

# INCULTURATING NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGIES IN AFRICA

## II A Case Study of the Yoruba and Igbo Grassroots Christians in Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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### 1. Some of the Relevant Texts

»But you, who do you say I am? Peter answered, ›You are the Messiah« (Mk 8,29; Mt 16,13; Lk 9,18; Jn 6,69)

»Jesus asked them, ›What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he to be?‹ They answered, ›David's« (Mk 12,35; Mt 22,41–42; Lk 20,41)

»Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?« (Mk 14,61–62; Mt 26,63–64; Lk 22,67–69).

»These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God« (Jn 20,31).

»God has fulfilled in this way what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer« (Acts 3,18).

»... and the refreshment may come by the mercy of God, when he sends the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus« (Acts 3,20).

### 2. Introduction

One can see from these few randomly selected texts that when Jesus lived in the first century Jewish Palestine, moved about and fearlessly ministered to the people in the company of his disciples, many people, especially the contemporary religious leaders were rather confused of his personal identity. After his death, the misunderstanding of his personality even continued far into the early New Testament Church.

This is well attested to by the official delegation that came to press the issue of John the Witness's identification in Jn 1,19–23 (Collins 1991:10–16). The evangelists did their utmost to dismiss the confusion. They put into writing early Christians' and other people's effort to confess the identity of Jesus as Son of God. The confession of the Demoniak (Mk 1,21–28), the Leper (Mk 1,40–45) and that made by the Centurion, a non Jew, who supervised his execution on the cross are quite remarkable (Manus 1986a). Again, one such Christian tradition is the first text above, transmitted in Mark as the confession of Peter, the spokesperson of the Twelve. The other texts reflect the similar traditions transmitted in



the Synoptic Gospels. The Fourth evangelist appears to have received the tradition documented in Jn 20,31 from the pre-synoptic tradition or from the canonical Gospels if the theory of his dependence on the Synoptics is still tenable as the Leuven School maintains (Denaux 1992). And as for the Acts, a refrain; namely the concept, *Messiah*, runs through the whole of Luke-Acts. Luke does not hesitate to assert before his usually packed audience that Jesus is *Χριστός* (the Christ).

In Mark, Jesus does not disown the title, Messiah or Christ. While teaching in the Temple on one occasion, he provides information aimed at correcting the seemingly wrong idea about the Messiah by people of his time. He re-interprets the title in terms of the traditional notion of the Son of Man (Brown 1994:89–99). But Matthew recasts the Markan statement into a question and puts it before the Pharisees who are, in Luke's perspective, known as the »teachers of the Law«. Even though the Synoptic tradition holds that Jesus was the Son of God (vid. Jesus' Baptism attested to in all three Gospels including Jn 1,34 and the Transfiguration episode), he wants his disciples to understand that his mission is a messiahship fulfilled by a Son of Man, the Danielic type who is to suffer. However, that he was the Messiah still required some proofs as many guesses abounded. Perhaps, it is in this light that one may understand why the generality of the Jews thought of him as either John the Baptist redivivus because he looked so weird and charismatic in behaviour and called out people to prepare for the dawn of the Reign of God or Elijah because he replicated that prophet's daring position against the forces of evil and idolatrous flirtations under Ahab and Jezebel and as the messenger who would return to come to prepare the day of the Lord: Mal 4,5–7) (Manus 1986b). For many he was like Jeremiah because he appeared to have cooperated with God in translating divine sovereign decisions in ruling the world. For other simple folk and pious Jews, the *bnaiya*, he was indeed like one of the prophets of old because of his outspokenness to strengthen humanity's yearning for justice in the world. But what do we make of Peter's historic affirmation?

### *3. Brief Reflections on Peter's Response*

From Peter's vocal statement, there is no doubt, as R. E. Brown has argued, that the early church confessed Jesus as the *Χριστός*, the expected anointed king of the House of David (Brown 1994:73). All the four Gospels, as is shown above, bear post-resurrectional witness that Jesus was the Messiah. Their account of the Messiahship of Jesus is based on their extended narration in which they describe the teaching and miracles of Jesus of Nazareth. Centuries prior to his birth, the Jews had expected the coming of the Messiah and had speculated about the return of some other long-awaited end-time figures (Collins: 10). By the time of his earthly life and ministry, much speculation had arisen as to whether Jesus was the Coming One or not. As I have stated earlier, there prevailed some confusion in different quarters and among various religious groups; a fact that is vindicated by the prevailing shades of public opinion about his wisdom and the nature of his ministry. But Peter's confession recorded in Mark confirms the belief in the New Testament church that



Jesus was the Messiah, the ideal king much like David, the Father of kings. Despite those unclear identifications proffered by the Jews, Peter's pronouncement uttered in a Jewish choicy category is the »mother« of the identifications. In Matthew, there is a decidedly literary effort by the Matthaean redactor to re-interpret this OT notion received from Mark. In fact, he re-interprets the concept with the addition of the expression »the Son of the Living God«. With this addendum, the concept Messiah is nuanced to an understanding of a *Christ* who would submissively accept his trial in terms of the Suffering Servant themes of Isa 42,1–4 and not in terms of a military-political figure the Messiah had been thought of by many of his contemporaries. It is however notable that in Luke, this amplification is absent. Luke is in agreement with Mark. Thus if I should take the position of most Synoptic scholars, I would state that the Markan–Lukan conception of Jesus' Messiahship appears to be the more traditional. What Matthew has done, is to amplify the confession in order to anticipate the macarisms poured on Peter in Mt 16,17. Peter's response could therefore be regarded as »overhasty«. In Pidgin English in some parts of West Africa, we would say that »he rushed the answer«. My assertion is buttressed by Peter's reproach to Jesus on what he told him before the rest of the disciples concerning the nature of the suffering he (the Son of Man) would undergo. In support of this view, v. 21 indicates that Peter unreflectively conceived the idea of the Messiah like his contemporaries in a purely Jewish thought-form. For him and the contemporaries, Jesus was probably an invincible military king »who would restore Jewish control over the land of Palestine and reunite the Jews then in dispersion« (Collins:11). This is perhaps the reason why Jesus taunted Peter harshly: »Get behind me, Satan« (v. 23).

This »very inadequate grasp of the implications of that title« (Brown:75) notwithstanding, Peter's vocal utterance on the identity of Jesus confirms that Jesus' earliest and most intimate followers accepted him as the Messiah both in his life-time and after his death and resurrection. Some of the challenges this early Christians' initiative throws on the African Biblical scholar can be put in this question: in what categories do African Christians affirm, like Peter, their faith in Jesus as the Son of God today? Does Peter's original confession help African Christians express Jesus' identity and role in God's plan? If it does, where are such images best found and how can such categories and titles be assembled?

This paper will largely be limited to the investigation and collection of the New Testament-inspired christologies of various Christian denominations in Ile-Ife town, southwest Nigeria where the main industry of people in this area is the founding of Christian establishments and Prayer Houses. The University Campus with over 25, 000 vibrant youths who daily engage themselves in active Christian revivals and worship services in the evening and night *Kesha* (*night vigils as in Kenya*) provided fertile ground for the observed research.



#### *4. Methodology*

In spite however of the scintillating literary critical issues involved in unraveling the origin and development of the title *Ἐρίστος*, which had been applied to Jesus by early Jewish and gentile Christians before the age of our own faith generation, what concerns me in this paper is to demonstrate how Peter's response to the perennial question: »Who do you say I am« constitutes the basis for the emergence of grassroots African Biblical Christologies. This is pertinent in so far as the understanding of African expression of Christianity in the 21st century must seriously reckon with the level of her development of autochthonous christologies. While African theologians have done a lot to propound theological christologies with indigenous African categories (Bujo 1986, Nyamiti 1988, Nkwoka 1991, Ukpog 1992, Manus 1993), my approach in this paper is mainly dependent on the findings from Focus Group Discussion with contemporary Yoruba and Igbo Christians in their faith community contexts in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The approach is necessitated by the fact that such faith groups and communities hardly name Christ or sing with his name without biblical coloration. The paper, in ordther words, explores and interprets how grassroots Christians, and this time not the professional theologians, express the personality and significance of Jesus Christ in their faith encounter with him in their own ecclesial contexts. In this respect, the principle *lex orandi lex credendi* guides the approach, since the life experiences and liturgical activities of Nigerian Christians are considered essential sources in this sort of christological research on the young churches of Africa. The focus of the paper is, therefore, the collection and exposition of popular biblically-inspired christologies of the Yoruba and Igbo Christian groups resident in Ile-Ife, in the southwest of Nigeria.

#### *5. Fieldwork Approach*

The methodology adopted to assemble the local christological formulations in this research paper was the Person-Participant Observation (POP) made by myself with the assistance of an aide in the town. The visitations to the churches were made late March and April 2000 and before the fratricidal war that raged on in some quarters of that ancient between late April and early May of that year. We attended several of these churches' worship services, Sunday Schools, revival meetings, choir practices and Masses; especially during the Lenten period and the Holy Week celebrations. In the light of the Focus Group Discussion approach, I devised some generative questionnaires asking about christology the leaders of the communities, founders of the churches, choir masters, prayer leaders, ushers and from ordinary members. We allowed them to offer their own experiential views. Notes were taken, the responses were later listed out followed by the discussions and comments on the designations.



Groups worshiped with, discussed with and interviewed included men, women, youths and some intelligent young children from families of University dons and administrators. The churches visited included the Roman Catholics (Igbo-speaking group, English Mass, 8:00 am and the Yoruba-speaking group's Mass at 10.00 am at Ss. Peter and Paul, Lagere, St. Mary's RC Church, Igboya, Ile-Ife (The RCs), members of the Anglican Communion both Yoruba- and Igbo-speaking groups at St. Peter's Church, Ireemo, Ile-Ife and St Matthew's Anglican Church, Eleyele, Ile-Ife, (The Anglicans), the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Eleyele, Ile-Ife (The Baptists), the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Idi-Omo, Ile-Ife (The SDA); the Christ Apostolic Church, Olorun Sogo, Oke-Ibukun, Oluorogbo, Ile-Ife, The Christ Apostolic Church, Oke Itura, Ooni Ilare Street, Ile-Ife (CACs), the Assemblies of God Church, Ajebandele, Ile-Ife (mainly an Igbo speaking group), the Rhema Chapel, Ibadan Road, Ile-Ife largely made up of students and University staffers, Sunday morning Power Service of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Breakthrough Model Parish, Ibadan-Ife Expressway, Ajebandele, Ile-Ife (The RCCGs), the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church, Mayfair, Ile-Ife, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S), Kayode Street, Ile-Ife, the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), Yoruba Group, Ile-Ife, the New Covenant Church, Ajebandele, and the branch at Road 7, Ile-Ife (NC), the Agbala Daniel Church, Ilesa Road, Ile-Ife, led by a lady Bishop, Mrs Dorcas S. Olaniyi. On Campus, the Prayer Meetings, Fellowships and the Cell Groups of three major Fellowships were visited; namely those of the Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group of the Chapel of the Perpetual Light (The RC Charismatics), the Christ Love Fellowship (CLF) and the Believers Love Word (BLW), some groups of the All Souls Chapel (ASC), the main Protestant Community on Campus.

These twenty-two establishments are the main Christian churches and Fellowships with large membership in Ile-Ife and on the University Campus. Person-participation in the parochial activities of these churches took place on Sundays, Weekend Fellowships, Saturday Wedding Services, Wednesday Evening Prayer Meetings of the RC Charismatics, the Lenten Period Stations of the Cross, The Passion Week Celebrations and some of their Choir Practices. The end of worship services and meetings provided the opportune time to ask questions and hold discussions with people. Though the English language was a common vehicle of communication, some of the discussions were conducted in Yoruba and Igbo language as most of the respondents were traders, artisans and low-income-earners from the two major ethnic groups resident in the town. As I am Igbo-speaking myself, I had to engage the services of a Yoruba interpreter, Mr. Sam Oladeinde, formerly an ex-seminarian, now a Secondary School teacher in town. Most of the interviewees were fairly literate but with the assistance of the Yoruba interpreter, the illiterate ones gave good information. Sometimes, money was spent on respondents to »buy« them to spend their time to speak to us as many of them were not convinced of the value the questions and answers have for their salvation or for the growth of their churches.



## 6. Research Questions, Discussion Topics and Responses

The research involved me in informal discussions on the responses proffered for the generative questions. The interaction was considered pertinent to help us arrive at some types of the identities members give Jesus in their communities. Apart from oral discussion, bible-based questions drawn according to scholarly consensus on the classification of the New Testament books were administered to respondents in order to elicit the kind of titles and nomenclatures they ascribe to Jesus when they read those New Testament portions. The responses given are found below each generative question.

(I) What do you read from the Bible that can help you people experience the presence of Jesus Christ in your midst?

*Jisus Kraist bu Ome Udo*  
(Jesus, the Peace Maker)

Igbo-speaking RCs at Lagere and the Anglicans at St. Peter's Iremo.

*Jisus Kraist bu Ome Mma*  
(Jesus, the Good-Doer)

The Anglicans, the RCs and the Pentecostals.

Jesus is our Doctor

The RC Charismatics on Campus.

Jesus is our Bulldozer

From the Praise Songs of the RC Charismatic Prayer Groups.

Jesus is our Lover

Strictly emphasized by the members of the CLF.

Jesus is a Hero

The Catholic Community on Campus as they prepared for Palm Sunday procession with palms fronds singing: Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord.

Jesus Christ, Son of Mary

The RCs, and the RC Charismatics.

*Jisus Kraist Onye nwe'uwa,*  
*Kristi di Mma*  
(Jesus Christ, owner of the world, Christ who is Good)

An Igbo chorus in the Campus RC Hymnal, (Hymn No. 128).

*Jesu Oko Mi*  
(Jesus, my husband)

The women members and leaders of Agbala Daniel Church where a preponderant number of members are women. Jesus is conceived engagingly as husband who provides for their material and spiritual needs.



*Jisus bu ezi Eyi-ayi*  
(Jesus is our True Friend)

Igbo-speaking Anglican groups at Irema,  
Hymn No. 3 – ABU 249.

*Jisus bu ebe-nghaba-ayi*  
(Jesus is our Shelter)

Igbo-speaking Anglicans, from the same  
Hymnal.

*Jisus , Aka n'echebe ayi*  
(Jesus our Defender)

Igbo-speaking Anglicans, Hymn-Abu, No. 84.

## (II) Is Jesus Christ powerful in your lives? How do you know?

Jesus is Liberator of the oppressed

The RCs, the ASC members and the  
Fellowships on Campus.

*Jesu Asoro ko ribe*  
(Jesus is One whose word ever happens)

The ASC, the CLF and the NC.

Jesus, our Refuge and Strength

The RCs, Baptists, BLW and the CLF.

*Jisus Onye n'egboro ayi nkpa dum*  
(Jesus who solves all our problems)

Igbo-speaking Anglicans, Hymn No. 84.

*Jesu ni Oluwa ati Olugbala*  
(Jesus is Lord and the Saviour)

This is strongly affirmed by the Yoruba  
CACs, the Agbala Daniel Church and is  
shared by most Yoruba-speaking denomina-  
tions.

Jesus' Power is invincible

The Faithful of the Agbala Daniel, the  
RCCGs, the C&S—all the Pentecostals have  
devised a famous chorus:  
*Jesus Power, Super Power (2x)*  
*Satan's power, powerless power etc.*

*Jisus bu Onwuatuiegwu*  
(Jesus who never fears death)

Jesus is One who freely and humbly accepted  
death, even death on the cross. This is a very  
significant refrain in the praise-songs of Igbo-  
speaking RC Charismatics.

Jesus is our Speaker

By this epithet, all the communities I contac-  
ted affirm that Jesus is the Speaker whose  
word is most powerful and effective against  
all forces of evil and anti-life agents.



Jesus is the Perfect Man of the Moment

Some learned members of the Basic Christian Communities of the the RC Church on the University Campus.

*Jisus ma mkpa nile*

(Jesus knows all ones' problems)

Igbo-speaking RC Charismatics and the Pentecostals in most of the denominations.

(III) How does Jesus Christ reign in your lives, that of your family and faith communities?

*Jesus rules as Oba Adakedajo*

(Jesus is the Silent Judge who dispenses Eternal Justice and fair judgment)

BLW, CLF, the Rhema group and the NC.

Jesus, the Dawn of Justice

The ASC on Campus, the RCs and the BLW.

Jesus rules as Kabiyesi

(His Majesty)

Many Yoruba groups: the RCCG, the C&S, the CACs, and the New Covenant Group.

Jesus rules as Eze, Oba

(Glorious King)

For Igbo and Yoruba groups, the title is acceptable in all denominations and Fellowships to glorify Christ the King.

Jesus rules as *Alaabo*

(Protector)

Idea quite current in the New Generation Churches, the CLF, and the Charismatics.

Jesus reigns as *Olugbija omo orukan*

(Jesus rules as Defender of orphans)

Yoruba members of the Anglican Church, the CACs, the AC and the C&S.

Jesus liveth and reigneth with the Father

The Anglicans, the Baptists and the CACs.

Jesus is One Gentle and Humble of Heart

The RCs, CACs, AC, RCCGs, and the CCC.

(IV) How do you experience Jesus in your Family Prayers and Bible Sharing?

As Elder Brother

(*Okpara Chineke*)

Igbo members of the Anglican Church, the Catholics and the Assemblies of God Church in their Songs and Hymns praise Jesus as Okpara Chineke.

As *Olupese*

(The Provider who enriches the family)

Virtually all the Pastors of the Pentecostals as they preach their Prosperity Gospel in Yoruba.



As *Oluorogbo*  
(The Only Son)

Most Yoruba members of the C&S, the RCCGs, the CCC, and the CACs use this role model.

As One with Limitless Love

Members of the RC both at Lagere and on Campus; especially in their Stations of the Cross Prayers and chants of the Lenten Season.

Jesus is our Ladder to Heaven

Igbo-speaking groups in the Anglican and the Assemblies of God communities.

Jesus is Comforter of the poor

The RCs, Anglicans, Assemblies, and the C&S.

Jesus is Giver of Life

The RCs English-speaking Igbo group at Lagere, the NC and the Agbala Daniel Church.

#### (V) How does Jesus minister to you or to your community?

Jesus is a Faithful Servant

The Igbo, the Yoruba educated Christians in the University and Seminaries say Jesus bears witness to a special filial relationship to his Father and that his ministry from his Baptism to the Cross is one of a humble servanthood.

Jesus is the Humble Slave

The Rhema Church, the RC and the Anglicans agree that Jesus humbled himself by emptying himself of his divinity to become a servant.

Jesus is a *Low-Profiler*

The RC Charismatics and the BLW, the CLF (Matt 16,22–23).

Jesus is *Olubukun Ode Orun*  
(Jesus, the Announcer of God's Eternal Reign)

The RCCGs, the C&S, the CCCs and the NC.

*Jesu Kristi Oba to wa niwaju to wa lehin*  
(Jesus is King of everything)

The RCCGs, the C&S, the CCCs, the RC Charismatics and the Pentecostals.



(VI) What do you know from Mark's Gospel about Jesus' nature apart from Peter's confession that he is Messiah?

Jesus is *Onye Obi Oma*  
(Jesus is a Kind-Hearted Man)

Igbo-speaking Roman Catholic Groups.

(*Jesus is Okúta Igun Ilé*) Jesus is the Corner-stone

Yoruba- and Igbo-speaking communities in all the churches.

Jesus is »he who comes everyday«

An eschatological title regularly used with the expression Maranatha by the SDA, RCCGs, CCC and the Mountain of Fire Groups.

Jesus is *Oluwosan*  
(Jesus is Healer)

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church Members.

Jesus is *Aka n'Agwo Oria*  
(Jesus is Perfect healer)

The RC Charismatics, the Pentecostals and the RCCGs.

(VII) Who do you say Jesus is to you as you read the Gospel of Matthew?

Jesus is Prince of Peace

The RCs, Anglicans, the BLW and the CLF.

Jesus, Saviour of the world

The CLF, the BLW and the RCs, and the Anglicans.

Jesus is the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord

The Mission Churches and New Generation Churches in their Palm Sunday Devotion.

Jesus is the Son of the Kingdom of Heaven

Igbo and Yoruba-speaking Christians of the New Generation Churches and New Covenant Church.

Jesus, Son of the Living God  
Jesus is the Miracle-Worker

The BLW, the CLF and the RCCG.  
The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church acclaims this title for Jesus the Onisegun (the Healer).

Jesus is the Prophet of God

The C&S, the CCC and the RCCGs who emphasize the role of the prophets in their communities accept with Matthew that Jesus is the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.



Jesus is the Triumphant Man

The RCs on Campus and in the town agreed that they celebrate Palm Sunday in union with the Universal Church to commemorate Christ's entry in triumph into Jerusalem in order to consolidate his ministry as the Messiah.

Jesus, Son of Abraham

All denominations agreed that Abraham is Father of all believers.

(VIII) How do you recognize Jesus as you read Luke-Acts daily in your Church?

(a) Luke:

Jisus Kraist Onye Ekpere  
(Jesus, a man of Prayer)

The RC Charismatics, the NC and the Fellowships who insist that Christians share in the prayer life of Jesus.

*Jisus Kraist, Onye n'ejeghari n'eme mma*  
(Jesus, the itinerant good-doer)

A cherished title for most evangelical pastors and those of The New Generation Churches who stress Lk 4,43–44 in this regard as gospel truth.

Jesus is Prophet-Teacher  
(Lk 4,16/Lk 24)

The C&S, the CCC, the RCCGs and the Fellowships.

*Jisus Kraist, Onye n'emere m'ihe nile*  
(Jesus Christ, the One who does everything for me)

The RC Charismatics, the CLF, and the BLW.

*Jisus Kraist, Onye Muo Nso di n'ime Ya*  
(Jesus Christ, Bearer of the Spirit)

The RC Charismatics, and the CCC, the Yoruba-speaking Pentecostals, the Rhema Church members and the Fellowships emphasize the special role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and in the Church.

(b) The Acts of the Apostles:

Jesus is the Preacher of the Kingdom

The SDA, the NC and most of the Mission Churches.

*Jesu Kristi Onisegun Ode Orun*  
(Jesus Christ, Healer from Heaven)

he Mountain of Fire Miracles Church, the RCCGs, the Evangelicals.

Jesus is the Source of Life

The RCs, the Anglicans, the Baptists, the CLF and the BLW Pentecostals.



Jesus Christ, ever in our midst

The RCs and all others agreed that the Church of Christ is, like in Acts 4,32–35, united in heart and soul.

*Jisus Kraist nwe mmeri*  
(Jesus is Owner of victory)

The RCs, the Anglicans, the RCCGs and the AC.

Jesus is our Self-Sufficiency

Members of St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Eleyele.

(IX) Who is Jesus to you (people) as the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation indicate?

(a) John:

*Jisus bu Chukwu Nwa si n'igwe bia*  
(God's Son descended from Heaven)

Igbo-speaking RCs. The Pentecostals and the Charismatics emphasize this category in their Praise-Songs.

*Jisus Kraist bu Onye n'enye Nri Oma*  
(Good Meal Giver)

Igbo-speaking RCs during the Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus, the Sufferman  
(Isa 42,1–4)

The NCs, the CACs, the Apostolic Churches and the C&S.

Jesus, our Converter

This is chorused by women members of most of the New Generation Churches, the CCCs, the RCCGs and the BLW.

Jesus is *Omoba*  
(Prince)

The Yoruba RCs, the NC, the RccGs and the CLF.

Jesus is Redeeming Love

The RCCGs, the CACs,CLF, the BLW and the RC Charismatics.

*Jisus Kraist bu Okwu Chukwu*  
(Jesus is the Word of God)

The BLW, the RCs, the C&S and the CCCs.

(b) Revelation:

Jesus is the Lamb

The RCs, the Anglicans, the Baptists and the CACs.

Jesus is the Triumphant Judge  
(Rev 20,4–6; 7–15)

The SDA, the Baptists, the NC, the CAC, the AC.



Jesus is Chairman at our Marriage Feast  
(Rev 19,9–16)

The Assemblies, the Rhema, the CLF, the BLW.

(X) What do you read from the Major Epistles of Paul that endears you the more to Jesus?

Jesus is the Picture of God, the Father

The SDA, the Agbala Daniel, the NC, the BLW.

*Jisus bu Nnukwu Ukochukwu ayi*  
(Jesus is our High Priest)

The more Episcopalian churches (the Igbo-speaking RCs and the Anglicans, the C&S and the CCCs) affirm this as Paul's doctrine.

Jesus is Head of all things

All denominations agree to this central significance of Christ in their lives.

*Jisus bu Nwoke Umeani*  
(Jesus is a Humble Man)

All Igbo-speaking members of the BLW, the CLF, the RCs, and the SDA.

Jesus Christ is Lord

All denominations.

*Jisus bu Onye Isi Uka*  
(Jesus is Head of the Church)

All Igbo-speaking groups agree to this Pauline ecclesio-christology.

(XI) What do you understand from the Pastorals about the significance of the person of Jesus in your contexts?

Jesus is Lord of the End-time

The SDA, the BLW, the CAC who emphasize the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in history (1 Tim 6,14; 2 Tim 1,10,1,8; Tit 2,13).

Jesus is the Epiphany of Salvation

The RCs, their Charismatics, the Pentecostals, and the Anglicans.

*Jisus Kraist, Onye Nzoputa Uwa*  
(Jesus, Saviour of the world)

The RCs, the Anglicans, the NC, and the CCC (2 Tim 1,10; Tit 2,10).

Jesus is God-sent  
(1 Tim 6,15–16)

The RCs, the Baptists and the Anglicans.

*Jisus bu Onye Nkuzi*  
(Jesus is Teacher. Tit 2,11–14)

All Igbo-speaking groups agreed to this title for Jesus.

Jesus is Word of God

The BLW, the CLF and the RCs.

Jesus is Community Leader

The RCs, the Anglicans, the Baptists and the NC.



## 7. *Theological Reflections on the Categories*

This research has not been carried out without the full knowledge that all titles local churches in Ile-Ife ascribe to Jesus in their own contexts and situations have not been entirely assembled here. The twenty-two faith communities visited are taken as sort of pilot study organizations whose terms reflect invariably ideas that are current in most urban and rural areas of Nigeria as revivalists, preachers, evangelists of all persuasions and pastors gravitate from one town to the other preaching Christ. So far ninety designations are gathered here from respondents and discussants. Let no one make the mistake of concluding that the categories we have assembled here are mere title christologies expressed without adequate knowledge of their theological implications. I offer, in this section, my personal explanations as an observer. But the interpretations given are from our respondents. It must be noted that many of the Pastors and preachers have had some formal theological education in Seminaries and Bible Colleges of their denominations and have been strenuously teaching their flock. What we have done therefore is to allow the ordinary members of the congregations to speak from their experiences and knowledge. Their information was often given in »broken English« expression, a popular patois in English-speaking West Africa. From their explanations of some of the categories they employed to describe the identity of Jesus Christ, this research paper disproves Charles Nyamiti's assertion made nearly a decade ago, that »none of the existing African Christologies has had any appreciable influence in the life of the African churches« (Nyamiti 1992:18). To curtail the length of this paper, my summation of the implications of the terms and reflections on their experiences will be made on few of the categories considered quite innovative in the emergence of African Biblical Christologies.

## 8. *On the General Questions from the Bible*

From numbers (I) to (IV), it is noted that a preponderant number of respondents hail from the New Generation Churches Churches (our own term for some brands of the Pentecostals in Nigeria: Olayinka 2000). They are followed by the Mission Churches; namely the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans and the Baptists. Both groups offer titles and epithets that show the presence and power of Jesus in their lives, in their family prayers and community Bible sharing meetings. What emerges is that the expression of their understanding of the personality of Jesus and his significance in the churches are largely drawn from the Bible. Thus the scenario supposes that the expressions on the Power of Jesus, his Reign, his presence in family settings and his ministration in these communities are taken from the senses of the Scriptures. This fact confirms the growing consensus of scholarly opinion on the centrality of the Bible in the African Christian theological enterprise (Shorter 1972, Kato 1975, Dickson 1978, Mbiti 1979, Pobee 1979, Bediako 1996). The role of the Bible christological formulations is equally notable. In this perspective, I find this portion of Kenneth. Ross' essay pertinently *ad rem*: »Other re-



sources offered by the Christian tradition, such as sacraments, hymns, catechisms and charitable works, are not so highly valued as the Bible. This underlines the massive importance of the text of the Bible in contemporary African Christianity, in this case in the central area of the construction of a Christology« (Ross 1997:162–163).

What this significant direction of scholarship bears out in the case of Ile-Ife is that the responses reveal that in the Mission and the New Generation, contextualized Bible reading and devotional interpretation have ideally become a common praxis. Thus it is noted that Bible-inspired impromptu prayers and Gospel music are criss-crossing denominational divides hitherto considered unbridgeable. This evangelical interest is decidedly borne out by the choice for functional biblical terms that can address human experience in the midst of the socio-economic decay contemporary Nigeria has witnessed in recent times. For most of the groups met in discussion sessions, Jesus is living today. He is looked upon as a contemporary personality, the complete man of the moment. The focused discussions reveal that virtually all churchgoers revere the Christ of faith far more than the historical Jesus. They claim seriously the Lord's benediction: »Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe« (Jn 20,29b). When, for example, the Igbo-speaking group says that Jesus is *Onwuatuegwu* – one who never fears or runs away from death – or that he is *Odogwu n'Agha, Dike n'Agha* – Chief Commander, Super General in Battle – and its subsequent refrain, they mean to say that Jesus is a bold and courageous war-lord against the forces of demons and satanic powers. We are informed that they draw their idea from Lk 13,33 where it is narrated that when the Pharisees, the very opponents of Jesus, warned him of Herod's threat on his life, Jesus retorted with courage and said: »It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem« (Peter Egwu). By these titles, taken from the Biafran war experience of some of the Igbo indefatigable war-lords during the Nigerian Civil War (1966–1970), Jesus is, for them, one indomitably fearless of death and the one who has finally conquered death and all satanic forces that have taken humankind captive (Manus 1994:23). On this notion, Justin Ukpog, in a recent essay, further amplifies: »Even in the face of death while standing trial before Pilate, he told him to his face that he would not have had power over him if it had not been given to him by God« (Jn 19,11; Ukpog 1993:182). This show of courage and boldness to an authority like Pilate who was vested with power over life and death shows, for most Igbo RC Charismatic groups who reside in Ile-Ife as well as in the southeast, that Jesus was indeed *Onwuatuegwu*.

### 9. The Synoptics: Mark and Matthew

Within numbers (V) and (VI), there are fourteen responses offered in Igbo, Yoruba and English languages. The designations reflect biblical ideas known and developed in the local churches visited. The RCs, the Anglicans, the BLW, the CLF, the RCCGs and the C&S have perfected ways of working out and building in their local christologies into their praise-songs, hymns and preaching profiles. Some outstanding titles include *Okúta Igun Ilé*



(Cornerstone), Healer, Prince, Announcer of the Kingdom of God, Son of the Living God, Prophet of God and the Triumphant Man. One thing special with some members of the groups that always tend to surface in the discussions is their ignorance of the rich theology they put forth when they explain the terms they use. In the lead are the Yoruba groups who, by the category *Okúta Igun Ilé*, are saying that they acknowledge the continuity of God's plan and the dawn of his Reign as solidly realized in the incarnation of Jesus, the Christ in the church. The biblical irony of the rejection of the principal stone in any construction (Mk 12,1–10) is for them a figure of speech devised to portray the manner the Son of God is cast out of the Vineyard and rejected by his own people. They have skillfully nuanced the parable and claim themselves as the true communities gathered in the Church of Christ and as the ones to whom the kingdom has been given. When they read this text in Matthew, I am informed, they understand the term to stand for the significance of Christ as Son of David and thus the only acceptable King in their church communities (Pastor Adejobi). Besides, most literate members among the respondents informed us that the person of Jesus is uniquely related to the kingdom of God because of its nature as a heavenly reality which descends from heaven into human history in and through Jesus' ministry. As Announcer of the Kingdom (Mk 1,15), he has the right to say »the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel«. For most of the RCs, the CACs, the RCCGs and the Pentecostals, this programmatic statement of Mark is indicative of the total significance of the ministry of Jesus, his teaching and his miraculous activities. It is in this light that the Pastors see the kingdom that Jesus proclaims as the kingdom of the NOW, a contemporary event that is particularly directed to the Church as God's elect. As the Announcer of the kingdom, it is Jesus who tells with local picture-talks and imageries the nature of the kingdom established through his passion, death and resurrection (Mk 15,31ff; 14,36). It is he who successfully establishes the kingdom by destroying the rule of Satan over the world (Mk 3,22–27).

From this sort of doctrine and the complexion of their preaching, these Pastors exploit the Markan portraiture of the humanity of Jesus to their preaching advantage. Many of them observed that Mark emphasizes Jesus' human sentiments and attitudes that they claim that they replicate in their own communities (Pastor Omotola). In all their praxes, they take for granted this Markan portrait of a human Jesus. To my mind, this primitive stage of the tradition is exploited to full advantage by the preachers and most of the ebullient and charismatic African church leaders and planters in the New Generation Churches. For them, it is the Gospel of Mark that provides them with the image of Jesus, the Man. Mark alone, they argue, describes more the human feeling of Jesus in the manner members of their congregations admire, cherish and aspire to live up to. In that light, they read, with equal sentiment, Mark's gospel that Jesus is moved with compassion for a number of people befallen with misfortunes such as the leper who entreates him, kneels down and he (Jesus) immediately cures him and sends him away (Mk 1,40–43). In Mk 6,6, they observe that in Nazareth, Jesus marvels because of the people's unbelief. In 3,5, he looks around at the Pharisees with anger. He orders, »Stretch out your hand«. He is indignant at the disciples who try to prevent children from being brought to him (10,13). Curing the Deaf-mute, he



groans (7,34). In 8,12, he sighs deeply in spirit. He receives small kids in his arms (9,36;10,16). About the Rich Young man who refuses to follow him, Mark says, »And Jesus looking upon him, loved him« (10,21f).

It is in light of this Markan portrayal of the humanity of Jesus that most of the Pastors claim that their praxes at healing sessions and revival ministrations are informed by Jesus' action who, upon healing, for example, the Deaf and Dumb man (7,33), puts his fingers into the ears and his saliva upon the tongue of the man and looks up to heaven, sighs and says to him, »*Ephphatha*: Be opened«. Again, they point out Mark's report that Jesus applies spittle on the eyes of the Blind man at Bethsaida (8,23a). These and other instances where Jesus applies natural elements to solve people's problems portray a Jesus who has Limitless Love, who is *Onye n'eme mma* (Good-doer), *Onye Obi Oma* (Kind-hearted person) and *Alaabo* (Protector), Giver of Life, Saviour of the world, and the Miracle-Worker par excellence. Though naïve these designations may appear to be, they are accepted in African Christianity as basis for understanding the functionality of the Christologies the members promote in their churches in order to show-case the full significance of Christ in their lives and in their faith communities.

It is observed that the members of the churches that engage in evangelization as spiritual warfare also hold the kingdom as a contemporary reality that must continue to do battle against all forces of evil, oppression and death-dealing forces (Oguogho 2000). They depose that when their pastors exorcise lunatics and people possessed by Mamie Wata (Water spirits/Mermaids), *site n'aka Chukwu* (by the finger of God – Lk 11,20/Ex 10,15; especially as is known among the Igbo groups [à la Bastian 1997:116–136]), it is the sign that the Reign of the Miracle-Working God proclaimed and promised by Jesus has come upon their communities, Fellowships and into their Camps. It is from the Synoptic tradition, that most of the respondents have evolved a Christology that acknowledges the power of God present and ever working in and through the person and work of Jesus, their Refuge and Strength. They see themselves as the Christians of the New Age and as the people in whose midst the Reign of God has come. For the RCCGs, that is partially why their Church is named The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, and for the CCCs, that is one reason why they took the name, the Celestial Church of Christ in Nigeria and have internationalized the church.

It is almost inter-confessionally accepted and believed that Jesus is Liberator. This is affirmed on the fact that Jesus preaches the Good News of justice, freedom and liberation as he was taught by God, the Father of all races who has asked him to enjoin all mankind to love their neighbours as themselves. In contemporary Nigeria where the Military once ruled the nation for over fifteen years with draconian decrees and police brutality the order of the day, the notion of a divinely appointed liberator is very much a desideratum by all believers. Besides, the social political oppression of and the domination of one ethnic group over the others have led to an increase in spirituality and the search for a credible messiah who, for most Christians, is found only in the person and life of Jesus. Thus beset with social political problems and difficulties arising from reckless violations of human rights during the military regime, Nigerian Christians demonstrate strong faith in a Jesus who



preaches love, equality and fraternity and who demands that the dictators and their cronies stop being selfish and exploitative to the people whose security and right they were meant to defend (Lk 3,14). And to the political class, to be committed and honest representatives of and the law-makers to the people whose mandate they hold. The scene in which Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the back of a hard-worked and always whipped donkey unlike some of our politicians who ride in convoys of bullet-proof Mercedes-Benz Limousines provides the contrast between Jesus, the Liberator and the ruling class as the oppressors. The large number of these local Christians say that they find themselves belonging to that crowd who hails Jesus as their Liberator as he gallantly enters Jerusalem. For them, by the Hosanna they shout, they hail Jesus as their Hero, their Leader and Liberator who comes in the name of the Lord to set them free from the clutches of man-made oppression and death.

Jesus as Prophet is found an endearing title among the prophetically-oriented groups such as the *Aladura* Churches (the Praying Church groups); namely the CACs, the CCC, the C&S, the Church of the Lord *Aladura* (CLA) (Manus 1991a:28–46). These groups take seriously several New Testament passages in which Jesus is described as either a prophet or the prophet. From our interactions, we observed that they use the term, as some theologians have remarked, to allude to some aspect of Jesus' person and work (Ukpong 1993:178–179). These local Christians read from both Mark and Matthew that Jesus is a prophet whose own people rejected him (Mk 6,4/Matt 13,57). They see themselves as sharing the same destiny from secularists in the larger society and from certain critics from the Mission churches.

### 10. *Luke-Acts*

In number (VIII) a–b, there are twelve designations representing findings from all the churches. The significant categories such as *Jisus Onye Ekpere*, Bearer of the Spirit, the Good-Doer, Prophet-Teacher, *Onisegun* (Healer), Source of Life, the One ever-in-Our-Midst and so on are typically Luke-Acts profiles of the Christ of faith. The Luke-Acts story of how the first believers formed the local church in Judaea, Galilee and Samaria under the leadership of apostles, witnesses, the seven deacons, prophets, elders and disciples recommends his salvation-history to admiration of many of the founders and leaders of the local churches we visited. For them, the titles they ascribe to Christ are derived from the cult of that flesh-and-blood first community in Jerusalem (Manus 1990:11–37). All the categories above are inspired, as we were made to know, by Jesus' role as the central figure in their church ministrations. Like the earliest Christians, they baptise, break bread together, exercise perseverance, practice poverty, share their goods, fellowship together and engage in community prayer life. This last practice is the attitude that informs their belief in Jesus as a Man of Prayer (*Onye Ekpere*). In Lk 16,18; 18,1f, Jesus prays. In the Acts, the Apostles prayed as the Master taught them. Many a time, especially before the occurrence of any major episode in Jesus' life, he prayed. In Gethsemane, he prayed hard and sweated so profusely. In the spirit of Jesus' regular prayers, they emphasize the



importance of prayer in Christian life. The Charismatics among my respondents deposed that they experience Jesus as the Bearer of the Spirit. According to them and rightly too, it is from Luke-Acts that they are informed that Jesus receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism and that it was the occasion of his empowerment and commission for his public ministry (Lk 3,21f). After forty days in the desert and the temptations, Jesus returns into Galilee bobbling with the Spirit (Lk 4,14) (Manus 1998a: 21–40). »The Spirit of the Lord is upon me« (Lk 4,18) is read as Jesus' own evidence that he is the bearer of the Spirit of God par excellence. According to an RCCG Pastor, Jesus, before his Ascension, promises the Apostles, »... before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit« (Acts 1,5) (Pastor Cletus Okara). In Acts 2,1–4, the Apostles were all imparted the Holy Spirit in the form of »tongues of fire«. The above information shows that the RCs, the Anglicans, the RCCGs, the Fellowships and the Charismatics emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and his followers. In the light of this understanding, some of the Pastors and preachers institute »Holy Ghost Hour« programmes and sessions during which time they say they call down the Spirit of Christ on the patronizers of their Camps and revival grounds. Thus to share in Jesus' spirituality as the Bearer of the Spirit has become a common feature in recent Nigerian pentecostal evangelism.

Among Nigerian Christian groups as elsewhere in Africa, there are people with diverse illnesses, ailments, physical handicaps and those afflicted with psychological traumas that have arisen from mental agonies suffered during the excesses of military regimes and autocratic democrats. And the recent economic hardships have made it difficult for many to procure orthodox drugs for themselves and their families. For this class of people, Jesus is *Onisegun* or *Oluwosan* (Healer). These two concepts are taken from Yoruba traditional religious culture where the Medicine-man was considered a gift of the ancestral spirits and the deities to the communities. By using these designations, the concepts have become christianized and are faithfully received and religiously applied to depict Jesus' role as Medicine-man and Healer in the *Aladura* churches in Ile-Ife, Yorubaland. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus performed miracles and healed diseases of all types. In the African churches, the time of Jesus is now the time of the Holy Spirit made manifest in the healing activities of the Spirit-filled pastor-healers and prophets. Members of these churches regard Jesus as the guiding force and power of their local pastors, preachers, prophets and teachers. While the Apostles healed (Acts 3,6,16; 4,10,30; 19,13) and preached (Acts 4,12,17; 5,28,40) in the name of Jesus, these local churchmen hold themselves spirit-filled and empowered to restore life, cast out demons and even to sanitize the secular society *ni oruka Jesu* (in the name of Jesus), the real Miracle Worker (Manus 1988).

Most of the churches and their members proclaim Jesus as Master and Source of life. As if they have been schooled in the Hellenistic popular literature where the cultural motif of the *Imitatio Magistri* was a common literary feature, the churches believe there should exist correspondences between their praxes and those of Jesus. In this light, members of some of the local communities see themselves as disciples who have learned the Master's Way. And because Jesus is their Teacher, they hold themselves obligated to remain faithful to the transmission of the deposit of faith, unity of life and doctrine. Thus, witnessing to



Christ and imitating him is, for them, the same thing insofar as they show by their attitudes that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus. By Jesus being *Ome Mma* (Good-Doer), they accept that the period of the history of salvation has dawned in their life-world, contexts and situations. As in Luke-Acts historiography, some of the non Igbo-speaking communities see themselves as true reflections of the local churches that are continuing the work of Jesus *in terra Africana*. In this same guise, they defend the idea that Jesus ever lives in the midst of their churches. To some of the Pastors, Lk 11,20 donates the view that Jesus' proclamation of God's eschatological Reign is ever present on earth. Again, for the Igbo-speaking RC Charismatics and other largely Igbo denominations who glory in miracles galore, when demons are cast out site *n' ikpoku Aha Jisus* (by invoking the name of Jesus), it is a sign that *Ike Chukwu* (the Power of God) is present in their midst and empowers them to perform miracles in and through the name of Jesus. Thus, members see themselves as the churches in which the Reign of God is manifested. God's rule operates, they sincerely believe according to Luke, in the hearts of men (Lk 17,20).

### *11. John and The Book of Revelation*

From the Johannine section of the NT, ten titles are recorded largely from the AICs, the Pentecostals and the New Generation Churches. Some of these organizations have powerful Pastors and Preachers who are quite evangelical in orientation. From their literal perception of the Bible (Manus 1998b), they have evolved christologies such as *Jisus Nwa Chukwu si n' igwe bia* (God's Son who had come from Heaven), Meal Giver, Sufferman, *Okwu Chukwu* (God's Word) and Chairman at Wedding Reception. Indeed, these are titles inspired from this sector to help the African church leaders to domesticate the Christian Religion. Truly, that Jesus is God's Son descended from heaven is a significant Johannine high christology. We are surprised that such a category could be employed as a central theme in the preachment of the New Generation Churches. According to some of the members with whom we engaged in discussion, Jesus who has come to settle in our world now lives in their Redemption and Boot Camps, Rally Grounds and the Miracle Centres of their big branches in larger cities. The idea of Jesus' empowerment of the men and women leaders who minister at these grounds makes many of the respondents claim that their worship places and churches are Holy Lands where miracles and healings happen unceasingly. For the womenfolk, especially those of the Agbala Daniel, that Jesus is their Converter is an idea that hails from Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well at Sychar (Jn 4,7ff). For them, Jesus converts them, forgives them their sinful past and receives them into the church and empowers them to evangelize their kinswomen and men; a role they not only see as missionary but as nation-building in modern Africa (Manus 1987:121–135). And that Jesus is the Word of God is the real yardstick for the churches' measurement for Jesus' authoritative teaching. For them, Jesus speaks not his own words as such but the word he received from the Father who sent him (Jn 8,38; 12,49–50,13,18; 14,10). From my observation during our interactions, members of most of the churches



rightly consider the Book of Revelation as a visionary book whose ideas about the identity of Jesus is described rather in eschatological perspectives. For most of them, the Book of Revelation alone furnishes the idea that Jesus is Lamb, Triumphant Judge, Chairperson at the Marriage feast. These categories though expressed in conventional terms, point to Jesus' function in the end-time events in which their victorious members shall celestially participate.

## 12. The Major Epistles of Paul

Here we have received six titles. These designations suggest that the Epistles of Paul appear not so much resorted to in the preaching or daily readings of the local churches as much as the Gospels. The terms are re-interpretations of Paul's original conceptions. The titles have become acculturated to the Nigerian religio-cultural concepts in order to support members' taste for a localized spirituality being developed in the context of contemporary human experience in a world where people are often confused by myriads of evangelists who claim to possess legitimate authority to make truth-claims that can lead people to God. From the adherents of the New Generation Churches the idea that Jesus is the Picture of God is increasingly gaining wide acceptance. They know what a picture is: a visual image of a person or sometimes a mental image of a person or something. We were told that in their Bible Sharing Groups and discussions on 2 Cor 4,4; 15 and Col 1,15 / Phil 2,6, members are enjoined to accept Jesus as the true image of God and as the Beginning and the Firstborn (Patricia Maduka). This is considered Paul's way of teaching them about the heavenly relationship between the Father and the Son. For them, with these categories, Paul is, in most of his great letters, saying that the Glory of Christ and his headship of the Church are closely related. Thus, from their mental imaging of the person of Jesus, they picture what God is doing in their lives and settle with the idea that Jesus is the real picture through which they see the nature and benevolence of God as the father of all.

It is from Hebrews 2,17 that the Igbo-speaking members of the RCs, the Anglicans and strangely the C&S, and the leaders of the CCC told us that they agree with Paul on his vision of Jesus as a merciful and faithful High Priest (*Nnukwu Ukochukwu*) who serves none else than God. The Anglicans depose that Heb 4,14f,10 portrays the profile of the merciful high priest. From that text, they are taught that Jesus is Mediator, whose human prayers to God are ever heard (Heb 3,7) and that he is compassionate because he suffered (5,8). For them, and rightly, Jesus is High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (5,9f). Besides, *Nnukwu Ukochukwu* is a well received designation of Christ among the Episcopalian or the Presbyterian churches. Thus we found it a favourite term in the liturgical manuals of the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans, the C&S and the CCC; especially at their ordination ceremonies.

Based on Eph 1,10; Col 1,16–18, members of some of the denominations, especially those of evangelical persuasion, recognize the central significance of Jesus as Head of All Things. Our respondents made it amply clear to us that in a world where many people,



even »churched« persons, consider the neighbourhood as dominated by »principalities and powers«, and where earthly potentates and political juggernauts arrogate to themselves authority over life and death and control or monopolize the good things of life, the use of the designation Jesus is Head of All Things is a reflection of their deep faith in the Lordship of Jesus, Son of God, the Creator. In this light, the more educated members see Jesus as the great point of integration for all that is in heaven and on earth. Consequent upon this cardinal belief, Jesus becomes easily accepted as the Humble Man (Phil 2,8), the Man who is in God's nature (Phil 2,11) and the Head of the Body; namely the Church. By this designation, most of the literate groups firmly believe that Christ is superior. He is above all rulers, authority, power and dominion (Eph 1,21; Col 1,16; 2,10). By this reasoning, they express a typical Pauline teaching deep-rooted in the ecclesiology of Colossians and Ephesians, as most of the adherents of the CCC and the C&S agree that the glorification of Christ as Head of all things confers on him the position as Head of the Church (Eph 1,23). One learned Pastor of the CCC explained that he understands that Colossians and Ephesians offer insights into Christ's fullness. For him, it is on that basis that their Pastors carry on their warfare against the spiritual entities of the African world (Pastor Timothy Maxwell). For me, these six items, though not taken from cultural thought-forms, are key Pauline terms to which the local churches have religiously given African christological orientation.

### *13. The Pastorals*

The questions asked on the Pastorals elicited some exciting responses that yielded seven designations: two from the Igbo-speaking Christians in the town and five from English-speaking Yoruba and Igbo groups on Campus. The Adventists (SDA) are one of the protagonist groups on the teaching that Jesus is Lord of End-time. From 1 Tim 6,14; 2 Tim 1,10; Tit 2,13, the Pastors of this church emphasize, even at Wedding ceremonies of their members, the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of time as a necessary article of faith in the Church's teaching. And as well, the doctrine that the Parousia is near at hand has, for most members of the Anglican and the Pentecostal groups we discussed with, a frightening tenor. Quite frequently, their Pastors charge them to keep the Law of God and to be good stewards of all that have been entrusted to them until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim 6,14). They insist that the appearance of Jesus at the end-time should be made the object of Christian hope as on that Day Jesus will come as Lord and the righteous Judge.

From the Roman Catholics, the English-speaking Anglicans, the CCC and their like, the second coming of Jesus confers on or wins him the status, Saviour of the world (Tit 2,4; 3,6). These groups told us that belief in the appearance of Jesus shall be a salvific experience for all their members as Jesus is believed by them not only as Saviour but as their Saviour. We understood that the Pastors go further to read from the text that Jesus is nevertheless subordinate to God (1 Tim 6,14; 2 Tim 4,1). For them, it is God who has



made possible the appearance of Jesus that has abolished death and earned life to all those who are baptized and believe in Christ. When asked if the term »life« means prosperous life here in Nigeria or eternal life in the hereafter, we were informed that through Jesus the Saviour, the grace of God has appeared for salvation of all who believe and would desist from worldly passions (Tit 2,11f). In other words, all the members agree that the appearance of Jesus is the manifestation of divine salvation in the African world (Johnson Igwe).

The Igbo-speaking groups in virtually all the denominations informed us that as they read the Pastorals, they encounter Jesus as *Onye Nkuzi* (Teacher). When asked why, they said that Jesus is Teacher precisely by the exemplary life he led in his lifetime (Tit 2,11–14). They unanimously consider him their model for upright living and ethical life (1 Tim 6,13). For some of the more articulate ones *Agwa bu mma* (Virtue is character) and as such »Jesus saves because virtues save«. These groups extrapolate from their readings and interpretations of the Pastorals to our admiration, that Jesus was born into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 2,8). Their Pastors strongly emphasize to the hearing of their audience that Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man because he gave himself as ransom for all (1 Tim 2,5f). In the light of this status, Jesus is the Risen Lord whose pedigree is of David's Royal House (2 Tim 2,8). For the Yoruba-speaking side, the acceptance of Jesus as *Kabiyesi*, (*His Majesty*), is continually re-echoed (Manus 1991b, 1991c, 1998:18).

Jesus is the Word of God for many of the more literal Bible readers as the BLW; and for the CLF, he is God's final word. According to both churches, God has spoken his final word in Jesus. For the members of the BLW, the idea that Jesus is the Word of God is the central belief that confirms the believer in his/her faith. Members accept Jesus as the true and the last Word of God. And the members of the Mission churches are all agreed that Jesus is a Community Leader. In their own understanding and reading of this part of scripture, they see Jesus as one who has called the Christian community into being. And they believe strongly that the same Community receives from Jesus the mandate to continue his mission of proclaiming the kingdom until the parousia of the eschatological Son of God dawns.

#### 14. Conclusion

The gains of this case study can be measured in many ways. Firstly, the assemblage of the different terms, titles, categories and designations with which Nigerian Christians are seeing, knowing and understanding Jesus as the Lord of the African church is good enough indication of the virility and development of African Christological spirituality. There is no doubt that this emerging religiosity reflects a phenomenon that is vitally touching every aspect of the personal and religious life of believers that, in turn, is revolutionizing the societal ethos. The paper has sufficiently demonstrated that the documentation of the manner the significance of Jesus is being expressed in the African cultures (especially in those of the Igbo and the Yoruba peoples of southern Nigeria) is a worthy venture towards



chronicling the emerging history of contemporary African Christian Theology. Besides, it notes well that the way the adherents of the local churches use the Bible in the light of their concrete historical situations and cultural religious experiences have influenced African Christians' articulation and imaging of the personality of the Christ of faith. The ninety titles collected just from twenty-two Christian organizations and churches in a town of no more than 1.2 million people stand to justify an earlier assertion of mine elsewhere that »... African portrayals of Jesus have today become uncountable« (Manus 1998:3). These distinctive indigenous portrayals of the Christ of the New Testament represent to a large extent the level and significance of the encounter between the increasingly vibrant African Christianity and the Christ of the Scriptures.

But where is the role of the Bible in this whole phenomenon? I like to argue that the discernment of the meaning of the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, of the Johannine Corpus, of Luke-Acts, the major Pauline Epistles, the Pastorals and the Book of revelation is shown by this study to have been expressed in conformity with the emerging interest in African Christian inculturation theology. The reasons why christological thought in Africa is being affected by cultural transformation is due to the increasing realization of the inadequacy of the missionary methods adopted in the presentation of the gospel message and the impoverishment of the designations of Jesus furnished by western historical models and interpretative methods. The achievement of this research, if anything at all, does not lie in the fact that christological constructs as the ones assembled here demonstrate how the revelation of Christ is being re-interpreted with African cultural thought-forms and idioms for Africans (Manus 1994:24) but in the fact that this sort of exposition of what the African eyes has seen of Christianity which I had, four years ago, prophetically stated in this *Journal*, will »determine what the Christian religion is going to be like in the 21st century« (Manus 1998:8). As a research done from the perspectives of basic Christian communities, there is no doubt that the findings may comprise ideas relative to the »Christology from below«. This is because most of the designations draw attention to how the biblical Christ is understood by simple folk Christians and what he accomplishes in their daily lives and in their believing communities in Nigeria and Africa in general. As these Africans regularly read their Bibles, they encounter in the real life activities of Jesus of Nazareth, God's self-disclosure in human history. Thus African Biblical Christologies are derived from the various responses given by African grassroots Christians and church-goers to the perennial question: Who do you say I am (Mk 8,29 and parallels). Here, I still consider my 1998 assertion regarding this question *ad rem*:

This is a question which is contextually being given expression in multifarious, autochthonous categories and symbols from various parts of Christian Africa by the episcopal authorities, the 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 (Manus 1998:5).



A major finding that emerges from the designations and the expositions given by the Pastors and several of their flock themselves is that African Christians define Jesus in his functionality. This is quite reasonable to infer; especially when one realizes that most of the responses have been drawn from *biblicalised* indigenous anthropological terms with which the functionality of Christ is spontaneously verbalized. Thus I hold strongly to the view that African christologies are intensely inspired by the original orientation of the senses of New Testament texts in which Jesus' activities and ministry are depicted in functional rather than in ontological terms (Murray 1964:40–41). For the groups we dialogued with, Jesus' question »... who do you say I am?« is not asked to seek explanation about his nature but about his reconstruction of the broken world of suffering humanity. Thus most African Christians as simple folk Bible readers do extrapolate from the New Testament narratives the significance of Jesus in the African church and society, a world which they do not find quite dissimilar to that of the First Century Palestine and the culture of the eastern Mediterranean.

In sum then, that this paper has been able to initiate the documentation of the latent Nigerian biblical christologies represents a milestone in contemporary Missiological agenda on the development of African Christian Theology and in holistic theological education in Africa. Several of the titles and designations indicate foresightfully that the burgeoning African Christianity is developing its own tradition on the accumulation of massive soteriological christologies whose *leitmotifs* are anchored on what God continues to do through the name, person and work of Jesus in the lives of African Christians. My recommendation is that for an adequate chronicling of the history of the Theology of African Christianity, the search for grassroots' bible-based christologies must relentlessly be further pursued in culture after culture in the African Continent.

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*Zusammenfassung:* Für christliche Theologie ist die Christologie das Herz der christlichen Religion. Dessen bewusst haben afrikanische Theologen ernstlich begonnen, die Identität Jesu Christi in der Vorstellung afrikanischer Christen zu erfassen, wie sie in deren Glaubensbegegnung mit dem Herrn des Lebens entsteht. Das phänomenale Wachstums des Christentums auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent im Blickfeld, konfrontiert uns diese Arbeit mit einer eingehenden Erforschung konfessionelle Grenzen überschreitender christlicher Basisgemeinschaften in der Universitätsstadt Ile-Ife im Südwesten von Nigeria, wo andere ethnische Gruppen als Wanderarbeiter und Händler leben. Mit Hilfe von Interview- und Gruppendiskussionmethoden wurden ihre eigenen Ausdrucksweisen der Darstellungen Jesu im Neuen Testament anhand von generativen Fragebogen ermittelt, die an die Anhänger verteilt wurden. Die neunzig eingesammelten Antworten zeigen, dass die Kirchenmitglieder die Bedeutung der Person und Arbeit Jesu von ihrem persönlichen Leben und ihrer täglichen Existenz her deuten und verstehen. Die Arbeit folgert daraus unter anderem, dass diese latenten nigerianischen Bibel-abgeleiteten Christologien pragmatische Aspekte reflektieren, die die zeitgenössische Missionswissenschaft ernst nehmen muss, will sie die auf Inkulturation bedachte Evangelisation im Afrika des 21. Jahrhunderts nicht beeinträchtigen.

*Summary:* Christian theology admits that Christology is the heartbeat of the Christian Religion. Aware of this fact, African theologians have earnestly begun to chronicle African Christians' identity of Jesus, the Christ as He is experienced in their faith encounter with the Lord of life. Given the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the African continent, this paper treats us to a painstaking research done on grassroots Christian communities cut across denominational lines in a University town, Ile-Ife, in the southwest of Nigeria where other ethnic groups live as migrant workers and traders. With the interview and group discussion approaches, their own articulations of the portrayals of Jesus in the New Testament were ferreted with generative questionnaires administered to the adherents. Ninety responses collected indicate that the church-members understand the meaning of



the person and work of Jesus in their personal lives and daily existence. The paper concludes, among other things, that these latent Nigerian Bible-derived christologies reflect pragmatic ingredients contemporary missiology can only afford to dismiss at the detriment of inculturational evangelization in Africa of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Sumario:* Para la teología cristiana, la cristología es el corazón del cristianismo. Consciente de ello, teólogos africanos han comenzado a investigar la identidad de Jesucristo en la mentalidad de cristianos africanos, tal como ésta se desarrolla en su encuentro con el Señor de la vida. Teniendo en cuenta el gran crecimiento del cristianismo en el continente africano, el artículo nos confronta con una investigación de las comunidades de base cristianas, que se saltan las fronteras confesionales, en la ciudad y centro universitario de Ile-Ife en el suroeste de Nigeria, donde diferentes grupos étnicos viven como trabajadores temporeros y comerciantes. Con ayuda del método de entrevistas y discusiones en grupos así como por medio de cuestionarios generativos repartidos entre los miembros de las comunidades se ha investigado la recepción personal de la visión de Jesús en el Nuevo Testamento. Las noventa respuestas recogidas muestran que los miembros de dichas comunidades interpretan y comprenden el significado de la persona y la obra de Jesús a partir de su propia vida y existencia. El artículo deduce de ello entre otras cosas que estas cristologías latentes nigerianas, sacadas de la Biblia, reflejan aspectos pragmáticos que la misionología actual debe tener en cuenta, si no quiere poner trabas a la evangelización inculturada de Africa en el siglo XXI.