems with it, and aspects of its significance as articulated by the selected African Christians. The results of field research in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana are juxtaposed, with convergences and divergences between nationality or other variables pointed out as appropriate.

a) The Data

That Jesus as ancestor is a controversial image immediately comes to light in the statistical findings from the qualitative interviews. In Kenya and Uganda, of the 27 individual respondents with whom it was discussed, a slight majority (48%) were

⁷³ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 91.

⁷⁴ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 89.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷⁶ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 91.

positive in their overall verdict compared with those who were negative (45%). These findings are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Individual Responses in Kenya & Uganda to the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	10 / 27	37 %
Negative Responses Only	11 / 27	41 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 3 / 6 Overall Verdict Negative: 1 / 6 Overall Verdict Neutral: 2 / 6	6 / 27	22 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	13 / 27	48 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	12 / 27	44 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEUTRAL	2 / 27	8 %

Contrasting responses also occur in Ghana although in this case, of the 32 respondents with whom the image was discussed, the majority were overall negative (63%) as opposed to positive (31%). The findings are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	5 / 32	16 %
Negative Responses Only	13 / 32	41 %
Neutral Responses Only	1 / 32	3 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 5 / 13 Overall Verdict Negative: 7 / 13 Overall Verdict Neutral: 1 / 13	13 / 32	41 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	10 / 32	31 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	20 / 32	63 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEUTRAL	2 / 32	6 %

On the basis of matrix tables exploring variables which might reflect patterns of differentiation in the individual responses, a few observations are apposite. The most obvious divergence occurs between Catholic and Protestant respondents, with Catholics being more favourably inclined towards the image than Protestants.⁷⁷ This

⁷⁷ Matrix tables prepared in the process of analysis reflect that the Catholics are divided almost equally in their views, while the Protestants are clearly more negative than positive, reflecting a ratio of approximately 2 negative to 1 positive.

factor probably accounts for the majority of negative responses in Ghana, since more Protestants than Catholics were interviewed in this context. Further differentiation might be detected on the basis of the language favoured for personal Bible reading. While those reading in vernacular are divided roughly equally in their views, those reading in English are more readily opposed to the image. Additionally, there may also be some divergence in responses on account of theological education, for those who are theologically educated are divided approximately equally in their views, while those who are not theologically educated are more negative in response. This might suggest that theological education encourages at least consideration of the image, that is, acknowledging positive and negative factors about it even if the overall verdict is negative. It must be stressed that these findings from qualitative research indicate certain clusters of responses within this particular sample. However, further quantitative research would need to be conducted to establish more definite conclusions regarding possible variables at play in respondents' views.

The pattern of conflicting responses indicated in the individual responses is also found in the focus groups. Combining all the groups together for the present purpose, the following findings emerge: of the 10 groups with whom the image was discussed, the consensus from 4 groups was positive (40%) while that from 6 groups was negative (60%). A summary is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Focus Group Responses in Kenya & Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	3 / 10	30 %
Negative Responses Only	2 / 10	20 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 1 / 5 Overall Verdict Negative: 4 / 5	5 / 10	50 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	4 / 10	40 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	6 / 10	60 %

Further corroboration for this observation is found in the summary charts of respondents' views. In Kenya and Uganda, of the 13 respondents who provide an overall positive response, 9 are Catholics while 4 are Protestants. Conversely, of the 12 who give an overall negative response, 8 are Protestants and 4 are Catholics. The 2 who offer positive and negative considerations without indication of an overall verdict are both Protestants. In Ghana, of the 10 respondents who voice an overall positive response, 4 are Catholics and 6 are Protestants. More significantly, of the 20 who give an overall negative response, 4 are Catholics and 16 are Protestants. The 2 who provide no overall verdict include 1 Catholic and 1 Protestant.

Finally, a few observations are noted concerning the prevalence of the image of Jesus as ancestor in the selected contexts for field research, as well as its sources and shaping influences. The first consideration is the extent to which respondents volunteer the image themselves, as opposed to the interviewer raising the idea and requesting their response to it. In Kenya and Uganda, only two individuals initiate discussion of Jesus as ancestor and both do so in the context of question three regarding images of Jesus especially relevant to African Christians. While one of these interviewees admits he wrestles with it, voicing pros and cons,⁷⁸ the other raises it as a negative example, arguing strongly against African theologians assigning such christological titles.⁷⁹ In Ghana, 4 respondents volunteer the image, in the same context of discussing question three, with 3 voicing fairly strong support⁸⁰ and 1 acknowledging awareness without personal assent.⁸¹ Thus 6 out of the total of 65 respondents (9%) volunteer the image of Jesus as ancestor.

It is noteworthy that all 6 who raise the image are theologically educated. While not all of these support the ancestral model for Jesus, as mentioned above, it does indicate that the image is under discussion in theological circles across Africa. Further evidence is found in respondents volunteering the names of specific theologians who articulate the image. For example, Kenyan and Ugandan respondents refer to Nyamiti⁸² and Bujo,⁸³ and Ghanaian respondents mention Bediako,⁸⁴ Bujo,⁸⁵ and Pobee.⁸⁶ Once again, all the respondents who do so are theologically educated, and are not necessarily supportive of the image. However, these findings reveal that the fairly recent christological discourse derived from ancestral concepts is being disseminated to some degree through theological education. Also, a few interviewees explicitly state that their theological studies have had some impact upon their view of Jesus as ancestor.⁸⁷ What is more, 2 respondents argue that the image is advocated by academic theologians but it is not in use by “ordinary people.”⁸⁸

⁷⁸ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

⁷⁹ Peter Gichure, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

⁸⁰ Samuel Aboa, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998; Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998; Emmanuel Martey, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 24, 28, 1998.

⁸¹ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

⁸² Marie Gacambi, Vincent Kamiri, Peter Kiarie, Hannah Kinoti, John Waliggo, and Peter Gichure.

⁸³ John Waliggo.

⁸⁴ Samuel Aboa, Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Thomas Oduro, and Juliana Senavoe.

⁸⁵ Matthew Edusei.

⁸⁶ Robert Aboagye-Mensah.

⁸⁷ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998; David Kamau, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

⁸⁸ Brigid Sackey, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 3, 1998; Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

Yet the latter view is countered by the witness of Catholic parish priest Joseph Aggrey, who confirms that the image is operative within his own life and church community in Ghana.⁸⁹ Moreover, Catholic Bishop Charles Palmer-Buckle⁹⁰ plus Protestant Dan Antwi, Principal of Trinity Theological College, Legon,⁹¹ admit that it is not meaningful to them personally, yet affirm that it is functioning for some local parishioners. Interesting corroboration is voiced by Joseph Asare in the focus group of Ghanaian Protestant clergy, who states, “There is a song which says ‘*Yesu ɔye made nyinaa. ɔye magya. ɔye mene.*’ So we pray to our ancestors.” The Twi song is translated literally as “Jesus is everything to me. He is my father. He is my mother,” and it signifies that a song which traditionalists would normally sing to their ancestors, specifying the relations, is now addressed to Jesus as the father, mother, or hence the ancestor.⁹² Also in Uganda, certain members of the Little Sisters of St. Francis, including Nasimiyu Wasike, relate how their experience of celebrating mass, during which an expatriate priest incorporates prayers of invocation for the African ancestors to join in worship, has enhanced their understanding and appropriation of Jesus as ancestor.⁹³

So no clear-cut picture appears regarding the prevalence of the ancestral image for Jesus in the selected African contexts, yet a few contour lines emerge through the present research. First, the image is decidedly controversial, as demonstrated in the statistical findings. Second, Catholic Christians show greater proclivity to adopt the ancestral image than Protestants. Third, theologically educated respondents show greater awareness of theologians’ proposals for Jesus as ancestor than those without theological education. While this point seems obvious, it was also noted that increased awareness does not necessarily mean increased affirmation, and that there is some contextual evidence to indicate that the image is operative beyond the realm of academic theology. Thus it is necessary to turn to the respondents’ expressed views to further clarify the emerging picture of Jesus as ancestor in Africa. Rationale for the image is examined first, followed by problems with the image. Finally, conclusions are offered regarding its significance to African Christianity.

⁸⁹ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

⁹⁰ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua, Ghana: Sept. 10, 1998.

⁹¹ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

⁹² Joseph Asare, Focus Group, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998; translation and interpretation of the song by language informant E. Kingsley Ako-Addo at the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, Akropong-Akuapem.

⁹³ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Oral Interview, Nairobi: April 21, 1998, together with her colleague Mary Savio; Mary Pius, Oral Interview, Jinja, Uganda: May 2, 1998.

b) Rationale for the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

Several reasons are advanced to explain why Jesus as ancestor is a viable and meaningful image for African Christians. The reasons reflect the interplay between biblical and African concepts, and elucidate how Jesus fulfils the role that was traditionally played by the ancestors in Africa. Four main ancestral functions are evidenced, all of which reflect aspects of the summary introduction to the ancestors above: namely, mediation, founder of a community, ongoing participation in the life of the human community, and provider of life.

The first major role in which respondents perceive Jesus is that of mediator between God and humanity, analogous to the ancestors. Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Samuel Aboa summarises clearly as follows:

Well I can think of ... Christ as an ancestor, because we believe that our ancestors are also mediators. Those who have died before us ... continue at least in spirit, and they can mediate between us and the gods or other ancestral spirits, or other powers. And ... it becomes more meaningful to me when it's said that Christ has died for us and he mediates for us. In this way, I equate him with *our* understanding of the ancestors.⁹⁴

Later, Aboa reiterates how the notion of Jesus as ancestor helps him to understand the vicarious death and the resurrection of Jesus, asserting that "our traditional worldview ... gives us an idea" of how to comprehend these biblical affirmations. Kenyan Catholic sister Marie Gacambi also interprets Jesus as ancestor in this way and relates the image to his role as the first-born of all creation. She argues,

After all, in the scripture we say he's the *first-born* ... of all creation. And so, someone that *has* an interest, ... our ancestors have an interest in the well-being of the family. ... They are the mediators between us and God... So *really*, Jesus *is the* ancestor, from that perspective. Because he ... really has this aspect which *links* us. [T]he ancestors have the line ... [which] is not cut. So he's the one that has *this whole human link* with the transcendent. So for me, I *would* say he's the ancestor.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Samuel Aboa, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998. It must be clarified that although Aboa uses the term "equate" in the passage cited, the context of conversation makes clear that he does not equate Jesus with the African ancestors literally, but only analogically.

The point is also made in very similar terms by Catholic priest John Waliggo in Uganda. In addition, Kenyan Catholic priest Vincent Kamiri relates Jesus as ancestor to his ongoing role as priest in heaven, for he explains, "[H]e is really my ancestor, and the Great Ancestor, an ancestor who can help me, bless me. Indeed, as we say, 'He is at the right hand of God the Father, pray for us.' He continues a priest, blessing me." Vincent Kamiri, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 28, 1998.

⁹⁵ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998. Hannah Kinoti also agrees with the image on the basis of Jesus being the first-born of all creation.

Gacambi's insight introduces the second key parallel between Jesus and the ancestors in that he is the founder of a new community and, as such, establishes its identity. Kenyan Catholic layman Peter Kiarie explains, "If you look at it that way, you will see that Jesus fits exactly as the supreme ancestor, because here he comes and he founds a new community."⁹⁶ From Johannine teaching Kiarie outlines the nature of spiritual rebirth into the new humanity, and from Pauline teaching he adds the concepts of the mystical body of Christ with Jesus as the head. He then spells out the significance as follows:

[H]is ancestry is so physical, in the sense that not only was he *there*, at that time, but he *continues*. ... So you can see Jesus presents himself as an *ever-present ancestor*—he's actually *there* all the time, and he was there before, and now he continues. So this makes the people feel very much at home.⁹⁷

Similarly, Kenyan Protestant clergyman Peter Bisem volunteers the image of Jesus as "the great ancestor," and despite its shortcomings, contends that "it is very appealing, and quite exciting ... in the sense that it *recreates*, if you like, the identity of a people, or of a community. Because it is from the ancestor that you have your name. It is from the ancestor that you have your *identity*."⁹⁸ Both aspects of naming and identity are further emphasised by Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Emmanuel Martey. Pointing out the importance in African tradition of naming and describing someone according to the founder of the family, "to *identify* who that person is," he draws a parallel with the first Christians being called after Christ in Syria. He comments, "So, from *him*, from the *head*, from the ancestor, we got our name, in African understanding." With respect to Jesus as "the *founder* of the Christian

Kenyan Catholic layperson Mary Kizito expounds the same point as Gacambi, but on the basis of the New Testament teaching that believers are "heirs and co-heirs" of Christ. She explains how Jesus links with African tradition as follows:

I think that [i.e. the concept of us being "heirs and co-heirs"] falls in very well with the whole idea of Jesus as the ancestor. Because in the African sense, it puts you like in a whole clan, or a whole ethnic group, where Jesus is the first-born. Where Jesus is now the *anchor* person, where everyone now lines up ... and everyone comes from that particular person.

Interestingly, Kizito then recounts how, having grown up in a Catholic family far removed (i.e. by her mother's influence) from the cultural traditions, she once interviewed her father, asking him, "Dad! Where do we come *from*?" She describes how he traced himself back twelve generations to the original clan leader, and then notes the significance of this for understanding Jesus as ancestor: "Twelve generations. So now ... through him I can trace myself back ... to the clan leader! Now, the same way, we as Christians can trace ourselves back to Jesus. The *difference* is that, when I trace myself *back*, I don't have to go back through my dad. I go *straight!*" Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

⁹⁶ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru, Kenya: June 5, 1998.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

family,” he concludes, “So with that concept, it explains Christianity better to the African, especially Christ to the African.”⁹⁹

Concerning the critical question of how Jesus becomes the lineage head for Africans today, only one respondent, Ghanaian traditional leader Birikorang, claims a common ancestry with Jesus in Jewish origins.¹⁰⁰ Others respond by stressing Jesus’ incarnation for all humanity and believers’ adoption by faith into the family of God. For example in the focus group of Kenyan Catholic laity, Charles Otieno points out that Jesus belongs to the tribe of Israel, and that “Abraham is actually our father in faith. ... So if Jesus came from Abraham, then he is our ancestor.”¹⁰¹ He further states that despite the fact that Jesus had no children, he belongs to the race of Abraham as “we all” do: “black, white, red and different colours.” Hence he concludes that Jesus “is part of our ancestry.” Also, in the focus group of Kenyan Protestant laity, Purity Nguhiu notes that the gospel genealogies record Jesus’ ancestry “*up* to the birth of Jesus Christ. And that is it, full stop. But from there, the next introduction is that we are *heirs* with Christ Jesus....”¹⁰² She further points out that he was of the lineage of David and by faith we have entered that family.¹⁰³ So for many of the respondents, questions of biological ancestry are not considered problematic in comprehending Jesus as ancestor on account of New Testament teaching regarding the spiritual adoption of believers into Jesus’ family.

A third major role of African ancestors understood to be fulfilled in Jesus is that of ongoing participation in the life of the human community, specifically as family guardian. Concepts clearly overlap in this regard, for as already noted, Jesus is believed to found a new family and to continue making his presence known to that family. Among the more common reasons cited for viewing Jesus as ancestor is the perception that “he also came to live here on earth, and has *died* and gone. But we still remember Jesus Christ, because we know he is still in our midst, spiritually.”¹⁰⁴ In terms of Jesus’ ongoing participation, Kwesi Dickson explains,

The question is, who is ancestor? It is not everybody who dies who becomes ancestor. The person who is to become an ancestor must have lived an exemplary kind of life, and because of that, that person never dies—he’s always present, and he’s involved in the life of the

⁹⁹ Emmanuel Martey, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 24, 28, 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Nana Addo Birikorang, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998. Birikorang relates how he and others believe the Akan are descendents of Manasseh who remained in Egypt. On the basis of this perceived physical kinship, he remarks that it brings Jesus “*very, very, very close.*”

¹⁰¹ Charles Otieno, Focus Group, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹⁰² Purity Nguhiu, Focus Group, Ngong Town, Kenya: June 12, 1998.

¹⁰³ Despite these arguments, however, in the end Nguhia concludes, “But I cannot think of him as my great, great, great, great grandfather.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

people, even though he is across the borders, as it were. And we have this idea of communing with ancestors....¹⁰⁵

The analogy of ancestral communion is discussed further in the focus group of Kenyan Catholic clergy, with Elijah Chege disclosing the corresponding image of Christ as brother. Although the elder brother symbol warrants full explication, it can only be introduced here as overlapping with the ancestral model.¹⁰⁶ Chege explains,

An ancestor is someone who is close to the people from which he came. And he is considered like a brother, because if people ask him to pray for them, then he will do that. Jesus himself said that if we ask anything through his name, we will get it. Also we know that our ancestors—we never worshiped them. Instead they used to pray for us. They are there to intercede for us, they are like today's saints. But, although we call Jesus an ancestor, he is an ancestor but somehow slightly different because he is God.¹⁰⁷

Besides intercession, Jesus continues to participate in the human community by way of protection. Kenyan Catholic priest Kamau draws attention to this facet of ancestral communion and its significance as follows:

[The one] who protects people now, is Christ! Then Christ becomes an African ancestor because ... he takes care of the people ... like ancestors. And you know the comparison—he's the *true ancestor*, because he is playing the role of ancestors. This is how we have Christ as ancestor, African ancestor.¹⁰⁸

Closely related to protection is the traditional belief that "power emanates from the ancestors and from the spirit world." So comments Oscar Muriu in the focus group of Kenyan Protestant clergy, when he cautiously considers Jesus as ancestor and concedes that "[i]f you were to look at ancestors in *that* sense, as a source of power, maybe."¹⁰⁹ Thus several dimensions of Jesus' ongoing involvement in the human community come to the fore, including his presence, prayer, protection, and power. In these respects he is understood in an analogous way to the African ancestors, and, as highlighted above, especially to the corresponding role of elder brother.

¹⁰⁵ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

¹⁰⁶ "Elder" does not necessarily refer to age, but rather to the most experienced ones who enrich the community by their wisdom. See Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 21, n. 13a.

Jesus as brother is among the key images to be developed in the fourth christological model, Jesus as Loved One, which lies beyond the confines of this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ Elijah Chege, Focus Group, Ruiru, Kenya: June 7, 1998.

¹⁰⁸ David Kamau, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998. Likewise Abraham Akrong in Ghana explains that "the ancestors are very close to us, as Africans, in the sense that they are the very first level we approach as *protectors*, as guarantors, as beneficiaries, ... people who give us. So for me, once the ancestral symbol is used as understanding Christ, it makes Christ very, very close and near." Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹⁰⁹ Oscar Muriu, Focus Group, Nairobi: May 18, 1998.

The final point is essentially a culmination of the three aspects of ancestral communion outlined above: namely, Jesus, as first-born of all creation, mediates between God and humanity, he establishes a new human family, and he continues to participate in that community. That is to say, just as the goal of ancestral veneration in Africa is to foster abundant life, so Jesus is believed to provide the fullness of life which the ancestors sought themselves and continue to transmit to their descendants. Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Abraham Akrong expresses this notion clearly in discussing Jesus as ancestor, explaining,

It's a meaningful category to *me*, in a *way*, because the ancestors stand for what we call *fullness* of life. You know, it's the *ideal* life. If you want to ask the African, 'What is your ideal?' It's to grow up, go through the rites of passage, and die and become an ancestor! That's an ideal. So the ideal nature of the ancestors for me would be a way in which we could also articulate the ideal nature that Jesus Christ came to teach us about what we really ought to be.¹¹⁰

Echoing Pobee and Bujo's fundamental assertion that Jesus as ancestor exegetes both God and humanity, respondents affirm that Jesus reveals the humanity, in terms of the qualities, which the African ancestors exemplified. For instance Kiarie remarks, "[I]t's very clear that Jesus presents himself as *the man*. You know, he even calls himself the *son of man*, that human image, that actually we are growing like him. So, I think that image of calling Jesus the ancestor fits in ... very well."¹¹¹ Furthermore, focusing on the qualities of Jesus in this manner is perceived to overcome the hurdle of physical ancestry in depicting Jesus as ancestor to Africans. Kenyan Circle member Mary Getui comments about the image, "I would not want to look at it from the *physical* perspective, but I would like to look at it from the qualities that my ancestors wanted to promote."¹¹² Likewise Ugandan Catholic priest John Waliggo interprets the image as linking Jesus to the traditional values in African religion, with the advantages of this approach spelled out in this way:

[P]eople then ... may be able to begin linking with Jesus as ancestor without excluding their own ancestors. And the idea is to take away the duality between the ancestors who were not baptised and ancestors who were baptised, and use Jesus to be the link between the *values* in the African religion and the new values of understanding. ... [For] mediation to go on in that way ... therefore also leads to a spirituality which is drawing from the ancestorship of Jesus....¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹¹¹ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

¹¹² Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

¹¹³ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 7, 1998.

Thus the convergence of Jesus as life-giver and Jesus as ancestor comes to light in the textual and oral christologies, with implications for spirituality and ethics in the African context. Before exploring the significance of Jesus as ancestor, however, it is necessary to examine various problems with the image.

c) Problems with the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

Like the controversial image of Jesus as traditional healer, objections to Jesus as ancestor stem primarily from historical and missiological issues, theological problems, and challenges of contemporary relevance. In Kenya, Protestant clergyman John Gatu is again a leading witness to the missiological issues. With respect to Jesus as ancestor, Gatu begins with “the *concept* that was introduced by missionaries,” and explains the problem in presenting the image as follows:

I would have to first of all clarify this ancestor understanding, because the way it has been understood is very negative. It is very, very negative. ... The idea that has been given, because of the *comparisons* between the Western concepts and African concepts, is that *ancestors* are *pagans* who had no knowledge of God and so on.... I would challenge that view.¹¹⁴

Despite efforts by some African Christians to reinterpret the concept of ancestors more positively, Ghanaian Catholic priest Edusei sums up the present situation in remarking, “it’s just the *connotations* associated with the *term*.”¹¹⁵ For example, Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Aboagye-Mensah points out that “most people ... have associated ancestorship with ... forces that are anti-Christian, ... demonic forces and so on.”¹¹⁶ Certainly the term “ancestor worship,” or even “ancestor veneration worship” [*sic*], arises in conversation, revealing commonly held perceptions. On this account, many respondents share the verdict of Ghanaian Protestant clergyman S. S. Quarcoopome: “So, I would not use the word ‘ancestor’ for Jesus.”¹¹⁷

As a result of missionary denigration of African ancestors, many contemporary Christians no longer identify with this aspect of their cultural heritage. Striking witness comes from Kenyan Protestant laywoman Marcy Muhia, for when asked if she thinks about Jesus as ancestor, she responds,

Not really, because for me there’s been that severance, that separation.... In that, my ancestors have come to mean not very many positive things, because it’s associated with ancestor worship. And ...

¹¹⁴ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

¹¹⁵ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

¹¹⁶ Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

¹¹⁷ S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

my grandparents coming out of that, they rejected it completely, *completely*. And so I don't know too much about my ancestors, which makes it difficult for me to *associate* Christ with ancestry, you know? It's easier for me to think, I'm descended from Noah, I'm descended from Adam, but I don't think of Christ as my ancestor.¹¹⁸

Combined with the missionary inheritance are other historical factors like modernisation and urbanisation, which have further alienated Africans from traditional culture. Ghanaian Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle attests to these forces at play when he recounts,

[B]ecause I grew up in a Christian environment, ... the role of the ancestors was overshadowed already at a very early age by the saints in the Catholic faith and by Jesus Christ and the rest of it. ... So ... I've never had a very big, call it *reverence* of ancestors as such. ... [B]ut I grew up in Accra. Maybe that's another negative aspect of it, that I grew up in the urban area, so something like pouring libation, calling on the ancestors, something like a *stool*, ancestral stools, never played much of a role in my life.¹¹⁹

Given these historical and missiological factors, then, it is not surprising that many African Christians reject proposals of Jesus as ancestor.

The most serious objections to the image, however, are theological, being grounded in concepts of the African ancestors deemed inapplicable or inappropriate for Jesus. Arguments are summarised here in terms of conflicting definitions, qualifications, and characteristics of ancestors, all of which are contrasted with Jesus. The foregoing discussion has amply shown that perceptions of the ancestors vary widely among the selected African Christians. While many define the African ancestors more positively, emphasising the exemplary life required for becoming an ancestor, others define them more generally as “those who have gone before us,”¹²⁰ including the virtuous and the disreputable. For example, Kenyan Catholic priest Peter Gichure is quick to point out the shortcomings of the African ancestors and on that basis, to vehemently oppose the image for Jesus. Among other vices such as authoritarianism and being “really treated as gods,” Gichure points out,

The history of Africa is also very, very terrible. For example, slavery—who really sold the Africans? They were the ancestors! Who really ... discriminated? It was our ancestors. There's no way Christ will fit that—you could only use that as a way of explaining, but *never* as a model.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Marcy Muhia, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

¹¹⁹ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.

¹²⁰ Peter Gichure, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

So different estimations of the ancestors obviously lead to different views regarding the suitability of the analogy for Jesus.

If the concept of Jesus as ancestor falls strangely upon African ears, the reasons most commonly expressed stem from the qualifications associated with the ancestors. First, the fundamental notion of lineage ancestors is simply insurmountable for some Christians to conceive of Jesus in this way. Nearly ninety-year-old Ugandan Catholic sister Mary John states that she has never heard of Jesus as ancestor before, and he would not fit into that role “because he is not of my tribe. ... [T]he ancestors of Buganda must have been the Baganda—only.”¹²² Likewise Ghanaian Protestant clergywoman Margaret Asabea insists that “[a]n ancestor in the context of the African is your *kith* and *kin*, mother, father, grandfather, great grandfather,” and that any attempts to construe Jesus as kindred to Africans are simply “academic gymnastics.”¹²³ Ghanaian Catholic Bishop Sarpong concurs, stressing that “ancestor is very restrictive” since it is an “ethnocentric concept.” He explains,

You don't have the ancestors of the Asantes, you have the ancestors for the *clans*. ... My father is my ancestor, he's not your ancestor. ... And so before you adopt Jesus as an ancestor, ... you must be able first of all to *convince* the whole world that Christians *are* one family.¹²⁴

Although he admits it could be done, using the African family as a model for the church, he also cautions as follows:

[I]t can be very good and it can be very dangerous, in the sense that the African family is characterised by love, sharing, sensitivity to one another, sharing problems, joint ownership ... of property, and so on. These are all excellent things. *But*, at the same time, the African family *excludes* other families. It's very ethnocentric. And what is happening in ... the African world, in Rwanda, in Burundi, it's *all* an *enlargement* of the idea of the African family. The person who is outside my family is not as important as those in my family. I can band together with my own family members *against* another person from another family. When somebody from my family has done something, no matter how obnoxious, I support him or her, you see? So whereas the concept of the family can be used beautifully as for the church, in some respects it can be very dangerous.¹²⁵

¹²² Sr. Mary John, Oral Interview, Nkokonjeru, Uganda: April 30, 1998.

¹²³ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

¹²⁴ Peter Sarpong, Oral Interview, Kumasi: Sept. 7, 1998.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

In addition to physical lineage, objections are raised on the grounds that Jesus did not fulfil the traditional requirements of an ancestor in terms of age, marriage, and offspring. Kenyan Protestant layman Ole Ronkei gives lively expression to these problems from Maasai perspective, stating,

Christ can't be an ancestor! *No! How* can he be? He was ... a young kid! Culturally speaking.... [A]n *ancestor* has this connotation of *age*, where I come from. ... [Y]ou *need* to reach a certain *stage*, you pass away, and we classify you as one of our ancestors. If a *young* person dies, he will just go into historical oblivion!¹²⁶

He then continues,

An ancestor is somebody who is *here*, he's one of us, born, raised his own family until he passed away, and so we're looking at him as an ancestor, as a *line* that we've come through. You know? Then Christ even becomes more problematic. He didn't have a wife! He didn't have children! ... [W]here are the offspring? Ancestor! Very problematic where I come from.¹²⁷

One last requirement traditionally held for African ancestors is a "good death." Asabea questions whether Jesus' death would be considered so in African understanding, unless, she suggests, it was underscored as a sacrificial death.¹²⁸ These examples therefore illustrate the kind of conundrum that the image of Jesus as ancestor poses to some African Christians who interpret the image more literally.

The third area of theological problems stem from characteristics of ancestors considered contrary to Jesus. Kenyan Protestant Bishop Kivunzi and Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Oduro both stress that ancestors are creatures while Jesus is the creator of the ancestors; hence he cannot even be called "ancestor par excellence."¹²⁹ Ghanaian PACWA member Florence Y. B. Yeboah adds that although Jesus represents believers in heaven, he does so as creator and not as an ancestor from whom she comes. Therefore "even though he's condescended to come and dwell within us, he's still our Lord, our creator, our maker."¹³⁰ Concomitantly, the ancestral image is deemed insufficient because while ancestors come to an end, once forgotten, Jesus is eternal.¹³¹ The ancestral paradigm is further limiting, according to Bisem speaking from a Kalenjin perspective, in that "it would exclude women,

¹²⁶ Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

¹²⁹ Titus Kivunzi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998; Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

¹³⁰ Florence Y. B. Yeboah, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

¹³¹ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998; Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

because women have no identity in my community *themselves*. They get their identity in terms of their husband.” He therefore concludes that “it is not as all-embracing as we see in the Bible in terms of embracing the whole aspect of humanity, including male and female.”¹³²

Perhaps the most common objection regarding ancestral characteristics is that ancestors are “dead and buried” while Jesus is “alive,” “contemporary,” and “present.” Kenyan Archbishop David Gitari acknowledges that “of course, to the African, the living and the dead are very important. They are part of the family. ... But Jesus died and rose again, and he’s *living*. Therefore he is *more* than an ancestor.”¹³³ Likewise Ghanaian Oduro emphasises that “[t]he fact of his resurrection makes him greater and more important than any ancestor I can think of.”¹³⁴ Implications for the Christian life are also spelled out, for example, by Bishop Palmer-Buckle who explains, “[T]he tendency is that ancestors are a shade *removed* from that which is happening, unless they are invited to it. Whereas Jesus is always present, whether invited or not.”¹³⁵ Ghanaian Protestant layman Lawrence Darmani concludes along the same lines, as follows:

I would picture him as rather *much bigger* than an ancestor. ... I see ancestors as, ... in the traditional concept, ... living in *ghost land*—*vaguely* alive, but *hardly* having bodies and not being able ... to interact with people. ... Jesus as ancestor would only mean to me that he’s *died* and gone, but my *difficulty* with the use of that word ‘ancestor’ for Jesus Christ has to do with *my* understanding of who Jesus is. You see, he *died*, but he rose again! ... And therefore I can’t *relate* with ancestors, but I can *relate* with Christ.¹³⁶

Consequently, Kenyan Catholic layman Wanjohi concludes, Jesus as ancestor does not make much impact on him personally because “we know Jesus *much, much* better than we know our ancestors.”¹³⁷

These theological problems contribute to the conviction that Jesus is above the ancestors and must remain so to be on par with God. So for some respondents, presenting him as ancestor, even distinguishing him as “ancestor par excellence” or “proto-ancestor,” risks compromising his divinity. Representative comments include

¹³² Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998. It must be underlined, however, that this is not the case for all African societies. Women feature among the ancestors for many people groups, particularly among matrilineal societies like the Akan, according to Mercy Oduyoye and John Pobee. However, Bisem’s point warrants attention as women are often overshadowed by men in the expressed concepts of ancestors.

¹³³ David Gitari, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 19, 1998.

¹³⁴ Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

¹³⁵ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.

¹³⁶ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

¹³⁷ Gerald Wanjohi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

the following: “He’s *higher* than an ancestor” and “on that human basis, we could say he was an ancestor, but then coming *back* to his *divine* nature, that is where the difference lies”;¹³⁸ “you are hitting a problem, because Jesus is worshipped, but the ancestors are not worshipped”;¹³⁹ “I think I have reservations, *maybe* because I view him more in terms of his divinity than his humanity!”;¹⁴⁰ “Jesus is the son of God—we don’t see him as an ancestor,” and “he’s the first-born of God, so we don’t see him as an ancestor.”¹⁴¹ In Kenya, a notable example comes from Ole Ronkei, who stresses that he would not advocate the image for his Maasai people because it would be problematic according to their traditional piety. Referring to the Old Testament approach to prayer, addressing God as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” to signify their ongoing covenant relationship with him, Ole Ronkei explains,

[W]e pray *exactly* the same way! ... ‘The God of our forefathers,’ and then we name them, according to the generations, not an individual person. I think you say, ‘The God of Isaac,’ and you’re talking about this Isaac and his own entire generation, you know? But, we talk about it in terms of those age-groups. So, we say, ‘The God of that age-group, and the God of the next age-group,’ ... [t]o *show* that we have not deviated, that we are still believing in exactly the same God that our ancestors have believed. Do you want to put Christ in that category? When you talk about ancestors. ... See, if I put Christ there and he’s God, he *can’t fall* in that category! He has to be *above*!¹⁴²

In Ghana, Protestant laywoman Irene Odotei voices a related concern. Although she responds positively to Jesus as ancestor, desiring to see some traditional concepts recovered to enhance African Christianity, she emphasises that Jesus is “unique” and there is danger of “mixing” him with hoards of other ancestors. While granting it is possible to distinguish him as “ancestor par excellence” or “proto-ancestor,” she nonetheless cautions,

There’s no group with only *one* ancestor. There are *so* many of them. And even the gods, there are *so* many gods, and there are *so* many ancestors. And if you come to Accra and they’re pouring libation, they will mention *so* many names, and then the gods, and then they will say, ‘From this place to that place, from the east to the west,’ then they call all of them and say, ‘I don’t even know your number, *so come, all* of you, come, both great and small.’ Now, getting Jesus

¹³⁸ Samuel Ackah, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 16, 1998.

¹³⁹ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

¹⁴⁰ Theophilus Dankwa, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 16, 1998.

¹⁴¹ Gladys Dadebo, Focus Group of Ghanaian PACWA Women, Accra: Sept. 5, 1998.

¹⁴² Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

mixed up with all of you, 'Come and drink,' that will mean, would *take out* of the uniqueness of Christ.¹⁴³

So the crux of the matter stems from the two non-negotiables pointed out previously by Pobee: the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. The spokespersons above clearly consider the ancestral image to compromise the divinity of Jesus, and on this basis reject it.

Finally, respondents voice various problems related to the contemporary relevance of the image. Some point out that the image may be more meaningful among those ethnic groups whose ancestral beliefs have featured more prominently. For instance, Kenyan Protestant clergyman Peter Bisem affirms that "it would be fascinating for a community like the Dogos of Ghana, who have a wonderful, mystical representation of the ancestor. Our communities didn't have that kind of thing."¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the processes of modernisation and urbanisation, referred to with respect to historical factors, are said to diminish the relevance of the image especially for young people in urban contexts.¹⁴⁵ More significantly, John Waliggo cautions that "the model of ancestor ... may not change much in society. It may make us *re-own* our culture within Christianity, but ... may not touch very much the injustices that have been done to us and which we are doing to each other."¹⁴⁶ The inculturation-liberation dichotomy reflected in this comment challenges the pertinence of the image and calls for further attention in the conclusions regarding christological method. Lastly, among those respondents who agree that portraying Jesus as ancestor is appropriate conceptually, several admit that it does not function for them experientially. Kenyan Circle member Hannah Kinoti concludes, "There is no problem about seeing Jesus as an ancestor, to me," yet she admits that "[i]t is not an image that I entertain a lot, or think too much about."¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, Kenyan religious sister Gacambi speaks enthusiastically about the image, and when asked if it is meaningful to her personally, she replies, "It is starting to be meaningful to me, because before I did not study that aspect of Jesus as the ancestor."¹⁴⁸ Gacambi's

¹⁴³ Irene Odotei, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998. The same point is made by Kenyan Protestant clergyman Mutava Musyimi, who admits he does not have a strong consciousness of the African ancestors himself, but suggests that the image might be more relevant in other cultures of South, Central and West Africa. Mutava Musyimi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998; Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

¹⁴⁶ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 7, 1998.

¹⁴⁷ Hannah Kinoti, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998. Similar statements are made in Ghana by Protestant clergymen Samuel Aboa and Robert Aboagye-Mensah, and in Kenya by Catholic priest Vincent Kamiri and Catholic layman Gerald Wanjohi.

¹⁴⁸ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

statement corroborates a few points made thus far: first, the challenge of contemporary relevance, since presumably the image was not meaningful to her previously; and second, the perception that it is being promoted by academic theologians, perhaps more than in the church context as a few suggested above. Yet it also illustrates the potential for the image to become personally significant to Christians when it is disseminated through theological education. So despite the complex problems associated with depicting Jesus as ancestor, including historical and missiological issues, theological problems and those of contemporary relevance, it remains to attempt some assessment of the evidence in order to discern its current significance within African Christianity.

C. Conclusion

The second christological model reflects the importance of mediation in the African context. Among the mediatorial images which arise in the interface of African and biblical traditions, Jesus as ancestor is a fairly recent and notable proposal. Francois Kabasélé sums up the perspective of many African Christians in stating that “Christ fits the category of Ancestor because, finally, he is the synthesis of all mediations (Heb. 8).”¹⁴⁹ After exploring the analogy, he further concludes that “[f]or Bantu Christians, Christ performs the role of Ancestor, by the mediation he provides. He is the exemplar, Ancestor, who fulfils in himself the words and deeds of the mediation of our Ancestors.”¹⁵⁰

Not all African Christians favour this portrait of Jesus, however, as the evidence above clearly demonstrates. Hence the need remains to consider whether the category of African ancestors does indeed provide a hermeneutical key for interpreting Jesus meaningfully to African Christians today. A brief assessment of the image, in light of the criteria established in Chapters 3, attempts to recapitulate those factors which promote and those which restrain this particular christological image. In the process, observations are offered regarding its significance for contemporary African Christianity.

First, regarding the appropriateness of sources and methods, the image of Jesus as ancestor is clearly rooted in the African heritage. As Nyamiti explains, “Each author starts, in his own way, with the African ancestral beliefs and practices and tries to confront these with the Christian teaching on the Saviour.”¹⁵¹ Rationale is grounded in the pervasiveness of the ancestral paradigm and its enduring presence

¹⁴⁹ Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 123.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹⁵¹ Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 9.

despite certain threats mentioned from the missionary inheritance, modernisation and urbanisation. Granted, the relative strength of ancestral veneration varies among African societies, as repeatedly stressed. Consequently, depictions of Jesus as ancestor based on generalised summaries of ancestral concepts must be re-examined in particular contexts where the gospel encounters ancestral beliefs.¹⁵² According to Akrong, “Among the Akans for example it’s very *deep* and strong.” He explains that the average person may not be able to fully articulate ancestral beliefs, “yet ancestral symbol is the *underlying paradigm* of all social interactions.” Probed further as to whether it is still operative among African Christians, Akrong maintains that it is, explaining that “[i]t’s so *deep*! The African culture controls us. Don’t be deceived by anything. Don’t be deceived by their *cars*, the external westernisation. I mean deep, deep, deep down, we’re moving into the world from an African premise, deep, deep, deep down.” For this reason, he contends that the ancestral image

could *help* us to reveal the mystery of Christ, because I believe that Christ is a mystery and you cannot exhaust him. It’s a mere attempt to *understand*.... [W]e produce our ways by which we can build traditional bridges, where we don’t tax them too much. They’re contributing *to*, ... in a deep way, these traditional symbols are *powerful* in terms of capturing that *mystery*.¹⁵³

Therefore, among those peoples for whom the ancestral paradigm remains operative, the ancestral image potentially provides building materials for “traditional bridges” connecting the African heritage with the biblical witness of Christ.

If the “bridge” begins from the African heritage, it nonetheless joins with biblical affirmations about Jesus, according to proponents of Jesus as ancestor. The matter is contested here, however, for the textual and oral sources reveal both acceptance and rejection of Jesus as ancestor on account of particular interpretations of biblical teaching. On the one hand, for example, a layperson interprets the image more literally in terms of Jesus’ descent from African lineage and rejects it saying, “I just go for what the Bible tells me.”¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, among those who interpret the image more figuratively, Bujo insists that “this proto-ancestor is *biblical*”¹⁵⁵ and Ela remarks that the image is not original, since it is simply an “*African recovery*” of Pauline christology and not specifically African.¹⁵⁶ This conflicting evidence demonstrates the urgent need for closer analysis of contextual biblical hermeneutics.

¹⁵² King, “Angels and Ancestors,” 11.

¹⁵³ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹⁵⁴ Felicia Opere-Saforo, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 3, 1998.

¹⁵⁵ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

¹⁵⁶ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

For as Ernst Wendland rightly points out, a serious problem with comparative analogy

occurs when the analogy is not recognised at all, and people either interpret it literally or begin to identify the image and the topic. In either case, the result is confusion, whether it is recognised or not, and a serious breakdown in understanding and/or communication ensues.¹⁵⁷

Such confusion is definitely recognised in the mixed responses of interviewees to the proposal of Jesus as ancestor. Conclusions concerning the aptness of the image thus diverge. For example, in his article Wendland notes that the risk of conceptual misunderstanding did not prevent either Jesus or the apostolic writers from employing analogies and figurative language, and acknowledges the need for theological analogising in missiological contextualisation. Yet he dismisses the ancestral image for Christ on the basis of a highly selective reading of African theologians, plus his own presuppositions regarding African ancestral cults and Christian doctrine.¹⁵⁸ In contrast many African Christians selected for this study, even those whose overall verdict is decidedly negative, display openness to consider the image provided it is qualified with adequate instruction. For example, Bishop Sarpong's response to the image is primarily negative, as indicated above, yet he does acknowledge that you could "use the blanket term *ancestor* for Jesus Christ," but it "*needs* a lot of explanation."¹⁵⁹ Above all else, that explanation must distinguish Jesus from the level of human ancestors so as not to jeopardise his divinity, the main theological problem voiced above. Representative remarks include insistence upon Jesus as a "*superior ancestor*"¹⁶⁰ or as "*a great ancestor, ... an*

¹⁵⁷ Ernst Wendland, "'Who Do People Say I Am?': Contextualizing Christology in Africa," *AJET* 10, no. 2 (1991), 15.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-20. For example, working from the assumption that ancestors supplant the Supreme Being in the lives of Africans, Wendland points out the danger that "a similar displacement exists then in Christian theology when the ancestral analogy is contextually applied to Christ" *Ibid.*, 17. Major grounds for rejecting the image are found in the "predominant emphasis" said to be "firmly fixed upon worldly cares and concerns and thus upon Christ's humanity." Pobee is among those accused of having "an overly anthropocentric perspective on Christ's mission" and person. *Ibid.*, 18. Despite the stark clarity of Pobee's thesis regarding the two non-negotiables of Jesus' divinity and humanity, Wendland selects two sentences which allegedly reflect the ancient Adoptionist heresy. Furthermore, Nyamiti's ancestral christology is rejected on the basis of being "unfortunately marred in many respects due to the influence of conceptual interference from the tradition of his own church," and on one example of misguided application of the image. *Ibid.*, 19. One may also question whether there is some contradiction in Wendland's criticism of Kwesi Dickson for trivialising the theology of the cross by likening it to "the authority associated with royal staffs and stools as symbols of the 'presence of the ever-living ancestors,'" while Wendland himself advocates applying to Jesus certain "praise-names" traditionally employed in the royal induction ceremonies in Central Africa. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Sarpong, Oral Interview, Kumasi: Sept. 7, 1998.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

ancestor with a difference!”¹⁶¹ Explication of the image therefore requires clear indication of the differences as well as the similarities between Jesus and the ancestors.¹⁶² Thus the ancestral analogy must function to elucidate biblical affirmations about the identity and significance of Christ, rather than reading the African category back into scripture in such a way as to distort the biblical message, as Wendland, citing Tite Tiénou, rightly cautions.¹⁶³ Furthermore, despite the hermeneutical complexities involved, both sides of the debate clearly follow Pobee’s directive that the fundamental plumb-line for assessing these contemporary christologies is their faithfulness to biblical teaching. In that sense, the Bible is again underlined as a central source for African christologies.

If allowance is made for an appropriate convergence of biblical and African sources, there is certainly potential significance for African Christianity. Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Emmanuel Martey speaks of the ancestral image as being theologically appealing because “it *fits*—if you read scripture, and the African concept of ancestry....” He further clarifies how the analogy functions as follows:

[T]his is an image which can *explain* who Jesus is better, because Africans understand the concept of ancestry.... *Every* analogy breaks down at a point. We are not saying that Jesus is an African ancestor, *per se*. What we are saying is that we’re taking the concept, that image, the metaphor, to *explain* to the *African* who Jesus Christ is.¹⁶⁴

He then points to the christological questions which Jesus addressed to his disciples in Mark 8, first whom others and then whom they themselves thought he was. Martey stresses that the responses given to both questions, including John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets, as well as Messiah, were all derived from Judaism. From this observation he explains,

His disciples *use* their *previous religious understanding* and experience to answer the reality of Jesus. So what African theologians are arguing is that in answering the christological question, one cannot ignore one’s previous religious understanding and experience. That’s why some of us go back into African traditional religion and African culture, to see what images, what symbols, are *there*, which will *help us to understand* who Jesus Christ is for the African....¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Samuel Ackah, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 16, 1998.

¹⁶² For further rationale for this conclusion, see King, “Angels and Ancestors,” 22-23.

¹⁶³ Tite Tiénou, “The Church in African Theology: Description and Analysis of Hermeneutical Presuppositions,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualization*, ed. D. A. Carson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 160; quoted in Wendland, ““Who Do People Say I Am?”” 16.

¹⁶⁴ Emmanuel Martey, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 24, 28, 1998.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Hence his conclusion, previously highlighted, that the ancestral concept is especially significant for explaining Christ to Africans.

A few final observations are germane to examining sources and methods. First, Pobee and Bujo in particular, although other interlocutors in addition, emphasise the humanity and the divinity of Jesus, plus the need for complementary approaches of “christology from below” and “christology from above.” Second, while the ancestral image definitely draws more heavily upon the Bible and the African heritage as sources than the living experience of the church and contemporary realities in Africa, Bujo’s firm stress on ecclesiology and orthopraxy in relation to the ancestral paradigm helps to counter any undue tendency towards a purely cultural Christianity.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, despite Waliggo’s caution that Jesus as ancestor may not sufficiently address past and current injustices in Africa, he nevertheless validates the image and it is in this context that he underlines the inter-relatedness of various christological models, as follows:

I always object to any theology which tries to be either *merely* liberation, because you cannot have inculturation without liberation, and you can’t have liberation theology without inculturation. ... I would want to see all the different models *interacting* and being interplayed, rather than taking any title at the exclusion of another.¹⁶⁷

Within this interplay of christological models, where do the relative strengths and weaknesses of the ancestral image lie? Following from the preceding discussion and considering the seven criteria for contextual relevance, it becomes apparent that the portrait of Jesus as ancestor contributes less to the issues of historical relevance and gender appropriateness. Likewise caution has been voiced concerning its contemporary relevance, and with that, the credibility of Christian witness. To the extent that the ancestral image truly inspires and elicits an orthopraxy grounded in Jesus as model or exemplar, it has potential relevance for the current context. As Oduyoye comments, “For me ... the ancestor Jesus as the example, the person whose life you admire and therefore would like to live like that, is *paramount*.”¹⁶⁸ Otherwise, the image risks losing its contextual significance.

Conversely, the ancestral image contributes more to the concerns of cultural relevance, as evidenced in the comments highlighted throughout the chapter such as Martey’s conviction above that it explains Christ better to Africans, and Kiarie’s

¹⁶⁶ For a striking example of the danger of a purely cultural Christianity, see the criticism voiced by an African student in Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 70-71.

¹⁶⁷ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 7, 1998.

¹⁶⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

statement that it “makes the people feel very much at home.”¹⁶⁹ As Akrong summarises, “So for me, once the ancestral symbol is used as understanding Christ, it makes Christ very, very close and near.”¹⁷⁰

Jesus as ancestor also carries considerable theological relevance, as indicated in the lengthy discussion of reasons for and against the image on theological grounds. Strengths thus lie in relating Jesus to the African heritage and in employing aspects of this heritage to deepen African Christians’ understanding of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, to which Aboa and Gacambi, among others, attest.¹⁷¹ Attention has also been drawn to the need for further research regarding the significance of the ancestral image in light of the contemporary context of religious pluralism. While many African Christians currently question claims of Jesus’ sole mediation, the community of faith needs to examine the extent to which the ancestral image may be stretched in this regard. Serious reservations may be elicited, for example, in response to certain christological expressions such as the following from Amoah and Oduyoye:

Is Jesus our ancestor, the quintessence of a life of faith? If so, then one begins to formulate Christology in terms of mediation and of participation in the divine-human axis that links humanity to divinity. In Jesus of Nazareth we see the return to earth of the Divine Spirit of God, the source of life, as an individual—just as in African tradition the ancestors return in the birth of new babies. This would, of course, imply that there can be many Christs as the spirit of a grandmother returns to grandchildren in perpetuity as long as such children are named after her, that is, called by her name.

Does Christianity have room for the concept of many Christs, persons in whom the Spirit of God dwells in all its fullness? Has history seen many ‘Christs’ and will such Christ-figures continue in perpetuity? These would be legitimate questions for a Christology that focuses on Jesus of Nazareth as our ancestor in religious obedience.¹⁷²

The discussion has also intimated that for some African Christians, particularly Catholics, the ancestral image for Jesus provides a link between the African ancestors and the Christian doctrine of the communion of the saints.¹⁷³ Yet

¹⁶⁹ See p. 206 above.

¹⁷⁰ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹⁷¹ See pp. 205 above.

¹⁷² Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 38-39.

¹⁷³ For example, see Bujo, “Nos ancêtres, ces saints inconnus,” 173-178; also oral interviews with Marie Gacambi and Mary Kizito. For opposing views in this regard, see Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 28-29; “Ancestors and Christian Faith,” 47; Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 125-126.

as indicated in the introductory issues, various Christian traditions hold different views concerning the role of human mediators, whether living or deceased, and these theological presuppositions inevitably influence perceptions of Jesus as ancestor.¹⁷⁴ In turn, there is potential ecclesiological relevance as various approaches are taken with respect to incorporating the African ancestors, and Jesus as ancestor, into the liturgy. For example, reference was made to the Little Sisters of St. Francis who relate how their personal and corporate worship has been enhanced through the African ancestors being invoked to join in worshipping God in the Eucharist, as illustrated in Fig. 7.¹⁷⁵ The photograph depicts Father Peter Korse, missionary for thirty-five years in the Congo and Uganda and currently chaplain to the Little Sisters of St. Francis, Jinja, officiating at the morning Mass. After consecrating the Host, he pours a little wine on the ground while informally invoking the African ancestors to join them in worshipping God.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ For example, Protestant theologian Bediako contends that Jesus fulfils the role of the African ancestors and thereby displaces their mediatorial function. See p. 17 above. In contrast, Catholic theologian Kabasélé argues along different lines as follows:

Just as Christ, the one priest, does not abolish human mediations, but fulfils them in himself, so does he consummate in himself the mediation exercised by our Ancestors, a mediation that he does not abolish but which, in him, is revealed to be henceforward a subordinate mediation. And at all events, we need only observe that this mediation of the Ancestors permits Bantu Christians to approach, perhaps even to comprehend, the fullness of the mediation of Jesus Christ. Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," 126.

¹⁷⁵ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Oral Interview, Nairobi: April 21, 1998, together with her colleague Mary Savio; Mary Cleophas, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 6, 1998; Mary Pius, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 2, 1998.

¹⁷⁶ In an informal tape-recorded interview, Korse explains, "Sometimes I say, 'You who are gone before us, our parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, our colleagues, our friends'" Peter Korse, Informal Interview, Jinja: April 29, 1998. I witnessed this ritual on four consecutive mornings, sometimes tape-recording the service, and found slight variations in the conversational invitation of which he speaks.



Fig. 7. Father Peter Korse Officiating at Mass, Jinja, Uganda

Likewise, regarding the Zaire Mass, Kabasélé explains,

Thus we have proposed to retain the offering of libations to the Ancestors. Instead of simply replacing them with the Mass, we have decided to integrate them into the Eucharistic celebration, so that they may express that Jesus Christ is the fullness of being, that he is the very essence of Ancestor—in brief, so that our libation may signify that, without the body and blood of the Son of God, our Ancestors do not attain the fullness of life, and thereby proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.¹⁷⁷

So clearly the ancestral portrait of Jesus has significant ramifications for the ongoing development of African theology and ecclesiology.

Finally, the criterion of linguistic and conceptual relevance, with its concern that current christologies truly capture and incarnate the existential realities of life and African self-understanding, takes on heightened significance with respect to Jesus as ancestor. For as Oduyoye explains, echoing Pobee's statement previously cited, the image of Jesus as ancestor emerges as an attempt "to *marry* the two ideas, because that's what people will *understand*. You see, you're using a model which is *already* in their language."¹⁷⁸ The problem which arises, however, as indicated in the introduction to this chapter, is that the English term "ancestor" is a translation of

¹⁷⁷ Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," 126.

¹⁷⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

vernacular terms but is not identical with indigenous concepts. So for example, when asked if he would speak of Christ as ancestor in his church setting, Akrong replies, “We would *not*, but you see, you can use the *title*—the ancestors are normally referred to by titles. ... ‘Nana,’ ... and significantly the same title you give to an elder, you give to a chief, you give to an ancestor, you give to God.”¹⁷⁹ This statement corroborates Bediako’s observation that

even though *Nana* recalls the category of ‘ancestor,’ and so, in that sense translates the term, in actual fact it is not adequate to leave it at that. For whereas ‘ancestor’ is a generic term in English, ‘Nana’ is both a title and a personal name, in the same way that ‘Christos’ (Christ) was both a title and a personal name in early Christian usage. This means that in point of fact, ‘Nana’ is a more satisfactory term for speaking of the actuality of Christ than ‘Ancestor.’ It should therefore be clear from this that the real theological problem here has to do with the English word ‘ancestor’ and not with *Nana*.¹⁸⁰

Problems with the English word “ancestor” arise not only in translation, but also in cross-cultural interpretation. For example, Bujo relates his experience of Europeans or Americans studying African christology and responding with criticism based on western philosophy. He recounts one instance in which a European priest teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome critiqued African ancestral christology, and in Bujo’s words,

According to him it is not possible to do African christology with a concept of ancestor. Ancestorship means for him to be old, and to be old in today’s world means you are not attractive anymore. So Christ will not be attractive for young people! And that means, for me, we are not understanding the *same* thing with the same concept. To say ‘ancestor’ in Europe is something *different* from saying ‘ancestor’ in Africa.¹⁸¹

On this basis, Bujo insists that “*we should* write our theology in African languages, because otherwise there are *so* many misunderstandings.”

Bediako strongly concurs with the need for cultivating African theologies in vernacular, and goes a step further in stressing that mother tongues potentially carry new idioms which are crucial for discovering fresh insights into our common understanding of Christ. He thus concludes that “culture, and especially the new cultural entities that are becoming incorporated into the church worldwide, will

¹⁷⁹ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹⁸⁰ Kwame Bediako, “The Doctrine of Christ and the Significance of Vernacular Terminology,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, 3 (July 1998): 110.

¹⁸¹ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

continue to have a decisive impact on the shaping of Christian thought.”¹⁸² Herein lies a central aspect of the significance of African christologies to world Christianity, also asserted by Fergus King. In examining possible correlations between angelic mediators in inter-testamental Judaism and ancestors in African religions, or shared features which might yield insights regarding the development of local theologies, King raises the theological question of how the person of Christ fits into existing theological categories. To this he responds by arguing that Christ transcends all categories, citing C. F. D. Moule in support as follows:

[J]ust as, in the New Testament period, Christ was recognised, indeed, in terms of various familiar categories and yet each time proved to be too big for that category and burst out of it in startling ways, so one might deduce, by extrapolation from this, that he would continue to confront each generation in the same way - familiar, yet startling, recognizable yet always transcending recognition, always ahead, as well as abreast: the ultimate from whom each generation is equidistant.¹⁸³

If this is the case, King contends, then Christ may be recognised in the category of ancestor, but his confrontation with African traditions will transform those very concepts. The Christian theology of ancestors will be transformed, for example in terms of liberation from fear of the ancestors or in terms of doctrine such as eschatology. Thus King concludes,

The underlying feature of theological engagement with the Risen Lord is that theological categories and concepts are changed, whether that change occurs in the first century A.D. or the twentieth. It is a meeting that has happened in every place and time, that of Christ meeting his people in their own place and saying to them, ‘Come and see’ (John 1:39).¹⁸⁴

So the controversy continues as some African Christians come to see Jesus as one who “fits” but also “transcends” the category of ancestors. Indications have emerged that the image is already operative to some extent in the religious experience of African Christians, and that it is being further disseminated through theological education. Openness to the ongoing process of christological formulation and its significance is voiced by Abraham Akrong, who notes that “if we have musicians and theologians who begin to use these things, so that *once* they get in language, their conceptual Jesus may be changed by the use of this kind of

¹⁸² Bediako, “The Doctrine of Christ,” 110.

¹⁸³ C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: n.p., 1984), 145-146; quoted in King, “Angels and Ancestors,” 23.

¹⁸⁴ King, “Angels and Ancestors,” 24.

language.”¹⁸⁵ Other African Christians, however, remain reluctant for the reasons outlined. Despite the current inconclusiveness, what lies beyond dispute is that Christianity in Africa is posing questions and problems from its own context of faith in Christ for which it received no preparation from Christianity in the West. Nor is there any reason to expect that their theological endeavours should be any less arduous than they have been in other contexts of world Christianity. Yet this very process of forging creative contextual christologies reveals that the new languages of Christian experience from non-western cultures are assuredly making a decisive impact on the development of Christian thought.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹⁸⁶ Bediako, “The Doctrine of Christ,” 110-111.

CHAPTER 7

JESUS AS LEADER

Jesus Christ is indeed a great personality whose life conforms to what the Asante expect a great leader to be. ... [H]e became our rescuer, liberator ... leader par excellence.¹

- Peter Sarpong, Catholic Bishop of Kumasi, Ghana

*Mere chiefs and kings are not his equals
though filled with glory and power,
wealth and blessings, and royalty
in the greatest abundance.
But of them all, he is the leader,
and the chiefs with all their glory follow after him.²*

- Afua Kuma, non-literate laywoman in rural Ghana

Le scandale de l'évangile c'est que Jésus-Christ dit Dieu dans la douleur. ... Il nous parle de Dieu qui aime ... qui s'identifie à l'homme qui souffre ... qui veut que l'homme vive, parce que Jésus-Christ meurt pour que l'homme vive. Jésus-Christ dans sa croix, il s'implique, il participe étroitement dans les luttes de l'homme pour la vie. D'un instrument qui est destiné à humilier, il en fait un instrument pour la vie, pour la liberté.³

- Jean-Marc Ela, Catholic priest from Cameroon

Yesu Di Yen Kan – “Jesus Leads Us” or “Jesus, Go Before Us”

- Slogan on a vehicle in Ghana

A. Introduction

When Christians articulate the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, they inevitably draw upon categories from their own social experience. Within this realm of human experience, concepts of leadership are pivotal. John Pobee notes that while various African communities have different ideas and practices of authority,

¹ Peter K. Sarpong, “Asante Christology,” *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 191-192.

² Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, trans. Jon Kirby (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981), 20.

³ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

The scandal of the gospel is that Jesus Christ speaks God in suffering. ... He speaks to us of God who loves, ... who identifies himself with the person who suffers, ... who wants people to live, because Jesus Christ died in order for people to live. On the cross Jesus Christ implicates himself, he participates closely in people's struggles for life. From an instrument which is intended to humiliate, he makes an instrument for life, for liberty.

“[w]hatever the leadership concept and practice, they can be a very powerful avenue for articulating the answer to the question ‘Who do you Africans say that I am?’”⁴

Certainly a wide range of images related to leadership emerges in the textual and oral sources under consideration in this study. Though not exhaustive, the following list is illustrative of leadership titles attributed to Jesus: model, guide, teacher, shepherd, chief, king, warrior, liberator, head, judge, master of initiation, rain-maker, sea captain, as well as assorted vernacular titles. Like the christological portraits delineated in previous chapters, these images are derived from the gospel’s encounter with the African heritage and contemporary realities. Since certain leadership roles have already been discussed, including religious specialists like traditional healers and family or clan heads who become ancestors, this chapter concentrates on other leaders in the socio-political and religious realms. The first half of the chapter explores the conviction of African Christians that Jesus fulfils the leadership expectations in traditional thought, particularly with respect to concepts of kingship / chieftaincy in some societies. The second half of the chapter focuses on selected expressions of Jesus as liberator elicited by contemporary realities in Africa. The overall purpose of the chapter is to present the rationale for interpreting Jesus as leader in light of African thought and biblical teaching, to investigate the substance of key leadership images in contemporary Christian reflection and practice, and to offer critical assessment regarding the significance of these images for African Christianity.

B. Jesus as King / Chief

1. Concepts Of Leaders In Traditional Africa

Since leadership patterns vary among traditional African societies, contextual grounding for the initial discussion is located in one ethnic group: the Akan of Ghana. However, given the commonalities in concepts of leaders among many African peoples, the relevance of the African heritage to contemporary christologies in this respect extends beyond this particular people group. Hence evidence from other African witnesses enters into the later discussion regarding Jesus as leader.

Spokespersons regarding traditional Akan leadership include Anglican theologian John Pobee, Methodist leader Robert Aboagye-Mensah, and Catholic bishop Peter Sarpong. Pobee explains that “the institution of chieftaincy is the focal

⁴ John S. Pobee, “In Search of Christology in Africa,” in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 17.

point of culture and a model for leadership patterns in society.”⁵ Aboagye-Mensah adds that the “lineage system is vital to the understanding of kingship/chieftainship,”⁶ with descent and privileges being traced through the mother since Akan society is matrilineal. Each lineage comprises a political unit with its own headman acting as representative on higher councils, from the household head through successive levels of chiefs administering larger political units. At each level the leader is responsible for maintaining defence, law and order, harmonious relationships within the group, and communication between God or the gods, the living, and the departed. In descending order of importance, the main leaders include the chief/king (*Ohene*), the queenmother,⁷ and other sub-chiefs.

Pobee, Aboagye-Mensah and Sarpong all underline the pervasive influence of religion in the socio-political structures of the Akan. Pobee cites the sociologist K. A. Busia regarding the institution of chieftaincy among the Asante,⁸ one of the linguistic and cultural groups within the Akan, as follows:

The most important aspect of Ashanti chieftaincy was undoubtedly the religious one. An Ashanti chief filled a sacral role. His stool, the symbol of his office, was a sacred emblem. It represented the community, their solidarity, their permanence, their continuity. The chief was the link between the living and the dead, and his highest role was when he officiated in the public religious rites which gave expression to the community values. He then acted as the representative of the community whose members are believed to include those who are alive, and those who are either dead or are still unborn. The sacral aspect of the chief's role was a powerful sanction of his authority.⁹

Aboagye-Mensah explains further that since the Akan king combines religious, social, and political leadership in occupying the stool, “he is described as the Priest-

⁵ John S. Pobee, *Christ Would Be An African Too*, Gospel & Culture Studies Vol. 9, West Africa (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), 24.

⁶ Robert Kwasi Aboagye-Mensah, “Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth: Trinitarian and Incarnational Christology as the Ground for His Social Action and Its Implications for Us Today,” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1984), 425. The English terms “king/kingship” and “chief/chieftaincy” are used interchangeably in the literature, although certain oral interviews reveal a slight difference in connotations which will be noted in the later discussion on Jesus as king / chief.

⁷ Aboagye-Mensah explains that among the Akan, the queenmother is actually the sister of the chief/king but is described as the “mother” because of the matrilineal bond. Her roles include participating in the selection of a new chief, in consultation with the elders who represent the populace, and advising the chief on his conduct. In the latter regard she has greater freedom to scold and reprove than the other councillors. *Ibid.*, n. 32, 461.

⁸ “Asante” is the indigenous term which was used in the 19th century and which has recently regained currency over the anglicised form “Ashanti.” Therefore “Asante” is employed in the discussion while quotes retain their original usage.

⁹ K. A. Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 26; quoted in John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 94-95.

chief/king.”¹⁰ This office is delineated in terms of four main functions and titles of the king. First, he is the priest-chief who alone has power and authority to gather all the lineages and to sacrifice to the ancestors and God on their behalf. Citing the quote above from Busia, Aboagye-Mensah concludes that “[a]s Priest-King, he demonstrates that for the Akans there is no deep split between politics and religion; and that both affect the living and the dead.”¹¹ Second, he is the commander of the army responsible for delivering his people from their enemies in battle. Third, he is to remove anti-social acts within the community in order to maintain social cohesion, and thus acts as the legislator and the executive and administrative head. Fourth, he is the custodian of the land or “owner of all the lands,” in that he supervises and defends the ancestral lands without having the right to own land privately. Thus the office of kingship is clearly composite.

2. Jesus as King / Chief

Following his introduction to Akan leadership, Aboagye-Mensah observes, with lack of surprise, that many African theologians have called for serious consideration to be given to traditional concepts of kingship / chiefship in formulating African christologies. For example, Pobee is said to speak for many Africans, particularly Akan Christians, when he asserts that “the court of the royal house in Akan society can serve the cause of Christology in Akan African theology.”¹² Hence Aboagye-Mensah’s important assertion that

Akan Christians have no hesitation in transferring to Jesus Christ descriptions and titles which were used for our traditional kings. More strikingly, in this form of transposition they also portray Jesus Christ as one greater and superior to them. They are mere chiefs/kings in comparison to Jesus Christ. Jesus is their leader and is sovereign among them.¹³

Closer examination of Jesus as king / chief¹⁴ entails analysis of the data and the substance of the image before conclusions are reached. For the purpose of this

¹⁰ Aboagye-Mensah, “Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth,” 431. In a corresponding summary of chiefly functions, Sarpong stresses that “[t]his religious role is so important that if a chief fails to play it, he can easily be dismissed or destooled.” Sarpong, “Asante Christology,” 193.

¹¹ Aboagye-Mensah, “Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth,” 433.

¹² Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 94.

¹³ Aboagye-Mensah, “Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth,” 437-438. Aboagye-Mensah supports his statement with quotations from Afua Kuma, including the citation included at the outset of this chapter.

¹⁴ The combined expressions “king/chief” and “kingship/chieftaincy” appear in the literature, indicating dual terms for the singular office of traditional leadership. However, in the interpretive discussion I use them in conjunction but separately (i.e. “king / chief”; “kingship / chieftaincy”) to acknowledge some degree of nuance as expressed by respondents concerning the English terms in

section, the textual and oral christologies are combined in presentation, together with further evidence gleaned through informal methods of field research.

a) The Data

Contextual evidence from Kenya, Uganda and Ghana points to the kingship of Jesus being a prevalent theme in local expressions of Christianity. Participant observation in a wide variety of churches exposes numerous references to Jesus as king in songs, prayers, liturgy and preaching. Without doubt, such imagery is at least partially spawned by the biblical and the western missionary inheritance, as many hymnbooks, for example, attest.¹⁵ Yet there are clear indications that traditional leadership symbolism further informs christological images of kingship / chieftaincy. For example, in addition to biblical affirmations about Jesus, a traditional greeting reserved for Zulu kings animates the following song which was sung in Nairobi Chapel on April 26, 1998:

BAYETE INKOSI

Bayete, Bayete Inkosi
Bayete, King of Kings
Bayete, Bayete Inkosi
Bayete Inkosi means King of Kings

Who can match Your greatness
Who can know Your power
Who can search Your riches
Who can deny You are crowned Lord of Lords

You are crowned King of Africa
You are crowned Lord of Lords
You are crowned King of Africa
Who can deny You are crowned Lord of Lords.¹⁶

relation to Jesus. That is to say, presumably no African Christian would disavow Jesus as “king,” yet not all agree with the ascription of “chief” to Jesus.

¹⁵ For example, *Asempa Hymns*, published in Accra (1982), contains English choruses adapted from various vernaculars plus classic hymns from British Christianity expressing the theme of Jesus as king. For instance one chorus adapted from Ga is as follows:

You are the king of kings,
Other gods are lifeless things.
Lord Jesus, who can be compared with you?
You are the king of kings.

Hymns originating in Britain include, for example, Isaac Watts’ “Jesus shall reign where’er the sun,” and Charles Wesley’s “Rejoice, the Lord is king!” See *Asempa Hymns* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1982), song numbers 7, 62, 64.

¹⁶ Nairobi Chapel Song Sheet, April 26, 1998.

This song also illustrates that the impact of traditional leadership symbolism extends beyond the particular people group represented, for in this case South African Zulu appellations inspire worship within a multi-ethnic congregation in Nairobi, Kenya.

Within the particular context of the Akan, however, christological portraits of kingship / chieftaincy take on added proportion. Catholic bishop Charles Palmer-Buckle confirms that “[a] lot of the Akan songs present Jesus Christ as king, as king of kings, you hear it very, very often, ‘*Ahanfo mu hene*.’”¹⁷ Protestant clergyman Dan Antwi adds, on a more personal note, that

the vernacular compositions, ... the local choruses, have been very, very powerful. ... [A]nytime I hear such a piece like ‘*Mamaŋso Yesu na ɔye ɔhene*,’ you know, ‘Lift him up. Jesus is the king!’ ‘*Ahanfo mu hene*,’ ‘he’s the king of kings.’ ‘*Eye-se obiara kotow no*,’ ‘everybody must bow unto him,’ ... it’s such a powerful piece that I love very much.¹⁸

Furthermore, Aboagye-Mensah notes that “Jesus as chief or Jesus as *king* is also another common terminology people use in prayer.”¹⁹ While the meanings of the vernacular terms await further explication below, Sarpong concurs that “[i]n the spontaneous prayers of ordinary people, one hears their kings and chief. They would address Jesus as *Osagyefo, Kantamanto, Kurotwiamansa, Oduyefoo, Paapa, Ahummobro*.”²⁰

Besides songs and prayers, several Catholic respondents speak of liturgical celebrations employing local terminology and customs related to kingship, especially in Easter dramatisations and the annual Feast of Christ the King on Nov. 22. Describing the latter, Catholic priest Joseph Aggrey relates how the Corpus Christi is carried in a palanquin: “[W]e carry Jesus Christ amidst dancing and drumming, and praises, some of which I will say are very traditional. Yes, very traditional.”²¹ In the focus group of Catholic clergy, Anthony Kornu adds further detail that Christians including

traditional chiefs even go and kneel down on their bare knees and go through the whole village. You see it in Cape Coast—all the regalia of chieftaincy! He’s [i.e. Jesus, symbolised in the Eucharist] even sometimes brought from the king’s palace to the church *adorned* with all the paraphernalia for the procession with the blessed sacrament. ... [T]hose who are Christian chiefs are *there*, and they are kneeling

¹⁷ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 1, 1998.

¹⁸ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

¹⁹ Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

²⁰ Sarpong, “Asante Christology,” 202.

²¹ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

down doing obeisance. ... [W]e associate with him *all* that goes with kingship and *more*.... So he is chief, king of kings.²²

One last clue to the importance of Jesus' depiction as king lies in the visual indicators apparent in the Ghanaian context. Together with the signboard for "King Christ Medical Laboratory" featured in Chapter 5, Figs. 8 and 9 represent many occurrences of this christological image.



Fig. 8. Signboard for Workshop, Accra

²² Anthony Kornu, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998.



Fig. 9. Signboard for Roadside Refreshment Bar, Akuapem Region

Also, among the ubiquitous slogans on vehicles are indicators of Jesus' perceived kingship / chiefship, such as one *trotro* (local transport vehicle) publicising “*Osahene Yesu*,” a Twi military metaphor used of conquering war heroes applied here to Jesus.²³ So simply being in the context of African Christianity, particularly in Ghana, allows ample opportunity to witness the widespread conviction that Jesus is king / chief as expressed in churches and in wider society.

Further corroboration comes to light in the oral interviews. In Kenya and Uganda, no set question was asked regarding the image of Jesus as king or chief. Nevertheless, Jesus as king undoubtedly emerges as a meaningful category for these selected Christians, as 9 of the 30 individual respondents (30%) volunteer comments to this effect. In contrast to the fairly common use of “king” in reference to Jesus, only one respondent speaks of Jesus as “chief” and this occurrence is in response to a specific question, not initiated by the respondent.²⁴ This suggests that the English term “chief” is not applied as readily to Jesus by these particular Christians as it might be in other African contexts. Nor is this observation surprising, since

²³ As part of the observational research in Ghana, I recorded a list of those slogans referring to Jesus which were personally witnessed on vehicles. Other slogans suggestive of Jesus' kingship, though unconfirmed, include “He Reigns” and “*Yesu Tumi Nyinaa Wura*,” Twi for “All power belongs to Jesus,” with “*wura*” denoting either “owner” or “source.”

²⁴ Gerald Wanjohi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

leadership concepts in many ethnic societies in Kenya, including the largest people groups of the Gikuyu, Maasai and Kamba, are based upon rule by elders.²⁵

Conversely in Ghana, where chieftaincy has been more predominant,²⁶ the christological evidence shifts accordingly. Here, in addition to 8 of the 35 individual respondents (23%) who suggest the image of Jesus as “king,” 4 respondents (11%) initiate perceptions of Jesus as “chief.” Therefore, combining the two terms, 11 of the 35 respondents²⁷ (31%) volunteer the king / chief image of Jesus as a meaningful christological category. In view of the prevailing patterns of traditional leadership in Ghana, questions were posed to the interviewees in this context concerning Jesus as “chief” and as “*Nana*” (a Twi term associated with “king / chief” and “ancestor,” introduced in Chapter 6 and further discussed below).²⁸ Consequently, the Ghanaian material features in the following discussion. Due to the overlapping of terminology including “king” and “chief,” plus other vernacular titles like “*Nana*,” precise statistical charts isolating any single term, like those in previous chapters, are inadvisable.²⁹ However, the overall pattern of evidence from the individual interviews in Ghana is decidedly favourable towards the cluster of “king / chief / *Nana*” images by an approximate ratio of 2 positive to 1 negative response.³⁰ Thus the data from participant observation in the context of Ghanaian Christianity and from the oral interviews leave little doubt as to the widespread conviction of Jesus’ kingship / chieftaincy.

²⁵ It is worth noting that the functions and qualities expected of elders in these societies is closely akin to those of the king / chief in other people groups. For an in-depth study of Jesus as elder in the context of the Gikuyu, see P. N. Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (Ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agikuyu Understanding of Elder* (Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers Ltd., 1992).

²⁶ See, for example, Eric O. Ayisi, *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1972), 55-63.

²⁷ One interviewee suggests both images of “king” and “chief”; hence the total of 11 respondents. Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

²⁸ The addition of this question to the fieldwork in Ghana demonstrates the flexibility of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research, in being able to pursue issues as they arise in the context of research. Furthermore, it reflects the fundamental methodological stance advocated by Harold Turner in the study of religion in Africa, that “the nature of the field of study must provide the major control over the methods employed.” See p. 23 above.

²⁹ Respondents repeatedly explain the approximate equivalence between two or sometimes three of the terms “king,” “chief,” and “*Nana*.” For example, Protestant clergyman Theophilus Dankwa responds to the specific question of Jesus as “chief,” explaining, “Well ‘chief,’ ‘*Nana*,’ ‘king,’ all go together, if one is thinking in terms of his *kingship*, his *rule* and authority....” Theophilus Dankwa, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 16, 1998. In addition, respondents sometimes answer the question of Jesus as “chief” using vernacular terms such as the Twi “*shene*.” With such difficulty in isolating particular terms, it is advisable to treat this leadership image in terms of a cluster of descriptions carrying slightly different nuances, and seek to discern the overall pattern of response for the composite image.

³⁰ See the Chart 11 in Appendix 1, pp. 371-373. The focus group materials from Ghana reflect similar findings.

b) Rationale for the Image of Jesus as King / Chief

On par with previous christological images, it is enlightening but insufficient to determine the prevalence of a particular theme in local expressions of Christianity. Further requisite is investigation into the meaning and significance of the proposed portrait. A consideration of the rationale expressed for the composite king / chief image, plus problems raised with it, will contribute towards this end.

Among the early proponents of Jesus as chief, Pobee provides clear rationale for depicting Jesus in this way. He explains that the Supreme Being in Akan religion is conceived of as a paramount chief so great that he must be approached through subchiefs and his official spokesperson, the *ɔkyeame*. The *ɔkyeame* is as the chief in public affairs and exercises royal authority, although such authority is subordinated to the paramount chief. Every chief is said to have an *ɔkyeame* who serves him in various capacities and must be competent in public speaking. Moving from the Akan heritage to the Bible, Pobee notes similarities between the two sources regarding the kingship of God. He cites biblical teaching regarding God as king³¹ and Jesus as king,³² yet notes that “Jesus shares in the kingship of God and holds his kingship under God.”³³ In order to convey this teaching to local Christians, he suggests,

In our Akan Christology we propose to think of Jesus as the *ɔkyeame*, or linguist, who in all public matters was as the Chief, God, and is the first officer of the state, in this case, the world. This captures something of the Johannine portrait of Jesus as the Logos, being at one and the same time divine and yet subordinate to God.³⁴

A further parallel is proposed in the sacral role exercised by the Akan chief and by Jesus, although Christian distinction is claimed for Jesus’ priestly function extending beyond earthly to heavenly rule, as the Epistle to the Hebrews argues, and bringing salvation and forgiveness of sin to humanity by virtue of being both priest and sacrificial victim. Finally, akin to the African chief, Jesus as chief is head of a community, namely the church. Not only does he represent the community, he also symbolises their identity, unity, and continuity. He further exercises authority over his people as their judge and the one to whom they owe their allegiance. A new

³¹ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 95; citing Ps. 10:16; 44:4; 47:7; Mt. 5:35; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15.

³² *Ibid.*; Mt. 25:32; cf. the charges against him claiming to be king in the trial scene, and Rev. 17:14; 19:16.

³³ *Ibid.*; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24, 25, 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Pobee explains further: “There are two types of *ɔkyeame*: (a) *Ahenkyeame*, who is also a chief, and that is hereditary; (b) a common linguist who is appointed by the Chief because he was judged to be responsible and reliable and was generally capable of fulfilling the roles of an *ɔkyeame*.” See p. 167, n. 21.

element with Jesus as chief, Pobee stresses, is that his community cuts across political and ethnic boundaries to embrace all humanity.³⁵

On the basis of this functional analogy, various honorifics used of chiefs in traditional society are said to capture aspects of New Testament christology. Pobee's proposal for the christological title "*Nana*," as a term traditionally attributed to God and to the ancestors, has been introduced in Chapter 6 in relation to Jesus as ancestor.³⁶ He cites more examples, in each case setting forth the Akan definition and biblical grounds for its association with Jesus. The first, *Osuodumgyima*, literally means "water that extinguishes fire," fire symbolising all pain and disaster, and it is attributed to the chief as one who removes all that is inimical to the community, thereby enhancing life. Water, symbolising life, is likewise important in Jesus' teaching (John 4:10). Hence Pobee states, "Jesus is *Osuodumgyima* because he gives life and delivers from the flames of passion, the flames of sin, and gives hope."³⁷ The next two terms are said to be synonymous: *Kasapreko*, literally meaning "he who speaks once and for all and does not foreswear himself," and *Kantamanto*, "one who does not break his oath." The determination of the Akan chief, whose word stands firm, is likened to that of Jesus in his unswerving devotion to God to the bitter end, and above all, to the absolute assurance of his promises (2 Cor. 1:19-20).

A fourth recommended title is *Osagyefo*, meaning "one who saves in battle; therefore, a deliverer." Pobee explains the basic idea of this term as comparable to the Old Testament judges who saved their people from the tyranny of oppressors. While this appellation is applicable to Jesus as deliverer, according to Pobee, one key difference is that Jesus' deliverance is not through a "literal battle" but rather figurative rescue from "the inimical forces of legalism, self-sufficiency, and the cosmic forces."³⁸ Finally, Pobee points out one addition from Christian tradition to the traditional honorifics: *Asomdwehene*, or "prince of peace." He explains that as far as he has been able to ascertain, the chief was never addressed with this title in traditional society, although his role included ensuring peace and harmony in the community. The term is considered to be representative of Jesus' mission, yet Pobee clarifies that Jesus' kingship entails leading his people not to military war but to peace (John 14:27) with God and with one another. After delineating the traditional

³⁵ Ibid., 95-96.

³⁶ Ibid., 94. See p. 193 above, and note, once again, Pobee's recollection that reflecting on Jesus as "*Nana*" prompted his further reflections on Jesus as chief. His observation underlines how this cluster of images, including "chief," "*Nana*," and other vernacular titles, overlap with one another and also with that of Jesus as ancestor.

³⁷ Ibid., 96.

³⁸ Ibid., 96-97.

concept of chieftaincy and these praise names attributed to the chief, Pobee concludes with their relevance to contemporary Christianity; namely, that “among the African tribe of the Akan of Ghana a royal priestly Christology aptly speaks to their situation.”³⁹

Within this brief summary of Pobee’s rationale for portraying Jesus as chief, three elements come to light: theological grounds for the analogy in the kingship of God being extended to Jesus, similarities in chiefly functions, and titles of respect associated with the chief which carry christological meaning and significance. These three elements find corroboration among other Ghanaian Christians selected in this study.⁴⁰

With respect to the theological grounds for conferring God’s kingship / chieftaincy upon Jesus, Aboagye-Mensah provides strong confirmation in his discussion of *Nana* as a christological title. He defines “*Nana*” as an expression of honour or respect used for the head of a family, such as a grandfather, or the head of a nation, such as kings/chiefs or queenmothers, or for royal ancestors who once ruled the people. The term emphasises family relations and reflects the bond of love uniting the head of a family or a nation with his or her people. Yet the title is also applied to God, “*Nana Nyame*,” emphasising God as “One of great age” and one who creates and unites all the families of the world. Aboagye-Mensah then stresses the significance of this title being extended to Jesus, in that

the same title is used of human beings and God. The implication is that it can be used of Jesus Christ, the God-man without much difficulty. Christologically, the title acquires new significance. It is the first time that it is used of one ‘Person’ who unites in Himself the Sovereign God and creaturely man. It means Jesus Christ is also the true head of all individual families, and nations, as well as being the head of the One family of all clans and nations of the universe. In Him

³⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁰ While the present discussion focuses on the Ghanaian context, further support is found elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, when asked about images of Jesus meaningful to Africans, the first one offered by Ugandan Catholic religious sister Mary Cleophas is that of king. From her background within the Baganda, she explains, “[W]e have great respect for kings. And ... I see Jesus as king, for example. So tracing back how Baganda treat their kings, I place Jesus also there. Yes, I have that image of him too.” She then describes traditional customs of honouring the king, like the subjects’ joyful willingness to lie down on the path for him to walk on, and how this background enhances her image of Jesus as king, especially in relation to Palm Sunday. Mary Cleophas, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 6, 1998. See also Douglas W. Waruta, “Who Is Jesus Christ for Africans Today? Prophet, Priest, Potentate,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1989), 40-53; François Kabasélé, “Christ as Chief,” in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 103-115.

the title finds fulfilment as the head of all sovereignty, authority, power or domination in the Church and outside the Church.⁴¹

Similar theological reasoning is voiced by Lawrence Darmani. From his perspective as a Protestant layman, he explains that “*Nana*” is a title for “Supreme,” and confirms that he conceptualises God as “*Nana Nyankopɔn*.” Since he associates the title “*Nana*” with God, he needs a “bridge” to associate Jesus with “*Nana*.” That bridge he finds in the Bible, and he explains the significance for him personally as follows:

[B]ecause of what I understand from the scriptures, I’m very much privileged to be able to connect Jesus to God, and *therefore* be able to use ‘*Nana*’ for Jesus. Because immediately, I see him not just like the gentleman walking by the shore of Galilee, or ... being led to the cross to be crucified. But as the *God* now, who came in the form of man. *Then* I can see Jesus as ‘*Nana*.’⁴²

Thus the ascription of “*Nana*” to Jesus clearly carries potential for conveying to Akan Christians the universal rule of Christ and his incarnation. It is worth noting, however, that when probed as to whether the image of Jesus as “*Nana*” is operative in his own life and specifically in his ministry as editor of Step Magazine – Ghana, Darmani replies,

We have not used that word, or that title, ‘*Nana Jesus*,’ but we have presented him as *king*. ... He came in a humble way but in my mind, ... I see him as ... a *great one* who is actually sitting as a *chief*, as a *king*! And therefore in my own devotion, prayer, thought, I’m able to see him as the king with *powers*! Powers to liberate me.... Powers to *guide me* and to lead me. In *that* sense, we have presented him in our publication.... So I’m able to say ‘King Jesus’—that’s almost like saying ‘*Nana Jesus*,’ just that I’ve not used the word ‘*Nana*.’ But otherwise, in my mind, yes, he is ‘*Nana*.’⁴³

Therefore, even when the vernacular title “*Nana Jesus*” is not expressed publicly, it evidently functions conceptually within many Ghanaian believers as part of the cluster of king / chief images.

⁴¹ Aboagye-Mensah, “Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth,” 445. Despite expressing strong theological support for *Nana* as a christological title in this context, he admits in conversation that the term has not taken root among local Christians as might have been expected since the 1960s and 1970s when it was advocated by theologians like Pobee. He accounts for the situation by noting that the term “*Nana*” is much more closely associated with God, “*Nana Nyankopɔn*,” than with “*Nana Yesu*.” Although he affirms that people are using the term for Jesus, in the end he states, “[L]et me stick my neck out and say that it is terminology more within the theological set-up than within a church situation.” Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

⁴² Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The functional analogy Pobee develops between the traditional Akan chief and Jesus as chief is also witnessed among other Ghanaian Christians. The most obvious parallel, remarked upon by many respondents, is the rule and power exercised by the chief over the subjects. For instance, when asked about the image of Jesus as chief, Protestant laywoman Grace Nartey replies, "Chief, as ruler, as judge, as someone who has authority, yes, one can think of Jesus as chief."⁴⁴ She explains further in response to the question of Jesus as *Nana*:

Yes, Jesus is king, Jesus is Lord. Jesus is—you know the family head or the *chief* is somebody that one should be able to look up to, somebody that you *respect* and somebody who provides support and protection. And Jesus does all this and more, so....⁴⁵

Protestant clergyman Thomas Oduro brings out another aspect of the subject's allegiance to the chief in the sense of personal identity gained through association, for the chief is "somebody you can be proud of, to relate yourself to."⁴⁶ In addition, Protestant layman Kingsfold Amoah affirms the fundamental concept of lordship inherent in the image of Jesus as chief. He explains that "when you talk of a 'lord,' a 'king,' then the word 'chief' has the same connotations. ... [I]f I was trying to explain his supremacy and ... what is meant by 'Lord of all lords,' then I could say that he's the greatest chief."⁴⁷ Once again, however, a respondent admits that the image of Jesus as "chief" is not verbalised in his own experience or ministry. Yet Amoah states unequivocally that it is meaningful conceptually and that it holds potential for ministry, in that

a lot of Ghanaians know a chief as the depository of authority and control and power and that sort of thing. So one could use that same thing that they know and transfer it to describe the lordship of Christ upon their lives. So, just like a chief makes laws and a chief is

⁴⁴ Grace Nartey, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

⁴⁵ Ibid. It is noteworthy that Protestant clergyman Samuel Aboa responds negatively to the image of Jesus as chief, first outlining the functions of a chief and then stating he does not see Christ in this way, for reasons to be set forth below. Yet in discussion, as he reflects upon the analogy, he concedes as follows:

Except that, I think of his [Christ's] *power* over the world, then of course I would say, a chief in his own small way, he has power over his subjects and all that the reign is. Because he is also the custodian of even the *land* for the people. So in a way, he commands all, as God or Christ is the creator of the world and has power over everything that is in the world and of the world. It is only in this respect that I would somehow equate God with the chiefs.

So even when a respondent disagrees with the chiefly image for Jesus, he nonetheless acknowledges certain aspects of the analogy. Samuel Aboa, Oral Interview, Mampong, Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998.

⁴⁶ Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

⁴⁷ Kingsfold Amoah, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 18, 1998.

supposed to be *obeyed*, and a chief is to be honoured, ... one could use that to *present* the lordship of Christ.⁴⁸

So whether or not such terms as “chief” and “*Nana*” are actually voiced in relation to Jesus, they are acknowledged by many respondents as mentally operative and potentially constructive for ministry purposes in Ghana.

The most common reason expressed for affirming Jesus as king / chief / *Nana*, on par with Pobee’s third rationale, is the respect or reverence accorded through ascribing these titles. Protestant clergyman Dan Antwi’s explanation is telling, for when asked specifically if the term “*Nana*” comes naturally to him in relation to Jesus, he replies,

You have the imagery of a *chief*, ... a king, ... lord of lords and king of kings, then in *that* respect you wouldn’t address him in any other way but as you would address a chief—‘*Nana*’ would be quite a convenient way. Because, in any case, *if* Jesus is the *heir* to the throne of God, ... then he deserves the title ‘*Nana*’!⁴⁹

Striking evidence also comes from Nana Addo Birikorang, himself the chief linguist to the regional king. When asked about Jesus as *Nana*, Birikorang responds enthusiastically, with slight laughter, “Jesus is super-*Nana*! Yes! He is super-*Nana*! Because if I go before God, I *feel* that Jesus is the only means by which I can go unto God.”⁵⁰ He likewise affirms Jesus as “super-chief,” thus validating Aboagye-Mensah’s assertion cited above that Akan Christians transpose titles for traditional kings to Jesus while maintaining his clear superiority over them.

Finally, Pobee’s exposition of traditional Akan accolades capable of expressing facets of New Testament christology is echoed by other Ghanaians. Although all of the vernacular titles Pobee proposes in this regard are also voiced by other respondents, the one most commonly raised is *Osagyefo*, the king/chief who delivers his people in battle.⁵¹ Described as a “brave warrior, conquering king,”⁵² *Osagyefo* is said to “*very aptly* describe who Christ is to a believer.”⁵³ Especially instructive here is the conflict which arose between church and state when the title

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

⁵⁰ Nana Addo Birikorang, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 27, 1998.

⁵¹ This title is introduced by 9 out of the 35 individual Ghanaian respondents (26%): 2 in publications, including Aboagye-Mensah and Sarpong, and an additional 7 in conversation. However, one respondent, Catholic layman Samuel Asubonteng, takes issue with the aspect of “*strife* and *wars*” conveyed by the “*osa*” in “*osagyefo*.” Instead, he favours simply “*gyefo*” or “*saviour*,” since “there has not been the need for him [Jesus] to go to war.” Samuel Asubonteng, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

⁵² S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

⁵³ Kingsfold Amoah, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 18, 1998.

Osagyefo was applied to Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first President who led the people of Ghana from colonialism to independence. Certain church leaders vehemently opposed it as "a blasphemous equation of Nkrumah with Jesus the saviour."⁵⁴ Pobee explores the use of the term in Asante tradition and in the lyrics of the Fanti Methodist Church, where *Osagyefo* was commonly applied to God, and notes how African and church traditions overlapped so that the same term was used with different connotations. Full explanation of this controversy, involving *Osagyefo* and other chiefly titles, lies beyond the present scope. However, the point underlined here is the extent to which Ghanaian Christians have adopted vernacular appellations for traditional leaders and ascribed them to Jesus. Aboagye-Mensah follows Pobee in criticising the church's attitude of monopolising the title for Christ without adequate awareness of the term's usage in its traditional context. He then draws an important conclusion, worth citing in full for its explication of the meaning and significance of *Osagyefo* as a christological title:

[I]n the traditional usage, the title referred to socio-political liberation. The Church in Ghana gave it a religious or divine interpretation. Arguably, the Church understood the term in the spiritual sense. In applying the title to Jesus, we must include both interpretations, traditional and church. Thus Jesus Christ will be understood as the One who delivered and continues to deliver us from socio-political domination and oppression. At the same time He is the One who sets us free from spiritual bondage. In this sense when the title is applied to Him we are stressing the fact that He is concerned about the liberation of our entire life, from the social, political and religious realities that ensnare us. Jesus Christ has come and continues to come to liberate us from all structural and private sins which hold us captive. He is indeed the *Osaagyefoo* and all the other leaders and kings are His subordinate *asaagyefoo*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ John S. Pobee, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana 1949-1966* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1988), 143. The incident is also referred to by Protestant laywoman Grace Nartey, which suggests that the controversy and its significance regarding christological titles are common knowledge among Ghanaian believers. Nartey summarises as follows:

[T]here are specific words that *may* be used for chiefs and elderly, respectable people, but which in actual fact are restricted to, ... [or] most of the times ... used in terms of Jesus. I can think of the Twi word '*Osagyefo*,' ... which was used for our first President, Kwame Nkrumah. And when first he took that title, in fact a lot of people were affronted. They felt that he was ... projecting himself as divine. ... And there are words like that, ... I think originally in the traditional society, these were given to the chiefs. But when Christianity came, Christianity adopted those words and now they've become almost restricted to [Jesus], so that now if you want to apply them to the chiefs, they sound like you are being sacrilegious. Grace Nartey, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

⁵⁵ Aboagye-Mensah, "Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth," 449-450.

The importance of this particular portrait of Jesus warrants further consideration in relation to the next section on liberation theologies.

In addition to *Osagyefo* and the vernacular praise names outlined by Pobe, other chiefly titles are put forward by the selected Ghanaian Christians. For example, Sarpong advocates *Kurotwiamansa*, meaning the “leopard” which was traditionally considered the king of the forest and thus applied to the king of Asante. After describing the image of the leopard in terms of its power, fierceness, beauty, and majesty, Sarpong concludes,

In calling Jesus the leopard, *Kurotwiamansa*, therefore, the Asante is saying that Jesus is feared by the devil; Jesus is the Master of us all; Jesus is beautiful; Jesus is majestic, noble. But these qualities of Jesus are seen in association with the leadership of the Asante people. Jesus is graceful; Jesus is solemn; Jesus is dignified—in the last analysis, Jesus is *the* King. Before him, the King of Asante is no King.⁵⁶

Aboagye-Mensah adds *Oyeadeeyie*, defined as “one who mends, remedies, transforms or restores a person and a thing into its original state,” so that the old is transformed into the new. When used of kings it implies prompt action taken to restore peace to a nation and its people. Therefore when applied to Jesus, it implies that he is the one through whom God has restored humanity to its original state. Aboagye-Mensah explains, “Through His incarnation, death and resurrection all men have been restored into the image of their Creator and Lord. Thus Jesus Christ is the *Oyeadeeyie par excellence*.”⁵⁷

More vernacular titles for Jesus surface in the research, yet these examples suffice to illustrate how traditional Akan praise names are applied to Jesus in order to convey his kingship / chieftaincy. Besides this rationale for the image of Jesus as king / chief, grounds for casting Jesus so have been identified in respondents reasoning theologically from the kingship / chieftaincy of God to that of Jesus, and developing analogies between the functions of Akan chiefs and Jesus as chief. Despite the amassing of such evidence, however, not all Ghanaian believers support the christological image of chief, as indicated by the data outlined above. The reasons for their reluctance must therefore be considered.

c) Problems with the Image of Jesus as King / Chief

From the outset of his proposal regarding Jesus as chief, Pobe acknowledges that the image is necessarily limited. He pinpoints the key danger as the chief

⁵⁶ Sarpong, “Asante Christology,” 204-205.

⁵⁷ Aboagye-Mensah, “Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth,” 451.

analogy being “a *theologia gloriae*, lacking a *theologia crucis*.”⁵⁸ That is to say, it denotes chiefly power and authority attained through means other than suffering. In contrast, biblical tradition discloses Jesus entering his kingly glory only through humility, suffering, and martyrdom as symbolised in the cross. Despite the slight modification Pobee makes to his proposal, drawing upon certain chiefs who gain their position through some act of devotion to society, a fundamental tension remains between concepts of power and authority as demonstrated by Jesus and as associated with African chiefs.

Negative connotations surrounding African chieftaincy account for the greatest number of objections raised by the selected Christians in Ghana to the image of Jesus as chief.⁵⁹ One example is Catholic priest Matthew Edusei’s response to the question of Jesus as *Nana*:

The image of Jesus as the *king* of the *kings* is *powerful*, and very biblical. He *rules* over all. Unfortunately, ‘*Nana*’ has all kinds of connotations—imposing on people, taking the first place. And then the area of *service—death* on the cross for salvation. Most *Nanas* wouldn’t do that, they wouldn’t dirty their *hands*. So we need to be careful how we see Jesus as *Nana*.⁶⁰

Contrary to traditional kings who shared their resources with the people, reservation is expressed about portraying Jesus as chief because of contemporary chiefs “who rather *grab* and don’t share.”⁶¹ Moreover, Catholic layman George Hagan summarises problematic associations regarding the chiefly lifestyle as follows:

⁵⁸ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 97.

⁵⁹ The contrast between the prescribed role of traditional chiefs and the actual role of contemporary chiefs and dictatorial politicians also forms a refrain throughout the writings of Bénézet Bujo. While Bujo recommends Jesus as chief on one level, in relation to the ancestral paradigm, he also points out, “Still on another level, Jesus goes beyond the traditional African ethos. A customary chief or traditional king had the task of guaranteeing the life of family and nation. But in certain circumstances he could display a horrifying authoritarianism. We see, at once, the difference in Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor. Contrary to black potentates, who in their fury could well put any member of their community to death, this Proto-Ancestor did not come to condemn or to take life, but to call to conversion. Forgiveness occupies the primary place in his proclamation. And also, unlike traditional rulers, he is the one who empties himself of any despotism, making himself a slave to his disciples, in order to bring by such a change of heart, life and human happiness in abundance. Bénézet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990), 106.

See also the earlier critique of Harry Sawyerr refuting Paul Fueter’s proposal of Jesus as chief, with four reasons set forth: (1) chiefs lost power and influence under colonialism and national independence, (2) chiefship never implied supreme rule, as the chief was always accountable to elders, (3) chiefs are not readily accessible to the ordinary person, but only through middlemen, and (4) chiefs live removed from ordinary contact with their subjects. Harry Sawyerr, “The Basis for a Theology for Africa,” in *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr*, ed. John Parratt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 104-105.

⁶⁰ Matthew Edusei, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

⁶¹ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.

But the *Jesus* that people see cannot easily be projected as *Nana*, you see, because we associate in our minds a certain *gorgeous* way of life with *Nana*. A certain *opulence* with *Nana*.... *Jesus* as *Nana* will mean *Jesus* who married so many wives, *Jesus* who has so much wealth.... So the *image* doesn't quite fit.⁶²

Further problems with the christological image stem from traditional chiefs having lost some degree of status, authority and credibility through the changes brought by colonialism and independence. Protestant clergyman S. S. Quarcoopome explains that the word "chief" has gained derogatory connotations in Ghana due to the British custom of calling African rulers "chiefs" instead of "kings" so as to avoid equating them with the king of England.⁶³ Protestant clergyman Kwesi Dickson adds that the British tended to use the chiefs to implement their own colonial policies, thereby influencing people's perceptions of the traditional leaders. He also voices the present problem of "absentee chiefs" who live and work in distant cities, returning home for festival occasions, in contrast to traditional chiefs who lived among their people, were known by them and served them regularly. Hence Dickson concludes that "the *chief* concept has gone through various vicissitudes, and I don't think it's such a *vital* concept now, ... christologically."⁶⁴

In light of these and other reservations regarding African chieftaincy, several respondents stress the distinction between the biblical imagery of *Jesus* as the "king of kings" and "lord of lords" and the traditional chief, as did Edusei above. The pivotal point in these arguments is the conviction of *Jesus*' divinity. For instance, African chiefs are said to be subject to human weakness and failure and are consequently dethroned, while *Jesus*' reign is eternal. Earthly kingdoms are necessarily limited to particular territories and peoples, while *Jesus*' rule is deemed universal. Aboagye-Mensah grants that the Akan king is described as "sacred" as long as he sits on the stool, yet stresses that "he is never considered divine. Even when he dies and becomes an ancestor, he still remains man, for the ancestors are not thought of as deities." Hence he sums up the contrast as follows: "[A]n Akan king is no more than a mere man, but for *Jesus* Christ we are talking of one who indeed was man like all men and yet more than man. He is the Word-become-man."⁶⁵ This fundamental affirmation regarding the supremacy of *Jesus* over earthly rulers receives forceful expression by PACWA representative Florence Y. B. Yeboah. In response to the question of *Jesus* as *Nana*, she exclaims, "He is *higher* than *Nana*."

⁶² George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 28; Aug. 6, 1998.

⁶³ S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

⁶⁴ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

⁶⁵ Aboagye-Mensah, "Socio-Political Thinking of Karl Barth," 442.

He's the *creator of all Nanas! He made* all presidents and prime ministers, and all *Nanas.*" She continues, when asked about Jesus as chief,

He is *greater* than every chief! *Chief, ... Nana,* they are human beings! And like the *radiance* that fills the heavens, a little atom of his dignity he gives to the *Nana.* ... And we have *no words,* we have no mentality to picture his greatness, the *awesomeness* of his power, and the *radiance* of his glory... So *if* we compare him to *Nana,* we are belittling him. We dare not!⁶⁶

Related to these theological objections are those which stem from perceived discontinuities between the African heritage and the Christian faith. Protestant clergyman Samuel Aboa argues that "the chief in our thought is the epitome of our traditional culture, including our religion," and therefore insists he cannot "connect Christ with our religion" in this way.⁶⁷ Similarly, PACWA leader Felicia Opare-Saforo counters any suggestion of Jesus as chief or *Nana*, declaring that "he's the *king* of kings, and lord of lords. And I want to take it that way, [rather] than bringing it to *our* cultural way of calling our leaders."⁶⁸ Hence these two typify some respondents who favour biblical terminology over indigenous expressions for Jesus.

A few additional problems are noteworthy. First, feminist theologians have criticised ruler images for Jesus on the basis that human experience of hierarchies, which are usually patriarchal, does not commend itself to those being alienated and oppressed. For example, Amoah and Oduyoye stress that "patriarchal/hierarchical structures have little room for the participation and inclusiveness that those whose humanity is being trampled upon yearn for."⁶⁹ Second, a few Protestant clergymen remark that their common use of English inhibits their use of vernacular titles for Jesus. For instance, while Theophilus Dankwa agrees that "*Nana*" is fitting for Jesus, he admits, "[F]or me personally, I don't think I often refer to Jesus as *Nana*. But maybe that's my problem, that I pray more in English than in Twi!"⁷⁰ One final limitation is that the image is naturally context-specific. Those Ghanaian respondents not from traditional chieftaincies are less inclined to identify with the image of Jesus

⁶⁶ Florence Y. B. Yeboah, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

⁶⁷ Samuel Aboa, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998.

⁶⁸ Felicia Opare-Saforo, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 3, 1998.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 41. They also criticise Pobee's portrayal of Jesus as *okyeame* or chief linguist, stating that for Pobee the *okyeame* "can be nothing else but male. Whereas in the Akan system of rule the *okyeame* can be either a man or a woman." *Ibid.*, 43. However helpful their clarification is in this regard, there is no evidence of gender restriction in Pobee's publication. See Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 94ff.

⁷⁰ Theophilus Dankwa, Oral Interview, Accra: Aug. 16, 1998.

as chief, such as Peter Kodjo, Chairman of the Ga Presbytery, who admits he is highly critical of chieftaincy.⁷¹

A variety of factors thus hinder more widespread acceptance of the christological portrait derived from Akan kingship / chieftaincy and its associated titles. Historical and contemporary realities have given rise to certain negative connotations of African chiefs, which in turn fuel attempts to emphasise the theological distinctions between these human rulers and Jesus as divine ruler. Convictions regarding discontinuities between the traditional African heritage and the Christian faith make some respondents reluctant to consider Jesus in indigenous categories of thought. Further obstacles to employing the image are voiced by women concerned about perpetuating authoritarian male images, by those communicating primarily in English, and by those from non-chieftaincy traditions. These factors must therefore be borne in mind when considering the overall effectiveness of the christological image.

d) Conclusion

Analysis of the research data suggests that the majority of selected Ghanaian Christians favour the images clustering around Jesus as king / chief / *Nana* and other vernacular titles for socio-political leaders. Reasons which prompt the composite image have been set forth, as well as those which constrain its usage. While the core concept of Jesus' kingship is virtually undisputed,⁷² controversy surrounds the depiction of Jesus according to categories derived from traditional Akan/African leadership. Cognitive associations are crucial, as Protestant clergyman Abraham Akrong underlines, "because once you use a model, you have to look at the *ready* meaning that it evokes, whether it's going to hamper or enhance what you intend to do."⁷³ If the intention is to communicate the identity and significance of Jesus Christ to contemporary Ghanaians, then certainly some respondents believe the African kingship / chieftaincy image hampers that goal. In contrast, the majority are

⁷¹ Peter Kodjo, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998. As a Ga, Kodjo explains that the chieftaincy tradition is very *new*, in my context. We have a dominant traditional *priest*, and priesthood in the African context from where I come is very acceptable. ... Jesus is not the showy leader who has power and who ... can order everybody about, to work for him and all that. Jesus for me is not a chief.

The same point is underlined by Protestant laywoman Irene Odotei, who is also Ga. Irene Odotei, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

⁷² That is, one Ghanaian respondent consents that Jesus is king of kings, but cautions that he is a "spiritual king" whose "kingdom is not of this earth." George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 28; Aug. 6. Similar comments were made by one Kenyan respondent. J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

⁷³ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

evidently convinced that it enhances their understanding of Jesus, and would presumably identify personally with Catholic bishop Peter Sarpong's verdict as follows:

Now the Asante Catholics consider these [leadership] roles as applicable to, and indeed perfectly fulfilled by the Lord Jesus. They see Jesus as a chief, a king, over them. With the qualities Jesus exhibits—qualities of humility, goodness—the Asante see in him a person who is their leader in a superhuman way.⁷⁴

Indications of the image's relevance for Christian individuals and communities have emerged throughout the discussion, confirming Pobee's assertion that a royal priestly christology speaks aptly to the Akan context. Parish priest Joseph Aggrey affirms, simply, "[W]e can refer to God, or Jesus Christ, as *Nana*. ... [I]t makes sense to me, and to my people. ... They will understand that."⁷⁵ Protestant clergyman Thomas Oduro assigns even weightier significance to the image of Jesus as chief in suggesting that it communicates more effectively the meaning of the original Greek word translated "lord." In his words,

[T]he word 'lord' in the Greek and its interpretation, to me, does not have a connotation in the Twi version. For instance, [in] Twi, when you say somebody is 'my lord,' it means nothing. ... But if you take the image of somebody as my chief, ... you don't even need an interpretation. The person already knows what you mean.⁷⁶

Theological relevance is also attributed to the chiefly portrait as an integral part of the ancestral paradigm for Christ. Protestant clergyman Abraham Akrong raises the image and states that it "is very significant because then Jesus as a chief will stand in the shoes of God the Ancestor. You see, because the chief takes over the personality of the ancestor. So the chief is the ancestor to us." He explains further that ancestorhood functions as a "semantic domain" with related titles that can be employed for various purposes. In particular, he spells out the concept of chief as potentially valuable in explicating the incarnation according to Akan thought:

[W]hen it comes to an attempt to explain the relationship between God and Christ, the chieftaincy pattern is very, very important. ... [W]e understand that *technically*, the *chief* is the incarnation of the ancestors. And that is why we give them reverence.... I'm not saying that the chieftaincy model will *exhaust* the mystery of the *incarnation*, but at least it helps people. So if you tell them that 'if you see Jesus,

⁷⁴ Sarpong, "Asante Christology," 194.

⁷⁵ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

⁷⁶ Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

you've seen God;' ... 'if you have seen the chief, you've known the ancestors!' ... it *resonates*. It's a similar logic.⁷⁷

The portrait of Jesus as African king / chief not only enhances respondents' understanding of Christ, but it may also influence their manner of worship. In the context of discussing Jesus as chief, Protestant layman Lawrence Darmani relates,

Because I see him as king, I've seen him also as chief, ... [a] *great chief* ... with a lot of subjects, meaning people who are worshipping him daily. The reason I can *lie* down prostrate, *really* lie down prostrate, before Jesus, is because I'm able to see him as chief.⁷⁸

By way of background, he narrates childhood memories from his home area of people removing their sandals, crawling and lying prostrate before a certain chief. He also points out further postures, such as crossed legs or wearing a hat, on which he comments, "[D]efinitely, I wouldn't be able to do that [in prayer]. Because in my mind, I've just gone before the chief or the king." Nana Dokua bears similar witness, which is all the more striking in light of her own position as a traditional leader. In response to the question of Jesus as chief, she states,

He is king of kings. Chief is '*Dhene*,' and king is '*Dhene*.' In our language we say '*Ahane mu hene*,' 'king of all kings.' ... So whenever I mention his name, I *bow*, because I am a chief, a queenmother. So he is my superior. ... Yes, when worshipping him, ... I can't stand straight like that. I bow!⁷⁹

These personal accounts from layman and queenmother alike thus amplify previous evidence of the christological image in context, such as the liturgical celebrations honouring Christ the King. Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, as one particular test case, therefore provides strong indication of the prevalence, meaning and significance of Jesus as king / chief. The next area of investigation concerns socio-political leadership images for Jesus advocated in African liberation theologies.

C. Jesus as Liberator

1. Introduction

Having established that the image of Jesus as king / chief is effective in certain African contexts, such as among Akan Christians, it remains to consider additional christological images of leadership arising in the research. For as Jean-Marc Ela queries, "In this context, what does a Christ dressed up in a leopard's skin

⁷⁷ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

⁷⁸ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

⁷⁹ Nana Dokua I, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 18, 1998.

like a Bantu chief signify?”⁸⁰ The context referred to is that of Africa at large, described as “a grouping of societies that are historical because they are societies that have suffered,” and which remains “a land of poverty, oppression, and violence.”⁸¹ For all Ela’s emphasis on the need for Africans to express the gospel according to their own cultural symbolism, as pointed out earlier in the thesis with respect to Jesus as healer, he nonetheless maintains that questions of faith posed on the level of culture alone are insufficient. Instead, the “urgent problems of contemporary Africa become the obligatory *locus* of theological research.”⁸² Ela therefore advocates a critical approach with points of departure in African culture, economics and politics in order to discern and address the mechanisms and structures of oppression at work, for example in the marginal role given to women in the church. To strengthen his case, he appeals to the “Final Communiqué” from the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians in Accra. What makes this conference a landmark, according to Ela, is its acknowledgement that the new challenge for African theology lies not only in seeking liberation from cultural captivity, but also from political, economic and social structures. Hence the document’s declaration that “African theology must also be *liberation* theology,” and the firm resolve expressed by the Accra theologians: “We stand against oppression in any form because the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all forms of dehumanisation.”⁸³

While the aim of rediscovering the liberating dimension of the gospel has been fundamental to emergent African theologies, the realisation of this goal is inevitably an ongoing process. Critical questions continue to arise, such as those of Mugambi and Magesa with respect to christology:

Can the title *Liberator* be applied to Christ today? Is it justifiable in terms of the contemporary situation of the African continent? In other words, is Jesus seen as the ‘One Who makes people free?’ Is He preached as such? Indeed, what is the ‘image’ of Christ? What ‘image’ of God are the suffering people of Africa presented with? Particularly, from the perspective of African women’s painful

⁸⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ,” in *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, trans. and ed. Yacob Tesfai (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸² Jean-Marc Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press, 1994), 140.

⁸³ Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, “Final Communiqué,” in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 194; quoted in Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” 139-140.

existential experience, what is liberation as applied to the power and authority of Christ in the African world?⁸⁴

Although the issues are vast and complex, the present discussion focuses on selected textual and oral christologies, with particular attention paid to women's christologies.

2. Textual Christologies

a) Jean-Marc Ela

Jean-Marc Ela is eminent among Africa's contemporary theologians, particularly in the area of liberation theologies outside of South Africa.⁸⁵ Since he does not follow the approach of developing christological titles directly, as pointed out previously, his contributions concerning Jesus as liberator require more extended explanation. Autobiographical reminiscences about Ela's theological formation bring to light certain convictions which mark his christological reflections: namely, the fundamental role of history, memory and identity in forging contemporary expressions of the gospel. He recalls critical events that shaped his thinking, including his uncle leading in the political party that struggled during the 1950s for Cameroon's independence. As a child, Ela participated in protest through singing at school a national anthem, in vernacular translation, which was composed in French by young Protestant Cameroonians and forbidden by the French authorities.⁸⁶ What

⁸⁴ J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, "Introduction," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), xiv.

⁸⁵ Philip Gibbs notes that Ela was using the term "liberation" in a 1963 publication ("L'Église, le monde noire"), before Vatican II and before the term became popular in Latin American theology. Ela's initial use of it is said to carry little explicit theological content, in referring to the African struggle against colonialism. However, Gibbs contends that in Ela's view the confrontation was not merely political, but that black culture was to be acknowledged as a worthy recipient for the gospel to be incarnated. See Philip Gibbs, *The Word in the Third World: Divine Revelation in the Theology of Jean-Marc Ela, Aloysius Pieris and Gustavo Gutiérrez*, Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 8 (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996), 104.

⁸⁶ Ela explains the significance of the song as follows:

Et tout petits nous chantions ça à l'école pour montrer que nous avons une âme, nous avons une conscience, nous avons une histoire, nous avons un pays, le Cameroun, le berceau de nos ancêtres. On chantait ça comme pour nous affirmer devant les Européens, devant les Français. Et tout petits, donc à l'école, on chante comme ça dans ce contexte historique où on commence par soulever la grande question de l'indépendance. Et donc, je participe étroitement à ça, dans mon enfance, dans mon formation. Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

And from a very young age, we sang it at school to show that we have a soul, we have a conscience, we have a history, we have a country, the Cameroon, the cradle of our ancestors. We sang like that to affirm ourselves before the Europeans, before the French. And from a very young age, then at school, we sang like that in the historical context in which we began to raise the great question of independence. And therefore, I participated closely in that, in my childhood, in my formation.

struck Ela with particular force was that his uncle and parents, active in the independence movement, were devout Christians, while the official churches rejected this movement. Hence his allegiance clearly sided with his Christian parents rather than with the missionaries who considered the nationalist movement to be the work of communists. He sums up, “Et ça explique un peu la dimension politique de ma théologie, ce contexte historique là, dans laquelle j’ai grandi, puisque je ne peux pas renier mon identité. ... J’ai ça dans ma mémoire. Mes parents ont lutté pour l’indépendance du Cameroun.”⁸⁷ He further notes that this background prompted his fundamental view that “si Dieu n’est pas *pour* les gens, n’est pas avec les gens qui cherchent leur liberté, ce Dieu, moi je n’en veux pas.”⁸⁸

Aspects from Ela’s early formation resound in his present theological agenda. Although he has not yet written a treatise on African christology, he expresses his desire to do so as follows: “Je voudrais écrire une théologie de Jésus-Christ en Afrique, essayer de réjoindre Jésus-Christ en Afrique, dans notre histoire, à travers notre mémoire.”⁸⁹ His basic reflections along this line are outlined in an article entitled, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ,”⁹⁰ with additional insights spread throughout various publications. Central aspects of his thought are presented through a brief summary of the critical issues inducing its expression, and Ela’s contribution to present formulations of Jesus as liberator.

Ela finds rationale for African christology in the necessity of gaining access to Jesus through the New Testament as it is interpreted in light of the historical perspective of the church. The central question of “Who is Jesus Christ to the African?”⁹¹ is said to hold particular significance in light of the future of Christianity lying predominantly in the countries of the South. Hence the need to go beyond “the Byzantine quarrels” to consider what is truly at stake in the current christological debate. In order to do so, Ela spells out three main critical issues which are inter-related. Without rehearsing the details of these issues, some of which feature in Chapter 3, the key problems are identified briefly in order to pave the way for Ela’s proposed christology. The first major concern is the ethnocentrism of European

⁸⁷ Ibid. “And that explains a little the political dimension of my theology, this historical context in which I grew up, since I did not want to renounce my identity. ... I have that in my memory. My relatives struggled for the independence of Cameroon.”

⁸⁸ Ibid. “[I]f this God is not *for* the people, is not with the people who seek their liberty, this God, as for me, I don’t want a part of him.”

⁸⁹ Ibid. “I would like to write a theology of Jesus Christ in Africa. To try to meet with Jesus Christ in Africa, in our history, through our memory.”

⁹⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ,” in *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, trans. and ed. Yacob Tesfai (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 17-35.

⁹¹ Ibid., 18; also Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

theology which has dominated Christianity for centuries, resulting in the “Babylonian captivity”⁹² of African Christianity to Roman structures, doctrine and piety. Attendant christologies include an “abstract” Christ who, instead of a personal and tangible reality, is portrayed as disincarnate and restricted to the conceptual framework of Greco-Latin philosophies.⁹³ Other faulty christologies, arising from the collusion of Western Christianity with colonial conquest and the slave trade, include “an imperial image of Christ”⁹⁴ used to justify oppressive powers and a “slave-trader”⁹⁵ Christ used to promote faith as escapism from present suffering through promise of heavenly bliss. Against any presentation of Jesus via a theology of the “salvation of souls,” Ela repeatedly insists that “salvation in Jesus Christ is liberation from every form of slavery.”⁹⁶

A second major area of concern Ela terms “the traps of inculturation”⁹⁷ or “the dead-ends of ethnotheology,”⁹⁸ meaning the tendency to lock African theology in the problematic of inculturation without rendering adequate attention to the concrete subjects of history. Here Ela criticises attempts to reinterpret Jesus in Africa which limit themselves to a “theology of digging the sources,” that is, developed only in relation to traditional African culture.⁹⁹ In his estimation, inculturation christologies alone are insufficient for enabling the Christian faith to face the challenge of current crises such as that of globalisation. Therefore his third related concern is the “irruption of the Third World,” with its epistemological rupture from

⁹² The term is akin to Pobee’s concept of the “North Atlantic captivity of the Church,” yet Ela is even more scathing in criticising certain aspects of mission and African Christianity. He explains further, as follows:

[W]e must liberate African Christianity from its Babylonian captivity. Christianity in Africa has been made captive by Roman structures that are weighed down by an ecclesiastical mentality; by the sociological burden of a religion of the ‘other world’; by forms of piety and devotion of Christianity in decay; by the disguised apolitical stance of Western missionaries; by the massive apathy, irresponsibility, and intolerable greed of certain members of the clergy; by the disembodied spirituality of some indigenous lay people; and by the lack of awareness or infantilism of African religious trained in a European fashion. Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 154.

⁹³ Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 20.

⁹⁴ Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 111.

⁹⁵ Ela, “Le motif de la libération dans la théologie,” 43.

⁹⁶ For example, see Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” 142.

⁹⁷ See Jean-Marc Ela, “Globalisation et paupérisation: Un défi à la théologie africaine,” in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, no. 135, ed. G. de Schrijver (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 161-165.

⁹⁸ Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 19-20.

⁹⁹ In this context Ela criticises theologians like John Mbiti, plus theological anthologies like that of Robert Schreiter, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*. Concerning the latter, see Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 19-20. Ela also voiced this critique during the oral interview. Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

North Atlantic theology in now doing theology from the “periphery.”¹⁰⁰ With characteristic incisiveness, Ela delineates the contemporary context in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of the disillusionment with flag independences across the continent, the international domination perpetuating injustice in political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and the internal factors stemming from widespread neo-colonialism.¹⁰¹ It is against this backdrop that Ela questions the meaning of Jesus’ portrait as a Bantu chief clad in leopard skin. Instead, he makes the fundamental assertion that “il est impossible de tenter une interprétation globale de la Bonne Nouvelle à partir de notre situation d’Africains sans faire de la libération l’axe fondamental d’une théologie qui vient de notre peuple.”¹⁰²

From this perspective, what are the key christological questions which Ela identifies? He certainly highlights Jesus’ own question to the disciples, “And you, who do you say that I am?”¹⁰³ Then the discussion above notes his concerns

¹⁰⁰ Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, August 5-12, 1976, “Final Statement,” in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World*, ed. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), 259ff.; referred to in Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 18. See also Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

¹⁰¹ For example, see Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” 137-139, although such socio-political analysis underlies virtually all of Ela’s theological reflections. For instance, in a recent publication he summarises aspects of the contemporary socio-political context in Africa as follows:

Le Synode africain a pris conscience des enjeux socio-politiques de ces défis en s’interrogeant sur les tâches de l’évangélisation dans les pays du Continent soumis aux régimes autoritaires et oppressifs. L’on s’est rendu compte du poids de la dette, des conséquences du trafic des armes et de l’utilisation de l’Afrique comme dépotoir des déchets du Nord. L’on a mesuré aussi l’ampleur des conflits qui déchirent des peuples. L’on a également perçu les ravages dus à l’exploitation des pauvres par les riches. Derrière l’Afrique qui vit dans une situation économique de pauvreté, on a retrouvé les puissances d’argent qui oppriment l’hémisphère Sud. En cette veille du XXI^e siècle, une évidence s’impose à la conscience de l’Église: ‘Dans un monde contrôlé par les nations riches et puissantes, l’Afrique est pratiquement devenue un appendice sans importance, souvent oublié négligé par tous.’ Ela, “Globalisation et paupérisation,” 164.

The African Synod has become aware of the socio-political stakes of these challenges in questioning itself about the tasks of evangelisation in the countries of the Continent submitted to authoritarian and oppressive regimes. We have taken account of the weight of the debt, the consequences of the traffic of arms and of the utilisation of Africa as a deposit for the waste from the North. We have considered also the extent of the conflicts which tear apart the peoples. We have equally perceived the ravages due to the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Behind the Africa which lives in an economic situation of poverty, we have seen again the power of money which oppresses the Southern hemisphere. On this eve of the 21st century, one obviousness is imposed upon the conscience of the Church: ‘In a world controlled by the rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an appendage without importance, often forgotten and neglected by all.’

¹⁰² Ela, “Le motif de la libération dans la théologie,” 38. “[I]t is impossible to attempt an overall interpretation of the Good News from our situation of Africans without making liberation the fundamental axis of a theology which comes from our people.”

¹⁰³ Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 17.

regarding who Jesus is to the African today, and what kind of images have dominated in the history of African Christianity. Ela's distinctive contribution, however, lies in the profound christological questions he raises in view of the critical issues outlined above. For example after pointing out Jesus' remark, in a pre-capitalist society like first century Palestine, that it is more difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, Ela queries what Jesus would say today in the face of the oppressive structures of capitalist-driven globalisation?¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, Ela insists that the African reality requires "a kind of *pedagogy of the discovery of situations of sin and oppression*,"¹⁰⁵ situations which contradict God's salvation and liberation in Christ. From the misery and despair enveloping Africans in the villages and slums, he calls for an awareness of their kinship with Jesus in humiliation. He then voices an acute challenge to the Church, as follows: "After all, it is Jesus himself who walks unrecognised today in the African people. Mission today calls for an encounter with a soul-piercing question: 'Why do you persecute me?' (Acts 22:7)."¹⁰⁶

The contours of Ela's christology thus take shape around two focal points: the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of Africans. Neither the scandal of the cross nor the scandal of Africa "crucified" today can be bypassed, unless the Church falls prey to the temptation of the priest and the Levite who pass by the suffering victim in the parable of the Good Samaritan.¹⁰⁷ The two nuclei are brought together in Ela's fundamental question, "[H]ow can we articulate the crucifixion of Jesus and the historical suffering of our people? In other words, how can we reread in our own way the narratives of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ taking into account the stations of our memory?"¹⁰⁸ Hence Ela's lifelong concerns regarding history, memory and identity underlie his current challenge for fellow African Christians to "see the crucified [Christ] with our own African eyes," while "joining him in the tragedy of his Passion."¹⁰⁹

In order to address his christological query, Ela explores the historical experience of the African in relation to Jesus. He takes up the double challenge he puts to African theologians: to rediscover the identity of Jesus Christ through investigating his life, words, and acts, and to rediscover "our own proper identity in

¹⁰⁴ Ela, "Globalisation et paupérisation," 168-169.

¹⁰⁵ Ela, "Christianity and Liberation in Africa," 143.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ This striking analogy recurs in Ela's writings. For example, see Ela, "Le motif de la libération dans la théologie," 47; "The Memory of the African People and the Cross," 18-19, quoted on p. 78 above.

¹⁰⁸ Ela, "The Memory of the African People and the Cross," 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 20.

such a way that Jesus Christ becomes part and parcel of our memory.”¹¹⁰ African memory is probed for its impact in shaping historical consciousness plus African imagination and identity. After briefly surveying “the brutal and massive reality of a continent whose life and history are tied to a long, drawn-out agony,”¹¹¹ traced through Africa’s experience of slavery, colonialism and postcolonialism, Ela stresses the “imperative not only to see an exclusively suffering Africa, but also an Africa of struggle and resistance.”¹¹² With these dual strands of agony and resistance forged together in Africa’s memory, Ela places the continent’s history alongside the historical experience of Jesus. Mutuality is made clear when Ela states that “the historical experience of the black person is a theological *locus* that we should pick up in order to read the passion story on the paths of suffering where the crucified Jesus appears as the prototype of the African.”¹¹³ He further asserts that “*Africa today is crucified,*” and that “*the struggles of our people bring the memory of the Crucified One right into our life and times.*”¹¹⁴

On the basis of this association in suffering, Ela contends that instead of Africa’s condition in history evoking shame, it must be acknowledged as “the very place where the ‘great black cry’ springs, the cry that joins the anguished appeal of the crucified of Golgotha.”¹¹⁵ The metaphoric merging of these cries is so vital to Ela’s christology that his explication warrants citation, as follows:

In uttering ‘a loud cry’ (Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46), Jesus on the cross actualized the cry of the poor and the wretched (Pss. 34:7, 69, 70, 72, 77). In his passion he took upon himself the oppression and the injustice born by the Black Continent. In modern societies where the fact of being an African is a great challenge, tied as it is to a tragic and shameful history, we find here ‘a memory of the suffering’ of the African. The slaughtered Lamb ‘recapitulates’ the history of suffering in Africa, where the powers of death have been active for many centuries. ... In a sense, Jesus the Crucified is the African humiliated and oppressed for centuries.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹¹² Ibid., 27.

¹¹³ Ibid., 28. Here Ela acknowledges Bénédet Bujo, “Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique,” in *Combats pour un christianisme africain: Mélanges en l’honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*, Bibliothèque du Centre d’Etudes des Religions Africaines, no. 6, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1981), 21-31.

¹¹⁴ Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” 146.

¹¹⁵ Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 28. See also *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

¹¹⁶ Ela, “The Memory of the African People and the Cross,” 31.

Ela elucidates how the depth of Jesus' humiliation on the cross reveals both the suffering humanity of Jesus and God's sympathy and passion for humanity. Since Jesus manifests God's presence in the world, the agony Jesus endures on the cross demonstrates the love of God in a definitive way. Therefore it is through Jesus' revelation of God to humanity in the mystery of the cross that meaning is found for the suffering of Africans in history. Since it is in weakness that God reveals his power, Ela concludes that "it is necessary to learn to contemplate God from 'below,' in the humiliation in which God is engaged in the drama of the crucified throughout history."¹¹⁷

Furthermore, Ela points out that Jesus' death on the cross is inseparable from his life and his resurrection. The cross is said to complete the incarnation, through which Jesus reveals the God of the exodus (John 17:6, 8:28, 13:19; Exod. 3:14). A central tenet in Ela's theology is that "*God is not neutral.*" Rather, he is preoccupied with the poor and committed to bringing justice to the oppressed.¹¹⁸ Jesus' ministry is viewed accordingly, for the incarnation discloses "the ultimate scandal of our faith: Jesus Christ made a radical choice in favor of those considered to be the dregs of the world."¹¹⁹ Ela maintains that this reality has long been concealed by the dominant theology of the rich, which spiritualises Jesus to such an extent that his humanity, with all its tensions and conflicts, is overlooked. To recover the New Testament perspective, he asserts the following:

The incarnation is the supreme event of our faith—God's final word to us (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-2). It is difficult to realize its full significance unless we grasp it through the world of poverty and oppression. The real world of the gospel is one of hunger, wealth and injustice, sickness, rejection, slavery, and death. It is precisely through the structures of such a world that God is revealed. God is present through Jesus of Nazareth, who, in the incarnation, reveals God's omnipotence in weakness and establishes a form of conspiracy between God and the downtrodden.¹²⁰

Jesus' ministry is then expounded in terms of his announcing the good news, indicating God's option for the poor, and his central act of proclaiming the kingdom of God as the liberation of the oppressed. His actions are interpreted as being rooted in the prophetic tradition of protest against every form of domination and injustice, whether religious, political, economic or social. Hence Ela concludes,

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁸ Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 104.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

By his life and his action, he constantly takes the side of the poor, the humiliated, and the defenceless, against the rich, the pious, and the powerful. He does not hate the rich, but he will not tolerate the exploitation or slavery of men and women. He came, as he says himself, to free the oppressed (Luke 4:17-21).¹²¹

Together with the incarnation, the resurrection of Jesus is acknowledged to be the summit of revelation and the means by which he has conquered death and inaugurated a new world. Ela immediately questions, however,

But how can we celebrate the resurrection where millions of men and women live in suffering and oppression? How can the resurrection of Jesus become an historical experience in the struggle for life itself by those who are weak and without power. How does the resurrection of the humiliated begin today?¹²²

For Ela, these questions lead to the heart of the biblical message and the Christian faith today, as Africans are presently living out the passion of Jesus in history. Aligning the cross of Jesus Christ with the cross of the Third World, he contends that “the very existence of the Third World shows us what sin is and how it is structured in history. The Third World carries within itself the hidden Christ. It is the historic body of Christ today.”¹²³ Consequently, Ela urges Christians to rediscover Jesus in the slums and other places of misery where the poor and oppressed reside, for it is there that salvation in Christ is made visible. The Church is thus called to demonstrate this salvation concretely by creating conditions that liberate people and allow them to grow. In Ela’s words,

The church must adopt the practice of Jesus himself. Jesus did not limit his mission to preaching an inner conversion. His concern was precisely for the liberation of the poor and oppressed (Luke 4:16-21). In Jesus, God is glimpsed in the gesture of shared bread and in the act of the person who rises up and walks.¹²⁴

Hence Ela calls for Christianity with “dirty hands,”¹²⁵ or a willingness to live out the implications of the “dangerous, subversive memory”¹²⁶ of Jesus Christ. In other words, Christians must recognise the injustices in their current situations, examine them in light of the mystery of the gospel, and thus discover the prophetic character of the poor and marginalized whose very presence manifests the nature of sin. Once

¹²¹ Ibid., 108.

¹²² Ibid., 110.

¹²³ Ibid., 99.

¹²⁴ Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” 142.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 152.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 146. Ela adopts the phrase from the German theologian Johannes B. Metz and uses it throughout his writings.

exposed, this “sin of the world” is confronted by the gospel when Christ’s resurrection takes on reality through transformed lives and structures. Ela therefore concludes, “Only through an active but humble involvement in the dynamics of African society will they [Christians] be able to live and proclaim Jesus Christ as the ultimate Liberator.”¹²⁷

b) African Women’s Liberation Christologies

The image of Jesus as liberator is likewise central to, though does not exhaust, African women’s christologies. Previous chapters have highlighted significant contributions of women to other christological portraits, such as those of healer and ancestor. Yet, as Chapter 3 on critical issues emphasises, women’s concerns and experience have become another *locus* for liberation theology in particular. As they reflect upon various forms of oppression suffered under western Christianity, African religio-cultural traditions, and contemporary socio-economic and political realities, women offer fresh insights into the identity and significance of Jesus in Africa today. Like women theologians throughout the Third World,¹²⁸ African women theologians identify christology as a fundamental quest for them in which they seek primarily to articulate the images of Jesus they encounter in the popular religiosity of their own communities. Their departure point is generally located in “the people’s struggle for justice, fullness of life, and loving, caring relationship,” and their approach is summarised as follows: “The women take into account what the men say, what traditional christology teaches and what the Bible says, but what they make of all this and of the Christ arises out of their own and other women’s experience of the Christ.”¹²⁹ As a result, their christological reflections often concur with those of their male counterparts, yet add new dimensions to the subject from their perspective.

Common ground is found in the sources and methods considered most relevant to contemporary christological reflection. For example, Elizabeth Amoah

¹²⁷ Ela, *African Cry*, 87. Elsewhere he puts it graphically, as follows:

The African church needs to find a way to live the gospel in the midst of violence and misery, knowing that God identifies with the miserable. Today Jesus is each oppressed person. We must rediscover the rooting of Christ in the living conditions of Africans; and, through the crucifixion, rediscover the tragedy of the black people, where every hut is its own calvary. Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 156.

¹²⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, “The Passion Out of Compassion: Women of the EATWOT Third General Assembly,” *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 322 (1992): 316. Oduyoye notes evidence of the importance of christology to Third World women in the fact that in one issue of *Voices from the Third World* addressing the topic, six of the eleven contributors are women, whereas normally only a third of the articles are by women. See “Christologies in Encounter,” in *Voices from the Third World*, 11, no. 2 (Dec. 1989).

¹²⁹ Oduyoye, “The Passion Out of Compassion,” 316.

and Mercy Oduyoye together work not only from Christian scripture but also from the “unwritten Scriptures” of the Fante of Ghana. They speak graphically of “the need to rewrap Christology in African leaves,”¹³⁰ illustrated through narrating a Fante legend of a woman who served as a “Christ-figure” by enhancing life and wholesome relations in her community. The biblical and African traditions are also combined with contemporary realities, for instance in Oduyoye’s christological reflections on salvation and liberation which she situates in a context of racism, sexism, and religious pluralism.¹³¹ Interestingly, like Ela she contemplates a fundamental “cry” which she identifies as a universal cry for salvation. Note the multiple sources brought to bear on her investigation, outlined with its significance as follows:

If one studies the Old Testament with the knowledge of the primal worldview of Africa and an awareness of the political and sociological realities that are shaping Africa as part of one’s critical equipment, many similarities surface. The primal cry for salvation (*yeshuah*) is taken up in the New Testament and salvation is declared by Christianity to be in Christ. This I believe is the reason for the continued attraction of Christianity to Africans, in spite of the negative burdens associated with its carriers. The Christ of Christianity touches human needs at all levels, and Africans are but ordinary members of the human race feeling the need for salvation.¹³²

Especially noteworthy is that in examining the widespread notion that “Jesus saves” in terms of “What does it mean, what does it imply?,”¹³³ Oduyoye expounds biblical affirmations by drawing upon two vernacular terms already introduced in this study in relation to Jesus. Yahweh, the “warrior-saviour” of the Hebrew scriptures whose salvation was experienced concretely in military and political terms,

¹³⁰ Amoah and Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” 35, 37.

¹³¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 97-98. Although Oduyoye identifies these contemporary realities as the context for her christological reflection, she does not attend to them as directly here as she does elsewhere. For example, in addition to her monographs and edited words, see, “‘In the Image of God’: A Theological Reflection from an African Perspective,” *Bulletin de théologie africaine* 4, no. 7 (jan.-juin 1982): 41-53; “Naming the Woman: The Words of the Akan and the Words of the Bible,” *Bulletin de théologie africaine* 3, no. 5 (jan.-juin 1981): 81-97; “The Roots of African Christian Feminism,” in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, ed. John S. Pobee and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1986), 32-47; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Violence Against Women: Window on Africa,” *Voices from the Third World* 18, no. 1 (June 1995): 168-176.

¹³² Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 98-99.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 97. Similarly, Louise Tappa from Cameroon questions, “In the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, sociocultural and socioreligious context of Third World countries in general and of Africa in particular, what does confessing Christ mean for the African woman?” Louise Tappa, “The Christ Event from the Viewpoint of African Women: II: A Protestant Perspective,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 31.

is portrayed in the Akan language as “*Osagyefo*,” or “the one who saves in the battle.”¹³⁴ The vernacular term has been highlighted previously in this chapter regarding Jesus as leader, and Oduyoye points out the extension of the warrior image to cover “the inner battle against evil inclinations” as well (Eph. 6:10-20).¹³⁵ The second term, “*Agyenkwa*,” features in Chapter 5¹³⁶ regarding Jesus as life-giver and is defined by Oduyoye as follows:

The *Agyenkwa*, the one who rescues, who holds your life in safety, takes you out of a life-denying situation and places you in a life-affirming one. The Rescuer plucks you from a dehumanising ambience and places you in a position where you can grow toward authentic humanity. The *Agyenkwa* gives you back your life in all its wholeness and fullness.¹³⁷

Through the juxtaposition of biblical and African traditions, Oduyoye explicates Jesus as the Christ, God’s chosen instrument of salvation. Salvation is then interpreted in its multi-faceted dimensions, summed up as follows:

Just as in the Hebrew Scriptures, Yahweh rescued people from childlessness and disease, famine and fire, from flood and from the deep sea, from disgrace and humiliation, so we find Jesus in the New Testament snatching women and men away from all domination, even from the jaws of death. He redeems by a strong hand all who are in the bondage of sin and who manifest their being in the service of sin by exploiting their neighbors.¹³⁸

Thus the biblical and African images amalgamate into one multi-dimensional portrait of Jesus as saviour/liberator/redeemer. Its significance to the African context is presented according to the ideal of feminist theology in becoming fully human, as previously introduced.¹³⁹ As Oduyoye concludes,

The images of the Warrior and of the Liberator are companion images; they give us hope for space in which to be truly human. The Liberator will set us free through the process of redemption. The imagery of God in Christ as Redeemer is one that speaks clearly to Africa.¹⁴⁰

If African women theologians generally concur with their male counterparts, they also claim to go beyond the christological position of African men or at times even contradict it altogether. The claim is said to be “gleaned not so much from the

¹³⁴ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 99.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³⁶ See p. 134 above.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹³⁹ See p. 81 above.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

writings of African women as from the way they live and from their Christianity—their very spirituality, their witness to what Christ means for their lives.”¹⁴¹ Certainly textual evidence of outright contradiction is scant, as they suggest. Many of the objections women authors raise are against christologies in which “the figure of the Messiah remains powerful and victorious and male,”¹⁴² that is, overlooking the Messiah as suffering servant. Or classical christologies presented to Africa, like the “royal Christ” ruling as a magnanimous potentate, are criticised for being akin to paternal colonial and missionary rulers without adequately addressing Africa’s need for a conqueror to overcome evil forces.¹⁴³ Further censure is voiced regarding images of Christ which focus on a supramundane realm and “the end of the age” with its paradise to come, rather than a Christ who empowers Christians for life in Africa today with all its spiritual and material demands. Yet as Chapter 3 indicates, these faulty images are derived primarily from Western missionary Christianity, and the major contention of African women theologians is that these alienating images of Jesus were created by an elite group of white male theologians and then universalised, leaving the marginalized peoples’ images of Jesus unarticulated.¹⁴⁴

With respect to African men’s christologies, Amoah and Oduyoye briefly survey key christological contributions from John Mbiti, Emmanuel Milingo, Kwesi Dickson, Burgess Carr, Gabriel Setiloane, and John Pobee. Little disagreement is voiced, aside from the reservations regarding Pobee’s proposal of Akan “royal christology” outlined above.¹⁴⁵ Where African women theologians part company with their male colleagues most vociferously is in their analysis of sexism and, consequently, their formulation of liberation christologies. Oduyoye relates how the gender question, one of humanity’s oldest power struggles, has gained dramatic visibility around the globe since the 1960s, especially through three United Nations-sponsored meetings. Concerning the 1985 meeting held in Nairobi, she contrasts the “snickering” of African men who “pride themselves on having women who have no need to seek liberation as women,” with the African women who “announced their position on the liberation struggle and their solidarity with other women.”¹⁴⁶ Thus Oduyoye speaks for many African women in their conviction summed up as follows:

¹⁴¹ Amoah and Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” 43.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴⁴ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, “Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context,” *Propositum* 3, no. 1 (June 1998): 18.

¹⁴⁵ See p. 247 above, n. 69.

¹⁴⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 2-3.

As a Christian African woman, ... I seek the quality of life that frees African women to respond to the fullness for which God created them. It is my experience that Christianity as manifested in the Western churches in Africa does little to challenge sexism, whether in church or society. I believe that the experience of women in the church in Africa contradicts the Christian claim to promote the worth (equal value) of every person. Rather, it shows how Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalisation of women.¹⁴⁷

In response to this situation, liberation becomes paramount in the praxis and christological reflection of African women theologians. Oduyoye is again representative in defining the term “liberation” as one which “presupposes the existence of an unjustifiable situation that has to be eliminated. All limitations to the fullness of life envisaged in the Christ Event ought to be completely uprooted. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.”¹⁴⁸ Nasimiyyu Wasike points out further presuppositions and the agenda of women’s liberation christologies as follows:

Jesus is calling all the peoples of Africa, women and men and children, not to accept their hardships and pain fatalistically but to work at eliminating the sufferings and creating a better Africa for all. They have to focus on Jesus, the one who enables and empowers and who wants to liberate them from all that denies them life: political oppression, economic oppression, social, cultural and religious oppression.¹⁴⁹

Hence the women certainly collaborate with the African male theologians in their confrontation of injustice in the socio-economic and political spheres, bringing women’s experiences and perspectives to these issues. Yet it is often in their particular focus on matters of religion and culture that women bring their distinctive voice. For example, Amoah and Oduyoye articulate their view of Jesus as liberator in this way:

This Christ is the liberator from the burden of disease and the ostracism of a society riddled with blood-taboos and theories of inauspiciousness arising out of women’s blood. Christ liberated women by being born of Mary, demanding that the woman bent double with gynecological disorders should stand up straight. The

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 9. See also Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge, eds., *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996). The work is introduced as a corporate attempt to re-read and reinterpret the African cultural and religious milieu as well as scriptures “through the eyes of women who yearn and long for liberation.” Ibid., xii. The theme of liberation is fundamental throughout the Circle publications.

¹⁴⁸ Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Nasimiyyu Wasike, “Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context,” 25.

practice of making women become silent ‘beasts’ of societies’ burdens, bent double under racism, poverty, and lack of appreciation of what fullness of womanhood should be, has been annulled and countered by Christ. Christ transcends and transforms culture and has liberated us to do the same.¹⁵⁰

In their pursuit of liberation in Christ, what features characterise African women’s christologies? One key emphasis is “the interplay of faith and life”¹⁵¹ as demonstrated in the prayers and praises to Jesus of Afua Kuma, the non-literate Ghanaian woman introduced from the outset of this thesis and acknowledged in various textual and oral sources. Nasimiyu Wasike explains further, pointing out that most African women work sixteen to eighteen hours daily to provide the basic necessities for their families. Consequently,

[t]hey have very little time to seriously reflect on their relationship with other people and with God. Nevertheless, these women believe that their lives are lived in union with God; their theology is not one which is written and articulated but one which is lived and practised in everyday activities and experiences.¹⁵²

Recognising the shortage of written materials, Nasimiyu Wasike conducted interviews with six African Christian women (two rural, two religious women and two university lecturers) concerning the central question, “Who is Jesus Christ in your life?”¹⁵³ From her findings, she discerns the actual role that Jesus plays in their lives, such as protector from evil powers and provider of strength, comfort, courage and hope midst the hardships within home, church and society.

The afflictions which African women face lead to a second characteristic of their christologies, in the deep conviction of Jesus’ solidarity with them in adversity. Amoah and Oduyoye put it with stark clarity: “God wears a human face in Christ. God in Christ suffers with women of Africa.”¹⁵⁴ Nasimiyu Wasike specifies that Christ “is the one who takes on the conditions of the African woman—the conditions of weakness, misery, injustice, and oppression.”¹⁵⁵ Due to this profound sense of camaraderie between Jesus of Nazareth and African women,¹⁵⁶ relational, nurturing

¹⁵⁰ Amoah and Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” 43.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁵² Nasimiyu Wasike, “Christology and an African Woman’s Experience,” 130.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁵⁴ Amoah and Oduyoye, “The Christ for African Women,” 44.

¹⁵⁵ Nasimiyu Wasike, “Christology and an African Woman’s Experience,” 130.

¹⁵⁶ For example, Thérèse Souga from Cameroon states, “There seems to be a deep bond, even a complicity, between Jesus of Nazareth and African women, a bond due to the fact that the women are among those who are most marginalized in our society.” Thérèse Souga, “The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women: I. A Catholic Perspective,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third*

images tend to predominate in their christological formulation. One representative expression is as follows:

Jesus of Nazareth, by counter cultural relations he established with women, has become for us the Christ, the anointed one who liberates, the companion, friend, teacher, and true 'Child of Women'—'Child of Women' truly because in Christ the fullness of all that we know of perfect womanhood is revealed. He is the caring, compassionate nurturer of all. Jesus nurtures not just by parables but by miracles of feeding. With his own hands he cooked that others might eat; he was known in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is Christ—truly woman (human) yet truly divine, for only God is the truly Compassionate One.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, it is in this context that Nasimiyu Wasike develops the image of Jesus as mother, a theme corresponding to the image of Jesus as life-giver as interpreted by Mary Getui and others in Chapter 5.¹⁵⁸ Once again, the maternal, life-promoting qualities found in Jesus evidently mark African women's written and "lived" christologies.

Not only do women's liberation christologies appeal to the life of Jesus in relation to their contexts of suffering, but also to his death and resurrection. Oduyoye condenses widespread views in observing that "[f]or many third world women theologians the resurrection changes all and the living praxis of Jesus empowers them."¹⁵⁹ Nasimiyu Wasike points to the same source for her hope in the transformation of oppressive structures which dehumanise people. Calling Christians to follow Jesus in this task, she offers the following reassurance: "The identification or solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the downtrodden can seem impractical without the hope and assurance of Jesus Christ's cross and resurrection to affirm that it is God's own undertaking and we are called to participate in it."¹⁶⁰ Perceptions of solidarity between Jesus and African women thus play a significant role in contemporary women's christological reflection and praxis.

A third related feature is the emphasis on the need for holistic christologies. Nasimiyu Wasike explains,

The African woman's experience calls for a christology that is based on a holistic view of life. She needs the Christ who affects the whole

World Women Doing Theology, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 26-27.

¹⁵⁷ Amoah and Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," 43-44.

¹⁵⁸ See p. 110 above. The image of Jesus as mother is another important theme to be developed in the fourth christological model on Jesus as Loved One, which lies beyond the confines of this thesis.

¹⁵⁹ Oduyoye, "The Passion Out of Compassion," 316.

¹⁶⁰ Nasimiyu Wasike, "Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context," 27.

of her life, whose presence is felt in every corner of the village and who participates in everything and everybody's daily life.¹⁶¹

Amoah and Oduyoye corroborate this view and delineate various facets of contemporary life for which the recommended holistic christologies bear significance. Their statement thus warrants full citation for its clear summary of leading aspects of African women's christologies, expressed as follows:

Having accepted Christ as refugee and guest of Africa, the woman seeks to make Christ at home and to order life in such a way as to enable the whole household to feel at home with Christ. The woman sees the whole space of Africa as a realm to be ordered, as a place where Christ has truly 'tabernacled.' Fears are not swept under the beds and mats but are brought out to be dealt with by the presence of Christ. Christ becomes truly friend and companion, liberating women from assumptions of patriarchal societies, and honoring, accepting, and sanctifying the single life as well as the married life, parenthood as well as the absence of progeny. The Christ of the women of Africa upholds not only motherhood, but all who, like Jesus of Nazareth, perform 'mothering' roles of bringing out the best in all around them. This is the Christ, high priest, advocate, and just judge in whose kingdom we pray to be.¹⁶²

Finally, these African women theologians stress that however Christ has "*been explained*" throughout the centuries in the historical realities of each age and place, they ultimately conclude that "whatever the age or place, the most articulate Christology is that silently performed in the drama of everyday living."¹⁶³ Hence they are committed to discovering and disseminating the actual working christologies of African women across the continent. In the process, they are fostering creative methodologies to glean insights from these untapped sources, such as Nasimiyu Wasike conducting interviews with various women and Oduyoye exploring the "folktalk"¹⁶⁴ and narratives of African women. These African women theologians are also contributing to new expressions of oral theology, for example in the "theo-poetics" included in their works and the Circle publications.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, they join with their sisters in EATWOT "to demonstrate that theology is not only written and spoken, but danced, prayed, mimed and cried."¹⁶⁶ This claim is attested through

¹⁶¹ Nasimiyu Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," 130.

¹⁶² Amoah and Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," 45.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Oduyoye employs the term in reference to the myths, folktales, and proverbs which shape the popular ideology which governs people's lives. See *Daughters of Anowa*, 14, n. 12.

¹⁶⁵ In addition to Oduyoye's poem on wholeness mentioned on pp. 110-111 above, see "Woman with Beads" in the opening pages of *Daughters of Anowa*. See also Mercy Oduyoye, ed., *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God* (Accra: Same-Woode Limited, 1997), 148-169.

¹⁶⁶ Oduyoye, "The Passion Out of Compassion," 313.

participant observation in meetings with the Circle chapters in Ghana and Kenya, illustrated in Figs. 10 to 12 below. I would further add the aspect of dress, as observed and photographed among Circle and PACWA women. Fig. 12 displays the printed fabric of a skirt worn by the Coordinator for PACWA – Kenya, Naomi Gathirwa. All these expressions, the formal and the informal, thus create a mosaic of women's christologies depicting the overall image of Jesus as liberator.



Fig. 10. Mercy Oduyoye and the Circle, Legon, Accra

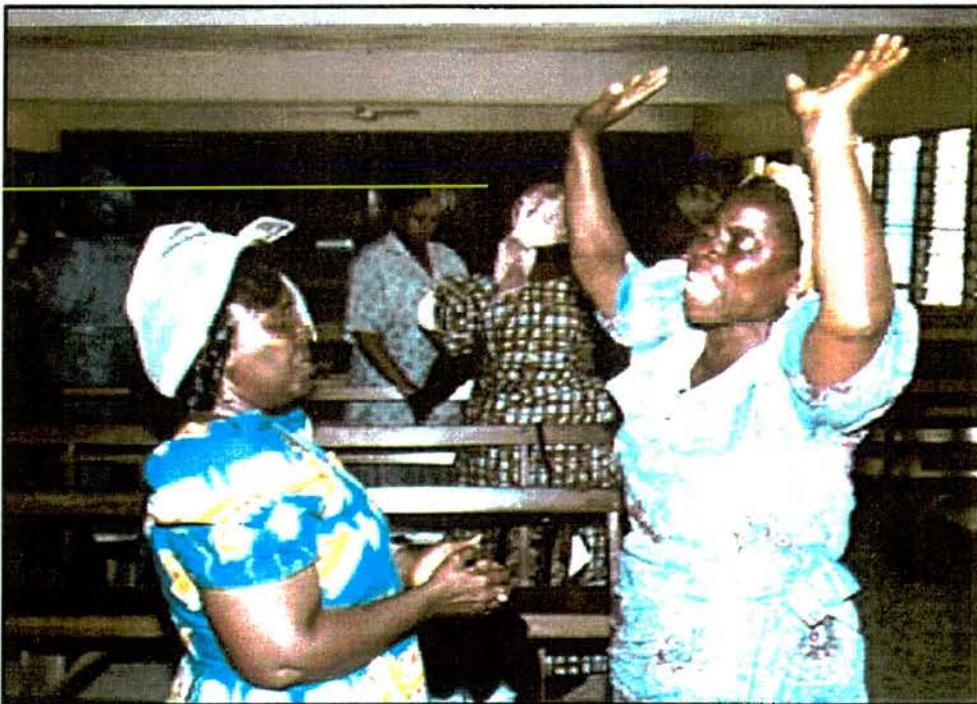


Fig. 11. PACWA Women Praying, Accra



Fig. 12. Printed Fabric worn by PACWA Member, Kenya

c) Conclusion

A fusion of men's and women's perspectives therefore emerges from the crucible of African experience eliciting liberation christologies today. Overlap occurs in the critical issues outlined, although women give prominent attention to sexism which they claim men often deny or ignore. Shared sources for christological formulation include biblical and African traditions, as well as historical and contemporary socio-economic and political realities. Men and women theologians generally favour theological methodologies from "below," with conscientious efforts demonstrated in the writings of Ela, Oduyoye and Nasimiyu Wasike to discern the issues and the images of Jesus in the popular religiosity of their communities. Central to this undertaking is the experience of Africans as a *locus* for theological reflection,

with attempts to highlight the agony and the resistance inherent within African history, memory, and identity. A further priority entails identifying the structures of oppression so as to overcome poverty, injustice and indignity with the liberating power of the gospel. In that ongoing process, women and men theologians share key convictions about Jesus as liberator: his solidarity with them in their historical and contemporary suffering, the immediacy of his presence in the ongoing struggles of life, the relevance of his life, death and resurrection to all aspects of life, and the integration of salvation and liberation in his call for believers to discover the fullness of life for which he created them. Thus there is widespread consensus that “*liberation* as a socio-political concern and *salvation* as a theological concern are two sides of one coin—two aspects of the aspiration of all people, as individuals and as groups, towards self-realization and self-fulfilment.”¹⁶⁷ These aspirations, according to the theologians, are met in Jesus the liberator. The next section examines this image as evidenced in the oral christologies.

3. Oral Christologies

In keeping with previous chapters, the image of Jesus as liberator is explored in the oral christologies in an attempt to discern the extent to which it is operative among selected contemporary African Christians, plus what meanings and significance are ascribed to it. Since the results of field research in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana are very similar, they are presented together with convergences and divergences pointed out as appropriate.

a) The Data

The image of Jesus as liberator receives strong support from respondents across the selected geographical contexts, with virtually every individual agreeing with it in concept if not in its contemporary expression. In Kenya and Uganda, 26 out of the 29 individuals with whom it was discussed (90%) affirm some notion of Jesus as liberator, and 24 out of 29 (83%) do so without questioning the term.¹⁶⁸ These findings are summarised in Table 8.

¹⁶⁷ J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), x.

¹⁶⁸ One respondent does not explicitly agree or disagree, but points out that Jesus did not liberate his people in the way they expected, i.e. from Roman subjugation, and this was the root cause of their rejection of him. This response is interpreted as “Negative Only” in the summary table. Four additional respondents discuss positive and negative factors related to the image, with two respondents concluding more negatively about its current usage.

Table 8. Individual Responses in Kenya and Uganda to the Image of Jesus as Liberator

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	24 / 29	83 %
Negative Responses Only	1 / 29	3 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 2 / 4 Overall Verdict Negative: 2 / 4	4 / 29	14 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	26 / 29	90 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	3 / 29	10 %

Likewise in Ghana, 29 out of the 31 individuals with whom it was discussed (94%) agree with this depiction of Jesus, while 2 (6%) disagree with its contemporary expression. Table 9 displays these findings.

Table 9. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Liberator

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	22 / 31	71 %
Negative Responses Only	2 / 31	6 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 7 / 7 Overall Verdict Negative: 0 / 7	7 / 31	23 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	29 / 31	94 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	2 / 31	6 %

Further corroboration is found in the focus groups. The combined results indicate that a positive consensus regarding Jesus as liberator is reached in 10 out of the 12 groups (83%), while no consensus is achieved in the remaining 2 groups (17%) whose members express dissenting views. The findings are set forth in Table 10.

Table 10. Focus Group Responses in Kenya & Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Liberator

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES	STATISTIC	PERCENTAGE
Positive Responses Only	8 / 12	67 %
Negative Responses Only	0 / 12	0 %
Positive and Negative Responses Overall Verdict Positive: 2 / 4 Overall Verdict Negative: 0 / 4 Overall Verdict Neutral: 2 / 4	4 / 12	33 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL POSITIVE	10 / 12	83 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEGATIVE	0 / 12	0 %
TOTAL RESPONSES OVERALL NEUTRAL	2 / 12	17 %

Concerning the prevalence of the image in the selected contexts of field research, a few observations are offered, first regarding the extent to which it is suggested by interviewees. In Kenya and Uganda the term “liberator” or Jesus’ work of “liberation” is volunteered by 8 out of the 29 individual respondents (28%), with 7 of those voicing it positively while 1 raises it in the context of discussing faulty images of Christ.¹⁶⁹ Similarly in Ghana, 6 out of the 31 individual respondents (19%) volunteer the English terms “liberator” or “liberation,” though the equivalent vernacular terms discussed above must also be borne in mind. The image is likewise initiated in 2 out of the 12 focus groups (17%), notably both times by the Circle women in Kenya and in Ghana.

Second, one experience of informal field research is related briefly by way of illustration, together with a photograph taken during the incident, depicted in Fig. 10. On September 10, 1998, I entered “Grace Land Enterprises,” a gift and flower shop in Koforidua, Ghana. On the wall behind the cashier was a picture with chains falling away from a pair of wrists, and the caption, “Jesus can set you free.”¹⁷⁰ Striking up a conversation with the young man working who vouched for the picture, I asked what Jesus had set him free from. He replied, “Certain pains and immorality.” Probed further, he explained, “It means, if I couldn’t have found Jesus, my life could have been in danger. I was drinking and smoking heavily and Jesus has changed me. So I have found him very great and precious in my life.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ In the context of discussing the relevance of Jesus to life in Kenya today, Pastor J. B. Masinde raises the image of Jesus as liberator negatively as “an intellectual reaction to the Christ that was presented to us” (i.e. the “white,” “colonial” Christ). Though he is by and large positive about the image, his interpretation is not in line with the depiction of Jesus as a freedom fighter like Jomo Kenyatta. J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

¹⁷⁰ A large poster with the same caption was also noted and photographed among other posters on a street in Accra.

¹⁷¹ Notes on Field Research, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.



Fig. 13. Wall Picture in Gift and Flower Shop, Koforidua, Ghana

In view of these contextual clues, plus the interview respondents volunteering the image of Jesus as liberator, some concept along these lines is apparently operative. Further analysis of the interviews is requisite, however, to ascertain the meaning of the christological image, including the rationale for it and problems with it. Only after such investigation can conclusions be reached regarding its significance today.

b) Rationale for the Image of Jesus as Liberator

Grounds for assent to the image of Jesus as liberator are located primarily in the Bible. Certainly the main passage pinpointed is the programmatic summary of Jesus' mission recorded in Luke 4:18-20, making it one of the biblical texts most commonly referred to throughout the interviews with 7 individual and 2 focus group respondents either citing or alluding to it. For example, Kenyan Catholic priest Vincent Kamiri immediately responds to the question of Jesus as liberator, "Indeed yes. This is the gospel."¹⁷² He then quotes Luke 4:18-20, summarises Jesus' "manifesto in Nazareth" as proclaiming liberation to the poor, and applies the significance of the image to his parish ministry in Buru Buru, Nairobi. The same Lukan passage is cited as pivotal to Ugandan Catholic priest John Waliggo, for reasons to be further developed in the next chapter.¹⁷³ Two respondents refer to the

¹⁷² Vincent Kamiri, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 28, 1998.

¹⁷³ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja, Uganda: May 7, 1998.

Lukan text as the fulfilment of Isaiah 61,¹⁷⁴ and two relate Jesus' ministry to God's liberation of Israel from Egypt in the Old Testament. After introducing God's salvation or redemption of his people, Kenyan Catholic clergyman Peter Kiarie explains, "Christ then comes almost like the new Moses.... In the Old Testament it was Moses liberating the people of Israel, so now we have the saviour in Jesus Christ."¹⁷⁵

Appeal to additional biblical texts draws out various facets of how African Christians understand Jesus as liberator. Personal experience manifestly shapes such interpretation, as the following examples illustrate. Interestingly, Kikuyu philosopher Gerald Wanjohi replies to the question of Jesus as liberator as follows:

I would also accept that completely. Especially for me ... as a philosopher, he says ... in the Gospel of John, 'Know the truth, and the truth will make you free, will liberate you.' ... So, Jesus came to teach us the *truth*. And it is *truth* which liberates us. So, I accept Jesus as *liberator*, because ... one of the enslaving elements in man is *fear*, and fear can harm for lack of knowledge. So, if we *know*, and since Jesus brings us knowledge, in other words, *truth*, then we are liberated from so many enslaving elements, circumstances.¹⁷⁶

Other incidents in Jesus' earthly ministry inform perceptions of his role as liberator today. For example, Kenyan Circle member Hannah Kinoti admits, "[I]t's probably more as a woman I would say that" Jesus is liberator. She refers to the gospel account of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe, emphasising how "she had to announce who she was" before being healed. Kinoti then relates personally how Jesus also drew her out so that she could no longer remain quiet about her experience as a woman. She sums up, "I believe this is liberation," before she continues to discuss further issues of injustice.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ S. S. Quarcoopome, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998; Felicia Opare-Saforo, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 3, 1998.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru, Kenya: June 5, 1998. Kiarie speaks of songs his mother would sing to him at a very young age about Moses and Egypt, and he reiterates that "now Jesus is the new Moses." He then interprets this statement in the Kenyan context, pointing out that "[a]ctually even when it came to the question of political independence, people like the late Kenyatta and others were *seen* in that light of liberators, ... of messiahs. So you can see that Jesus fits in very well...." The same point is expressed in Ghana. Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

¹⁷⁶ Gerald Wanjohi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

¹⁷⁷ Hannah Kinoti, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998. Similarly, Kenyan PACWA leader Naomi Gathirwa is among those who allude to the Luke 4 synopsis of Jesus' mission. She interprets his ministry today by drawing an analogy between Jesus untying the donkey before the Triumphal Entry and Kenyan women being unbound from certain cultural traditions which hinder them from achieving their full potential, for instance denying girls' schooling. She then concludes, "So being liberated, being set free is when you are able to go out and study and read and participate in meetings. You learn how to pray, you learn how to read, so he is a liberator." Naomi Gathirwa, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 13, 1998.

Aside from specific biblical texts believed to shed light on Jesus as liberator, theological rationale for this image is identified in the close association between “saviour” and “liberator” as outlined above in the textual christologies. That the two terms are understood as approximate equivalents is evident in Kenyan Catholic laywoman Mary Kizito’s comment regarding certain African traditions: “So I ... look at Jesus as the liberator, or use another term, the saviour, to *free* us from that kind of *bondage* with the traditions.”¹⁷⁸ The perception that the terms are virtually interchangeable, together with the third term “redeemer,” forms a refrain throughout the interviews. The view is summarised along with its significance by Kenyan Catholic religious sister Marie Gacambi, as follows:

I see Jesus as a liberator—I take it more or less as the saviour. Because I don’t see *saving* just in spiritual terms; ... the African *sees* the *totality* of the *person*. So it is *helping* me to acquire the fullness of life in all aspects, ... sociological, psychological, economic, political, spiritual. ... [B]ecause liberation that *only* looks at the political elements, that’s not liberation. ... But for *me*, Jesus is *enhancing* the *whole* ... aspect.¹⁷⁹

Gacambi’s observation strikes at the heart of the issue concerning Jesus as liberator. Analysis of the data, indicated above, reveals almost unanimous agreement with the image. However, the crux lies in how the term is interpreted. Undoubtedly the meanings most commonly ascribed to it relate to the spiritual dimensions of liberation. For example, Kenyan Catholic Archbishop Mwana a’Nzeki strongly supports the notion of Jesus as liberator and explains its meaning in this way:

Of course he is, there is no question about it. He liberated us from death. He is still concerned with people, he is the liberator number one. Meaning he snatched us, he set us *free* from the slavery of sin, and he continues to set us free. As a matter of fact *anybody* who does what is wrong and repents, Jesus forgives. Always!¹⁸⁰

Other representative expressions include the following: liberation from “original sin” and “punishment of sins,”¹⁸¹ “that sense of guilt” and “former lifestyles,”¹⁸² “from ourselves,”¹⁸³ “*internal liberation*” from the power of evil, Satan, and psychological hang-ups,¹⁸⁴ “from the clutches of self-condemnation,”¹⁸⁵ “whatever problems you

¹⁷⁸ Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

¹⁷⁹ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹⁸⁰ Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

¹⁸¹ Constantine Kulipoe, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 26, 1998.

¹⁸² Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

¹⁸³ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

¹⁸⁴ Juliana Senavoe, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 18, 1998.

¹⁸⁵ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

have, ... even the abuse of alcohol,”¹⁸⁶ and from the “fear of death,” “the unknown,” and “the underworld.”¹⁸⁷ Further examples are cited, such as liberation from traditional religions and the dual life often experienced by African Christians still adhering to them, cultural captivity especially for women, and freedom from temptation, evil influences, disease, worries, fears, demons, witchcraft, poverty, materialism, hatred and the desire for retaliation.

The findings so far would confirm the impression of Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Abraham Akrong, for when asked about Jesus as liberator, he replies,

[O]nly in the spiritual sense, not liberator in terms of liberation theology. ... [I]f we are moving from where the people really are, I think he's liberator only in the sense of the one who liberates us from demons and witches ... but not in terms of social, political liberation.¹⁸⁸

Akrong accounts for the common perception of Jesus as liberator being “solely spiritual” as stemming partly from the impact of charismatic churches with their emphasis on Jesus as liberator from or conqueror over spiritual forces like witches and the devil.¹⁸⁹ More significantly, however, he explains,

It is because African traditional religion itself, which also controls our evaluation of Christianity, still is more for personal well-being and welfare. That is it. And I don't think it's changed. So that ... people see religion as a spiritual source *for* protection from spirits at work. The *other* dimension, that you are called *to* certain change, to transform society, is not ... developed.¹⁹⁰

Compounding the situation, according to Akrong, is the fact that Christianity was presented with an emphasis on individual salvation before God, so that people don't connect individual salvation with the redemption of society.

Before addressing these concerns further, it must be noted that new awareness of the socio-economic and political dimensions of Jesus' liberation is articulated by some respondents in Kenya and in Ghana. Regarding Kenyan Christianity, Catholic clergyman Peter Kiarie explains that this reflects a new development, since historically “Jesus was not seen as a political liberator.” On the contrary, nationalist thinkers were against Jesus due to the strongly perceived

¹⁸⁶ Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

¹⁸⁷ Aidan Dasaah, Focus Group, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998.

¹⁸⁸ Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹⁸⁹ In this regard, Akrong cites a vernacular song which is currently popular among charismatic churches in Ghana. He provides the English translation as “Satan, you are still ashamed. Jesus has come to disgrace you.” He then concludes, “So we see Jesus Christ more as a spiritual liberator, as a *man* of power to rescue you from the witches and all the others.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

collusion between Christianity and colonialism. Furthermore, recent revival of African traditional religion is said to be “specifically against Jesus,” urging that he be removed “because as long as Jesus is with us, we are not yet *free*, because he is part of the *mzungu*.” Despite these obstacles in the Kenyan context, Kiarie asserts that “the new understanding of the theology of liberation is another development, because now we are seeing Jesus ... as guaranteeing ... human rights, God-given, inalienable human rights.”¹⁹¹ Similarly in Ghana, Catholic layman George Hagan contrasts the Jesus preached by the early missionaries with the Jesus of liberation theology. The main discrepancy between the European “Christ of submission” and the “Christ to liberate us” has been set forth in Chapter 3.¹⁹² The point underlined here is Hagan’s emphasis regarding Jesus as liberator, that “*this* is the Jesus who has been *constructed* by Africans who are now feeling themselves competent to preach Jesus. ... *This is the Jesus that has been* defined and reconstructed *by* Africans.”¹⁹³

Hagan is among those who acknowledge the impact of South African and Latin American liberation theologies plus Black theology in America. Specifically, he suggests that “the idea of *Christ* as a *companion* in the struggle for freedom, that is something that came from America.”¹⁹⁴ Whatever precise sources are at play, certainly the theme of Christ’s companionship in the struggle comes through strongly in the christological reflections of Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Peter Kodjo. Asked who Jesus is to him personally, he responds immediately in terms of Jesus as liberator. Once again, overlap with the christological image of Jesus as life-giver becomes clear as Kodjo interprets Jesus’ liberation on the premise that “it is almost impossible to understand the face of Jesus outside the context of struggle for life.” He describes the everyday difficulties faced by most Ghanaians and then explains,

This is where Jesus’ significance comes in *vividly*, as the one who *redeems us* from the *crisis* we have to live with. We are in a context in which we have to *struggle for life*, and *Jesus* is the person who has gone through it. And *because of Jesus*, we also have life. So Jesus as a *saviour*, I think is very important for me. *Jesus saves*, not because he comes like a magical wand, ... but he’s a comrade [in the] struggle. ... [T]he experience of Jesus is ... usually in the struggle, the cutting edges of life. ... So it’s not an *intellectual* exercise, it is usually an *encounter*.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

¹⁹² See pp. 67-68 above.

¹⁹³ George Hagan, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 28; Aug. 6, 1998.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Hagan explains that Americans had a consciousness of what liberation had brought to them, and that Kwame Nkrumah was influenced, particularly by the black religious leaders, in his political thought and his Christian belief by this struggle for liberation.

¹⁹⁵ Peter Kodjo, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

Having already integrated the concepts of Jesus' redemption and salvation in life's struggle, Kodjo further incorporates the notion of liberation as he reflects theologically upon his own experience of meeting with leaders and the youth wing of liberation movements throughout Africa. Like the textual theologians discussed above, he stresses the importance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as follows:

[M]y *most religious* moment is Easter. And for many congregations in which I have worked, forty days' fast is pronounced. Yes! They try to get closer and accompany Jesus on the journey, because they *internalise* the journey with their own journeys, because some of them are living in very, very frightening situations. And therefore *Easter* becomes *our* resurrection. ... [T]he liberation of the community comes out very big in their thinking. So Jesus *is* saviour. Jesus *is* liberator. Jesus *redeems*, not as an outsider who comes, but *as one* of us, because he's gone through everything we've gone through and he's accompanying us through the struggle.¹⁹⁶

The growing awareness of the socio-economic and political dimensions of Jesus' liberation extends beyond those who are theologically educated, for Protestant and Catholic laypeople in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana express various aspects of this understanding. For example, they voice expectation that Jesus can liberate from "dictatorship" and "bad governments,"¹⁹⁷ "the bondage of leaders who oppress,"¹⁹⁸ as well as from "tribal barriers"¹⁹⁹ and "economic handicaps."²⁰⁰ They further articulate that Jesus is concerned and involved in issues of justice,²⁰¹ that his deliverance is to be experienced here and now, that the church has a significant role to play in national politics,²⁰² and that their personal experience of national liberation from oppressive regimes has enhanced their understanding of Jesus as liberator.²⁰³ Thus the aggregate image of Jesus as liberator from the selected oral sources definitely favours the spiritual dimensions of salvation/redemption/liberation, yet

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Marcy Muhia, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998; also Emily Harlley, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 26, 28, 1998.

¹⁹⁸ Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998; also Samuel Ackah, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 16, 1998.

¹⁹⁹ Anne Kanyi, Focus Group, Ngong Town, Kenya: June 12, 1998.

²⁰⁰ Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

²⁰¹ Hannah Kinoti, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

²⁰² Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998. On the basis of his Ph.D. research on the role of the church in Kenyan politics, Ole Ronkei concludes that church leaders

did not go to the extent of liberation theology, as you saw in Latin America. But they went to an extent of total *engagement* with the political system in this country over a very long time period. ... So, would I call that liberation? Yes, I would certainly *use* that term, because the church was influential in liberating this country from deteriorating into dictatorship.

²⁰³ Mary Cleophas, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 6, 1998.

there are indications of reflection upon the socio-economic and political dimensions as well.

c) Problems with the Image of Jesus as Liberator

As the data analysis reveals, not all respondents concur with certain presentations of Jesus as liberator. Perceptions hinge on the meaning and methods associated with the liberator image, and further reservations stem from the concept in relation to contemporary experience. The main objection concerns the correlation of Jesus' earthly ministry with some contemporary depictions considered "purely political."²⁰⁴ Several respondents contend that any portrait of Jesus as a revolutionary freedom-fighter is contrary to the gospel account, since "Christ never fought" but rather "Christ is peaceful. So if you want to liberate yourself by arms, I don't see how you can say that it is Christ who is helping to liberate you."²⁰⁵ Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Samuel Aboa's summation is typical of the appeal to Jesus' ministry and the problem of his Jewish contemporaries:

They were expecting somebody like a soldier or a politician using force to liberate them from their colonial powers, from the Romans and the Greeks. But he was quite different. He came to liberate people from what separated them from the source of their life—God.²⁰⁶

On this basis, some respondents express vehement objection to the portrayal of Christ as liberator on par with Jomo Kenyatta or Kwame Nkrumah. For example, Protestant clergyman J. B. Masinde deeply opposes such proposals as "an *intellectual reaction* to the [colonial] Christ that was presented to us," and "a *faulty christology*" that leads to a "faulty Christianity." Instead, he maintains that "Christ liberates us from something *much more* than political bondage," namely, the "bigger slavery ... to sin."²⁰⁷ Hence he criticises Latin American liberation theologians for a certain reductionism, as follows:

²⁰⁴ Mutava Musyimi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

²⁰⁵ Joseph Aggrey, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998. However, a contrasting view is voiced for example by Morompi Ole Ronkei, who distinguishes between the context of Kenya and those of Latin America and South Africa. He refers to the book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, by the Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchú, and explains, "[W]hen you read that, you begin to justify liberation theology, from a political point of view—people taking up arms, the *church* people, the *pastors*, the *priests* and what have you, when it appears like that is the only option." He contrasts this context, however, with the Kenyan context, saying, "I think here we have the options—we haven't reached that point of non-option." He further points to South Africa as having reached the point of having no option but violence, but again contrasts this with the situation in Kenya. Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

²⁰⁶ Samuel Aboa, Oral Interview, Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998.

²⁰⁷ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

Liberated from what, you know? Again, I would be very reserved. ... If we mean liberator, the one who liberates me from *all* evil, *all* evil, even the evil in myself, probably I would understand. But the way it has been used, it's as if liberation is only from certain known evil structures or oppression. And as long as it remains that way, for example with the Latin American theologians, ... you're already limiting Jesus. ... But I think Jesus should be seen as one who stands against all evil: ... 'Deliver us from the evil one.'²⁰⁸

So strong is this concern about reductionism that some church leaders express caution about employing the term "liberator" for Jesus.²⁰⁹ For example Mutava Musyimi, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and widely known for his commitment to the political process,²¹⁰ clarifies as follows:

I prefer to think of him as a redeemer, not as a liberator. Redeemer is *safer* for me. Liberator is loaded ... because there are those who see Jesus in purely political terms. And although we *are* involved in political issues, we don't see Jesus coming to redeem us in the political sense in which it is understood by liberation theologians. ... We see Jesus *redeeming* us, in a holistic way.²¹¹

Further analysis of the relations between the African christologies selected for this study and liberation christologies originating elsewhere lies beyond the present scope. Suffice it to note that common perceptions of Latin American and other

²⁰⁸ Peter Gichure, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

²⁰⁹ For example, in addition to Kenyan clergymen Masinde, Gichure and Musyimi cited here, there is also Africa Inland Church Bishop Titus Kivunzi. In Ghana, Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle and Protestant clergyman Theophilus Dankwa express the same reservation.

Concern with the term is raised from another angle in the focus group of Kenyan Catholic clergy, when Njoroge Mwangi asserts that its use might jeopardise the role of the clergyman. He responds to the question of Jesus as liberator as follows:

Now you see, according to the way the Church has been teaching us, if you start bringing Jesus Christ as liberator, you are going to be termed as a politician. You are fighting the President. And it would be very difficult for people to distinguish you as a minister or a politician. So, it's going to bring another connotation. Njoroge Mwangi, Focus Group, Ruiru: June 7, 1998.

²¹⁰ For example, a newspaper article titled after a quote from Musyimi, "'Politics Not for Politicians Alone,'" features the 85th anniversary of the NCCCK and traces its political involvement in the country since 1923 when it challenged the colonial political elite over issues like child labour in coffee farms and tea estates. The article reports, "As pastor at Nairobi Baptist Church Musyimi feared for his life and went into hiding after urging his congregation to boycott the June 1 Madaraka Day celebrations in 1992 to protest the so-called ethnic 'clashes,' political murders, torture and harassment." It further records that "President Moi, boasting 44 years [*sic*] experience in elective politics, hit out at the reverend last July with accusations of handling NCCCK like a political party and 'for attempting to teach' him politics." Fred Mudhai, "'Politics Not for Politicians Alone,'" *The Sunday Standard*, (Nairobi: June 28, 1998), 7.

²¹¹ Mutava Musyimi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

expressions being unduly political in orientation hinders more widespread acceptance of Jesus as liberator among these selected African Christians.²¹²

Even where there is agreement with the concept Jesus as liberator, further reservations about the christological image are expressed in relation to its outworking in contemporary experience. Although Ghanaian Protestant clergywoman Margaret Asabea raises the image herself regarding images of Jesus especially meaningful to Africans, she admits that she is “*battling*” with it and questions: “What is wrong with the concept of Christ as a liberator, in Africa? Why is it elusive? Why is Christ *in* the centre, *in* the issues, and yet, to *my* concept of liberation, we’re not getting there. We’re not getting the kind of liberation that Christ *epitomises*.” She then specifies that continued suppression “is *more painful* and more serious when it’s happening in the church, *against* women.”²¹³ Likewise in the focus group of Kenyan Protestant clergymen, Oscar Muriu candidly acknowledges the problem he has personally in accommodating the image, as follows:

[O]f course theologically I could argue ... that he is liberator, but if I put it rather crudely, it’s not very clear what he has liberated me from. I am still in my political realm and there hasn’t been much liberation there, because so many times we don’t relate Jesus to the real world of politics. He hasn’t liberated me from my poverty—I am not speaking for myself but for so many who are needy, and accepting Jesus doesn’t change the reality of their need, in that sense. And then because so many times we don’t *relate* to the spirit world, ... we don’t sense liberation there. As a born again Christian, I could argue that he is my liberator, but in my day-to-day life, I don’t conceive of him as that.²¹⁴

²¹² Abraham Akrong notes that some Latin American liberation theologians, like Boff, are now giving greater consideration to cultural liberation. Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998. Yet among the relatively few respondents who speak of liberation theologies (whether or not the context of origin of the theologies is specified), the general tenor seems to echo the lament voiced by Kwesi Dickson in 1984. Reflecting on the 1976 conference of Third World theologians in Dar es Salaam, Dickson recalls a detectable difference in the approaches of Latin American and African theologians which he felt was not adequately reflected in the Final Statement published in Torres and Fabella, eds., *The Emergent Gospel*, 272. Dickson explains,

While Latin American theologians felt that African theologians seemed to be obsessed with matters of culture ... in turn African theologians thought Latin American theologians were overly concerned with doing a doctrinaire analysis of society and making theology sound almost exclusively like political action. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 126.

Despite ongoing discussions since then about the inter-relationships among various liberation theologies, the perceptions briefly voiced by these influential African church leaders may be somewhat telling of contemporary views on the subject.

²¹³ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

²¹⁴ Oscar Muriu, Focus Group, Nairobi: May 18, 1998.

Thus the oral christologies indicate almost universal consent that Jesus is liberator, yet dissenting views arise regarding the precise nature of the image, particularly in its socio-political interpretation, and the degree to which it is actualised in the selected contexts of contemporary African Christianity.

d) Conclusion: Jesus as Liberator

Analysis of the oral christologies reveals almost unanimous assent to the image of Jesus as liberator, with interpretations generally favouring personal and spiritual dimensions such as deliverance from sin, fear, and evil powers. Growing awareness of socio-economic and political dimensions of liberation is also manifest, together with cautions against portrayals of Jesus in narrowly conceived political terms. In light of the various perspectives voiced from across the continent, the crucial role of context must be underlined in determining the meaning and significance of Jesus as liberator. Ghanaian Protestant clergyman B. Y. Quarshie stresses the importance of working from the particular situation to considerations of the christological image, for in his view it would be meaningful in many contexts in Africa, like South Africa. Hence he makes the important observation that

at the level of Christ as liberator, in political terms that may be meaningful in a situation where political action is needed. But then on the other hand, Christ as a liberator *need* not be understood in purely political terms. And that is why I say the context is critical, because you could use the category of liberator in non-political terms. And Christ could be liberator in terms of maybe the social ills of the day, or even economic liberation and so on. So ... it's a category that can be used.²¹⁵

As this christological category gains ground across Africa, several main points from the oral christologies evidently echo those noted in the textual christologies. First, the image of Jesus as liberator conveys his solidarity in suffering, as discovered by encountering Christ in the concrete, everyday realities of the struggle for life. For instance, despite his own publications on African theology, Protestant clergyman Emmanuel Martey reflects on his pastoral ministry and emphasises that "christology for me became not just a theorem, a ... theological theorem, but a *reality* ... in my church, because I saw Jesus liberating people, Jesus delivering people and *healing* people."²¹⁶ Second, respondents voice the deep relevance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to the contemporary context, especially to women seeking freedom from bondage to certain church and socio-

²¹⁵ B. Y. Quarshie, Oral Interview, Accra: July 29, 1998.

²¹⁶ Emmanuel Martey, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 24, 28, 1998.

cultural traditions. Ghanaian PACWA representative Florence Y. B. Yeboah states simply, “On the day of resurrection, Jesus liberated women.”²¹⁷ Other women render testimony to that reality in their lives, be it from female circumcision, traditional customs considered degrading, or stigmas attached to singleness or childlessness. Third, the oral christologies confirm the intrinsic relation between salvation, redemption and liberation. Language issues emerge here, with some respondents preferring the English terms “salvation” and “redemption” over “liberation,” due to the socio-political connotations of the latter term. Other respondents prefer vernacular terms deemed more appropriate for the composite christological image. For example, Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Peter Kodjo asserts that

liberator ... comes out also in the vernacular—*Ogyefo*. He’s a saviour—he saves us *from*. ... Conqueror. It’s *real* for many people. And here the language is very rich because it captures [the image] a little more vividly. And I would wish that we use Ghanaian languages because the imagery is more real when we use a Ghanaian word. English *limits* our expression of the concepts.²¹⁸

Finally, the oral christologies attest to the central affirmation of the need for a holistic image of Jesus as liberator. Kodjo insists that the concept of liberation is not restricted to political emancipation but extends to “*all that dehumanises us in community*.”²¹⁹ Kenyan Circle member Mary Getui specifies further as follows: “I would like to look at Jesus as a liberator *all round*—a liberator from our narrow perspectives, a liberator from our political differences, from our ethnic differences, a liberator from our economic handicaps.”²²⁰ Archbishop David Gitari of the Anglican Church of Kenya sums up the personal and communal, plus the spiritual and socio-political dimensions of the image in his delineation of Jesus

liberating people from their *sin*. And ... obviously sin can be a very big burden. ... [T]here are people who have given their testimonies of [how] they were drug addicts, or alcoholics, but when they went to Jesus, he *liberated* them, thus *restoring* them to the fullness of life. But even Jesus as a *liberator* of a nation like this one, from evil rulers and from corruption and from all that. We know he is still working, and we will continue *prophesying* so that the liberation can come in all its fullness.²²¹

Gitari’s closing comment leads to one last observation from the oral christologies. While respondents voice the expectation for Jesus to liberate his people here and

²¹⁷ Florence Y. B. Yeboah, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

²¹⁸ Peter Kodjo, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Mary Getui, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

²²¹ David Gitari, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 19, 1998.

now, as indicated above, they also recognise the eschatological dimensions of Jesus' salvation/liberation. This important aspect, expressed by Kenyan Protestant laywoman Marcy Muhia, strikes an appropriate note on which to close the present discussion of liberation christologies:

There's a part of me that says ... it's possible to see Kenya liberated *now, today*. And it's possible to see God's kingdom come, and his will being done here on earth as it is in heaven, *now*. But at the same time, ... there's a part of me that accepts ... that that will not come to fruition until Christ returns. And yet, there's the part of me that says, you know, keep praying. Keep praying.²²²

D. Conclusion: Jesus as Leader

Concepts of leadership in Africa provide fertile ground for christological images, as amply demonstrated in the textual and oral sources under consideration. Attention has focussed on two main figures within the realm of socio-political leadership: Jesus as king / chief and Jesus as liberator. While various interpretations surface in relation to these images, a certain congruence emerges between African christologies derived from traditional categories of leadership and those proposed in contemporary liberation christologies. Returning to the test case of the Akan in Ghana, Catholic bishop Peter Sarpong's conclusion encapsulates key themes which have come to light in the examination of both types of christologies:

The Asante Christology, therefore, is a Christology that is based upon their conception of leadership in the traditional political set-up—chieftaincy. ... [Jesus] came not to destroy the tradition given us but to uphold it for us. He is our leader in the war against the forces of evil, against the oppression of sin, against the domination of anything that is inhuman or dehumanising. Jesus is our military leader. But as he himself said, the war he fights is not for earthly hegemony but to liberate us from the shackles of all that makes it impossible for us to be true sons and daughters of God.²²³

Here the merging of African and biblical traditions becomes explicit as Jesus is interpreted in light of the dual inheritance of African Christians. Yet the significance of the proposed christology clearly relates to the contemporary realities so central to liberation christologies. Thus according to the selected African Christians, Jesus represents both the fulfilment of leadership expectations in traditional African thought and of current yearnings for liberation in all dimensions of life.

²²² Marcy Muhia, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

²²³ Sarpong, "Asante Christology," 194.

Observing the coherence between the traditional king / chief and the liberation christologies does not dismiss Ela's legitimate question of what the image of Jesus as chief clad in leopard-skin signifies in the face of Africa's past and present suffering. Rather, it simply invites the recognition of Jesus as archetypal leader, in all the manifold aspects of that sovereignty as applied to the needs of particular contexts. Put differently, the approach taken here of christological patterns allows for leadership images to be considered in thematic clusters rather than in isolation or in opposition. In place of the dichotomous approach of inculturation versus liberation christologies, the integration of leadership images allows for particular images to operate in those contexts where relevant, such as the image of chief among Akan Christians, while also providing a system of cross-checks to guard against irrelevance. Thus, for instance, if the portrait of Jesus as chief does not adequately address gender issues, then the challenges voiced by women's liberation christologies provide an appropriate corrective. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive, as demonstrated by the Ghanaian women theologians and queenmother clarifying that Akan women hold certain chiefly offices when this aspect was not brought out in the men's christologies.²²⁴ Likewise, if images of Jesus' lordship have prevailed in terms of distant, domineering rule, then liberation christologies rightfully recover the suffering Messiah whose solidarity with humanity in his life, death and resurrection continues in the ongoing "crucifixion" of the Third World today.

Taking this approach to the cluster of leadership christologies, where do the relative strengths lie at present? What enduring questions remain in need of further address? An examination of these questions according to the criteria set forth in Chapter 3 sheds further light on the significance of the selected contemporary African christologies for African Christianity.

Analysis of the sources and methods employed in the various leadership images reveals appropriate strategies according to the criteria recommended. All four of the sources advocated are attested in the textual and oral christologies in different degrees. First, the Bible is appealed to for both kingship and liberation christologies, the latter highlighting Luke 4:18-20 in particular. Second, the African heritage inspires specific images such as Jesus as king / chief / "*Nana*" and associated vernacular terms. It also provides traditional praise names employed in worship and exposition of New Testament christologies, oral sources such as the "folktalk" examined in women's christologies, and the collective memory of suffering so

²²⁴ See p. 247, n. 69 above.

fundamental to the christologies of Ela and others. Third, the living experience of the church features to a somewhat lesser extent, for example in the image of Jesus as king / chief operating in worship and being articulated in christological reflection, or the attempts to discover and disseminate the “lived” christologies of African women. Fourth, contemporary realities are prominent in liberation christologies which identify African experience, whether of sexism, racism, poverty, or any kind of oppression, as the *locus* for reflection. Hermeneutical strategies demonstrate that any one of the four sources may serve as a departure point for christological formulation, with movement either from the Bible to the African context or vice versa.

As to the question of whether the methods are effective in the pursuit of contextual christologies, positive indications are found in the extent to which the African heritage and contemporary realities function, as identified above. Moreover, certain theologians demonstrate a conscious and conscientious effort to articulate their christologies in line with the priorities advocated by EATWOT. For example Ela quotes from the “Final Communiqué” regarding the need to bring out the liberative dimensions of the gospel, thereby reflecting not only his efforts to do so but also self-critical reflection upon the theological process. Furthermore, Oduyoye represents further refinement of EATWOT priorities as an active participant in the “irruption within the irruption” and a pioneer of new, creative methods in women’s christologies. Critical reflection upon previous methodologies consists in deliberate attempts to uncover sources of oppression, whether perceived to originate in biblical, church or African traditions or in contemporary realities. While noting the gains made in christological methodologies thus far, the fact that representatives like Ela and Oduyoye are pioneers in this regard also indicates the scope for continued development. To the extent that their fellow African Christians follow in these directions, African Christianity will become more deeply contextual in its identity and expression.

Brief estimation of the seven factors of contextual relevance builds upon the analysis of sources and methods. Areas of strength have already been signalled, primarily those of cultural and linguistic relevance. Widespread evidence contributes to the impression that Jesus has significantly entered cultural perceptions of leadership. Indications have been identified in the textual and oral witness, the contextual clues found in private and corporate worship as well as in the “lived” and “visual” christologies, and in the particular instance of conflict between church and state in Ghana when many Christians considered it blasphemous to use traditional honorifics adopted for Jesus in reference to Nkrumah. Limitations have been noted, such as the cultural specificity of the chief as a christological image and the impact

of historical change in concepts of chieftaincy. Nonetheless, striking evidence has confirmed the opening observation that Africans perceive Jesus as a leader according to traditional categories yet to a superlative degree, such as the African chief himself, Nana Addo Birikorang, enthusiastically affirming Jesus as “super-chief” and “super-Nana.” Furthermore, some respondents claim that certain vernacular terms like *Osagyefo* and *Agyenkwa* convey the holistic mission of Jesus more accurately than the English terms “saviour,” “redeemer,” and “liberator,” and that employing such vernacular terms enhances their understanding of Jesus and their worship of him.

Areas of moderate strength include contemporary relevance and gender appropriateness, gained foremost through recent expressions of liberation christologies. Ela and Oduyoye lead in highlighting the “cry” of Africans in relation to current conditions of poverty and oppression across the continent. Nasimiyu Wasike and others add to new articulations of women’s christologies in the face of sexism deemed rampant in church and society. While acknowledging the strides made in liberation christologies, the impact nonetheless remains moderate due to the enduring tendency to favour interpretations of Jesus as liberator in the spiritual domain more than the socio-economic and political domains. Despite the emphasis the selected African Christians place on the need for a holistic understanding of Jesus as saviour/liberator, comparatively less attention is evidently devoted to christological reflection and praxis in the socio-economic and political realms.

Before further consideration of this observation, the aspects of historical and theological relevance are certainly manifest, but the force of their presentation is countered by the level of representation. For instance Ela is powerful and poignant in his portrayal of the joint sufferings of Jesus and Africa throughout her history. As a result, he redresses the critical issue outlined by John Waliggo in Chapter 3 regarding the need to understand the historical suffering of Africans as fundamental to contemporary African christologies.²²⁵ African Christianity awaits further contributions along these lines in the full-fledged christological treatise which Ela anticipates writing. In the meantime, however, the christologies represented in this study would be strengthened by more in-depth reflection upon Jesus in relation to Africa’s historical suffering. For the more African Christians are able to recover a sense of Jesus’ presence in their history, the less of a newcomer he will seem to their continent.

²²⁵ See pp. 63-64 above.

Finally, the area of perhaps greatest potential and greatest need relates to the criterion of credible witness. The suggestion of greatest potential is confirmed by Ela's remark that

si on actualise le projet prophétique et subversif de Jésus-Christ dans nos sociétés africaines aujourd'hui, ça ne va laisser personne *indifférent*. Et par conséquent, il faut que, la christologie qu'il nous faut développer, c'est celle qui fait ressortir tout le potentiel libérateur de l'évangile du Jésus-Christ. De cette manière, à ce moment-là, les gens vont être obligés de faire attention.²²⁶

The greatest need, however, is summed up in Ela's "brutal" question, "How can we liberate the gospel so that it can become the leaven of liberation," given the current realities in the African church and society?²²⁷ Likewise Mugambi reflects on the contemporary witness of African Christianity and raises trenchant issues. First, he notes that "Africa is also portrayed as the most religious continent in the world. We are told that Christianity is growing numerically in Africa at such a rate that this will be the most 'christian' continent by the end of the twentieth century." He then queries, "Is this religiosity authentic and genuine, or is it superstition arising from despair?"²²⁸ Even more pointedly, he continues:

It appears as if Africa is overburdened with religion and as if God does not listen to the prayers of Africa. This is very paradoxical. How can the most religious continent in the world be abandoned by God to perish in poverty, in debt and under the yoke of the great powers of the world? What can Africa's religiosity mean at a time when the news about Africa proclaims that nothing good can come out of this continent or from its people?²²⁹

These are penetrating questions, bearing in mind the honest lament of the Ghanaian and Kenyan clergy quoted above regarding Jesus' liberation being somewhat elusive in their current experience. Even granting the eschatological dimension to Jesus' salvation/liberation, the questions voiced require careful consideration. Do such impressions nullify the foregoing discussion of Jesus as leader? Or are there

²²⁶ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

[I]f we actualise the prophetic and subversive project of Jesus Christ in our African societies today, that will not leave anyone *indifferent*. And consequently, we must develop christology which emphasises all the liberating potential of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way, at this time, the people will be obliged to pay attention.

²²⁷ Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 112.

²²⁸ J. N. K. Mugambi, "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa," in *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, African Challenge Book Series no. 2 (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991), 29.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

indications of Jesus' significance to African individuals and communities which, upon cross-examination, provide countering evidence?

Part III explores these major questions concerning the significance of contemporary African christologies to the African context and to the global church, for in these issues, it must be underlined, African Christianity does not stand alone. On the contrary, the christological questions posed in Africa ultimately bear upon the understanding and witness of Christians worldwide. For as Kenyan Catholic clergyman Peter Kiarie notes with respect to Jesus as liberator,

I think we are going to discover him together, internationally.... This is my reflection, that there is Jesus the liberator from personal sin, he's my personal saviour from the slavery of the devil, and then Jesus as the liberator of structures, and also of nations. And ... he'll have an impact even at the international level.²³⁰

²³⁰ Peter Kiarie, Oral Interview, Ruiru: June 5, 1998.

PART III

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES**

CHAPTER 8

SALIENT FINDINGS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

[I]t is quite clear that Jesus, in His public ministry, was actively and simultaneously involved in both personal and social reconstruction. He mobilized His followers to become involved in social change, having convinced them of the necessity and urgency to change their attitudes towards themselves and the world.¹

- J. N. K. Mugambi, Kenyan theologian

*La manière dont nous présentons Jésus-Christ a une incidence **directe** sur nos sociétés. La preuve, si vous voulez: si je suis en exil, c'est que j'ai parlé de Jésus-Christ!²*

- Jean-Marc Ela, Cameroonian theologian currently exiled in Canada

Through these [Christian Scripture in mother tongues], Jesus Christ the Lord has shouldered his way into the African religious world, and was to be discovered there by faith, not invented by theology.³

- Kwame Bediako, Ghanaian theologian

A. Introduction

In Part II of this thesis, central themes in contemporary African christologies have been analysed in terms of their rationale, sources, methods and meaning. Areas of strength have been noted with respect to the christological images, as well as unresolved controversies and enduring questions. Critical assessment has proceeded on the basis of priorities voiced by the African Christians, including the use of sources and methods in christological formulation, plus several aspects of contextual relevance in christological expression. Important issues have arisen throughout the discussion, yet the overriding concern is that of significance: is Jesus Christ significant to life in Africa today?

¹ J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 6.

² Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999. "The way in which we present Jesus Christ has a *direct* impact upon our societies. The proof, if you like: if I am in exile, it is because I spoke of Jesus Christ!"

³ Kwame Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity—A Manifesto," *Studies in World Christianity* 1, Part 1 (1995): 54.

Part III examines this crucial question in light of evidence from the selected textual and oral christologies. Unlike Part II, in which the data was treated comprehensively, the present chapter is confined to certain indicators of significance according to the selected African Christians. While the christological materials are employed illustratively, their combined witness establishes that Jesus is perceived to be highly relevant to various spheres of life. The discussion opens with a brief consideration of Jesus in recent theologies of reconstruction, followed by an examination of the significance of christological praxis and reflection in Africa today.

B. Jesus in Reconstructive Theologies

Chapter 7 closed with an assessment of the current christological images regarding Jesus as Leader. Among the areas of concern, piercing questions were raised about the relevance of Jesus to contemporary life. In particular, J. N. K. Mugambi poignantly expressed the paradox of Africa being the most “religious” and specifically “Christian” continent at the end of the twentieth century, while “its peoples remain the most abused of all in history.”⁴ Concerned whether Africa’s religiosity might be sheer superstition arising from despair, perhaps even a hindrance to progress, Mugambi further questions, “What, precisely is the role of Christianity in particular, and religion generally, in social transformation?”⁵

In order to address this problem, Mugambi advocates “reconstruction” as a new theological paradigm for African Christians in the “New World Order.” Without elaborating Mugambi’s theological project, the present focus is on the historical and theological context, the rationale, and main proposals in relation to contemporary African christologies. In turn, these considerations provide a springboard for further analysis of the selected textual and oral christologies for the perspectives they offer on Jesus’ relevance to social transformation.

Mugambi situates his theology of social reconstruction in the context of the dramatic changes in Africa’s political landscape in recent history: from decolonisation in the 1960s, through disillusionment with independence in the 1970s and 1980s, to the “New World Order” of the 1990s with the demise of the cold war and the colonial era, including apartheid.⁶ Throughout these decades, liberation has

⁴ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 33. The text cited occurs in the revised version of a paper delivered at the AACC Symposium held in Mombasa, Kenya in November 1991, published in J. N. K. Mugambi, ed., *The Church and the Future of Africa: Problems and Promises* (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997), 41.

⁵ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

featured prominently in Latin American, African-American, and other Third World theologies. According to Mugambi, "The theme of *liberation* had become commonplace in Africa" by the time the WCC held its Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975, entitled "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites."⁷ Moreover, liberation had become "a dominant paradigm on the continent."⁸ Mugambi explains the analogy drawn between the history of the Israelites liberated from bondage to Egypt, and modern Africans aspiring for national liberation from colonial rule. He therefore interprets the Old Testament Exodus in a primarily political way. Addressing the Executive Committee of the AACC in Nairobi in 1990, Mugambi voiced the following critique:

Until now, the majority of renowned African Christian theologians have highlighted the *Exodus* metaphor and emphasised the theme of *Liberation*. ... After South Africa (Azania) and Western Sahara resolve their para-colonial crises, the metaphor of the Exodus will become totally inapplicable and irrelevant. For most African countries that metaphor has been applied for too long, and perhaps should have been replaced at the time of the declaration of African republics.⁹

Mugambi therefore called for a review of the liberation paradigm, questioning, "If most of Africa had been 'liberated' in the 1950s and 1960s, what happened to that 'liberation'?"¹⁰ He further queried what theological imagery would be more appropriate for Africa in the new world order, and along with Charles Villa-Vicencio,¹¹ proposed reconstruction theology. Thus Mugambi stated to the AACC Executive Committee in 1990 that "we need to shift paradigms from the Post-Exodus to Post-Exile imagery, with *reconstruction* as the resultant theological axiom."¹² Since the 1990s were viewed as a decade of reconstruction in many areas, such as constitutional reforms and economic revitalisation, African theology was called to play a culturally reconstructive role like that of Protestant theology during the European Renaissance and Reformation.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁹ J. N. K. Mugambi, "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa," in *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, African Challenge Book Series no. 2 (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991), 34. For further aspects of Mugambi's critique of the liberation paradigm, see *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 14, where he concludes that "the parallels drawn between the Exodus and the process of decolonization have been rather contrived and far-fetched."

¹⁰ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 5.

¹¹ For example, see Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*, Cambridge Series in Ideology and Religion 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹² Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 5.

In developing his reconstructive theology, Mugambi identifies further rationale in the dichotomy commonly found between the liberation and salvation paradigms. He explains that the polarisation arises from different views regarding the role of the gospel in social transformation. While some theologians identify salvation primarily with spiritual conversion and view liberation theology as a “social gospel” which deviates from the biblical message, other theologians insist that the gospel requires involvement in the process of liberation and social transformation.¹³ Mugambi argues that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. On the basis of Jesus’ ministry of personal and social reconstruction, Mugambi insists that salvation and liberation are theologically complementary. He reiterates the following conviction which recurs throughout his writings:

In the African context and in the Bible *salvation*, as a socio-political concept, cannot be complete without *liberation* as a socio-political concept. Thus Jesus, proclaiming his mission, quoted from the book of Isaiah to indicate the correctness and relevance of his concern (Isaiah 61:1-2).¹⁴

Mugambi therefore concludes that African theology must seek an integrated approach to the gospel which overcomes the polarisation between liberation and salvation paradigms. Likewise, he contends that African christologies must overcome the sharp dichotomy between inculturation and liberation, as noted in Chapter 4.¹⁵ In his view, the theology of reconstruction meets both needs.

The terms “construction” and “reconstruction” are said to originate in engineering, and the notion of “social reconstruction” to belong to the social sciences.¹⁶ Mugambi turns to African history and biblical traditions to locate processes of social construction, highlighting various motifs in the Old Testament such as the Exilic motif in Jeremiah, the Deuteronomic motif associated with Josiah, the Restorative motif expressed in Isaiah 61:4, and the Reconstructive motif exemplified in Haggai and Nehemiah.¹⁷ For the present purpose of christological investigation, attention is drawn to Mugambi’s brief reference to the mission of Jesus being essentially reconstructive of Judaism, rather than deconstructive. Without elaborating, Mugambi identifies the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) as “the most basic of all reconstructive theological texts in the synoptic gospels.”¹⁸ Then in his

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), 12; quoted in *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 7.

¹⁵ See p. 95 above.

¹⁶ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

call for three levels of reconstruction, namely, personal, cultural and ecclesial, Mugambi introduces the first level by emphasising that social reconstruction must begin with the individual. Evidence is located in Jesus' teaching regarding the need for transforming personal motives and intentions in order to produce constructive change. Following examples from Matthew and Luke, Mugambi concludes that "the key to social transformation is appropriate disposition of the individual members of the community concerned, especially its leaders."¹⁹

While christological formulation is not prominent in Mugambi's theology of reconstruction, it does underlie the entire approach of social transformation and reconstruction which he anticipates will characterise African theology in the twenty-first century.²⁰ For example, in response to his own question of whether Africa's religiosity marks authentic faith or superstitious despair, Mugambi stresses the need for hope among individuals and communities in Africa today. That hope is to be spread through Christian witness, as indicated in the following charge:

The Churches of Africa are challenged by the scriptures to continually act as God's witnesses on earth in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we affirm to be Christ. Each Christian is challenged to act upon this challenge and endeavour to make it a reality. Do we witness with despair, or with hope?²¹

This challenge presumably forms the basis for the three levels of reconstruction indicated above, and further broken down elsewhere as political, economic, aesthetic, moral and theological reconstruction.²²

The question remains, however, as to the extent of innovativeness represented by the proposal for reconstructive theology. Certainly the new terminology, derived from the process of *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union during the late 1980s and the political discourse associated with F. W. De Klerk's 1990 reform initiatives in South Africa, enhances the contextual relevance of African theology in the 1990s.²³ Nonetheless, recent theologies of reconstruction have been questioned regarding their newness and their constructiveness in the lack of clear, concrete proposals.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰ Ibid., 40. For a more concentrated expression of his christological reflections, see J. N. K. Mugambi, "Conclusion: Christological Paradigms in African Christianity," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 136-161.

²¹ Mugambi, "The Future of the Church," 30.

²² J. N. K. Mugambi, "Social Reconstruction of Africa: The Role of Churches," in *The Church and Reconstruction of Africa*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997), 1-25.

²³ For example, see Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 3-8.

²⁴ See Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Recent Developments in the Christian Theologies of Africa: Towards the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Constructive Theology* 2, no. 2 (Dec. 1996): 42-44; "The

One problem stems from the zeal to find new theological paradigms without adequate appreciation of the gains made in previous theologies.²⁵ Neither liberation nor inculturation theologies receive due recognition in Mugambi's treatment, nor those who have already succeeded in surmounting previous polarisations between the two trends.²⁶ For example, Mugambi acknowledges briefly that Jean-Marc Ela's theology "brings about a synthesis of inculturation and liberation."²⁷ Yet he overlooks other theologians like John Pobee, Bénézet Bujo, Mercy Oduyoye and Anne Nasimiyyu Wasike who move in the same direction, as attested in this study.

A second problem consists in overlooking the continuity in major theological concerns from past decades to the present time. Mugambi evidently overstated the case in predicting that the Exodus metaphor would become "totally inapplicable and irrelevant" once South Africa and Western Sahara resolved their para-colonial crises. His statement reflects the danger of reducing the theme of liberation to the Exodus metaphor narrowly construed in relation to colonialism, a tendency in Mugambi's reconstructive theology. However, the evidence in this thesis indicates that the theological concern for liberation is far from *passé*.²⁸ Finally, many of the fundamental questions eliciting Mugambi's proposal for theological reconstruction are clearly aligned with those of other inculturation theologies. For example, he introduces his new paradigm with the question, "In a world where national borders are becoming increasingly irrelevant, how can African Christians be faithful to both their own cultures and to the Gospel?"²⁹ In sum, Mugambi's reconstructive theology is certainly valuable in its contribution to overcoming the polarisation between "the

Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction: A Critical Appraisal," *Missionalia* 22, no. 2 (Aug. 1994): 245-258. Along with the central thrust of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction, important emphases such as the need for ecumenical and multi-disciplinary approaches have been attested in other theologians under consideration in this study.

²⁵ See Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (Nov. 1997): 16-17. The same caution may be extended to Valentin Dedji's assessment of the so-called paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction theology. See Valentin D. Dedji, "Paradigm Shifts in African Theological Debates: From Liberation to Reconstruction," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1999).

²⁶ For example, none of the six authors selected in this study as leading representatives of contemporary African theologians feature in the bibliography of Mugambi's key work on reconstructive theology, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*. Other significant African theologians are also overlooked, and EATWOT's theological achievements are largely discounted for being "reactive" rather than "proactive." See Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 5-12.

²⁷ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 10.

²⁸ In addition, Maluleke states, "From a black and African perspective, therefore, the proposal for a theology of reconstruction, *in lieu of*, and even alongside of black and African theologies of liberation, is misplaced and unacceptable." Maluleke, "The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction," 256. See also Maluleke, "Recent Developments in the Christian Theologies of Africa," 44.

²⁹ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, xiv. See also Mugambi, "Social Reconstruction of Africa," 3-4; "The Future of the Church," 40.

so-called 'political theology' of South Africa and the so-called 'cultural theology' of the rest of the continent."³⁰ It also offers timely recommendations for reforming Christian witness across Africa. Yet the findings from this research corroborate Tinyiko Maluleke's assertion that

the proposal for some theology of reconstruction is not new in the Third World. Most Third World theologies, insofar as they have been local initiatives aimed at local renewal, have been kinds of theologies of reconstruction. Africans and churches north of the Limpopo have for a long time been engaged in theologies of reconstruction of one sort or another (AACC 1991).³¹

The christological data from this study indicate first, that "theologies of reconstruction" are undeniably necessary, and second, that they are currently underway in Africa, whether or not the language of reconstruction is employed. First, the expressed need is clear in Oduyoye's reflections on the reconstruction of Africa: "The future of the Church in Africa is dependent on its ability to embark afresh on its mission to be Christ in Africa."³² This mission requires responding to "all the poverties of human life." It also means ensuring that the gospel is "set in the context of the real lives of the people to whom it is delivered" and that it makes a difference to those lives.³³ Oduyoye further stresses that "[a] revisit of both ecclesiology and spirituality is urgent for the theological enterprise of the African Church. The viability of this reconsideration will depend upon the development of a dynamic Christology."³⁴

Second, evidence from the present research confirms that the dynamic christology sought is indeed developing in African Christianity. Part II of this thesis has explicated christological themes, indicating progress made thus far. The recurring emphasis is that christological formulation is insufficient without considering its significance to the reconstruction or renewal of human lives in the specified contexts. Mugambi expresses common consensus as follows:

The **Good News** which Jesus proclaims to the world is not theoretical. It is news which in real life rehabilitates individuals and groups that are marginalized by various natural and social circumstances. In

³⁰ See Kwame Bediako, "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension," *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (Apr. 2000): 312.

³¹ Maluleke, "The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction," 255-256. Examples of African theologians cited in this regard include Jean-Marc Ela, John Mbiti, Kwesi Dickson, John Pobee, and Charles Nyamiti, 256 n. 34.

³² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Church of the Future in Africa: Its Mission and Theology," in *The Church and Reconstruction of Africa*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997), 73.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

contemporary Africa, the **Good News** understood in this way, ought to ... help Africans regain their confidence and hope at a time when the print and electronic media portray Africa as a hopeless and helpless continent.³⁵

The remainder of the chapter addresses these concerns, reiterated as follows: how is Jesus Christ considered to be significant to life in Africa today? Do the selected African Christians find confidence and hope in him? Do they manifest engagement in theologies of reconstruction, or local initiatives in renewal? Once again, the discussion which follows is not to be interpreted as a comprehensive treatment of the issues. Instead, the christological data function as “cairns” along the way of Christian witness in Africa, testifying to believers’ experience of Jesus and its perceived impact in their lives.

C. Jesus in Africa Today: Christological Praxis

1. Introduction

An axiom of Third World theology is that theology entails critical reflection and praxis, or committed action. A hermeneutical connection is upheld between faith and obedience, meaning that people gain a deeper understanding of the gospel by living in accordance with its demands. Theology thus arises in the interaction between action and reflection as Christians live out the faith they articulate.³⁶ While the two aspects of theology are interwoven, each is considered separately at present for its respective place within emergent African christologies.

The selected African theologians unanimously maintain that praxis is essential to christology. Oduyoye underlines that a theology divorced from ethical demands is irrelevant to Africa, and that the reason African theologians must review christology is to highlight the necessity of ethics derived from faith in Christ.³⁷ Bujo concurs, and castigates African theologians who “are foremost concerned with earning academic degrees as passports to higher careers,” and “have no interest in carrying their theologizing into the huts and shanties.”³⁸ He states forcefully,

If our theology ... restricts itself to an academic exercise taking place exclusively in the lecture halls of universities and highly specialized institutes and seminaries, or mainly at overseas conferences, we must

³⁵ Mugambi, “The Future of the Church,” 46.

³⁶ Sam Amirtham and John S. Pobee, eds., *Theology by the People: Reflections on Doing Theology in Community* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 6.

³⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 96.

³⁸ Bénédet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990), 124.

necessarily conclude that it can be *of no relevance or significance whatsoever for our African society*.³⁹

To avoid complicity in forming such an elitist Christianity in Africa, social commitment is indispensable to theology. Bujo thus urges professional theologians to maintain close contact with all classes in society, yet to exercise a preferential option for the poor on the basis of Matthew 25:35ff. He concludes, “We, African theologians, can no longer afford to merely think socially concerned, or preach socially concerned, or teach socially concerned, but we must also take social action and move from mere orthodoxy to orthopraxis.”⁴⁰

If this is the widespread conviction, what is the situation with respect to christological praxis in the selected African contexts? Before coming to the research findings, it is instructive to note C. G. Baëta’s observation regarding Christianity’s impact in Africa in the twentieth century:

In numberless institutions of many different kinds as well as in the equally numerous and diverse voluntary organisations and free associations of men, women and children; in the pervasive influence and challenge of its message to men and demand upon their individual lives and their relationships with one another; in countless personal and group decisions made, and lives actually lived very differently from what they would otherwise have been; in the new high hopes and aspirations for individual and social destiny which it has awakened; in the sheer excellence of human performance in devotion and courageous, self-sacrificing service to others, and yet in other ways, Christianity ... plays a role and exerts a force in tropical Africa which is none the less real or significant because it eludes full and conclusive analysis.⁴¹

Kenyan Catholic Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a’ Nzeki echoes Baëta. Asked if Jesus is relevant to life in Kenya today, he replies, “*Very much. Very, very much. People may not be able to express it, but the way they live it, I think he is very relevant.*”⁴² Nzeki then cites examples, such as the fervour of Pentecostals preaching and caring for street children in the slums, and the Catholic cathedral (Holy Family Basilica, Nairobi) being packed out for communion services every morning at 7:20 a.m.

The overall consensus of the interview respondents is that Jesus is definitely relevant to life in their respective contexts, and to all aspects of life. Kenyan

³⁹ Ibid., 124-125.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁴¹ C. G. Baëta, “Introduction,” in *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, ed. C. G. Baëta (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), xii-xiii; quoted in Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 440.

⁴² Ndingi Mwana a’ Nzeki, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

Protestant layman Ole Ronkei typifies widespread response to the question of Jesus' relevance: "Absolutely ... definitely ... I see him coming into play in *every* part of our lives, in *every* part of *my* life."⁴³ It is somewhat difficult to isolate particular dimensions of life, given the holistic worldviews generally characteristic of the African Christians. However, for the purpose of the present discussion, Mugambi's three levels of theological reconstruction (personal, cultural, and ecclesial) provide a framework with slight modification as follows: personal formation, social transformation, and ecclesial reformation.

2. Personal Formation

The centrality of Jesus to personal formation lies at the heart of the gospel, according to African Christian witnesses. J. B. Masinde, a Kenyan Protestant pastor, expresses it this way:

[W]hen all is said is done, all of us need to ... find out, *where* do we begin to tackle ... problems of humanity? It's not in the *lab*, it's not on the streets, it's not in the parliament, it's in our *hearts*. And the only thing that seems to *adequately* address the issues of human hearts, whether it's an African heart or a European heart, is the *person* of Jesus Christ and his teachings. And that's why I'm saying he is still *very* relevant to an African. He's *relevant* to a European. He's *relevant* to an Indian, because he's the only person who talks about *issues* of the heart, and *addresses* them ... in a way nobody else does.⁴⁴

Whatever the precise issue faced, respondents give account of Jesus' significance to their personal renewal physically, emotionally, morally, and spiritually. Examples of these accounts feature throughout Part II, and often reflect universal human needs in accordance with Masinde's observation above. Other evidence conveys more contextual colouring, such as the following statement from Ghanaian Protestant clergyman Thomas Oduro:

We are surrounded by spirits and we interpret whatever happens to us in the spiritual realm. And, therefore, we always want somebody who is more powerful than the spirits, to protect us, and to lead us through darkness, and to be our guide, and to *link* us with Onyankopong, the Supreme Being. That makes Jesus Christ very, very, very, very relevant. Without him we would have been trying other, lesser deities to test their power and they may disappoint us. So you go to this shrine, disappointed you run to another shrine, disappointment and all that. But, to know Jesus Christ as someone who created *all* these

⁴³ Morompi Ole Ronkei, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

⁴⁴ J. B. Masinde, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

lesser deities, and therefore is more powerful and is *next* to God, makes one rest assured that he does not have to run after gods and shrines and fetish priests.⁴⁵

If the issues vary, the common response is one of expressed hope in Christ despite all the odds of the situation. The conviction forms a refrain throughout the oral interviews in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. Notably, both the General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Kenya, Mutava Musyimi, and his Deputy, Peter Bisem, highlight hope as paramount in the significance of Jesus today. Bisem focuses more on personal formation, while Musyimi attends to social transformation, noted below. Speaking of his own experience and of the struggles of Christians across the continent, Bisem acknowledges that they have known much pain and suffering. Yet he states, “Jesus comes in as a *new picture of hope*, irrespective of all that [happens], as one who can fill our own person and help us to see God even in the pain that is going on.”⁴⁶ He explains further, regarding the Kenyan context:

The hopelessness that some people seem to face—in the *message* of Christ, they are able to *see* their hope *realised*, even if not completely in their life. ... The majority of people would find a lot of solace, a lot of comfort, a lot of hope ... in Christ. That even *though* they’re in the slums of Mathare Valley ... [or] Kibera, the only meaningful hope that seems to address their every context ... is the message of the gospel. ... And so people are able to *see* this man [Jesus] is so real and so relevant, and they respond to the gospel, in spite of all this, with a lot of *zeal*, with a lot of dedication.⁴⁷

That hope is firmly grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as poignantly attested in one last illustration of personal renewal. Kenyan laywoman Marcy Muhia relates candidly the death of her first child at full term in the pregnancy. Despite intense grief, she affirms,

[W]e live in the hope of the resurrection. *God* knew what it was like for his son to die—*same* way that I knew what it was like for my son to die. Then *God* knew the joy of the resurrection, and I too will know the joy of the resurrection. And I think as we wait for that, that is what gives us hope.... I think that perspective has made me willing to be an active member of life again.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Thomas Oduro, Oral Interview, Akropong, Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

⁴⁶ Peter Bisem, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Marcy Muhia, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

3. Social Transformation

A key point in Mugambi's christological reflections outlined above is that social reconstruction must begin with the personal reformation of individuals. The insight is confirmed by other African Christians. For example, with respect to Jesus as liberator, Marcy Muhia states, "I've seen more and more how the liberation of the individual is the beginning of liberation for the nation. That as each person is set free from their own sins, ... that person becomes a link in the liberation of the whole nation. That I see as Christ."⁴⁹ In Ghana, Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle's statement is worth quoting at length for its graphic portrayal of individuals contributing to social transformation, thereby demonstrating Jesus' significance:

From my vocation as a bishop, I definitely believe that Jesus *owns* the answer to the contemporary problems and difficulties and joys and happiness. ... I see Jesus in the healing of the doctor ... in the hospital. I see Jesus in the teaching of the teacher ... who is helping to enlighten the kids. I see Jesus in the mother who, because of her love for her children, would sacrifice herself for her children. I see Jesus in my receptionists who would welcome people into my office and make them feel wanted. I see Jesus in myself, when I stop by an old lady who just wants to see who her bishop is, and I pick her up in my arms, and she strengthens my faith and I strengthen hers. I see Jesus in the orphan who comes to me because he or she has no way of paying his or her school fees, and asks me at a time when I'm *tight* myself for money, and I have to help. I see him in the priests with whom I work, who are killing themselves in the villages for the good of the people. I see Jesus in the policeman who would fight for justice, honesty and sincerity. I see Jesus in the soldier who would go all out to protect the people, and put order in place. And so for me, Jesus is *very*, very much alive and he's far larger than, you know, the scriptures would present him. ... That's how I see Jesus.⁵⁰

Christological praxis is thus considered fundamental to social transformation. Once again, hope in Jesus forms a motif throughout the textual and oral data. In response to the basic question of who Jesus is, Mutava Musyimi of the NCKK immediately speaks of Jesus as the saviour who remains "the major sign of hope and redemption" for the world.⁵¹ He emphasises hope "because of the level and the scale of needs that surround us. And I use the word need in its comprehensive sense." Addressing the Kenyan situation, he continues,

We have major problems in terms of governance, security, economy.
... The thought-forms ... that take Jesus and his values seriously

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua, Sept. 10, 1998.

⁵¹ Mutava Musyimi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

provide, in my view, the only kind of hope that I can see, because Jesus comes into situations with a *disarming selflessness* and teaches us to serve in a way that nobody else does—gives us the capacity to do so in a way that nobody else does. And so whether we are talking about evangelism, ... discipleship, ... development projects, ... advocacy issues, gender issues, the environment, the disabled people, constitution, economies—*frameworks* of thought that derive their inspiration from him are the only sign [of hope] that I see.⁵²

The natural question is whether such hope is “merely a utopian dream or a realistic hope?”⁵³ Virtually all the African Christians in this study, including theologians, clergy and laity, address contemporary issues in their respective contexts and voice ways in which they believe that obedience to Jesus effects positive change in society. Bujo names “modern African sins” like corruption in the public services which hinders the development and the humanisation of Africa, and the modern exercise of power often characterised by personal enrichment and exploitation of the weak. In sum, Bujo asserts that corruption and the abuse of power can only be overcome if priority is given to Christ, the proto-ancestor.⁵⁴ Ela applies thoroughgoing sociological analysis of political, economic and social ills which can only be addressed by “the subversive project of Jesus Christ.” For his outspoken proclamation of the gospel against political injustices in Cameroon, Ela is currently exiled in Canada.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Pobee’s prolific writings indicate a wide range of social issues which call for christological reflection and praxis.⁵⁶ For instance, he stimulates further consideration of Jesus in relation to poverty in this way:

Africa is characterized by poverty. They are the poor who are not only materially deprived but also the marginalized, the bruised, the voiceless. Christology in Africa is about how the Word has become flesh in this context of poverty. He is Christ of the Poor. He is the Poor Christ of Africa. He is the Christ of Poor Africans. He is the Christ, the hope of the embattled Africans.⁵⁷

Pobee also concludes that Christians must live out this hope in society:

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 99.

⁵⁴ Bénédet Bujo, “Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique,” in *Combats pour un christianisme africain: Mélanges en l’honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*, Bibliothèque du Centre d’Etudes des Religions Africaines, no. 6, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1981), 30.

⁵⁵ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

⁵⁶ For example, see John S. Pobee, “Sin and Evil in an African Theology,” and “The Ethics of Power,” chaps. in *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 99-119, 141-156.

⁵⁷ John S. Pobee, “In Search of Christology in Africa,” in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 16.

The importance of tying in social action and Christology cannot be overstated. It is crucially important for the Christian to let his/her engagement in social action be rooted in a clear understanding of the person of Jesus Christ in whom his/her faith is grounded.⁵⁸

Without minimising the scale of needs in the African contexts, noted by Musyimi above, African Christians maintain that conformity to Christ contributes positively to social transformation. Full-blown analysis of the social impact of Christianity lies beyond the present scope.⁵⁹ The following discussion is limited to brief illustrations of the perceived significance of christological praxis according to the selected African Christians in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana.

a) Kenya

The vitality of Christian experience in contemporary Kenya is unmistakable. Aside from ample manifestation in the oral interviews, evidence abounds in context: in proliferating churches, mass crusades and open-air preaching, overnight prayer meetings, press accounts and popular publications, and even Sunday morning traffic jams. Vincent Kamiri, a Catholic parish priest in Buru Buru, Nairobi, remarks about Kenyans as follows:

[A]ny time somebody is ... opening the gospels or the scripture, people are attentive. We flock into churches. We have problems: problems at home, perhaps as individuals, indeed, as a society. But we have recourse to Jesus. So he is very present in our lives.⁶⁰

Kamiri continues by referring to the Emmaus disciples who did not immediately perceive Jesus in their midst, but came to recognise his presence among them in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24). From this gospel account, Kamiri concludes that “*Jesus is with us in our difficulties, in our mess, wherever we are. So, he is very present to us, ... and that is why we shall go to him in our prayers.*”⁶¹

Concerning the outworking of this Christian vitality, senior church leaders in Kenya voice the potentiality and the actuality of social transformation accomplished through obedience to Jesus. John Gatu, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church

⁵⁸ John S. Pobee, *Who are the Poor?: The Beatitudes as a Call to Community*, Risk Book Series no. 32 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 3.

⁵⁹ For example, see Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998); “Christian Fundamentalism, State and Politics in Black Africa,” in *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, ed. David Westerlund (London: Hurst & Company, 1996), 198-215; “Some Recent Developments in African Christianity,” *African Affairs* 93 (1994): 513-534; Paul Gifford, ed., *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

⁶⁰ Vincent Kamiri, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 28, 1998.

⁶¹ Ibid.

of East Africa, identifies the “*selfishness* of man” as the root of the suffering in Kenya. He specifies that “those in leadership have been far too selfish.”⁶² He alludes to the gospel accounts of the rich young ruler whom Jesus asked to give away his possessions, and the witness of Zaccheus upon his conversion in giving back what he had taken from people. Gatu then concludes, “I would say from our economic point of view, those are *very direct* illustrations of what Jesus would have us do with our economy. And it must start with *me*, and so on.”⁶³ Gatu’s comment is not simply pious platitude; it reflects the real expectation and the historical experience of many believers in the East African Revival. Gatu narrates how, through the influence of the Revival, he renewed his faith in Christ as an adult in 1950, after having “abandoned” it for many years. One of the distinguishing marks of the Revival was a deep conviction that sin required confession and restitution or “putting things right” wherever possible. Hannah Kinoti explains, “Restitution could mean returning to the owner things one had stolen, or a run-away wife returning to her husband, or asking forgiveness from the person one has wronged and thus seeking reconciliation.”⁶⁴

The Christian commitment to “putting things right” extends into the political sphere in Kenya. Due to the current sensitivity of the subject, specific details are limited here. However, Gatu relates one example of how he and other senior church leaders confronted senior government members during political tensions which preceded the 1997 general election. Tensions surrounded the Kenya Constitutional Review in particular, for Parliament had established in 1992 that the Kenyan Constitution would be rewritten by an independent Commission, yet the process had been repeatedly postponed. By 1997 the Kenyan people increasingly insisted that this Commission had to be established immediately in order to provide time to rewrite the Constitution before the elections to come in December 1997. On account of the discussions which ensued between senior church and government leaders, Gatu concludes, “*That’s* how we had such a smooth general election last year. For me, it was a *direct intervention* of Jesus Christ in the midst of this land.”⁶⁵

Similarly David Gitari, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya, voices his perspective on the significance of Jesus during the same period of political tensions in Kenya. One particular incident received international media coverage,

⁶² John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hannah W. Kinoti, “Christology in the East African Revival Movement,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 68.

⁶⁵ John Gatu, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

and Gitari's own account of it warrants full citation. Asked if Jesus is relevant to contemporary life in Kenya, he replies,

He is very, very relevant. In July last year, there was a rally at Uhuru Park of the Opposition. The police went and chased people away, and they came to the Cathedral. They wanted to pray, and the police came and threw tear gas in that Cathedral and injured people. I was telephoned at home by the Provost, so I got the whole story. And that story was reported all over the world. What I did a week later was to preach from Daniel chapter 5: '*Mene, Mene Tekel, and Parsin.*' And we reminded the President and the police that 'your days are numbered and you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.' And that sermon had such a great impact on the President and the politicians, that within two days he called me to State House with other church leaders. And he agreed to the change of the Constitution [in order to make the Kenya Constitution Review Commission independent] before the elections [in December 1997]. Before that he had said, '*Never!*' We had gone to see him and he told us he cannot change. After that sermon he agreed to change. So, I think the gospel preached *prophetically* and *powerfully* has a lot of *impact*.⁶⁶

While the process of political change and Constitutional review is undoubtedly complex, there is clear witness to the leading role played by a united front of church leaders in recent Kenyan politics.⁶⁷

Finally, the call for Christian engagement in "putting things right" is extended not only to Kenyan leaders, but also to ordinary believers. Participant observation in a church service at Nairobi Chapel allowed exposure to a sermon entitled "Facing Our Giants." Preaching from his written sermon on 1 Samuel 17, Pastor Oscar Muriu addressed "the giants, the Goliaths, the major problems Kenya is facing." He identified nine points, as follows:

⁶⁶ David Gitari, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 19, 1998. See also Paul Gifford, "Introduction: Democratisation and the Churches," in *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, ed. Paul Gifford (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 1-13.

⁶⁷ Since 1998 when the present field research was undertaken, the independence of this Kenya Constitution Review Commission has continued to be a highly contentious issue. Elaboration exceeds the scope of the present study, yet it must be noted that the initiative for establishing an independent Commission has been spearheaded by the NCKK and the Catholic Secretariat, who together formed a strategic group called the "*Ufungamano* Initiative." Among the leaders who introduced this initiative are Mutava Musyimi, General Secretary of the NCKK, Catholic Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a' Nzeki, and Anglican Archbishop David Gitari, all of whom feature in the present research. As a result of the *Ufungamano* Initiative, driven largely by this united front of senior church leaders together with key politicians and lawyers, a Bill is currently being discussed in Parliament to ensure the independence of the Commission. See *The Standard*, (Nairobi: Friday May 4, 2001) East African Standard Online Edition, front page.

1. Unemployment – especially with 60% of Kenya’s population being youth under the age of 25
2. Poverty, with 50% of our population now living under the poverty line
3. Insecurity due in part to people’s increasing desperation, and in part to the fear of guns coming in from the war-torn northern neighbours ...
4. Future of the street children
5. Debt – both internal and external, and the drag that this has on our economy
6. Land clashes
7. The decaying infrastructure
8. The lack of visionary national and political leadership
9. And the breakdown of the rule of law in this country.⁶⁸

Following exposition of the biblical text, which records David slaying the giant Goliath, Muriu sets forth “5 smooth stones” for fighting the Kenyan “giants.” The first is prayer, and he comments: “It may be that indeed the only thing that has so far restrained the giants from overwhelming the land sooner, is that Kenyans have been faithful to pray.” The second smooth stone is evangelism, “for the gospel can transform society.” The third is “speaking out,” since God calls Christians “to expose lies and speak out on behalf of the poor and voiceless.” The fourth is “non-violent public lobby for responsible stewardship.” Muriu explains, “The idea here is to hold our elected officers, public institutions or private businesses to act in accordance with righteousness. To mobilise mass protest so that our collective numbers and voice are heard.” He also calls for Christian involvement in the constitutional review process, in order to establish accountability structures to help the public remain honest. The fifth smooth stone is “strategic non-cooperation,” or “the selective non-participation in those institutions of government or private enterprise that are unjust, and that oppress people.”⁶⁹ Thus Muriu seeks to mobilise ordinary Kenyan Christians to live out the gospel of Christ, thereby making an impact politically, economically and socially.

Obviously, proclamation of the gospel of Christ does not guarantee a righteous society, even in countries like Kenya where the majority of the population are allegedly Christian. This research does not overlook the severity of social ills, acknowledged above by leading clergy. However, the present discussion remains limited to those “cairns” or indicators of the social impact of christological reflection and praxis in contemporary Kenyan Christianity. From the few illustrations provided, evidence points to at least some degree of vital Christian engagement in social transformation.

⁶⁸ Oscar Muriu, “Facing Our Giants,” (Nairobi: Written sermon produced personally on computer by Oscar Muriu; text provided by the author, April 19, 1998), 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

b) Uganda

In the discussion of Jesus as liberator in Chapter 7, it was indicated that Jesus' manifesto in Luke 4:18-20 is pivotal to Catholic priest John Waliggo.⁷⁰ In response to the question of who Jesus is to him personally, Waliggo replies,

[R]eally, deep down, I think ... he *has* to be an African to me, to make sense. And therefore he has to be somebody who *knows* the suffering the Africans have passed through, and who experiences our marginalization and all the problems that we are going through, *even* this problem of Christian *duality*. And *who* then *works* with us, in order to achieve total liberation. So, somebody who is an *activist* ... for the African liberation, and for removal of *every enslavement* that would be found in this community of Africans.⁷¹

John Pobee's observation that "all theology is biography"⁷² apparently applies to Waliggo, for the dual themes of suffering and liberation articulated above certainly encapsulate Waliggo's life and thought. In the interview and in later informal conversation, he recounted various experiences of persecution under the Amin and Obote regimes. He also spoke of the "humiliation" and the "alienation" of being exiled for years in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and the former Zaire.

After reference to his exile from 1982-1986, Waliggo continues, "And so, when we managed to remove the oppressive regime, my whole work was to plan how Uganda should be reorganised after the victory."⁷³ He explains the new role to which he was appointed as General Secretary of the Constitutional Commission, with the key task of establishing how to "empower all the people ... to make a people-centred constitution." For four years he provided oversight to the Commission which conducted oral interviews at the grassroots level throughout the country. From the thirty-five thousand memoranda amassed (some up to 500 pages in length), he and the Commission were responsible for writing a draft Constitution of one thousand pages. Afterwards, Waliggo worked for the largest newspaper, publishing weekly articles to foster further debate on the issues, before the Constitution was approved in 1995. The Uganda Human Rights Commission was then established to deal with human rights violations and to teach people civic education and the Constitution. Waliggo was appointed to this latter Commission by Parliament, and he continues in that capacity to the present.

⁷⁰ See p. 273 above.

⁷¹ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 7, 1998.

⁷² See p. 64 above.

⁷³ John Waliggo, Oral Interview, Jinja: May 7, 1998.

In view of Waliggo's experience, it is understandable that Jesus as liberator is the cardinal christological image for him. He declares, "The idea of liberation for me can never go away.... [I]f Jesus *is* revelation, ... then he becomes relevant in so many realities."⁷⁴ He adds that "Jesus from the point of view of *justice*" is critical for him. Commenting upon his own longstanding involvement in justice issues, he assesses his experience of christological reflection and praxis in relation to the Uganda Human Rights Commission, as follows:

I've never discovered Christ more clearly than I am now. *Never* in my whole life, especially when I move into the prison ... and meet the prisoners and talk to them. At the end I can say, 'Ten of you are really unlawfully held. You can come out now.' I can come back the next week and see ... the children in the remand home, the women ... and I release them. I felt that before, I could only preach and didn't have that power of Jesus. You left everybody in their own *suffering*. But now I feel that I am *working* exactly like Jesus in Luke 4:16-18: 'I have come so these may see.' When you go into the civic education, you see that the blind are beginning to see, the deaf are beginning to hear. ... And I've felt if *more* people within Christianity *really* had that chance of moving from mere preaching to *seeing* that the *power to liberate is* with them, and they are doing it with Jesus, then a lot of things would be solved.⁷⁵

He thus asserts that Christians must extend Jesus' liberative praxis

in the secular world, if one is working in the economic system, in the political system, in the school system, in the health system and ... so on. Rather than restricting ourselves to something called 'spiritual, religious.' That is only one small aspect where you can liberate people. We need to be integral in our approach.⁷⁶

Waliggo's publications provide notable confirmation of the deep significance of Jesus to his own thought and work.⁷⁷ His christological reflections revolve around the nucleus of "[w]ho is Christ to the suffering people of Africa?"⁷⁸ Waliggo stresses the importance first of analysing christological images, and second, of addressing what difference Jesus makes in the lives of the suffering people of Africa. He articulates a liberation theology founded upon two integral images: "the rejected

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ In addition to the works cited below, see John Mary Waliggo, "Making a Church That Is Truly African," in *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, J. M. Waliggo and others (Kampala: St. Paul Publications - Africa, 1986), 11-30.

⁷⁸ John M. Waliggo, "African Christology in a Situation of Suffering," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 93.

stone” of the historical Jesus and “the cornerstone” of the risen Christ. He then underlines the practical tasks entailed in making this christology a reality by breaking the fetters of hardship and joining the victorious Christ in realising concrete liberation.⁷⁹

The outworking of his christological vision is clearly manifest in one further publication. In 1997, “The Second National Seminar on the Implementation of the African Synod” was held for discussion and an action plan by the Catholic Church in Uganda. The theme for the consultation was “The Church as Family of God in Uganda Based on Justice and Peace,” with the sub-title, “Protection of Children’s Rights, Elimination of Oppressive Cultural Practices and Corruption, Taking Jesus Christ as the Model.” Waliggo contributes several chapters to this publication, integrating his expertise in theology and his experience in justice issues. Especially significant to the present discussion is his chapter entitled, “Jesus as the Model of Justice and Peace, Defender of Children and Women, Challenger of Corruption and Oppressive Cultural Practices.”⁸⁰ Here, in condensed form, Waliggo’s christology derived from Jesus’ manifesto in Luke 4:18-20 is applied to contemporary social issues in Uganda. Thus christological reflection and praxis are at the heart of Waliggo’s dual roles as theologian and as leader in the Uganda Human Rights Commission. Although the present discussion has featured only one Ugandan individual, clearer indication of Jesus’ significance to the social renewal of a nation could hardly be found.

c) Ghana

The vitality of Christian experience noted above with respect to Kenya is likewise attested in Ghana. Lawrence Darmani speaks for many Ghanaians, including theologians, church leaders and laity, who are convinced that Jesus Christ is relevant to life in Ghana today. Darmani states,

[W]e’ve had our share of *deep* problems and situations that have affected our lives—economically, politically, ... and even socially. Now Jesus has been with us here in *very* difficult times. All kinds of evil still goes on in this country. But we’ve seen situations where

⁷⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁰ John Waliggo, “Jesus as the Model of Justice and Peace, Defender of Children and Women, Challenger of Corruption and Oppressive Cultural Practices,” in *The Second National Seminar on the Implementation of African Synod: The Church as Family of God in Uganda Based on Justice and Peace, 28th April to 3rd May 1997*, by the National Commission of Justice and Peace and the Pastoral Department (Kampala: Uganda Catholic Secretariat, August 1997), 55-59.

Ghanaians have *prayed* over national problems, like economic hardships and political problems, and the Lord answering them.⁸¹

Emmanuel Martey concurs, referring to the “terrible, *terrible*” times Ghana experienced in the early 1980s. He explains,

Not that we are better or ... more *righteous* than Liberians, than Sierra Leonians, or Rwandans and the people of Burundi, but it’s by God’s grace. ... I’ve been involved, *fasting* and praying for the country. It’s only God’s grace, through Jesus by the power of the Spirit, which has sustained *us*. So I *know* the difference which the Lord Jesus has made in *my* life and in the life even of our nation as a whole. So, Christ is very *relevant*, very relevant.⁸²

As in Kenya, theologians and church leaders assert the need for christological praxis to effect tangible social transformation. Pobee’s writings, mentioned above, provide many illustrations of christological reflection in relation to contemporary realities. One noteworthy example is found in *Who are the Poor?: The Beatitudes as a Call to Community*.⁸³ In similar terms to John Gatu, Pobee highlights Zaccheus’ conversion and consequent promise to repay four-fold those whom he had cheated. From this gospel story, Pobee insists that “[s]alvation begins with repentance of one’s misdeeds against humanity....”⁸⁴ Yet it also requires reparation and an amended life with firm resolve not to repeat the offence. Pobee applies this concept of salvation to both individuals and nations. For instance he points out that there has been much discussion of the need to create a just economic international order, yet little progress has been made. He then underlines two reasons for why this situation must be seriously addressed:

It is not just a question of giving back some of one’s gains, whether ill-gotten or otherwise. It is a two-fold issue. First, to realize one’s humanity. As long as there are pockets of abject poverty on the face of the earth at this time when we have technological and other material resources to correct the situation, our humanity is at stake. Second, it is an issue of what the example of Christ means for those of us who claim to be Christian: ‘You know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich’ (2 Cor. 8:9).⁸⁵

⁸¹ Lawrence Darmani, Oral Interview, Accra: July 30, 1998.

⁸² Emmanuel Martey, Oral Interview, Akropong, Akuapem: Aug. 24, 28, 1998.

⁸³ John S. Pobee, *Who are the Poor?: The Beatitudes as a Call to Community*, Risk Book Series no. 32 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Thus Pobee's rationale for redressing international economic injustice is grounded in his conviction, highlighted at the outset of Chapter 3, that "the real purpose of being Christian ... [is] to be human in the image of Christ."⁸⁶ It also reinforces Peter Kiarie's assertion, at the close of Chapter 7, that Jesus as liberator must be discovered corporately at the international level, where issues of humanity and credible Christian conversion are at stake.

At the national level in Ghana, church leaders are proactive in addressing social ills according to the gospel of Christ. The "Communiqué" from the Ghana Catholic Bishop's Conference, July 2-10, 1998, prepares for the "Great Jubilee" of the year 2000, for which "our Holy Father the Pope has requested all Christians to reflect on Christ...."⁸⁷ On this basis, the bishops declare "*a crusade against bribery and corruption*," depicted as "a dangerous social cancer that is eating its lethal way into the fabric" of Ghanaian society. Specific instructions are outlined for prayer and for dealing with bribery in everyday life. The bishops take an ecumenical and inter-religious approach in appealing to all Christian Churches, Muslims and followers of traditional religion to join in the campaign "to deliver our nation from the clutches of the bane of corruption." They further address current issues related to the energy crisis and the Cocoa Research Institute, with recommendations for national leaders and citizens in order to enhance economic prosperity. Bishop Peter Sarpong is widely known for his outspokenness on social issues at the national level.⁸⁸ In conversation, Sarpong refers to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 about divine judgement based on treatment of the poor and sick, the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the imprisoned. He applies this passage to the contemporary context in Ghana, for example "the *abject* poverty in this society," prisons, street-children, blind people, and current ills in the health services. Appealing to Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), Sarpong concludes, "Oh! The relevance of Jesus and his doctrine could not be more *felt* in Ghana than *now*."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ John S. Pobee, *Christ Would Be An African Too*, Gospel & Culture Studies Vol. 9, West Africa (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), 8.

⁸⁷ Peter K. A. Turkson, "Communiqué," (Koforidua: Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1998), 1.

⁸⁸ For example, Sarpong is featured in the media for his leadership in the war against corruption. See also Peter Sarpong and John Onaiyekan, "Communiqué," (Kumasi: The Bishops of the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA) Triennial Plenary Assembly, August 22-31, 1998). This "Communiqué" addresses issues concerning the socio-political situation in the sub-region including "Strategies for a Self-Reliant Church," "Towards Sustainable Human Development," "The Imperative of Democratisation in the Sub-region," "The Development of Civil Society," "Turning Swords into Ploughshares," "Self-reliance and International Solidarity," and "A Call for Debt Cancellation."

⁸⁹ Peter Sarpong, Oral Interview, Kumasi: Sept. 7, 1998.

Once again, Christian leaders clearly call for christological praxis to affect society, but what indications are there that the call takes on reality in the lives of ordinary Christians? On par with Kenyan Christianity, Ghanaian Christians evidently find hope in Jesus as expressed tangibly in everyday life. According to Oduyoye,

Christians live by *hope* in Africa, ... that this miracle-working Jesus will work miracles in their *daily* encounters, and especially in the socio-economic realm because that's where the suffering is. Everybody's hoping that with Jesus, this *trotro* will bring a lot of money, it will not have an accident, ... [the owner] will not have to spend so much money. And that's how people carry on.⁹⁰

Fig.14 illustrates Oduyoye's point.



Fig. 14. *Trotro*, Ghana

⁹⁰ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

Further confirmation occurs in informal conversation with taxi-driver Charles Obeng, featured in Fig. 15. Obeng's taxi displays a picture of Jesus and two inscriptions: "Annoiting [*sic*] Power" and "Invite Jesus into Your Life." Questioned about why he placed them there, he replies, "Because I am a Christian" and "because I want the anointing to work with my car." Probed further, he explains that the anointing denotes God's power to protect the car and himself, and to provide business.⁹¹ Obeng also voices his perspective that in general, the inscriptions commonly found on vehicles in Ghana do reflect genuine Christian belief. Certainly they do for him personally, according to his own account. Even granting that some vehicle drivers may well display these slogans merely as a fad or a ploy to drum up business, many interview respondents interpret them as visual indicators of the vibrancy of Ghanaian Christianity.⁹² For example, Dan Antwi notes with slight laughter,

It's *amazing* how even if you travel around, some of the inscriptions on vehicles, ... you think that people are Jesus-crazed! But that's exactly what you [find]—they're not just putting them, but they are increasingly becoming *aware* of *who* this Jesus is.⁹³

⁹¹ Charles Obeng, Informal Conversation, Accra: Sept. 13, 1998. Obeng did not specify Jesus as the source of the anointing power, but his self-identification as a Christian and the second slogan provide grounds for making the assumption. As indicated in Chapter 1, p. 26, African Christians do not always distinguish precisely between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

⁹² Full treatment of this question goes beyond the present bounds, yet the majority of interview respondents in Ghana with whom it was discussed contend that the shop signboards and vehicle slogans generally provide evidence of authentic Christian belief. This assessment is in keeping with the interpretation of Hannah Schreckenbach, who co-authored a 1975 publication combining poems by Kojo Gyinaye Kyei with her own photographs and sketches depicting slogans of Ghana's lorries. In the introduction, Schreckenbach explains the slogans on cars and shops as follows:

The slogans are always very personal. They sometimes relate to some personal experience of the driver or the owner of the truck, such as for instance, a happy turn in his life, events, or happenings on the road; they may derive from the face of a gift ('Good Mother' or 'Good Uncle'); or they may relate to a personal idol (like 'Samson'—the owner or driver most probably saw the film 'Samson'); or they may be an expression of the driver's relationship to God, or Allah. Kojo Gyinaye Kyei and Hannah Schreckenbach, *No Time to Die* (Accra: Catholic Press, 1975), 7.

⁹³ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.



Fig. 15. Taxi Inscriptions, Accra

Likewise many marketplace workers adorn their shops with vivid expressions of Jesus' identity and significance to them. Fig. 16 displays how plumbers in Kumasi publicise their roadside workshop.

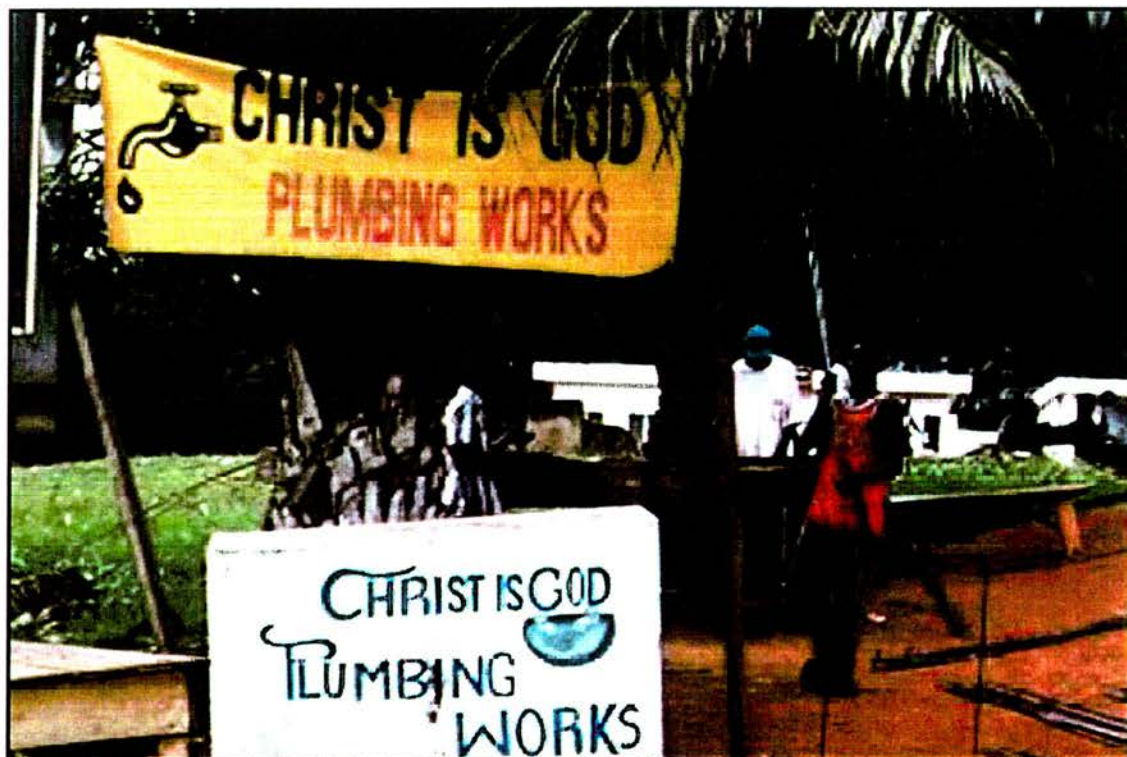


Fig. 16. Roadside Workshop, Kumasi

Informal conversations with shop-owners reveal their hope in Jesus for economic prosperity. Two examples suffice at present. Rebecca Owusu advertises “Wonderful Jesus” across her brightly-coloured shop in a Kumasi *trotro* station, illustrated in Fig. 17. Asked why Jesus is wonderful, she explains that some people starting businesses look to fetishes and other gods for success, but she believes that Jesus will help her.⁹⁴

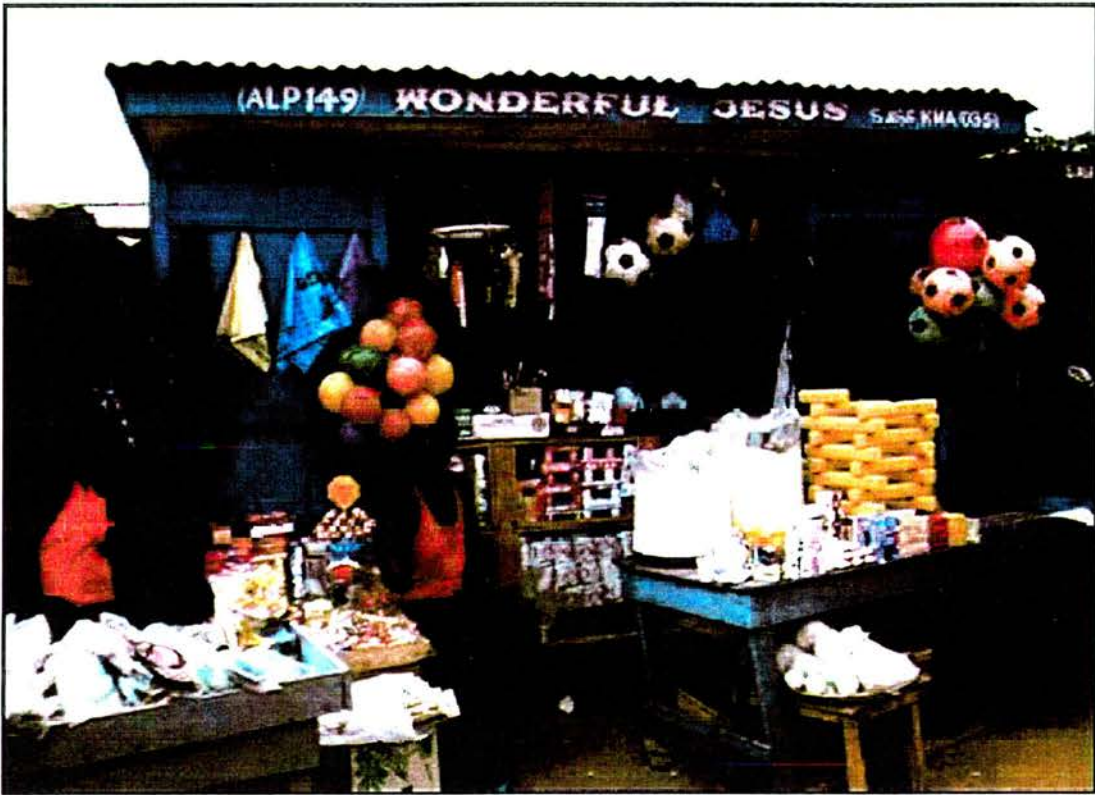


Fig. 17. Trotro Station Shop, Kumasi

⁹⁴ Rebecca Owusu, Informal Conversation, Kumasi: July 14, 1998. Conversation in English.

Similarly, a dress-making shop in Kumasi bears the signboard, “Grace High Class Fashion (Don’t Despair),” featured in Fig. 18. Across the front awning is painted “*Hwe dee Awurade aye*,” which translates, “See what the Lord has done.” Along the side awning is added “*Yesu Mo*,” a common expression of praise which combines the sense of “Congratulations / Well done / Thank you Jesus.” When asked about the signs, the women workers said that they had had a stall in the Asafo Market but it had burned down. They had no hope, but this is what God had done for them, and therefore they proclaim “*Yesu, Mo*.”⁹⁵

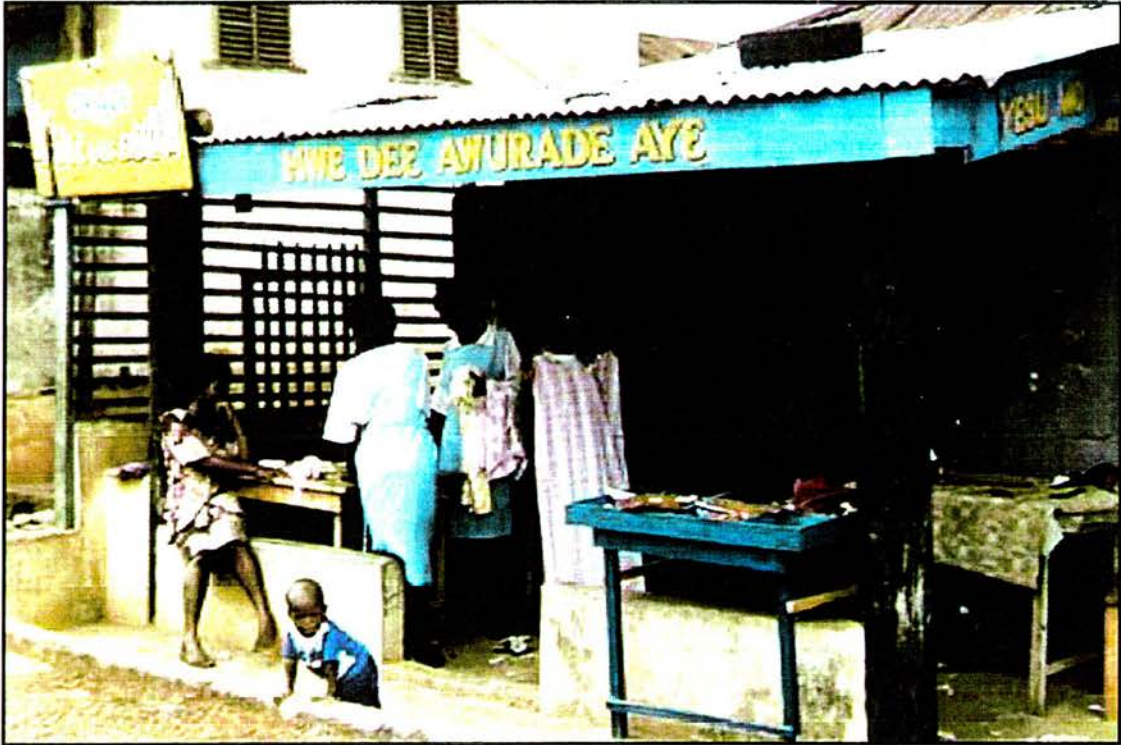


Fig. 18. Women’s Fashion Shop, Kumasi

The Ghanaian evidence thus corroborates that from Kenya and Uganda concerning the significance of Jesus Christ to contemporary life. Across the three African contexts, the witness of selected Christians affirms the potentiality and the actuality of christological praxis contributing positively to social transformation. Hope in Jesus, against all odds in the contemporary political, economic and social ills, emerges as a central motif. Evidently this hope is not merely a utopian dream, for concrete manifestations of change are clearly attested: from a priest acting on government authority to bring about tangible liberation in the lives of marginalized peoples, to market women celebrating Jesus as the one who enables them to forge a

⁹⁵ Informal Conversation, Kumasi: July 14, 1998; translation of the conversation and signboards by research assistant Joseph Bansu.

living under difficult economic circumstances. The examples indicated do not dismiss the gravity of suffering in these contemporary situations. They do illustrate widespread conviction that social transformation at the national and international levels can only begin with individuals. The individuals featured in this section on social transformation therefore serve as cairns, signalling ways in which Jesus is deemed to be significant today politically, economically, and socially.

4. Ecclesial Reformation

Christology is closely related to ecclesiology. The fundamental concern prompting African christology naturally extends to the central question eliciting African ecclesiology: “How can the Church be truly African and truly Christian?”⁹⁶ While the subject commands in-depth attention, the present discussion is restricted to a brief sketch of Jesus’ significance to contemporary African ecclesiology according to the selected African Christians.

A dominant model developed in recent African ecclesiology is that of the church as extended family or clan.⁹⁷ Important consequences stem from this conception and foster reformation in church polity and practice. Bujo’s proposal of Jesus as proto-ancestor forms the basis for his “Christological-Eucharistic Ecclesiology.”⁹⁸ Just as every individual in African tradition shares basic responsibility for strengthening the life-force of the community, so all Christians are to enhance communal life within the church. The challenge is addressed especially to church leaders, who are called “to deepen and to transmit to others the life of Jesus Christ, the Proto-Ancestor.”⁹⁹ Hindrances to this process, such as “clericalism,” “episcopalism,” and “sacerdotalism,” are decried as “a kind of cancerous growth which slowly but surely chokes the proto-ancestral life.”¹⁰⁰ Among the many ecclesial reforms advocated, Bujo underlines that “our christology *should* criticise the concept of hierarchy in the Catholic Church.”¹⁰¹ He develops the notion of Jesus as the “new Abraham” and the “father of the faithful,” on the basis of the gospel

⁹⁶ J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, “Introduction,” in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1990), 1.

⁹⁷ For example, see John Mary Waliggo, “The African Clan as the True Model of the African Church,” in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1990), 111-127.

⁹⁸ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O’Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 92ff.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰¹ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

account of Jesus choosing the twelve disciples representing the twelve tribes of Israel. He therefore asserts,

The Pope is not a 'Holy Father'; he is a 'brother,' the '*eldest* brother,' because the father is Christ, according to this text. And then, at the level of the parish, the priest is not a 'father' for the parish; he is a 'brother' among other brothers and sisters.¹⁰²

Further recommendations are directed towards priests, religious orders, missionaries and laity. Again, the various proposals for reform are interwoven within the overall christological pattern of Jesus as proto-ancestor. Thus Bujo concludes, as noted in Chapter 6, that orthopraxis derived from the model of Jesus as life-giver and ancestor could provide "a veritable ferment" for transforming African society today.¹⁰³

Similarly, Pobee relates his christological reflections to specific issues within the Anglican Church of Ghana. For instance, he questions what it means to affirm Christ as "the Prince of Peace" in confronting one situation of indiscipline and struggle for power at the diocesan level. He concludes, "I want our common affirmation of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to be at the centre of how we organise our life as a diocese. It's not just a power game! It's not just administration. For me it's a question of our credibility."¹⁰⁴

Issues of hierarchical structure and power are further questioned in relation to women's participation in the church as the family of God. According to Oduyoye, Christian baptism signifies entry into "a new humanity modelled after Christ," and therefore requires dismantling barriers of classism, racism, and sexism (Gal. 3:28).¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, Nasimiyu Wasike asserts,

Therefore, for men to be what they have to be, women must be allowed to actualize their potential and to freely participate in all ministerial roles. This is a way in which humanity could be restored to wholeness. Women and men in the Church must be educated to equality, and women's expectations of themselves have to be raised to a model for human justice.¹⁰⁶

This call does not arise from women alone, as noted in Chapter 3.¹⁰⁷ For example, Bishop Palmer-Buckle admits that it remains problematic at present for women to enter the priesthood in the Catholic church. Yet he stresses the need for women in

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See p. 200 above.

¹⁰⁴ John Pobee, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Nasimiyu Wasike, Anne, "African Women's Legitimate Role in Church Ministry," in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1990), 68.

¹⁰⁷ See pp. 83-84 above.

leadership roles such as presidents of parochial councils, and heads of diocesan financial committees, pastoral programmes, and the laity Justice and Peace Commissions. He concludes,

I'm looking forward to the day when I have many more women participating in these, because they have a different perspective that has been lacking for quite a while. We can talk about it as men, but we can never feel the way women feel, absolutely not. And so *they* must be the ones to tell us *how* they feel about Jesus, ... their church, ... issues of justice, ... compassion, ... love, ... and sin. It would be a wonderful contribution, especially to the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁸

Archbishop David Gitari of the Anglican Church of Kenya voices further witness, as follows:

St. Paul makes it clear that in Christ there is neither female nor male.... Now that we have started ordaining women (I ordained more in Kirinyaga than any other bishop), there are more ordained women in my former diocese and they are doing a better job than men. ... There are certain things women are able to do which ... men cannot do. They can penetrate in some places, especially ministering to fellow women, which men could not have done. So I think the church cannot be the church without women playing their role.¹⁰⁹

The need to redress women's participation in church leadership is far from being met completely. Nonetheless, some gains have apparently been made in this regard. Though the church must be ever reforming, evidence from the textual and oral sources suggests that the African christologies are exerting influence upon church polity regarding issues of structure, power, and gender.

Church practice is likewise affected by Africans' perceptions of Jesus. Only brief summary statements are offered here by way of example. Jesus' prayer for unity among his followers (John 17) is fundamental to the recurring emphasis on ecumenism in African Christianity.¹¹⁰ While problems of denominationalism continue to breed divisions among local churches, national and international organisations seek to overcome such divisions by portraying believers from other

¹⁰⁸ Charles Palmer-Buckle, Oral Interview, Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.

¹⁰⁹ David Gitari, Oral Interview, Nairobi: May 19, 1998.

¹¹⁰ For example, see J. N. K. Mugambi, "The Ecumenical Movement and the Future of the Church in Africa," in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1990), 5-28; "Towards Ecumenical Consensus on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," in *Christian Mission and Social Transformation: A Kenyan Perspective*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi (Nairobi: National Council of Churches of Kenya, 1989), 108-117; John G. Gatu, "Ecumenism," in *Christian Mission and Social Transformation: A Kenyan Perspective*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi (Nairobi: National Council of Churches of Kenya, 1989), 103-107; John Pobee, ed., *Towards Viable Theological Education: Ecumenical Imperative, Catalyst of Renewal* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997).

church traditions as “true relatives” within the wider clan of Christ.¹¹¹ Moreover, Jesus as healer features prominently in the preaching, prayers, testimonies and healing ministries of many African churches, as noted in Chapter 5. Jesus as ancestor is much less evident in church practices to date, yet indications of the christological image appear for example in vernacular prayers addressed to Jesus as “*Nana*,” and in certain liturgical innovations mentioned in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 indicates that whichever terms are favoured, the image of Jesus as liberator/saviour/redeemer is foundational to Christian worship and to Christian witness in church and society.

Furthermore, the extent to which Jesus has found “a place to feel at home” in Africa is widely reflected in church practices. As African Christians have increasingly appropriated Jesus in accordance with African culture, visible changes have occurred for example in preaching and worship. Kwesi Dickson relates his experience of being the first Methodist minister to preach in traditional Ghanaian cloth in the early 1970s, and the stir which this created at the time.¹¹² Now African attire among ministers, or African influence on church vestments, is commonplace. African music, lyrics and dance animate worship in a great number of churches, as Fig. 19 illustrates.

¹¹¹ Waliggo, “The African Clan as the True Model of the African,” 125. Examples of Christian organisations committed to ecumenism include the All Africa Conference of Churches, The National Council of Churches of Kenya, The Council of Churches in Ghana, the Association of Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), and the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA).

¹¹² Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.



Fig. 19. Worship in Legon Interdenominational Church

Traditional artwork and symbols reflect Jesus' entry into the spiritual universe of Africans, thereby inspiring more authentic worship in local churches. For example at Holy Trinity Church in Buru Buru, Nairobi, on the wall behind the altar, a large mural depicts the life of Jesus in African images. Fig. 20 exhibits a close-up of the mural.

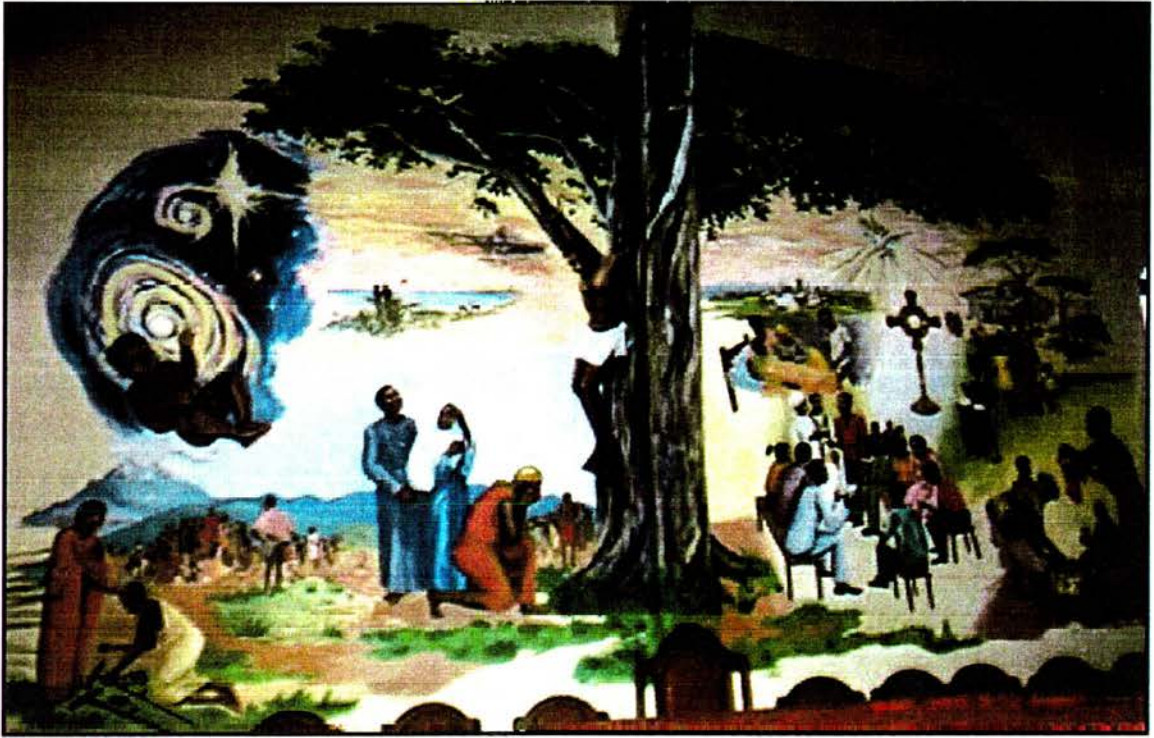


Fig. 20. Holy Trinity Church, Nairobi

At St. Francis Spiritual Centre in Nairobi, the tabernacle for the Consecrated Host is shaped like a traditional African hut, displayed in Fig. 21. In front of the hut are maize cobs and local festive drink in African gourds. The significance here lies not only in the African home where Jesus dwells in the form of the Eucharist, but also in the elements of the Eucharist depicted in local staple foods. Although the indigenous foods are not used in worship at this site, the symbols portray what many Africans Christians call for in celebrating the Eucharist with local foodstuffs.¹¹³



Fig. 21. Tabernacle for the Consecrated Host, Nairobi

Thus there is ample evidence of Jesus' significance to church polity and practice in the selected African contexts. Whatever church traditions have been inherited, the emergence of contemporary African christologies clearly shapes new ecclesial models and manifestations of African Christianity. Naturally, many issues remain in need of address, yet there is no doubt that Jesus is highly significant to ongoing ecclesial reformation.

D. Jesus in Africa Today: Christological Reflection

Reflection and praxis are integral to christology, as pointed out above. Attention focuses upon each in turn for the purpose of highlighting the significance

¹¹³ For example, see Jean-Marc Ela, "Eucharist in the African Churches: Sign of Salvation or of Dependence?" chap. in *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 1-8.

of Jesus to life in Africa today. The present section concentrates on christological reflection, summarising key aspects of the topic to suggest its significance first to African Christianity and subsequently to world Christianity.

1. The Formulation of Contextual Christologies: Personal Encounter and Communal Affirmation

One of the chief distinguishing features of contemporary African christologies, confirmed by this study, is that they are contextual. Far from abstract, academic pursuits, these christologies arise from people seeking to discover Jesus while grappling with concrete issues experienced in real life. Pobee stresses that “christology is always a confession” or “a question of relevant affirmation. ... What really does it mean to affirm Jesus as saviour in this context?”¹¹⁴ Kwesi Dickson echoes the concern, explaining, “[M]y whole idea is *looking* at Christ in the realities of *my* life.... The *basic* thing is *who* is Christ in my circumstances?”¹¹⁵ Two main points flow from this common stance, indicating elements of the significance of contemporary African christologies.

The first point is that for most African Christians, authentic christological reflection arises out of personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Emmanuel Martey sets forth the classical definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding.” He then asserts, “So if we take christology as an *aspect* of theology, ... then before you even christologise, you should have faith in Jesus Christ. It’s very, very important, so that, without faith, I don’t know what you are going to write about.”¹¹⁶ Again he stresses the importance of personal knowledge of Christ, declaring that the crucial issue is not “christology from above or from below, Pannenberg and Barth and the rest. But, the question should be, ‘Who is Jesus Christ for us today?’ ... [In] the final analysis [it] is, ‘But what do *you* say?’”¹¹⁷ Peter Kodjo explains that this personal knowledge of Jesus “is not an *intellectual* exercise, it is usually an *encounter*. It is only in the encounter that the fact of Jesus becomes very vivid for me personally, and I guess for many people in my experience as a congregational pastor.” He further points out that the knowledge becomes “*discernible* in the things which happen daily.” He adds, “I have realised that I get close to Jesus only when I can *find* Jesus in the context of

¹¹⁴ John Pobee, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

¹¹⁵ Kwesi Dickson, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

¹¹⁶ Emmanuel Martey, Oral Interview, Akropong, Akuapem: Aug. 24, 28, 1998.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

life....”¹¹⁸ These insights are in keeping with Mugambi’s proposal for “the theological analogy of *Encounter*” as essential to African christologies.¹¹⁹

So Jesus is experienced personally, according to the selected African Christians, and he is affirmed publicly. Therefore the second point is that christological reflection arises in the community of faith and in dialogue with other communities of faith. This observation is widely attested in the present research. Dan Antwi states that “it’s the kind of *experience* people have with Jesus that *determines* the nomenclature of worship and so on.”¹²⁰ Consequently, Robert Aboagye-Mensah emphasises that “African theology should more or less be found within the churches.”¹²¹ Instead of theologians artificially coining christological titles and trying to incorporate them into church use, Aboagye-Mensah and others call for theologians to listen to the language about Jesus employed in the faith community, to reflect on it and to then articulate these christologies on behalf of the community. This does not preclude creative, christological construction by theologians. By and large, however, the evidence from this thesis strongly supports christological formulation “from below,” as theologians articulate the perceptions of Jesus already operative in the lives of African Christians. Abraham Akrong acknowledges that “a time of christology of the pew is coming up,” as for example titles and attributes of the traditional God are now extended to Jesus.¹²²

Certainly all six of the selected African theologians express their understanding of the role of the theologian along these lines. Pobee speaks of the theologian as “an articulate individual in the womb of the community of faith.”¹²³ Ela identifies the local community in North Cameroon as the vital context of his theology. He describes his transition from Strasbourg to Tokombéré as “an intellectual and spiritual *revolution*” in which all of his prior theology was called into question. In place of academic theology within the concrete walls of libraries, he discovered “theology under the tree.” In place of university professors as his masters, he met with the old, the young, and the women in the community. He stresses that the essential thing for him was this immediate contact with the life of Africans in their everyday situations. Instead of starting from the questions posed by classical

¹¹⁸ Peter Kodjo, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

¹¹⁹ J. N. K. Mugambi, *The African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd., 1989), 162. Mugambi explains that “Jesus encounters people in their own situation.” He adds that this kind of “religious experience, when effective, is always very deeply personal” and “closest to our daily lives.” See Mugambi, “The Future of the Church,” 33.

¹²⁰ Dan Antwi, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

¹²¹ Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Oral Interview, Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

¹²² Abraham Akrong, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

¹²³ John Pobee, Informal Conversation, April 3, 2001.

Western theology, like whether God exists, he began by listening to the villagers and reappropriating their questions as the departure point for christological reflection.¹²⁴ In the same way, Nasimiyyu Wasike specifies that she writes for “African women first.”¹²⁵

Yet each of these theologians also anticipates a wider audience for their publications. Nasimiyyu Wasike explains that given the plurality of contemporary theologies, she expects that her writings from the perspective of an African woman offer something to African men and to the universal church. Ela states that his theology aims to be theology in dialogue with that of other cultures. He draws attention to the epistemological rupture which has occurred, breaking the prior monologue of theological discourse arising in the Western context and spreading from there. He insists,

Pour la première fois dans l’histoire du christianisme, on parle de Dieu non pas à partir de l’Amérique du Nord, et de ses problèmes, de ses défis. On parle de Dieu à partir de l’Afrique. ... Les Occidentaux n’ont jamais fait ça. ... Ils ont ignoré que pour comprendre Dieu maintenant, il faut être à l’écoute des questions qui sont des questions africaines.¹²⁶

Hence Ela formulates his theology in hopes that it will challenge theologians for example in North America, Europe and Asia.¹²⁷ Likewise Pobeé underlines that he writes his christological reflections “as an African, but not as an African in isolation.” He claims that the test of his theology is whether what he writes is consonant with his home community. Yet he also has foreigners read his work, for “if *they* can understand what I’m saying, then the theology does not become something esoteric for the initiated.”¹²⁸

To conclude, christological articulation is born not from creeds and doctrines in the first instance, but from personal encounter with Jesus Christ. As believers reflect on scripture and on their experience of Christ in the concrete realities of life, they express their convictions in the community of faith, particularly in the context

¹²⁴ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

¹²⁵ Anne Nasimiyyu Wasike, Oral Interview, Nairobi: April 21, 1998.

¹²⁶ Jean-Marc Ela, Oral Interview, Montreal: Jan. 8, 1999.

For the first time in the history of Christianity, we speak of God not from North America, and from its problems, from its challenges. We speak of God from Africa. ... Westerners have never done that. ... They are unaware that in order to understand God now, it is necessary to be listening to questions which are African questions.

¹²⁷ Ibid. In the context of this discussion in the oral interview, Ela read a paragraph of critique by Edward Schillebeeckx on his own work, *African Cry*. In the critique, Schillebeeckx acknowledged that he was profoundly moved by Ela’s theology, and that this was a new experience for him as a European theology to be challenged by an African theologian.

¹²⁸ John Pobeé, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

of worship. The present research has confirmed the emergence of creative African christologies in liturgical contexts, that is, in the songs, prayers, and testimonial confessions of local believers gathered together for worship. It is significant to note that the process of christological formulation attested in this study reflects a similar process to that of the original emergence of christologies in the apostolic churches. New Testament scholar Larry Hurtado demonstrates that behind the christological debates and creeds of later centuries lies the “Christ-devotion” of the earliest Christians who encountered and affirmed the Risen Jesus.¹²⁹ On the basis of extensive research in first-century Christianity, Hurtado concludes,

The christological rhetoric of the New Testament and of the later christological controversies and creeds reflects the attempt to explain and defend intellectually a development that began in human terms in profound religious experiences and in corporate worship. Whoever would seek to understand truly the fervent christological discussion of ancient or modern times must first appreciate the religious life that preceded and underlay the ancient development and that continues to inspire sacrificial commitment and intense intellectual effort to this very day.¹³⁰

Parallels between first-century christological formulation and that of twentieth-century Africa merit further investigation. However, for the present discussion it suffices to point out that the ongoing affirmation of the identity and significance of Jesus by African Christians gives rise to christological innovations, with theologians playing a specialised role of discerning and articulating the operative christologies within the community. They do so for the sake of the local community, but also with the intention of dialoguing with other faith communities. While elaboration lies beyond the present confines, the theologians in this study emphasise that the wider dialogue must be both inter-denominational and inter-faith in orientation.

2. The Importance of the Vernacular in Christological Reflection

Throughout this thesis, the importance of vernacular in christological expression has repeatedly come to light. What remains here is to underscore Pobeé’s point, noted in Chapter 3, that vernacular extends beyond language to assume the

¹²⁹ Larry Hurtado employs the term “Christ-devotion” to encompass “Christology,” or “the beliefs about Jesus held by earliest Christians and the factors that shaped them,” and also “the wider matters of the role of Jesus in the beliefs and religious life of ancient Christians.” Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), viii.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 128. See also Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*, The Didsbury Lecture Series 1999 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1999); “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament,” *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000): 183-205.

world-view or “world-taken-for-granted” of a people.¹³¹ With mother tongue so fundamental to cultural identity, it is also vital to christological reflection at every level. First, in the realm of African Christian experience, the impact of vernacular in enhancing christological expression has become clear in the present research. Respondents have explained that certain insights about Jesus simply cannot be conveyed as vividly in English as in their own mother tongue. Ela voices the need graphically in calling for a “Passover of language,” as follows:

In Africa, the confrontation between the message of the gospel and the African universe must bring forth a meaning with the power to transform the lives of African Christians. Today the faith of the church in Africa is in danger of death because the church tends to forget that its cultural dimensions are marked by its Greco-Latin heritage. If the faith of Africans is not to die, it must become a vision of the world that they can feel is theirs; European cultural orientations must be stripped away. There is an urgent need to reject present foreign models of expression if we are to breathe new life into the spoken Word. Our church must experience a Passover of language, or the meaning of the Christian message will not be understood.¹³²

It is in this context that Ela advocates the reformulation of the gospel message through the mediation of African culture and symbolism, indicated in Chapter 5.¹³³ Thus the evidence from this thesis concurs with Kwame Bediako’s observations regarding the primacy of vernacular in African Christian experience. From the account of Pentecost in Acts 2, Bediako contends that the ability to hear and respond to the word of God in one’s own language is pivotal to authentic religious encounter.¹³⁴ Following the process of christological formulation outlined above, the encounter with Christ in African vernaculars has serious implications for theological construction, which forms the next point.

Second, at the level of formal christological articulation, Bujo insists that it “must employ an African theological language.”¹³⁵ Otherwise, there is risk that the

¹³¹ See p. 87 above. Pobee attributes the term to Alfred Schutz, a sociologist.

¹³² Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 44.

¹³³ See p. 113 above.

¹³⁴ Kwame Bediako, “How Is It That We Hear in Our Own Languages the Wonders of God?": Christianity as Africa’s Religion,” chap. in *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 60.

¹³⁵ Bénédet Bujo, “African Theology: Which Direction to Take and What Methodology to Use?” *African Christian Studies Occasional Paper no. 3 and 4* (Nov./Dec. 1985): 10. The quote refers to “African theology” more generally, yet it occurs within a wider context of methodological directives which includes considerations for christology. The point is also reiterated in the oral interview, as noted below, with specific reference to christology.

christologies may not take on “flesh and blood,” but merely speak to the literate and thereby foster a *bourgeois* Christianity. He therefore urges mother tongues as

the means which finally guarantee an active contribution by the simple faithful to a more genuine African theology, outside the academic ivory towers. In this way a process can be initiated that will lead from a clericalist church *for* the people to a church *by* the people and *of* the people.¹³⁶

While publishing christologies in African vernaculars remains a moot point, given the logistical obstacles entailed in printing and dissemination, the priority of vernacular in christological formulation is clear.¹³⁷

Third, at the level of christological analysis, Bujo goes even further in recommending that interpreters of African christologies must gain competency in the relevant mother tongues. Chapter 6 mentioned a European critic who misrepresented Bujo’s ancestral christology due to mistaken presuppositions concerning the English term “ancestor” and its connotations in European culture.¹³⁸ Bujo cites additional examples of miscommunication, when Europeans and Africans employ the same term in English but associate it with different meanings (e.g. “brother,” “mama”). He therefore concludes,

Christology should start with *our own languages*, mother tongues. *Then* we can do a theology which can be understood by our *people*. And also *if* somebody wants to discuss it with us, he or she has to first study our languages, because you have a lot of philosophy in the mother tongues.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Bénézet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990), 128-129.

¹³⁷ For example, Pobee argues strongly that personal ministry in local vernacular remains high priority for him in Ghana. He also states, “Ideally, African theologies should be in the vernacular.” Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 23. Yet he believes that publishing in vernacular is neither economically viable nor terribly strategic, since the oral culture of largely illiterate people means few would read theology in vernacular. He therefore contends that African theologians best concentrate on publishing in the colonial languages, despite the disadvantages, for the benefits of wider dissemination. John Pobee, “African Theology: *Quo Vadimus*,” Seminar and Discussion, Edinburgh: Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, Oct. 31, 2000.

On the other hand, if the vernacular paradigm is as important to theology as it is claimed, perhaps a reassessment of priorities in publication is required, notwithstanding the economic difficulties and limited audience. The widespread impact of Afua Kuma’s small booklet of poems and prayers to Jesus, referred to throughout this thesis, is a case in point. Published separately in the original Twi and in English translation, the booklet has had a notable impact both in Ghana, as attested in the oral interviews, and beyond, as African theologians like Mercy Oduyoye and Kwame Bediako refer to her work in their publications. If the christological reflections of an illiterate peasant woman in vernacular can enhance African theology to such an extent, perhaps there is greater need for African theologians to publish in vernacular (even with copies in English translation) than Pobee is willing to concede.

¹³⁸ See p. 225 above.

¹³⁹ Bénézet Bujo, Oral Interview, Fribourg: Oct. 29, 1998.

So vernacular is crucial to all aspects of christological reflection, from encountering Christ, to articulating that experience, to analysing that expression of christology.

3. Jesus at the Well: African Women's Christologies

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (John 4) may be seen as a portrait, or a paradigm, of what is presently occurring in African women's christologies. Just as Jesus cut through deep prejudices of race, religion, gender and class to make meaningful contact with the Samaritan woman in her particular context of suffering, so the women in this study relate how Christ meets them directly in their various contexts of suffering. Women's contributions to contemporary African christologies have been highlighted throughout the thesis, but are recapitulated here for their significance to the field of study.

This study provides ample evidence of women's insights into all of the topics under consideration, and not simply gender issues. However, their voices rise distinctively and poignantly with respect to gender concerns that deeply affect them. Significance thus lies in that their christological reflections are often silhouetted against enduring sexism in African societies and churches. In the section above on ecclesial reform, attention was drawn to the impact of women in church life and the need to enhance their participation in leadership. With respect to social issues, women's contributions certainly contribute to reconstructive theologies by overcoming the previous polarisation between inculturation and liberation christologies. Nasimiyu Wasike was noted in Chapter 4 for her observation that they are two sides of the same coin.¹⁴⁰ She makes the point in the context of vehemently denouncing polygamy, as follows:

Personally I have spoken very, very strongly and *loudly against* that. ... [T]his is *not inculturation!* This is the continuation of *enslavement* of some human persons, and Jesus *liberated* us. He set us free! Therefore we cannot continue some of the practices or institutions in our tradition that are actually *oppressive* and *dehumanising*....¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ See p. 97 above.

¹⁴¹ Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Oral Interview, April 21, 1998. Elsewhere she explains that polygamy is among the "degrading and segregating systems"

which legitimise the exploitation of some while preserving the privileged status, prestige, and power of others. Polygamy is one of those systems that legalize the inferiority and subordination of women to men. Christ's message is one that gives full life to all and mends the brokenness of our humanity. Polygamy reflects the brokenness of our humanity, and as such it cannot be accommodated by Christianity. "Polygamy: A Feminist Critique," in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 115-116.

Nasimiyu Wasike's verdict on polygamy is not unanimous among African Christians. Yet she joins the chorus of African women (and men) who criticise it as one aspect of African culture deemed incompatible with the gospel of Christ. In Musimbi Kanyoro's words, polygamy remains "a 'thorn in the flesh' of the Church of Africa."¹⁴²

Oduyoye argues just as vehemently against certain other cultural practices considered violent against women in Africa, such as wife-beating, bodily modifications for beauty (e.g. fattening, body-piercing for some ornaments, elongated necks), and female circumcision.¹⁴³ She asserts,

The deafening silence of the Church in the face of indescribable cruelty to the girl-child as she is prepared to please men, must surely be an indicator that the whole Church has yet to wake up to its total calling. The global challenge of the Churches' solidarity with women is particularly acute in Africa.¹⁴⁴

Again, the basis for her charge is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and particularly Jesus' teaching against the use of power in "lording over" others.¹⁴⁵ The concern is to break down the systems and attitudes which exploit, abuse, or do violence in any form to others, especially those most vulnerable like the girl-child.

Other women, noted in Part II, voice the significance of Jesus to them in their experience of cultural stigmas against singleness or childlessness. Moreover, Mary Kizito recounts how her mother became freed from various cultural traditions, such as women not being able to eat chicken, eggs, pork, and certain kinds of fish, and how she herself was not required to kneel down in greeting her father as tradition had stipulated. She then concludes, "So Jesus sets you free! *Free*, you are not bogged down with traditions, and he himself was *breaking* some of the traditions!"¹⁴⁶ Additional issues arise for women in political, economic, legal and other social spheres. While acknowledging the gravity of gender issues still in need of address,

¹⁴² Musimbi Kanyoro, "Polygamy: A Dilemma for the Church in Africa," in *Culture, Women and Theology*, ed. John S. Pobee (Delhi: The Indian Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 171.

¹⁴³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 164-166.

¹⁴⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Church of the Future in Africa," 75. Presumably Oduyoye is referring to certain practices of female puberty rites, although it is not specified in this context. See also T. M. Hinga, "Christianity and Female Puberty Rites in Africa: The Agikuyu Case," in *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa: Interaction Between Christian and African Traditional Religion*, ed. James L. Cox (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 168-179; Pacificah F. Okemwa, "Clitoridectomy Rituals and the Social Well-Being of Women," in *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996), 177-185.

¹⁴⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Church of the Future in Africa," 83, n. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Mary Kizito, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

the selected African women nonetheless believe that Jesus is significant to women's concerns. Marie Gacambi concludes with an honest admission of the hope and the anguish faced by African Christian women today:

Obviously Jesus is really the one who is inspiring us, because ... we need to reflect and to theologise on the issues of women. I think our hope is *inspired* by the belief that *Jesus* came to break all barriers—no Jews and Greeks, no female, no male. ... So, I can say that Jesus has a lot to help us forge ahead, but it is not easy. Sometimes we just wonder, really, how long are we to wait? You know, how long are we to wait?¹⁴⁷

As the women strive for more justice in gender issues, certain themes characterise the christologies they articulate. One of the central motifs to emerge in the thesis is the deep sense of Jesus' solidarity with women in their suffering. Inherent in that solidarity is a profound intimacy with Jesus expressed by many African women. For example, Margaret Asabea marvels that God himself, in Jesus, passed through the birth canal of a woman. She then comments,

I think Christ is more *intimate* to women than to men! He *feels* the *woes*, the *wounds*, the *very heartbeat* of a woman. Christ feels it *better* than any other person, because he was in the *womb* with the placenta. The ... *heartbeat* of the mother regulated *his heartbeat!*¹⁴⁸

This camaraderie between Jesus and African women is further expressed in the supremacy he is said to hold in their lives, and in the strongly relational images with which they identify him. Women in all categories in this study tend to speak of Jesus primarily as friend, or similarly as companion, lover, husband, and "all in all." Oduyoye comments,

In the Circle, we haven't picked christology as an issue, and yet *through* the religion and culture and ecclesiology that we have been doing, there is a lot of christological things that have come out. ... [W]hen we have prayers and worship services, they're *very*, *very* christocentric. The hymns they choose, the choruses they sing, are *all* about this Jesus the companion, Jesus the helper, Jesus the friend. It's *that* kind of relationship that they have with Jesus.¹⁴⁹

The discussion of African women's liberation christologies in Chapter 7 highlights additional characteristics of women's christologies, such as their holistic emphasis and their manifestation of the interplay between faith and life. Finally, Oduyoye explains that in Africa there is "a nascent feminism which grants full personhood to

¹⁴⁷ Marie Gacambi, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹⁴⁸ Margaret Asabea, Oral Interview, Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

¹⁴⁹ Mercy Oduyoye, Oral Interview, Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

the human-male as to the human-female.”¹⁵⁰ That is, African women tend not to promote antagonism between the sexes, but rather “the wholeness of the community as made up of male and female beings.”¹⁵¹ Accordingly, she emphasises that “[t]here is no sexual distinction in the Trinity, but qualities labelled feminine and masculine are all manifested in Christ Jesus who is the image par excellence of God.”¹⁵² Jesus thus becomes the model for all humanity, female and male.

It is precisely for this reason that African Christian women insist upon articulating “the feminine experience as a legitimate part of the data for theological reflection or we will continue to live in our brokenness.”¹⁵³ Again, it has been noted that women are not alone in voicing this need. Kenyan Catholic priest Peter Gichure acknowledges that women in his society are still oppressed and that theology “is *very* male dominated.” He asserts that “women theologians must be *allowed* to ... *do* theology, as women. And the church must be able to accept theology by women...”¹⁵⁴ Even stronger censure is expressed by Tinyiko Maluleke. After noting the “explosion” of African women’s theological activities since the 1980s, he states, “However, it is a serious indictment of African male theologies that women’s issues have not received immediate and unreserved acceptance.”¹⁵⁵ Echoing the same point, more positively, the last word rightfully goes to Oduyoye for her role across the continent in fostering African women’s christologies as part of the recent “explosion” in theological reflection: “The future Church is one that ensures that women’s liberative theology becomes an integral part of the Churches’ contribution, made visible in the Church and in the Academy.”¹⁵⁶

E. Conclusion

Recent theologies of reconstruction underline the need for African Christianity to play a vital role in social transformation across the continent today. Whether or not the language of reconstruction is employed, the evidence from this study has disclosed various ways in which African christologies contribute towards the renewal of individuals and communities. The necessity of christological praxis has been confirmed, and the reality of its impact upon the contemporary context has

¹⁵⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Roots of African Christian Feminism,” in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, ed. John S. Pobee and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1986), 37.

¹⁵¹ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 121.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Gichure, Oral Interview, Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

¹⁵⁵ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (Nov. 1997): 20.

¹⁵⁶ Oduyoye, “The Church of the Future in Africa,” 78.

been illustrated through the combined witness of selected African Christians to personal formation, social transformation and ecclesial reformation. Notwithstanding the gravity of issues still in need of address, there are definite indications of the significance of Jesus Christ to the lives of contemporary African believers.

Furthermore, as African Christians encounter Jesus personally and affirm his identity and significance within the community of faith, creative christological reflection is born. From the crucible of contemporary realities in Africa where the interface of biblical and African traditions occurs, emergent christologies display potent signs of how Jesus is consciously appropriated by these Christians. Certainly women's recent contributions have been highlighted in this regard. Additionally, the importance of vernacular has been underscored for its role in enhancing the authenticity of christological formulation and expression in Africa. Finally, it has been stressed that the christologies forged within local communities must then engage with christological expressions from other communities ecumenically, internationally, and in inter-faith contexts. Thus the significance of Jesus Christ to African Christians lies beyond question, according to the believers informing this study. The final question for brief consideration in the next chapter is what import these contemporary African christologies have for world Christianity.

**CONCLUSION:
AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY IN
CONTEMPORARY WORLD CHRISTIANITY**

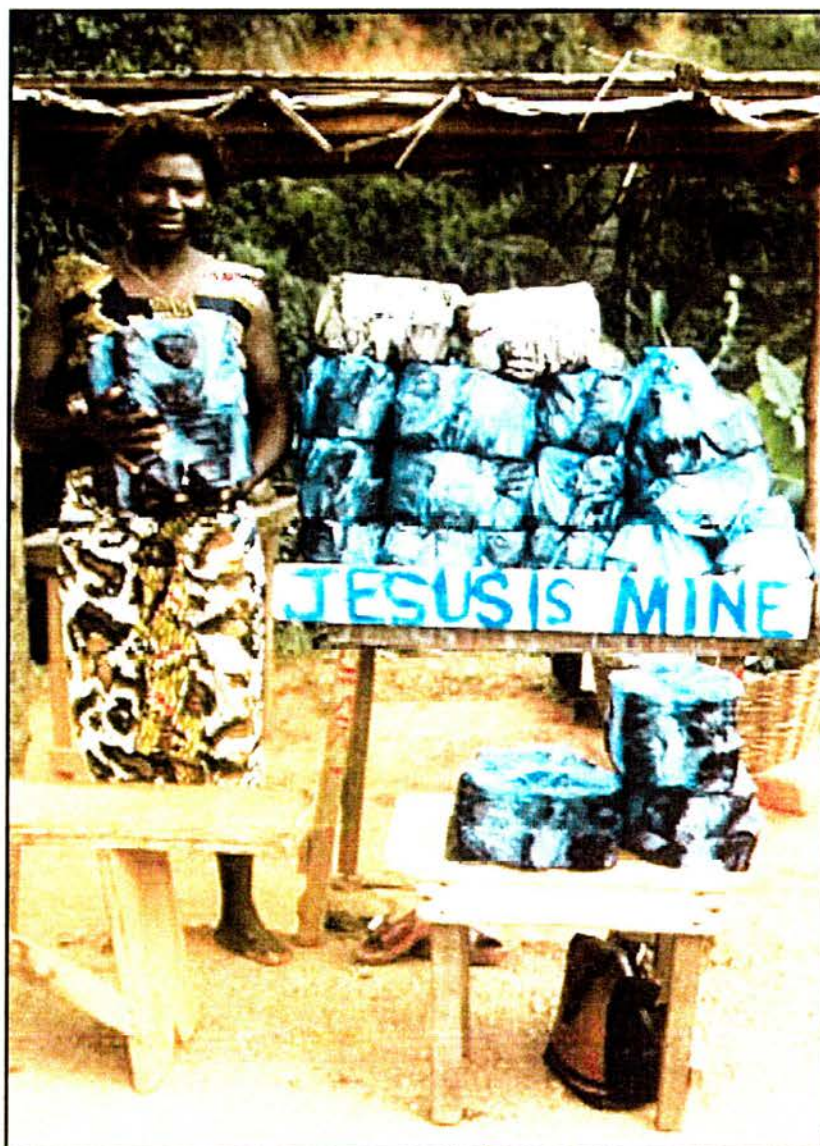


Fig. 22. Roadside Kenke (local staple food) Seller, Ghana

The test of any cultural construct of the gospel is whether it enables growth, change and transformation in and into the image and likeness of God through Christ.¹

- John S. Pobee, Ghanaian theologian

¹ John S. Pobee, *Christ Would Be An African Too*, Gospel & Culture Studies Vol. 9, West Africa (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), 32.

Contemporary African christologies command attention because of Africa's prominent place in world Christianity at the turn of the third millennium. Just as the thesis opened with this assertion, so it concludes. Research findings have shown beyond doubt that the selected African Christians voice confident, contextual responses to the fundamental question of Jesus Christ, "Who do you say I am?" The christological confessions affirm that Jesus is consciously appropriated in accordance with biblical and Christian tradition *and* historical and current realities in Africa. In the interface between biblical and African traditions, set within the crucible of African affairs today, emergent christologies offer fresh insights into the identity and significance of Jesus Christ. They thereby mark important strides in the advance of African Christianity.

Acknowledging progress achieved thus far does not suggest that recent theological agendas have been attained. On the contrary, areas of ongoing controversy and enduring questions have been noted throughout the study. The configuration of current christologies portrayed in four interlocking circles elucidates the present shape of christology in Africa. Three of the four christological models have been examined in this thesis: Jesus as Life-giver, Jesus as Mediator, and Jesus as Leader. The thesis suggests that approaching the subject through thematic clusters of christological images serves to overcome artificial dichotomies in prevailing paradigms of inculturation and liberation christologies. In-depth analysis reveals that critical issues in the historical, theological and contemporary contexts prompt particular portraits of Jesus. As these christological images are adopted in contemporary Christian praxis, they serve to redress the very issues that prompted their formulation. The circular motion of christologies arising *from* and *for* their African contexts has been amply attested in the present research, both in potentiality and in actuality. Therefore the study confirms important developments in relation to the fundamental goal of constructing contextual theology in Africa.

What relevance do these developments in African christology have for world Christianity? Are they merely exotic expressions of the Christian faith, of passing interest? Or worse yet, as some people might argue, are they simply evidence of "syncretism," tainting the gospel with African religions? Brief conclusions from the present research challenge these notions as uninformed and unwarranted. Given the southward shift of world Christianity, Africa marks one of the central zones of theological activity today. To ignore developments in this region, or to treat the African christologies as exotic manifestations peripheral to the world church, is to betray one's own theological myopia. Indeed, the fact that the African christologies have not yet gained adequate acknowledgement beyond the continent is more

reflective of enduring ethnocentrism within the wider theological community than of the value of the christologies *per se*.

The very dynamism of Christianity in Africa today suggests key aspects of the emergent christologies' significance for world Christianity. Perhaps most fundamentally, the present flourishing of christology in Africa clearly manifests the universality of the gospel. As African Christians understand and convey Jesus in light of biblical revelation and contextual realities, they demonstrate that Christianity can truly find a home in every cultural context. The risk of incorporating cultural elements in ways deemed incompatible with the gospel is countered by the biblical and ecumenical orientation of the African christologies. Certainly hermeneutical issues of reading the Bible in Africa are becoming increasingly prominent, and rightfully so.² Yet the evidence from this thesis underlines the centrality of the Bible in the christological reflection and praxis of these African believers. Likewise, the selected Christians manifestly uphold the humanity and the divinity of Jesus as non-negotiables within their faith, thereby aligning themselves with Christian tradition from apostolic times to the present. While ecumenical perspectives and cooperation need further attention at local levels of African Christianity, the voices highlighted in this study attest to the importance of christological formulation within the local faith community, and in dialogue with other faith communities across denominational, national and religious borders. So, far from being "syncretistic," the African christologies reflect the wholehearted acceptance of the gospel in Africa. They thereby demonstrate the universality of the gospel not only in principle but in practice.³

Important ramifications flow from the fact that Christianity is developing new local forms shaped by the priorities of those contexts in which it is taking root most firmly, like in Africa. For example, the new diversification of Christianity challenges the tendency in classical Western theology to absolutise certain concepts of Christ, or to assume that christological definitions established in the West are necessarily normative for other contexts of faith. In general, the African Christians considered in this study do not discount creedal and confessional statements from the history of Western Christianity. However, they stress that the christological controversies of other eras and contexts, expressed in foreign languages and thought forms and

² See Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, eds., *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

³ See Andrew Walls, "The Christian Tradition in Today's World," in *Religion in Today's World: The Religious Situation of the World from 1945 to the Present Day*, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 76. See also Kwame Bediako, "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension," *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (Apr. 2000): 313.

addressing issues unrelated to their experience, need not govern their christological formulation. Thus African Christians champion the irruption of Third World theologies which break with Western theological agendas and seek to discover the reality of Jesus in relation to current issues in their own respective contexts.

As the Word “tabernacles” in Africa today, priorities emerging there potentially recover certain aspects of the gospel neglected in the West today. The communitarian aspect of African christologies derived from biblical teaching and indigenous worldviews challenges the rampant individualism in Western Christianity. For example, African concepts of community, encompassing the deceased, the living and the unborn, invite contemplation by Western Christians steeped in cultural values that often disregard communal life, particularly among generations. Furthermore, the images related to Jesus as life-giver encompass key facets of African worldviews, like the exaltation and celebration of life, plus holistic views of life and healing. These emphases offer correctives for Western worldviews from Enlightenment times, which have tended to elevate the individual and to erect dichotomies between sacred and secular, natural and supernatural. More significantly, the African christologies raise crucial challenges for Western Christianity in the face of geopolitical divisions and economic injustices intensified by contemporary globalisation. Attempts to recapture the liberative dimensions of Jesus’ mission to the poor and marginalized, and to expose the scandal of Christ’s ongoing “crucifixion” in the Third World, command serious reconsideration of christological reflection and praxis in the West.

At the same time, and through such theological interaction, African christologies offer means of renewal to churches in the West. Drawing upon an African proverb, Pobeé graphically expresses the opportunity for mutual revitalisation, as follows:

The Akan have a saying, ‘The mother feeds the baby daughter before she has teeth, so that the daughter will feed the mother when she loses her teeth.’ The old church has lost her teeth. Evidence: empty churches. This new church, the younger church, is now the vibrant part. It *owes* it to the so-called mother churches to *share* its insights, so that together they may be renewed and transformed.⁴

The dynamism of African Christianity evidenced in the present research certainly underscores the importance of lived or experiential christologies. Far from abstract, academic exercises, these christologies witness to the perceived immediacy of Jesus and his solidarity with believers in the concrete realities of life, particularly for

⁴ John Pobeé, Oral Interview, Geneva: Oct. 28, 1998.

African women. Despite the ongoing challenges acknowledged with respect to christological reflection and praxis in Africa, engagement with the current christologies provides opportunity for fostering spiritual renewal.

Finally, the fact that Africans Christians portray local “faces of Jesus,” articulating what they find appealing and relevant in him, forms a significant contribution to world Christianity. The study has stressed that no single cultural context can claim a monopoly on understanding Jesus Christ. Rather, the multiplicity of christological images arising in Africa enhances the discovery of the fullness of Christ which transcends all cultural constructs of the gospel. The emergent African christologies therefore confirm what Andrew Walls has ably demonstrated through biblical and historical investigation: namely, that the perception and experience of Jesus by different cultures throughout history has in fact expanded our corporate understanding of Christ. Examining what occurred in the apostolic church as Christ was communicated across cultural boundaries, he explains that

the process was hugely enriching; it proved to be a discovery of the Christ. As Paul and his fellow missionaries explain and translate the significance of the Christ in a world that is Gentile and Hellenistic, that significance is seen to be greater than anyone had realized before. It is as though Christ himself actually grows through the work of mission—and indeed, there is more than a hint of this in one New Testament image (Eph. 4:13). As he enters new areas of thought and life, he fills the picture (the Pleroma dwells in him). It is surely right to see the process as being repeated in subsequent transmission of the faith across cultural lines.⁵

Given the biblical and historical precedents, there is every reason to believe that African Christians are extending this very process in their expressions of Jesus’ identity and significance today. Ela is clearly convinced of the ongoing expansion of corporate christology globally, for he explains, “The Risen One exposes faith to an inexhaustible realm of possibilities. That is why we are searching for a form of speech that will bring the voices of Africa to the life of the world-wide church.”⁶ Thus the voices of contemporary African christology featured in this thesis are of utmost significance to world Christianity. For as Walls concludes, “It is a delightful paradox that the more Christ is translated into the various thought forms and life

⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), xvii.

⁶ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 143.

systems which form our various national identities, the richer all of us will be in our common Christian identity.”⁷

⁷ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 54.

Appendix 1. Qualitative Research Materials

A. Interview Questions for Selected African Christian Theologians

PART ONE: REFLECTING ON THEOLOGICAL FORMATION

1. Reflecting autobiographically, what do you think are the most formative influences in your life that have shaped your theology? Are there any critical experiences that would help me to understand your theology better?
2. (a) What is the main context *from* which and *for* which you have written your theology? [Please feel free to answer in the plural “contexts” if need be.]

(b) In what way(s) has this context impacted your present understanding of Jesus Christ?
3. Which theologians, African and non-African, have had the greatest impact on your own formulation of christology? [Either positively or negatively] Please explain.

PART TWO: SETTING THE PARAMETERS

4. (a) In your understanding, what is Christian theology in the African context?

(b) How do you proceed, methodologically, in doing Christian theology in Africa today?

PART THREE: EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

5. (a) How would you define “African christology”?

(b) What are the most critical issues regarding African christologies today?
6. (a) What do you think have been your main contributions to the contemporary dialogue concerning African christologies?

(b) Are there any christological concerns with which you are wrestling at present? If so, please explain.

(c) What do you think needs to be addressed in future concerning African christologies?

7. In your view, how does the Christian understanding of God relate to the traditional African worldview(s) in your own context? Please comment on each of the following aspects:

(a) God the Father

(b) Jesus Christ

(c) The Holy Spirit.

8. (a) What relevance, if any, do African christologies have for African society today?

(b) What significance, if any, do they have for world Christianity?

9. (a) Are there any final comments you would like to add about contemporary African christologies?

(b) After observing and responding to these questions I have raised, are there any other aspects of African christologies to which it is imperative that I attend?

B. Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews and Focus Groups

1. When did you first learn about Jesus Christ?
– *Further prompts:*
How did you first hear about Jesus?

Were there any people who were especially significant in telling you about Jesus?

What did you learn about Jesus at that time?

Can you recall any first impressions about Jesus?

2. In view of all you've said so far, *who* is Jesus for you today?

3. Are there any main ideas about Jesus, or images of Jesus, that are especially meaningful to you as an African?
– *Possible prompt: e.g. many metaphors/pictures of God in the Bible that stem from the writer's personal experience, such as David the shepherd addressing God as shepherd, or David the warrior addressing God as his "shield" and "fortress". Are there any such images of Christ that resonate specially with your experience as an African?*
(Note: not just biblical metaphors, but any images deriving from the African worldview)

4. Do you think Jesus is relevant to contemporary life in Africa? If so, how? (If not, why not?)
– *Further Prompts:*
To political life in Africa/your country?

To economic life?

To social life?

5. In your opinion, does Jesus have any particular significance for women in Africa today? If so, please explain.

6. I've heard certain ideas about Jesus discussed by some African Christians. Could you please comment personally on how you might understand these ideas?
 – *Possible prompts: Have you ever heard of Jesus being understood this way before? Have you thought of him that way yourself? If so, what does each one mean to you? Do they resonate with your own experience of Jesus?*
 – *Note: skip any themes already discussed above at the respondent's own initiative.*
- (a) Jesus as healer / traditional healer
 - Kenya: *mganga* in Swahili, or other vernacular equivalent
 - Ghana: *odunsini* in Twi, or other vernacular equivalent
- (b) Jesus as liberator
- (c) Jesus as ancestor
 - Ghana: *Nana*
- (d) Any other image or title for Jesus you would like to discuss?
 - Ghana: chief
7. In your understanding, what relationship is there, if any, between Jesus Christ and the God who has been worshiped in your home area before Christianity came to Africa?
 - Ghana: I've heard that you (the) Akan say, "*Yen nkyere abofra Nyame,*" (Twi: "We don't teach any child to know God.") Yet you seem to be very vocal and powerful in preaching Jesus! Why do you insist on preaching Jesus? What *difference* does he make in your religious experience? What is new with him?
 – *Depending upon the respondent, introduce this question as being a more difficult one and repeat it as necessary. Anticipate that some, especially lay Christians, may not have given serious thought to this question before.*
 – *In other words, how does Jesus "fit" into the traditional worldview(s) of the African(s).*
8. Have you read any books about Jesus besides the Bible? If so, what do you recall about the books?
 – *Further prompts:*
Authors—African, western, or other?

Titles?

In what language(s)?

Content—ideas about Jesus?
9. Are there any final comments you would like to make about the identity and significance of Jesus to you personally or to African Christians today?

C. Data Base Information Regarding Individual Respondents

Codes for Categories of Interviews:

KCC – Kenya Catholic Clergy
 KCL – Kenya Catholic Laity
 KPC – Kenya Protestant Clergy
 KPL – Kenya Protestant Laity
 KWC – Kenya Women Circle
 KWP – Kenya Women PACWA
 U – Uganda
 G – Ghana
 FG – Focus Group

1. Kenya & Uganda

Document	Nationality	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Church Affil.	Lang. – Bible	Lang. – Pray	Theol. Educ.
KCC – GACAMBI	Kenyan	Female	Single	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KCC – GICHURE	Kenyan	Male	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KCC – KAMAU	Kenyan	Male	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KCC – KAMIRI	Kenyan	Male	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KCC – KIARIE	Kenyan	Male	Married	> 50	Cath.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
KCC – NZEKI	Kenyan	Male	Single	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KCL – WANJOHI	Kenyan	Male	Married	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
KPC – BISEM	Kenyan	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
KPC - GATU	Kenyan	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
KPC - GITARI	Kenyan	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KPC - KIVUNZI	Kenyan	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
KPC - MASINDE	Kenyan	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Swah.	Yes
KPC - MUSYIMI	Kenyan	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KPC - WAMBUGU	Kenyan	Female	Single	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
KPL - CORREA	Kenyan	Female	Single	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	No
KPL - KASSAM	Kenyan	Female	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	No
KPL - MUHIA	Kenyan	Female	Married	< 35	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	No
KPL - MURIITHI	Kenyan	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
KPL – OLE RONKEI	Kenyan	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	No
KWC - GETUI	Kenyan	Female	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
KWC - KINOTI	Kenyan	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
KWP - GATHIRWA	Kenyan	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
KWP - MBUGUA	Kenyan	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
UCC - WALIGGO	Ugandan	Male	Single	> 50	Cath.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
UCL - CLEOPHAS	Ugandan	Female	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	No
UCL - KIZITO	Ugandan	Female	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
UCL – MARY JOHN	Ugandan	Female	Single	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	No
UCL - PIUS	Ugandan	Female	Single	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	No
UCL - SSEMAKULA	Ugandan	Male	Single	< 35	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
UPL - NABWIRE	Ugandan	Female	Married	< 35	Prot.	Swah.	Vern.	No

2. Ghana

Document	Nationality	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Church Affil.	Lang. – Bible	Lang. – Pray	Theol. Educ.
GCC - Aggrey	Ghanaian	Male	Single	< 35	Cath.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
GCC - Edusei	Ghanaian	Male	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GCC - Palmer-Buckle	Ghanaian	Male	Single	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GCC - Sarpong	Ghanaian	Male	Single	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GCL - Ackah	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Cath.	Vern.	Engl.	No
GCL - Asubonteng	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GCL - Hagan	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GCL - Kulipoe	Ghanaian	Male	Married	>50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GCL - Sackey	Ghanaian	Female	Married	35-50	Cath.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GPC - Aboa	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Aboagyemensah	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Akrong	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Antwi	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Asabea	Ghanaian	Female	Divorced	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Dankwa	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Dickson	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Kodjo	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Martey	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Oduro	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Quarcoopome	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	Yes
GPC - Quarshie	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GPC - Senavoe	Ghanaian	Female	Widowed	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GPL - Amoa	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GPL - Amoah	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GPL - Dankwa	Ghanaian	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GPL - Darmani	Ghanaian	Male	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	No
GPL - Glover-Quartey	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GPL - Nartey	Ghanaian	Female	Divorced	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GPL - Odotei	Ghanaian	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Engl.	No
GWC - Amoah	Ghanaian	Female	Married	35-50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	Yes
GWC - Harlley	Ghanaian	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Engl.	Vern.	No
GWG - Yeboah	Ghanaian	Female	Single	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	Yes
GWP - Opare-Saforo	Ghanaian	Female	Married	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	No
GTL - Birikorang	Ghanaian	Male	Married	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	No
GTL - Dokua	Ghanaian	Female	Widowed	> 50	Prot.	Vern.	Vern.	No

D. Final Coding Scheme For Interview Transcripts

1. DATA BASE

* Def.: Personal info regarding respondents from the form used in introducing the interview

2. CONTEXT

* Def.: Comments providing background information regarding the respondent's context

- 2.1 Quotes
- 2.2 Africa
 - 2.2.1 Kenya
 - 2.2.2 Uganda
 - 2.2.3 Ghana

3. SOURCES AND SHAPING INFLUENCES

* Def: The sources and shaping influences of the respondent's working christology

- 3.1 Quotes
- 3.2 The Bible
 - 3.2.1 Old Testament
 - 3.2.2 New Testament
 - 3.2.2.1 Gospels
 - 3.2.2.2 Acts
 - 3.2.2.3 Letters
 - 3.2.2.4 Revelation
- 3.3 Church Ministries
 - 3.3.1 Sunday School
 - 3.3.2 Catechesis
 - 3.3.3 Worship/Liturgy/Sacraments
 - 3.3.4 Preaching
 - 3.3.5 Bible Studies
 - 3.3.6 Youth Groups
 - 3.3.7 Creeds
- 3.4 Parachurch Ministries
 - 3.4.1 School/Christian Union/Catholic equivalent
 - 3.4.2 Christian Camps
 - 3.4.3 Women's Ministries
 - 3.4.3.1 Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
 - 3.4.3.2 PACWA
 - 3.4.3.3 Other
 - 3.4.4 Bible Study Fellowship
 - 3.4.5 Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship
 - 3.4.6 Other Fellowships
- 3.5 Songs
 - 3.5.1 English
 - 3.5.2 Kiswahili
 - 3.5.3 Vernacular
 - 3.5.4 Other (e.g. Latin)

- 3.6 Pictures
 - 3.6.1 Signboards & Slogans
 - 3.6.1.1 Positive Views
 - 3.6.1.2 Negative Views
- 3.7 Symbols
- 3.8 Other People
 - 3.8.1 Family Members
 - 3.8.2 Friends
 - 3.8.3 Church Leaders
 - 3.8.4 Parachurch Leaders
 - 3.8.5 Teachers
 - 3.8.6 Communities
 - 3.8.7 Missionaries
 - 3.8.8 Saints
 - 3.8.9 Theologians (i.e. personal relationship, not merely books as in 3.11)
- 3.9 Personal Experience
 - 3.9.1 (Answered) Prayer
 - 3.9.2 Healing
 - 3.9.3 Christian Ministry
 - 3.9.4 Revival
 - 3.9.4.1 East African Revival
 - 3.9.4.2 Charismatic Renewal
 - 3.9.5 Conversion
 - 3.9.6 Worship
 - 3.9.7 African Independent Churches
 - 3.9.8 Religious Pluralism
 - 3.9.9 Dreams/Visions/Visitations
 - 3.9.10 God's Protection
 - 3.9.11 Ecumenism
 - 3.9.12 Baptism of the Holy Spirit
- 3.10 Post-Secondary Education
 - 3.10.1 Theological Training
 - 3.10.2 Religious Studies
 - 3.10.3 Other
- 3.11 Books
- 3.12 The Holy Spirit
- 3.13 Culture
- 3.14 Creation
- 3.15 Movies

4. METHODS

* Def.: The ways in which respondents reason in arriving at their view of Christ

- 4.1 Quotes
- 4.2 Bible to Christology
- 4.3 African Context to Christology (African Heritage and/or Contemporary Realities)
- 4.4 Personal Experience to Christology

5. CENTRAL THEMES

* Def.: Central themes and motifs regarding Christ voiced by the respondents

- 5.1 Quotes
- 5.2 Lord
- 5.3 King
- 5.4 Christ/Messiah
- 5.5 Son of God
- 5.6 Saviour
- 5.7 Redeemer
- 5.8 Suffering, Death and Resurrection
- 5.9 Healer
 - 5.9.1 Positive Views
 - 5.9.1.1 Jesus as Traditional Healer (e.g. *Mganga, Mchawi; Odunsumi*)
 - 5.9.2 Negative Views
 - 5.9.2.1 Jesus as Traditional Healer
- 5.10 Liberator
 - 5.10.1 Positive Views
 - 5.10.2 Negative Views
- 5.11 Ancestor
 - 5.11.1 Positive Views
 - 5.11.2 Negative Views
- 5.12 Vernacular Titles for Jesus
 - 5.12.1 *Nana*
 - 5.12.1.1 Positive Views
 - 5.12.1.2 Negative Views
- 5.13 Relation to Traditional God
 - 5.13.1 Continuity
 - 5.13.2 Discontinuity
- 5.14 Relation to the Trinity
- 5.15 Muslim Perceptions
- 5.16 Incarnation
- 5.17 Images of Family & Kinship
 - 5.17.1 Brother
 - 5.17.2 Mother
 - 5.17.3 Father
 - 5.17.4 Parent
 - 5.17.5 Elder
 - 5.17.6 Son / Daughter
 - 5.17.7 Husband
 - 5.17.8 Uncle
 - 5.17.9 Sister
- 5.18 Images of Mediation
 - 5.18.1 Mediator
 - 5.18.2 Prophet
 - 5.18.3 Priest
 - 5.18.4 Lamb
 - 5.18.5 Sacrifice
 - 5.18.6 Reconciler
 - 5.18.7 Advocate / Lawyer
 - 5.18.8 Prince of Peace / Peace-maker
- 5.19 Images of Friendship, Companionship, & Personal Presence
 - 5.19.1 Friend
 - 5.19.2 Presence

- 5.19.3 Person
- 5.19.4 Lover / Love
- 5.19.5 Guide
- 5.19.6 Counsellor
- 5.19.7 Visitor
- 5.19.8 Comforter
- 5.20 Images of Creating, Preserving, and Nurturing Life
 - 5.20.1 Life
 - 5.20.2 Creator / Preserver
 - 5.20.3 Protector
 - 5.20.4 Provider
 - 5.20.5 Architect / Planner
- 5.21 Images of Leadership
 - 5.21.1 Leader
 - 5.21.2 Teacher
 - 5.21.3 Shepherd
 - 5.21.4 Warrior
 - 5.21.5 Chief
 - 5.21.6 Head
 - 5.21.7 Judge
 - 5.21.8 Master of Initiation
 - 5.21.9 Model / Example
 - 5.21.10 Sea Captain
 - 5.21.11 Rain-maker
 - 5.21.12 Pastor
- 5.22 Miscellaneous Images
 - 5.22.1 Image of God
 - 5.22.2 Second Adam
 - 5.22.3 Refugee
 - 5.22.4 Names for Jesus
 - 5.22.5 Good Samaritan
 - 5.22.6 Alpha and Omega
 - 5.22.7 Spirit
 - 5.22.8 Living Word
 - 5.22.9 Prince
 - 5.22.10 Risen Lord (e.g. at the right hand of God)
 - 5.22.11 Victor/Conqueror
 - 5.22.12 Revealer
 - 5.22.13 Rock
 - 5.22.14 Servant
 - 5.22.15 Light of the World
 - 5.22.16 Carpenter
- 5.23 Qualities of Jesus

6. SIGNIFICANCE

* Any summary comments outlining the significance of Christ to the context of (the):

- 6.1 Quotes
- 6.2 Individual
 - 6.2.1 Personal Life
 - 6.2.2 Family Life
- 6.3 Country
 - 6.3.1 Politically
 - 6.3.2 Economically
 - 6.3.3 Socially
- 6.4 Africa
- 6.5 Women
 - 6.5.1 Positive Views
 - 6.5.2 Negative Views
- 6.6 World Christianity

7. CHRISTOLOGICAL ISSUES

* Any comments concerning christological issues or problems

- 7.1 Quotes
- 7.2 Problems/Issues
 - 7.2.1 Historical/Christological (e.g. colonialism and Christianity; Jesus a foreign God)
 - 7.2.1.1 Positive Views
 - 7.2.1.2 Negative Views
 - 7.2.1.3 Impact of Vernacular on Christology
 - 7.2.2 Theological Issues
 - 7.2.2.1 Jesus and ATR/other African traditions
 - 7.2.2.2 Jesus Absent in Contemporary Realities
 - 7.2.2.3 Jesus Ineffective in Contemporary Needs (e.g. comp. to trad. means)
 - 7.2.2.4 Jesus and the Trinity
 - 7.2.2.5 Jesus and Gender Issues
 - 7.2.2.6 Jesus and Religious Pluralism
 - 7.2.2.7 Jesus and Justice
 - 7.2.2.8 Jesus and Mary
 - 7.2.2.9 Jesus and the Marginalised
 - 7.2.2.10 Jesus and Ecumenism / Denominationalism
 - 7.2.2.11 Jesus and Tribalism
 - 7.2.2.12 Jesus and Prayer
 - 7.2.2.13 Jesus and Africa (i.e. the historical Jesus in Africa and its significance)
 - 7.2.2.14 Jesus and Colour/Race (including comments re the particularity and universality of Jesus)
 - 7.2.2.15 Jesus as Divine and Human
 - 7.2.3 Contemporary Christian Witness
 - 7.2.3.1 Nominalism (e.g. gap between faith professed & practiced)
 - 7.2.3.2 Hypocrisy (e.g. Christians, especially leaders, involved in corruption)
 - 7.2.3.3 Appropriateness (e.g. relevance to context, representation of Christ)
 - 7.2.3.4 Difficulties in the Contemporary Context (i.e. which mitigate against reflection upon Christ, e.g. poverty, crime, urbanisation etc.)
 - 7.2.3.5 Need for Preaching/Teaching about Christ
 - 7.2.4 African Christian Identity (e.g. impact of tradition, modernity, westernization)
 - 7.2.4.1 Positive Views
 - 7.2.4.2 Negative Views (e.g. problems, challenges, duality etc.)
 - 7.2.5 Issues Outlined by the 6 Selected African Theologians

7.3 Method

- 7.3.1 Christology from Above
- 7.3.2 Christology from Below
- 7.3.3 Christology from / for the Contemporary Context
- 7.3.4 Plurality of Christologies (i.e. rationale for)
- 7.3.5 Dialogue / Comparison with Western / Global Christologies
- 7.3.6 Methodological Practices and Priorities Outlined by the 6 Selected African Theologians

7.4 Christological Emphases

- 7.4.1 Concrete, Practical Christology (i.e. vs. abstract christologies)
- 7.4.2 Comprehensive Christology (i.e. all-embracing character of faith in Christ)
- 7.4.3 Community Oriented Christology (vs. individualistic christologies)
- 7.4.4 The Immediacy of Jesus (i.e. the sense of his involvement in everyday affairs)
- 7.4.5 Holistic Christologies (i.e. no false dichotomies between inculturation & liberation, spiritual and social gospel etc.)
- 7.4.6 African / Incarnational / Inculturated / Indigenised Christologies
 - 7.4.6.1 Positive Views
 - 7.4.6.2 Negative Views
- 7.4.7 Christological Definitions and Priorities of the 6 Selected African Theologians

E. Summary Charts of Analysis

* Blank cells indicate that the topic was not discussed during the interview.

* Shaded cell indicates where the weight of the evidence or the overall verdict lies, when the respondent discusses positive and negative factors concerning the image.

Chart 1. Individual Responses in Kenya & Uganda to the Image of Jesus as *Mganga*

Document	Positive Views	Negative Views	Overall Verdict
KCC – GACAMBI	X	X	Positive, with qualification; need to recover terms
KCC – GICHURE		X	Negative – Jesus placed on par with witchdoctor
KCC – KAMAU	X	X	Positive – J. is medicine man; <i>not mganga</i> [Matter of terminology here, for the figure he describes as medicine man is what others define as <i>mganga</i>]
KCC – KAMIRI	X	X	Positive – J. is <i>mganga</i> , but not witchdoctor
KCC – KIARIE	X		Positive – J. is “the supreme <i>mganga</i> ”
KCC – NZEKI	X	X	Positive re J. as “spiritual <i>mganga</i> ”; Negative re J. as <i>mganga</i> associated with witchcraft
KCL – WANJOHI	X	X	Positive re “medicine man”; Negative re “wizard”; Overall verdict: cautious re its use.
KPC – BISEM			
KPC - GATU	X	X	Positive – enthusiastic, with qualification. Equivalent term in Kikuyu deeply meaningful.
KPC - GITARI	X	X	Positive, re <i>mganga</i> as doctor, despite some interpreting it as witchdoctor
KPC - KIVUNZI		X	Negative – minimises his divinity
KPC - MASINDE	X	X	Positive – acceptable in Tanzania; root meaning Neg. – connotations in Kenya w. demonic power: No overall verdict; dependent on context
KPC - MUSYIMI			
KPC - WAMBUGU			
KPL - CORREA			Asked but not discussed; non-Swahili speaker, yet immediate association with the term is witchcraft
KPL - KASSAM			Asked but not discussed; Swahili speaker, but has not heard of J. as <i>mganga</i> ; associates the term with witchcraft
KPL - MUHIA			
KPL - MURIITHI	X		Positive – takes <i>mganga</i> as healer, despite others assuming witchdoctor; also speaks of J. as <i>daktari</i>
KPL – OLE RONKEI		X	Negative – God is healer; if J. is equated with God, then J. as <i>mganga</i> will reduce him & create confusion among the Maasai
KWC - GETUI	X		Positive – interprets <i>mganga</i> as one who heals and promotes life
KWC - KINOTI	X		Positive – strong affirmation of the image
KWP - GATHIRWA	X	X	Positive – Swahili term <i>mganga</i> or “healer”; Negative – Kikuyu term <i>morogi</i> or sorcerer
KWP - MBUGUA		X	Negative – equates <i>mganga</i> with witchdoctor
UCC - WALIGGO			
UCL - CLEOPHAS	X		Positive – has never considers the image before, but after reflecting on it, is very supportive

UCL - KIZITO	X		Positive – specifies J. as “modern doctor”; not witchdoctor
UCL – MARY JOHN			
UCL - PIUS		X	Negative – contrasts unfavourable view of <i>waganga</i> (i.e. witchdoctors) with Jesus’ healing ministry
UCL - SSEMAKULA	X		Positive – interprets <i>mganga</i> as “doctor”
UPL - NABWIRE	X		Positive – J. as “big <i>mganga</i> ” and the other <i>mganga</i> merely a “photocopy”

Chart 2. Focus Group Responses in Kenya to the Image of Jesus as *Mganga*

Document	Positive Views	Negative Views	Overall Consensus
FG – KCC	X		Positive – 1. clarification of terminology, contrasting <i>mganga</i> as “medicine man, herbalist, seer” vs. <i>mchawi</i> as “sorcerer, wizard, witch”. 2. Strong support for <i>mganga</i> as fitting Jesus “very well, very well.” 3. Emphasis on the <i>mganga</i> ’s holistic approach to healing. 4. Personal experiences of the priests in administering Christian rites using oil and holy water and laying hands on those requesting healing; final conclusion re the impact this term and such practices can have.
FG – KCL	X	X	Positive – agreed to Jesus as <i>mganga</i> meaning “herbalist” or “traditional doctor,” referring to “someone who treats you when you are sick” or “who cures.” Negative – 1. rejection of Jesus as “ <i>mganga</i> ” meaning “witchdoctor” or “one who kills.” 2. Difference in the manner of treatment between Jesus and <i>mganga</i> , so the title is inappropriate. Overall verdict – no consensus, but conclusion that it depends on the community and the connotations associated with the term <i>mganga</i> .
FG – KPC	X	X	Positive – 1. provided the terminology is made clear, with distinction between <i>mganga</i> as “healer” vs. “witchdoctor.” 2. important aspect of the church’s ministry, since people will seek healing from whatever source. Negative – 1. Caution about how the image is translated into some healing ministries in the churches, replacing the <i>mganga</i> ’s paraphernalia with communion, anointing oil, and holy water etc., imitating the manner of healing, and placing elevated expectations upon the pastor to heal. 2. Likewise concern expressed about “command healing.” 3. Concern re the power upon which is drawn for healing, emphasising that it must only be done “ <i>purely through Jesus Christ.</i> ” Overall verdict – not stated explicitly, but evidently favourable provided the meaning is clear and the healing ministries are sound, i.e. avoiding the concerns expressed above.

FG – KPL	X	X	Positive – 1. Jesus mixed saliva and soil to heal, similar to the <i>mganga</i> giving herbs. 2. Luos speak of Jesus as “ <i>mganga waganga</i> ,” thereby differentiating Jesus as being superior to all other <i>waganga</i> [i.e. equivalent to “Lord of lords”] Negative – <i>mganga</i> associate with evil Overall verdict – no consensus voiced; initial response was negative, with affirmation from group. Then more positive views stated.
FG – KWC			
FG – KWP	X	X	Positive – one member insists that the term could be useful meaningfully in certain contexts (though not her own) and with proper qualification Negative – most members argue against the term for these reasons: 1. association with “Satanism” and a “demonic kind of life.” 2. terminology differentiated, with “ <i>mganga</i> ” as “healer” and “ <i>mchawi</i> ” as “a killer,” “a witchcraft,” “a witchcraft doctor.” 3. Argument that Jesus is more powerful than any human doctor or <i>mganga</i> . Overall verdict: clear consensus that Jesus is “ <i>more</i> that the <i>mganga</i> .”

Chart 3. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as *Odunsini*

Document	Positive Views	Negative Views	Overall Verdict
GCC – AGGREY	X		Positive – healer = <i>odunsini</i> ; rationale because both cure sicknesses; term is used in ministry
GCC – EDUSEI	X	X	Positive – meets the people’s felt need (protection from evil etc.), therefore inculturating Christianity Negative – danger of syncretism; can prevent people from going to Christ themselves Overall verdict – open to inculturation, but serious reservations about the image
GCC – PALMER-BUCKLE	X	X	Positive – yes to <i>oduyefoo</i> , a vernacular term for “somebody who makes healing or medicines” Negative – no to <i>odunsini</i>
GCC – SARPONG			
GCL – ACKAH	X		Positive – provided <i>odunsini</i> is understood as the herbalist with gift of healing illnesses “without consulting any gods” or trying to be mysterious
GCL – ASUBONTENG	X	X	Positive – biblical rationale in Jesus’ method of healing; qualification of <i>odunsini</i> as herbalist, not fetish priest Negative – most relate <i>odunsini</i> to fetish priest Overall verdict – yes, provided meaning is qualified
GCL – HAGAN		X	Negative – <i>odunsini</i> carries connotations of spiritual powers not to be associated with Christ; <i>oduyefoo</i> , “someone who treats us ... makes us whole, heals us” is better
GCL – KULIPOE	X		Positive – as an Ewe, did not know the term “ <i>odunsini</i> ,” but agreed to the image of traditional healer, explaining that it is God who heals through the herb

GCL – SACKY	X		Positive – Jesus and <i>odunsini</i> do the same thing so they are equal, just using “different objects, using different cultural perspectives”
GPC – ABOA	X	X	Positive – <i>odunsini</i> healing with herbs; Jesus likewise healing using other materials Negative – question re what spiritual powers <i>odunsini</i> draws upon to heal Overall verdict – yes, with qualification; Jesus as “physician”
GPC – ABOAGYE-MENSAH			
GPC – AKRONG			
GPC – ANTWI		X	Negative – while very positive about Jesus as healer, offering vernacular titles, not <i>odunsini</i> as that “would be getting to the pagan expression.”
GPC – ASABEA	X	X	Positive – agrees to the image of the traditional healer using herbs Negative – rejects the one consulting mediums and spirits Overall verdict – to the academy, yes; possibility of confusion to others, but okay with qualification
GPC – DANKWA	X	X	Positive – only if <i>odunsini</i> is used for a healer Negative – mostly rejects the image on account of difference in healing methods, <i>odunsini</i> using herbs and roots while Jesus doesn’t
GPC – DICKSON	X	X	Positive – fits conceptually as the herbalist Negative – not the charlatan, whom many associate with the term Overall verdict – uses it infrequently (mostly ministers in English) and with great caution; need to qualify
GPC – KODJO			
GPC – MARTEY	X		Positive – any adjective works for Jesus, so if the traditionalist sees him as <i>odunsini</i> , no problem
GPC – ODURO		X	Negative – Jesus does not employ other spirits in his healing, as do the traditional healers
GPC – QUARCOOPOME		X	Negative – Only God’s work is genuine; traditional healers are counterfeits that put people in bondage
GPC – QUARSHIE		X	Negative – fine line between herbalist and “witch-doctor”; term does not convey Christ overcoming evil with <i>good</i>
GPC – SENA VOE		X	Negative – <i>odunsini</i> uses herbs and sometimes’ idols, so she would not use it for Jesus
GPL – AMOA			
GPL – AMOAH	X	X	Positive – as “herbalist,” as one who heals; especially useful in communicating with the illiterate Negative – not as “spiritualist,” the second way in which <i>odunsini</i> is understood
GPL – DANKWA		X	Negative – term understood as “medicine man” who incurs spirits in healing, and is “below the status of Jesus”

GPL – DARMANI	X	X	Positive – explanation of <i>odunsini</i> as healer, with biblical rationale for seeing Jesus this way, i.e. the method of using mud in healing; need for teaching Negative – need for “sieving out” certain connotations; term not used in Step magazine
GPL – NARTEY	X	X	Positive – only if used in the very broad sense of Jesus as a healer Negative – Jesus is “much, much, much bigger”
GPL – ODOTEI		X	Negative – negative associations with the term stemming from missionaries considering African culture heathen; contrast in connotations with “doctor” as associated with European mission hospitals.
GTL – BIRIKORANG		X	Negative – strongly opposed, stressing that Jesus “could never have been an <i>odunsini</i> ” since he never used herbal medicine in healing
GTL – DOKUA		X	Negative – not <i>odunsini</i> , since Jesus does not deal with roots and leaves but only speaks to heal; instead uses “ <i>oyaresafo</i> ” or “healer”
GWC – AMOAH			
GWC – HARLLEY	X		Positive – Jesus is <i>odunsini</i> , for “that’s a healer”; she relates her own experience of healing but does not elaborate on the term in relation to Jesus
GWP – OPARE-SAFORO		X	Negative – while <i>odunsini</i> fits to some degree conceptually, she rejects the term because of the connotations of “medicine man” or “juju”
GWP – YEBOAH		X	Negative – <i>odunsini</i> heals with evil, satanic powers, so Jesus is not <i>odunsini</i>

Chart 4. Focus Group Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as *Odunsini*

Document	Positive Views	Negative Views	Overall Consensus
FG – GCC	X		Positive – Not discussed by whole group, but one priest volunteers the image of Jesus as “medicine man,” adding the vernacular term in Ewe. Like this traditional healer, Jesus heals physically and wards off evil. Vernacular song to this effect cited.
FG – GCL	X		Positive – 1. “Jesus is everything anyway”; his power is behind the <i>odunsini</i> ’s work. 2. Jesus and the <i>odunsini</i> both use their strength, power and faculties to draw someone out of illness; so “it’s the same thing.”
FG – GPC	X	X	Positive – 1. openness to consider the image “in a seminar like this” [i.e. pastors exploring “Gospel and Culture”], but cautions expressed below. 2. One member speaks of a song or prayer re Jesus as <i>odunsini</i> , but qualifies that “he is a healer who doesn’t use herbs.” Negative – 1. Need for caution, since most <i>odunsini</i> only use herbs but some use spiritual powers, so people may misunderstand. 2. Contrast between Jesus, who heals spiritually, and <i>odunsini</i> who “applies herbs and things like that.” 3. Some churches are deceptive in claiming healing through

			Jesus while hiding paraphernalia of traditional cultic practices. Overall consensus: reservation affirmed about <i>odunsini</i> , while stressing Jesus as healer.
FG – GPL	X		Positive – the group affirms Jesus as <i>odunsini</i> , stating it to be a meaningful term in their own understanding and ministry, without distinguishing it in any way from the terms “healer” and “great physician”
FG – GWC			
FG – GWP		X	Negative – Jesus Christ is “ <i>more than that odunsini</i> ”; his healing is superior.

Chart 5. Individual Responses in Kenya & Uganda to the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

Document	Pos	Neg	Overall Verdict
KCC – GACAMBI	X		Positive – Because J. is the <i>firstborn</i> of creation, and the <i>mediator</i> between God and man; links it with the Catholic belief in the communion of saints.
KCC – GICHURE		X	Negative – Points out the <i>shortcomings</i> of the <i>African ancestors</i> , and argues that they cannot serve as a model for Jesus.
KCC – KAMAU	X		Positive – Because J. provides <i>protection</i> and <i>communion</i> (i.e. <i>life</i> and <i>guidance</i>) previously sought from the ancestors.
KCC – KAMIRI	X		Positive – Because J. establishes us in <i>relationship</i> with God, the living and the dead; by our <i>baptism</i> in his death and resurrection; produces <i>peace</i> with others; J. now functions as <i>priest</i> , praying for & blessing us.
KCC – KIARIE	X		Positive – Because J. is <i>founder of a new community</i> ; continues as an <i>ever-present ancestor</i> ; related to his <i>humanity as Son of Man</i> .
KCC – NZEKI	X		Positive – Because J. is <i>elder brother</i> ; he is <i>human and divine</i> ; he <i>went before us</i> and left a <i>mission</i> for us to continue.
KCL – WANJOHI	X	X	Positive – Importance of African ancestors; Jesus also lived before and continues to be <i>present</i> . Negative – Not meaningful personally, because “we know Jesus <i>much, much better</i> ” than the ancestors.
KPC – BISEM	X	X	Positive – Ancestor image <i>recreates identity</i> of a family/community, i.e. symbol of <i>light</i> passed on. Negative – 1. Ancestor has an <i>end</i> ; J. is <i>eternal</i> . 2. Major limitation in patriarchal <i>ancestor paradigm</i> which <i>excludes women</i> , unlike J.’s community embracing all of humanity, including men and women. Overall verdict: Fine as <i>one</i> title; depends on the context: traditional setting, yes, urban youth, no.
KPC – GATU	X		Positive – States the <i>problem</i> stemming from negative missionary teaching that the ancestors are pagan. Support for the image from J.’s <i>descent into hell</i> and <i>living again</i> . Need to distinguish J. as special category of ancestor. Clarification of the meaning is essential.
KPC – GITARI		X	Negative – Ancestors are dead and buried, while Jesus is contemporary and present. He’s <i>living</i> , and therefore <i>more than an ancestor</i> .
KPC – KIVUNZI		X	Negative – Ancestors are created; Jesus is the <i>Creator</i> .
KPC – MASINDE		X	Negative – The Bible does not present him as such (i.e. old men seeing their children’s children), since he <i>died at 33</i> . Need to present Christ as the <i>Incarnate Christ</i> , the <i>Ancient of Days</i> .

KPC – MUSYIMI		X	Neither positive nor negative about the image, but stresses that it <i>depends upon</i> “ <i>how strong the ancestor worship is.</i> ” Concludes that it is very weak in Kenya, compared with other African cultures.
KPC – WAMBUGU			
KPL – CORREA		X	Negative – Has never heard of the image for Jesus. Despite the respect for ancestors in her Goan heritage, she sees no potential for it being a meaningful image for Jesus.
KPL – KASSAM			
KPL – MUHIA	X	X	Negative – Begins with a strong statement of the <i>problem</i> , i.e. <i>negative connotations of ancestor worship</i> , severance of Christians from their culture. Positive – Reconsidered, in light of its practical application to <i>possible Christian forms of rites of passage</i> , she expresses openness. Overall verdict: Neither pos. nor neg.; worth exploring in that context
KPL – MURIITHI	X		Positive – Because J. was <i>there</i> from the beginning, and their forefathers prayed to God [i.e. and therefore J. as well]; affirms the use of the image in contemporary preaching.
KPL – OLE RONKEI		X	Negative – Because ancestor carries the <i>connotation of age, marriage</i> , and children which J. did not have. Because if <i>Christ is to be equated with God</i> , he must be portrayed <i>above</i> the ancestors.
KWC – GETUI	X	X	Negative – Because ancestors are eventually forgotten, unless named. Positive – If interpreted not from a <i>physical</i> perspective, but in terms of the <i>qualities</i> they promote, which also J. represents. Overall verdict: Fine if developed in this way, i.e. re the qualities.
KWC – KINOTI	X		Positive – Because J. is <i>firstborn of all creation</i> ; he is <i>alive today</i> , as the ancestors are, since death is not the end. Image not personally significant, but no problem with it.
KWP – GATHIRWA		X	Negative – Because of the <i>negative connotations</i> associated with ancestors, and because the ancestors were once here and now gone, while Jesus has “continued <i>all through</i> , from creation to this day.”
KWP – MBUGUA		X	Negative – Because J. is “ <i>God from creation</i> , from everlasting to everlasting”; ancestors associated with “ancestor worship” & J. “is not in that group”; ancestors do not go far enough back in generations, as does the historical Jesus.
UCC – WALIGGO	X	X	Positive – Emphasis on its place in <i>inculturation</i> ; interpreted in terms of <i>mediation</i> ; <i>advantages</i> of the image outlined, in overcoming the exclusion of one’s ancestors, and in linking J. with traditional values. Negative – Supports the image, but warns against inculturation without liberation theology; hence thinks ancestor won’t change much in society.
UCL – CLEOPHAS		X	Negative – Because Jesus is <i>present</i> in a different way than the “living dead,” since he’s <i>risen</i> and <i>coming again</i> while they are simply spirits.
UCL – KIZITO	X		Positive – Argues from 1. The Bible: “ <i>heirs and co-heirs</i> ”; 2. African tradition: J. as <i>first-born and founder of a clan</i> ; 3. Personal experience: <i>tracing her own clan 12 generations & relating J. to this.</i>
UCL – MARY JOHN		X	Negative – Because J. is not from her tribe, and “the ancestors of the Baganda must have been the Baganda—only.”

UCL – PIUS	X	X	Negative – Begins with <i>negative view from the missionaries</i> , that Christians “should not believe in ancestors” but in “God, the Creator.” Positive – Recounts the practice of the expatriate priest <i>incorporating the ancestors into the celebration of Mass</i> , how this has enhanced her worship, and how she can now view Jesus as ancestor.
UCL – SSEMAKULA	X		Positive – Because Jesus was “ <i>there before</i> ”; he lived in human form and died, going to heaven, and so he is God and an ancestor.
UCP - NABWIRE			

Chart 6. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

Document	Pos	Neg	Overall Verdict
GCC – AGGREY	X		Positive – “[B]ecause he also came to live here on earth, and has <i>died</i> and gone. But we still remember Jesus Christ, because we know he is still in our midst, spiritually.” Must be distinguished from other ancestors, because they are “dead and gone” while Jesus is still with us.
GCC – EDUSEI	X	X	Positive – “[W]ith the <i>right</i> kind of dialogue,” the concept can be sharpened for use, since the ancestors led good lives and established a lasting family tree. Negative – Negative connotations associated with the term, stemming from “a <i>mindset</i> ... full of ideas and statements that might not be totally acceptable to Christianity.” Overall Verdict – Positive, providing adequate instruction is given to overcome the negative connotations.
GCC – PALMER-BUCKLE	X	X	Positive – Acknowledges that some find the image useful. Negative – Ancestors, as the “living dead,” are “with us in spirit,” but Jesus is still alive; likewise ancestors are “a shade <i>removed</i> ” unless invited to be present, while Jesus is present whether invited or not. Also, as a 4 th generation and an urban Christian, the ancestors have not featured largely in his own personal life and ministry. Overall Verdict – Negative, image fits conceptually but not meaningful personally.
GCC – SARPONG	X	X	Positive – Acknowledges that certain aspects of ancestorhood might be applied to Jesus meaningfully, with proper instruction. Negative – “Ancestor” refers to “a certain concept,” “a certain mould,” which he defines and states that some of the aspects “are contradictory to Jesus’ life.” Also the concept is “restricting” and “ethnocentric,” while Jesus is not. As a Catholic, the ancestors have not featured very much in his life due to missionary condemnation of “ancestor worship,” which Sarpong says is “foolishness.” Overall Verdict – Negative
GCL – ACKAH	X	X	Positive – Because of his sacrifice, which set such an example. Negative – Since Jesus is “God, the son of God, ... he’s <i>higher</i> than an ancestor,” or perhaps “an ancestor who could be described as a <i>primus inter pares</i> , ... ‘greater among equals.’” Yet even this is incorrect in equating him with the other ancestors. Overall Verdict – Positive, since he assumed a human nature despite being divine, there is room for the image provided the distinction is maintained.

GCL – ASUBONTENG		X	Negative – Concept of ancestor is restricted to biological descent, so “I <i>cannot</i> readily see where Jesus fits into that...”
GCL – HAGAN			Neutral – “Not so much Jesus as ancestor,” but responds to the question of the role of the Christian saints and the African ancestors.
GCL – KULIPOE		X	Negative – Ancestors lived and died, but “we believe that Christ is still alive.”
GCL – SACKEY	X	X	Positive – Continuity between ATR & Christianity, so the image is meaningful “because we believe in ancestors very, very much.” Example of pouring libation to & communicating with her mother. Negative – Used in academia; not by “ordinary people” Overall Verdict – Positive about disseminating the image.
GPC – ABOA	X	X	Positive – Jesus mediates between God and humans, like the ancestors, so the image enhances the understanding of Christ & his death. Negative – Does not deny the image, but stresses it’s not a literal understanding of Jesus’ function as Saviour with that of the ancestors. Overall Verdict – Positive, as the traditional worldview helps to understand Jesus’ identity and significance
GPC – ABOAGYE-MENSAH	X	X	Positive – Image stems from academic theologians; may fit conceptually, but not found in the church situation. Negative – As above, not found in the churches due to negative connotations associated with the term as related to demonic forces. Overall Verdict – Negative, given the “anti-Christian” associations.
GPC – AKRONG	X	X	Positive – Volunteers the image & relates it to those of shepherd & parent. Strong support found in fullness of life and protection provided by Jesus / ancestors. Further emphasis on the extent to which the ancestral paradigm still functions for most Ghanaians. Negative – Jesus is not often presented as a parent, especially since he was young and had no children. Overall Verdict – Positive, with deep significance for understanding Jesus and experiencing closeness with him.
GPC – ANTWI	X	X	Positive – Ancestor image volunteered and simply acknowledged to exist. Negative – Jesus is worshipped while the ancestors are not. Overall Verdict – Negative, in view of this problem.
GPC – ASABEA		X	Negative – An ancestor must be “ <i>kith</i> and <i>kin</i> ,” while Christians (apart from Jewish Christians) are “grafted into” Christ; adoption may help conceptually, but not common to Africa. Also, Jesus’ death does not fit traditional requirements for an ancestor’s death, unless interpreted as a sacrifice.
GPC – DANKWA		X	Negative – While “Nana” functions conceptually for him, ancestor does not, whether in English or Twi. Expressed reason is that he thinks of Jesus more in terms of his divinity than his humanity, especially since prayer is related to approaching a deity.
GPC – DICKSON	X		Positive – Because Jesus lived an exemplary life and continues to be present and involved in the lives of his people.
GPC – KODJO	X		Positive – Acknowledges the interpretation of the ancestor image through chieftaincy, but prefers to approach it as a priestly concept.

GPC – MARTEY	X		Positive – Strong support for the image, since Jesus lived and died and continues to be present, like the ancestors. Like them he also founded a new family. Further statements re the significance of this image and African christologies in general for African Christians.
GPC – ODURO		X	Negative – While ancestors are “living” in the afterlife, only Jesus resurrected and is with God. Also, Jesus is creator while ancestors are created, so he cannot be even ancestor par excellence.
GPC – QUARCOOPOME		X	Negative – It’s not a scriptural image, and has negative connotations from association with ancestor worship.
GPC – QUARSHIE	X	X	Positive – It may convey that Jesus is not dead but alive and involved in life today; also rationale in the exemplary life Jesus lived. Negative – Ancestors are dead while Jesus is truly alive; “you <i>can’t</i> uproot ancestorship <i>from</i> the traditional perceptions of it.” Hence difficult to affirm the resurrection when ancestors associated with the dead. Overall Verdict – Negative
GPC – SENAVOE		X	Negative – Ancestors signify physical descent and are restricted to particular tribes; also reservation due to the association with “ancestor veneration” and “ancestor <i>worship</i> .”
GPL – AMOA			
GPL – AMOAH		X	Negative – Has never thought of the image nor heard of it; sees no room for applying the concept to Christ since there is no power outside Christ.
GPL – DANKWA		X	Negative – Because of the way ancestors are thought of in her culture, in terms of “small gods” appealed to for assistance.
GPL – DARMANI	X	X	Positive – Jesus has gone before, like an ancestor; room to use the image “if it will help people relate with Jesus Christ but it has to be properly qualified.” Negative – Jesus is much “bigger” than the ancestors, “much more to me than the ancestors”; ancestors are “living in <i>ghost land—vaguely</i> alive,” while Jesus “rose from the dead!” Overall Verdict – Depends on the definition of ancestor; open to the possibility of the image, but cautions against misunderstanding by village people and strongly insists on proper qualification. Hence no clear overall verdict.
GPL – NARTEY	X	X	Positive – Because we are adopted into Jesus’ family and gain the heritage of his values, traits etc. Negative – Ancestors are dead while Jesus is alive and eternal. Overall Verdict - Negative
GPL – ODOTEI	X	X	Positive – The image might enhance African Christianity by recovering traditional concepts and relating them more effectively. Negative – Jesus is more “real” and “near” than the ancestors. Also, the image jeopardises the uniqueness of Jesus since the ancestors and “gods” are numerous and called up in great numbers. Overall Verdict – Open to the potential use of the image, but only if Jesus is adequately distinguished from other ancestors.
GTL – BIRIKORANG	X		Positive – He already thinks of Jesus as ancestor based on physical descent, on account of his conviction that the Akan are descendents of the Jews (from Manasseh’s offspring who remained in Egypt).

GTL – DOKUA		X	Negative – Ancestors are dead while Jesus is alive. He alone could rise from the dead.
GWC – AMOAH			
GWC – HARLLEY		X	Negative – Because Jesus is supreme. Portraying Jesus as ancestor would mean “going towards the fetish.”
GWP – OPARE-SAFORO		X	Negative – Jesus’ family is based on faith rather than blood relationships. She does not accept the view that Africans come from the line of Jesus; instead, “I just go for what the Bible tells me.”
GWP - YEBOAH		X	Negative – Although Jesus represents us in heaven, he does so as our creator and not as an ancestor from whom we come.

Chart 7. Focus Group Responses in Kenya & Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Ancestor

Document	Pos	Neg	Overall Consensus
FG – GCC	X		Positive – Volunteered the image; strong emphasis on ancestor as “fore-runner,” “traditional hero,” and “model” to be emulated. Salvation interpreted as living according to the example of the ancestors and thus being recognised by them in the afterlife.
FG – GCL	X	X	Positive – Jesus as a “good ancestor” who is close to us and with whom we commune Negative – Jesus was “ <i>there</i> ... before even time began. ... For creation, he was <i>there</i> .” The image “rather obscures the dignity of Christ,” for he is God, he is creator.
FG – GPC	X	X	Positive – Biblical rationale found in Matthew’s genealogy, plus Jesus’ kinship with his mother, Abraham and Adam. Also, the image is used in evangelism among traditional cultures in the north; example of traditional song sung to the ancestors now sung to Jesus. Negative – Group members clarify that it is not functioning in “society in general,” and emphasise the reason being they are more urbanised. Overall verdict – Positive, since they point out rationale and examples of the image operating, even if not for them personally
FG – GPL		X	Negative – Ancestors are “those who have come and <i>passed</i> , then they are no more living.” Jesus is not “a ghost” but “a living spirit.”
FG – GWC			
FG – GWP		X	Negative – Jesus is emphasised as “the Son of God,” “the firstborn of God,” and “our Lord and Saviour” to distinguish him from the suggested image of ancestor.
FG – KCC	X		Positive – The ancestral paradigm allows Jesus to fit into the traditional African worldview; Jesus “knew our problems, he lived with ... the people of the world,” and displayed the characteristics of the ancestors. Also, Jesus is close to the people, like a brother whose presence is needed, and he intercedes for them like an ancestor. Thus the image enhances the significance of Jesus to Africans and helps to “bring Christ’s name to <i>every people</i> .”
FG – KCL	X	X	Positive – One participant insists that Jesus belongs to the tribe of Israel and by faith we are offspring of Abraham; hence Jesus is our ancestor. Negative – Jesus did not have children, so his lineage ended with him. The concept of ancestor is interpreted in terms of biological descent, so the group consensus (except for one) is that “it doesn’t

			make sense.” Overall Verdict – Negative, apart from the one participant.
FG – KPC	X	X	Positive – Jesus interpreted as a source of power which emanates from the ancestors and the spirit world; also on the basis of Pauline theology linking Jesus and Adam, Jesus is ancestor by virtue of being human; or he is our ancestor since we have been adopted into his family. Negative – Ancestry is understood in terms of physical descent, so it is not fitting for Jesus. Also a distinction made between spirits, which Jesus can be understood as, and ancestors, which he cannot. Furthermore, the NT identifies him as brother and co-heir rather than an ancestor. Overall Verdict – Negative: while recognising certain grounds for viewing Jesus in this way, the group on the whole does not favour it.
FG – KPL	X	X	Positive – One participant notes that Jesus’ ancestry is recorded up to his birth, then from there “we are <i>heirs</i> with Jesus.” He comes from the lineage of David and by faith we have entered that family. Negative – Ancestors died, while Jesus rose from the dead. Also Jesus did not have children or establish a lineage. The concept of Jesus is “foreign,” “bad,” and “farfetched.” Overall Verdict - Negative
FG – KWC			
FG - KWP	X		Positive – It is through Jesus that we become children of Abraham and children of God; therefore Jesus is our ancestor. We are adopted as children of Abraham.

Chart 8. Individual Responses in Kenya & Uganda to the Image of Jesus as Liberator

Document	Pos	Neg	Overall Verdict
KCC – GACAMBI	X		Positive – Closely associated with saviour, relating to the totality of the person, not just politics
KCC – GICHURE	X	X	Positive – J. as liberator, i.e. opposing <i>all</i> evil; Negative – current presentation of the image is <i>limiting</i> with respect to J.; he favours J.’s ministry interpreted in terms of justice, peace, & reconciliation Overall Verdict – negative
KCC – KAMAU	X		Positive – Interpreted in light of African <i>women who feel enslaved</i> and see Jesus as liberator
KCC – KAMIRI	X		Positive – “Indeed yes. This is the gospel.” Quotes Lk. 4:18-19; discusses impact in parish ministry
KCC – KIARIE	X		Positive – Jesus as New Moses. Salvation interpreted <i>spiritually</i> as liberation from sin, and <i>politically</i> as recently shown by lib. theol.
KCC – NZEKI	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>spiritually</i> , as liberation from slavery to sin, and death
KCL – WANJOHI	X		Positive – Interpreted by a Kikuyu philosopher, from Jn. 8:32, as knowing the <i>truth</i> which will set us free, e.g. from fear, other circumstances
KPC – BISEM	X		Positive – Volunteers it in Q.3; interprets it <i>holistically</i> as applying to the totality of life
KPC – GATU	X		Positive – Associates it with J. as “brother,” in terms of his concern and suffering alongside one
KPC – GITARI	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>spiritually</i> (from sin) and <i>politically</i> (from evil rulers, corruption etc.)

KPC – KIVUNZI	X	X	Positive – Interpreted <i>spiritually</i> (from sin & death) Negative – Interpreted <i>politically</i> (oppression from other nations) Overall Verdict – Positive
KPC – MASINDE	X	X	Pos. & Neg. – “J. is a liberator, but in a different sense.” Not in <i>political</i> sense, but <i>individually</i> and <i>internally</i> . Overall verdict positive in this sense
KPC – MUSYIMI	X	X	Negative – J. not to be understood in “purely political terms,” as lib. theol’s have presented him; much prefers “redeemer” to convey the <i>holistic</i> nature of J.’s ministry. “Liberator” is too loaded. Overall Verdict – negative, due to connotations
KPC – WAMBUGU	X		Positive – J. is “ <i>my</i> personal liberator,” interpreted in terms of liberation from trad. cultural practices
KPL – CORREA	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>individually</i> in terms of being bound to, e.g. religion, drugs, alcohol, self-esteem, and <i>spiritually</i> in terms of liberation from death.
KPL – KASSAM	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>individually</i> and <i>spiritually</i> , e.g. “I was bound by the spirit of Islam.”
KPL - MUHIA	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>politically</i> , in being set free from dictatorial governments; eschatological dim’s. Also <i>spiritually</i> , in that the liberation of individuals leads to the liberation of the nation.
KPL - MURIITHI	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>individually</i> and <i>spiritually</i> ; lib. from evil; understanding good & bad, & J.
KPL – OLE RONKEI	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>politically</i> : supportive of lib. theol. in L.A. and S.A., but Kenyan situation not so critical; church helped prevent dictatorship. Also <i>spiritually</i> and <i>individually</i> , from sin & alcohol abuse.
KWC - GETUI	X		Positive – <i>Holistic</i> view emphasised; applied to Rwanda & Kenya; important to Circle, and closely connected with J. as life-giver.
KWC - KINOTI	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>individually</i> (e.g. woman who touched J.’s robe) and <i>politically</i> (re injustices).
KWP - GATHIRWA	X		Positive – Related, experientially, to J.’s <i>liberation of women</i>
KWP - MBUGUA	X		Positive – Interpreted in light of J.’s <i>liberation of women</i>
UCC - WALIGGO	X		Positive – Powerful statement of definition, and of the impact of J. as liberator upon his work with the Uganda Human Rights Commission.
UCL - CLEOPHAS	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>spiritually</i> , (i.e. salvation), then her understanding of J. as liberator enhanced through her experience of <i>political</i> liberation.
UCL - KIZITO	X		Positive – Interpreted <i>spiritually</i> (bondage to traditions), <i>politically</i> (oppressive leaders, ethnic thinking), and <i>liberation of women</i> .
UCL – MARY JOHN		X	Doesn’t explicitly agree or disagree, but notes that Jesus did not liberate his people in the way they expected him to, i.e. from the Romans; hence his rejection by them.
UCL - PIUS	X		Positive – Interpreted in light of her experience of liberation from Amin’s regime, hence <i>political</i> liberation.
UCL - SSEMAKULA	X		Positive – Interpreted in terms of contemporary needs, especially <i>political</i> liberation.
UPL - NABWIRE			

Chart 9. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Liberator

Document	Pos	Neg	Overall Verdict
GCC – AGGREY	X	X	Positive – Rationale in OT Exodus; interpreted spiritually as liberation from sin. Negative – Rejects contemporary political application, pointing out contradiction between taking up arms and the peace Jesus brought. Overall Verdict – Positive, when interpreted spiritually.
GCC – EDUSEI	X		Positive – Interpreted in terms of the power of the gospel to console those who are oppressed, to help them take hold of their lives, and to free them from debilitating fears.
GCC – PALMER-BUCKLE	X	X	Positive – Initiates discussion of Jesus freeing us from cultural captivity, particularly with respect to women’s emancipation. Negative – When asked about Jesus as liberator, he considers this a diminutive of “saviour” and states his preference for “saviour” or “redeemer” because of “the socio-political connotations” of liberator, especially related to the use of violence in liberation struggles. Overall Verdict – Positive about the liberation Jesus brings, but has reservations about the term “liberator” as stated above.
GCC – SARPONG			
GCL – ACKAH	X		Positive – Interpreted in terms of the socio-political dimension of Jesus opposing those who oppress others, e.g. slave labour.
GCL – ASUBONTENG		X	Negative – Liberator associated with “captivity” and “bondage,” and considered “far-fetched” for Jesus; rather sees him as “a saviour in the spiritual sense” of “punishment from sins.”
GCL – HAGAN	X	X	Positive – Interpreted holistically in terms of Jesus freeing people from all evil forces, diseases, and social problems. Also contrast developed between the “recent” image of Jesus as liberator and the christology of some early missionaries which encouraged submission. Negative – Single comment that the recent concept of Jesus as liberator in the political sense doesn’t make much sense to Africans. Overall Verdict – Positive, emphasis on holistic understanding.
GCL – KULIPOE	X		Positive – Interpreted as liberation from original sin and punishment for sins.
GCL – SACKY	X		Positive – Interpreted historically, with contrast drawn between traditional society where Jesus was not thought of as liberator since people were not oppressed, and recent history where Jesus became perceived as a liberator from colonialism. Emphasis on the impact of scripture in vernacular and Christian songs about liberation.
GPC – ABOA	X	X	Positive – Interpreted “spiritually, in a spiritual way, that is liberation from our sins” and from punishment on the judgment day. Negative – Interpreted politically as a revolutionary like Nkrumah in the struggle for independence, or what Jesus’ contemporaries were expecting from him in terms of liberation from Roman oppressors. Overall Verdict – Agrees with it in terms of spiritual liberation but not political.
GPC – ABOAGYE-MENSAH	X		Positive – Interpreted holistically to encompass liberation from spiritual forces as well as economic and political oppression. Emphasis on the term “deliverer” over “liberator,” though strictly speaking they are the same.

GPC – AKRONG	X	X	Positive – Personally, voices strong need for the liberative dimensions of the gospel to transform society, with his preferred terminology of “transformation” or “evangelisation of our culture.” But from the perspective of Ghanaian Christians, Jesus is thought of as liberator only spiritually, e.g. “from demons and witches” but “not in terms of social, political liberation.” Negative – Laments and accounts for the above in terms of traditional religion and its impact on Christianity, mission history and the charismatic movement, all of which have not promoted a strong social conscience but favoured personal well-being instead. Overall Verdict – Strong agreement with the image conceptually, but laments that it is not more of a reality experientially in Ghanaian Christianity.
GPC – ANTWI	X		Positive – Liberator falls within the category of “saviour” or in vernacular “ <i>Ogyefo</i> ,” “one who really rescues you.”
GPC – ASABEA	X		Positive – Asabea initiates the image in response to Q. 3, questioning why it is not more of a reality in the contemporary context and affirming that it is a significant image to her personally. She interprets it as freedom of the mind, not being suppressed by others, and questions why people, e.g. women, are still under such suppression.
GPC – DANKWA	X	X	Positive – Agreement with the image as interpreted spiritually, in terms of “ <i>personal</i> liberation from the shackles of sin.” Negative – Hesitates to press the image to mean political liberation. Emphasis on “deliverer” more than “liberator.”
GPC – DICKSON	X		Positive – Strong agreement with the image, interpreted holistically as “one who <i>liberates</i> us from <i>ourselves</i> ” in all aspects of life, so that we become more of what God intends us to be.
GPC – KODJO	X		Positive – Initiates the image in response to Q. 2. Strong agreement, interpreted as personal encounter (not intellectual theory) with Jesus in the struggle for life, based on his own involvement with liberation movements in Africa. Close correlation between saviour, liberator and redeemer, with all signifying Jesus as companion in the struggle for <i>life</i> .
GPC – MARTEY	X		Positive – Initiates the image in response to Q. 2; juxtaposition of saviour, liberator, deliverer, healer. Significance of the image not as “theological theorem” but as “ <i>reality</i> ” in the local parish.
GPC – ODURO	X		Positive – Interpreted spiritually, in relation to traditional religions providing protection from evil spirits and the significance for AICs and African Christianity. However, emphasis on “spiritual” being holistic, encompassing all of life including the socio-political.
GPC – QUARCOOPOME	X		Positive – Interpreted spiritually, with biblical rationale from Jesus’ mandate in Lk. 4, echoing Is. 61. Emphasis on liberation from sin, accomplishing peace between God and man, and its significance to daily life.
GPC – QUARSHIE	X		Positive – Interpreted holistically, with important observation that the context determines the nature of the liberation, whether it be political, economic, or cultural.
GPC – SENA VOE	X		Positive – Interpreted spiritually, from sin, evil and psychological hang-ups, i.e. therefore “internal liberation. Political liberation may have its outworking in society due to Christ’s influence, but not taking up arms.
GPL – AMOA			
GPL – AMOAH	X		Positive – Interpreted in terms of “bondage” to African “customs and traditions”; significance in terms of distinguishing what is idol worship.

GPL – DANKWA	X		Positive – Interpreted spiritually in terms of sin, various problems, and sickness; close association between liberator and deliverer.
GPL – DARMANI	X	X	Positive – Interpreted primarily in spiritual terms, from the “prison” of “self-condemnation,” akin to Peter’s miraculous release from prison in Acts. Also interpreted physically, with respect to sickness. Negative - Does not agree with the image interpreted politically, as the emphasis is placed again on liberation from sin.
GPL – GLOVER-QUARTEY			
GPL – NARTEY	X		Positive – Interpreted primarily in personal and spiritual terms, e.g. liberation from bondage to hatred, allowing you to forgive others, plus liberation from sin. Acknowledges the validity of political liberation but states that has not been the experience in Ghana. Significance to everyday life in terms of freedom from addictions and anything that binds us.
GPL – ODOTEI		X	Negative – Interpreted politically, and rejected on the grounds that Ghana has not experienced political dictatorship as others have. Instead stresses overlapping images of protector and saviour, explaining the vernacular titles in use to convey these concepts.
GTL – BIRIKORANG	X		Positive – Interpreted “physically and mentally or spiritually,” referring to liberation from spiritual temptation (as the temptation of Jesus indicates) and physically, e.g. from materialism.
GTL – DOKUA	X		Positive – Interpreted spiritually as freedom from the “chains of Satan.”
GWC – AMOAH			
GWC – HARLLEY	X		Positive – Interpreted socio-politically in terms of Christians praying in countries ruled by dictators and God liberates them. Probed as to whether Jesus functions as liberator in this respect, she agrees strongly, saying she sees it happening in Ghana where the head of state is prospering, in her view, “because he’s closer to God.”
GWP – OPARE-SAFORO	X		Positive – Interpreted personally and spiritually in terms of ways in which we “imprison ourselves.” Biblical rationale alluded to in brief reference to Isaiah as providing relating why Jesus came.
GWP – YEBOAH	X		Positive – Interpreted primarily spiritually, stating that Jesus “makes you <i>liberated</i> from anything that holds you captive. Examples given, e.g. from fear, human appraisal, death, fear of the unknown etc. Also the significance, especially for women.

10. Focus Group Responses in Kenya & Ghana to the Image of Jesus as Liberator

Document	Pos	Neg	Overall Consensus
FG – GCC	X		Positive – Interpreted holistically to cover sin and death, as well as socio-economic hardships and also racial oppression.
FG – GCL	X		Positive – Rationale found in Jesus coming to set the captives free. Interpreted primarily spiritually, but in a holistic sense that seeking God’s kingdom brings liberation in every aspect, e.g. even poverty.
FG – GPC	X	X	Positive – Interpreted spiritually as liberation from sins and deliverance from evil spirits (e.g. deliverance ministries). Negative – Hesitation about the image interpreted politically. Overall Consensus – Positive, when interpreted spiritually.
FG – GPL	X		Positive – Interpreted as liberation from bondage which all experience (though kind not specified) and problems.

FG – GWC	X		Positive – Interpreted holistically to cover illness and economic problems, with significance outlined for Christians in Ghana generally and for women in particular.
FG – GWP	X		Positive – Interpreted personally and spiritually as liberation from especially fears, “ancestral worship,” problems, and one example of “an ancestral case” of traditional law regarding marriage.
FG – KCC	X	X	Positive – Interpreted socio-politically, with Jesus as liberator working through people who take a stand for the poor and oppressed and work against oppression. Also significance of Jesus as liberator for women. Negative – Concern that the image will bring out the wrong connotations, so that ministers will be taken for politicians working against the government. Overall Consensus – No consensus, as the priests agree to disagree.
FG – KCL	X		Positive – Interpreted holistically to encompass every form of oppression including political and spiritual oppression. Also “liberator” and “saviour” said to mean the same.
FG – KPC	X	X	Positive – Interpreted socio-politically, with examples cited of South Africa and the former Soviet Union. Also the spiritual dimensions underlined, with emphasis on Pauline eschatological perspective. Holistic approach stressed, with sin at the heart of all situations of oppression needing liberation. Finally, acknowledgement that knowing Jesus as liberator requires personal awareness of one’s bondage. Negative – Problem of the credibility gap between theological teaching regarding liberation in Christ and the experiential reality of life today. Overall Consensus – Positive, despite the problems outlined.
FG – KPL	X	X	Positive – Interpreted spiritually; significance to life today in removing “tribal barriers.” Rationale found in Jesus’ ministry, which begins with the individual but potentially moves into socio-political realms. Negative – Strong disagreement voiced with the image interpreted socio-politically, with respect to political or women’s liberation. Overall Consensus – No consensus, as various members express dissenting views.
FG – KWC	X		Positive – Rationale found in the gospel of freedom and love, entailing liberation. Significance of the image for women underlined, as well as its relation to Jesus as life-giver.
FG - KWP	X		Positive – Brief discussion only allowed affirmation of the image without interpretation of its meaning or significance.

Chart 11. Individual Responses in Ghana to the Images of Jesus as Chief & Jesus as “Nana”

Document	Chief Pos.	Chief Neg.	Chief: Overall Verdict	Nana Pos.	Nana Neg.	Nana: Overall Verdict
GCC – AGGREY	X		Pos. – e.g. Christ the King celebrations	X		Pos. – it makes sense to people; contextual evidence
GCC – EDUSEI		X	Neg. – connotations of “chief”	X	X	Pos. – <i>Nana</i> as old person; wisdom etc. Neg. – connotations of taking instead of serving

						Overall - negative
GCC – PALMER-BUCKLE	X		Pos. – people “see Jesus as a chief, as <i>Nana</i> , very easily.”	X		Pos. – examples from contextual evidence
GCC – SARPONG	X		Pos. – raises and develops the image re qualities and functions	X		Pos. – theological grounds
GCL – ACKAH	X		Pos. – overlap of “king,” “chief” and “ <i>Nana</i> ,” so appropriate	X		Pos. – title of respect
GCL – ASUBONTENG		X	Neg. – rejects image of traditional chief; favours biblical “king of kings”		X	Neg. – <i>Nana</i> is further removed, while Jesus is a friend, more available
GCL – HAGAN					X	Neg. – advocated by theologians, not people; opulence ass’d with <i>Nana</i> ; spiritual vs. earthly kingdom; possibility of destooling
GCL – KULIPOE		X	Neg. – term not in use for Jesus; Jesus more important than a chief	X		Pos. – title of respect
GCL – SACEY	X		Pos. – contextual evidence; struck her as “a new thing”	X		Pos. – contextual evidence; significance to African context
GPC – ABOA	X	X	Pos. – similarities with respect to power/rule			
GPC – ABOAGYE-MENSAH	X		Pos. – overlapping of “chief,” “king,” and vernacular terms; contextual evidence		X	Neg. – promoted by theologians (cites Pobe), but hasn’t taken root with the people
GPC – AKRONG	X		Pos. – volunteers the image re ancestor; theological significance	X		Pos. – operates conceptually, but more associated with God than Jesus
GPC – ANTWI	X		Pos. – fits conceptually, but “king” and vernacular titles more in use than “chief”	X		Pos. – association with God as “ <i>Nana</i> ”; title of respect
GPC – ASABEA						
GPC – DANKWA	X		Pos. – overlapping of “king,” “chief” and “ <i>Nana</i> ”; concept of rule, though preference for “king” over “chief”		X	Neg. – fits conceptually, but not part of personal experience; language issues, i.e. impact of colonial lang’s/ed.
GPC – DICKSON			[See “ <i>Nana</i> ” – answer combines both]		X	Neg. – connotations of chief re lifestyle & wealth; changes in modern chieftaincy
GPC – KODJO			[See “ <i>Nana</i> ” – answer combines both]		X	Neg. – not from a chieftaincy tradition (Ga; priestly authority); very critical of showiness re chieftaincy
GPC – MARTEY	X		Pos. – same as “ <i>Nana</i> ”	X	X	Pos. – title of respect Neg. – critique of feminist theologians

GPC – ODURO	X		Pos. – volunteered the image and developed parallels and significance	X		Pos. – title of respect
GPC – QUARCO-OPOME	X	X	Pos. – in relation to biblical “king of kings” Neg. – connotations from British denigration of Ghanaian “kings” to “chiefs”	X		Pos. – title of respect; issues of language and personal experience
GPC – QUARSHIE			[See “ <i>Nana</i> ” – answer combines both]	X		Pos. – equivalent to “chief,” which he “can appreciate”
GPC – SENA VOE				X		Pos. – title of respect
GPL – AMOA						
GPL – AMOAH	X		Pos. – conveys concept of lordship, supremacy	X		Pos. – title of respect; significance: “very aptly describe who Christ is”
GPL – DANKWA		X	Neg. – Jesus is king and lord; more than a chief		X	Neg. – grants that it fits, since he’s king and lord, but not part of her experience
GPL – DARMANI	X		Pos. – concept of power; significance to worship	X		Pos. – theological rationale & significance
GPL – GLOVER-QUARTEY						
GPL – NARTEY	X	X	Pos. – as ruler, judge, someone with authority Neg. – connotations of contemporary chiefs Overall – positive, though preference for “king” over “chief”	X		Pos. – someone to look up to and respect
GPL – ODO TEI			[See “ <i>Nana</i> ” – answer combines both]		X	Neg. – not from background of chieftaincy (Ga; priestly authority)
GTL – BIRIKORANG	X		Pos. – “Jesus is ‘super-chief’”	X		Pos. – “Jesus is ‘super- <i>Nana</i> ’”
GTL – DOKUA		X	Neg. – Jesus as king is higher than a chief	X		Pos. – Title of respect
GWC – AMOAH						
GWC – HARLLEY		X	Neg. – doesn’t use local terminologies as she is “conservative”	X	X	Pos. – Title of respect since “ <i>Nana</i> is a Supreme” Neg. – not part of her experience
GWP – OPARE-SAFORO		X	Neg. – prefers biblical to “ <i>our</i> cultural way of calling our leaders”		X	Neg. – Jesus is more than <i>Nana</i>
GWP – YEBOAH		X	Neg. – Jesus is “ <i>greater</i> than every chief!”		X	Neg. – Jesus is “ <i>higher</i> ” and “ <i>greater</i> ” than <i>Nana</i>

SUMMARY OF "CHIEF":

Positive only: 14/25 (56%)

Negative only: 8/25 (32%)

Positive and Negative: 3/25 (12%)

Overall Verdict Positive: 3/3

Overall Verdict Negative: 0/3

TOTAL POSITIVE OVERALL: 17/25 (68%)

TOTAL NEGATIVE OVERALL: 8/25 (32%)

SUMMARY OF "NANA":

Positive only: 17/30 (57%)

Negative only: 10/30 (33%)

Positive and Negative: 3/30 (10%)

Overall Verdict Positive: 1/3

Overall Verdict Negative: 1/3

Overall Verdict Neutral: 1/3

TOTAL POSITIVE OVERALL: 18/30 (60%)

TOTAL NEGATIVE OVERALL: 11/30 (37%)

TOTAL NEUTRAL OVERALL: 1/30 (3%)

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A. Oral Sources

The information concerning interview respondents pertains to the time of the interviews.

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Bujo, Bénézet. Professor, University of Fribourg, Chair of Moral Theology and Social Ethics.

Fribourg, Switzerland: Oct. 29, 1998.

Ela, Jean-Marc. Professor, l'Université du Montréal à Québec, Department of Sociology.

Montreal, Canada: Jan. 8, 1999.

Mugambi, J. N. K. Professor, University of Nairobi, Department of Religious Studies.

Nairobi, Kenya: June 10, 1998.

Nasimiyu Wasike, Anne. General Superior of the Little Sisters of St. Francis; Professor, Kenyatta University, Department of Religious Studies.

Nairobi, Kenya: April 21, 1998.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. Professor, Institute of Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theological College, Legon; Founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

Legon, Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

Pobee, John S. Professor Emeritus, University of Ghana, Legon, Department for the Study of Religions; Co-ordinator of the Programme on Theological Education of the World Council of Churches.

Geneva, Switzerland: Oct. 28, 1998.

2. Individual Interviews (See also Data Base Tables in Appendix 1)

a) Ghanaian Christians

(1) Catholic Clergy

Aggrey, Joseph. Parish priest, Akuapem Region.

Mampong, Akuapem: Aug. 31, 1998.

Edusei, Matthew. Priest, National Catholic Secretariat, Accra.

Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

Palmer-Buckle, Charles. Bishop of Koforidua.
Koforidua: Sept. 10, 1998.

Sarpong, Peter Kwasi. Bishop of Kumasi.
Kumasi: Sept. 7, 1998.

(2) Catholic Laity

Ackah, Samuel. Teacher, Presbyterian Teacher's College, Akropong-Akuapem.
Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 16, 1998.

Asubonteng, Samuel. Executive Secretary, National Catholic Laity Council, Accra.
Accra: Sept. 1, 1998.

Hagan, George. Professor, University of Ghana, Legon, Director of the Institute of African Studies.
Legon, Accra: July 28; Aug. 6, 1998.

Kulipoe, Constantine. High school teacher, Aburi.
Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 26, 1998.

Sackey, Brigid. Lecturer, University of Ghana, Legon, Institute of African Studies.
Legon, Accra: Aug. 3, 1998.

(3) Protestant Clergy

Aboa, Samuel K. Former Principal of Presbyterian Teachers' College, Akropong.
Mampong-Akuapem: Aug. 17, 1998.

Aboagye-Mensah, Robert. Superintendent Minister of the Methodist Church – Dansoman Circuit, Accra; Lecturer, Trinity Theological College, Legon.
Accra: Sept. 20, 1998.

Akrong, Abraham. Professor, University of Ghana, Legon, Institute of African Studies.
Legon, Accra: July 27, 1998.

Antwi, Dan. Principal, Trinity Theological College, Legon.
Legon, Accra: July 24, 1998.

Asabea, Margaret Victoria. Presbyterian Minister; Chaplain, Women's Teacher Training College.
Akropong-Akuapem: July 2, 1998.

Dankwa, Theophilus B. Pastor, Accra Chapel.
Accra: Aug. 16, 1998.

Dickson, Kwesi. President of the All Africa Conference of Churches; Professor Emeritus, University of Ghana, Legon.
Legon, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

Kodjo, Peter. Chairman of the Ga Presbytery.
Accra: Sept. 3, 1998.

Martey, Emmanuel. Lecturer, Trinity Theological College, Legon.
Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 24, Aug. 28, 1998.

Oduro, Thomas. Principal, Good News Theological College, Accra.
Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 14, 1998.

Quarcoopome, S. S. Senior Research Fellow, University of Ghana, Legon, Institute of African Studies; Resident pastor, Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry, Legon.
Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

Quarshie, B. Y. Lecturer, University of Ghana, Legon, Department of Religions; Former Chairman of a Presbytery.
Accra: July 29, 1998.

Senavoe, Juliana. Principal, Christian Service College, Kumasi.
Akropong-Akuapem: July 18, 1998.

(4) Protestant Laity

Amoa, Yeboa. Managing Director of Ghana Stock Exchange, Accra.
Accra: July 28, 1998.

Amoah, Kingsfold. Director, Ghana Road Fund, Accra.
Accra: Aug. 18, 1998.

Dankwa, Virginia. Ophthalmologist, Accra.
Accra: Aug. 16, 1998.

Darmani, Lawrence. Editor, Step Magazine – Ghana, Accra.
Accra: July 30, 1998.

Glover-Quartey, Alex. Management Consultant, Accra.
Accra: Sept. 18, 1998.

Nartey, Grace. Administrator, Ridge Church, Accra.
Accra: Sept. 2, 1998.

Odotei, Irene. Lecturer, University of Ghana, Legon, Institute of African Studies.
Legon, Accra: Aug. 4, 1998.

(5) The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

Amoah, Elizabeth. Senior Lecturer, University of Ghana, Legon, Department of Religions.
Edinburgh, Scotland: Nov. 16, 1998.

Harley, Emily Asaa. Public Services Commission, Accra.
Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 26, Aug. 28, 1998.

(6) Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance

Opare-Saforo, Felicia. Businesswoman, Accra; National Coordinator of PACWA – Ghana.

Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 3, 1998.

Yeboah, Florence. National Director of GHACOE (Ghana Congress on Evangelisation) Women's Ministry, Accra.
Accra: July 30, 1998.

(7) Traditional Leaders

Birikorang, Nana Addo. *Apesamakahene* (Chief Linguist, or official spokesman of the Traditional Council of Akuapem).

Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 27, 1998.

Dokua I, Nana. *Okuapehemmaa* (Queenmother of Akuapem Traditional Region).

Akropong-Akuapem: Sept. 18, 1998.

b) Kenyan Christians

(1) Catholic Clergy

Gacambi, Marie Therese Gacambi. Lecturer, Catholic University of East Africa, Nairobi.

Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

Gichure, Peter. Lecturer, St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary; Catholic University of East Africa, Nairobi.

Nairobi: June 3, 1998.

Kamau, David. Vicar at Holy Family Basilica, Nairobi.

Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

Kamiri, Vincent. Parish priest, Nairobi.

Nairobi: May 28, 1998.

Kiarie, Peter. Lay theologian and evangelist; former Director of Education at the Catholic Secretariat, Nairobi.

Ruiru, Kenya: June 5, 1998.

Nzeki, Ndingi Mwana a'. Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Kenya.

Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

(2) Catholic Laity

- See Ugandan Christians interviewed in Nairobi.

Wanjohi, Gerald. Retired Professor, University of Nairobi; Former Chairman of the Department of Philosophy.
Nairobi: June 26, 1998.

(3) Protestant Clergy

Bisem, Peter. Deputy General Secretary, National Council of the Churches of Kenya, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

Gatu, John. Former Moderator of Presbyterian Church of East Africa.
Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

Gitari, David. Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya.
Nairobi: May 19, 1998.

Kivunzi, Titus. Bishop of the Africa Inland Church.
Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

Masinde, J. B. Pastor, Deliverance Church, Umoja, Eastlands.
Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

Musyimi, Mutava. General Secretary, National Council of the Churches of Kenya, Nairobi.
Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

Wambugu, Anne. Lecturer, Pan African College, Nairobi.
Nairobi: May 21, 1998.

(4) Protestant Laity

Correa, Mabel. Beauty Therapist, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 8, 1998.

Kassam, Shenya. Pastor, Solid Rock Church; former businesswoman, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 9, 1998.

Muhia, Marcy. Director of Worship, Nairobi Chapel.
Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

Muriithi, John Njoroge. Fruit hawker, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 12, 1998.

Ole Ronkei, Morompi. Director of Compassion—Africa, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 2, 1998.

(5) The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

Getui, Mary. Chair of Religious Studies Department, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.
Nairobi: May 20, 1998.

Kinoti, Hannah W. Professor; former Chair of Religious Studies, University of Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 11, 1998.

(6) Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance

Gathirwa, Naomi. National Coordinator of PACWA—Kenya; Consultant in Gender and Development, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 13, 1998.

Mbugua, Judy. Coordinator of PACWA – Africa, Nairobi.
Nairobi: May 29, 1998.

c) Ugandan Christians

(1) Catholic Clergy

Waliggo, John Mary. Secretary for Justice and Peace Commission, Uganda.
Jinja: May 7, 1998.

(2) Catholic Laity

Kizito, Mary. Lecturer, Daystar University, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 7, 1998.

Ssemakula, Peter Nelson. Political refugee in Nairobi; MA student at the American University, Nairobi.
Nairobi: May 31, 1998.

Little Sisters of St. Francis:

Sr. Mary Cleophas. Jinja: May 6, 1998.

Sr. Mary John. Nkokonjeru: April 30, 1998.

Sr. Mary Pius. Jinja: May 2, 1998.

(3) Protestant Clergy

(4) Protestant Laity

Nabwire, Sarah. Political refugee; Housegirl, Nairobi.
Nairobi: June 20, 1998.

d) Miscellaneous Taped Interviews

Kanyoro, Musimbi. General Secretary of the Y.W.C.A.; Executive Director of the Women's Dept. for the Lutheran World Federation; Coordinator for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.
Geneva, Switzerland: Oct. 30, 1998.

Korse, Peter. Catholic Missionary; Chaplain to the Little Sisters of St. Francis, Jinja.
Jinja: April 29, 1998.

Sr. Mary Savio, Little Sisters of St. Francis; colleague whom Anne Nasimiyu Wasike included in her interview. Nairobi: April 21, 1998.

2. Focus Groups

a) Ghanaian Christians

(1) Catholic Clergy

National Catholic Secretariat, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998. Participants based on site.

- Dasaah, Aidan C. Priest.
- Kornu, Anthony. Priest.

(2) Catholic Laity

National Catholic Secretariat, Accra: Sept. 4, 1998. All participants employees.

- Abban, Isabella. Nurse Educator and Health Coordinator.
- Akantu, Gilbert K. Accountant.
- Amoo-Adare, Afua. Women's Desk.
- Asubonteng, Samuel. Executive Secretary.
- Avorny, Raphael. Coordinator for AIDS Programme.
- Tetteh, Emmanuel. Personnel Administration.

(3) Protestant Clergy

Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, Akropong-Akuapem: Aug. 13, 1998. All participants attending a workshop on Gospel and Culture.

- Antwi, Stephen. Pastor, Bible Church of Africa, Accra.
- Aryee, Joshua. Pastor, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Accra.
- Asare, Johnson. Cross-cultural Church Planter, Tamale.
- Lamptey, Joseph. Canon, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Accra.
- Marbell, Bernard E. Teacher, Maranatha Bible College, Accra.
- Mills, Joseph C. Teacher, Assemblies of God Bible Institute, Saltpond.

(4) Protestant Laity

Ridge Church, Accra: Sept. 2, 1998. All participants members of Ridge Church.

- Adu-Asante, Joseph. Accounting Officer, Accra.
- Amissah, Hetty. Caterer, Accra.
- Sackey, Grace. Nurse; Florist, Accra.

(5) The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

Trinity Theological College, Legon, Accra: Sept. 18, 1998. Meeting of the Circle.

- Dowuona, Rebecca F. A. Teacher; Student, Trinity Theological College.
- Nyarko, Laurene R. Minister, Youth Training Centre of Methodist Conference, Aburi.
- Obu, Helena. Pastor, Teacher; Student, Trinity Theological College.

(6) Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance

PACWA Prayer Day, Accra: Sept. 5, 1998.

- Agyei, Mary. Not working, [place unspecified].
- Arthur, Agnes. [work unspecified], Accra.
- Dadebo, Gladys. Student Teacher, Accra.
- Forson, Grace. Unemployed, Accra.
- Hyde, Mary Anna. Evangelist, Accra.

- Nyarko, Christiana O. Politician, Accra.
- Nyinaku, Grace. Customs Officer, Accra.

b) Kenyan Christians

(1) Catholic Clergy

St. Francis Church, Ruiru, Kenya: June 7, 1998. Priests working in this parish.

- Chege, Elijah. Priest.
- Jabedo, Francis. Priest.
- Mwangi, Njoroge. Priest.

(2) Catholic Laity

Home of Mrs. Ruth Odera, Kileleshwa, Nairobi: June 3, 1998. All participants members of Consolata Shrine, Base Christian Community in Kileleshwa.

- Awange, Peres Alice. Secretary, Nairobi.
- Kariuki, Gervase. School maintenance worker, Nairobi.
- Kulemo, Angelic. Housegirl, Nairobi.
- Makoriwa, Frances Therese. Teacher, Secretarial College, Nairobi.
- Muketi, Mary. Unemployed, Nairobi.
- Mwangi, Catherine. Deputy Executive Director, African Centre for Technology Studies, Nairobi.
- Odera, Ruth Phoebe. Senior Supplies Officer, Nairobi.
- Okeyo, Salome A. Primary school teacher, Nairobi.
- Olwana, Salome Rose. Civil servant, Nairobi.
- Otieno, Charles. Civil servant – Administrator, Nairobi.
- Owuor, Rose. High school teacher, Nairobi.

(3) Protestant Clergy

Daystar University: May 18, 1998.

- Adoyo, Boniface. Pastor, Nairobi Pentecostal.
- Gachinga, John. Pastor, Nairobi Baptist.
- Kibicho, Sam. Minister, Presbyterian Church of East Africa - St. Andrews, Nairobi.
- Muriu, Oscar. Pastor, Nairobi Chapel.
- Obwa, Samuel. Lecturer, Daystar University, Nairobi; Church leader in Africa Inland Church, Ngong Road, Nairobi.
- Wambugu, Ann. Lecturer, Pan African College, Nairobi.

(4) Protestant Laity

Member's home in Ngong Town, Kenya: June 12, 1998. All participants members of a Bible Study from the African Inland Church, Ngong Road, Nairobi.

- Jamwah, Ruth Atieno. Christian Education Dept., Africa Inland Church, Nairobi.
- Kanyi, Anne. Church worker, Nairobi.
- Komen, Simon. Engineering Consultant, Nairobi.
- Nguhiu, James Mwangi. Veterinary Surgeon; University Lecturer, Nairobi.
- Nguhiu, Purity. Veterinary Surgeon, Nairobi.
- Obwa, Leah Osimbo. Teacher, Nairobi.
- Obwa, Samson. Lecturer, Daystar University.

(5) The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

J. J. McCarthy Home of Assumption Sisters in Kileleshwa, Nairobi: May 15, 1998. Weekend seminar of the Circle. The following members were present but not all participated in the focus group discussion.

- Ayanga, Hazel. Lecturer, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
- Choge, Emily. Student; Lecturer, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
- Gacambi, Marie Therese. Lecturer, Catholic University of East Africa, Nairobi.
- Gachiri, E. L. Roman Catholic religious sister; Teacher, Retreat Director. [place unspecified].
- Gecaga, Margaret. Student; Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.
- Getui, Mary. Chair of Religious Studies Department, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.
- Muchocho, Evelyne. Lecturer, Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya.
- Muriithi, Sicily Mbura. Minister, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Chogoria, Kenya.
- Muthei, Ruth. Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.
- Mwangangi, Jane Nyaguthu. Minister, Anglican Church of Kenya, Kerugoya, Kenya.
- Njiri, Edith. Minister, Anglican Church of Kenya, Kutus, Kenya.
- Okemwa, Pacificah. Lecturer, Teacher's Training College [place unspecified].
- Otieno, Pauline A. Student; Lecturer, University of Nairobi.
- Owuor, Margaret A. Student; Lecturer, Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya.
- Wamue, Grace. Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.

(6) Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance

Presbyterian Church of East Africa - St. Andrews, Nairobi: June 13, 1998. PACWA Meeting.

- Gitere, Elizabeth W. Businesswoman, Githunguri, Kenya.
- Koinange, Mary M. W. Evangelist; Social Development Officer, Nairobi.
- Mathu, Jane Nyaguthii. Social Worker; Probation Officer, Nairobi.
- Muia, Rose M. Evangelist; Teacher, Nairobi.
- Ndirangu, Rachel. Businesswoman; Teacher, Nairobi.
- Sakuda, Rose W. Evangelist, Ngong Hills, Kenya.

B. Published Sources

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- Amoah, Elizabeth, and Mercy Oduyoye. "The Christ for African Women." In *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye, 35-46. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Bujo, Bénédet. *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications—Africa, 1990.
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- _____. "Nos ancêtres, ces saints inconnus." *Bulletin de théologie africaine* 1, no. 2 (juil.-déc. 1979): 165-178.
- _____. "Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique." In *Combats pour un christianisme africain: Mélanges en l'honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*. Bibliothèque du Centre d'Etudes des Religions Africaines, no. 6, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete, 21-31. Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1981.
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CLII

THE MYRIAD CHRIST

PLURALITY AND THE QUEST FOR UNITY
IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGY

EDITED BY

T. MERRIGAN AND J. HAERS



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THE MYRIAD CHRIST

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JESUS OF AFRICA:
VOICES OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

O great and powerful Jesus, incomparable Diviner,
the sun and moon are Your **batakari** [robe]
it sparkles like the morning star.

Sekyere Buruku, the tall mountain,
all the nations see Your glory¹.

The mountains of Jerusalem surround us
We are in the midst
of the mountains of Zion.

Satan, your bullets can't touch us.
If Satan says he will rise up against us
we are still the people of Jesus.

If Satan troubles us,
Jesus Christ,
You who are the Lion of the grasslands,
You whose claws are sharp,
will tear out his entrails
and leave them on the ground
for the flies to eat².

Jesus, Saviour of the poor,
who brightens our faces!

Damfo-Adu [lit. Great Friend, Dependable Friend]
we rely on you as the tongue relies on the mouth³.

Striking images of Christ are voiced by an illiterate Ghanaian woman, Afua Kuma, one who works her fields, serves as village midwife, and worships in the Church of the Pentecost. In the vivid language, proverbs and poetry of the Akan people, she expresses the reality and significance of Jesus in her everyday life and that of her community. The recent recording and publishing of her prayers and praises illustrates an important point; namely, that African Christians have understood and responded to Jesus in light of received biblical teaching *and* their own cultural heritage. Indeed, perceptions of Christ "through African eyes" have been operative among indigenous believers for as long as Christianity has been on the continent.

In the last few decades, however, African theologians south of the Sahara have identified a "christological crisis"; that is, a lack of critical

1. A. KUMA, *Jesus of the Deep Forest – Praises and Prayers of Afua Kuma*, tr. J. Kirby, Accra, Asempa, 1981, p. 6.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

and systematic reflection on Jesus Christ by Africans in light of their own cultural inheritance and identity, including ontology, cosmology and epistemology, in order to articulate an *African christology* in keeping with the needs of African Christians. For example, an early pioneer of contemporary African theology, John Mbiti, claimed that "African concepts of Christology do not exist"⁴. Yet he then proceeded to delineate those aspects of Jesus which do indeed correspond to an African conceptualisation of the world. The need for such endemic expression was recognised even earlier, for in 1963 John V. Taylor spoke passionately of "a sense of urgency in the search for the true meeting-place where Christ is conversing with the soul of Africa"⁵. Elaborating on the significance of Christianity being perceived in Africa as a "white man's religion", Taylor pinpointed the heart of the problem in a most penetrating way:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church Universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of her total, uninhibited humanity, would they be acceptable⁶?

In the decades since Taylor voiced his diagnosis of the theological malaise, an increasing number of African theologians have likewise expressed the need for African Christians to perceive and respond to Jesus in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the African mentality and experience. The fact that this felt need continues to the present time is reflected in recent publications. For example, Anselme Sanon, citing Ernest Sambou, emphasises that "in most African countries, the prime theological urgency consists in discovering the true face of Jesus Christ, that Christians may have the living experience of that face, in depth and according to their own genius"⁷. Or perhaps even more poignant is the charge from Efoé Julien Pénoukou:

4. J.S. MBITI, *Some African Concepts of Christology*, in G.F. VICEDOM (ed.), *Christ and the Younger Churches*, London, SPCK, 1972, p. 51.

5. J.V. TAYLOR, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion*, London, SCM, 1963, p. 7.

6. *Ibid.*, 16. Where non-inclusive language occurs in quoted material, here and elsewhere, the author's original language has been maintained in recognition of different conventions employed in other times and cultures.

7. E. SAMBOU, *Une voie réaliste pour l'ecclésiologie*, in *Lumière et Vie* 159, p. 32; quoted in A.T. SANON, *Jesus, Master of Initiation*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1991, p. 85.

The spiritual torment – or to put it positively, the profound hope – of Christians of Africa in our day recalls Jesus' challenge to his disciples: 'And you – who do you say that I am?' ...

... We shall constantly have to reread or evaluate our intuitions and elaborations regarding the data revealed by the Son of God, in order to better know ourselves in him and to better recognize him in ourselves. What appear here are paths of christology, paths to an ever deepening reappropriation of our faith in Christ, for a new outlook on the spiritual and human expectations of the African⁸.

What "paths of christology", what new trails for seeking Jesus are currently being blazed across Africa? And where do such new paths lead? What is their import in terms of the wider context of global christologies? Or, in the words of two leading theologians from East Africa, what is "the specific significance of Christ as seen by Africans, particularly by African Christians, at the present stage of their appropriation, understanding and appreciation of Him and faith in Him"⁹? In order to explore such questions, a brief overview of the sources and methods of African christology will set the context for highlighting selected voices of contemporary African theologians.

I. SOURCES AND METHODS OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

First, a few introductory definitions are in order. Although the term "African theology" is widely recognised as a legitimate discipline, clarification of its precise meaning may be salutary. "Critical African theology" is stated succinctly to be "the organized faith-reflection of an authentically African Christianity"¹⁰. Or, more elaborately, African theology has been defined in its broad sense as "the understanding and expression of the Christian faith in accordance with African needs and mentality", and in its narrow sense as "the systematic and scientific presentation or elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs and mentality of the African peoples"¹¹. In the same way, African christology has been

8. E.J. PÉNOUKOU, *Christology in the Village*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), p. 37.

9. J.N.K. MUGAMBI and L. MAGESA, *Introduction*, in J.N.K. MUGAMBI and L. MAGESA (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christianity*, Nairobi, Initiatives, 1989, xi.

10. R. GIBELLINI, *Introduction: African Theologians Wonder ... and Make Some Proposals*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology*, London, SCM, 1994, p. 6.

11. C. NYAMITI, *Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (n. 10), p. 63.

defined as "discourse on Christ in accordance with the mentality and needs of the people in the black continent"¹².

The sources for christological discourse were clearly delineated from the outset of African theology in recent decades. In the same essay cited above in which John Mbiti lamented the lack of African concepts of Christ, he likewise stated that the African Church was "without a theology, without theologians, and without theological concern"¹³. He therefore urged his fellow Africans to develop theological reflection on the basis of four rich sources of material. The first of these "four pillars" was the Bible, which he asserted to be the final authority on religious matters. The second was the theology of the older churches, referring especially to the scholarship and tradition of the Church in Europe. The third pillar was the traditional African world, which he insisted must be taken seriously since "[i]t is within the traditional thought-forms and religious concerns that our peoples live and try to assimilate Christian teaching. These traditional thought-forms strongly colour much of their understanding of the Christian message"¹⁴. Finally, the living experience of the Church was to be an important source of theological reflection. In this regard, Mbiti showed openness to further investigation of the African Independent Churches as an authentic expression of African Christianity.

Looking back over the development of African theology since Mbiti's appeal, it is evident that these four pillars have indeed supported the theological endeavours of Africans thus far. While the relative weight given to each source will differ among theologians, the potential for drawing upon all categories has certainly been tapped. A clear indication of wider assent regarding these sources is set forth in the "Final Communiqué" of the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, held in Accra, Ghana. Like Mbiti before them, these theologians point to *the Bible and Christian heritage* as the first source, emphasising that "[t]he Bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture"¹⁵. Second, they point to *African anthropology* and include cosmology in addition, stressing that the salvation of the human person is inextricably bound to that of the cosmos. Third, *African traditional religions* are appealed to on the basis of the

12. *Ibid.*

13. MBITI, *Some African Concepts of Christology* (n. 4), p. 51.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

15. Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, *Final Communiqué*, in K. APPIAH-KUBI and S. TORRES (eds.) *African Theology en Route*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1979, p. 192.

fundamental premise that “[t]he God of history speaks to all peoples in particular ways. In Africa the traditional religions are a major source for the study of the African experience of God. The beliefs and practices of the traditional religions in Africa can enrich Christian theology and spirituality”¹⁶. The fourth source identified is the *African independent churches*, and the final one is *other African realities*, a broad category covering everything from cultural forms of life and arts, to family and communal life, to the struggles against racism, sexism, and any other form of economic, political, social, and cultural oppression.

Depending upon the sources favoured and the methods employed, it has become customary to distinguish two broad schools of African theology: “African” or “cultural” theology, and “Black” or “liberation” theology¹⁷. More recently, the former school has generally adopted the term “inculturation” theology¹⁸. The latter category has been further subdivided into South African Black theology, arising out of the particular context of apartheid in that country, and African Liberation theology, found throughout independent sub-Saharan Africa and broader in scope. Its intention is summarised as follows:

Liberation theology in independent Africa endeavors to integrate the theme of liberation in the rest of the African cultural background. Liberation is not confined to modern socioeconomic and political levels but includes emancipation from other forms of oppression such as disease, poverty, hunger, ignorance, and the subjugation of women¹⁹.

While the broad classifications of inculturation and liberation theologies may serve their purpose in distinguishing the various contexts and approaches of African theology, there is also the danger of erecting or promoting false dichotomies between the two strands. Consequently, there is currently a move towards diminishing the boundaries between them. As John Parratt explains,

While they represent differing emphases, which result largely from historical factors, there is a unity in the theological task throughout Africa that derives from its common concern and its common sources. Its concern is to relate the Christian faith to contemporary life; its common sources lie in

16. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

17. E.g. D.M. TUTU, *Black Theology and African Theology – Soulmates or Antagonists?* in J. PARRATT (ed.) *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, London, SPCK, 1987, pp. 46-57.

18. The reasons for the change in terminology lie beyond the scope of the present paper. However, a brief survey of the development may be found in J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, pp. 295-297.

19. NYAMITI, *Contemporary African Christologies*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (n. 10), p. 66.

the Bible and Christian tradition on the one hand, and in the African heritage and present experience, in its widest sense, on the other. The use that theologians make of these sources, their assumptions as to their usefulness and authority, the relative weight they attribute to each – these factors will clearly affect both the method and the final result. In essence, however, there is no disagreement as to the fundamental sources that lie at the base of the task of theology in Africa²⁰.

Concerning the sources and methods of African christologies more specifically, a brief outline will be provided here and then illustrated further in the next section. Perhaps the simplest and most lucid typology, which clarifies the complex subject of christological methodology, is that of Charles Nyamiti²¹. He suggests two broad categories: christologies of inculturation and christologies of liberation. Dealing first with the christologies of inculturation, which he defines as an effort “to incarnate the Gospel message in the African cultures on the theological level”²², Nyamiti maintains that this is the most common and developed approach which encompasses most African christologies. He then outlines two methods undertaken by theologians: (1) starting from the biblical material about Christ and moving to the African cultural context to discern relevant christological themes, and (2) drawing upon the African cultural background as the point of departure for christological elaboration.

John Mbiti stands out as an example of the movement from the biblical teaching to the African reality. In his early explorations in African christology, he surveyed the New Testament (NT) materials of christological interest and summarised the evidence in terms of the most significant events of Jesus’ life: his birth, triumphal entry, death and resurrection. Of these, his resurrection is deemed to be the dominant interest and also the one that appeals most to African Christians. Mbiti therefore highlights Jesus as the *Christus Victor*, explaining his significance to Africa as follows: “The greatest need among African peoples, is to see,

20. J. PARRATT, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1995, pp. 193-194.

21. C. NYAMITI, *African Christologies Today*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), pp. 3-14; cf. *Contemporary African Christologies*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (n. 10), pp. 64-73. For an alternative typology which is also instructive, see J.S. UKPONG, *Christology and Inculturation: A New Testament Perspective*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (n. 10), pp. 41-45. Ukpong outlines five different approaches, namely the *incarnational approach*, the *Logos Spermatikos* (*Seeds of the Word*), the *functional analogy*, the *paschal mystery*, and the *biblical approach*. While he claims to take a different approach himself, his method does not differ markedly from the biblical approach.

22. NYAMITI, *African Christologies Today*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), p. 3.

to know, and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces from which Africa knows no means of deliverance"²³. He also notes that the birth, baptism, and death of Jesus are of special interest to the Aladura Church and likely to other African Christians as well. He accounts for this observation in terms of the crucial importance of *rites de passage* among African societies, and suggests that these events in the life of Christ are especially meaningful to African peoples since they demonstrate that Jesus is "a perfect man" and "one who fulfils everything which constitutes a complete, corporate member of society"²⁴. While the NT christological titles are said to lack meaning for Africans, other aspects of NT teaching provide fruitful contact with traditional concepts, such as solidarity in Christ's Body and the sacraments, especially baptism. He then concludes,

If the Gospel is to make sense to African peoples it can happen only through their picture and experience of Jesus. It is only by understanding who he is, by experiencing who he is, and by participating in him as he is, that they will be transposed from traditional solidarity, or any other solidarity, to the solidarity of Christ²⁵.

Thus Mbiti is among those theologians who demonstrate the methodological movement from the biblical sources to the present reality.

Most frequently, however, theologians move in the other direction from the African reality to christology. Nyamiti explains, "In this approach, the author examines the mystery of Christ from either the perspective of the African worldview, or from the angle of some particular theme taken from within the African worldview"²⁶. It is in this category, known as the "thematic" or "functional analogy" approach, that African christologies have flourished. Since this method will be demonstrated in greater detail below, only brief descriptions will suffice at present to introduce the array of creative christologies which have recently emerged. For example, Harry Sawyerr begins with the assertion of Dr. Bengt Sundkler that "theology in Africa has to interpret ... Christ in terms that are relevant and essential to African existence"; therefore it "must needs start with the fundamental facts of the African interpretation of existence and the universe"²⁷. While

23. MBITI, *Some African Concepts of Christology* (n. 4), p. 55.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

26. NYAMITI, *African Christologies Today*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), p. 4.

27. B. SUNDKLER, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, London, SCM, 1962, p. 281; quoted in H. SAWYERR, *The Basis of Theology for Africa*, in J. PARRATT (ed.), *The*

objecting to an earlier proposal of Jesus Christ as “Chief”²⁸, Sawyerr suggests instead that he be represented as the “First-born” among many brethren who form the Church “in keeping with African notions”²⁹.

John Pobee questions, “Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth, who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe or nation?”³⁰. He then seeks to explicate Christ’s divinity and humanity according to the Akan understanding, and portrays Jesus as the “Great Ancestor (*Nana*)” who is superior to all ancestors and spirits. Several other African theologians favour the term “Ancestor” for Christ, including Kwame Bediako³¹, Charles Nyamiti³², François Kabasélé³³, and Bénézet Bujo³⁴ who will be considered further below. Christ as “Healer” is another symbol discussed, for example, by Aylward Shorter³⁵ and Césé Kolié³⁶. Closely related is Matthew Schoffeleers’ proposal of the *Nganga* (“the medicine person”) paradigm for understanding Christ at the level of folk theology³⁷. Moreover, Anselme Sanon develops the theme of Jesus as the “Head and Master of Initiation”³⁸, a status gained by his passing

Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1996, p. 100.

28. Made by Paul Fueter, for example. See SAWYERR, *The Basis of Theology for Africa*, in J. PARRATT (ed.), *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr* (n. 27), pp. 104-105, for the reasons he objects to the term. Cf. F. KABASÉLÉ, *Christ as Chief*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), pp. 103-115, for a recent restatement of the christological symbol of chiefship.

29. SAWYERR, *The Basis of Theology for Africa*, in J. PARRATT (ed.), *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr* (n. 27), p. 105.

30. J.S. POBEE, *Toward an African Theology*, Nashville, TN, Abingdon, 1979, p. 81.

31. K. BEDIAKO, *Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions*, in V. SAMUEL and C. SUGDEN (eds.), *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, Bangalore, Partnership in Mission-Asia, 1983, pp. 115-175; *Jesus in African Culture – A Ghanaian Perspective*, Accra, Asempa, 1990.

32. C. NYAMITI, *African Christologies Today* (n. 21); *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Gweru, Mambo Press, 1984.

33. F. KABASÉLÉ, *Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), pp. 116-127.

34. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, tr. J. O’Donohue, Nairobi, St. Paul Publications – Africa, 1992.

35. A. SHORTER, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness*, London, Chapman, 1985.

36. C. KOLIÉ, *Christ as Healer?* In R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), pp. 128-150.

37. M. SCHOFFELEERS, *Christ in African Folk Theology: The Nganga Paradigm*, in T.D. BLAKELY, W.E.A. VAN BEEK, and D.L. THOMSON (eds.), *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, London, James Currey, 1994, pp. 73-88.

38. A.T. SANON, *Jesus, Master of Initiation*, in R. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), pp. 85-102.

through the human stages of initiation, climaxing in his death and resurrection. As the "Master" who himself endured and triumphed over the pain, he now acts as guardian and guide to all those who obey him.

Christologies of liberation form a second major division, since Christ as "Liberator" is increasingly resounding across sub-Saharan Africa as evidenced in the two forms of liberation theologies mentioned above. Points of departure are found in both a "christology from below", beginning with the man, Jesus of Nazareth, and highlighting the liberating dimensions of his ministry, and in the contemporary context as the locus for theological formulation. For example, Laurenti Magesa describes his task of discerning a liberating christology in Africa as follows:

[W]e have to commit ourselves to what we know is the way and action of Jesus Christ the Liberator on [*sic*] this historical experience. It is by doing this that we shall be true to our calling as Christians.

Drawing on the experience of the general mass of the African peoples, and also on the work of the various social sciences which have analyzed the codified experience, a theological examination of the socio-economic and political situation prevalent in Africa brings to the fore numerous ethical and moral questions. ... All of these are questions of suffering, issues of lack of freedom in its various aspects. Further problems to be seen all over the continent – problems of ignorance and preventable disease, of famine and ethnic wars, of class antagonisms and racial persecutions – are the direct consequence of ignoring this basic question of 'unfreedom.' They are a result of not confronting it in time with the active, liberating word of God³⁹.

Thus an initial survey of the sources and methods of African theology brings to light the enormous complexities of contemporary life in Africa and the wide range of christologies which have arisen in response to such complexities. Schreiter rightly questions where Jesus Christ is in the midst of all this, and wisely notes that in many ways the understanding of who Jesus is mirrors the challenges that Africa faces today⁴⁰. This observation will become further evident through a brief introduction to selected voices of contemporary christology, summarised under three central themes.

39. L. MAGESA, *Christ the Liberator and Africa Today*, in R. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), pp. 151-163.

40. R.J. SCHREITER, *Introduction: Jesus Christ in Africa Today*, in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (n. 7), p. ix.

II. VOICES OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

1. *Christ as Ancestor*

Bénézet Bujo

Bénézet Bujo, a Roman Catholic priest from the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and presently Professor of Moral Theology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, is gaining increased recognition as a creative and respected theologian. In his most substantial work thus far, *African Theology in its Social Context*, he emerges as one who blurs the boundary between "inculturation" and "liberation" theologies, as indicated above. He denounces the theology of inculturation in scathing terms as "a pompous irrelevance, truly an ideological superstructure at the service of the bourgeoisie"⁴¹. He clearly sides with the goal of liberation theologies in seeking the emancipation of men and women, yet he qualifies his position as follows: "I am not speaking of some sociopolitical liberation to be achieved through revolution, but of liberation in all its aspects, personal as well as social. People should enjoy fullness of life at every level"⁴². The means to achieve such liberation, however, require a serious reconsideration of the traditional cultures of Africa. Responding to the inadequacies of both inculturation and liberation theologies, he asserts,

In all of this, the problem of culture cannot be ignored. The Black African must rediscover his roots so that the ancestral tradition may enrich post-colonial men and make them adopt a critical attitude towards modern society. Then Africa will be able to breathe with a new life which neither idealizes the past, simply because one is black, nor treats the past as an idol. What is needed is a new synthesis. It is not a question of replacing the God of the Africans but rather of enthroning the God of Jesus Christ, not as the rival of the God of the ancestors, but as identical with him⁴³.

It is precisely such a synthesis which Bujo attempts in urging the rediscovery and reappropriation of the traditional African heritage in a way that will further the cause of liberation from all forms of present day oppression.

The central question Bujo poses is as follows: "*In which way can Jesus Christ be an African among the Africans according to their own religious experience?*"⁴⁴. To address this challenge, he develops an

41. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context* (n. 34), p. 71.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 9; emphasis original.

ancestral theology on the presupposition that “[t]here is no African tribe which does not revere its ancestors”⁴⁵. While a full explanation of his ancestral theology cannot be undertaken at present, it must be introduced as the framework for his christological formulation. In this respect, the most significant factors include the eschatological and salvific dimensions inherent in communion with the ancestors, according to traditional belief. These crucial components are summarised as follows:

Here we begin to understand the supreme importance of the past for the African: for the secret of life is to be found above all in the hallowed attitudes and practices of the ancestors. In their wisdom is to be found the key to a better and fuller life, and it is therefore crucial that the rites, actions, words and laws which the ancestors have bequeathed to their descendants be scrupulously observed: they are the indispensable instruments of salvation. The way a person treats this inheritance is decisive, for life or for death. The ancestral traditions are gifts of God, they have a truly sacramental character. The life-giving traditions of the past must determine the present and the future since in them alone is salvation to be found⁴⁶.

Having outlined the ancestral cult in terms of its pervasiveness and significance, Bujo then proceeds to relate this cultural heritage to biblical revelation and Church tradition. He states his sources and methods clearly in this way:

What the Church needs to do today is to uncover the vital elements of African culture which are stamped on the African soul. Once the African heritage has been clearly understood, then it can be placed alongside the biblical and patristic traditions, and progress will be possible. Our guide in the construction of an African theology must be, apart from African tradition, the Bible and the Fathers of the Church⁴⁷.

He acknowledges the need to distinguish between those traditions which truly continue and those which have died, and also to be discriminating about which traditions should be maintained. The task requires not only theology, but also other disciplines such as depth psychology, cultural anthropology, popular art, and sociology. Every available resource is to be utilised “to promote a real understanding of the kingdom of God in which Africans can be truly themselves”⁴⁸.

In order to relate the African heritage to the biblical material, Bujo draws a striking parallel between the ancestral cult and “narrative theology”. In other words, he likens the African perspective of remembering

45. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 27; see pp. 23-29 for further detail.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

and re-enacting the past as a means of guaranteeing prosperity for the future to the biblical tradition of "Exodus theology"⁴⁹. He stresses that

[i]n making their acts of pious remembrance, Africans are seeking more than earthly prosperity; they are seeking salvation in its fullness. ... In other words, the remembering and re-enactment of the deeds of ancestors and elders is a memorial-narrative act of salvation designed to secure total community, both before and after death, with all good and benevolent ancestors⁵⁰.

It is on this basis, therefore, that Bujo suggests the title for Jesus as the "Ancestor Par Excellence" or the "Proto-Ancestor". He recognises the importance of a "christology from below" for the African context, and interprets Jesus' earthly ministry in terms of those qualities and virtues which Africans seek to attribute to their ancestors. He explains,

If we look back on the historical Jesus of Nazareth, we can see in him, not only one who lived the African ancestor-ideal in the highest degree, but one who brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfilment. Jesus worked miracles, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead to life. In short, he brought life, and life-force, in its fullness⁵¹.

Bujo goes on to explain that in identifying himself with humanity in this way, Jesus encompasses all the history and religious aspirations of the ancestors, so that he himself becomes "the privileged locus for a full understanding of the ancestors"⁵². That is to say, the African can now understand the mystery of the Incarnation,

for after God had spoken to us at various times and in various places, including our ancestors, in these last days he speaks to us through his Son, whom he has established as unique Ancestor, as Proto-Ancestor, from whom all life flows for His descendants (cf. Heb 1,1-2). From him derive all those longed-for prerogatives which constitute Him as Ancestor. The African ancestors are in this way forerunners, or images, of the Proto-Ancestor, Jesus Christ⁵³.

Thus Jesus becomes the Saviour whose passion, death, and resurrection must be remembered and retold down the generations, for he is the one who opens up the future which the ancestors had sought to secure. Interpreting Christ in this way, insists Bujo, will be far more meaningful to Africans than titles such as *logos* (Word) and *kyrios* (Lord). Hence he concludes,

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

53. *Ibid.*

It is important that Christianity show the Africans that being truly Christian and being truly African are not opposed to each other, because to be a true Christian means to be a true human being, since it was Jesus himself who was truly human and who humanised the world. Once however we have established that the legitimate yearnings of the African ancestors are not only taken up in Jesus Christ, but are also transcended in him, can we not use the concept of Proto-Ancestor as the starting-point of a Christology for which the enthusiasm of the African will be more than a passing fashion⁵⁴?

So although Bujo prefaces his work by stating that it is not to be viewed as a treatise on christology, he nonetheless introduces some profound reflections on Christ which are firmly rooted in African ancestral practice and directly relevant to Christian belief and practice today. Before concluding his work by spelling out such implications, he summarises his basic conviction as follows: "I believe that a truly dynamic Christianity will only be possible in Africa when the foundation of the African's whole life is built on Jesus Christ, conceived in specifically African categories"⁵⁵.

2. *Christ as Liberator*

Jean-Marc Éla

Another contemporary theologian who has received widespread acclaim is Jean-Marc Éla, a Camerounian priest. Like Bujo, Éla claims not to write a theological treatise, but to respond to the urgent requests arising from his decade of ministry to the Kirdi people of north Cameroun. Hence he writes a highly contextualized theology in that his experience of living among village peasants, whom he refers to as those "rejected by history"⁵⁶, continually informs his reflections on the faith. Yet his theology is not restricted to this particular context; rather, he draws upon their common experience of suffering injustice and oppression to address the broader concerns of independent, sub-Saharan Africa. Again like Bujo, Éla blurs the distinction between inculturation and liberation theologies in his central thesis that "liberation of the oppressed must be the primary condition for any authentic inculturation of the Christian message"⁵⁷. And further like Bujo, he seeks to address the central question of the Christian faith: "Jesus of Nazareth asks us:

54. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

56. J.-M. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, tr. J. Pairman and S. Perry, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1988, p. xviii.

57. *Ibid.*, p. xvi; emphasis original.

'Africans, who do you say I am?' and we must answer from our world of today"⁵⁸.

Indeed, it is his prophetic perception of and response to the "world of today" which lends such power and distinctive focus to Éla's writing. He finds clear rationale for his approach in recent directives of the Roman Catholic Church⁵⁹ as well as in the conclusions of the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians in Accra. Éla asserts that the Final Communiqué from this conference is a landmark in that it not only acknowledges the new challenge for African theology to manifest "the liberation of our people from a cultural captivity", but also admits that oppression extends beyond culture to political, economic, and social structures. Hence Accra confirmed that "African theology must also be liberation theology"⁶⁰. Given such freedom and necessity, Éla launches into full-scale attack on the deplorable conditions across contemporary Africa. Space does not allow for recounting the litany of ills suffered by the continent, but it is in such expression that Éla's writing is at its most incisive. Nor does the Church escape his scorching critique, as one example will suffice to show:

In our environment, our faith does not ask questions about the sex of the angels or the infallibility of the pope; instead we question the lack of any genuine application of the critical function inherent in the Christian faith. How can we show that the African church is blocked by an ecclesiastical praxis that is, in fact, a kind of museum of a narrow moralism,

58. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

59. E.g. those articulated by the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) at Accra in 1977, the African bishops meeting in Yaoundé in 1981, and various statements from Pope John Paul II. See, e.g., J.-M. ÉLA, *Christianity and Liberation in Africa*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (n. 10), pp. 136-139.

60. This section of the Final Communiqué is worth citing in full in view of its significance for the development of liberation theology in Africa. The document records,

Because oppression is found not only in culture but also in political and economic structures and the dominant mass media, African theology must also be *liberation* theology. The focus on liberation in African theology connects it with other Third World theologies. Like black theologians in North America, we cannot ignore racism as a distortion of the human person. Like Latin American and Asian theologians, we see the need to be liberated from socio-economic exploitation. A related but different form of oppression is often found in the roles set aside for women in the churches. There is the oppression of Africans by white colonialism, but there is also the oppression of blacks by blacks. We stand against oppression in any form because the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all forms of dehumanization. African theology concerns itself with bringing about the solidarity of Africans with black Americans, Asians, and Latin Americans who are also struggling for the realization of human communities in which the men and women of our time become the architects of their own destiny. See *Final Communiqué*, in K. APPIAH-KUBI and S. TORRES (eds.), *African Theology en Route* (n. 15), p. 194.

a ritualistic sacramentalism, a disembodied spirituality, and a withering dogmatics⁶¹?

From this context of what Éla perceives to be “a form of decaying Christianity, bound up in its doctrine and discipline”⁶², he proposes what he calls “shade-tree theology – a theology that, far from the libraries and the offices, develops among brothers and sisters searching shoulder to shoulder with unlettered peasants for the sense of the word of God in situations in which this word touches them”⁶³. Once again, an examination of his theology cannot be undertaken at present other than a brief consideration of his method and christological reflections.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Éla finds his point of departure for theology in the present context. He writes, “These urgent problems of contemporary Africa become the obligatory locus of theological research. ...[I]t is no longer enough to pose the questions of faith on the level of culture alone. We must also pay attention to the mechanisms and structures of oppression at work”⁶⁴. His overriding concern is to testify to the gospel message in terms of incarnation, which entails far more than merely adopting African words and African rhythms to speak of God and sing his praise. With eyes fully fixed on the plight of the poor and oppressed, Éla calls for the “*pedagogy of the discovery of situations of sin and oppression* – situations that rear their heads in contradiction with the project of the salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ”⁶⁵. This includes promoting a mentality of active solidarity among the suffering people, and making an inventory of the factors or mechanisms of injustice. Then, in addition to exposing such sin in the contemporary world, the church must submit itself to a critical analysis to reveal its “*radical incompatibility with God’s plan for the world*”⁶⁶. From here, leaders must arise as prophetic voices within the community, and together the community must seek transformation so that they might experience more of the justice and peace intended by God⁶⁷.

As a liberation theologian, Éla also works from the fundamental premise that “*God is not neutral*. God is revealed as the one who brings

61. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African* (n. 56), p. 153.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

63. J.-M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, tr. R.R. Barr, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1986, p. vi.

64. J.-M. ÉLA, *Christianity and Liberation in Africa*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (n. 10), p. 140.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 143; emphasis original.

66. *Ibid.*; emphasis original.

67. For summary statements of Éla’s method, cf. *African Cry* (n. 63), p. 28, and *My Faith as an African* (n. 56), p. xvi.

justice to the oppressed (Ps. 146:7-9)"⁶⁸. Consequently, the ministry of Jesus is interpreted in the same terms: "God's revelation through the incarnation obliges us to unmask the ultimate scandal of our faith: Jesus Christ made a radical choice in favor of those considered to be the dregs of the world"⁶⁹. Éla then contrasts this reality with the dominant theology of the rich, which normally reigns and which is said to spiritualize Jesus to such an extent that his humanity, with all its tensions and conflicts, is forgotten. Hence he emphasises,

The incarnation is the supreme event of our faith – God's final word to us (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-2). It is difficult to realize its full significance unless we grasp it through the world of poverty and oppression. The real world of the gospel is one of hunger, wealth and injustice, sickness, rejection, slavery, and death. It is precisely through the structures of such a world that God is revealed. God is present through Jesus of Nazareth, who, in the incarnation, reveals God's omnipotence in weakness and establishes a form of conspiracy between God and the downtrodden⁷⁰.

Jesus' ministry is then expounded in terms of his announcing the good news, beginning with an option for the poor, and his central act of proclaiming the Kingdom of God for the sake of the poor. His actions are rooted in the prophetic tradition of protest against injustice and oppression. It must therefore be noted, according to Éla, that Christianity begins with a criticism of religion, which is essentially a criticism of all society, of human relationships, and of power (Mt 20:25). However, the real issue Jesus confronted was the oppressive laws which assured the prosperity of some at the cost and exclusion of others. He summarises his interpretation as follows:

In the end, the gospel confronts a strategy of domination leading to hunger, set in a world structure where the administration of the wealth of the earth is monopolized by those who control the economic and political apparatus. Jesus reveals God and his option for the poor and the little ones – in the heart of a society built for ideological and religious reasons on the basis of marginalization, misery, and oppression⁷¹.

Thus, concludes Éla, Jesus constantly sides with the poor and defenceless against the rich and powerful, and the Kingdom of God means the liberation of the oppressed.

This perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus also shapes the way in which his death and resurrection are perceived. Since his life was one of solidarity with the poor, this forms the key to a credible interpretation

68. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African* (n. 56), p. 104; emphasis original.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

of his death in the contemporary context. Jesus, as a victim of repressive violence, is said to pay for the boldness of his subversive ideas with his life. Hence today his death is to be understood in terms of God's presence amidst actions that break away from the dominant religion and society. Éla explains,

Jesus' death is the result of his option for the poor and oppressed. The contemporary society, in turn, condemns Jesus as a blasphemer for having shown the God of the exodus to the poor.

... Jesus died so that people can stand upright – that is the center of the gospel message.... To 'follow Jesus' is to live out his subversive plan, his stance for the poor against situations of misery and oppression. The presence of misery and oppression is a basic form of the 'sin of the world' that contradicts the kingdom of justice and freedom inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth. ... For Christians and the church, the liberation of the poor, then, is the basic issue at stake in the death of Jesus⁷².

Similarly, the resurrection of Jesus is acknowledged to be the summit of revelation, and the means by which he has conquered death and inaugurated a new world. Éla immediately questions, however,

But how can we celebrate the resurrection where millions of men and women live in suffering and oppression? How can the resurrection of Jesus become an historical experience in the struggle for life itself by those who are weak and without power? How does the resurrection of the humiliated begin today⁷³?

Such questions lead to the heart of the biblical message and Christian faith today, for in Éla's view, Africans are presently living out the passion of Jesus in history. Hence he questions, "If the poor and oppressed are the presence of the crucified God, can we read the Bible apart from contemporary situations of poverty and oppression?"⁷⁴ On this basis he urges the questioning of everything that traditional theology has taught about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, voicing doubt that it has any real meaning at all today. Instead, he asserts the following interpretation:

If we view the cross of Jesus Christ as the cross of the Third World, the very existence of the Third World shows us what sin is and how it is structured in history. The Third World carries within itself the hidden Christ. It is the historic body of Jesus Christ today.

We must go and rediscover Christ in the slums, in places of misery and domination, among the majority of the poor and the oppressed people. It

72. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

74. *Ibid.*

is the Third World that allows the church to make salvation in Jesus Christ visible⁷⁵.

With this view of ministering the gospel, Éla reflects the centrality of Jesus of Nazareth to his own thought and action. He comments, "Certain events force me to turn back to the Nazareth experience, to go to the heart of that time and to live it again, not as a time of pre-mission, but as the mission itself. That is not easy"⁷⁶. Yet his primary conviction is that salvation in Jesus Christ means liberation from every form of slavery, and the Church must demonstrate this salvation concretely by creating conditions that liberate humans and allow them to grow. He states,

The church must adopt the practice of Jesus himself. Jesus did not limit his mission to preaching an inner conversion. His concern was precisely for the liberation of the poor and oppressed (Luke 4:16-21). In Jesus, God is glimpsed in the gesture of shared bread and in the act of the person who rises up and walks. The practice and message of the good news will be translated by acts of liberating people from legalism and ritualism⁷⁷.

Thus, according to Éla, "Only through an active but humble involvement in the dynamics of African society will they [Christians] be able to live and proclaim Jesus Christ as the ultimate Liberator"⁷⁸.

3. *Christ at the Well: Views of African Women Theologians*

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (Jn 4) may be seen as a portrait, or a paradigm, of what is presently occurring in African women's christologies. Just as Jesus cut through deep prejudices of race, religion, gender and class to make meaningful contact with the Samaritan woman in her own context of suffering, so Christian women in Africa today relate how Christ meets them directly in their various contexts of suffering, especially those caused by oppressive structures in male-dominated societies. Hence Jesus' solidarity with those who are marginalized becomes a main motif for these women theologians, as expressed by Thérèse Souga from Cameroun: "There seems to be a deep bond, even a complicity, between Jesus of Nazareth and African women, a bond due to the fact that the women are among those who are most marginalized in our society"⁷⁹. Likewise his message of liberation and

75. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

78. ÉLA, *African Cry* (n. 63), p. 87.

79. T. SOUGA, *The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women: I. A Catholic Perspective*, in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1988, pp. 26-27.

life becomes central to their understanding and expression of what Jesus means to them in their situations of suffering. Consequently, these theologians assert that African women's experience in church and society must be taken into account in formulating relevant christology. Before hearing from selected women, however, it is beneficial to note the common ground which they share with male African theologians.

Like their male counterparts, African women theologians draw upon the sources and methods considered most relevant to contemporary christological reflection. For example, Mercy Oduyoye from Ghana, acknowledged as a leading woman theologian in Africa today, devotes a chapter to christology in one of her main publications, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. In addressing the topic of salvation, she begins by citing the contemporary realities which provide the context for Africans seeking salvation. She then turns to the Bible and, taking the approach of a word study, explains her method and its import as follows:

If one studies the Old Testament with the knowledge of the primal worldview of Africa and an awareness of the political and sociological realities that are shaping Africa as part of one's critical equipment, many similarities surface. The primal cry for salvation (*yeshuah*) is taken up in the New Testament and salvation is declared by Christianity to be in Christ. This I believe is the reason for the continued attraction of Christianity to Africans, in spite of the negative burdens associated with its carriers. The Christ of Christianity touches human needs at all levels, and Africans are but ordinary members of the human race feeling the need for salvation⁸⁰.

Likewise, Oduyoye writes an essay on christology with Ghanaian theologian Elizabeth Amoah. Together they work not only from Christian Scripture but also from the "unwritten Scriptures" of the Fante of Ghana⁸¹, and speak graphically of "the need to rewrap Christology in African leaves"⁸².

Furthermore, these women theologians share similar concerns to the male writers concerning the content of contemporary African christology. Amoah and Oduyoye provide incisive critique concerning the main christologies which Africa inherited from the modern missionary enterprise, such as the problems surrounding the "royal Christology" and

80. M. ODUYOYE, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1986, pp. 98-99.

81. A. AMOAH and M. ODUYOYE, *The Christ for African Women*, in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (n. 79), p. 35.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

those related to eschatology⁸³. In doing so, they reflect similar views regarding inculturation and liberation christologies as those articulated by male African theologians.

For the present purpose, however, attention will be focused on the emergence of the feminist paradigm in contemporary African christological reflection. First, these authors lament the fact that until recent decades, most written theology was produced by men and from a male perspective. Not only was the female perspective left unarticulated, but also "The theology on the person of Jesus tended to be much more philosophical and abstract than that of the existential Jesus of the Gospels who calls people as individuals and as a community to authentic human existence"⁸⁴. Ann Nasimiyu-Wasike, a Catholic theologian from Kenya, traces the origin of the problem to the early church era when christological formulations were being forged in the context of Jewish and Hellenistic categories of thought. As a result of the patriarchal realities of the time, theological references to Christ became heavily androcentric, reinforcing the assumption that God was male. Therefore, only male metaphors were considered appropriate to speak of God; moreover, "Christ had to be male in order to reveal a male God, and this was taken literally"⁸⁵. While man was understood to be made in the image of God, woman was only seen as the image of man and only saved through man. Such concepts about God and Christ in relation to man and woman coloured the development of theology in Europe for centuries, and consequently tainted perceptions of Christ brought by modern European missionaries to Africa. Nasimiyu-Wasike summarises the problem as follows:

The African church has inherited the misinterpretation of woman and her relation to God and Jesus from the European church. Therefore, the African woman, in addition to being under her cultural bondage and oppression, also experiences the socio-economic oppression of neo-colonialists in the church⁸⁶.

Given this historical backdrop, it is not surprising that African women theologians today are raising new questions in their exploration of christology. For example, Amoah and Oduyoye ask, "What have women to do with the concept of Christology? What do women say about Christology?"

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38.

84. A. NASIMIYU-WASIKE, *Christology and an African Woman's Experience*, in J.N.K. MUGAMBI and L. MAGESA (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (n. 9), p. 123.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

Is there such a thing as a women's Christology? Do the traditional statements of Christology take into account women's experience of life?"⁸⁷ Likewise Souga questions,

Is this Jesus whom we find to be full of concern for the women of his own time also today standing with African women in their particular context? Can African women understand Jesus Christ and understand themselves in relation to Jesus of Nazareth? Doesn't the concrete historic situation of African women challenge the theology that we would like to live in the churches of Africa⁸⁸?

In similar fashion, Louise Tappa, also from Cameroun, voices what she considers to be the fundamental question as follows: "In the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socioreligious context of Third World countries in general and of Africa in particular, what does confessing Christ mean for the African woman?"⁸⁹

Once again, new paths of christology emerge in response to such questions. Women theologians are quick to point out that despite the paucity of written christologies by African women, reflections on Christ do exist even if they are virtually unknown. For example, Amoah and Oduyoye mention Afua Kuma, cited above in the introduction, whose prayers and praises to Jesus have only recently been translated and published for wider access. Or, Nasimiyu-Wasike, recognising the shortage of written materials, conducted interviews with a variety of African Christian women concerning the central question, "Who is Jesus Christ in your life?"⁹⁰

On the basis of such explorations, these women theologians attest to the fact that African women's christologies tend to reflect primarily *the interplay of faith and life*. Amoah and Oduyoye point out that the men and women of Africa share the same traditions and present realities, and they learned their Christianity "from the same Western, male-centered, clerically minded missionaries". They then claim that "African women, however, have a different experience and interpretation of this common reality and of lived Christianity", explained as follows:

87. AMOAH and ODUYOYE, *The Christ for African Women*, in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion* (n. 79), p. 35.

88. SOUGA, *The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women: I. A Catholic Perspective*, in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion* (n. 79), p. 25.

89. L. TAPPA, *The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women: II. A Protestant Perspective*, in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion* (n. 79), p. 31.

90. NASIMIYU-WASIKE, *Christology and an African Woman's Experience*, in J.N.K. MUGAMBI and L. MAGESA (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (n. 9), p. 125.

Though, in general, the women affirm the Christological position of the African men, at times they go beyond it or contradict it altogether. This can be gleaned not so much from the writings of African women as from the way they live and from their Christianity – their very spirituality, their witness to what Christ means for their lives⁹¹.

For example, while affirming the recognition of Christ as liberator, they offer their perspective on what this means for African women:

This Christ is the liberator from the burden of disease and the ostracism of a society riddled with blood-taboos and theories of inauspiciousness arising out of women's blood. Christ liberated women by being born of Mary, demanding that the woman bent double with gynecological disorders should stand up straight. The practice of making women become silent 'beasts' of societies' burdens, bent double under racism, poverty, and lack of appreciation of what fullness of womanhood should be, has been annulled and countered by Christ. Christ transcends and transforms culture and has liberated us to do the same⁹².

Moreover, they object to the ruler-image of Christ the King as developed by John Pobee, on the basis that human experience of hierarchies, which are usually patriarchal structures, does not commend itself to those being alienated and oppressed. They stress, "Patriarchal/hierarchical structures have little room for the participation and inclusiveness that those whose humanity is being trampled upon yearn for"⁹³.

Instead, Amoah and Oduyoye affirm Jesus in their understanding and experience as the true companion, friend, and teacher, and

the true 'Child of Women' – 'Child of Women' truly because in Christ the fullness of all that we know of perfect womanhood is revealed. He is the caring, compassionate nurturer of all. Jesus nurtures not just by parables but by miracles of feeding. With his own hands he cooked that others might eat; he was known in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is Christ – truly woman (human) yet truly divine, for only God is the truly Compassionate One⁹⁴.

Finally, their main conclusion is worth quoting at length, to capture the voices of these women in their contemporary christological reflection:

An African woman perceives and accepts Christ as a woman and as an African. The commitment that flows from this faith is commitment to full womanhood (humanity), to the survival of human communities, to the 'birthing,' nurturing, and maintenance of life, and to loving relations and life that is motivated by love.

91. AMOAH and ODUYOYE, *The Christ for African Women* in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion* (n. 79), p. 43.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Having accepted Christ as refugee and guest of Africa, the woman seeks to make Christ at home and to order life in such a way as to enable the whole household to feel at home with Christ. The woman sees the whole space of Africa as a realm to be ordered, as a place where Christ has truly 'tabernacled.' Fears are not swept under the beds and mats but are brought out to be dealt with by the presence of Christ. Christ becomes truly friend and companion, liberating women from assumptions of patriarchal societies, and honoring, accepting, and sanctifying the single life as well as the married life, parenthood as well as the absence of progeny. The Christ of the women of Africa upholds not only motherhood, but all who, like Jesus of Nazareth, perform 'mothering' roles of bringing out the best in all around them. This is the Christ, high priest, advocate, and just judge in whose kingdom we pray to be⁹⁵.

Nasimiyu-Wasike provides further insight into African women's christologies. First, she points out that most African women work sixteen to eighteen hours daily to provide the basic necessities for their families. Hence she observes, along with her theological colleagues from West Africa, that

[t]hey have very little time to seriously reflect on their relationship with other people and with God. Nevertheless, these women believe that their lives are lived in union with God; their theology is not one which is written and articulated but one which is lived and practised in everyday activities and experiences⁹⁶.

Working from the context of African women's experience, Nasimiyu-Wasike notes that their main struggles are against those forces which deny them control over their own destiny and which prevent them from fulfilling their God-given potential. Severe hardships include the physical labour demanded of them, particularly in the rural areas, as well as ongoing cultural oppression. Nasimiyu-Wasike sums up, "Despite their nurturing, maintaining, and serving life for the survival of human communities, women are always marginalized and given an inferior status"⁹⁷.

Having considered the contemporary context, Nasimiyu-Wasike proceeds by analysing her personal interviews with women as mentioned above. From her findings, she discerns the actual role which Jesus plays in their lives, such as protector from evil powers and provider of strength, comfort, courage, and hope midst the hardships within home, church, and society. She also examines the gospel materials concerning

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

96. NASIMIYU-WASIKE, *Christology and an African Woman's Experience*, in J.N.K. MUGAMBI and L. MAGESA (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (n. 9), p. 130.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Jesus and women, and asserts that Jesus' attitude to women was "revolutionary" and "countercultural"⁹⁸. Hence she concludes that despite the inferior status of women in Jewish society, "Jesus esteemed them and gave them equal status to men. The original relationship between women and men first established by God at creation was restored in Jesus Christ"⁹⁹. She then reviews several christological models in contemporary theological discussion, adding a feminist perspective to the eschatological, anthropological, liberational, and cosmological models¹⁰⁰.

Particularly noteworthy is Nasimiyu-Wasike's proposal of Jesus as "mother". Elsewhere she expands on this theme as follows:

In Jesus' life we see him take on the qualities of a mother. He is a nurturer of life, especially that of the weak. Jesus' motherhood is characterized by nourishment, protection, and care for the poor and marginalized. The way Jesus related to people and especially the disciples, showed warm tenderness, affection, receptivity and a readiness to restore life to wholeness. ... All the followers of Christ, especially those in Africa, are called today to be mothers that nurture life in all its different dimensions¹⁰¹.

She further highlights Christ the healer as being especially relevant to the African reality. Finally, she summarises her reflection on christology as follows:

The African woman's experience calls for a christology that is based on a holistic view of life. She needs the Christ who affects the whole of her life, whose presence is felt in every corner of the village and who participates in everything and everybody's daily life. She needs the Christ who relates to God, the God who can be reached through the spirits and the living dead or through direct intercession. This God, the Christ, is the one who takes on the conditions of the African woman – the conditions of weakness, misery, injustice, and oppression.

... He continues to empower and enable the African woman today so that she passes from unauthentic to authentic human existence, and so that she discovers her true identity of being made in the image and likeness of God¹⁰².

Thus it becomes evident that African women's experiences of Christ provide new perspectives on current christological inquiry. In their

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 130.

99. *Ibid.* p. 126.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-134.

101. A. NASIMIYU-WASIKE, *Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the African Context at the Dawn of a New Millenium*, [photocopy, unpublished manuscript of a lecture delivered in Assisi, Italy, June 1997, made available by the author], p. 7.

102. NASIMIYU-WASIKE, *Christology and an African Woman's Experience*, in J.N.K. MUGAMBI and L. MAGESA (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (n. 9), pp. 130-131.

reflections upon biblical and African traditions and the contemporary context, these female theologians seem especially concerned to grapple with the reality and significance of Jesus to the everyday existence of African women. Perhaps it is this interplay of faith and life exemplified by women across the continent that will comprise their lasting contribution to contemporary African christology, for as Amoah and Oduyoye stress,

Christology down the ages, though derived from the experiences of the early companions of Jesus of Nazareth and those of their immediate associates, has been formulated in response to the actual historical realities of each age and place. Persons have contributed by the way each perceives and experiences Christ. 'Christ' has *been explained* through imagery, cosmology, and historical events by both 'speakers' and 'listeners.' This process continues in Africa. One thing is certain: whatever the age or place, the most articulate Christology is that silently performed in the drama of everyday living¹⁰³.

III. CONCLUSION

If indeed the centre of gravity of world Christianity has shifted to the southern hemisphere, as it is increasingly recognised, then Africa warrants careful consideration in any dialogue concerning current developments in theology. This introductory exploration of new paths of African christology, however brief and selective, has attempted to highlight certain voices that are representative of the creative christologies presently flourishing across the continent. What, then, is the significance of these christologies, both within Africa and within the wider context of global christologies?

African Christian theologians express optimism at the progress which has been made from the initial declaration of need for African christology to be formulated, to the actual proliferation of such christological expressions in recent decades¹⁰⁴. Despite the ongoing needs and challenges, a plurality of christological reflections is in fact emerging from the African context. Nor should such a plurality of christologies be considered a theological novelty, since the critical question of Jesus, "Who do you say I am?" (Mk 8:29) is understood by Christians to be addressed to every individual and generation in every context. As John Pobee explains, christology pertains to

103. AMOAH and ODUYOYE, *The Christ for African Women*, in V. FABELLA and M. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion* (n. 79), p. 45; emphasis original.

104. E.g., NYAMITI, *Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions*, in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Christology* (n. 10), p. 70.

people's attempt to articulate and portray the Christ who confronts them or whom they have experienced or met on a Damascus Road. And they do that articulation from their being and as they are. So one ... can expect different and varying emphases in that articulation, differences determined by one's experience, by one's heritage, by one's gender, by one's race. The encounter on the Emmaus road is not identical with the encounter on the Damascus road¹⁰⁵.

The very existence of this plurality of African christologies reflects a crucial observation, that Jesus Christ has indeed nudged his way into the spiritual universe of the African. No longer need he be regarded as a "white man's god", a stranger, or a guest, as he may have been viewed in the past. Instead, these African theologians have articulated how African Christians may understand and respond to Jesus not only as Lord and Christ, Saviour and Shepherd, but also as "Ancestor", "Elder Brother", "Nganga" ("the medicine person"), and "Master of the Initiation". Even more significantly, in understanding and appropriating Jesus according to their own cultural inheritance and identity, these African Christians clearly evidence the universality of the gospel message. Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako notes, "For Christianity is, among all religions, the most culturally translatable, hence the most truly universal, being able to be at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character"¹⁰⁶. He further emphasises that once this discovery is made,

the important question is no longer: why should we relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to our clan, family, tribe and nation? Rather the question becomes: how may we understand more fully this Jesus Christ who in fact relates to us most meaningfully and most profoundly in our clan, family, tribe and nation¹⁰⁷?

As Jesus becomes more deeply rooted in various African families, clans, and nations, with the concomitant plurality of African christologies, further theological significance emerges for the wider context of global theologies. Yusufu Obaje points out,

As the Lord of life, no one or no particular group of persons in any given period of life can exhaust the full meaning of who he is and the implications of his life for either the individual, the Church, or the world as a whole. This must be the case, for there is always the known, the not-yet-disclosed or the unknown dimension of the one 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty' (Revelation 1:8b)¹⁰⁸.

105. J.S. POBEE, *In Search of Christology in Africa: Some Considerations for Today*, in J.S. POBEE (ed.), *Exploring Afro-Christology*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1992, pp. 9-10.

106. BEDIAKO, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (n. 31), p. 43.

107. *Ibid.*

108. Y.A. OBAJE, *Theocentric Christology*, in J.S. POBEE (ed.), *Exploring Afro-Christology* (n. 105), p. 43.

No single context of Christianity, then, can claim a monopoly on christological reflection. Rather, as Andrew Walls has ably demonstrated through biblical and historical investigation, the perception and experience of Jesus by different cultures throughout history has in fact expanded our corporate understanding of Christ. Examining what occurred in the apostolic church as Christ was communicated across cultural boundaries, he explains:

And the process was hugely enriching; it proved to be a discovery of the Christ. As Paul and his fellow missionaries explain and translate the significance of the Christ in a world that is Gentile and Hellenistic, that significance is seen to be greater than anyone had realized before. It is as though Christ himself actually grows through the work of mission – and indeed, there is more than a hint of this in one New Testament image (Eph. 4:13). As he enters new areas of thought and life, he fills the picture (the Pleroma dwells in him). It is surely right to see the process as being repeated in subsequent transmission of the faith across cultural lines¹⁰⁹.

Given such biblical and historical precedents, there is every reason to believe that contemporary African theologians are extending this very process in their efforts to articulate African christologies. This would seem to be at the heart of Éla's appeal when he states, "The Risen One exposes faith to an inexhaustible realm of possibilities. That is why we are searching for a form of speech that will bring the voices of Africa to the life of the world-wide church"¹¹⁰. May we therefore welcome the voices of those men and women who bring the Jesus of Africa to our attention, for "It is a delightful paradox that the more Christ is translated into the various thought forms and life systems which form our various national identities, the richer all of us will be in our common Christian identity"¹¹¹.

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109. A.F. WALLS, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1996, p. xvii.

110. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African* (n. 56), p. 143.

111. WALLS, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (n. 109), 54.

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