

JESUS AS AN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL ANCESTOR: HIS RELEVANCE TO  
AFRICAN CHRISTIANS AND AFRICA AND A DISCUSSION OF HIS MULTI-  
FACETED ROLES

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(i) **ABSTRACT: JESUS AS AN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL ANCESTOR:  
HIS RELEVANCE TO THE AFRICAN CHRISTIANS AND AFRICA AND A  
DISCUSSION OF HIS MULTI-FACETED ROLES**

African Christianity requires an African expression that is in harmony with Africa's cultural heritage. Christ should be given an African image that is understood in the traditional and cultural setting of Africa. Christianity can only become an integral aspect of life for African Christians if it touches their lives in their social and cultural environment. This study shows the links between the nature of the ancestors in traditional African belief and the nature of Jesus, particularly by assessing his 'ancestors', his role as healer and mediator inter alia.

Introducing a study of this nature helps the African Christians not to live a dualistic life with one foot in the world of Western Christianity and the other one in their traditional world.

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(iii) DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late spiritual mentor Fr. Heinz Theo Stens and my beloved late sister Sarafina Ndaline.

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Benjamin Ndaline

Wintouk, Namibia

August 2006

(iv) **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “Jesus and an African Traditional Ancestor: His relevance to African Christians and Africa and a discussion of his multifaceted roles” is a true reflection of my own research and has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher learning.

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Sheehama Naftali  
Windhoek, Namibia

August 2008

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

African Christians need to develop an African theology that will enable them to understand Christ in their own cultural context. Christianity will become truly theirs if an authentic theology that propagates salvation in their cultures is developed.

This study will address the problem of why so many African Christians do not feel at home with the Christianity propagated by the European missionaries. Was there anything lacking in their missionary enterprises that culminated in the African Christians not feeling entirely being part of Christianity? This study also intends to demonstrate that African culture is not in contradiction to Christianity. Cultural awareness and sensitivity are crucial to the development of evangelisation in Africa. In addition, they are also crucial to the African. It is for this reason that Diane Stinton in her work, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (2004:63) considers culture as life to the African. Stinton points out that Jesus in Africa is understood and interpreted in the cultural context as the life giver. Christianity in Africa will maintain its rightful position only if African Christianity is offered the chance to develop its cultural richness and dynamism. This study will underscore the relevance of Christ to African traditions and culture.

#### **1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Books by both African and non-African theologians as well as journals on African religion will be used as the key sources because they deal

with the African traditional ancestors and Christ's ancestorship and his relevance to African culture.

Larenti Magesa in *The Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (2004) summarises that inculturation enables African Christians to grasp Christianity better than previously. In addition, it helps the African Christians to worship God in their own way. African Christians require a sense of identity in order to live humanely as Christians. If Christ is not proclaimed in their culture they will feel truly lost. Magesa (2004:170) explains it as follows: 'We need a sense of identity to live humanely, without it we will feel literally lost.' In his contribution to inculturation, Emmanuel Martey, in *Inculturation and Liberation: African Theology* (1993:63-69) traces the historical background of inculturation. The theological notion of perceiving Christ as an ancestor in the African religious and theological milieu came into existence for the first time at the All African Conference of Churches held in Kampala in 1963.

*A Reader in African Christian Theology* (1998:3) edited by John Parratt is a collection of essays written by various African theologians. Parratt points out the weakness of the Western missionary Christianity. He identifies two key areas in which the missionaries failed in terms of evangelisation in Africa. Firstly, the gospel was introduced into Africa during the period of colonialism. As a result, Christianity increased and gained more adherents largely owing to the support from the ruling European authorities. Secondly, Parratt clearly states that there was a mental attitude amongst the missionaries to denigrate traditions in African cultures. African culture and traditional religion were labelled as pagan. This mindset resulted in African culture, traditional concepts and rituals not being incorporated into Christianity. Parratt notes that Western missionaries discouraged the connection between Christianity, African cultures and African traditional religion. They disapproved of African religious beliefs and practices without making an accurate assessment of African cultural elements that were compatible with

Christianity. Consequently, this made African Christians feel that Christianity is a foreign religion. Parratt's views are shared by Stinton (2004:19), where she points out that Christians in Africa practise two religions, namely Christianity and African religion. This is because Christianity is still treated by the vast majority of Africans as a foreign religion. For this reason illustrious, leading African theologians such as Nyamiti, Mbiti, Idowu, Pobee, Mugambi, Bujo, Martey, Setiloane, Magesa, Thlagale and Imasogie are of the overwhelming opinion that Christianity in Africa must be considered in the light of the African's cultural inheritance and identity.

In his book, *An Introduction to African Christian Theology* (1989:63-70), Mugambi concurs with Parratt that missionaries were negative towards African culture. They referred to it as pagan.

According to Mugambi, the term pagan denotes a person who is neither a Christian, a Jew, nor a Muslim. The word pagan derives from the Latin "*paganus*" which means someone who lives on the periphery of a country.

Mugambi(1989:63-70) further points out that the term was wrongly used by the missionaries when referring to Africans who were not yet baptised. Mugambi notes that the word pagan was generally associated with development because during the Roman era in the first century AD, it was used in two ways describing either a person who lived in the country side or an ordinary citizen. Thus the Africans who were not yet baptised at the time were considered as undeveloped by the missionaries. In addition, Mugambi points out that pagans were considered as enemies of the Christians.

Mugambi(1989:63) is of the opinion that the failure of the missionaries to identify themselves with the dreams of the African peoples resulted in them not being able to see the difference between the missionaries and other Europeans. Scores of Africans did not repudiate the gospel.

Instead what they repudiated was the application of the gospel values that were used to justify colonial ideologies. While Christianity is immensely important, both Parratt(1998:15) and Mugambi(1989:60) feel that the way in which it was presented failed to touch the hearts of the African Christians. In order for the African churches to be genuinely African, they should extricate themselves from the continuous effects of the colonial era by implementing inculturation.

Parratt's point on the contemptible treatment of the African culture by the missionaries corresponds to Mugambi's point on paganism. (Mugambi 1989, Parrat,1998).

Mugambi (1989) states that the missionaries were biblically literate; however, they were not aware of the theological and cultural conflicts that took place between Peter and Paul. These cultural conflicts could have helped them to understand such conflicts which they were going to encounter in their missionary enterprises in Africa. During their missionary enterprises Peter and Paul encountered problems because they compelled the converts to desert their cultural heritage with a view to embracing the values of Christianity. They caused one of the greatest conflicts in the history of Christianity. Mugambi(1989:62) further points out that the missionaries did not know the resolution made at the first ecumenical council in Jerusalem. The council resolved that it was not necessary for a Gentile to become an honorary Jew in order to become a Christian. Similarly, in the African context, it is not necessary for an African to become an honorary white in order to become a Christian. Many missionaries in Africa insisted that Africans become honorary whites in order to become Christians (Mugambi 1989:64).

This was a huge theological mistake committed by the missionaries. Mugambi (1989:68) castigates the missionaries for patterning their theological base on wrong theological grounds. The missionaries did not consider the theological affirmations of the Christian faith practised

during the time of Jesus: that converting to Christianity did not really resolve into adopting the culture of the missionaries.

Benezet Bujo, in *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (2003:7), does not support the way in which the gospel was propagated by the missionaries. He stresses the importance of incarnation. Basing his arguments on the theology of incarnation, Bujo states that Jesus Christ is really one of us despite being born of a Jewish woman; he identified himself with humanity on earth. He is like us in everything, except sin.

In this context, Bujo(2003:8) argues that Christianity is not a foreign religion because Christ is the Saviour of the world. Therefore he is also a Saviour of the African. In agreement with Bujo, John Foster in his book, *The First Advanced Church History* (1965:58), notes that Christianity was neither exclusively for the Jews, Proselytes, Samaritans, Gentiles nor for the Europeans.

Rather, Christianity was meant to be the faith or religion for all humanity. In this context, castigation can be levelled against the missionaries for portraying Christ as a white man. (Jesus was always depicted as a white man in most of the statues and pictures found in the religious books).

In *Christ As Our Ancestor* (1984) Charles Nyamiti starts from the African heritage, calling for a profound analysis of ancestral beliefs and practices with a view to implementing these aspects more suitably for theological purposes. While Nyamiti is criticised by Bujo for fashioning his African theology on the model of the European speculative tradition, he paved the way by setting a good example for future African theologians who intend to venture into academic work on African theology.

Nyamiti expands the entire Christian message using the general African concept of ancestors as a point of departure for dogmatic theology, Christian morality, spirituality, liturgy, etc. Nyamiti stresses that Africans need a holistic perception of life and this therefore demands a Christ who influences the whole of life for African Christians. Nyamiti states that there is a difference between European religious educations and African religious educations. European religious educations separate the material from the spiritual whereas African religious educations do not separate the material from the spiritual. Nyamiti, therefore, notes that the missionary transmission of the gospel did not perceive African religious life in a holistic fashion. It is on these grounds that a number of rigorous endeavours are being made currently to relate Jesus Christ to the African heritage from the nature of God and His African self-revelation through salvation.

As this thesis develops I intend to demonstrate the relationship between Christ and the African traditional ancestors drawing upon Nyamiti's Christology from an African perspective. In *Towards Liberation: Crossing Boundaries between Church and Politics* (2006:88) a contribution to African theology and Politics by Bishop Zephania Kameeta in the form of lectures, sermons and meditations, Kameeta concurs with Bujo (2003) and Stinton (2004) that Christ is not foreign to the Africans. Historically and biblically it has been proven that the Africans gave shelter to Jesus. They also assisted him in carrying his cross. Despite Christianity being viewed as a foreign religion by the African Christians Kameeta, like Stinton, argues that according to the biblical assumption, Jesus Christ is not a stranger to the African heritage. Christ's parents are believed to have sought refuge in Egypt when King Herod was killing all the male children soon after the birth of Jesus. (See Matthew 2:13-15).

In his *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy* (1975) Mbiti points out that, notwithstanding Christianity being one of the foreign and ancient religions in Africa, particularly in Egypt and in Ethiopia,

there is a lack of serious reflection on who Christ is in Africa. Mbiti further goes on to say that Christianity and African religions have a lot in common in relation to Jesus Christ.

In *African Theology: In Its Social Context* (1999:55-57), Benezet Bujo propounds the idea that any African theologian who intends to develop an African theology should take the basic cultural and traditional African elements that are compatible with Christianity and explicate them vividly in the biblical context. The Bible can be used as one of the salient sources of African theology because it is the primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Bujo (1999) and Mbiti (1975) suggest that the African theology and Christianity should be modelled upon traditional African religion, creating a balance between the old and the new. African theologians must assist in restoring the confidence of Africans in their own cultural heritage. Gabriel Setiloane in *An Introduction to African Theology* (1986:10-11) explains how the notion of community plays an important role in the life of the ancestors. In Africa one cannot talk of the ancestors bereft of the community. His concept on community will help me a great deal in explicating the African ancestors within the context of their descendants in the community. Community in the African context expresses the essence of belonging and the root of being.

Setiloane further explains how the concept of "Ubuntu" is held in high esteem. "Ubuntu" means we are who we are because of the community in which we live. In agreement with Setiloane, Professor Roderick Zimba, in *UNAM Inaugural Lecture: Learning to Live with Others* (2005:8), explains, citing the words of South African President Thabo Mbeki, that one's character is developed into an improved person through the collective endeavours of others in the community. Benezet Bujo's book, *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (2003:125) points out that our life can only be fulfilled through the community. In addition to this, the life of the ancestors is only understood within the context of the community in three ways, the

children yet to be born, the ancestors and the living. Bujo's concept of the community will contribute a great deal to the understanding of the connection that exists between the ancestors and their respective communities.

In *An Introduction to the History of the Church in Namibia* (2003:4-7), Buys and Nambala explain the importance of the beliefs in the ancestors in Namibia and elsewhere in Africa and how these beliefs decreased because of the influence of Christianity.

In order for African Christians to understand the ancestorship of Christ, Mugambi(1989:113-115), elucidates "political power and the power of the cross". Since the cross is an indispensable symbol in the history of Christianity, its meaning will help in explaining the meaning of liberation and salvation. In addition, I also intend to trace the historical background of the cross in the political context of Jesus' time.

Mugambi's contribution to the meaning of the cross will be underpinned by information on the history of the cross found in Martin Hengel's book, *The Cross of the Son of God*, (1981). One cannot talk of the cross of Christ without making reference to his resurrection.

I therefore intend to use *The Resurrection Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection* (1998) edited by Stephen Davis. In the same vein, I will also use Michael Rassool's article on the resurrection entitled "As African Christians We Understand New Life" (2007:9) drawn from the "Southern Cross" explaining the meaning of resurrection from and African traditional point of view what resurrection means from an African traditional point of view.

Ancestors play an important role in the health of their descendants, therefore it is important to look at the differences between African traditional medicine and Western medicine. This difference is explained in *African Traditional Religions in Religious Education* (1992)

edited by Moyo and Ter Haar. This book will be utilised in indicating measures taken in remedying illnesses engendered by the ancestral spirits.

In addition, a journal "Illness and Healing" (1998) edited by Marie-Louis Chauvet will be of great help in demonstrating that there is no connection between African traditional medicine and Western medicine. The measures used in restoring the health of the patient are different. In the same vein, in *The Healing Touch of Affirmation* (1976:30), a contribution to psycho-spirituality by Thomas A. Kane, Kane defines what healing is and its responses to crisis. It will be utilised in this thesis in providing a full definition of healing.

The question of culture and religion is an integral aspect of this study. Therefore "*Toward a Theology of Inculturation*" (1997:4-5) by Aylward Shorter will be used in this study as a contribution to the definition and the understanding of the following terms: culture, acculturation, and inculturation. In the same vein, these terms will be linked with the definition of the term "culture" found in Samuel Ngewa's book, *Issues in African Christian Theology* (1998:20).

Emmanuel Martey's book "*Inculturation and Liberation: African Theology*" (1993) will also make a contribution to this study on the aspect of inculturation. Another issue this study intends to address is the debate about whether the ancestors are venerated or worshipped. *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa* (1981:23) edited by H. Kuckertz addresses the difference between ancestral veneration and worship. He argues that ancestors are not worshipped. Instead, they are venerated. It is only God who is worshipped. Buys and Nambala(2003) do not make a distinction between worshipping ancestors and venerating them. According to Buys and Nambala, ancestors are either worshipped or venerated. The difference and the similarity between Christ and the African traditional ancestors will also be addressed in this study by looking at the work of Charles Nyamiti in

*Christ as our Ancestor* (1984). One of the central questions this study intends to address is who is Jesus according to African Christians?

This is an African Christological question rooted in a biblical origin. Bujo(1999) points out that since African Christology is not yet fully developed, it cannot really give a clear answer to this question. However, Diane B. Stinton(2004:29-33), answers the question on who Christ is from an African Cultural Christological perspective. In this study I intend to answer the aforementioned question using the answers provided by Stinton.

For Stinton, Christ in the African religious and traditional context is a life-giver, an ancestor, a healer, a mediator etc. While Stinton provides some of the answers to the above-mentioned question, Bujo in *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (2003:133-137) answers this question from a Christological perspective.

Both Bujo (2003) and Nyamiti (1984) understand Christ as Proto-ancestor. These answers will be expanded upon in the development of the discussion on who Christ is. I shall explain the meaning of the term "Proto-ancestor" in subsequent chapters. Adding to the answers of Bujo, Stinton and Nyamiti on who Christ is from an African traditional and Christological perspective, Schoffeleers in *Folk Christology in Africa: The Dialectics of the Nganga Paradigm* (1989:158-159) understands Christ as a victor and a chief.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

While Mbiti (1975) states that African Christianity has had an impact on the Africans and made an enormous contribution to Christendom through scholarship, participation in Church councils, defence of the faith movements such as monasticism, credential doctrines, translation, martyrdom, preservation of the scriptures, heresies, and controversies, but it appears as though Christianity is not owned by the Africans.

Moreover, African Christians cannot practise Christianity as they know best in their own cultural way. The problem seems to be the European and Western influence on Christianity which makes it difficult for Christianity to touch the hearts of the African people. The unfortunate and regrettable aspect of Christianity is that for a lengthy period of time it was perceived as a foreign religion. It is on this ground that many Africans cannot view themselves as fully Christian. The way they practise it impoverishes them because it does not help them to develop their potential to the fullest. One of the questions I intend to address in this study is "Who do the African Christians think Christ is?" this is an indispensable question in this study. The missionaries did not make any endeavours to address this question during their missionary enterprises in Africa. However, this question is currently being addressed through the process of inculturation. Religion in Africa is embedded in the lives of the people. According to Mbiti (1975), African Christians are not yet ready to embrace the values of the gospel unless Christ is proclaimed in their culture.

This study is crucial to the development of Christianity in Africa. African Christians should see to it that they develop their own Christianity as propounded by Mbiti (1975) and Idowu (1973). This study will be based upon cultural responses delineated and articulated needs of the African Christians.

In addition, this study will also address the issue of how Christianity should allow African Christians to develop an authentic African Christianity relevant to the life experiences of the African Christians. In short, this study will explain that the African Christians should appreciate being Christians, while not repudiating their African traditional and cultural roots.

#### **1.4 WORKING HYPOTHESIS**

I intend to show that African Christians hold Christ in high esteem in the context of African traditional ancestors. I shall also show that there is a connection between Christ and the African traditional ancestors and there is ample room for Christ within the African culture. In addition, I shall also make an attempt to explain who the ancestors are and the role they play in their respective communities and in the life of their descendants. This development will ultimately lead me to the ancestral role that Christ plays amongst the African Christians. I also intend to show various cultural statuses and names that have been accorded to Jesus. The cultural statuses accorded to Jesus will be developed as topics.

The thesis serves as a limited introductory literary resource about Christ, our ancestor, and his relevance and teaching from an African perspective. A variety of published books on African theology and Journals on missiology will be presented in an effort to collect more information on the topic.

#### **1.5 METHODS AND MATERIALS**

Firstly, I intend to consult works by writers on this topic, particularly writers on African theology and African Christology. Secondly, I intend to consult works by writers on African traditional religion found in Missionalia Journals. I do not intend to use either structured or unstructured interviews, since this study is based on course work.

#### **1.6 CHAPTER PLAN**

In the first chapter, the general introduction, literature review, statement of the problem, working hypothesis, and methodology of the study are outlined.

The second chapter of the thesis will focus on who the ancestors are. Their characteristics will be defined under the following subheadings: Death and after-life; African traditional ancestors and their roles; Divinities and spirits; Community; Community and self-determination of a person; Who qualifies to be an ancestor?; and The fall of man and original sin. The development of this chapter hinges upon these subheadings.

The third chapter discusses the similarities and the differences between Christ and African traditional ancestors.

The fourth chapter deals with the key question in this study: "Who is Christ according to the African Christians?"

Firstly, the answer to this question will concentrate on the biblical answer given by Peter. Secondly, I will concentrate on the following answers given by African Christians themselves.

Concepts of life in traditional Africa, Jesus as life-giver, Jesus as healer, what is health, the healing powers and techniques used by Jesus and African traditional healers, the image of Christ as healer, Jesus as traditional healer, Jesus as Mganga, Jesus as mediator, Jesus as an ancestor, Christ as liberator and saviour, and conclusion. These answers will develop this chapter into one unit. In addition, the last topic will focus on the parallels between salvation and liberation.

Chapter five concentrates on the mediation of Christ, Jesus as ancestor, ideas on ancestors in Africa, the problems regarding Jesus being an ancestor.

Chapter six will focus on the question of whether the ancestors are worshipped or venerated.

Chapter seven aims to look at Christ as liberator and saviour. I also intend to explain how the two terms are related.

Chapter eight will deal with the ancestral value of Christ's cross and resurrection. In this chapter I shall also give a definition of the cross in the context of both its political and theological definition. In addition I shall give a definition of resurrection from a theological and African perspective.

Chapter nine discusses inculturation. In this chapter I intend to start with giving the definition of two important words that are related to inculturation. The definitions of culture and acculturation will be followed by the definition of inculturation and its expansion into the discussion. The discussion on inculturation will be followed by the aspects that should be considered in the process of implementing inculturation.

Chapter ten will concentrate on the similarities and the differences between the saints and African traditional ancestors. In this chapter I intend to give an explanation of who the saints are.

Chapter eleven will focus on the data collection procedure.

Chapter twelve deals with the general conclusion of the study.

Chapter thirteen will concentrate on the explanation of the terms used in the research. The explanation of the terms will be followed by the bibliography.

Each chapter will include an introduction and a conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHO ARE THE ANCESTORS?

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I shall attempt to give a definition of who the ancestors are according to different theological and religious understandings of contemporary African and European theological scholars. It is important to note that my definitions and explanations will be confined to African traditional ancestors. The definitions will be dealt with under the following subheadings:

- Death and after-life
- African Traditional Ancestors and their roles
- Divinities and Spirits
- Community
- Community and Self-Determination of the person
- Who qualifies to be an ancestor?
- The Fall of Man and Original Sin

#### 2.2 DEATH AND AFTER-LIFE

Death is acknowledged as the process in which the spirit separates from the body. Generally, it is believed in the African world view that before the spirit enters the spirit world, it moves around the body or the homestead. It is for this reason that proper funeral rites must be conducted in order to send it off in a happy and peaceful way. After death, the spirit joins other spirits in the spiritual realm. It is commonly believed that the spirits take on another body. In the African traditional religious milieu before any man becomes an ancestor, he goes first through the process of death. The pronoun "he" is used exclusively to demonstrate that it is only the males who may become ancestors depending on their reputation (males are never declared ancestors while they are still alive). According to Mbiti (1975) the spirit does not

lose the original identity it had when it was a living person. The deceased person goes to a good place where his departed relatives are. The deceased person who lived a morally deplorable life goes to a bad place until God becomes merciful to him. In the case of a bad person, God's clemency is required for his entry into a place for the deceased who were good. The process of being saved through mercy in the African religious context is equivalent to the Christian doctrine of purification of souls. The African peoples demonstrate the belief that death is not the end for the dead by giving them food and drink. The food and drinks are given, particularly to the leaders of families, adults, and married people (Mbiti: 1975).

### **2.3 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL ANCESTORS AND THEIR ROLES**

Buyis and Nambala (2003), Idowu (1973), and Mbiti (1975) define the ancestors as the living-dead who are mediators between God and the living. The ancestors are the departed elders who are related to their kith and kin. Idowu (1973) makes a clear distinction between the ancestors and the deities. According to Buyis and Nambala (2003) the ancestors are the elders who are related to their living community. This means that the ancestors do not live far from their relatives and families. They enter the world of the spirit and reside near the Supreme Being. Mbiti (1975) refer to the ancestors as the living dead because even if they die physically, their existence is extended into the spiritual world. In the African world view the ancestors are considered as the heads of the families to which they belonged when they were still alive. Death does not really separate them from their families and relatives. Their descendants continue to refer to them as fathers or mothers. While Idowu (1973) mentions the mothers being part of the ancestors, Mbiti (1975) is of the opinion that in the African traditional context, deceased women and children are not referred to as ancestors.

Since the ancestors are no longer in the world of ordinary living people, the way their descendants approach them is different from the way they approached them when they were on earth. The ancestors are approached by their descendants with great honour and respect. It is commonly held in Africa that the living parents are as respected as the ancestors. According to Idowu (1973) the living parents, like the ancestors, are also endowed with the power to curse their disobedient children. It is, therefore, important that every stage of life needs both parental and ancestral blessings. Ancestors are custodians of cooperation and unity in their societies (Idowu 1973:184-185). According to Bujo (2003:122) death is a *sine qua non* for the ancestors to acquire an ancestral status. In the African world view, the ancestral beliefs cover every aspect of human life: religious, political, cultural and socio-economic. Bujo (2003) points out that ancestors have an intimate communication with their living descendants. In addition, the living also have contact with God. Ancestors are involved in the affairs of their descendants and events that take place in the villages. Bujo further points out that there are different categories of ancestors, namely founders of the clan, heroes of the community, deceased relatives, and members of one's own family. Bujo (2003) and Mbiti (1975) are both of the opinion that the ancestors are closer to their descendants than God.

Both Bujo (2003) and Mbiti (1975) regard the ancestors as the source of life in the unseen world. The ancestors have the power to interfere in the daily activities of their descendants and guide them. In addition, Bujo (2003) views the ancestors as the ancient people who lived exemplary lives accomplishing what the community believes to be an ethical lifestyle.

As far as their own life is concerned, the ancestors are believed to be living a virtuous and happy life in the spiritual world. Life cannot be enjoyable and successful on earth without being in contact with them.

This pivotal function belongs to them because they are perceived as the mediators and protectors of life.

Older people in the community are the ones charged with the responsibility of facilitating the relationship between the ancestors and the community. Therefore ancestors are held in high esteem in terms of contributing to building up the present and the future. As stated earlier, one cannot develop successfully and effectively unless one remains faithful to one's ancestors. One should be faithful to one's ancestors by keeping their memories alive.

Redemption stems from the ancestors and, therefore, when one beseeches for their benediction and protection, one becomes successful in all one's attempts. By remembering them, one is redirected toward the coming salvation. As a result a kind of an experiential narrative story comes into existence by realistically remembering them. This culminates in one realising that the ancestors are the true mediators between God and humanity. (Bujo 2003:123-124).

According to Bujo (2003) and Mbiti (1975) African traditional religion perceives ancestors as special people charged or endowed with Godly powers. Ancestors are able to see with exceptional eyes and the sagacity they give to their descendants is always counted upon; it does not deceive their descendants

Their descendants count upon them for anything just like they count upon the Supreme Being. It is for this reason that according to Setiloane (1986:19-20), many African Christians have been able to bring their ancestors into the Church. Schreier (1991:117-118) holds that it was to the ancestors that God originally passed on divine power. Therefore, they have the highest connection with God in the hierarchy of beings. The ancestors are still viewed as human beings although they are dead. Through their passage to death, they become more

powerful than their living descendants. Their impact on their earthly descendants can either be attenuated or augmented. Tihagale in *Inculturation: Bringing the African Culture into the Church* (1993:7) points out that ancestors are often referred to in the plural rather than in the singular. Ancestors have nothing to do with people who do not belong to their clans. Tihagale (1993) further points out that it is commonly held that the Africans did not have a highly advanced notion of the Supreme Being. What they had instead was an intimate insight about the ancestors. Tihagale (1993:7) holds that supernatural intervention is associated with the ancestors and not with God.

Mbiti in *African Religion and Philosophy* (1991) refers to the ancestors as the living-dead for two reasons. Firstly, by virtue of their being in a state of personal immortality and their process of demise which is not yet finished. Secondly, the ancestors as the living dead have the closest contact with humankind. They visit their families now and then and share meals with them in a symbolic form. They are conscious of what is going on in their families. The ancestors manifest themselves principally to the oldest members of the community. Ancestors can also be identified by their names. In addition they show interest in the affairs of their families by making enquiries into them. They protect their families by warning them against potential danger. They also give warnings to their relatives who do not observe their special instructions. According to Mbiti (1991), ancestors are custodians of family affairs, traditions, ethics, and activities. Since they are "human beings", the living dead are thus the closest channel between God and humankind. They are conscious of the needs of the people who have been with them recently. Mbiti (1991) considers that the ancestors have direct and indirect communication with God through their forefathers.

Therefore the living-dead involve themselves in the family affairs for trivial needs of life. Even though they cannot perform miracles to

solve the problems of their descendants, their descendants feel psychologically relieved when they articulate their troubles to them.

Whilst Mbiti (1991) refers to the ancestors as the living-dead, Bujo (2003) refers to them as "those who live in the hereafter". For Mbiti, the living-dead are those who have just joined the community of the ancestors with a view to becoming ancestors. Bujo (2003), on the other hand, does not regard the living-dead as the ancestors. This point shall be elucidated further in this chapter when the next topic, who qualifies to be an ancestor, is discussed. Imasogie in *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (1993) refers to the ancestors as the living-dead euphemistically on the ground that they have an unbroken affinity with their families. Hinnells in *A Handbook of Living Religions* (1988) views the ancestors as intercessors of their descendants in the same way as the Christians saints. Hinnells likens the ancestors to the saints by virtue of their communication with Christians through prayer. While the saints maintain only spiritual contact with their earthly descendants, the African traditional ancestors maintain both physical and spiritual contact with their descendants. Hinnells (1988) describes the ancestors as partners of humankind in terms of approaching the Supreme Being and as guarantors of sincere worship. As far as sacrifices are concerned, they are not only made to God, but they are also given to the ancestors. Ancestral sacrifice in the African traditional context is likened to the feeding of and caring for the elderly, but this idea clearly transcends human understanding of eating and drinking. Ancestors are endowed with an awareness and power. Therefore, a sacrifice to them is an appreciation of their powerful role in human society.

Misfortunes that befall their descendants at times are attributed to failure to make sacrifice to them in the proper way. Most African religious rituals are ancestral or funerary. This relates particularly to rites of passage in traditional African religion. Religious convocations and offerings play an important role in birth rites, naming, ceremonies,

puberty, rituals, initiation, funerals and marriage ceremonies. According to Hinnells (1988), while many Africans have embraced Christianity, it is statistically estimated that between 30% and 40% of the people in modern Africa still practise traditional African religion.

It is commonly held that 70% of Christians and Muslims in Africa still resort to African traditional religion and, particularly in times of trouble, they invoke ancestral assistance. Hinnells (1988) further notes that African traditional religion is more tenacious than any other religion. It has survived many modifications in terms of interpretation. Wole Soyinka (in Hinnells 1988:437), a Nigerian author, describes African religious symbolism as "protean", meaning African religion has the ability and exceptional resilience to survive any modern form.

#### **2.4 DIVINITIES AND DIVINERS**

Idowu (1973) makes a clear distinction in his definition of deities and divinities. The divinities and deities, unlike the ancestors, are clearly far from their communities and families. They are completely out of the world where people can experience them through the senses. They are in a different category. The deities take part in the judgment of those who are eligible to be ancestors. It is generally theologically justifiable that the divinities do not have complete existence. The divinities and deities complement each other in their work. Working without each other is meaningless. Each divinity has its own local name and its function to fulfill. The names given to them are in conformity with the roles given to them (Idowu 1973:169). Deities can either be female or male. They are given sacrifices and offerings in accordance with the needs of each divinity. Their adherents greet them with honour by genuflecting, and or prostrating correctly as they walk pass the shrines dedicated to them. Women in particular and anyone who is embarking on a journey, asks for their protection. The deities vary from one tribe to another (Dickson 1969). Magesa (1998) defines the divination as a form of possession in which the person is

understood as serving as an intermediary between spirits and humankind.

Alternatively, divination could also be referred to as a process of being possessed by spiritual powers. Divinity or divination is an art or skill or practice looking into the future events by finding out enigmatic knowledge. Diviners are found in every tribe in Africa. They do not only consult with the gods, but also with their ancestors at critical moments. In some cases they use objects such as animals in the practice of divination. Bones are used in the event of sickness. The salient aim of utilising one's divination is to detect the chief causes of an illness. Before throwing the bones, the diviner or the patient blows on the bones, thus filling them symbolically with the spirit. According to Tihagale (1993), diviners use a different language just like other religious leaders. The diviners communicate directly with the spirits. They can also attain assistance from the mediums who always work with them. The diviners have a supernatural capacity and knowledge to see invisible forces in the universe. People usually approach them for advice. They can also use their common knowledge and good imagination to detect anomalous forces that may be harmful to the community or society. Mbiti (1991) holds that the Africans seek the advice of the divinities and ancestral spirits regularly with a view to making sure that the development and success of their prospective plans are not forfeited and frustrated by any force. Imasogie (1993) agrees with Mbiti on this point that one's plans cannot be automatically successful without human and supernatural efforts.

## **2.5 GHOSTS AND SPIRITS**

Dickson (1969:60), Imasogie (1993:55) and Mbiti (1991:22) make a clear distinction between the ghosts and spirits. According to these authors the Africans believe in God, spirits, and the spiritual world. There are four main categories of spiritual beings: namely, the Supreme Being, divinities, the ancestral spirits and evil spirits. The

African people believe in the world of spirits, and evil spirits as existing in the real world.

Spiritual beings control the universe in which different types manifest their powers; humans in particular are completely dependent on these spiritual beings. The world of humans and the world of the spirits have a common meaning. They cannot have any meaning without each other. Both the world of spirits and the minor spirits need each other in order to make humans happy.

There is order between the two worlds. The spirits have the capacity to inflict any punishment on the order of the world but humans have the means to handle the punishment by preventing it. The world of the African is known for its cohesion. According to Dickson (1969:61) everything in the African world view is perceived in a holistic way. Ancestral spirits are classified as good spirits. The respect given to them is of paramount importance.

Daily offering and annual feasts are prepared in their honour. The ancestors can compel their descendants to offer sacrifices for them. It is for this reason that ancestral spirits are held in high esteem in African traditional religion. Mbiti (1991) defines ghosts or evil spirits as the spirits of the unknown people who died a long time ago. People are apprehensive of the ghosts because they are strange to them. It is generally held in the African traditional religious sphere that these spirits possess people without their will.

Mbiti (1991) points out that some of the illnesses such as meningitis, madness, deafness, and dumbness are sometimes perceived as caused by ghosts in some societies. While society may view evil spirits as bad, they are considered to be of benefit by some, particularly by the diviners and medicine men who gain knowledge and understanding of what is taking place in the community and the universe.

Mention has already been made of the living-dead or the people who died not long time ago; their spirits are remembered or recalled by many generations of their relatives and families. They are different from the ghosts by virtue of their recent death. The living-dead do not go far from their families. The spirits of the living-dead, like ghosts, may cause harm to their descendants. In the event of sickness, the assistance of the diviners is sought. Alternatively, their descendants could appease them by giving food to them as a sacrifice. Imasogie (1993:55) and Mbiti (1991:22) hold that bad spirits (malevolent spirits) are not as powerful as the ancestral spirits.

The divinities and ancestral spirits are endowed with a capacity to overpower ghosts. The ancestral spirits and divinities live in the World of the spirits and on earth. This makes them different from the ghosts and malevolent spirits. While some of the spirits referred to are considered to be powerful, they are still subordinate to God and rely upon Him. In addition, at times good spirits are assigned by God to carry out certain assignments. (Mbiti 1991:23)

## **2.6 COMMUNITY**

This is an indispensable aspect of African traditional religion. Bujo (2003:125) and Mbiti (1991:30) hold that Africans are known for being community oriented. Everything that they do centres around the community. It is through the community that Africans find their fulfilment. Bujo (2003:43) and Zimba (2005:8) are of the opinion that the entire notion of community in the African traditional milieu centres upon the philosophy of "*Ubuntu*" which means that one becomes an improved person owing to the collective contribution of others within the community. Thus one is often urged to be at the service of the community and the nation at large. Ancestors form an integral aspect of the community. They are held in high esteem owing to their involvement in the affairs of their respective communities. As mentioned before, their assistance is sought in critical moments.

They protect their communities from destructive spirits. Furthermore, they are aware of what is taking place within their communities (Mbiti 1991:31). The notion of the ancestors being mediators leads us to the Supreme Being. According to Bujo (2003:44), every living thing is related to the common source of life, the Supreme Being. Bujo further elucidates that life within the African sphere is only possible and fulfilled within the community. This is demonstrated by the African belief that there is no childless couple because everything that exists ensures and promises life on earth. The memory of those who have died is kept in the minds of the living. Equally, being faithful to their ancestors, keeping their words, deeds, and actions close to their hearts, can only enhance the life of the living. As the community is explained by the concept of life, it does not only include the living, but also the not yet born and the dead who live in the village of the ancestors. The concept of life within the African community is not based upon biological affinities. One may become a member of the family on the basis of marriage, friendship, or neighbourhood. However, Bujo (2003) argues that it is very important for one to understand first the notions of family and clan with a view to comprehending better the people who are not of African descent.

The reaffirmation of world view and of humanity is not tantamount to encouraging tribalism. Instead, Bujo (2003), argues that humanity and community are understood within the universal context. In point of fact, the community in the world view is open to the universe. Supported by traditional models, Bujo (2003) and Zimba (2005) stress that perfect respect is demanded by African tradition towards the "otherness of others". God is the source of otherness and therefore the origin of all created reality and the unity of mankind within the universe can be attributed to Him and be respected by the entire nation. Any clan is open to the universal. The relation to others and the universe is reflected in God's transcendental spirit.

## 2.7 THE COMMUNITY AND SELF – DETERMINATION

As indicated in the preceding discussion one realises one's humanity through others within the community. Therefore here I shall endeavour to explain how one attains self-determination within the community. If one is not fully understood in the community, one's self-determination cannot be realised. This results in one losing one's humanity. Bujo (2003: 127-128) argues that in the African communal context human understanding is not determined in terms of the Cartesian philosophy "*Cogito, Ergo Sum*" ("I think therefore I am"), but rather it is determined by the philosophy of "*Ubuntu*" (*Cognamus Ergo Sumus*) which means "We think, therefore we are". Bujo (2003) points out that reasons cannot even be conceived outside the community's sphere. Human understanding of the future is characterised by the individual's reason and feeling. In the African world view, life begins at conception or one becomes a person at conception. Bujo (2003) argues that the notion of life beginning at conception is not compatible with the controversial bio-ethical question regarding the origin of human life. From its very inception, the foetus is already attached to the community of the living and the ancestors.

Major issues are only understood within the context of the community. This means that important causes of events are not understood in isolation. Equally important, causes cannot be understood unilaterally like instruments for the mastery of the world. The process of self-realisation in the African milieu takes place through the individual and community, but it also involves the ancestors and the not-yet-born. Therefore, one shares in the life of the community in union with one's fellow human beings.

By maintaining this bond of unity, one ameliorates the quality of life not only individually, but also communally. In so doing, one improves

the quality of the entire humanity. The identity of the Africans is characterised and determined by their active participation in the community. In the African traditional world view becoming a person is conceived in the milieu of orienting oneself to the community. One becomes a person by talking and working with others. Bujo (2003) believes that African humanity is meaningless without the community.

Richards, in *Clergy Review* (1967:664), states that Africans live in plurality, being solitary or working alone invites failure. The problem of death, health and sickness are dealt with on the community level. Life diminishes in a community where members do not love one another. This negative phenomenon creates permanent friction within the community. It is this situation where sorcery may start. The sorcerers in this context are defined by Bujo (2003:40) as the people who are not willing to make life happy for others. Satanic things such as competition, envy, and lack of love, destroy life within the community, culminating in the exhaustion of all of its energies. In this sense the quality of relations is decisive in terms of the health of the community members. There can be a community where inhumane treatment leads to the demise of its members. Being wealthy means assisting the community to develop. Whoever destroys the community makes his or her life problematic. Material goods are only perceived in connection with the life-giving force.

Being poor, on the other hand, means being without relatives or living in a solitary life bereft of any relations with the other community members. According to Bujo (2003), the philosophy of communal sharing should not be confused with communism as it does not deny one the freedom of having personal possessions and wealth. The African philosophy of sharing emphasises sharing within the context of relationships. To date, with Westernisation being on the increase, many Africans are embracing an individualistic philosophy of not sharing materials goods.

However, the concept of community and sharing assists the African in reviving the community and cultural values of sharing one's wealth. Both the individual and the community need each other; neither can exist in isolation. Their affinity extends both to God and to the universe via the mediation of the spirit. (Bujo: 2003).

## **2.8 WHO QUALIFIES TO BE AN ANCESTOR?**

Much has been said in the discussion of these topics about the ancestors but the question of who qualifies to be an ancestor has not yet been dealt with. Therefore an attempt will be made to answer this question, drawing upon information from various theological sources on African religion. Bujo (2003:122), Idowu (1973:187), Imasogie (1993), and Nyamiti (1984) are of the opinion that for a man to become an ancestor he must be someone who had children. These authors indicate clearly that in the African traditional religious context it is only men (the word 'men' in this particular context does not include women) who become ancestors. However, there are requirements to be fulfilled before any man becomes an ancestor. According to the aforementioned authors, it is only those men who died being on friendly terms with God, the community, and relatives who become ancestors. Any virtuous man who dies at the right time and age with offspring and who is given a proper burial qualifies to be incorporated into the ancestral spirit-world.

By virtue of proper burial the deceased is admitted into the community of the departed members of family. What is more crucial, however, despite having a proper burial is that one is responsible for one's spiritual behavioural nourishment while on earth. According to Idowu (1973:187) even those who died while they were relatively young became ancestors on condition that they had children. As regards those who led a morally good life while they were on earth but did not have children like young people and children are first admitted into the spirit-world of the dead. They are so admitted by virtue of being good

people. Africans do not believe in the doctrinal notion of being reborn or reincarnation. However, there are countries in African where the people believe that the ancestors return to the life on the physical plane in the form of children.

What the African believe generally though is that life does not end at death; it continues. Idowu (1973) states that it is obvious that in becoming an ancestor, one should go through death as an important condition. On the other hand, Bujo (2003:122) argues that the qualification goes beyond death. Each tribe has its own method of determining who should become an ancestor. For one to become an ancestor, one must have lived an exemplary life. One must have been in conformity with the laws, observing them and respecting the ancestors. One must not have been involved in sorcery. He must not have been a quarrelsome person. He must have been a unifying figure in his community. He must not have died a violent death. In other words, he must have died a good natural death. After their death, the ancestors reside in a village of happiness because they were living a virtuous life on earth.

## **2.9 THE FALL OF MAN AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN**

This topic will look at how African religion views the fall of man and the notion of original sin in relation to our first ancestor Adam. In addition, the topic aims at finding out whether Africans believe in the doctrinal concept of sin. The original sin took place when Adam and Eve, our first parents, were tempted by the devil. They allowed their confidence in God to die in their hearts resulting in them missing their freedom by being disobedient to God's order. The result of the original sin was disobedience towards God and death of confidence in His goodness.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2004) man was originally in a state of holiness before falling into temptation. He was meant to be divinised by God in glory. Adam and Eve lost the grace of initial sanctity. Harmony with the creation was also destroyed. Consequently, the creation became hostile towards them. The entire creation has been subject to decay on the basis of Adam's and Eve's original sin that has been affecting humanity ever since the fall of man.

Death entered into the world because of the original sin. As St. Paul puts it: "Sin came into the world through one man and as a result it spread to the entire humanity". In this statement St. Paul draws a contrast between the universality of death and the universality of salvation in Christ. Mbiti (1991:82-86) argues from an African religions perspective, that it is not known when man came into existence. Both religion and science hold polarised views on the creation of man. However, in African religion God is depicted being the parent of the first humans (Adam and Eve).

God supplied them with all the needs. According to the mythical stories found in the African traditional religion, the first humans were blessed with a state of immortality just like Adam and Eve. However, Mbiti (1991) argues that the first humans lost their state of immortality when the separation of heaven and earth took place (see Mbiti 1991:82-86). This phenomenon culminated in them being separated from God. Consequently, they were susceptible to death from then on. The separation of God from humans is found in many religious and cultural stories in Africa. According to Harley (1967), humanity was not condemned to eternal death after committing original sin. God chose Christ instead, his son, to be the redeemer or liberator of the entire human race. Adam's sin is accepted as implied in the universality of Christ's work of salvation. We are no more Adamites, instead we are Christians because Christ has obliterated the original

sin. It is through Christ that Christians know themselves and their world. In addition, Christians acknowledge the cruel reality of original sin.

Despite the fact that African religion and Christianity are complementary in the sense that both can enrich each other culturally, in Hurley's (1967:60) view Christianity is a religion of redemption. What Christianity proclaims today is not original sin; instead, it proclaims the reality and the remedy of salvation.

## 2.10 CONCLUSION

In the previous discussion I have attempted to indicate the characteristics and requirements needed for ancestorship. I have also tried to draw the connection that exists between the ancestors, good spirits, malevolent spirits (bad spirits) and the community. The obliteration of original sin caused by our first ancestor Adam is also discussed. Both the living and the ancestors find their joy, fulfilment, and self-determination within the community.

However, the living, the ancestors, community and good spirits depend on God. These aspects have been thoroughly dealt with in this chapter. Malevolent spirits are feared by the living. Therefore the ancestors are discussed in this chapter as protectors of their descendants from malevolent spirits. The role of the ancestors in African traditional society has been touched upon. The ancestors in this discussion are seen as the mediators between God and humanity. The relationship between the yet-to-be-born and the living in terms of their dependence on the ancestors as their foundation is also touched upon.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SIMILARITIES AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL ANCESTORS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This topic will be centred on the aspects that Christ and the African traditional ancestors have in common. However, this topic will also look at the aspects in which Christ and the African traditional ancestors differ.

Nyamiti (1984) and Parratt (1997) hold that both Christ and the African traditional ancestors are plenipotentiaries of God with regard to the mediating role they play between God and humanity. Plenipotentiaries denote the supernatural power that the ancestors and Christ are endowed with by God to represent Him. The main role of the ancestors and Christ is to punish, reward, and judge their descendants who do not conform to their laws. Their main role is also to intercede. According to Nyamiti (1984) Christ, like the African traditional ancestors, is also involved in the affairs of his descendants (the Christians). Nyamiti points out that although Christ has a universal nature, he has interest in the affairs of individuals. The African traditional ancestors, on the other hand, are different from Christ in the sense that they are only interested in the affairs of their clans, tribes and communities. They do not have any universal interests. Both Christ and the African traditional ancestors have close contact with the living and the dead. Nyamiti (1984) notes that Christians who died in a positive relationship with Christ have contact with him with the hope to rise from the dead one day. The living Christians intercede with Christ for the departed Christians. Sacrifices and rituals accompanied by prayers are performed by the living to keep contact between themselves and Christ and themselves and the African traditional ancestors.

As far as spiritual awareness is concerned, Christ and the African traditional ancestors are aware of the spiritual, social, and moral needs of their descendants.

Nyamiti (1984) Parratt (1997) hold that Christ died a cruel death while the African traditional ancestors died a good death. However, at the same time Nyamiti (1984) argues that Christ died a cruel death for a good reason. His cruel death led to the redemption of humanity. Christ's close contact with his father is characterised by his being a member of the Trinity. The African traditional ancestors, on the other hand, have a close contact with God by virtue of their death and status.

Christ is referred to as an ancestor by virtue of his passing over to the other world. Mention has already been made elsewhere in this study that for someone to be an ancestor in the African traditional religious setting he must first go through the process of death. Both Christ and the African traditional ancestors give life to their descendants. Life in African religion is both indispensable and sacred. Both God and the African traditional ancestors are viewed as life-giving forces. Additionally, in the African world view, religion, community, ancestors, and life are interwoven. In other words, they belong together when one talks about life generically. Nyamiti (1984) stresses that Christ and the African traditional ancestors have a close contact with God and their descendants through their natural and supernatural ties. Natural ties display the earthly biological connection between the ancestors and their families and relatives. Supernatural ties, on the other hand, display the ancestors' celestial or heavenly ties with God. Christ's ties are threefold since he is born of a woman and the Holy Spirit. Firstly, he has supernatural ties with his celestial Trinitarian family. Secondly, Christ has natural ties with earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. Thirdly, he has natural ties on the individual and universal level with Christians by virtue of their baptism.

### 3.2 CONCLUSION

What I have demonstrated with this topic, it is important in terms of the spiritual connection which exists between Christ and the African traditional ancestors. The fact that Christ and the African traditional ancestors have certain elements in common is a clear indication that Christ possesses ancestral qualities. Nobody can be sceptical about his ancestorship. As far as the differences are concerned, Christ's ancestorship transcends or goes beyond the ancestorship of the African traditional ancestors. Moreover, the relationship that exists between Christ and the ancestors nourishes their descendants spiritually.

Baptism, supernatural, and natural ties have been highlighted because they create a positive affinity between the ancestors, God, Christ and humanity.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHO IS CHRIST ACCORDING TO AFRICAN CHRISTIANS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This question is specifically being posed to African Christians in the wake of the difficulty they have integrating the person of Jesus Christ in their cultural and traditional belief system, either because they are linked to the West and the colonial past or because their nature is thought to be not in conformity with the African traditional religion. At one stage it was pointed out officially by the missionaries that in African traditional cultures there are no Christological ideas. This pronouncement has resulted in African theologians developing an African theology based on Christ. This is one of the main problems I shall deal with in the next chapter because such theologians' idea of Christ harmonising the cultural feelings and emotions of the African Christians has not been dealt with correctly in the past.

Schoffeleers (1989:157) explains that those African theologians who were charged with a responsibility of developing an African Christological theology have not been able to reach a consensus as regards an appropriate African belief system for Christ. However, African theologians such as Mbiti, Pobee and Nyamiti preferred at the time to cast Christ as ancestor, chief, and victor. There was no common agreement reached before this.

However, subsequently, it was proposed to cast him as guest because there was no proper theological name for Christ in the African traditional religious and cultural context at the time. Following a number of theological attempts by African theologians to interpret Christ in the African cultural context, appropriate African cultural models describing Christ in accordance with religious beliefs of the African Christians were subsequently found at this point. Those who

held that the Africans have difficulty in incorporating Christ into their belief system were proven wrong.

Thus, today the above question can easily be answered from an African religious and theological perspective. Initially, in the Bible this question was posed to the disciples as to who do people say Christ is (Matthew 16:18). It seems that the people did not know him that well.

As a result, initially, they struggled to give a clear answer as to who Christ is, but after reflecting deeply, they were able to give a clear answer. In fact it was Peter who gave a clear answer to Jesus. Peter says to Jesus "You are Christ the Son of the Living God." By answering this question Peter professes his faith in his own context. Therefore it is also important for the African Christians to profess their faith in their own context. African Christians should make theology a living, flexible, active, and innovative reality amongst their fellow Christians. If Jesus Christ had to come and dwell amongst the Africans, the African Christians would indeed be able to say that he was their elder brother, liberator, healer, ancestor, and mediator, etc. These are truly African models fitting well in the African cultural traditional and religious context. In *Inculturation and Liberation: African Theology* (1993:81) Martey argues that the answer given by Peter to Jesus was based on Jewish religion. Therefore, Peter lacks creativity in answering this question because he was answering for a new reality. In Martey's view it is the same reality challenging the African Christians and the people of all ages.

Today the religious experience of African Christians and their understanding of who Christ is, is challenged by the same question. The African Christians cannot give the same answer given to Jesus by Peter. The African Christians must answer this question from an African perspective with a view to reflecting what Christ does amongst them.

Martey (1993:81) holds that this question can only be answered appropriately if African Christians have an intimate understanding of their culture and religious experiences. Bolayi Idowu, in Martey, *Inculturation and Liberation: African Theology* (1993:81) argues that if the God of our salvation is the same God who created us, then ancient religions of Africa should be considered when developing an African Christology. As far as the inculturationists are concerned, African Christology cannot be forged without consulting religious cultural developments. It is for this reason that some of the African traditional religious and cultural elements such as ancestrology, chieftaincy, sacrifice, healing, anthropology, and the notion of the family should create an environment (context) for developing an African Christology. It should be noted that not everything cultural is compatible with African Christology.

In *African Theology: The Contributions of the Pioneers* (2003) Bujo points out that the question "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:13-15) is at the centre of one's being a Christian. Jesus poses this question to each African Christian and to each generation. It is a question that he consistently asks. Bujo concurs with Martey that this question can be responded to depending on one's faith-experience and life. The essential purpose of this question is to help African Christians in finding their belonging to Christ by giving their own answers based on the views, images, and experiences they have about Christ. According to Matthew 8:24 Christ is delineated as the Son of the living God, the giver of eternal life. Bujo (2003) responds to this question by depicting Christ as life-giver from an African religious, cultural, and theological perspective.

In the next topic I shall discuss the notion of life in Africa according to Bujo's and Mbiti's views. These theological views will assist us in understanding how the Africans value life. The way the Africans value life is exactly the same as they value Christ. In addition, the African

Christian's views on life will subsequently enable us to understand who Christ is in the context of life.

#### **4.2 NOTIONS OF LIFE IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA**

Bujo (1999:122) and Mbiti (1991:104-105) point out that Christ is highly esteemed in the African religious and cultural context. Bujo (1999:121) note that Christ fits well in this context because he accomplishes African aspirations for life. Life is crucial to the Africans. Therefore it is considered as sacred. Mbiti (1975) explains that life in Africa is maintained through marriage. It is for this reason that any biologically normal female or male who refuses to get married terminates the flow of life. Mbiti further stresses that it is commonly held amongst the Africans that since the inception of human life, God ordered people to get married and have children. Anything that is destructive towards human life is looked upon as devilish.

Therefore everything possible is done in the African traditional milieu to prepare people for marriage and to help them think about it. Myths regarding the creation of humanity concede that human life began with a husband and a wife. Life should be maintained in the pattern of marriage. According to African religion marriage is a pillar of human life upon which the ancestors, the living, the children, and the yet-to-be born depend. The ancestors came into play because they are the foundation upon which the living stand. The living are the connection between death and life. Mbiti (1975) explains that at the inception of creation, humanity was given three gifts: namely the gift to live eternally, the gift to rise from the dead and the gift to be rejuvenated. Humanity lost these gifts to death for different reasons. Aside from marriage which is the only central way of overcoming death in the African cultural and religious context, African traditional religion does not offer us another means through which humanity can defeat the

consequences of death. Death conquers everybody; however, through childbearing and marriage, it cannot annihilate human life.

According to Bujo (1999) before the arrival of Christianity in Africa, African religion was viewed as a monotheistic religion that acknowledges God as the source of life. African religion also acknowledges God as the sustainer and creator of all life resulting in human life. Bujo further stresses that what is more essential regarding life is its hierarchical order. Bujo (1999:124) defines life as taking part in God, but it is always mediated by the one who is superior to the receiver in the hierarchy of seen and unseen powers or forces, This hierarchy extends from God down through the departed clan, family members, chiefs, elders, and heads of households. For the Africans, taking part in a communal life is indescribably important for their families, social, political, and religious customs. Life in African theology is looked upon as a vital union. It involves a relationship between each individual and his/her descendants, her/his family, her/his brothers and sisters in the clan, his/her antecedents and also with God who is the ultimate source of life. In the African traditional world view, life is looked upon as holistic and communal life transcends or goes beyond the biological and encompasses the entire human existence. Life is comprehended as the totality of all those aspects which make up the human person.

Both Bujo (1999) and Mbiti (1991) stress that to all Africans there is no difference between private, social, political, and religious life. Mbiti (1991) does not see any difference between life and religion. He (Mbiti) points out that an African who lives according to traditional African religion holds that religion and life are synonymous and inseparable. Life is crucially important to the Africans because it forges solidarity amongst family members and clan members. Physical or natural life is given by God through the ancestors and elders. God, the ancestors, and the elders who hold various positions in society establish laws and taboos regarding life and the economic well-being of

the community. The laws and taboos are set up in accordance with the ancestors who led exemplary lives while they were on earth. The communal laws set up by the ancestors pertaining to life comprise their experiences.

These experiences become a legacy for their descendants with a view to behaving faithfully. Both Bujo (1999) and Mbiti (1991) are of the opinion that when those living behave in accordance with the moral laws established by their ancestors regarding life, they fortify the well-being and the life of each individual in the family, clan, and tribe. By observing the ancestral laws and customs established within the community and clan, tribal disintegration is avoided. Bujo (1999) explains that it is indeed clear that the elders within the African traditional society have an onus to protect and extend all aspects of the communal life.

As far as morality is concerned good acts contribute indispensably to the vital force of the community. Unethical acts, on the other hand, decrease life within the community. African society is a realistic enigmatic entity comprising both the dead and the living. Both the living and the dead are responsible for one another. The ancestors are the head or superiors of the community. As mentioned earlier, in the African world view everything is perceived holistically. Nothing is perceived in isolation in relation to life and religion. It is commonly believed that the African world view is anthropocentric in that it centres upon human beings. However, Bujo (1999) states that this does not mean the African world view is solely humanly centred, it is also centred upon life and God. Life is ultimately viewed as God's gift. God is highly revered by the Africans on the grounds that, when they honour the ancestors, they also honour God indirectly.

Therefore Bujo (1999) argues that every single endeavour is made to preserve life. The same blood, the same life which is shared by all who receive it from these ancestors, the founder of the clan, runs through

the veins of all. Merciless eradication of life is avoided at any cost. The avoiding of merciless killing is based upon the philosophical and sagacious teaching of the Africans in relation to the sacredness of life. Theologically, the plenitude of life and its origin are found in God and his Son Jesus Christ.

### 4.3 JESUS AS LIFE-GIVER

The last topic on the concept of life in traditional African Worldview has a powerful impact over the African Christians' understanding of Jesus and the life he brings. In this topic we will see how African Christians view Christ as the giver of life, according to Bujo, Pobee, and Stinton.

Bujo, in *African Theology In Its Social Context* 1999 explains that to the African to be means to have a life force. Citing (John 10:10) Bujo stresses that Jesus is a life-giver because his primary aim on earth was to give more life to his followers and to give it abundantly. Bujo elucidates this point further by depicting Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. This implies that Christ is the ultimate answer to the dreams of the entire human race concerning life. All human cultures describe the human yearning for the fullness of life.

Both Bujo (1999) and Stinton (2004) in their theological analysis of this concept agree that what is most sacred in the African tradition is life. According to these authors, life in Africa is encouraged in all its aspects. However, Stinton et al. (2004) argue that Jesus is the unique demonstration of the life of God; he is the source and the archetype of all life. Jesus teaches humankind what the truth of life is and how it is lived. He came into the world so that humankind may have life and have it more abundantly. Jesus is the truth, force and energy of God which stream into all his followers. According to Stinton, the biblical concept of Christ as the new source of life goes along with the African concept of life because it encompasses a holistic character of the community.

John Pobee in Stinton (2004) analyses this concept in the light of the metaphors such as the bread of life, water of life, and light of life. African Christians are looking for the metaphors of life which present the image of Christ as the source of life.

Pobee singles out, particularly, the image of bread, with Christ as the bread of life. Bread is one of the daily basic foods in Africa. One cannot survive without bread because it is associated with physical life. The metaphors of life used by Pobee concerning Christ being the giver of life are close to the hearts of African Christians as they are well-acquainted with them. It is only Christ who is endowed with the spiritual capacity to feed the African Christians miraculously by offering them the bread of life. This is stated in John 6, where Jesus is referred to as the bread of life. It is in the sense that he is crucially important for the well-being of the African Christians. Using the fourth gospel to depict Christ as the giver of life, Pobee defines two Greek words, "*Zoe*" meaning biological life and "*Psyche*" meaning spiritual life in Christ. Metaphorically, Pobee uses the two words to demonstrate to us that Christ is the giver of both spiritual life and physical life. In the African religious and cultural spheres there is no distinction between physical and spiritual life. It is for this reason that Christ fits well into these metaphors. Despite these metaphors, Pobee, stresses that Christianity finds its completeness of life in Christ. John 1:4 states that Christ is the word and the life. Therefore the biblical faith approves the importance of Christ as the life of humanity. All the basic needs pertaining to life should be sought and found in Christ. African Christians' concepts regarding life as fulfilled in Christ are also visible in oral Christologies. According to Christological research conducted by Pobee, many African Christians interviewed about who Christ is for them, concurred that "Jesus is life", "Jesus is the source of life", "Jesus is our life-giver", "Jesus is the giver of both physical and spiritual life," etc. In addition to these points, African Christians do not only consider Christ as a giver of

life, but they also consider him as the giver of eternal life because he restores the completeness of life.

The biblical influences on the understanding of Christ being the giver of life are clearly evident in the minds of African Christians. Stinton (2004) states that when the African Christians are asked who is Christ for them, they reply as follows: Jesus is the “creator of the world”, “Christ is the giver of life who keeps the world intact”. The entire scriptures centre on him. The Bible is reflected in the context of the images given in the preceding paragraphs as the chief source of the perception of Jesus as life-giver. This shows that the African Christians’ understanding of Jesus as an ancestor who gives life does not solely rest upon their sole perception, but also on their perception of the Bible.

As a giver of life, Jesus is also understood by the African Christians as the fountain of life, an idea originating in the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well. The notion depicting Jesus standing at the well with a woman is also found in some of the African Christians’ songs. The African Christians composed them based on their spiritual and cultural understanding of Christ. In this context, according to Stinton (2004), the African Christians perceive Christ as a well of life that exists permanently. Christ is a well that never dries up. Aside from Christ being a well that never dries up, in the African Christian and traditional contexts, Christ is also viewed as someone who bring wholeness. He often listens to the supplications of his followers.

Bujo (1999) and Stinton (2004) maintain that there is a complementary understanding between the biblical and the African cultural traditions regarding life. The importance and source of life are traditionally acknowledged through God and are now extended to Christ. Quarshie, a Ghanaian clergyman in Stinton (2004), sees Christ as a symbol of life that cannot be encapsulated by all the answers. Quarshie sums up his

perception of Jesus' identity that "He is life". Quarshie is of the opinion that no African Christian can have life without him. The answer given by Quarshie assists African Christians in addressing an identity crisis in terms of defining who Christ is in their own biblical perceptions. They can eliminate the identity crisis by assuring themselves that Christ makes them whole by offering them life. According to Stinton (2004) some African women, particularly Christians, consider Christ as their role model because they too are responsible for giving life physically through conception, pregnancy, birth, and breast feeding. Aside from giving physical life, women in Africa are also responsible for giving spiritual life through the numerous caring functions they offer in their respective communities. Seeing Christ as a giver of life historically implies that women in Africa understand Christ as everything.

In the next topic I shall discuss health and illness. Health is viewed as an important aspect of life in the African religious and cultural context. Life is meaningless without health. Therefore the next topic links life to health.

#### **4.4 JESUS AS HEALER**

In this topic I shall discuss health, illness, and healing according to the views of Kane (1976), Philibert (1998), Rosny (1998) and Schreiter (1991). In addition, I shall also differentiate between illness and symptom from an African medical and religious perspective. Before I delve into the whole topic on healing, I shall make an attempt to define the important terms of health, and healing.

##### **4.4.1 WHAT IS HEALTH AND WHAT IS HEALING?**

Philibert (1998), Rosny (1998), and Schreiter (1991) define health as an undamaged physical wholeness characterised by the absence of wounds, fevers, weakness, pain or other sort of harms. According to these authors, health is more than the absence of sickness: it is an

overall well-being felt at the psychological, moral, spiritual, and physical levels.

Schreiter (1991) quotes the World Health Organisation which defines health as a "state of perfect physical, mental, and social well-being". Kane (1976), on the other hand, defines healing as a satisfying answer to a crisis engendered by a group of people, both individually and collectively. The term crisis is used here in the context of the New Testament. "*Krisis*" is a Greek term which at times is translated as discretion. Healing is, therefore, a discretion we make as an answer to a decisive time in the life of our brothers and sisters.

Illness, on the other hand, is defined as "the absence of health and physical integrity." Illness can be injury, pain, and physical inability to function socially or mentally. An illness can be attributed to external and internal causes. Kane (1976) further defines illness as a slow loss of powers caused by old age. Any illness can either reduce or destroy one's bodily stability and integrity. In the African context one's health is understood in relation to the community. One's well-being and integrity are attributed to the health of the community. The entire community cannot be entirely happy if one of its members is ill. In other words, one's illness does not only affect one's family, but it also affects the whole community.

According to Philibert (1998:1-3) and Rosny (1998:2-3), from an African medical and religious perspective there is a difference between the terms 'symptom' and 'illness' in the sense that what the Western doctors would refer to scientifically as an illness, would spiritually be called a symptom by African traditional healers. Symptom in the African medical context can be any sickness caused by evil spirits or malevolent spirits. An African traditional doctor diagnoses symptoms of his/her patients using the power he or she is endowed with by his or her ancestors. The special power he or she is endowed with by the ancestors is at times referred to as a gift. A medical doctor who has

received scientific training, however, diagnoses his or her patients by looking into their eyes with a view to giving them psychological confidence. Both Philibert and Rosny are of the opinion that as far as healing is concerned in the African traditional and religious setting, there are two terms used for performing healing namely the social dimension and the sacred dimension. In the social dimension, a healer offers healing to the patient through the powers given to him or her by the ancestors, deities, and God. In other words, the healer carries out healing with invisible powers vested in him or her by God, deities, and the ancestors. Whether he or she conducts the healing process he or she keeps assuring the patients that he or she is not the one healing them, instead they are being healed by God. In the social dimension, the traditional doctor who is referred to as Nganga in all the Bantu languages spoken in the Southern and Eastern African regions, utters some words that are immensely important for the patients. These are healing words. In the social dimension the healing process can last for a whole night.

Another healing dimension which is not pertinent to the above mentioned dimensions is called exercise knowledge. This exercise knowledge involves healing through scientific medical knowledge one has acquired at the University. This type of healing is different from the Western scientific medical type of healing since African traditional healing tends to be more metaphysical. It transcends or goes beyond the cause of illnesses.

What these authors discussed hitherto is linked to the preceding topic in the sense of wholeness. Both giving life and healing bring about holistic well-being to any person. Life is virtually impossible without complete healing. Similarly, one can never be completely happy in life without good health. Aside from African traditional scientifically trained doctors, Christ is viewed by the African Christians as their ancestor who gives them healing. In addition, Christ is seen as an ancestor who brings about healing to the broken African Christians. To date many

African Christians are yearning for wholeness in terms of healing. Healing is one of the most important aspects highly valued in Africa by the families, clans, and the community of the ancestors. However, one may ask the question whether health is still valued in post-colonial Africa. Responding to this question Bujo (2003), points out that in Africa health is treated with contempt. For this Bujo puts the blame squarely upon the politicians who do not have any respect for life across the African continent. Their dictatorial reign contradicts widespread ancestral traditions that hold life and health in high esteem. They disturb the ethical and moral laws regarding the sacredness of life. Another question arises from Bujo's contribution to this topic is the following - Why do the African Christians consider Christ as their healer? According to Bujo (2003), considering Christ as a healer at this time in Africa is something very crucial for African Christians because Africa is confronted with abject poverty, much disease, wars, tribal animosity, power struggles, and lack of consensus amongst the political leaders.

Despite these problems, Bujo argues that Christ is seen by countless African Christians as a great healer who triumphs over worldly powers. For the many Christians in Africa, Jesus came so that we may have life and have it to the fullest. However, other questions arising from this discussion are whether a full life being experienced in Africa at the moment and how can Africans experience life to the full on their continent while they are experiencing economic dependence, strife, and destruction. Can Jesus be seen as healer in Africa? The answer given by Bujo (2002) is yes, and this answer will be elucidated further in the next topic.

#### **4.4.2 THE HEALING POWERS AND TECHNIQUES USED BY JESUS AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL HEALERS**

In this topic I shall discuss the correlation between Jesus and the African traditional healers in terms of the healing powers they use.

What we have discussed in the last topic was the different healing approaches used by Western doctors and African traditional healers. I shall mainly focus on the spiritual healing powers and techniques that Christ and the African traditional healers are endowed with. This topic is also an answer to the question asked by Bujo (2003) in the preceding topic as to whether Jesus is seen as a healer in African religion.

In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus presents himself as a healer. His healing accounts in this gospel are intertwined with the entire meaning of his death and life. His healing powers can only be properly conceived in the context of his resurrection and suffering on the cross. The evangelist Matthew recounts that Jesus travelled through the whole of Galilee, teaching in the synagogue, announcing the Good News of the Kingdom, and curing illnesses amongst the people (Matthew 4:33). What stems from these words is the fact that the healing powers of Jesus cannot be separated from the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

Healing constituted the caring aspect of Jesus' ministry on earth. The first fruits of healing originated in his death and resurrection. One cannot be sceptical of the fact that Jesus had a gift of healing and he used it throughout his ministry on earth to heal scores of people. As for the healing techniques used by Jesus and the African traditional healers, there is a similarity. I shall discuss the healing techniques used by Jesus and the African traditional healers according to the views of Daneel (1993), Malone (1983), Mbiti (1991), Moyo and Ter Haar (1992), Schreiter (1991), and Stinton (2004).

According to the views of these authors, African traditional healers, like Jesus, use signs and words for healing their patients. At the pool of Siloam Jesus used the effectiveness of his words, saliva, and deeds to cure his patient. Many traditional healers heal their patients by touching them. Another similarity which exists between Christ and the

African traditional healer is the power of exorcism. Jesus, like the African traditional healers, used his words to expel demons from the people who were possessed by evil spirits. Schreiter (1991:128-130) explains that when the African traditional healers heal their patients they take their social context and the origin of their illnesses into account with a view to reinstating the patients into society. According to Schreiter, Christ did exactly the same thing: he took the social environment and the nature of the illness of his patients into account, particularly those who were stigmatised and marginalised by virtue of their sickness. He reintegrated them into the community by curing them. Subsequent to healing, the African traditional healers, like Jesus did, encourage their patients not to be involved in sinful activities. A gift in return after healing a patient is required by African traditional healers. Schreiter (1991) further explains that when Jesus healed ten lepers, he asked for a gift in the form of gratitude and faith. In the case of the African traditional doctors, a gift is given in the form of money. However, when the healing process is finished gratitude may be offered to the ancestors and God in the form of sacrifice. While Schreiter (1991) points out that there are African traditional healers who require money subsequent to healing, Malone (1983) disagrees and states that there are also those who do not ask for money. Malone (1983:206) points out that when the Mutumwa Herbalists heal their patients, they urge them not to give them any money because they believe that it is Christ who cures them. Mutumwa is a faith-healing church based in Zambia. Its healing system is based on the African traditional healers' system of healing. Mutumwa herbalists consider Christ as the true "*Shinganga*" "healer" whose healing ministry they are continuing in their society. What Malone (1983) finds interesting about the Mutumwa healing ministry is it has something in common with the healing system of Jesus and the African traditional healers in general and that it is holistic healing. According to Malone (1983), psychiatric therapy, medical treatment, and counselling are holistically combined with a view to giving holistic healing to the patients.

Daneel (1993:90) concurs with Malone (1983) that healing and wholeness have become important aspects not only amongst the African traditional healers but also in the African independent churches. Daneel (1993) stresses that African healing is not only an exercise of salvation, but it is also a restoration of relationships between a patient, ancestors, and God.

Schreiter (1991) states that one of the key tasks of Nganga (the African traditional physician) involves reconciling the social life with the community, family, ancestors, and the distant dead who wander about amongst the living.

Jesus' key healing task, on the other hand, is to reconcile the patients with his Father. The healing system used by Jesus and the African traditional healers can be defined overall or can be summed up as psychotherapeutic because in the final analysis, it aims at finding out the origin of an illness, creating harmony within the patient and within the community and reintegrating him or her into the society. Mention has been made elsewhere in the preceding topic that African traditional medicines are different from Western medicines on the grounds of holistic healing and the etiological origin of the sickness. Moyo and Ter Haar (1992) explain that today African medicines are gaining momentum unlike at the time of the Christian missionary enterprises when they were labelled as diabolical and irrational.

Malone (1983) castigates the Western missionaries for not studying the African cultural medical healing system upon their arrival in Africa. Non-Africans often do not know that the faith of the African person is articulated in a prayer based precisely on a concrete or practical situation in which a person finds himself or herself. Similarly, healing in the African traditional context tends to be practical in the sense of finding the etiological origin of an illness.

Becoming ill in the African traditional family set-up is viewed as a scandal. Africans are often interested in the practical causes of an illness. Although Western scientific medicine has made tremendous progress, it tends to put more emphasis on the reduced conception of health of the body. It does not relate illnesses to the social, economic, psychological, spiritual, and political malfunctions in our societies as the African traditional healers do.

According to Chavunduka, in *African Traditional Religions in Religious Education* edited by Moyo and Ter Haar (1992), illnesses that are viewed as normal by Western scientifically trained doctors are at times considered abnormal in the African traditional medical set-up. Chavunduka argues that it is traditionally held that abnormal illnesses are at times engendered by irate ancestors. Thus, in this context, African medical counsel is sought immediately. In the wake of the difference between the African traditional and Western medicines, Schreiter (1991) holds that in order for the gospel to be credible in the African traditional churches, the proclamation of the gospel must focus on the etiological roots of human sufferings, struggle, and evil forces. Sick people must be incorporated into healing liturgies of the ancestors. African traditional churches unlike the Western churches practise spiritual healing. Aside from healing and prayer, the demonstrative rites of the African traditional churches are cordial and warm unlike the rigid services conducted in most of the established churches. Mbiti, *In African Religion and Philosophy* (1991) stresses that healing plays an important role in Africa.

It is considered as a ministry within the African traditional religious context because of the understanding that the person is whole and an attempt is often made to alleviate anything that disturbs the wholeness of life. Therefore, it is important that when one talks of Jesus as healer, that this is an image that touches an African profoundly. Healing gives Jesus an unusual image. Jesus is a healer because he is endowed with spiritual power to take away our diseases.

In fact there is also a similarity between Christ's healing and ancestral healing in the African traditional context. From a theological perspective, Mbiti (1991) explains that Christ heals Christians through prayers. The ancestors, on the other hand, heal their descendants through prayers and sacrifices which the latter offer to the ancestors when the descendants are having problems with their health.

In *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary Christology* (2004), Stinton believes that Christ continues to heal African Christians through prayer. However, Stinton identifies one of the problems of the African Christians as being that they do not pray earnestly and consistently for healing. Jesus, as an advocate for holistic healing, heals both the bodies and the souls of the faithful. It is a common fact that the sickness of the body can easily affect the soul and the mind. Therefore, holistic healing makes sense in the African traditional context. Stinton further stresses that Jesus is a healer because he is God and God himself says that "I am the Lord Your God who heals you." Jesus is depicted a number of times in the gospels as a healer. Peter who validates the healing of Christ in Acts 10:38 by confirming, that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power with a view to doing good work and healing. Matthew 8:17 stresses that Christ bore our sins in his own body. He is also bears our frailties (infirmities).

According to Isaiah 53, Christ was wounded and beaten for our sinfulness. Therefore by his wounds we are healed. Both God and Jesus cannot be divorced from healing activities. In *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (2003), Bujo is convinced that Jesus is not only a healer of sickness, but he also heals the misery of societies in Africa. Christ is the first ancestor who gives both life and healing.

One of the questions arising from this discussion is who is the cause of the illnesses and suffering prevalent in Africa and in the world at large? According to the early fathers of the church such as Augustine, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, as explained by Gregory Palamas in *Illness and Healing* (1998:49-50) illness, suffering and death came into the world owing to the loss of original grace and of the exceptional state that humanity was originally given through Adam and Eve. In addition, owing to Adam's fall, humanity stopped its obedience to God, and participated in his limitless possibilities, his incorruptibility, and immortality. As a result, entire humanity fell sick with corruption.

However, Larchet in *Illness and Healing* (1998:49) argues that today the African Christians rejoice in the fact that their first ancestor, Christ has conquered infirmity, pain, illness, and death through his resurrection by bringing new life.

#### **4.5 THE IMAGE OF CHRIST AS HEALER**

Under this topic I shall discuss the image (how the African Christians perceive him) of Christ as healer according to the theological views of Chauvet (1998), Parratt (1997), and Stinton (2004).

In *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary Christology* (2004) Stinton states that despite the fact that healing has always played an important part in Christianity, the missionary churches in Africa did not meet the health demands of the Africans within the setting of the African traditional religion. One of the questions arising from this topic in relation to the image of Christ as a healer in Africa is "How do we incorporate what we preach into what we believe and what we practise?"

Who is this healer and doctor Jesus Christ"? When the African Christians refer to an image of Christ as a healer, they do not only mean a psychological figure of a doctor, but they also mean a real doctor or healer. When African Christians refer to an image of Jesus as a healer, this evokes a realistic picture of a spiritual healer. This is exactly where the African Christians managed to designate who Jesus is with reference to healing. Stinton stresses that integral individual healing is a psychological, spiritual, and physical gift which God breathes out on the community of the faithful through his Son Jesus Christ. The reason why African Christians do not have a proper image of Jesus as a healer is because the medical centres set up by the missionaries in some countries in Africa were used to recruit the converts. For a long time in Africa health centres were used to recruit converts. Health in Africa was not spiritualised during the missionary enterprises. In the African religious framework, healing is more spiritual than secular. Therefore, African Christians look at Christ as their spiritual healer. The spiritual picture that is evoked in the minds of the African Christians is the spiritual healing power of Jesus. Stinton (2004) notes that healing under the missionaries has lost its spiritual aspect. Consequently, healing has lost its sacred nature, its social roles, its objective impact on society, and its meaningful ethical terms.

In *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (1997) edited by Schreiter, Parratt points out that Africans do not make any distinction between medicine and healing. For many Africans, health is a symptomatic communication between people and their environment. The African Christians associate the coming of Jesus with the elimination of suffering and sickness. When African Christians refer to Christ as a healer, they do not strictly mean a typical African healer, but this is a matter of attempting to find out that indeed Christ is the solution to every situation, and every issue pertaining to any given situation. It is vitally important to be aware of the fact that Christ's healing is not only confined to Africa, it also transcends the African continent.

Christ can be presented in any context as a healer of any disease in any continent. The views expressed about Christ's healing are not necessarily contradictory but they demonstrate certain tensions in terms of depicting Jesus according to the African traditional classification. However, African notions of healing impact upon the interpretations of African Christians concerning Jesus as a healer. This background, according to Parratt (1997) assists African Christians in better understanding the image of Christ as a healer. In the African traditional religious context, a healer is not only an herbalist. A healer is multi-faceted, combining prophecy, divination, sagacity, and insight. Similarly, when Jesus combines all these attributes he not only heals, but he also counsels and brings people into fullness of life. Thus, Parratt argues that Jesus healing should be understood or interpreted in a broad way. There are some people who only understand Christ in terms of healing when they are sick. Similarly, there are some poor people who want Jesus to turn stones into bread because of their poverty. This is precisely where the problem regarding understanding the image of Christ as a healer lies. Therefore, Stinton (2004) and Parratt (1997) suggest that African Christians should avoid interpreting Jesus' healing in a narrow way. Any Christian in Africa or elsewhere around the world should understand the fact that Christ's healing encompasses everything. Notwithstanding the difference existing between the perceptions of African Christians and Western missionaries on healing, the Christian faith has never been a stranger to the problems of health. Healing has always been at the centre of the proclamation of salvation.

Although the churches in Europe lack healing activities, generally, according to Chauvet (1998), they have never stopped engaging in symbolic healing covering the somatic, psychological, and the spiritual aspects of humanity.

#### 4.6 JESUS AS MGANGA

In this topic I shall try to explain the role of Mganga in the African traditional spiritual context. I shall also give the definition of the term Mganga in some of the Bantu languages spoken in Southern African and East Africa. Buys and Nambala (2003:5), Malone (1983), Sybertz (1995:292-293), Moyo and Ter Haar (1992), define Mganga or Onganga as someone who is endowed with exceptional healing power.

In Shona, a Bantu language spoken in Zimbabwe, the equivalent for a traditional healer is Nanga while in Zulu the equivalent for a traditional healer is Inyanga. In addition, in Oshiwambo, a Bantu language spoken in the Northern region of Namibia, a traditional healer is referred to as Onganga, denoting the one who heals.

Similarly, in Swahili, a Bantu lingua Franca spoken in Eastern Africa, particularly in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the equivalent for a traditional healer is Mganga. In Zambia, one of the countries in Southern Africa, a traditional healer is called Shinganga. All these names refer to a healer.

According to the aforementioned authors the name Mganga does not only denote a traditional healer, but also denotes the best doctor, a spiritual healer or herbalist who makes herbs and gives them to patients. Mganga can be seen as a diagnostician and a therapist simultaneously. His or her medical examination is different from that conducted by a Western doctor. Mention has already been made elsewhere in this research that the former looks for spiritual cause of an illness while the latter looks at the physical cause of an illness. Moyo and Ter Haar (1992) hold that usually Western doctors confine their medical examination to the physical causes and not the spiritual ones.

For many years Mganga have enabled the Africans to protect themselves from different diseases. Mganga is different from a seer because a seer is the one who delivers good news to others.

The etymological verb for Mganga is Kuganga derived from the Kiswahili and it means to greet. The essential meaning of the noun Mganga Onganga or Shinganga is the doctor who greets people. The greetings are meant to detect the psychological state of mind of the patient. It is related to the healing process.

Africans make a clear distinction between a healer and witchdoctor. Witchdoctors, according to Healy and Sybertz, in *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (1995), are more associated with superstition, fortune telling, and sorcery. Furthermore, they are associated with enigmatic forces that are referred to as the occult. The occult denotes powers that are naturally used with good or bad intentions. Traditional doctors, in contrast, are held in high esteem by the people because they are in sincere harmony with spirits of nature. Moreover, they pray for guidance from God.

The importance of healing and life in the African World view supports the manifestation of Jesus as Mganga, Jesus as life-giver and Jesus as a mediator. These images are compatible with the spiritual spheres of Jesus. Healers and medicine persons are seen in Africa as the foundation of social life.

Traditional leaders such as Chiefs and masters of initiation practices are decreasing in African while traditional healers are on the increase. According to Stinton (2004), from a medical perspective, Mgangas are seen as the redeemers of humanity. Stinton also points out that the desire for redemption for the African Christians is accomplished in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer, and the Lord of the Universe.

Kibongi a Congolese theologian in (Stinton 2004) differentiates between the functions of Mganga and Jesus. The former (Mganga) wanted to redeem mankind, but was not successful in redeeming the whole of humanity. Therefore, in this sense Christ fulfilled the role of Mganga in terms of healing and redeeming humanity.

In *An Introduction to African Theology* (1986) Setiloane defines Christ as a traditional healer on the grounds of his being the Messiah. Setiloane is of the opinion that African theology has the potential to find the name of Mganga in Christ. When Setiloane first suggested that Christ be referred to as Mganga in the African theological context, some African theologians were clearly concerned about his proposal.

To date the name Mganga is taken seriously by African theologians in the area of African theology. In *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1993) vol. xxii Schoffeleers raises the question of why other African theologians did not recommend the name Mganga for Christ. Schoffeleers argues that the African theologians were hesitant to associate the name Mganga with Christ on the ground that Mganga was overshadowed by syncretic connotations originating within from the missionaries.

Healy and Sybertz (1995) observe that many African Christians seek healing from diviners and healers. Diviners like traditional healers' misfortune. Healy and Sybertz further observe that the African Christians practise both African traditional religion and Christianity. The African Christians should not have any difficulty in understanding the meaning of Christ as a traditional healer because they are aware of the difference between a witchdoctor and a traditional healer.

However, the missionaries misunderstood the image and functions of traditional healers in Africa by labelling them as witchcraft. They did not make a clear distinction between witchdoctors and traditional healers.

The two important roles of a traditional healer are finding out the sickness of a patient which may be engendered by the unfulfilled demands of the ancestors and prescribing medicine to the patients. A traditional healer can also pray over the patient for healing. In times of trouble a traditional healer turns to God, the Supreme Being: In a negative sense, however, a traditional healer is someone who instils fear into another person with a view to inflicting harm upon him/her.

Despite the contrasting views regarding the meaning of a traditional healer, Christ is viewed as the greatest African medicine man. African Christians are discovering the power of healing through Christ. According to Kane (1979), Christ is the Divine doctor who heals African Christians by affirming them. In *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary Christology* (2004) Stinton explains that the image of Christ being Mganga is central to the African Christians in the context of widespread African beliefs.

From an African cosmological perspective, healing originates in God and from there; it flows to spiritual beings. At the bottom of the hierarchy of spiritual beings, there are the living and the non-living beings. A mysterious power enters this hierarchy and gives it life according to this worldview. Within this hierarchy there are people with the knowledge of mysterious powers and they can utilise them to harm others. In contrast, there are also people in this hierarchy who can utilise mysterious powers for good purposes. These are African medicine men and women; they confront those who intend to inflict harm upon others.

Jesus is the greatest African medicine man because he uses his mysterious powers to heal and help people. Stinton (2004) refers to Christ as a medicine man by virtue of his healing function. Therefore he sees nothing wrong in referring to Christ as Mganga because his healing role is understood in a positive light.

Stinton stresses that African Christians should reclaim the titles given to traditional healers and demonstrate only their positive aspects. If African Christians avoid using these titles, they will lose the elements that they are endeavouring to enhance, particularly in the area of healing.

The foundation for finding suitable traditional words is the belief that Jesus accomplishes the functions that traditional healers perform in many African societies. The similarities between the healing functions performed by the traditional healers and Jesus are utilised with a view to giving grounds for interpreting Jesus in this context and to allow African Christians to describe Jesus in a more meaningful way. Both Christ and the traditional healers have mystical powers to confront and surmount satanic powers. *Mganga* is a replica of the great *Mganga* Jesus. Jesus knows the sickness of his patients and does not need to diagnose the African Christians when they are sick. The African Christians admire Christ because he is not only a medicine man but he is also a performer of miracles. Jesus is the Supreme *Mganga* whose healing powers in modern times are extended through prayers, sacraments and medical services. Stinton (2004) points out that Christ's healing function is also attached to his priestly and prophetic role.

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

In the preceding discussion we have attempted to define who Christ is in the context of healing. We have also tried to give Christ the images that are known to African Christians. The healing functions of Christ and the African traditional healers have been discussed.

So far we have seen that healing in Africa is held in high esteem because it focuses on all aspects of a person. Healing in the African religious context is not only physical, but also spiritual.

The spiritual aspects are vitally important because healing also focuses on the causes of illnesses.

In the previous discussion we have also seen that healing constitutes the key aspect of Jesus' ministry. Therefore, there is a connection between salvation and healing. Jesus is depicted as a giver of life and health. Although the role of healing was not well explained during the Western missionary enterprises, in the post colonial Africa, the Africans are beginning to understand the importance of healing and the functions carried out by Jesus and the African traditional healers in African societies.

## CHAPTER 5

### JESUS AS MEDIATOR

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall look at another role of Christ as an ancestor. The African Christians view Christ as a mediator because ancestors in the African context are known for the mediating functions between God and their descendants that they perform. I shall also indicate the grounds on which Jesus is referred to as mediator and the characteristics of a mediator.

According to Bujo (2003), Mbiti (1988), Magesa (2004), Malan (1995), Parratt (1997) and Stinton (2004) the notion of mediation is held in high esteem in most African societies. Channels through which God and the ancestors are approached are properly followed. In some cases the chief mediates between the ancestors and God. It is on this ground that the idea of Jesus as a mediator is better understood by the African Christians. Christ is perceived by African Christians as the traditional intermediator who maintains proper order for approaching God. The notion of Christ as mediator between God and his descendants in the African world view is different from the understanding of classical Christians' notion of Christ as a mediator, in the sense that he abolishes the boundaries of sin and guilt between God and humanity.

As a mediator between God and humanity Christ is seen as a Saviour and Redeemer. The notion of redemption is commonly found in most of hymns, prayers and catechisms of African Christians. The main themes in these expressions of worship are an appeal for communal and personal deliverance from the evil forces and natural calamities.

The notion of appealing for deliverance from evil forces ties in well with the traditional African religious notion of the ancestors as the mediators

between God and their descendants. This notion also ties in well with Christ as a mediator between God and the African Christians. In this regard, Christ is seen by the African Christians as their ultimate intercessor and refuge. Christ is the final resort to whom the African Christians turn whenever they need comfort and assistance. The notion of redemption is flexible in the African religious context and it is called upon in times of dire needs. It is this context that in African traditional religion God's intervention to save people is profoundly established in the experience the African Christians. Additionally, the lived theology of redemption is explicitly depicted in the hymns of African Christians. In the African religious context God is perceived as omnipotent and all-saving for what He has accomplished through Jesus Christ. Christ rescues and revives humanity from evil and their failings in practice. (Parratt 1997).

In his book *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (2003) Bujo states that Jesus deserves the title mediator because he is the final embodiment of all the goodness of the ancestors and the realisation of the liberation for which humanity is longing. Bujo notes that Jesus is the first ancestor and the first life-force. Mercy Oduyoye, a Ghanaian theologian, in Stinton (2004), sees Christ as a mediator who accompanies us on our life's journey. The closeness of Jesus to us is similar to the close presence of our ancestors. For Oduyoye, Jesus operates as an ancestor in the lives of many African Christians. Christ is an unseen companion whose presence can be felt strongly. Christ is an ancestor whose counsel and advice are dependable. Christ is an ancestor whose clear presence is always with the African Christians. As an ancestor, Christ is endowed with the characteristics of a prophet, priest, lamb, reconciler, advocate, and peacemaker (Stinton 2004:139).

Magesa (1998) sees Jesus as an ancestor who restores the moral order by the African Christians in their communities. Whenever there is a discord in the Universe, Christ is responsible for remedying it. In his

book, *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy* (1975), Mbiti identifies five types of intermediaries, namely priests, medicine men, seers, diviners, and ritual elders.

Their intermediary role includes, amongst other aspects, assisting humanity to maintain communication with the Supreme Being and the Spiritual world and dealing with the problems of the community. People communicate their problems to God through the intermediaries. The people's problems are then presented to God by the intermediaries through prayers, sacrifices, divination, and offerings. Mbiti (1975) notes that intermediaries are held in high esteem by the people on the ground of the exemplary life they live. The intermediaries articulate themselves in two languages, namely the language of the Spirits and of God and the language spoken by their descendants.

Intermediaries like the ancestors are also viewed as the channels between God and humanity. People usually approach God in a humble way. Mbiti stresses that Jesus as a redeemer has assumed the role of a mediator. He is the channel between God and the African Christians. In *African Theology en Route* (1979:112-113), Kofi Appiah-Kubi notes that African Christians take the intermediaries seriously, especially when remedying broken relations between God and ancestors. When relations are broken between God and the ancestors, every single effort is made at any cost to remedy them through sacrifices and communal meals.

Reconciliation between God and the African plays a crucial role in African religion. Once sacrifices are given to God through the intermediaries normality is restored between God and the African. Kofi Appiah-Kobu is of the opinion that Christianity in general has a lot to learn from African religions in the aspect of intermediary theology. African religion identifies various means and reasons why disorder occurs in the cosmos. As a result, measures for restoring the force of

life in the cosmos are recommended. The people entrusted with the task of restoring the force of life in the cosmos are referred to as intermediaries. Intermediaries are also responsible for reconciling humanity to God in the event of disharmony. Mbiti (1991:25) points out that a powerful position is accorded to the intermediaries and the ancestors in African societies since they are aware of the social needs of their descendants.

The ancestors keep regular contact with their descendants for one reason; the language of the ancestors is better understood by their descendants than the language of God. However, their descendants are also at liberty to approach God directly.

## **5.2 CONCLUSION**

In the previous discussion we have seen that Christ fits well in the group of the ancestors because he encompasses all the characteristics of the ancestors. The image of Christ as an ancestor is deeply rooted in the African heritage and in the hearts of the African Christians. Jesus as the Supreme mediator approaches his father on behalf of all humanity. We have also seen that the notion of intermediaries ties in well with the African understanding of the cosmos which maintains that the unseen world is at a higher moral level than that of humanity. The common role played by the intermediaries and the ancestors has also been discussed. God can only be approached through those who are subordinate to Him, but superior to the ordinary people. Intermediaries are found both amongst the ancestors and the living.

### 5.3 JESUS AS ANCESTOR NOTIONS OF THE ANCESTOR IN AFRICA

Bujo (2003), Nyamiti (1984), Schreiter (1991) and Stinton (2004) liken Christ's ancestral role to that of the African traditional ancestors. In *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (2003), Bujo notes that the idea of keeping in touch with the dead is reflected in the funeral rites, initiation rites, and hunting ceremonies of the Africans. What gives an impression that the ancestors are widely respected amongst the Africans is the cult of the ancestors.

The cult of the ancestors is widespread throughout Africa. Therefore it is impossible to prevent questions this practice sparks for the African Christian's life. Bujo (2003) understands Christ as truly God and as the fountain of life for the African Christians. Giving Christ the title "Proto-Ancestor" means Christ must not only be understood as the first born of all the ancestors, but he must also be understood as the "Ancestor par excellence" meaning that he is the eminent ancestor; he communicates God's life and redemption to humanity. St. Paul, as Dwyer, in *The Divine Office* (1974:292) views Christ as the eminent ancestor by virtue of being the first born of all creation and the first born to return from the dead. If the importance of the notion of the ancestors is valued in the African traditional religious setting because of its mediating and protecting role, the same role can be accorded to Christ. Christ executes the ancestral role perfectly. Therefore his entire life is an effective testimony of defending, communicating, and sustaining the lives of the African Christians. Christ's effective defence, communication, and substance of life as the eminent ancestor are clearly reflected in the gospels through his words, miracles, life-style, and resurrection (Bujo 2003:134).

Through his death, life, and resurrection, Christ manifests himself as the eminent ancestor and the fountain of life. It is on these grounds

that Bujo perceives Christ as the ancestor who is on the most supreme level.

From a theological perspective, Bujo (2003) views Christ as the "Proto-Ancestor". "Proto" implies the uniqueness of Christ's ancestorship. The term "Proto" also means Christ is the fountain of Union and life-giving force (power). The term "Proto" must be comprehended in the context of Christ as an excellent exemplary. Being "Proto Ancestor" means that the fullness of life of all the ancestors is understood and perfected in Christ. Christ is the messenger of the Kingdom of God and the Supreme ancestor. According to Kabesele in Schreiter (1991), Christ is the ancestor who is the source of life and the way to God. Nobody goes to the Father without passing through him. Kabesele's theological statement can be equated to the words of Jesus to Thomas that "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one goes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

As far as ancestral beliefs are concerned in the African traditional religious setting, the words of Jesus remind the African Christians of the continuous communication that exists between them and their descendants for the sustenance of life. Both Bujo (2003) and Nyamiti (1984) point out that Christ's ancestorship is based upon two things. Firstly, Christ has destroyed all the racial, ethnical, and tribal boundaries amongst humanity.

Secondly, Christ is not born of blood, but of the Holy Spirit. In addition, both Bujo and Nyamiti concur theologically with St. Paul that Christ is the second Adam in the sense that he replaced the first Adam. According to Nyamiti (1984), ancestors are the main friends of the living.

The ancestors are always attentive to all the dangers that waylay their descendants. Schreiter (1991), notes that the ancestors are called

upon by their descendants on every important occasion such as weddings, funerals, naming rituals, etc. As regards ancestral beliefs, Nyamiti (1984), points out that there is no common method of ancestral beliefs amongst the Africans. There may be differences in some of the societies regarding ancestral veneration. Notwithstanding such differences, Nyamiti argues that there are ample beliefs shared by ancestral societies to confirm common ancestral beliefs amongst the Africans. Nyamiti outlines five elements that are commonly shared by the Africans. They are as follows:

1. Natural relationship between the ancestor and his/her descendants. This natural affinity may be based on parenthood, sisterhood or brotherhood.
2. Sacred status is attained through death and conceived in relation to superhuman powers and closeness to God. Ancestors are always presented as both good and bad in character. Ancestors can be generous to their earthly descendants, but can also be punitive towards those who do not observe the ethical norms of their communities.

As a result the ancestors are feared. The living always expects care, protection and other benefits such as wealth, long life, and children though. Angry ancestors are propitiated through prayers and offerings.

3. Mediation between God and humanity takes place by virtue of the ancestors' supernatural position and closeness to God.
4. Habitual communication by the ancestors with their earthly descendants.
5. Ancestors are the archetype of ethical moral conduct.

Ancestral communication involves acts of remembrance that realize the presence of the dead for the living with whom they are in continuous

communication. Ancestral communication strengthens life for the community and universal union.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

In the preceded discussion the supremacy of Christ has been discussed. The notion of the ancestors in Africa has also been discussed. Christ forges a new linkage with humanity as a second Adam. In the previous discussion Christ as an ancestor is depicted as a channel through which humanity relates to God. As "Proto-Ancestor" Christ is seen as a new Moses who leads the African Christians to the water of life reliably. By presenting us with juxtaposing images of Jesus as the "Proto-Ancestor" and the new Moses, Bujo implies that Christ paves the way for advancing further liberating aspects of the gospel in modern Africa. It is worth noting that African Christians have a better understanding as to why Christ is referred to as an ancestor. By being the second Adam, Christ founded a new community and established its new identity. The African Christians can now rejoice in the fact that they find their new identity in Christ. Christ's ancestorship becomes more meaningful to the African Christians when it is said that Christ died for them. Christians can equate Christ with their understanding of the ancestors. One of the compelling reasons why numerous African Christians associate themselves with Christ is to eliminate discrimination between the baptised and the unbaptised ancestors. In the previous discussion, Jesus is viewed as a link between the unbaptised and the baptised ancestors by virtue of being a new Adam.

The linkage between the two parties of the ancestors culminates in the formation of a spirituality drawn from the ancestorship of Christ.

## 5.5 PROBLEMS REGARDING THE IMAGE OF JESUS AS AN ANCESTOR

In her book *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (2004), Stinton notes that while there are many African Christians who perceive Christ as their ancestor, there are also those who have difficulty in accepting Christ as their ancestor for the following reasons. Objections to Jesus being an ancestor emanate firstly from historical missiological and theological issues. According to John Gatu, a Lutheran Clergyman in Stinton (2004) the notion of Christ as an ancestor is very negative since Western concepts view the ancestors as pagans who were not knowledgeable about God. The teaching of the missionaries on the ancestors has negatively impacted upon the image of the ancestors, particularly in those countries where Christianity exists.

Aboagye-Mensah, a Ghanaian Lutheran minister, in Stinton (2004) is of the opinion that most of the people in Africa associate the ancestors with forces that are not compatible with Christianity. Evil forces such as witchcraft and dictatorship have been associated with the ancestors by foreign missionaries.

As a result many African Christians stopped identifying themselves with their ancestors. Moreover, some of the African Christians stopped identifying themselves with their cultural heritage.

There are also social factors such as modernisation which alienates Africans from traditional cultures. To date some African Christians are apprehensive of comparing the African traditional ancestors to Christ.

Aboagye-Mensah in Stinton (2004), on the other hand, argues that ancestors are gaining acceptance in the African religious Christian

context. Many African Christians are realising the importance of identifying themselves with their ancestors culturally. However, those African Christians who grew up in a Christian setting without exposure to the ancestral traditional and cultural norms do not know much about the ancestors.

In such a setting, the role of the African traditional ancestors is overshadowed by Jesus and the Saints. When asked who the ancestors are, some African Christians gave a general answer defining the ancestors as those who have gone before. Furthermore, some African Christians hold that ancestors were both good and bad. Not all the ancestors were held in high esteem; some were authoritarian and treated like gods. As a result the African Christians cannot equate these type of ancestors to Christ.

Aboagye-Mensah in Stinton (2004), maintains that the history of the African traditional ancestors is rather negative. For example, some ancestors were responsible for selling the Africans into slavery. As a result, Abogy-Mensah suggests that perhaps the African traditional ancestors should only be used as a way of explaining Christ's ancestral role, but should not be used as a model. Other reasons cited for not regarding Jesus as an ancestor are, according to Saprang in Stinton (2004), a Ghanaian Catholic Bishop, that the term ancestor has a limited meaning in the sense that it confines itself to an ethnocentric notion. Ancestors belong to their family and descendants. One's father is one's ancestor; he is not another person's ancestor. Bishop Saprang advises the African Christians that before they adopt Christ as their ancestor, they should be able to convince the entire world that Christians are one family.

Bishop Saprang propounds that perhaps the African family could be used as a model for the church. However, he warns that using an African family as a model for Christ could be dangerous because an

African family excludes other families. The person who is outside one's family is not as important as those in one's family.

Saprong further argues that an African family and the African traditional ancestors cannot be used as a model for Christ being an ancestor for the African Christians in Africa in the sense that they are too exclusive. In agreement with Saprong, Ole Ronkei, a Lutheran layman in Stinton (2004), objects vehemently to the notion of Christ as an ancestor for the African Christians on the grounds of age, marriage, and family. Ronkei is of the opinion that Christ cannot be perceived as an ancestor because he was young. From an African cultural perspective, Ronkei argues that an ancestor has a connotation of age. An ancestor is someone who is both here and now. With respect to Jesus being an ancestor, this becomes problematic in the sense that Jesus was not married and did not have children. Traditionally, one of the requirements to be qualified as an ancestor in the African religious context, one must die a good death. As far as a good death is concerned, Ronkei points out that Jesus would not be considered as an ancestor in the African traditional and cultural context because he died a cruel death.

Another theological problem worth mentioning in relation to this debate arises from the characteristics of ancestors which are viewed as contradictory to Jesus. According to Oduro, a Lutheran minister, in Stinton (2004), ancestors are creatures, whereas Jesus is their creator. Therefore, he cannot be referred to as an ancestor *par excellence*. Jesus represents for believers the creator in heaven but does not represent an ancestor.

Oduro stresses that although Jesus generously and willingly agreed to come down on earth and dwelt amongst humanity, he is still our Lord, our Creator, and our Maker.

At the same time the ancestral model is viewed as not being sufficient in the sense that ancestors are mortal and can be forgotten, but Jesus, on the other hand, is immortal and cannot be forgotten. Oduro deplors the idea of Jesus Christ being an ancestor in the African cultural and religious context because culturally ancestors exclude women. In some African cultural backgrounds, women have no identity while some have only an identity in relation to their husbands. Oduro is therefore of the opinion that it is impossible to talk about Christ being an ancestor in the African context because the cultural and religious images or qualities accorded to him are not inclusive as we see in the Bible. In the Bible, the entire aspect of humanity, including male and female, is considered Stinton (2004).

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

In the foregoing discussion the African traditional model of Christ being an ancestor of the African Christians has been critically scrutinised. We have seen that not all African Christians are in favour of Christ being their ancestor in the African cultural setting. However, the arguments and suggestions given in the discussion about Christ's eligibility to be an ancestor for African Christians need to be transcended. The African Christians, like Christians elsewhere, have a prerogative to understand who Christ is in their culture. It is right to call Christ an ancestor because he is endowed with ancestral qualities.

Virtually all African theologians who have written on the ancestorship of Christ commence in their own way with African ancestral beliefs and practices, using them as a point of departure and challenge such beliefs and practices with the Christian teaching on the saviour. Therefore the African Christians are at liberty to develop their own perceptual methods on which they construct traditional bridges between African culture and Christianity. The argument in the foregoing discussion is not about Jesus being an African ancestor.

Rather, it is about using the metaphors explaining to African Christians who Jesus is for them. The title given to Jesus is a noble one because when the African Christians view Christ as an ancestor, it means he is their elder brother in their communities, an intercessor between God and the community of African Christians.

## 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at clarifying why the categories are considered or developed. Before I delve into the topic I shall want to address to explain the terms "veneration" and "worship" because they do not necessarily denote the same thing in the views of Kibetzi, Bayo and Numbale. Their clarification will assist the African Christians in understanding the levels of worship and veneration given to the Saints, Jesus, God and ancestors. There seems to be profound theological views among those who have written on this topic.

In *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa* (2002) edited by Kibetzi, an attempt is demonstrated that veneration and worship do not have the same meaning that has been made by Howard Tuck. The latter uses two Latin terms "vire" and "vire", which denote the two different levels of worship given to the Tutsi and to the Sotho. "Vire" denotes an exceptional worship given only to the Tutsi. According to Howard Tuck the term "vire" is more used by the worship due to the saints and the ancestors. Therefore, the worship given to the ancestors and the saints cannot be equated to the worship given to the Tutsi on the ground that the Sotho are not inherently heathen in the same way. They are sanctified by God in their ancestral forms like God. Thus they cannot claim any worship of the Godhead. Howard Tuck concludes, therefore, that both the Tutsi and the Sotho are not worshipped as the gods in the way heathen Tutsi worshipped God. The term "vire", on the other hand, denotes the worship or veneration given to the saints and the ancestors.

## CHAPTER 6

### ARE THE ANCESTORS VENERATED OR WORSHIPPED?

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at clarifying whether the ancestors are venerated or worshipped. Before I delve into this topic I shall make an attempt to explain the terms “veneration” and “worship” because they do not necessarily denote the same thing in the views of Kuckertz, Buys and Nambala. Their clarification will assist the African Christians in understanding the levels of worship and veneration given to the Saints, Jesus, God and ancestors. There seems to be polarised theological views among those who have written on this topic.

In *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa* (1981:22) edited by Kuckertz, an attempt to demonstrate that veneration and worship do not have the same meaning has been made by Hammond-Tooke. The latter uses two Latin terms “*latria*” and “*dulia*” which denote the two different types of worship given to the Trinity and to the Saints. “*Latria*” denotes an exceptional worship given only to the Trinity. According to Hammond-Tooke the term “*latria*” is never used for the worship due to the saints and the ancestors. Therefore, the worship given to the ancestor and the saints cannot be equated to the worship given to the Trinity on the ground that the Saints are not intrinsically holy as in the case of God. They are sanctified by God or their sainthood comes from God. Thus they cannot claim any worship of the Godhead. Hammond-Tooke concludes, therefore, that both the saints and the ancestors are only venerated on the ground that their holiness hinges upon God. The term “*dulia*”, on the other hand, denotes the worship or veneration given to the saints and the ancestors.

Hammond-Tooke suggests that in Africa one should not talk of ancestral worship. Instead, one should talk of the ancestral veneration, in the strict sense of the word. Ancestral veneration remains a challenge to the African Christians in the sense that it is yet to be incorporated into Christianity. Therefore the exponents of African theology have a moral duty to ensure that ancestral veneration is well understood culturally in the African churches by African Christians. In agreement with Hammond-Tooke, Mahatma Gandhi argues that ancestral veneration should not be artificially clothed in Christianity. Instead, it should be appropriately and radically inculturated in the mindsets, traditions and customs of the African Christians, thereby making it a real part of their Christian life (Ellsberg 1991:20). Once inculturated, it should be celebrated liturgically by the entire community of the faithful because Christians belong to the universal church whose head is Christ the Supreme ancestor (Kuckertz 1981).

*In Inculturation Bringing the African Culture into the Church* (1993:3), Thlagale when writing on ancestral beliefs in Southern Africa states that ancestral veneration is the belief that acknowledges the intervention of the ancestors in mankind's affairs. It is a common practice amongst the Africans. Ancestral veneration is an African way of confronting life experience engendered by human problems with natural and unnatural phenomena. Ancestral veneration is a ritual performed by to strengthen human development and to retrieve human attenuation. Ancestral veneration is performed with a view to solidifying the union of the community and to driving away devastating mindsets. It is the African way or pattern to confront the living with devilish enigmas and suffering. Ancestral veneration is also the way that Africans celebrate and communicate with the enigma of the sacred (holy mystery) in their midst. Ancestral veneration is performed with a view to revitalising nature and to celebrating new life. Moreover, it is performed with an aim of absorbing the pain that breaks life. Ancestral veneration is meant to recognise the existence of spiritual reality. It

expresses an appreciation of the intensity of power that transcends the living and nature. Traditionally, however, it is not known whether this power exclusively lives within the ancestors or outside them. Tihagale (1991).

The temptation to compare ancestral veneration with the veneration of the saints in the church's tradition is increasingly irresistible, particularly in the growing interest of the subject of enculturation. It is vitally important to consider this analogy more closely as some African Christians seem to entertain the belief that the Saints and the ancestors are the same.

The veneration of the ancestors emanates from the belief that when a human body decomposes subsequent to death, the spirit is separated from the body. The spirit ends up in the world of the spirits through being somewhere underground. Tihagale (1991). The belief in life after death goes along with belief in the continual existence of the ancestors. Shorter (1984: 177), like Tihagale, states that the crucial value of African veneration is that the departed are not forgotten because they continue to play an important role in the community. Shorter stresses that people in Africa live and keep in touch with the departed. Once the existing communion between the living and the departed is changed by faith in the risen Lord and His power rising from the dead, there is potential to offer a new doctrinal meaning to the communion of the saints Shorter (1984).

According to Bujo (2003) ancestors are divided into three categories. Firstly there are those who are considered as the founders of the clan. Secondly, there are those who were considered as heroes of the community. Thirdly, there are those who are perceived as the departed relatives and members of one's family. These three categories help us understand that the ancestors are venerated at different levels. Some are venerated at clan, family, and tribal level (Bujo 2003:122-123).

In *An Introduction to the Church History in Namibia* (2003:3) Buys and Nambala, do not make a distinction between ancestral worship and ancestral veneration unlike Hammond-Tooke and Tlhagale. Writing from a Namibian ancestral perspective, Buys and Nambala stress that ancestor worship takes cognizance of the presence of the ancestors in the physical and spiritual worlds. The ancestors, particularly in the Namibian context, are treated with tremendous honour because they are perceived as the elders of the families in both the physical and spiritual worlds. Their role as elders does not end in the physical world, but continues into the spiritual world. In *The Peoples of Namibia* (1995:4) Malan, like Buys and Nambala, does not use the term ancestral veneration to demonstrate that the ancestors cannot be equated to God, instead Malan states that ancestors are worshipped because they are subordinate to God. Although Malan does not propose a better term reflecting the difference between worshipping God and the ancestors, he is of the opinion that God is above the ancestors because He is an omniscient God who is aware of the needs of his people. Malan further states that God unlike the ancestors does not need to be worshipped. The ancestors should be worshipped by their descendants because they are highly sensitive about their dignity and rights (Malan 1995).

According to Malan (1995) ancestral worship in Namibia prior to the arrival of the missionaries was performed in the form of the religious cultural practices and the ritual fire. Despite 90% of Namibians being Christians, ancestral worship is still performed in Namibia by some rurally based communities. Malan points out that ancestral worship or veneration is the core of the African traditional religious experience in Namibia. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries in Namibia ancestral worship was seen as the foundation of Namibia's avid religion. Ancestral worship or veneration is still practised in Namibia, particularly amongst Herero and the Ovahimba (Malan 1995).

Ancestral worshipped is performed with a view to offering respect to the ancestors, the heritage, and the family. It is also performed with a view to seeking security in times of crisis.

## 6.2 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have seen that the ancestors and the saints are worshipped or venerated by their descendants in accordance with the spiritual and psychological needs of those descendants. The two terms "*dulia*" and "*Latria*" have been discussed to demonstrate the levels of worship or veneration due either to the ancestors or due to God. Some authors treat the two terms as having the same meaning. However, ancestors are either worshipped or venerated by their descendants in order to keep their presence amongst their descendants alive. It is stated in the preceding discussion that it is only God who is worshipped by virtue of being above every creature. Tlhagale (1991) argues that rationally in the past the Africans did not have a developed concept of God. Therefore God was not worshipped as was believed to have been remote.

There are neither services, prayers, rituals, shrines, nor belief systems connected to Him. The ancestors are venerated because of their closeness to their descendants. However, this should not contradict the fact that Africans did not have any concept of a Supreme Being prior to the arrival of the missionaries. According to Tlhagale (1991), the reason why the term "worship" cannot be applied to God is because there was a belief that there was no linkage between God and the ancestors. Malan, on the other hand, argues in the preceding discussion that God does not need to be worshipped because He knows everything. Ancestors unlike God should be worshipped because they were aware of their needs and rights. Traditionally, the ancestors operated independently of God and thus the reference to

God would be omitted in the rituals or sacrifices performed for the ancestors. In the absence of God, one can conclude that ancestral worship constitutes the foundation of African Religion.

## CHRIST AS LIBERATOR AND SAVIOUR

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The images of Christ as both a Liberator and a Saviour are central to the past history of the African Churches. These images are prominent in view of the contemporary context in Africa. These images are also part of a response to the question asked in the last chapter of this research: as to who Christ is for African Churches. In that attempt to develop a contextually relevant theology for African Churches and the African theologians came up with terms such as liberation and salvation from the Gospel. Originally, the meaning of these two terms was extended with a view to relating them to issues in their own theological and culturally meaningful to the African Churches. The images of Christ as a Liberator and Saviour address most basic desires which African Churches nurture most dearly. As a Liberator, he liberates and delivers Christ makes the African Churches in developing a new identity in these images.

I shall first elucidate the meaning of the two terms "liberation" and "salvation". Then I shall describe the expressions of liberation and salvation for African Churches.

### 1.2 LIBERATION

In the introduction to *African Christian Theology* (1978: 25-26), Leggett defines liberally the meaning of the term "liberation" as denoting a context where all is the struggle of emancipation. In ancient times, its usage is more linked to the process of attaining political freedom, particularly in the context of master-slaveholder.

## CHAPTER 7

### CHRIST AS LIBERATOR AND SAVIOUR

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The images of Christ as both a Liberator and a Saviour are relevant to the past history of the African Christians. These images are justifiable in view of the contemporary context in Africa. These images are also part of a response to the question asked in the first chapter of this research as to who Christ is for African Christians. In their attempt to develop a contextually relevant theology, the African Christians and the African theologians came up with terms such as liberation and salvation from the Gospel. Originally, the meaning of these two terms was extended with a view to redefining them in order to make them theologically and contextually meaningful to the African Christians. The images of Christ as a Liberator and Saviour obliterate cruel harsh memories which African Christians harbour about Christianity. As a Liberator, Saviour and ancestor, Christ assists the African Christians in discovering a new identity in these images.

I shall first elucidate the meaning of the two terms "liberation" and "salvation". Then I shall elucidate the implications of salvation and liberation for African Christians.

#### 7.2 LIBERATION

In *An Introduction to African Christian Theology* (1989:109-110), Mugambi explains extensively the meaning of the term "liberation" as denoting a pattern whose aim is the realisation of emancipation. In modern times, its usage is more linked to the process of attaining political freedom, particularly in the context of modern nationalism.

According to Mugambi, the discussion regarding this term among Christians, particularly in Africa where Christianity suppressed the cultures of the Africans has become complex since some theologians are of the opinion that Christianity is chiefly concerned with the liberation of the "soul" and not with the liberation of societies and nations. It is on this ground that in the Christian milieu the term "liberation" has attained a socio-political attachment. The term "salvation", on the other hand, maintained its theological connotation. The term "liberation", like the term salvation, carries a positive connotation. It is for this reason that prominent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. participated actively in the process of liberation driven by the quest for salvation. The difference between the two terms cannot therefore be logically explained because of their complementary meanings.

Mugambi argues that those who are of the opinion that the term liberation can only be understood in the political context are wrong, the reason being that the mission of Jesus on earth was twofold. Firstly, it was concerned with physical liberation. Secondly, it was concerned with spiritual liberation. The term "liberation" therefore denotes a total emancipation of humanity from an oppressive context (Buys and Nambala 2003:329). Mugambi (1989) stresses that the connection between the two terms is reflected in the healing ministry of Jesus. When healing the sick, Christ also forgave them their sins. (I shall later explain the meaning of the term 'sin' in the context of liberation and salvation). During his earthly ministry Jesus eradicated physical illness and brought about spiritual wholeness. The practical results of the two terms cannot be achieved by the spiritual and physical needs of broken humanity. In order to heal the cultural wounds inflicted upon African Christians by the missionaries, the Churches in Africa should be involved in the liberation and salvation process.

Mugambi (1989) states the churches in Africa cannot preach salvation and ignore the physical conditions of those being evangelised. Mugambi encourages the churches in African not to lose theological focus for their ministry on earth. Should they do that, they become social entities. On the other hand, Mugambi encourages the churches in Africa not be too preoccupied with celestial concerns and forget to alleviate the physical sufferings of the evangelised.

Liberation according to the definition arising from this discussion involves more than the fulfilment of socio-political freedom. It is a part and parcel of salvation or redemption. The definition of these terms has the same meaning as the notion of deliverance in the Old Testament where it is perceived in the context of both socio-political and spiritual emancipation. From a biblical perspective, liberation can be understood as the penultimate pattern that roots out any dehumanising dependence and strengthens integrity that gives rise to humanising independence in each aspect of socio-political life on both an individual level and societal level.

### **7.3 SALVATION**

As explained in the preceding discussion the two terms are incomplete without one another. Salvation without liberation is incomplete as it may take humanity away from earthly concerns. Similarly, liberation without salvation is incomplete; it is deficient on inner clarity. During Jesus' ministry, there was no clear difference between the spiritual and the physical activities. Jesus incorporated physical healing supported by integrity. The holistic method of healing is also used in some of the African independent churches to demonstrate that physical and spiritual healing are inseparable.

De Vries, in Buys and Nambala (2003-329), explains that in modern times the meaning of salvation no longer demonstrates the sinners'

connection to God, De Vries explains further that the meaning of salvation should no longer be understood in the biblical context because it has lost its personal, private, and internal denotation. Its focal point is now on socio-economic patterns of society. Therefore it is defined by De Vries as a socio-political and historical truth. Sin exists where humanity is oppressed, maltreated, devastated, and violated. This can also be applied to the context of the African Christians whose culture and dignity were violated and mistreated by the missionaries. In the biblical context salvation is viewed as the ultimate hope of effecting (achieving) self-realisation and self-accomplishment which go beyond the natural and historical patterns (Mugambi: 1989).

Having defined and elaborated the meaning of these two terms, I shall now explain further the implications of Christ as a Liberator and a Saviour in the African context.

Jean-Marc Ela (in *Stinton: 2004*) points out that today the African is crucified and the battles of African Christians remind them of the crucified Christ. Ela notes that Christ's redemption emancipates everyone from any form of slavery. He is of the opinion that the churches in Africa should engage in biblically liberating projects. In addition to this, the churches in Africa should be accorded freedom to develop their own authentic liturgies and theologies arising from an active involvement in the liberation struggles of the African Christians. This can only come to fruition if the churches in Africa develop a mechanism that will enable them to speak with a common language articulating their needs with a united voice. The churches in Africa require an education that emancipates them from all oppressive situations.

Even though there is misery and despair affecting Africans in rural and urban areas, Ela urges the Africa Christians to persist in identifying themselves with Jesus in their humiliation and suffering. Despite

misery and despair, today Jesus walks unrecognised amongst the African Christians. The suffering of the crucified Christ is the suffering of the people of Africa.

Therefore Ela challenges African Christians to recognise the crucified Christ with their own eyes. African Christians should rediscover their right identity by making Christ a part of their memory. The historical experience of African Christians in this regard is compatible with the historical experience of the crucified Christ Stinton (2004). The depth of Christ's humiliation on the cross manifests both the suffering of humanity and God's empathy and compassion for humanity. When Christ reveals God's presence in the world, the pain Jesus suffered on the cross is manifest in the passion of God in a percussive way. It is for this reason that Jesus' manifestation to humanity in the mystery of the cross also relates to the suffering history of the Africans.

Stinton (2004) notes that it is not a weakness that God discloses his power to the world. Therefore it is imperative for the African Christians to reflect over God who came down from heaven, the crucified God who identified Himself with the Africans in their humiliation throughout their history. Christ's resurrection and his humanity are the supreme means through which he overcame death and oppression. As a result he introduced a new world of freedom. Moreover, Stinton (2004) poses a critical question to the African Christians: "How can the risen Christ be meaningful to the suffering and oppressed millions of African men and women?" Stinton responds by aligning the cross of Christ with the Third World because the very existence of the Third World reflects to us what sin is and how it is revealed in history.

The Third World bears within herself the hidden Christ. The Third World has become the historic body of Christ. Therefore Stinton encourages African Christians to find Christ once again in their various contexts of misery where the poor and the oppressed live. It is in these

contexts of misery where redemption in Christ is made evident. Therefore the churches in Africa are called upon to reflect on salvation and liberation by forging practical and concrete contexts that advocate total emancipation.

Christ's mission on earth was not only limited to preaching internal change. Christ's key concern was for the emancipation of the oppressed and the poor. The poor and the oppressed in the context of this discussion are the African Christians whose rights to identify themselves with Christ have been scoffed at and grossly violated by the missionaries. Their cultural freedom and rights to embrace an African Christ were violated and trampled upon. They were instead compelled to embrace a Western and White Jesus. When Stinton refers to Jesus as a Liberator, she does not only refer to His solidarity with the African Christians in their struggle to relieve poverty among the masses in Africa, but she refers to Christ's example in preparing the people for a better world.

Christ as the liberator should be the foundation, the inspiration and the key reason for the final success of the liberation struggle for the emancipation of the Africans. In the liberation of African Christians through the church development and healing should be taken into account. In *Faces of Jesus In Africa* (1991:157-162) Schreiter notes that the church is the agent and expression of Christ's liberation.

Therefore the church has a responsibility to see to it that this concept does not just become a metaphor. Schreiter further explains that the church has a responsibility to present Christ to the rural masses in "a comprehensible and credible fashion." Although Christ is the Liberator of everyone including the rich, the arrogant, and the intellectually proud, he gives voice to the voiceless to stand up for their rights. Christ instills determination into the weak-hearted and the exploited. In addition, Christ offers hope and inspiration to the sick people living with

disabilities; prostitutes; the unemployed; refugees or the displaced; domestic workers; and casual labourers in order to understand that despite degradation, they are equally children of God. For the African Christians, Christ is the Liberator who brings about a new beginning, the welcomed time, or well received time and the year of favour (Luke 4:19).

Christ will purge away the bitter memory of African Christians of oppression and exploitation and pave the way forward for the reconstruction of civil ecclesiastical institutions and systems that will no longer advocate degradation and exploitation. It is only the true Christ who can liberate the powerless and the oppressed from the chains of tyranny. Christ's mission as liberator puts him amongst his brothers and sisters in the world, feeling their joy and their sadness and leading them gently along the path of liberation. This noble assignment pointed out by Schreiter puts the churches in Africa at the service of strengthening Christ's mission of liberation within both the churches and within the entire world. It is the ecclesiological, social and Christological, duty of the churches in Africa to work toward human upliftment. Additionally the duty of proclaiming total emancipation of humanity is not foreign to evangelisation.

Therefore the churches in Africa are obligated to speak out strongly against anybody that disapproves of human freedom or anything that encourages humanity to remain on the margins of life.

The churches in Africa are also obligated to proclaim the freedom of millions of human beings, many of whom are their children. The churches in Africa must make sure that the obligation of human emancipation is endorsed and complete (Schreiter 1991:162). In *Breaking The Chains of Psychological Slavery* (2004:68) Akbar stresses that the ultimate emancipation acknowledges that the form of God is a form superior to human flesh and the Supreme Being invites us to a transcended condition that is broader than material identity. In

other words, human emancipation should go beyond material, cultural and physical boundaries. *Towards Liberation: Crossing Boundaries between Church and Politics* (2006) is a contribution by Kameeta to Namibia's political and spiritual emancipation in which he states that, given the current context of the churches in Africa, salvation and liberation constitute the core of evangelisation. Liberation and evangelisation were the key meaning and significance of Christ's mission.

Therefore His ancestorship can only make sense to the African Christians if the churches in Africa get involved in the process of total emancipation or liberation that alleviates their physical, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual sufferings. Kameeta notes that the church of Christ is sent into the world to spread the Good News of liberation to the people who are not yet convinced that they are human beings equal to everybody else. Extending Kameeta's theological views further, in his book *Introduction to African Christian Theology* (1989:111), Mugambi stresses that the churches in African must be like a school where the African Christians can be assisted in realising their complete human dignity. African pastors or priests should not just act as spiritual shepherds, but they should also act like teachers who teach their parishioners or congregants to realise the importance of human freedom and dignity. In addition to this, priests should also act as good shepherds who lead their flocks to greener pastures. In short, this means that pastors should lead their congregants to a decent life here on earth.

On the other hand, Mugambi argues that this can be a cumbersome assignment to some of the pastors who do not have an intimate knowledge of the context of the parishes they lead. Mugambi holds that total emancipation can only be attained when the African Christians treat their dependence on God seriously. In *African Theology, Inculturation and Liberation* (1993:66) Emmanuel Martey

points out that Christ as a liberating ancestor is endowed with all the qualities and virtues of the African ancestors. Therefore the African Christians are motivated to invoke their ancestors on a daily basis. Mugambi (1989:116) urges the churches in Africa to be the "light of the world and the salt of the earth". Mugambi observes that some of the churches in Africa are part of the oppressive patterns and strategies. If the churches in Africa cannot be the light of the world and the salt of the earth then the prophetic role of liberating the African Christians from any forms of oppression cannot be realised. Contributing to this discussion in his book *African Religion and Philosophy* (1991:122) Mbiti notes that salvation is not a foreign doctrine to Africans because they believe in eternal salvation after death.

#### **7.4 CONCLUSION**

In the preceding discussion we have seen that the African Christians can only claim total liberation and salvation when they treat their faith in Christ earnestly. True liberation and salvation assist them in rediscovering their cultural, physical, spiritual and economic dignity in Christ. By identifying Christ as their liberating ancestor, the African Christians are filled with the hope and confidence that will enable them to find their true dignity and identity in Christ. The term "liberation" has been theologically expounded to suit the context of the African Christians. The churches in Africa should be like a school where the African Christians are taught to promote human dignity and freedom.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE ANCESTRAL VALUE OF CHRIST'S CROSS AND RESURRECTION

#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the cross and the resurrection have an indispensable impact on the ancestorship of Christ, I shall discuss at length in this chapter how these two crucial aspects culminate in his ancestorship. These two dimensions are central to the ancestorship of Christ as they add another meaning to the role he plays in the lives of African Christians. The ancestorship of Christ would make no sense without these two dimensions. Similarly, Christianity in principle would not be meaningful if Christ had not died on the cross and risen from death. Christ's cross is not only the culmination of the birth of Christianity, but is also the culmination of his ancestorship. Before I discuss this topic at length, I shall first attempt to define the meaning of the cross in the theological and political contexts. Then I shall give the definition of resurrection. And finally I shall discuss the significance and the implications of both the cross and resurrection.

#### 8.2 WHAT IS THE CROSS?

##### THEOLOGICAL DEFINITION

Davis (1997:311-312), Downey (1993), Hengel (1986:178-179), and Mugambi (1989:114-115) point out that initially the cross was not a symbol of Christianity. The cross is older than Christianity. In other words the cross was already in existence before the birth of Christianity. Before the introduction of Christianity, the cross was used in various symbolic ways.

The cross only became an indispensable symbol of Christianity in the seventh century AD symbolising the suffering or passion of Jesus for the forgiveness of sinners and the martyrdom of Christians who were martyred for their faith in both God and his Son, Jesus. It is for this reason that the cross has been used consistently to symbolise the connection between the crucifixion of Jesus and the martyrdom of guiltless Christians killed by rulers who were against Christianity. Mugambi (1989) defines the cross as a symbol of both death and new life. For Christians, the cross is a symbol of new creation. The cross may be viewed as an imposition of death upon innocence for the struggle of salvation of new life and new creation. The cross is the most powerful symbol in the history of Christianity. The cross also denotes the power of God's will to raise life out of death to make the powerless powerful. It was the power of the cross that culminated in the centurion confessing subsequent to Jesus' death that Jesus was really the Son of God. Mugambi (1989) notes the meeting of the centurion and Jesus at the cross on Calvary Hill. The cross denotes God's championing for the powerless, showing the powerful the ephemeral essence of their political power which can easily fade. God's siding with the powerless is a demonstration to the oppressing world that God rules the entire creation. The cross gives the powerless the power to become Children of God. In Africa where there are too many powerless people, the cross denotes the changing of a relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor in terms of the existing social structures. In addition, the cross denotes the emergence of new social structures. God's siding with the powerless in Africa reflects the strengthening of the character of the powerless people.

### 8.3 POLITICAL DEFINITION OF THE CROSS

In *The Cross of The Son of God* (1986:179), Hengel states that in the political setting the cross denotes a penalty engendered by sin. Under the Graeco-Roman government, the cross was utilised as a form of punishment. Different punishments were carried out on numerous people in various forms. In addition, it was used as military and political punishment.

Amongst the Persians and the Catharaginians the punishment of crucifixion was imposed chiefly upon high officials and military commanders who were viewed as rebels. On the other hand, amongst the Romans, the crucifixion was imposed as a punishment upon the lower class people such as slaves, violent criminals and rebels. The main aim of using the cross as a punishment by these regimes was as a deterrent. The punishment of crucifixion was always carried out publicly.

### 8.4 WHAT IS RESURRECTION? THEOLOGICAL DEFINITION

Bonhoefer (1983:34), Davis (1998:90), Funnor (1967:273), King (1983:45), Nyamiti (1984:12), Walker (1997:89), and Wilhelm (1981:103), define the resurrection as a transformed body of Christ uniting the Christians. Resurrection is a state of changing from death to new life. It is a spiritual victory over death. Resurrection is an integral paschal mystery that can only be theologically comprehended in the context of the cross. Luther and St Augustine (in *Davis 1998*) view the resurrection of Christ as the most distinctive aspect of faith in the history of Christianity. It is the most powerful aspect of the faith of Christians. Christ's entire ministry including his existence as both God and man are incorporated in the resurrection of Christ.

Proclaiming the gospel according to Luther is tantamount to proclaiming the resurrection of Christ. In agreement with Luther, Augustine and Barth (in Davis 1998) point out that Christ's resurrection is the most crucial part of Christian faith. Barth also states that if Christ had failed to rise from the dead, his death would have been meaningless to humanity. In addition, God would have been meaningless to the Christians, whatever Christ was able to do, and humanity could have done it without his assistance. Christ's resurrection proves that God's power is beyond human capacity. Both the cross and the resurrection constitute an interwoven meaning that points to new life. The resurrection of Christ is the affirmation that mankind's redemption is not a Utopia, but a reality (Walker 1997:89).

Having defined and explained the resurrection and the cross of Christ in detail, I shall now explain in depth the implications of the resurrection, death, and the cross of Christ in the context of his ancestorship as well as in the context of the African traditional ancestors. Fannon (1967: 273) points out that humanity without the death of Christ on the cross is meaningless, lifeless, and helpless. Christ's death on the cross shows how God stands in the presence of humanity, enduring long suffering, forgiving, and engendering life out of death. In *Strength to Love* (1983), Martin Luther King, Jr. notes that every time humanity looks at the cross, it is reminded of what our first ancestor Christ achieved for the entire creation. Christ's redemption for humankind is manifested on the cross. Therefore, the cross of Christ teaches and challenges humanity to grow toward the end for which it was created. Additionally, the cross of Christ teaches humanity to accept the virtues of reality. As Christ endures suffering so mankind must also be ready to endure suffering. As the first ancestor to rise from the dead, Christ united mankind with his Father because mankind was originally cut off from its creator due to the sin committed by Adam. St. Paul refers to Christ as the first-born of the entire creation and the first-born from the dead. It is for this reason that Christ's glorification

and crucifixion are formed in the soul of each Christian uniting them with the church (his body) which is the common family of God. Christ's compassion as an ancestor annihilates the suffering of the poor. According to Nolan (1986) one cannot be sympathetic to the poor without being willing to assist them in terms of sharing in their suffering. Refusing to share in their suffering would be a hopeless feeling. One cannot share in the blessings of the poor unless one is ready or willing to identify oneself with them.

Nyamiti (1984) points out that Christ's death on the cross has an ancestral impact on the lives of Christians as it ransomed and redeemed their sinful nature. Christ's death on the cross is the climax of his ancestorship. By dying on the cross, Christ became an impeccable example for the moral ethics of the faithful and their prospective triumph at the end of time. On this basis, after his death and exaltation Christ insisted upon demanding proper moral ethics and obedience from Christians. Christ can only have a sacred contact with the Christians by virtue of their principled moral conduct. Therefore Christ orders his disciples that he will remain with them to the ends of the earth.

Moltmann (in Nyamiti: 1984) understands Christ's cross in the light of his pastoral earthly ministry. Christ's crucifixion, therefore, can only be perceived in the context of his earthly pastoral sphere. Moltmann states that the gradual movement leading to his death is characterised by important qualities of Jesus connected to the Old Law of the New Testament. Moltmann stresses that Jesus objected to the Jewish teaching about justifying works through faith. Jesus' disapproval of the teaching of the Jews on the law culminated in his death.

On this basis, Moltmann arrives at the convincing conclusion that Jesus' death was due to God's participation in the death of his Son on the cross. Christ's death on the cross is compatible with his Father's

authority. Christ was poised to reconcile with the Jews; unfortunately they decided to kill him. These incidents brought him into a conflict with the Jews. As a result Christ was crucified on the cross as a political rebel.

In agreement with Mugambi (1989), Moltmann (in Nyamiti 1984) is of the opinion that the cross of Christ comprises both political and social dimensions. Moltmann, like Mugambi, perceives the cross of the Saviour as the foundation of the political liberation theology of the oppressed.

What Moltmann discloses here are the clarifications regarding the ancestorship of Christ through his cross. As an ancestor who is a mediator between God and humanity, Christ's crucifixion liberated humanity generally from the cruelty of political and social oppression. Additionally, Christ's crucifixion has also emancipated humanity from the slavery of evil. As a result Christ set humanity an impeccable example of Christian ethics in the context of fighting against evil and sacrificing our lives for the goodness of our neighbours. On this basis, Christ's cross reveals him as the true brother of humanity in God. The relationship between Christ and his Father in the context of the cross is inseparable. Moltmann further asserts that Jesus' cry of pain on the cross reflects the opposition between God and God. By abandoning Jesus on the cross God simultaneously liberated him on the cross. What developed subsequently between God and Jesus is the Holy Spirit who filled them with love and gives life to the dead. The Victory of Jesus includes both the living and the dead.

Moltmann presents his theological elucidation of the cross in the context of the Trinity. The main essence of the doctrine of the cross revolves around the Trinity. Likewise the salient essence of Christ's ancestorship can only be comprehended in the context of the Trinity and the Cross. Nyamiti (1984) does not find Moltmann's theological

explanation of the cross profound enough to convince the African Christians. However, Moltmann's theological explanation of the cross is that Jesus did not die alone on the cross. The suffering he experienced on the cross is also experienced by the Trinity. The Trinity are the ancestors to each other, but Christ's ancestors, namely God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, abandoned him at the crucial moment when he was performing a redemptive activity. As a result, Jesus was not in a position to look for any help from them. None of Christ's foregoing ancestors was available to offer him a drink when he asked for it.

Despite all these incidents, Jesus' confidence in the ancestors did not waver. Jesus' courage to hold on to his faith in the Father must be an encouraging lesson to all the faithful to hold on to God even in arduous times. Both Matthew and Mark view the abandonment of Christ on the cross as the depth of his trust in his Father. Christ's painful cry on the cross was not a cry of hopelessness. Christ's trust in his Father is a demonstration that he maintains his filial relationship of sonship with his Father. In the darkness of being left alone, Christ turned to his Father. Christ did not detach himself from his ancestors because he wanted to fulfill the prophecy foretold by the scriptures (John 19.28, 30). Christ's attachment to the Father fulfills the final giving of his spirit into the hands of his celestial ancestors. The silence and the abandonment shown by the Father were not destined to last permanently (Luke 23-24). Christ's unswerving prayers were preparing him for the future. This culminated in Him receiving the ancestral reward of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit which he received from his Father resulted in him rising from the dead. After rising from the dead he was given the mandate to sit at the right hand of the Father. Christ's seat on the right hand of the Father was meant to glorify each member of the Trinity equally. In this way, according to Moltmann (in *Nyamiti 1984*), the cross articulates ancestral communication among the Trinity. The quality of ancestral communication amongst the Trinity is reflected in

the silent moment of Christ on the cross. Christ's cross is the cosmological sign of God's redeeming action effected in the world.

As far as the resurrection of Christ is concerned, modern Christologists interpret it as the second coming of Jesus. Panneberg, (in *Nyamiti 1984*), views the resurrection as the anticipatory actualisation of the end of history and the future of mankind. By rising from the dead, Christ revealed himself as the one who was yet to come into the world bringing liberation, equality, and the universal brotherhood and sisterhood for the whole of humanity.

Nyamiti's point on the universal redemption of the entire humanity is in conformity with Werrandy's theological conviction that those who are not Christians by profession of faith are also part of the universal redemption because they participate in the consolation and hope that stem from the risen Christ through charitable work, evangelisation, and the prayer of the Christians (Werrandy 2000: 264). Christ's resurrection and incarnation are regarded as the accomplishment of mankind's openness to God.

## **8.5 RESURRECTION FROM AN AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

In *The Southern Cross 4 April 2007*, a Catholic National weekly newspaper, Rasool explains resurrection from an African traditional perspective. In the African traditional religious context one dies one sort of life with a view to resurrecting into another type of life.

In African traditional initiation rites, a person attains or receives a new name, new clothing and a new function in life. One is revived and the community around is also revived through the sacrifice and rites of purification. The African Christians comprehend new life in Christ in the same manner. The rites of initiation that the Africans go through are similar to the sacraments of initiation all Christians go through in the church, the sacraments of initiation such as baptism and

confirmation. Christ and the African traditional ancestors went through resurrection in the process of death (Rasool 2007:9).

In *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy* (1991), Mbiti notes that Africans believe in the resurrection. The Africans hold many ideas about the life hereafter. They draw spiritual pictures, features, colours, and descriptions which are congruent to earthly life. Africans do not view physical death as the ultimate end of a human being because life continues in the next world. Therefore Africans award proper funerals to their departed. In addition, the departed are remembered by the living by giving them foodstuffs (Mbiti 1991:130).

It is the belief in the resurrection of the departed that influences the Africans to have an equilibrium between God, the spirits, the ancestors, and those yet to be born. Mugambi, in *Introduction to African Christian Theology* (1989:118) states that African religion, unlike Western religion, does not promise people a better life in the future. What is more interesting about the doctrine of resurrection according to African religion is that there is a connection between the physical world and the spiritual world. Thus, according to the African, there is no end of the world because human life goes on and on (Mbiti 1991:200).

## 8.6 CONCLUSION

In this discussion, we have not only seen that death is the process through which the dead qualify to be called ancestors, but we have also seen that the death and exultation of Christ brought humanity into a close relationship with God. Christ, as the ancestor of humanity becomes the head of the community of believers. Without the resurrection, death, and the cross of Christ, ancestors would be less effective in the life of the African Christians. The African Christians would not identify Christ as their ancestor if he had not overpowered

death. Just as his resurrection affects all humanity, so his ancestorship too will not exclude anybody at his second coming, because his ancestorship is truly human and will remain like that eternally.

## CHAPTER 9

### INCULTURATION

#### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this topic, I shall discuss the importance of evangelisation in the context of culture, acculturation, and inculturation. Culture should be used as a means of helping African Christians embrace the Gospel. The concept of inculturation is in conformity with an inclusive teaching of all the nations of the earth. Jesus' teaching was to be disseminated in various cultures and languages Matthew 10:15-16. The reason why the African Christians view Christianity as a foreign religion imposed upon their culture is because the question of evangelisation was not properly addressed culturally by modern missionaries in Africa. What the modern missionaries did instead according to Mugambi (1989:40) was they acculturated the African Christians into Christianity. Evangelisation was elucidated by the European missionaries in the context of acculturation. In *Introduction to African Christian Theology* (1989:40), Mugambi states that the missionary's activities in the early church had profound respect for the people's cultural and religious backgrounds. This is validated by the New Testament in which the Gospel and Jesus' teaching were culturally contextualised. This positive aspect contributed immensely to the spread of the Gospel in the first five centuries, particularly during the Graeco-Roman era. However, this positive trend was obliterated by the modern missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the negative perception of the African cultural and religious heritage. It is on these grounds, that to date theological endeavours are being made in Africa to present Christ in the African cultural context. This is the main issue I shall attempt to address in this chapter.

I shall begin first by defining the following key terms: culture, acculturation, and inculturation. Secondly, I shall discuss in depth different theological views propounded by different exponents of inculturation. Thirdly, I shall discuss the areas of consideration with reference to the implementation of inculturation. Discussion on areas of consideration is crucial to this discussion as it reminds the African Christians that not every element in their cultures is worth considering for inculturation.

## 9.2 CULTURE

Herskovic (1966:305), Ngewa (1998:21), Shorter (1997:4) and Yeow Choo (1983:15) define culture as the whole complex pattern of life that embraces knowledge, belief, identity, art, morals, law, custom and any other capacities and mental attitudes achieved by a person as a member of society. Culture can also be designated as the total way of life of a people that encompasses the art of thinking, the universe; life views and language. A language is an important aspect of a culture in the sense that the essence of contextualising the gospel is only adequate when it is communicated in the language of a particular people. A person within a society becomes naturally part of the cultural pattern. A culture is what a person learns and attains as a member of society. It consists of the learned part in contrast to the inherited parts of a person's mentality and behaviour. It is a method of inherited notions articulated in symbolic patterns through which a person communicates, continues, and advances his/her insight into attitudes towards life. Culture involves the whole context of the material objects of one's productivity, techniques, social directions, perspectives which are ultimately reflected in one's behaviour. The term 'culture' is derived from the Latin verb "*colere*" meaning to till, to cultivate. Adam was the first man to work out his culture as he was working in the garden at God's command.

### 9.3 ACCULTURATION

In *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (1997) Shorter defines acculturation as the meeting point between one culture and another or it is a meeting point between cultures. Culture comes into being in collective ways.

Acculturation therefore is a meeting point between two various sets of symbols and ideas. Acculturation also implies that Christian faith can be passed on from one culture to another. Acculturation is often associated with the theological notion of inculturation. The two terms, acculturation and inculturation can be used interchangeably. However, acculturation is a different sociological concept. From a theological perspective, acculturation is a sine qua non for inculturation.

### 9.4 INCULTURATION

According to Custodio (1993:57), Healy and Syberts (1996:31), Magesa (2004:76), Martey (1993:40), Muller (1991:15), Schineler (1990:20), Shorter (1988:22), Tihagale (1992:3), Walligo and Grollius (1986:80), inculturation is defined as authentic and critical endeavours to make Christ and his message of redemption comprehended by people of a particular, place and period. It is a process of interpreting one's faith and religious identity in one's cultural context.

It is a process of taking the African culture as a means of conveying the Gospel message to the African Christians in the African cultural set-up. The process of inculturation aims at giving a purified meaning compatible with Christian truths to the African Christians in the context of African cultural practices.

The process of inculturation can only take place by inserting the redemptive message of Christ into the mentality of the African Christians in the belief that Christ and his good news are versatile and challenge all the nations. The salient objective of inculturation and evangelisation is to allow the message of Christ to penetrate the blood of African Christians, making it responsive to their needs, aspirations, and entities. In addition to this, inculturation assists the African Christians in recovering their identity and dignity as Africans. Walligo (1986) stresses that the time has come for the churches in Africa to embark upon the assignment of studying the cultures, traditional religions, world views and aspirations of the people they encounter and apply whatever is viewed as culturally good and noble to them with a view to strengthening the Christian faith. Schineller (1990) views inculturation as the incarnation of Christian life and message in certain settings so that the entire experience of living the faith can find a meaning in the appropriate cultural elements. Inculturation becomes a guiding principle that activates and unifies the culture; changing it with a view to developing new Christians. Similarly, John Matiso Mbinda in (Magesa 2004:193) explains that inculturation is an endeavour made by indigenous Churches to propagate Christ and the values he stood for as seen in the Scriptures, involving symbolic expressions drawn out of the life experiences of the indigenous people. Mbinda notes that Christ must no longer be proclaimed to the African Christians as an expatriate because he is not confined to a certain culture. It is for this reason that theologians such as Bujo (2003), Buys and Nambala (2003), Martey (1993), and Schreiter (1991) equate the term inculturation with the term incarnation because it is based on the mystery of Christ's life as it is written in the Book of John 1:14. "The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us". It is in the context of incarnation (the process in which God became man and lived amongst humanity) that inculturation encapsulates all aspects of Christian life. The manifestation of God in the scriptures encounters the God who exists in the values of a culture and in the history of a particular nation.

The "Word" in the gospel comes across the word in any culture because God exists in all the cultures. When incarnation and inculturation form a bond they complement each other. Once this takes place the African Christians will no longer feel isolated from their cultural identity. Instead they will view themselves as genuine Africans, discovering God in their Africanness. In *Christianity and Rites of Passages: The Prospects of Inculturation* (1992:198) Charles O. Onuh notes that incarnation is God's real intervention in human history and the summit of his self-communication to humanity. Christ's intervention in human history and his manifestation to humanity through incarnation go beyond cultural and geographical limitations. Incarnation is the culmination of Christ being part of the entire humanity. In agreement with Onuh, Nolan (2006:57) in *Trefoil* points out that the gospel goes beyond all our cultures. Although the gospel and culture do not have anything in common, the Kingdom of God which the gospel proclaims is lived by men and women who are deeply associated with a particular culture. Therefore the assignment of building up the Kingdom cannot be disassociated from borrowing the elements of human cultures. On the other hand, Magesa (2004:16) argues that inculturation should not be understood as an endeavour to find the similarity between African and Christian religiosity. Inculturation is more than substituting African religious practices with Christian ones. Genuine inculturation is a profound and communal experience that emerges when there is a consistent quest for identification, reciprocal correction and the change between the gospel and culture. Magesa further explains that the "Word" became flesh denotes that God was truly both God and human. Inculturation, therefore, according to Magesa, becomes another way of describing Christian mission. If proclamation of the gospel sees mission in perspective of the "Word" to be proclaimed, inculturation will see the mission in perspective of the physical reality in which Jesus assumed his mission. Magesa, in *The Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (2004:163) explains that inculturation in Africa can only take place when African Christians are affirmed as Africans by the gospel message.

In practice this denotes that inculturation takes place when the African Christians do not feel guilty about articulating the reality about God and Jesus Christ, utilising symbols and images that appeal to their intellect, heart, and comprehension. In addition, inculturation takes place in Africa when the African Christians do not feel internally estranged when Christian symbols which are not known to them are used to reflect newly acknowledged reality which has become a spiritual part of their multiracial communities.

Magesa (2004) notes that the gospel loses its transforming power if it does not take into account the actual signs, symbols, and language of the people to whom it is addressed. At times African Christians argue that Christianity is incompatible with African culture because it is a foreign spiritual cultural import. However, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako in (Magesa 2004:113) dismiss this view by arguing that Christianity is endowed with the internal qualities that make it transcultural (that which goes beyond all cultures). The transculturality of Christianity makes it possible to be a part of the African culture like any other culture.. Lamin and Kwame further argue that St. Paul understood far better than the other disciples that Christianity possesses translatability (the ability to go beyond any cultures) of faith in Christ. In this context, St Paul was fully convinced that the message of Christ could be expressed beyond the Jewish, Greek, and Gentile cultures (Magesa 2004:163). Inculturation aims at deepening the faith of the African Christians.

Muller (1991:54) views inculturation as an extension of the incarnation of the Word of God into all human activities. According to Muller inculturation is very important particularly where peoples of various cultures are assembling.

According to Walter Van (1991) living the gospel in the African way denotes changing Christian symbols into African Christian symbols and transvaluing the African religious experience into Christian experience. Wilfred (1989) argues that inculturation has the cultural context of the African Christians.

However, Bruce (1982:21) does not concur with Wilfred because African Christians have not yet experienced the incorporation of culture, acculturation, and inculturation into the gospel. Thlagale (1991:11) points out that the African has been strangled resulting in their becoming retarded. For Thlagale, inculturation is a process that acknowledges that faith has its own life. According to Choo (1984) man is made in the image of God and therefore Christ is present in everyone's culture.

Choo's point on Christ being present in all the cultures is compatible with Kameeta's point on each nation having its own cultural right to worship God. Kameeta (2006) points out that the African Christians like other Christians in other nations are at liberty to worship God in their cultures. Kameeta criticises the missionaries for not being interested in knowing the African culture and listening to the way they experience God in their cultural context. In this regard, both inculturation and acculturation, according to Kameeta, did not take place. What the missionaries did instead was to impose their Western cultural teaching upon the African Christians. Kameeta (2006) notes that Jesus Christ is not a stranger to the Africans because the Africans gave him shelter and more importantly, they helped him carry his cross. The Africans too are delighted in the Good News of redemption. It should be borne in mind that rebelling against Christianity is not rebelling directly against Jesus, but against the method used by the missionaries to replace African religious cultural values with Western Christian cultural values.

Concurring with Kameeta's point on Christ not being an expatriate to the Africans, Mbiti (1991:140) points out that Christianity came to Africa before it reached Europe. Mbiti, therefore, urges African Christians to select African cultural religious symbols and rituals that can be incorporated into Christianity as part of African Christianity to generate new ideas based on their experience that they can use to enrich their Christian life, particularly where African cultural elements compatible with Christianity are lacking. Notwithstanding gradual endeavours which are being made to inculturate the gospel in Africa, Mbiti is of the opinion that foreigners are still a drawback in Africa because Christianity remains superficial. As such its impact cannot be felt in all the aspects of African life and in African problems. However, Mbiti is of the opinion that as far as health and education are concerned, Christianity has made a tremendous impact on the lives of the African Christians. Both Mbiti (1991) and Mugambi (1989) note that many African Christians have left the established churches and formed their own churches where they are culturally at liberty to include traditional African customs into their own Christian life. True inculturation, according to Mbiti, transcends adaptation models of contextualisation with a view to penetrating the hearts and souls of the African people. Through profound inculturation, people are challenged to find the richness of African Christianity and share this richness with other nations and cultures in the church at large. The merging of African culture with Christianity gives birth to newness, freshness, innovation, and a new state in evangelisation. Religion and culture are inseparable because both have a tremendous impact on each other. Religion has influenced African cultures and offered them their world-view. Mbiti (1991) states that the time has dawned for the African Christians when the seeds of the gospel will germinate and generate new flowers which the world has not yet experienced.

## 9.5 AREAS OF CONSIDERATION

By areas of consideration we mean cultural elements that should be considered by the African Christians and the African theologians when they are implementing inculturation. The areas of consideration involve challenges that the exponents and implementers of inculturation may encounter. John Mary Waliggo and A. Roest Crolius, in *A Volume of Essays Called Inculturation: Its Meaning and Agency* (1986), argue that there should be dialogue amongst the African theologians through interreligious services and exchange of notions with other religious groups. Martey (1993), Schineller (1990), Shorter (1988), Waliggo and Crolius (1986), and Nolan (2006) propose the following ideas for the implementation of inculturation:

- Inculturation should not be dominated by one cultural group;
- Other cultural groups should also be considered when implementing inculturation in the local churches;
- Inculturation should touch real-life experiences of the ordinary Christians in their situational cultural heritage;
- Prospective exponents of inculturation should be offered a theological training with a view to acquainting themselves with the cultures they work in;
- Inculturation should only accommodate African and Western cultural elements that are compatible with the gospel;
- Whenever the local churches decide on crucial cultural issues, preference should be given to the local people to propound what should be done;

- In the implementation of inculturation ideas from one tribe should not be imposed upon other tribes;
- Dialogue amongst all cultural communities and seminars for the laity and the youth at the level of small Christian communities should be initiated;
- Every ethnic group should be allowed to incorporate compatible values, customs and beliefs into liturgical celebrations, for instance, traditional aspects on naming, marriage, and burial ceremonies;
- Materials for inculturation should be written in local languages and theological meanings should be explained to the ordinary people;
- Inculturation should lead to promotion of identity and respect for the African cultural heritage;
- The African Christians should open their eyes and look at the African traditional religion in a positive light;
- All African Christians should be involved in the process of inculturation if it is to be successful;
- Well informed African theologians should be involved in the process of inculturation;
- Inculturation should emancipate women from discrimination evident in the missionary churches of the West;
- Inculturation should lead to the development of an African theology and Christology.

In *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (1974) Basil Moore propounds that a "Black Theology" within the context of inculturation will restore the dignity of the context of the African Christians.

In *African Theology and Inculturation* (1993:71), Martey, on the other hand, propounds that the "Bible" should be used in the implementation of inculturation as an original testimony of God's revelation in Jesus to the African Christians.

Magesa (2004), like Martey, is emphatic that Christ is the centre of inculturation.

In addition to this, there must be a Christology of liberation that God promises and offers to the world.

## 9.6 CONCLUSION

In the preceding discussion we have seen that the gospel needs to be inculturated so that it can be rooted deeply in the hearts of the African Christians. We have also established that the gospel is still on the surface because the African Christians have not yet accepted it as part of their culture. Inculturation will deepen the faith of the African Christians. It will help them not only in restoring their identity in Christ, but also in taking ownership of their faith. It prevents them perceiving Christianity as a foreign religion. We also found out that the gospel transcends all the cultures and at the same time all the cultures are open to transcendence so as to be changed by the gospel. Culture can be used as an important vehicle and channel to help any nation understand the values of the gospel. Inculturation allows every nation to find its identity in Christ. However, the African Christians should bear in mind that the gospel challenges all cultures. In the past, particularly during the time of St. Paul, there were many cultures that were challenged by the gospel. Both Jesus and Paul had to transcend the culture of their time, for example the Hebrew culture with its persistence on circumcision, filthy food and discrimination against the Samaritans. Subsequently, it was challenged and undermined by the Greek culture. We all need to inculturate the gospel with a view to recognising our cultural values, customs, and beliefs and transcending them in Christ. The power of the risen Lord according to Mugambi (1989) challenges every culture, including the Eurocentric and Afrocentric cultures. The power of the cross challenges all nations, societies and places.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE SIMILARITIES AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SAINTS AND THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL ANCESTORS

#### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter I shall discuss the similarities and the differences between the saints and the African traditional ancestors. Since the definition of the ancestors has already been dealt with in the first chapter of this research, the definition I shall give in this chapter will be confined to the saints. I shall first begin by defining the meaning of the term "saints" in two senses. Then, I shall explain in detail the role played by the ancestors and the saints in the context of their similarities and differences.

#### 10.2 WHO ARE THE SAINTS?

According to Steven (1989) saints were heroes and heroines who followed the consequences of their faith fully and unswervingly. They are saints either by virtue of having performed miraculous healing or by virtue of having been martyred for their faith in Christ. Even though styles and fashions change like the popularity of the saints, every age observes them, writes about them, probes their lives, explores their history and criticises the facts about them. Each generation observes new names and new personalities added to the list of the Saints. saints are very fascinating people because there is an unending curiosity about their lives.

In *The Southern Cross 24, 2007*, King firstly defines the saints as the people who originally acknowledged Jesus as their Lord. Secondly, King defines the Saints as those who finished their earthly journey and

toil. Thirdly, saints are those whose investigative process of the sainthood has been publicly declared by the church to be with God.

In the ordinary sense saints are the faithful (Christians) who are set apart as chosen people of God. Christians are saints by virtue of their baptism. Christians are called by God with a holy calling. They should live in holy conduct and godliness (Timothy 3:11). The New Testament refers to everyone as a "saint". In addition to this, collectively the church is also referred to as the church of the saints. People are set aside for God when they become the followers of Christ (Dagosamah 1999:193-194)

The saints, like the African traditional ancestors, were heroes and intimate allies of God. Both men and women are canonised as saints unlike the ancestors. It is only men who are declared ancestors, women and children are often excluded from being ancestors. The lives of the saints, like the lives of the ancestors in the African religious context, can be viewed as a rich source of theology (Stevens 1987:7). The supernatural powers which the saints are endowed with stem from their close contact with God.

The Saints, like the African traditional ancestors, intervene in the affairs of Christians, particularly in times of trial and tribulation making use of their direct access to God. Another reason why the Saints intervene in human affairs is that they understand the situation of the living.

The Saints know the situation of the living on earth because they had the same experiences as the living. It is on these grounds that the living are always confident that the saints, like the ancestors, will be sympathetic to them and intercede for them as intermediaries.

Saints are seen as loyal defenders of God who stand in His presence and enjoy his favour; they are in a position to act as God's friend at the

court. The aspect of friendship is also found between God and the African traditional ancestors. As far as mediation is concerned, the saints are in a position to be both personal and universal mediators. The intercessions of the saints can be involved on a personal and universal level. The intercessions of African traditional ancestors, on the other hand, can only be invoked on a personal, family and clan level. The intercessions of the ancestors are never invoked on a universal level. The descendants of the ancestors invoke their prayers on the basis of family ties. The ancestors are expected to listen to the outcry of their descendants because they are biologically related. The saints, on the other hand, are open and receptive to the prayers from any Christian who dedicates himself or herself to them. Saints, like the African traditional ancestors, qualify to be saints. Not everybody becomes a saint after death. Similarly, in the African traditional religious context, not everybody becomes an ancestor after death. Martyrs, for example, were canonised as saints by virtue of their suffering for their faith. Ancestors or African traditional ancestors, on the other hand, are mysterious agents because of death and not on *account of suffering or for any miracles they performed while they were on earth* (Tihagale 1991:8).

### 10.3 CONCLUSION

Both the African traditional ancestors and the saints participate in the ancestorship of Christ, the Supreme ancestor. Their ancestorship and sainthood are accomplished within Christ. The Saints are our ancestors in faith. Christ's ancestorship is the highest fulfilment of the African traditional ancestorship (Nyamiti 1984). Fear of the malevolent spirits of the ancestors paves the way for the gospel of freedom and hope.

It is Christ who liberates those who are enslaved by malevolent spirits. Christ liberates African Christians from the fear of the dead.

CHAPTER 11.1  
Notwithstanding this fact, however, the African Christians should seek for the intervention of both the saints and the ancestors because of their closeness to God. On the other hand, the living should also pray for the ancestors because the ancestors need to be saved. Prayers continue to be directed to the ancestors but above all, they are directed to God on behalf of the dead and the living.

## CHAPTER 11

### 11.1 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The information contained in this thesis has been collected through coursework. A number of books on African religion and theology, Journals, newspapers, and magazines from the UNAM's Library, Gobabis National Library, Gunichas RC Mission Library, St.Charles Lwanga Seminary Library. St Joseph's International Scholasticate in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, and Oblates' Library in Gunichas have been consulted and have played a major role in the completion of this thesis. This thesis does not contain any interviews. Its population is limited to the African, Asian American, and European Theologians cited in this thesis. The data contained in this thesis is chiefly qualitative.

## CHAPTER 12

### 12.1 GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this study *Jesus as an African Traditional Ancestor: His relevance to African Christians and Africa and a discussion of his multifaceted roles from an African perspective*, we have made an attempt to say who Christ is in the African traditional and cultural context. We admitted that Christ is present in all the cultures and therefore the implementation of inculturation is relevant in Africa. Christ then can be introduced into all the cultures according to Magesa (2004) and Martey (1993). On the other hand, Nolan in *Trefoil* (2006) argues that the gospel challenges and goes beyond every culture. Nolan further argues that the gospel redeems or liberates all cultures, but this can only take place when it challenges all cultures. Some of the cultural notions are compatible with the gospel. In *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (2004) Stinton depicts Jesus Christ as a liberator, ancestor, healer, etc. Christ is seen not only as a liberator for the African Christians, but also for other nations (See Werrandy: 2000).

We also agreed in this study that inculturation restores the identity of the African Christians because during the missionary evangelisation the African Christians were made to believe that redemption does not come through Christ alone, but through accepting the right way of living. We found out in this study that Christ is seen by many African Christians as their ancestor on the basis of his ancestral qualities and on the basis of his redemption and death for all. We agreed in this study that there is a need to restore African religiosity in order to build a truly African theology.

Therefore inculturation will play an important role in transforming the gospel in Africa and there is no need for the churches in Africa to inherit a burden of foreign rites as important elements that can be used the African Christians to identify themselves with the crucified and victorious Lord. Saprong, a Ghanaian Catholic Bishop, in *Stinton (2004)*, argues that before the African Christians adopt Christ as their ancestor, they should think of an inclusive African model. It is not good enough to use African traditional ancestors as a model for Christ because they are exclusive.

How can the African Christians perceive God as the loving Father when they were told that everything they had was unworthy of God? Surely, all these factors resulted in the African Christians internalising a feeling of inferiority. We agreed in this study that the African Christians have to embark upon the struggle for localising the gospel in order to emancipate themselves from the burden of oppression and injustice. However, we have seen in this study that much is still to be done in order to improve the quality of African Christianity so that the African Christians may come to the realisation that their Africaness and experiences are acceptable before God.

We also admitted in this study that salvation and liberation are used interchangeably to give a new meaning to African Christianity. It is argued in this study that the African traditional ancestors do not deserve to be used as a model for Christ because some practiced dictatorship and witchcraft. It is pointed out in this study that the embarrassing history of the Africans is reflected or demonstrated in the humiliated and the crucified Christ (Stinton: 2004). Therefore, African Christians have the right to identify themselves with Christ as their ancestor. In this study it is argued that culture and the gospel do not have anything in common; the gospel is proclaimed by men and women who are linked to the cultures. However, the gospel borrows elements from cultures. Hinnells (1988) finds out that African traditional

religion is tenacious because it survived numerous modifications and interpretations. Hinnells (1988) reveals that 70% of Christians and Muslims in Africa practise African traditional religion.

## CHAPTER

### 13.1 EXPLANATION OF TERMS

**Africanisation** – the process of making everything belong to the African

**Anthropocentric** – God which centres upon humanity

**Canonised** – the state of being declared a Saint

**Celestial** – God which belongs to heaven

**Empire** – that which is systematic. That which involves human organisation

**Ecological origin** – the state of the earth of a country

**Historic healing** – a healing that makes the whole person, both body, mind and spirit

**Humanity** – an attitude towards both women and men

**Humanism** – the concept of which God becomes born in the process of which God identifies Himself with mankind for redemption

**Incarnation** – the process of bringing the divine closer to the earthly

**Indigenism** – the implementation and improvement of traditional

**Integration** – the process of using science by taking account of its own goals

**Intercultural**

## CHAPTER 13

### 13.1 EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Africanisation – the process of making everything belong to the African

Anthropocentric – that which centres upon humanity

Canonised – the state of being declared a Saint

Celestial – that which belongs to heaven

Enigma – that which is mysterious. That which surpasses human comprehension

Etiological origin – the study of the cause of something

Holistic healing – a healing that involves the whole person, both body, mind and spirit

Humanity – an inclusive term for both women and men

Incarnation – the process in which God becomes man or the process in which God identifies Himself with mankind for redemption.

Inculturation - the process of bringing the gospel closer to the evangelised

Inculturationalists – the implementers and exponents of inculturation

Indigenisation – the process of making something belong naturally to its native place

Krisis – Direction

Localisation – Confining something to a particular place so as to be owned by the native people.

Men – an inclusive term for both men and women, in some cases it also refers exclusively to men

Mganga – a Kiswahili word for a traditional healer

Missiological – that which is of the mission

Natural tie – a biological relationship with one's descendants

Omniscient – all knowing

Plenipotentiaries – people invested with full power to carry out an ambassadorial task

Supernatural tie – a divine and spiritual relationship that ancestors have with God

Terrestrial - that which belongs to the earth

Transcultural – a culture that has the capacity to go beyond other cultures

Transtability – the capacity to go beyond something

Utopia – the state of being perfect, an imaginary place where everything is thought to be perfect

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