

AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES: THE CENTRE-PIECE OF AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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I. Introduction

There is no denial that the significance and personality of Jesus as the Christ has continued to be expressed differently from culture to culture in Christian history and tradition. Over the centuries, this category »the Christ, the Anointed One« and others, such as are found in the Epistles of Paul and the Book of Revelation, had dominated Christian thought and soteriology so much that we can say that people's concrete historical situation and their cultural religious experience determine their christology. In the early Christian period, we could distinguish between Jewish Christian christology and the Hellenistic Christian christology. Did the former not arise from Judaic culturally oriented-soteriology and the later from the Hellenistic culturally-oriented soteriology? In this perspective, and given the diverse cultures of the African peoples, African portrayals of Jesus have today become uncountable. Indeed the pattern of expressing who Jesus is and his significance for the salvation of African Christians has, in recent times, become a fertile area of research. Thus the African countenances of Christ are taking their queue in the long line of christological varieties in the Christian religion. Typical of the emerging, vibrant African Christianity are its own distinctive indigenous portrayals of the Christ of God; especially as he is encountered in faith and every-day life.

The encounter between Christianity and African cultures has resulted in the multifarious manner in which faith in Jesus Christ is being expressed. As Charles Nyamiti, a well known African christologist has observed, the expressions are produced in the light of »the problems, aspirations and mentality« of African peoples (Nyamiti 1989: 6). Since many African Christians have come to accept that it is in the incarnation of Jesus as the Son of God that the entire revelation of the most High God as Father is summed up, questions about Jesus' identity and personality have come to be uttered in diverse responses and verbalisations. Nevertheless, the discernment of the meaning of the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, his life, person, words, work, death and resurrection has increasingly been allowed to assume cultural significance in the African Christianity. This phenomenon has

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become urgent as African Christians, totaling almost 250 million today (Barret 1982: 4), have begun to question the adequacy of the missionary presentation of the gospel and the depictions of Jesus furnished by western historical models and interpretative methods. And as it has become almost widely accepted that the Christian religion has found a »homeland« in Africa, a different way through which African Christians are seeing, knowing and understanding Jesus as the Christ in the African situation has become part and parcel of their religiosity and spirituality. Such visions of Christ, whether biblically inspired or learned at the prompting of the Holy Spirit by the African faithful, church leaders and their professional theologians must be regarded as the hallmark of African Christianity. It must be admitted that Christianity, having crossed cultural boundaries, has begun to wear different garbs. There is no doubt that the African garb of Christianity will, to a large extent, determine what the Christian religion is going to be like in the 21st century.

This paper takes its starting point from a brief, analytic discussion on the meaning of Christology and the diversities which flow out of currents of African Christians', religious mentality and experience (II). Section (III) discusses the African contexts. It explores the worldviews and the socioeconomic conditions of man in the African world which provide the breeding ground for the birth of various autochthonous ideas and notions believers ascribe to Jesus. In the fourth unit (IV), the concept of African Theology is discussed as it is presented in current African theological literature. Its origin, content and current trends are explored. The paper argues that African Christologies uniquely constitute vital components of African Christian theology. The fifth section (V) is a presentation and discussion of eleven concrete samples of culturally-oriented images of Jesus created by African Christians. Section (VI) concludes the paper with a succinct summation of the implications of the diverse portrayals of Jesus Christ in Africa and for world Christianity.

II

What exactly is Christology? A classical English Dictionary defines the concept as follows: »the branch of theology concerned with the person, attributes and deeds of Christ« (Hanks 1979: 271). And according to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Christology is a »theological interpretation of the person and work of Christ« (Webster 1985: 238). At the centre of these definitions there stand out two prominent traits: Christ's personality and praxis. It is in this light that I have elsewhere argued that »Christology is the heart-beat of Christian theology and the axle at which all pastoral activities revolve« (Manus 1994: 18). This affirmation is made because the personality of Jesus is at the centre of the Christian faith. In their encounter with the »texts« of the historical Jesus of the Gospels, African Christians freely confess faith in Jesus as the promised One of God, and the Risen Lord. African Christians' understanding in faith of the person of Jesus, his attributes, words and his mission is an indication that they confess faith in a dynamic God who is involved in their precarious history, their insecure, politically, volatile and unstable societies. If the established churches do not or continue to pretend that they do not, the

divines of the African New Religious Movements do recognize this precarious nature of the African world. David Olayiwola has, in a recent study, identified the African Christian New Religious Movements' sensibility of this reality.

As he loudly states: »The leaders and members of these movements, ... affirm the reality of the unseen world of spiritual forces which is why they engage in relentless warfare against witches and socerers, thus enlisting their spiritual counter-power with all seriousness. Accordingly, they hold the view that recourse to religion is the solution to the problems of political instability, economic distress, social insecurity and myriads of personal problems and inadequacies.« (Olayiwola 1995: 332)

Most African simple folk agree that Jesus took on flesh; especially to meet them at their various needs in life. In their understanding, he is the Word-made-flesh through whom the whole African world is believed to be restored to God, the Father and the Creator. It is because they see Jesus at the same time divine and human, unlike the unacceptable and unintelligible Christology of the Greek Fathers with its lack of interrelationship of all being, that they accept that Jesus fulfills a unique role in Salvation History. If he were not divine, by what power and authority do the teeming millions of oppressed and famished African peoples believe that he liberates them? If he were not human, Africans would not believe he could achieve their redemption in this bleak and unjust world. How can he know their weaknesses and be able to repair their broken relationships? Questions such as these reflect the common view of the Christ in various parts of Christian Africa today. Formulated to give responses to these questions, African Christologies are in the tradition of the Church. The Christologies affirm the integrity of the two natures of Christ to which the historic Christological Councils of the fifth century (the General Council of Ephesus, 531 and Chalcedon, 451) had struggled to give a definitive expression; especially on the union of the two natures in one person (Pannenberg 1976: 283–364).

Aware of this traditional dogmatic stance reflected in the opinion of the common people, many African Christologists consider it necessary to stress, in view of the vicissitudes of life in the African world, the »Christology from below«. Their portrayals draw attention to what Jesus accomplishes as a historical person in the lives of the believing communities. For most Africans, the life, words, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus are the acts of God's self-disclosure in human history. The life-project of Jesus of Nazareth is the locus where Africans anchor their »speaking about« God, man and the world. African Christologies, therefore, derive from the different angles of response and answer given by African Christians to the perennial question: »Who do you say that I am?« (Mk 8,29/Matt 16,16/Lk 9,18) This is a question which is continually being given expression in multifarious, autochthonous categories and symbols from various parts of Christian Africa by the episcopal authorities, academia and the grassroots. In contemporary religious gatherings such as the open-air rallies, crusades of the New Religious Movements and the Healing Masses of the Roman Catholic priest-healers, the songs, testimonies, choruses, praise-songs and prayers uttered from the innermost being of African Christians – who Jesus is, what he has done and is doing in their lives and in the world in which they live – is authentically disclosed. Schoffeleers and others have carefully noted that African

Christians' experience of Jesus as the absolute Lord of life manifests itself more as a latent folk christology which is increasingly typifying African Christianity in the years ahead (Schoffeleers 1989). Such »popular« christologies lay emphasis on the soteriological dimension of the Christ event and the divine in-breaking into the African world.

With this understanding, it appears correct to argue that Africans define Jesus in terms of function. Thus functional Christology is decodable from the various names given to Jesus in the myriads of African Christian songs, hymns, prayers, chants and incantations. Thus African Christologies are in close agreement with the original orientation of the Synoptic Gospels which portray Jesus' activities in functional terms rather than in ontological perspectives. For the Africans, the question: »who is Christ« is not essentially an enquiry about Jesus' nature but as most perceive it, it is about Jesus' function, as Oscar Cullmann had much earlier argued from a biblical point of view (Cullmann 1959: 3-4). While Jean Galot, in his classic work »Who is Christ? ...«, would agree that by sound exegesis of the asidequestion Jesus put to his inner disciples (Mk 8,27 par.), he was not enquiring about what they believed he had come to do or what kind of work he was dedicating himself to (Galot 1989: 6); African Christians go further to extrapolate from the NT narratives as simple folk Bible readers, the significance of Jesus' signs and wonders in the African environments which are almost identical with those of Jesus' contemporaries. The answers to the question, who is Jesus, his personal identity as the Mighty One of God is, in the African conception, mythopoeic and needs literal interpretation. The query collapses into his mission. This is what African Christians I have observed closely informed me they elicit from the responses of the biblical crowd who wondered whether Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the old prophets redivivus. While the issue of the personality of Jesus has, in the light of the anti-Judaic portrayal of the first century Palestinian crowd, remained quite ambivalent, for African Christians, it is Jesus' towering personality and functionality which commandeers their faith towards him.

III. African Contexts

The central focus of the African mind is the human being. What contemporary African philosophers are today uncovering for scholarship is circumscribed within Afro-centric anthropology. In African folklore nature is cast in narrative when it has a moral to impart to humankind or when it is symbolically mirrored in itself and its associated phenomena. The African sage or thinker recognizes himself as a being wedded to the big stream of life that flows through the ancestors into God Himself and through the offspring flows back into the future. What is real life is life led within the community. In which part of Africa can one find stark individualism? Name it. Thinking is a patrimony of the community. Thinking builds tradition. This may explain why the transmission of traditional values belongs to communal wisdom and the traditors and the experts are recognized as

community gurus in their own right. To my mind, this is the mental framework on which the African socio-religious, -economic and -political contexts can be understood.

(a) The Socio-Religious Contexts

The truism that religious outlook and worldviews are symbiotic is very sure in Africa where, more than elsewhere, both realities are interdependent and influence each other. Because the traditional African worldviews exert serious influence on the way most Africans live their Christian lives, K. Hock has warned that African cosmologies »are virtually monistic systems of ambivalent powers« (Hock 1995: 64). Along this line of thinking, using the Igbo universe as a case example, I have elsewhere argued that the African world is duo-dimensionally conceived: the first consists of a visible physical sphere – Ala Mmadu (the human world); the second, the invisible sphere – Ala Mmuo (the spirit world) (Manus 1986: 46–52). Within the physical realm, there abound inherent neutral dynamic forces in nature yet untapped for good or for evil. As Hock rightly observes, this is the sphere in which forces that possess »anything limiting, besetting or destroying life« abound (Hock: 64). It is known that witches and wizards employ these vital forces to harm others, while gifted and charismatic votaries, diviners and healers use them to effect good works. In the invisible sphere, there is believed to exist a department which is occupied by ancestral and benevolent spirits. According to O. Imasogie, the African person dwells betwixt the two realities and is quite open to their influence (Imasogie 1982: 54–56). O. Onwubiko, a Roman Catholic priest of the Ahiara Diocese in south-east Nigeria acknowledges the reality of these phenomena. As he argues, »the African world is a world of inanimate, animate and spiritual beings« (Onwubiko 1991: 3). He further opines that most Africans are not unaware of the influence each category exerts on each other in the universe. Forces within these two realms pose dangers to human life even if they be facts which are not demonstrable or which arise merely from the figments of the religious imagination. It is believed that such entities cause insecurity in the African world. Another Nigerian Catholic priest, an intellectual and a pastor, Fr. Nathaniel Ndiokwere, has isolated such forces as witchcraft, Mami Wata (Water spirit), poison and demon possession as sources of the psychosomatic and spiritual ailments which Africans believe afflict them in their homes, work-places and the environments (Ndiokwere 1990: 40; Bastian 1997: 117, 123–127). Recent anthropological research reveals that one of the deepest and the most enduring desires of all African societies is the anxiety to eliminate evil. The fight against evil which traumatizes Africans has become a regular activity of Christians through the invocations of the power of Jesus in various names, images and aphorisms. Hence arise the myriad Christs of the African local churches.

(b) The Socio-Economic Contexts

Responses to the question of who Jesus is are also derived from the present decay in the political and the socio-economic situations of most African nation-states. Political instability and civil wars have combined to make living in Africa become quite nightmarish with each passing day. The peoples' standard of living has nose-dived into the vast ocean of hopelessness. There are uncontrollable unemployment crises. Galloping inflationary trends in the African urban markets have sent many a family packing to the rural villages. In rural communities, poor living conditions, hunger, disappointments arising from Government unfulfilled election promises and abandoned projects aggravate the anxieties of the local population and more often than not cause civil unrest. Both the political, the economic and the social life in Africa engender multifarious and real crises such as are evidenced in the increasing social inequalities all over the African continent. Where there are rich people, they get richer and richer while the poor become poorer. The number of poor people in the African metropolises has also increased as is evidenced by the number of able-bodied beggars of all ages who stream to motorists at the slightest screech of the brakes to ask for money. Well over 50% of Africa's population live in abject poverty with incomes below the poverty line. The situation has worsened since most of the African nations have been cajoled into opting for the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP).

Alongside the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP), African peoples have been subjected to the terrible consequences of the so-called foreign debt crises. Indebtedness and insolvency are confronting Africans with difficult choices determining survival or extinction. And endemic to almost all Black African countries is the »tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation« (Bishop Adelakun 1996: 20). Besides, many leaders and public servants in Africa are greedy, power-hungry and self-centred. They use their positions and power to amass wealth at the expense of the people. Mis-rule by African leaders and the constant re-occurrence of military regimes and juntas, army mutinies with a record high in the Francophone African states aggravate the fall and the eventual »death« of the local currencies resulting in high inflation all over the Continent. In spite of all this, in many regions, Africans fall victim to economic exploitation meted out to them by local exploiters and their foreign cronies. The horrendous acts of genocide that happened in Rwanda and are still rearing their ugly head in Burundi indicate that ethnic identity, loyalty and mutual suspicion still live with us and quite often result in the weaker ethnic groups being oppressed and even eliminated by the stronger ones. Everywhere and everyday crime is on the increase: armed robbery; the phenomenon of the hired assassin; and hoodlums and car-snatchers freely move about and operate with alacrity.

Thus the African terrain is vastly water-logged by insecurity of persons and property. The consequences of these crimes on the African psyche is manifest in shattered personalities, broken business-partnerships, broken love relationships and even in broken homes. To whom do African Christians turn for succour and solace except to the liberating presence of Jesus Christ who is in their midst and humanizes the African social world?

Who is their Comforter and Counsel? Who is their Doctor? Who is their Lawyer? These questions culled from a contemporary charismatic Song suppose that we do not need to seek far to realize that the contours of African cultures, the patterns of the peoples' mentality, their problems and aspirations inevitable shape African peoples' imaging of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that African worldviews, cosmologies and the contemporary socio-political and economic experiences influence the way in which the Christ and his person are being given expression in the African churches and religious psychology. It is in this light that one may understand R.H. Fuller's assertion that this was how the cosmology and anthropology of the Hellenistic-Roman and eastern Palestinian periods influenced the Christology formulated by the early church (Fuller 1965).

IV. African Theology

The days have gone when *Theologia Africana* was being floated as a neologism in theological literature by premier African theologians (Dickson: 1974; Appiah-Kubi: 1979; Wambutda: 1980). In recent times, African theology has come to be accepted as an important discipline in the ecclesial communities and as an invaluable course of studies in the Universities in Africa and beyond (Nyamiti 1989: 5). This section of the paper examines the meaning of African Theology, some of its themes and current trends. The survey is entirely heuristic. It will attempt to demonstrate how Christology done by Africans can rightfully claim its place as an intrinsic branch of African Christian Theology. The purpose is hoped to be achieved by way of a brief history and definitions of African Christian Theology.

African theology is born in sub-saharan Africa during the decade when most African nations were struggling for political independence and freedom from colonial rule (1960–1970). This emergence was due to the achievement of a pressure-group who saw the need to root the gospel message into the African culture or as J.S. Mbiti, one of the earliest vanguards of African theology asserts »to explore the relationship between the Gospel and African culture« (Mbiti 1977: 26; Manus 1993: 14–17). Was it not G.H. Muzorewa who, a decade later, affirmed that »the purpose of African theology is to present the gospel in a more intelligible manner to Africans and to deal effectively with problems and situations peculiarly African« (Muzorewa 1985: 5). Many African theologians have become aware of the need to look at African culture as a mode of expression, thought and reflection. Charles Nyamiti defines African theology as a »discourse on God and on things related to him in accordance with the needs and mentality of the African people« (Nyamiti 1985: 5). A sufficiently good number influenced by John S. Mibiti hold strongly to the view that African theology should be seen as contextual African Biblical theology. This is not totally out of place as it can be argued that the idea had influenced theological thinking in South Africa in the Apartheid era. In this perspective, Muzorewa correctly observes that E.E. Mshana's optimism that »African theology is a theology which emerges from life, culture, traditions and faith of the African

peoples in their particular African contexts« becomes far-reachingly insightful (Muzorewa: 96). On the contextual relevance of African theology, Appiah-Kubi further amplifies: »African theology should be practical and relevant to the African people's needs. It should be situational, activist, dynamic and liberating« (Taken from Muzorewa: 96).

Besides, a definition offered by no less a body than the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in her 1969 Consultation at Abidjan is suspicious. In that text the participants declared: »By African theology we mean, a theology which is based on the Biblical faith and speaks to the African ›soul‹ ... It is expressed in categories of thought which arise out of the philosophy of the African peoples« (AACC 1970: 114).

The injunction which flows from this definition urges concerned African women and men theologians to formulate a biblically-based and relevant theology that responds to both the spiritual and material needs of the people. And in view of the increasingly emerging socio-critical approach in contemporary African biblical scholarship (Abe 1986, Manus 1986, Onah 1991, Olubunmo 1991), I have a strong inclination to sue for a rather comprehensive understanding of African theology especially when reasoned out of the nexus between African cultures and the social-political situations vis à vis the traditions of the Christian Church. Such an African theology must be willing to critique the socio-structural order in order to be able to propose a liberational hermeneutic in favour of the underside of history (Tutu 1978: 369, Manus 1996). The existential situation within which African Christians live their lives today has become a necessary factor in the attempt to galvanize the people to appreciate the need for the promotion of integral human development (Uzokwu 1991: 275-278). As the survey on the African contexts reveals, the socio-political and the economic realities cannot easily be distanced from the cultural dimension of life in Africa. They qualify to be rated as emergent cultural realities in which we cannot afford to deny Christ's presence (Acts 14, 15).

For Africans, evil is man-made and it is experienced as an existential instead of a rational problem. From what has been said so far, it stands to reason that African theology responds to the quest of African Christians to live authentic lives in the face of tortuous conditions of life which seem to affirm the absence rather than the presence of God, the Lord of life. The question whether God is on the side of the poor, the oppressed and those in bondage remains the locus theologiae africanae in our times (Manus 1985: 34-37). From the north to the south and from the east to the west, dehumanizing existential problems call for radical solutions in light of the message of Jesus, the Christ and his liberating presence (Lk 4,18). Non-person-oriented economic and technological policies coupled with the general lack of efficiency in the social and political organizations of African nations and the negligence of sustainable development as positive steps to eliminate poverty must come under the critical search-light of African Christian theology. As Kwesi Dickson alerts us, the unprioritized and the unrealistic economic order as well as the high incidence of misrule in Africa have begun to wear the face of »new cultures« (Dickson 1984: 136). Well-known traditional African cultures now co-exist side by side with the »new cultures«. They have so much interpenetrated each other that they have now given rise to cultural pluralism and identity crisis. This social cultural phenomenon must be

critiqued. I draw attention to this phenomenon because culture is a lived dynamic reality. It accommodates and undergoes rapid change and can respond to adaptations to varying situations. For me, this is the locale in which African theologians have to focus attention in their reflections. In some regions of Africa, culture is conceived as a social heritage while in some areas, it is perceived as an ideology which sustains the interests of the dominant group. Real and down-to-earth theology must affirm the presence of Christ in all cultures whether socially or ideologically conceived. Exclusion of Christ from the so-called emergent cultures in Africa means the refusal of Christ to »purify« whatever is evil in the African society. In so doing, African theology must work out the framework within which African Christians will adopt in their response to the socio-political and religious problems in their midst.

In sum, the definitions and the thoughts they provoke constitute, in my own way of thinking, the content, tasks and presuppositions of contemporary African theology. In this light, the reflections and pious utterances made to translate the experience of the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth into real and up-to-date African religiosity is, *par excellence*, Christology.

V. Samples of African Christologies and their Exponents

The foregoing discussion may not fully be grasped unless some concrete samples of the images of Jesus that demonstrate his active presence in the struggles of Africa's poor, the powerless and the oppressed are presented and commented upon. The samples are my own collections of the christologies which originate from African settings and may truly be considered the centre-piece of African Christian theology. The categories, of course, do not emanate from a vacuum. They are the fruits of African Christians' faith experience with the praxes of Jesus Christ as read from the New Testament. The images are numerous but for want of space, I wish to present eleven cases and their originators or inventors. I will support the presentations with texts, chants and hymns where available.

(i) Jesus Christ, the Sufferer

For many African Christians who are underprivileged and are unable to lead a decent life as a result of repressive regimes, military dictatorships and the violence associated with a One-Party system, the image of the suffering and crucified Christ expresses best their destiny as followers of Christ. In the former apartheid South Africa, the existential situation of many a Black under oppression and suffering was identified with that of Christ who had suffered. Such an image constituted the central manifesto of Setiloane's poem: I am an African and Buthelezi's essay, *Daring to Live for Christ* (Setiloane 1976: 128–131). The motif of Christ the Sufferer elicited from the writings of these authors

reflect Christological categories which formed the basis for the South African liberation theology during the apartheid era. For them, Jesus Christ provides the model for Christian suffering. His self-sacrificing suffering which robbed him of the right to personal security and interests was held to be vicarious and redemptive. Black Christians were required to accept their sufferings as leading to liberation. The figure of Jesus of history over against that of the Jesus from above, among others, was regarded as supreme in the then South African Black Christology. For B. Goba, »Christ opens the part of liberation as he shares our common humanity and God in his forsakenness suffers with us as the one who is crucified« (Goba 1980: 27). In the post-Apartheid South Africa, new images of Christ, the Mediator and the Reconciler are being carved out in order to promote change and reconciliation on the interpersonal, ecclesial and social-political levels. Incarnation-Christology is fast replacing the »theologia crucis« of yesteryear.

(ii) *Jesus Christ, the Prisoner*

In the Gethsamane pericope, Mk 14,32–50 and par., Jesus is taken prisoner (Mk 14, 46,48). He is arraigned before the highest court in the land (Sanhedrin). The moment must have been terrific. His disciples made good their escape, except for an unknown young man, the Νεανίσκος (Manus 1997). Jesus' imprisonment remains a Christian theme of encouragement to persons unjustly languishing in many squalid prison-yards in Africa. This image informs and underscores our understanding of the arrest and the imprisonment of a persecuted Kimbanguist Christian in colonial Belgian Congo. His passion is expressed in this song:

»Jesus is a prisoner
 Jesus was whipped
 They whip us too,
 We, the Blacks are prisoner,
 The White man is free, ...
 We suffer inexpressibly
 But through thy power
 No one can deter us.« (Source, Daneel 1984: 80)

Here is an example of a christology originating from a large-group African Independent Church in Central Africa. The song reflects on the kind of persecution African Christians endured in the hands of fellow white Christians; namely Belgian colonialists. Punishment of Africans by intimidation, arrests and whippings is identified by the author with the passion of Christ whose cleansing blood knows no racial boundaries. The cross of Christ is proclaimed in the Song as both universal and redemptive. The Song draws attention to a Christology which extols the presence of Christ the prisoner in the oppression of the downtrodden in society. It sings the African Christians' acceptance of »redemptive suffering after the model of Jesus Christ« (Daneel: 80). Jesus is, for the composer, the arrested prisoner from Gethsamane who looks with compassion on the innocent sufferers

as they suffer with him. In African Christianity, suffering inflicted by any authority is human degradation and in all its ramifications anti-Christ.

(iii) Jesus Christ, the Victor

In West Africa, the members of one of the Yoruba Independent Churches, The Church of the Lord Aladura, are known to highlight certain events in Christ's life in their Prayer Meetings. Usually their sermons invite the adherents to reflect on Christ's birth, his healing ministry, miracles and triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and on his death and resurrection. John S. Mbiti who had studied these stages of Jesus' life as the Aladuras employ them states that Christ is regarded in those churches as Christus Victor (the Victorious Christ) (Mbiti 1972: 54). For the pastors of these churches who often emphasize the precarious nature of human existence, the loss of divine gifts of immortality and rebirth as are related in some traditional African mythologies, and the overarching reality of evil, Christus Victor is the real and the only conqueror of evil and the victorious Saviour (Mbiti: 55). According to William Kumuyi, the founder and the charismatic leader of the *Deeper Life Bible Church* in Nigeria, there is no real power but the power of Jesus. From K. Hock's evaluation of Kumuyi's preachings, it is known that he stresses to his audience that Jesus' power encounters the hollow powers of demons, spirits, witches, sorcerers and the powers of sickness, poverty and death; namely evil in its individual and structural manifestations (Hock 1995: 62). Faith in the healing power of Jesus and as Victor or Winner over evil forces is summed up in a popular Nigerian revivalist Christian song:

Jesus-Power, Super-Power,
Satan's power, powerless-power (2x)

(iv) Jesus Christ, the Healer

In most, if not all African traditional societies, the powers and the efficacy of traditional healers variously known as *Bongaka* (Zulu), *Nganga* (Swahili), *Dibia* (Igbo) or *Onisegun* (Yoruba) and so on as well as their healing practices had been believed to derive from the High God variously known in African Religions. J.S. Pobee, a Ghanaian theologian, has demonstrated how the Akan people of Ghana see the work of the Akan healer as best realized in the activities of Jesus in the Gospels. While the Akan healer depends on the vital force which derives from God for all his healing acts, Jesus is *Nana*, the one who has the power and authority of God the Father (Pobee 1979: 93–95). J.M. Schoffeleers (1989) has shown that the *Nganga* had laid the paradigm for liberation and redemption in pre-Christian Africa. The *Nganga* is believed to have long executed his functions as both saviour and liberator of Africans under siege by the evil powers. As a religious leader, the

traditional healer in the African cultures is Christ's precursor and forerunner. As Christ is in all cultures ennobling and transforming all good things in them, for African Christians, this transcultural Christ is the real healer, the one who completes the tasks of the African religious and therapeutic traditions. In this perspective, a vast number of the pastors of the African New Religious Movements proclaim Christ as the healing *Nganga*, *Onisegun* or *Dibia n' agwo oria* (Igbo). Their priest-healers perform healings and cures among their members *ni oruko Jesu* (in the name of Jesu, Yoruba). My experience as a participant-observer in one such church speaks loud of their divines' claim that the Spirit of Christ is the source of their »extra perception« in the words of Daneel (Daneel: 84). What I saw had elsewhere been expressed as follows: »The healer sees himself only as a medium Jesus is the real healer, who performs through him. Thus, for this group and the others, Jesus is both *Oba* (King) and *Onisegun* (traditional medicine-man).« (Manus 1991: 42–43)

All the utterances and the incantations of the African faith-healers indeed point to a latent christology. Roman Catholic priest-healers as much as their Pentocostal and the Evangelical counterparts hold themselves to be the very personifications of the liberating and healing power of Christ who »dwells among men«. In their thaumatological activities, Christ is encountered as the One who cares, protects, resteres and banishes all forces of evil and the destructive powers and principalities. Since evil is an absolute, an anti-divine power, Jesus' healing actions make present the divine power of »good« for salvation and wholeness. Thus, Jesus is, as Hock admonishes, »the supernatural miracle man in human disguise who due to his divinity tears his people with signs and wonders from the abyss of this world« (Hock: 64).

(v) *Jesus Christ, the Great Chief, Ntita*

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Mbuji mayi in the now Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) has, in its current Missal and the Liturgy of the Word, expressed a Christology devised from their own context, religious experience and spirituality. Before the Lessons of the day are read, the assembly prays thus: »Lord Jesus ... help us to hear your word, the example of the anointed *Luaba* and our Chief, who conquers Satan and all evil, He who has life and power; world without end.«

At the Offertory, the Antiphon goes like this: »*Cimankinda*, full of life and honour, you sacrificed yourself to wipe out our sins. Enable us to do good, and then we shall be with you when you come ... Jesus, the Anointed, *Cilobo* who never runs from the enemy, accept the offering of our faith, and take it to the Father, you who have life and power ..., Amen.« (Ngindu Mushete 1988: 76)

The texts require sound exegesis informed by African anthropology. But suffice it to briefly remark that Christ as source of both life and power is the key concept in this liturgical composition. He is portrayed as the Great Chief, *Ntita*, the chief above all chiefs. He is *Luaba*, the Lord who is chosen to rule; *Cimankinda* or *Cilebo*, the Great Hero who

is ever in the frontline of battles and valiantly leads his people. He is the warrior who never flees from the enemy (Manus 1994: 22). Because Jesus has both »life and power«, he is the one who makes the Reign of God present through his solidarity with the dispossessed children of God in Africa and elsewhere. This African Church at Mbujimayi shows that she recognizes that God's liberating Reign concretely realises itself in the invincible might of Jesus, as the Lord of their faith-community.

(vi) Jesus Christ, Immanuel (God be with us)

With the Immanuel image, the reality of Jesus' incarnation in human history is re-affirmed. As such he is depicted as the One from God who has tabernacled among his people. By his preferential option for the poor and the outcasts, Jesus demonstrates that the Reign of God has dawned on his people. As Immanuel, he fellowshipped not only with his disciples but also with Tax Collectors and sinners. For African Christians and their theologians Jesus did not only bring salvation to individuals but also whole groups like the less fortunate persons in African societies. By fellowshipping with the Tax Collectors, Jesus broke with the socio-cultural norms of his day in order to show that he is the Immanuel of God. He restored communication and inter-personal relationships where God's presence was felt or rendered absent. Jesus went to the house of the small Zaccheus who, earlier, had to climb up a tree in order to catch a glimpse of him. There he freely ate and drank. By breaking such social barriers, Jesus made community with a man who was so marginalized in society. By this interaction with Zaccheus, Jesus made him realize that he has come as the Immanuel to God's People (Okolo 1980, Ukpong 1992). As Jesus shows himself as one with all persons in travail; the distressed African Christians who make up more than eighty percent of African Christianity readily accept him as their Immanuel.

(vii) Jesus as Liberator

Africans by nature express hatred for any thing or person that liquidates life. Forces against longevity are communally fought against. When Christianity came with a Jesus whose power over all principalities and their agents who snuff off life from humans, earliest African converts readily accepted Jesus as the answer to their problems. In popular readings of the Bible typical of the New Religious Movements (NRMS), Jesus is preached as the only one who delivers the faithful from evil spirits, spirit possessions (the *Mami Wata* and *Ogbanje* phenomena among the Igbo in the southeast Nigeria, for example), attacks of demonic forces and satanic wiles. Jesus is the liberator from all afflictions both physical and psychosomatic in nature. He is above all accepted as the one who secures

total liberation of the faithful from oppressive and dictatorial socio-political structures (Molla: 1990).

(viii) *Jesus Christ, the Perfect Man*

In many African cultures, a man of success and of great achievement is recognized as a »perfect man«. Among the Igbo, such a man is an accomplished person, an *ogaranya*. Traditional African societies accorded high respect to such persons. Such a personality stands out in their communities as *Onwa n'etiri oha* (the light that shines for all, Igbo), in other words, as the embodiment of the values of integrity, accountability and moral uprightness. John S. Mbiti and Ngindu Mushete, Central and East Africans, have independently shown that Jesus did arrive as the Perfect Man as he had completely fulfilled all the rites of adult life. By his death on the cross, they opine, Jesus has attained the status of the »perfect man«. By shedding his blood on the cross he has restored to the children of Adam, African Christians inclusive; the *imago Dei* which had been disfigured ever since sin first entered the world (Mbiti 1972, Mushete 1988). African christians see the forgiveness of sins Jesus granted as a manifestation of his »having arrived« at the apex of the divine economy of salvation. Besides, the Jewish notion of the Rule of Three is a metaphor for completeness. It is a literary ploy used quite often by Matthew to portray the fulness of Jesus. Jesus' three-fold temptation in the Q-tradition and his triple triumph over Satan and his wiles is a demonstration of Jesus as Perfect Man. Therefore Jesus as »Perfect Man« is a christology of encouragement in the faith for Africans.

(ix) *Jesus Christ, the Perfect Husband*

Grassroots Christology remains a fervent feature of the 20th century religiosity of the New Christian Religious Movements in Africa. The case of the *Lumpa Church* founded by Alice Lenshina Mulenga in Zambia whose intuitive hymns reflect inestimable sources or folk christology is worthy of reference in a study of this scope and interest. In one of her songs, Jesus and the Angels are depicted as the great »Light«. In her own reading of the activities of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus is shown as the *Light Envoy*. This is a symbolism which as Hugo Hinfelaar observes, depicts »a relationship of love between herself as a woman and Jesus as the perfect husband« (Hinfelaar 1991: 113). The Christology which underlies the Song affirms that true perfection is only realized through the solemn union between the male and the female. Christ is, in the *Lumpa Church* teaching, the *Mulongwe*, the *perfect Weaverbird*, the ideal husband. In their Emblems and Initiation Rituals, the Weaverbird is a central symbol. From Lubwa nuptial concepts, Alice Lenshina Mulenga had selected sublime images to portray christ. Christ is for her and her followers, the

Shibwinda (Bridegroom), the *Kanabosa* (Provider of Food), the *Imfumu* (the good Lord of the home) and the *Mulopwe* (the king Master or the home).

These images portray Jesus as the dutiful male who serves the wife diligently. Among other categories invented by Lenshina, Christ is also held as the *Mwenge Wabuutu*, the White Shinning Torch, an esteemed symbol of a young husband in Lubwa social tradition. In virtually all the hymns, Jesus is *Katuula*, a Saviour in its conjugal context. He is the young man who unburdens the weary woman of her load (Hinfelaar: 114). Lenshina is, to be honest to the christological thinking in Africa, the first African inclusive womanist Christologist. Jesus is women's *munensu*, that is, their companion and co-sufferer. In a number of other hymns created by the Church, women are addressed and invited to recognize their sufferings and labour-pangs and travails in solidarity with Jesus.

(x) *Jesus Christ, Our Ancestor*

Ancestor veneration stands out as a prominent traditional cult among sedentary eastern and central African unlike their west African counterparts except the Efik and the Ibibio peoples of southeast Nigeria. Nevertheless, in their notion of the Living-dead, no injustice is done to the doctrine of the *communio sanctorum*. In those African cultures which value ancestral cults, belief in the intercession of spirit and brother ancestors in the Spiritland for the living is quite impressively popular. In Christian churches in parts of Africa where ancestral cult is communally celebrated, Jesus has become enthroned as the unique and the great Ancestor. For B. Bujo, a Congolese theologian, Jesus is the Proto-Ancestor, the Source of life and the greatest ancestral archetype for African Christians (Bujo 1981, 1986). For Charles Nyamiti, an east African Christologist, Jesus Christ is the Brother-Ancestor who, in a special way, analogically fulfills all the consanguinal and religious roles Africans' Living-dead brothers are believed to perform on behalf of their relatives in the Spiritland (Nyamiti: 1988). In the perspectives of these theologians and the churches they represent, Jesus is African Christians' Ancestor par excellence.

(xi) *Jesus Christ, the African King*

African Christians are not unaware of the honorific and the »Idea feast« of Christ the King in the Roman Catholic calendar per Pope Pius XI (*Encycl. Quas Primas*, Dec. 11, 1925). In many parts of Africa, Kingship had been and still is an institution associated with deep-seated and age-old religious rituals and sacramentality structured as follows: noble birth, divine choice, coronation, installation and rulership. African royal theology indicates, among other things, that the King who occupies the throne reigns as God's viceregent or sometimes as God-incarnate invested with sacral powers to pontificate over his subjects and land. Besides, African kings are the ritual heads in their kingdoms. This

cultural setting provides the background on which African Christians perceive Jesus as King and Lord in their ecclesial communities. He is acknowledged as King of all kings. While the native kings are Lords temporal, Jesus is the Lord Spiritual whom the Christian communities follow, in whose Reign they have faith, and to whom they render unalloyed homage and adoration (Manus 1991, 1993, 1994). For Yoruba Christians in southwest Nigeria, Jesus is *Kabiyesi* (Your Majesty, Your Worship). With this epithet they have evolved a praise-song as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Kabiyesi</i> O, Hosanna O (2x) | Your Majesty O, Hosanna O (2x) |
| E yin Jesu Kristi, | Praise Jesus Christ |
| Oba aiku. | Everlasting King. |
| 2. E gbe ga, e yin Jesu O | Praise Him, Praise Jesus |
| E yin Jesu Kristi, | Praise Him, Praise Jesus, |
| Oba aiku. | Praise Everlasting King. |
| 3. Wa ka yin Jesu, ara Mi O | Come let us praise Jesus |
| Oba mimo Jesu, | Holy King Jesus, |
| Oba aiku. | Everlasting King. |

For the Igbo Christians and in their churches in the southeast of Nigeria, that Jesus is *Eze* (King) is not in doubt. In jubilant *Thanksgiving Services* and *Masses* they boisterously sing:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Mma mma emena, Ezo Jesus | Thank you, thank you, my King Jesus |
| Ebe imere m'ka ndi ndu taa, | You have made me be alive today |
| Mma mma emena (2x). | Thank you, thank you, my King Jesus. |

In more ethnically mixed communities; especially in the urban areas like Lagos, Abuja, the new Federal capital and in the University campuses, a popular royal chorus is usually sung in the English Language during festal occasions to celebrate Jesus' Kingship. The chorus runs as follows:

The Most Excellency is Jesus
 Shout Alleluja, Amen
 The Most Excellency is Jesus
 Shout Alleluia, Amen (2x)
 Amen, Alleluia, Amen, Alleluia, Amen.
 The Most Excellency is Jesus
 Shout, Alleluia, Amen.
 The Most Excellency is Jesus
 Shout Alleluia, Amen (2x)

Conclusions

The paper has attempted to indicate the *fons et origo* of contemporary African Christologies. Efforts have been made to show that the categories have been articulated by African Christians themselves, their pastors and theologians. These abiding autochthonous

images and expressions of the Christ of God have been created out of African Christian religious experiences and genius. They portray what Jesus is doing in their lives and society. The categories bear outstanding lessons for all missiologists and missionaries who might wish to engage in interpreting the message of Christ, his person and work in Africa and for the people of African origin in the diaspora. The samples exposed in this paper demonstrate that christological reflections which adopt cultural categories are patterned on the model of the New Testament church. This is necessary because the Bible remains the valid starting-point for any meaningful contextual christological proposition and here the Africans are not going astray.

Besides the above, the paper demonstrates that African Christologies emerge out of the faith experience and encounter of the African faithful with Jesus and his good news. The consequences of this encounter are expressed in the writings of evangelists and priests who are conscientiously labouring in the Lord's Vineyard in the African continent. A lot more are stored and transmitted in the songs, choruses, hymns, chants and the many praise-songs of the charismatic choirs of the NRMs, the prayer-formular of the Pentecostals and the Charismatic Renewal groups in the Established and the older Indigenous churches all over Africa. The images which I have commented upon here draw our attention to the significance African Christians place on Jesus' praxes and their own identification with his life-project. Samples of African Christologies show no involvement in analytic study of titles but portray the spontaneous outpourings of sublime expressions which flow out of currents in African religiosity, vibrant liturgical and worship life-styles. Thus as in the Gospels so in Africa, the actual situation of the one who experiences the Christ event determines the kind of Christ-images he or she creates. The cultural reality is therefore a cardinal factor in faith response and its expression. Thus it can be argued that for African christians, the proliferation of Christ images supposes that the cultural adaptation of the Christ event is greatly preferred to the adaptation of rites.

The East Asian theologian, Yeow Choo Lak, has adequately reflected on this cultural factor. He asserts that »culture is that which holds life together ..., the patterned manner in and through which people do things together and live as a community« (Lak 1983: 142). And since Christ is present in all cultures, their transformation becomes a *fait accompli*, hence Christ's redemptive work is already made present in the African culture, that is, there is in the African cultures the hidden Christ. African cultural Christologies therefore represent African Christianity's way of purifying, liberating and expressing Christ's presence in the African world and her cultural heritage. The Accra Colloquium on Adaptation ou Liberation: La théologie africaine s'interroge, Paris 1979 amplifies this position. It states: »For us, the rapid growth of the people of God in Africa, the originality of the African experience of Christian life and worship, a typically African liturgy, Bible reading and communitarian life are signs of hope and confidence« (225-227).

In the light of the foregoing perception, a major finding of this paper can be summed up as follows: that the church in Africa can only deepen her understanding of the Christ event, strengthen her mission and commitment to evangelization when she, like Peter, the Proto-Apostle, continues to allow the free flow and confession of the identity of the Lord

Jesus in categories not unfamiliar to the faithful. As I have stated elsewhere, »it is through the recognition of the spiritual values in the christological constructs originating from the African setting that one may actually come to accept that the role of the church in Africa in the New Era of Evangelization takes account of her history, pace of development, her cultures, socio-political realities and the economic state of affairs as they stand today« (Manus 1994: 25). Thus the understanding of African culturally-inspired christologies as the king-pin of African theology can only become realistic when we come to recognize that all christological reflections and verbalizations are socio-culturally conditioned.

Besides, in contemporary Feminist Theology, Christology as had been conceptualized in the West is believed to have eclipsed the being of women and to have continued to negate their reality. African Christologies show no trace of the overt androcentric patriarchal terrorism against women discernible from the exclusivistic christologies of yesteryear. Most, if not all the african portrayals of Jesus are generally all-inclusive. The creativity of the Lumpa Church in Malawi should be recognized for its openness. The images etched out by that church promote women's becoming, belonging and empowerment. Such liberative symbolization of Jesus Christ in most African christologies sustains African women's struggles and cultural revision (Grant 1989: 176–191). It is noteworthy that the wholeness of Jesus Christ and the emphasis on his humanity in the christologies devised by Africans reflect a large proportion of the perception of Africans and their faith in Jesus as the Perfect Man, Liberator and Saviour of both men and women. In sum, I wish to submit that the soteriology of African christologies reveals itself in faith in a Jesus who is daily concerned with the survival of the entire people, male and female whom God have created and have given land to in the African continent.

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