

CHRISTOLOGY

CHRIST AS HEALER AND ANCESTOR IN AFRICA

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the typical “face” of Christianity may more likely be encountered in Lagos than in London. We in the West may live to see the day when “the phrase ‘a white Christian’ may sound like a curious oxymoron, as mildly surprising as ‘a Swedish Buddhist.’”¹ What is emerging is the sunrise of a fourth major branch of the Christian faith, not so easily pigeonholed within the familiar categories of Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Christianity. Andrew Walls predicts that if current trends continue, African Christianity will become “the representative Christianity of the twenty-first century.”² This emerging reality is why Philip Jenkins has boldly proclaimed the emerging Majority World church as “the next Christendom.”³

THE NEXT FACES OF CHRISTIANITY

The Rise of the Global Church

The shift from the West to the South is even more dramatic when one realizes that Western Christianity is increasingly becoming secularized, nominal, and even hostile to historic Christian confessions, whereas Christianity in the Southern hemisphere is vibrant, supernaturalist, and largely orthodox.⁴ In other words, Southern Christianity is an evangelistic and reproducible faith. While Western churches are looking increasingly like either entertainment centers or politically correct corporations, the African church is busy preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, baptizing new believers, and planting churches.

This should be a clarion call for Western Christians who are committed to historic Christianity. Hendrick Kraemer once said that “the Church is always in a state of crisis

1. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 3.

2. Andrew Walls, “Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1, no. 1 (June

1998): 2.

3. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 4.

4. See Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.”⁵ The church in the West must wake up and recognize that not only is the *numerical* percentage of Western Christians hemorrhaging away at an alarming rate, but the *spiritual* center of Christianity has already shifted to the church in the Majority World. We are in the midst of a massive spiritual crisis in the West, which, mercifully, is coinciding with one of the most dramatic and vibrant expansions of Christianity in history taking place in Africa. Therefore, we must learn to stand shoulder to shoulder with our African brothers and sisters, who are in the bright sunrise of a great movement of God across the continent of Africa, and allow them to teach us and help us to bring renewal and revitalization back to the Western church.

We have much to learn as well as to relearn from Africa, although there is also much that our own heritage, history, and collective Christian memory have to teach Africa. It is time for a truly mutual exchange. We should recall that African proverb from Ghana cited in the introduction: “The mother feeds the baby daughter before she has teeth, so that the daughter will feed the mother when she loses her teeth.”⁶ Perhaps our own faith and theological reflections can be nourished by listening to the voices of our young African brothers and sisters in the faith. As Andrew Walls has said so well, “Shared reading of the Scriptures and shared theological reflection will be to the benefit of all, but the oxygen-starved Christianity of the West will have the most to gain.”⁷

If African Christianity is to be the standard-bearer of Christianity for the twenty-first century, this means that “what happens within the African churches in the next generation will determine the whole shape of church history for centuries to come ... what sort of theology is more characteristic of Christianity in the twenty-first century may well depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians.”⁸ In this chapter we seek to understand what is “happening in the minds of African Christians,” particularly as it relates to Christology.

The Christological Puzzle

For Christians, Christological reflection is the centerpiece of all theological enquiry. Indeed, the entire Christian faith stands or falls on the person of Jesus Christ. If, for example, John Hick and the other British theologians in *The Myth of God Incarnate* are correct in their denial of the full deity of Jesus Christ, then Christianity, as Christianity, has been struck down. The new “Christianity” that emerges would be nothing more than a vacuous and ephemeral projection of relativism hiding beneath the language of devotion and piety. If such views were to gain traction in the life of the church, Christianity would soon be cast, like the broken statue of Stalin, into the dustbin of history.

5. Hendrick Kraemer, as quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 2.

6. Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 252.

7. Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 47.

8. Andrew F. Walls, “Towards an Understanding of Africa’s Place in Christian History,” in J. S. Pobee, ed., *Religion in a Pluralistic Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 183.

In contrast, if the Christians who formulated the Nicene Creed are correct in their affirmation that Jesus Christ is "very God of very God," who "for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit," then Christianity has a powerful message worthy of being proclaimed to the ends of the earth. In short, Christianity derives its life and meaning from Christ himself. Thus, Christology will always remain central to Christian reflection.

However, despite my strong affirmation of the Christology expressed in the Nicene Creed (AD 325), it would be a mistake to understand even this powerful statement as the final word on Christology as if no more conversations are either needed or desired. Indeed, the emergence of the later, more precise, Chalcedonian formula (AD 451), which finally hammered out the "two natures, one person" Christology that has become received orthodoxy, demonstrates that further, post-Nicene conversations were needed. The importance of the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian formulation lies in the fact that they were *ecumenical* councils. In other words, dozens of general church councils over the years have produced various Christological statements, but an *ecumenical* council is one that finds broad acceptance as "an expression of the mind of the whole body of the faithful both clerical and lay, the *sensus communis* of the Church."⁹

The proceedings of these ecumenical councils remind me of the experience of sitting down at a table before a large, thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle. Many of us know how frustrating it can be to keep trying piece after piece that looks like it should fit, but it doesn't. I have even been guilty of trying to force a piece into the wrong space, even though I know only one will be a true fit. Eventually, I find the proper puzzle piece that provides an exact fit.

Likewise, the delegates to the Council of Nicea and the Council of Chalcedon were seeking to be faithful to the hundreds of Christological "pieces" found in the texts of Scriptures. It was their unenviable task to put the whole "picture" of Christ together for the very first time in such a way as to find a perfect match for every piece. At times, various groups presented "pieces" they believed were a proper fit regarding the humanity or deity or natures or wills of Christ, but, in the end, each was declared to be improper fits. The proceedings of these councils did more to declare which pieces were *not* true pieces of the puzzle and should be discarded, than to provide a final, definitive statement of Christology that would silence all future discussions. We may know that the "Arius," "Nestorius," and "Eutyches" pieces do not fit the Christological puzzle, but this is not to say that a final and complete picture emerged.

Thus, even while fully affirming an ecumenical council like Chalcedon, we can also admit that the proceedings left several Christological questions unresolved. For example, precisely how does the *person* of Christ (which is the part of the puzzle the Council focused on) relate to the *work* of Christ? As Oscar Cullmann has pointed out, "the New Testament hardly ever speaks of the person of Christ without at the same time speaking of his work."¹⁰ This dilemma was also felt by Wolfhart Pannenberg in

9. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 2nd series (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1999), xii.

10. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959, 1963), 3.

his *Jesus: God and Man*.¹¹ Chalcedon seems to be focused almost exclusively on the person of Christ.

Another example is reflected in the insightful question about Chalcedon raised by Millard Erickson: "How do we integrate and understand a Christology 'from above' with a Christology 'from below'?"¹² In other words, the Council of Chalcedon was looking at the Christological puzzle from the upper side, that is, from the divine perspective of God's initiative in becoming a man. They did not deliberate or discuss how the incarnation is understood from the perspective of, for example, fifth-century Persian Christians who, at the time of this council, were being persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Even these few examples reveal two important insights about Chalcedonian Christology. First, even if we accept, as the *sensus communis* has, that every single piece Chalcedon placed into the Christological puzzle was a perfect fit and every single piece they rejected was truly worth rejecting, we must still recognize that the puzzle is much bigger than Chalcedon or any other council could fully tackle.¹³ Second, as it turns out, the puzzle is more complex than an ordinary one because each piece of the puzzle seems to have two sides: an "upper side" revealing God's perspective on Christ (eternality, Trinity, Son of God, etc.) and an "under side" revealing the human perspective on Christ (teacher, healer, friend of sinners, etc.). A complete Christology (if it is even possible) must surely be the work of many generations of faithful Christians, not merely the work of a particular council.

Christological reflection must be a part of the ongoing life of the church not only because of the sheer depth and glory of Christ himself, but also because each generation produces new challenges and questions that call us back to the biblical text and the apostolic witness concerning Christ. Even though the church has already said a collective "no" to the Ariuses and the Eutycheses of the ancient world, we must find new ways to say "no" to the John Hicks and the J. A. T. Robinsons of the contemporary world. We must also be reflectively critical about our own, less obvious, deep heresies that creep into our own worldview, such as the pathology of unbridled individualism so deeply engrained in Western evangelicalism. In short, each generation must learn to recognize the heresies of its day as well as the previously rejected heresies that, from time to time, get represented for fresh consideration.

This chapter is dedicated to listening to what African Christians have been saying concerning Christology. However, it is important that any new Christological discussions be heard in the larger context of those reflections that have stood the test of time and the test of many generations of Christians now in the presence of the living Christ. G. K. Chesterton once said that "tradition is the greatest expression of democracy." What he meant was that by listening attentively to the voices of those long dead

11. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, 2nd ed., trans. by Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968, 1977), 112, 137, 167, 186–89, 210, 279, 286–93, 300–303, 324, 360–61, 365, 397.

12. Millard Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 11.

13. I realize that not all of the Eastern churches accepted the

language of Chalcedon. However, the signed agreement between the Pope and the Assyrian Church of the East in 1993 demonstrates that, while the Eastern Church objected to some of the language, they were in broad agreement with the theology of Chalcedon. See "Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East" (November 11, 1994), *Information Service* 88, no. 1 (1995): 1.

(tradition), we actually bring more people to the table who might not have our particular cultural or theological biases and who can provide a check and balance to the tendencies that tempt us to force a piece that doesn't fit into the picture.

In short, we are always enriched by those who have struggled before us. We are not the first Christians to reflect deeply on the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Nevertheless, the fact that millions of Christians have already devoted countless hours to Christological reflection does not relieve us of the sacred responsibility of understanding Christ in the light of the issues we face in our own time. We desperately need the input and perspective of African Christians concerning Jesus Christ. I sincerely hope that this chapter reflects this balance between honoring the past and yet being enriched by these fresh new voices from the Majority World church.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

Christological reflection was first stimulated by Jesus Christ himself when he posed the question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). Jesus then asked Peter and the other disciples in a more direct and pointed fashion: "Who do *you* say that I am?" (v. 15, emphasis added). At a very basic level, Christology is the answer to this question.

For many years, African Christians were not encouraged to reflect on this question for themselves. Instead, they were taught to mimic what they had been taught. They were, in effect, answering the question, "Who do the *missionaries* say the Son of Man is?" The Africans learned to faithfully repeat what they had been taught about Christ. But as the number of African Christians grew and theological reflection deepened, many Africans began to sense the Lord Jesus turning to Africans *as Africans* and asking, "Who do *you* say that I am?" This question has stimulated a whole generation of African Christians and theologians, men and women, educated and illiterate, to speak out about the meaning of Jesus Christ for the African.

However, the emergence of an indigenous African Christology has not come easily. Paul Hiebert has correctly pointed out that the marks of an indigenous church are much more than the familiar three selfs: self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating. The most neglected and missing "self," argues Hiebert, is *self-theologizing*.¹⁴ The central difficulty, it seems, is that the Africans arrived at the "Christological puzzle" quite late and were not entirely sure that they had their own contribution to make.

One of the best analogies that describes the African experience comes from Anselme Sanon, a Roman Catholic archbishop in the country of Burkina Faso. Sanon begins by picturing the scene of Peter and John running to the empty tomb (John 20).¹⁵ John outran Peter and arrived first, but he didn't go inside. Peter arrived and went into the tomb and saw that the body was gone. He also noticed that the grave

14. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 97. The original "three-self" conception of indigeneity was articulated in 1851 by the missionary statesman and leader of the Church Missionary

Society, Henry Venn.

15. The text does not explicitly say that John was running with Peter. It only says that Peter "and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved" — widely understood to be a reference to John.

clothes were carefully folded up and placed to one side (20:7). Everything seemed to be neat and in a state of order. John also entered the tomb and, the text declares, "he saw and believed." There in the empty tomb, Peter and John join the women (who had earlier become the first witnesses to the resurrection) in a new and profound Christological reflection: He is the risen Lord!

Sanon goes on to point out how generation after generation has symbolically followed the women and the disciples into the empty tomb and have also contemplated and reflected on Christ. They put various words and descriptors about Jesus Christ all over the empty tomb. Indeed, they left everything in good order, well classified, and neatly explained. The Africans are some of the last people to arrive at the tomb. When they do arrive, Sanon asks, "what can be said of Jesus of Nazareth that has not [already] been said?"¹⁶ Those who have gone before have left behind creeds and formulations, icons and images, theology and sculptures; "everything has been tried, everything done, to transmit the best of this face, to deliver the secret of its beauty."¹⁷

But, as explored earlier, the full Christological puzzle will not be complete until the Africans have reflected long and deep on what it means for Christ to come into Africa. John V. Taylor once said:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Savior of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of her total, uninhibited humanity, would they be acceptable?¹⁸

As each generation of Christians reflected on Christ, they observed different facets of his glory. Naturally, each generation is tempted to think that their particular insights into Christ are normative and represent the last word for each succeeding generation. However, as we have noted, the "Christological puzzle" is exceedingly rich and textured.

Jaroslav Pelikan, in his *Jesus through the Centuries*,¹⁹ has carefully documented how different generations have responded to the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" He documents eighteen different portraits of Christ over the centuries. For the early Jewish believers he was the Messiah, the fulfillment of Jewish prophetic hopes and expectations. However, this image (while completely true) was insufficient to fully capture what the Gentiles had found in Jesus. For the Gentiles, to call Jesus the Messiah would have been merely mimicking what Peter said of Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of

16. Anselme T. Sanon, "Jesus, Master of Initiation," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 92.

17. Ibid.

18. John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence and*

African Religion (London: SCM, 1963), 7 (in the Fortress Press ed. of *The Primal Vision*, the quote is on p. 24).

19. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1985).

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the living God" (Matt. 16:16 TNIV).²⁰ The Gentiles did not share the Jewish prophetic hopes for a coming messiah. Therefore, the title *Messiah* did not carry the same meaning for Gentiles as it did for Jews. This explains why, in the book of Acts, Paul continues to preach to Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 9:22; 17:3; 18:5), while curiously avoiding this title in preaching to Gentiles. Instead, he seems to prefer to proclaim the "Lord Jesus" to Gentiles (Acts 15:11; 16:31; 19:5, 17; 20:21).²¹

Centuries later, in the post-Constantinian period of church history, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire. During this period Christological reflection began to emphasize that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of the nations. Later, during the Renaissance, with the increased emphasis on human reason and autonomy, Jesus was celebrated as the Universal Man. In times of war and conflict, he is looked to as the Prince of Peace. In our own time, we have seen Jesus burst the borders of Western Christendom and become a source of comfort to those who are disenfranchised and suffering. For our time, Pelikan argues, Jesus has become the great "Liberator" and the "Man who belongs to the world."²²

All of these images must be tested by the Scriptures and the apostolic witness to Jesus, since the Word of God provides divine revelation about Jesus Christ and the trustworthy record of the actual eye and ear witnesses to him. Each of the images that have emerged reflects genuine and helpful insights into the Lord Jesus Christ. As with all metaphors, each of these images also holds the potential to lead astray without constant vigilance and clarification. Yet, even those Christological reflections that stand the test of Scripture and time cannot be used to declare a moratorium on Christological reflection. If the gospel had stayed contained within the single ethnicity of Judaism, we would not have benefited from the Christological translatability whereby the Gentile, Hellenistic Christians reflected on the same Jesus and had new insights because of their own cultural and social context.

In the same way, as the gospel has been translated into Chinese, Indian, African, Korean, and other cultures, we gain more and more insights into the beauty and reality of Jesus Christ. I have referred to this phenomenon as the "ontic expansion of God in Jesus Christ."²³ This expression, of course, does not refer to any ontological change in the nature of Jesus Christ himself, but rather, to how our own understanding and insight into the full nature and work of God in and through Jesus Christ is continually expanding as more and more people groups come to the feet of Jesus. With this in mind we now turn to an examination of African Christology.

20. It seems clear that, despite the widespread use of the title "Christ," it was not considered mandatory. The term does not appear a single time in the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds.

21. By the time of Paul's letters, the term *Christ* was widely used (Paul uses it 270 times) by Gentiles. But, as Larry Hurtado points out, this word as used by Gentile Christians was a *name* for Jesus rather than the Jewish *title* of Jesus. See Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 99.

22. Pelikan's eighteen images of Christ in *Jesus through the Centuries* are: the Rabbi, the Turning Point of History, the Light

of the Gentiles, the King of Kings, the Cosmic Christ, the Son of Man, the True Image, Christ Crucified, the Monk who Rules the World, the Bridegroom of the Soul, the Divine and Human Model, the Universal Man, the Mirror of the Eternal, the Prince of Peace, the Teacher of Common Sense, the Poet of the Spirit, the Liberator, and the Man who Belongs to the World.

23. Timothy C. Tennent, "The Challenge of Churchless Christianity," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 4 (October 2005): 174-75.

Key Themes in African Christology

As late as 1967 John Mbiti, widely regarded as one of the leading pioneers of African theology, bewailed the fact that Africa is "a church without a theology, without theologians, and without theological concerns."²⁴ What he meant was that despite the presence of hundreds of African theologians and various theological institutions, African theology was "imported" from the outside. Bolaji Idowu articulated the same frustration in 1965 when he said that all Africa had was "a prefabricated theology, a book theology ... what she reads in books written by European theologians, or what she is told by Europeans is accepted uncritically and given out undigested in preaching or teaching."²⁵ John Pobee has characterized this situation as the "North Atlantic Captivity of the Church," whereby Christianity in Africa begins "with an assumed definition of the Christian faith which is definitely North Atlantic—intellectually, spiritually, liturgically [and] organizationally."²⁶

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, such statements cannot now be made without serious qualification. While there are still signs of Africa's "theological captivity" to the West, the last forty years have seen the rising tide of genuine African reflection and theological contributions represented by dozens of landmark books and articles by African theologians. The center of Christian gravity has now shifted to Africa, giving it a prominence hardly imaginable forty years ago. In 1967 Mbiti had declared that "African concepts of Christology do not exist."²⁷ By 2005 Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti declared that "Christology is the subject which has been most developed in today's African theology."²⁸

Today's student has the opportunity to become acquainted with several important works on Christology written by Africans. Yet, curiously, the insights of these thinkers are largely ignored by Western theologians writing in the area of Christology. However, if we truly aspire to think and live as globally oriented Christians, we must become acquainted with the reflections and insights of Africans concerning Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it is important to reflect on how these newer, African indigenous Christological works relate to the traditional Western Christological formulations of Nicea (325), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553), and Constantinople III (680). It is only with this context that we can then examine some of the specific Christological contributions by African theologians.

1. A Theology from Below

A survey of the major works on African Christology reveals at least four distinctive features that African writers tend to emphasize. First, as noted earlier, the starting point and main concern of African Christology is "from below," not "from above."

24. John Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology," in *Christ and the Younger Churches*, ed. Georg F. Vicedom (London: SPCK, 1972), 51.

25. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 22–23.

26. John S. Pobee, "Jesus Christ—the Life of the World: An African Perspective," *Ministerial Formation* 21 (January 1983): 5,

quoted in Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 25.

27. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology," 51. Even as late as 1982 Aylward Shorter spoke of the "failure to produce a convincing African or Black Christology" (see "Folk Christianity and Functional Christology," *Afer* 24 [1982]: 134).

28. Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, 3.

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Two implications result from this perspective. The first is that African thinkers are not as focused on the ontology of Christ and the relationship of his deity and his humanity as Western theologians have been. Africans do not invest a lot of time discussing precisely how the two natures of Christ become united into one theanthropic person. They rarely discuss how the two wills of Christ confirm him as the God-Man without confusion or compromise. Yet, these were all central concerns of the ecumenical councils that tended to focus on the person of Christ.

In contrast, African Christology tends to be more holistic in the way it integrates the person and work of Christ. Its view of the person of Christ is constantly informed by what Christ has accomplished in history and what he continues to do in the world. There is a deep concern in African Christology to demonstrate that Christ is no stranger to the practical realities of poverty, illiteracy, ethnic tensions, colonialism, dictatorship, illness, disenfranchisement, and suffering, all of which Pobee and Akinade have aptly called, Africa's "multiheaded hydra."²⁹ Africans tend to examine the "Christological puzzle" from the underside, not from the upper side. Therefore, their Christologies tend to focus more on Jesus' work than on his person in isolation. As John Pobee has noted, "Christology is not only the person of Christ, but also what he does."³⁰

The second implication of Africans' starting their Christology "from below" is that its overall approach is more holistic and integrative in explaining how the person and work of Christ apply to the whole of African life. This inevitably means that African Christology is almost unintelligible apart from soteriological, ecclesiological, and even eschatological themes. Many Africans' early exposure to Western, missionary-borne Christianity left the impression that Jesus Christ was the expert in protecting the individual from punishment in the afterlife and vouchsafing the African's safe passage into heaven, a place of joy and bliss. While this emphasis is true, it tended to ignore the traditional African worldview, which did not recognize any fundamental distinction or clear demarcation between the visible and the invisible worlds.

The early preaching about Jesus Christ did not, for example, point out that Jesus was Lord of the crops or the one who provided protection during dangerous journeys or who assisted in the safe birth of a new baby. The nineteenth-century missionaries did not generally come from Christian traditions that practiced casting out demons or were accustomed to praying for God to bring in the crops, except perhaps during times of extreme drought. In short, the Jesus Christ who was preached was often a truncated Christ, not measuring up fully to the biblical picture of Jesus' life, work, and ministry.

John Mbiti tells the story of one of the first Africans to go to Europe to study for the ministry. He learned German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and learned about the writings of Bultmann, Barth, Küng, and Niebuhr, among others. He carefully studied church history, systematic theology, homiletics, and biblical exegesis. He was eventually awarded a degree and returned to Africa. The relatives and neighbors in

29. Akintunde Akinade, "Who Do You Say that I Am? — An Assessment of Some Christological Constructs in Africa," *Africa Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (April 1995): 191. See John S. Pobee, "In Search of Christology in Africa: Some Considerations for

Today," in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 10.

30. Pobee, "In Search of Christology in Africa," 10.

his home village were so excited about his newly acquired knowledge (he was the first to ever receive a higher theological degree from his village) that upon his return after several years away, they planned a large celebration to welcome him home.

However, during the festival the man's older sister suddenly shrieked and fell to the ground. Everyone gathered around her and called her brother to come and help. He came and insisted that she be taken immediately to the hospital. They reminded him that the hospital was over fifty miles away. Someone else pointed out that she was possessed by a demon and the hospital would not be able to help her anyway. The village chief insisted that since the brother had studied the Bible and theology for all these years, he should be able to help her himself. Despite his great learning, Mbiti concluded, the man was not able to help his sister because "Bultmann has demythologized demon possession."³¹ Mbiti acknowledges that the story is fictional and caricatures Western Christianity within a narrow band of Protestant liberalism, but it is still important that we listen to this story because it gives an important insight into how Western Christianity is *perceived* and into the real disconnect that many Africans sense between the Jesus Christ of Western Christianity and the real life issues and needs facing Africans.

2. Conscious Awareness of Traditional Christological Formulations

The second distinctive feature of African Christology is its conscious awareness of traditional Christological formulations from the West. Unlike Western theologians who often write in isolation from the wider global context, African theologians are keenly aware of the historic Western Christological focus on precise philosophical and metaphysical questions concerning the person of Christ. It is true that some African theologians are critical of the way the councils produced "metaphysical rather than biblically functional images of Jesus,"³² or complain that the historic formulations are "static"³³ and fail to "touch the souls" of Africans or relate to the "concrete lives of people."³⁴ But the overall tenor of African Christology is marked by a profound respect for historic Christian confessions.

In fact, John Pobee encourages emerging African theologians to listen carefully to those who have gone before us so that we "do not go hopelessly wrong." He reminds Africans that they are not "starting from scratch," but that they must write in the context of the *depositum fidei* that should inform all African Christology.³⁵ John Onaiyekan calls the classical formulations "valid reference points" and argues that every African Christian should "consider this classical Christology part of the common theological patrimony of the Church, of which we are full-fledged members."³⁶ In

31. To read the full story, see John Mbiti, "Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church," in *Mission Trends, #3: Third World Theologies*, ed. Gerald Anderson and Thomas Stransky (New York: Paulist; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 6–8.

32. This comment by John Pobee is reported in Akinade, "Who Do You Say that I Am?" 186.

33. Akinade, "Who Do You Say that I Am?" 181.

34. Robert J. Schreiter, "Jesus Christ in Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, ix.

35. Pobee, "In Search of Christology in Africa," 10–11.

36. John Onaiyekan, "Christological Trends in Contemporary African Theology," in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, ed. William R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 362.

this regard, rather than reading African Christology as an *alternative* to the ecumenical confessions, a student should read these writers as looking at Christology from an *additional* vantage point. To continue with the puzzle analogy, the Africans are not seeking so much to take out past pieces that fit well and have served the church. Rather, they are simply seeking to add some additional pieces that have not yet been properly accounted for in Christological discussions to date.³⁷

3. Connecting Christ to Africa's Pre-Christian Past

Third, African Christology is deeply interested in understanding better how Christ connects with the pre-Christian past of Africa. One of the most prominent criticisms of the nineteenth-century missionaries is that they approached Africa as if it was a spiritual *tabula rasa*. African culture in all of its particulars was widely condemned by missionaries and described in the most degrading terms. African religion was regarded as no more than a pagan array of witch doctors, fetishism, and superstition. In the nineteenth century, the "Great Chain of Being" placed the peoples of Africa at the very bottom—ethnically, culturally, and religiously.³⁸

Thus, Christ was presented to Africa as a foreign stranger in complete discontinuity with its own past. For an African to become a Christian was to step into a world of spiritual amnesia whereby everything in the African past was to be jettisoned to make way for their newly found faith in Christ, which was firmly hinged to a European worldview. Andrew Walls has described the resulting situation as the "crisis of African identity," whereby Africans live in a state of spiritual schizophrenia, not knowing how "to be truly Christian and authentically African."³⁹ Therefore, the task of integrating Christian faith with authentic African identity becomes a central theme in the emergence of African Christology.

4. An Emphasis on the Power and Victory of Christ

Fourth, despite the diverse Christological images developed by African writers, a common underlying theme is an emphasis on the power and victory of Christ. All of the major African Christological images, such as Christ as Liberator, Chief, Ancestor, Healer, Master of Initiation, and so on, tend to portray Christ in terms of power as *Christus Victor*. Harold Turner, in his *Profile through Preaching*, has documented this emphasis in the popular preaching of African independent church leaders.⁴⁰ He discovered that African preachers often focus on Jesus' victory over the devil, his works

37. This is not only because Africans, in general, have a healthy respect for the past, but most of the leading theologians of Africa are either Roman Catholic or Anglican—traditions that hold the ecumenical councils in high regard.

38. The chain ranked races as follows: White, Red, Yellow, and Black. This was also linked to a religious chain that was ranked as follows: Trinitarian monotheism, Jewish and Islamic monotheism, polytheism, and base fetishism. See *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1797), under "Religion," as quoted in Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa—The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 194.

39. Diane Stinton, "Africa, East and West," in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parratt (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 112. See also Andrew Walls "Africa and Christian Identity," in *Mission Focus: Current Issues*, ed. Wilbert Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 212–21. This is one of the important distinctions between "inculturation," which inserts Christianity into a new culture, and "indigenization," which involves, in part, a Christianization of the religious past.

40. See John Mbiti's discussion of this study in "Some African Concepts of Christology," 53.

of healing and demonic deliverance, his announcement of deliverance for the captives, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and his resurrection.

These findings are entirely consistent with African colonial history, the legacy of slavery, the traditional African emphasis on the presence of spiritual powers, the active belief in the demonic, and the presence of devastating physical maladies such as AIDS. Mbiti points out that Jesus draws attention "first and foremost as the Victor over the forces which have dominated African life from time immemorial." Jesus is portrayed as the one who fought victoriously over the "multiheaded Hydra" of Africa. He is the Victor, the Great Conqueror, the one who has emerged victorious from each of the battles that frame much of the African existence. Thus, Mbiti concludes, "the greatest need among African peoples is to see, to know, and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces from which Africa knows no means of deliverance."⁴¹ It is evident that African Christology is influenced and shaped by the physical, sociopolitical, cultural, and economic realities of the African context. With this general background in mind, it is now time to examine more closely several of the Christological images that have been utilized by sub-Saharan Africans.

Images of Christ in Africa

The Jesuit scholar Avery Dulles, in *Models of the Church*, served us well by demonstrating how "extremely luxuriant" the New Testament is in producing ecclesiological imagery.⁴² Images such as the body of Christ, the vine, the temple, the bride, God's field, or the flock all provide unique perspectives in understanding the reality of the church, which transcends any simple or singular description.

Ian Ramsey calls each of these images a "disclosure model."⁴³ Each one discloses certain truths about the mystery of the church, but each can only illuminate in part and needs all of the other images to bring out a fully biblical picture of the church. Some of the images are intended to inspire hope and courage in the face of persecution. Others emphasize the importance of purity, our continuity with God's past acts, or our connectedness to Jesus Christ. If this is true of ecclesiology, how much more so must this be true of the mystery of Christ himself! Thus, our task is to gaze at the images of Christ being presented to the global church by our African brothers and sisters and to reflect deeply on what these images mean for them and for us.

Four Pillars for Building an African Christology

In the rest of this chapter I have selected two prominent Christological models that emphasize different tendencies within African scholarship. Both models will be described and then evaluated according to four points of reference that Mbiti has suggested as the guide for constructing African theology, especially Christology. I have found these guidelines to be a helpful measuring rod for assessing and discussing the contours of African Christology.

41. Ibid.

42. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 17. Dulles notes that Paul Minear, in his *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, explores ninety-six different

images of the church.

43. Dulles's use of the term *model* is similar to the more familiar language of *paradigm* by Thomas Kuhn, which frequents missiological literature.

First, a biblical, exegetical standard must be applied to all African Christologies. Is the proposed image of Christ consistent with what we know about Christ from the biblical revelation? Second, we must take seriously the Christology of what Mbiti calls the "older churches." How do these new Christological images relate to, expand, contradict, or contrast with the historic, ecumenical confessions of the ancient church? Third, we must reflect on how effectively this particular Christological proposal resonates with or responds to the traditional African worldview. Finally, any authentically African Christology must somehow connect with the living experience of Africans, including the Church in Africa. As the AACC (All-Africa Conference of Churches) once said, "We must try to rescue theology and therefore Christology from the shelves of universities . . . and make it a living, dynamic, active and creative reality in our communities and among our people."⁴⁴ While there is considerable divergence in how much weight various African writers put on each of these four pillars, they remain important in all of their major Christological images.

A survey of the key publications on African Christology reveals six major images that have been proposed: Christ as Healer and Life-Giver, Christ as Liberator, Christ as Chief, Christ as Mediator, Christ as Master of Initiation, and Christ as Ancestor/Elder Brother. There are some variations on these themes and there is considerable overlap. For example, similar emphases are brought out in the images of Christ as Healer and Christ as Liberator. Likewise, there is considerable overlap between Christ as Mediator and Christ as Ancestor.

There is also a distinction between those images that are more universal and draw on language explicitly found in Scripture and those images that do not utilize explicitly biblical language but are rooted more naturally in the particularity of the African context.⁴⁵ To illustrate the spectrum I have chosen to examine two of the six major Christological images: (1) Jesus as Healer and Life-Giver, which is drawn quite intentionally from biblical language used to describe Christ, and (2) Jesus as Ancestor, which draws on language never explicitly used of Christ in the Bible, but which deeply resonates with the African religious worldview.

CASE STUDY IN TWO AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

Jesus as Healer and Life-Giver

The influence of the Enlightenment on the worldview of many of the nineteenth-century Western missionaries, coupled with the dramatic rise in health care in the nineteenth-century West, had several important effects. As noted above, the missionaries tended to de-emphasize the supernatural aspect of Christ's healing ministry. Furthermore, they also tended to attribute illness to solely physical causes, calling more for a physician (even an unbelieving one) than a pastor. In light of the strong emphasis in the Gospels on Jesus' healing and deliverance ministry, it is justifiable that the Africans felt that the Christology they had been taught was, upon reflection, inadequate.

44. Akinade, "Who Do You Say that I Am?" 184. Mbiti appears to be adapting John Wesley's famous quadrilateral (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) to the African setting, but

with a deeper respect for tradition.

45. For a general survey of African Christologies, see Schreiter, ed., *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, or Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*.

It seemed to be lacking both in its honest accounting of the scriptural evidence regarding Christ's work and in its sensitivity to many of the cultural and spiritual realities of Africa regarding suffering and illness.

The Imagery of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver

The imagery of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver should be understood as containing several circles of meaning, each linked with the next and each carrying deeper understandings of Christ. The Christological picture begins with a recognition that Jesus spent a considerable amount of time in his earthly ministry reaching out to people with various infirmities. Christ as Healer and Life-Giver emphasizes that Jesus cares about Africa's suffering and malnutrition and the AIDS pandemic. This is an important starting point. It is a picture of a Christ fully connected to the suffering of Africa.

This is the Christ we meet in the Gospels. He who was "despised and rejected by men" comes as the Life-Giver to those who, more than any other races on earth, have also been despised and rejected by others. Jesus Christ enters Africa not as a stranger but as one who is "familiar with suffering" (Isa. 53:3). Jesus comes as the Great Physician. A key verse that summarizes this image may be found in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Indeed, John's Gospel is filled with metaphors that provide grounding for this image. Christ is the bread of life (6:35), the living water (4:10), the light of the world (8:12; 9:5), and the resurrection and the life (11:25). These are all images of a life-giving Christ.

The Christological image of Christ as Healer is not limited to his meeting physical needs. In the second link one should picture Christ's role in *spiritual* healing. However, this role should be seen not as a separate work of Christ but as an extension of the first. This is why the various dimensions of the African understanding of Christ as Healer should be viewed as links in a chain rather than separate spheres of action. Africans simply do not maintain a sharp demarcation between physical healing and spiritual healing, as often occurs in Western writings. Even the traditional healers in African cultures served as bridges between the physical and the spiritual.

For the African Christian, this integration is exemplified in Acts 3, which records the story of a crippled beggar being healed through the name of Jesus. This physical healing provides public, tangible evidence to support Peter's claim to the onlookers that Jesus is "the author of life" (Acts 3:15). Thereupon, Peter applies Christ's healing power to his work in healing sinful hearts (3:19).

This holistic view of Christ's healing work is central to African Christology. For example, a Ghanaian pastor named Aboagye-Mensah says that "Jesus is the healer, [the] one who heals not only our sicknesses, but our deeply wounded souls."⁴⁶ A Kenyan laywoman named Marcy Muhia also finds great comfort in Jesus as Healer. He not only heals our broken bodies, she declares, but we are "broken in our sinfulness, broken in our relationships because of that sinfulness ... and I think Christ is able to heal that, to heal very completely."⁴⁷

46. As quoted in Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 71.

47. *Ibid.*, 72.

In light of our study in chapter 4, it is interesting to observe how Africans seamlessly link the spiritual healing that Jesus brings with the rebuilding of a broken *community*. The work of Christ, for the African, implies not just the restoration of an individual into a right relationship with God, but also the spiritual healing of our relationships one with another. Jesus extends his healing within the larger context of social reintegration into the community. Healing is both physical and spiritual; it is both individual and corporate.

Because the starting point of African reflections about Christ is the work of Christ, African Christology is closely linked with both soteriology and ecclesiology. In other words, Christ as Healer is part of his larger work of soteriology—Christ saves his people. Christ as Healer is also part of his larger work of ecclesiology—Christ is bringing restoration to the community by building his church. Of course, none of this work would be possible apart from the person of Christ, so African Christology largely presupposes the prior Christological formulations regarding Christ's person.

The third link in the image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver exemplifies the full cosmic dimensions of the African worldview. Christ comes not only to heal our diseased bodies and to spiritually restore our communities, but he also comes as the one who grants us victory over Satan. The enemy has come to "kill, steal and destroy," whereas Jesus has come so that his sheep "may have life" (John 10:10). Therefore, the life of Jesus must be extended into the whole cosmos, overturning Satan and the principalities and powers that rule in "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). The Ghanaian pastor Aboagye-Mensah, quoted above, goes on to say that Jesus is the "one who is victorious over the spiritual forces," including the "powers of darkness" and the "principalities and powers."⁴⁸

From a cosmic perspective, it is clear that the Christological image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver is understood in the larger context of *Christus Victor*, giving an eschatological emphasis to African Christology. The following diagram demonstrates the holistic, threefold understanding of healing and life-giving in African Christology. (See Figure C.)

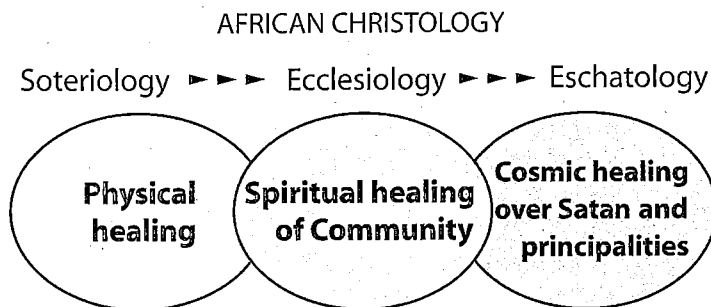


Figure C: Christ as Healer/Life-Giver

48. Ibid., 74.

Evaluation of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver

Let us now evaluate the image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver utilizing the four criteria suggested by Mbiti.

1. *Biblical criteria.* There are no serious objections to the general recognition that healing was a regular component of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Even a casual survey of the New Testament reveals dozens of verses portraying Jesus Christ as Healer and Life-Giver. The only major objection on biblical grounds to this particular image of African Christology has come from those who argue that too much emphasis on physical healing will serve to diminish the deeper, spiritual significance of Christ's ministry and, possibly, create a movement to Christ for the wrong motives.

Some have argued that African Christianity lacks depth and that its superficiality is due to the emphasis on Christ's meeting physical needs rather than on a larger, more comprehensive view of the kingdom of God. This concern is reflected in the remarks of Kenyan lecturer Peter Gichure at the Catholic University of East Africa, who expressed concern that "the emphasis on Jesus the healer can be another euphoria," opening the door for itinerant evangelists to exploit Africans who are "in very desperate situations" and cannot afford modern medical care.⁴⁹

These are important concerns but they must be, at least, partially mitigated by two points. First, both popular and highly developed African Christologies that portray Christ as Healer and Life-Giver *do* tend to include, as noted above, a much more comprehensive view of healing than a mere physical healing of the body. To insist that this is only about physical healing is to caricature the actual usage and development of this image by most African Christians. Indeed, as Jean-Marc Ela has said, Jesus' healings are not expressions of a mere miracle worker, but "one who roots salvation in the web of history ... demonstrating that salvation is available in 'bodily' form."⁵⁰

Second, the image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver is as incapable of capturing a comprehensive view of the kingdom of God as is any other single image. It is impossible to come up with one Christological image that fully exhausts the glory of Christ. In short, this objection could be made against *any* Christological image. However, this should serve as an ongoing reminder of the importance of utilizing multiple images of Christ in our Christological catechesis with new believers.

2. *Older church criteria.* The notion of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver does come across as quite alien to the kinds of Christological statements made about Christ by the older, ecumenical formulations. The reason it does, as noted earlier, is that African theologians approach Christology from a different starting point and that they are gazing at the beauty of Christ from a different perspective. A Christology "from above," like the Chalcedonian formula, which focuses on the person of Christ, is not going to emphasize Christ's healing ministry among the sick. Because of the Chalcedonian precedent, all of the Christological work by subsequent Western theologians has tended to approach Christology from the upper side. Louis Berkhof, for example, in his renowned *Systematic Theology*, never mentions Christ as a healer in over 250

49. Ibid., 77.

50. Ibid., 78.

pages that he devotes to the person and work of Christ and its application in the lives of believers. A survey of all the major systematic theologies used in Western seminaries would reveal that this is not unusual.

Even when Christ is heralded as a healer, as he is in the second volume of Thomas Oden's systematic theology, it is not applied to believers today in a way that resonates with African presuppositions. Oden's application of Christ's healing ministry today is found in a section beneath the heading, "Can Miracles be Defined *a Priori* as Impossible?" Oden makes the point that advances in quantum physics make it more acceptable to understand modern-day miracles without also having to believe in the suspension of natural laws.⁵¹ Oden's point is an important one. However, he is clearly seeking to convince skeptical, rationalistic Westerners that miracles really *can* happen, a point hardly necessary for a supernaturalist African.

Thus, even an image as straightforward as Jesus as Healer and Life-Giver can be articulated and comprehended in different ways. For the purposes of this chapter, we must concede that the image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver is highly inadequate as a Christology focused on the *person* of Christ. However, it is a powerful Christological image that fully resonates with the *work* of Christ. This is not to say that the African image has any fundamental conflict with Chalcedon, merely that it is a very different image based on an entirely different perspective, but both are needed in the larger Christological puzzle.

3. *Traditional African worldview.* It is primarily on the basis of their traditional worldview that many African Christians have objected to the image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver. The rather remarkable spectrum of African responses to this image is largely due to the different connotations various groups attach to the traditional healers who are central to many expressions of African Traditional Religion. In a survey conducted by Diane Stinton, approximately two-thirds of the Africans interviewed responded positively to the idea that Jesus was a Healer (*mganga*), whereas one third had a negative reaction to the image.⁵² The negative reaction is due to the negative associations some Africans have with traditional healers. For these Africans, to associate Jesus with traditional healers may create a syncretistic association of Jesus with divination, manipulation, magic, and witchcraft. It is tantamount to associating the work of Jesus with the work of Satan.

By contrast, however, other African languages and cultures make important distinctions between traditional healers, witch doctors, herbalists, medicine men, and so forth. In their case, the traditional healers may carry none of the above negative associations. For them, this is a powerful way for Jesus to fulfill and to transcend the traditional role of the healer in African society. For these Africans, to discourage this application actually hurts the cause of Christ in Africa and further contributes to the spiritual amnesia that has been inflicted on that continent for centuries. It would seem, therefore, that the suitability of using the Christological image of Christ as Healer and Life-Giver as a dominant motif in Africa should be determined, at least in

51. Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 1989), 302.

52. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 82–83.

part, by the associations a particular African language and culture attributes to the traditional healers.

4. *Living experience of African Christians.* African history and culture has been dramatically influenced by the legacies of slavery, colonialism, political corruption, disease, famine, and, more recently, the AIDS pandemic. There is little doubt that the image of Jesus as Healer and Life-Giver represents a wonderful expression of the good news of the gospel in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Oduyoye have observed that one of the features of the African Independent Churches, which constitute the fastest growing edge of African Christianity, is that "Christ, the great Healer, is seen as the center of the Christology of these charismatic churches."⁵³

In conclusion, there are no major reasons why the Christological image of Jesus as Healer and Life-Giver should not be celebrated in Africa. It will not be an image that finds broad support in those parts of Africa with negative associations of traditional healers, but overall, many Africans will discover in this picture an expression of the good news of the gospel, and Jesus as Healer will be able to enter into Africa not as a stranger but as a friend, as one who speaks their language and knows their culture.

Jesus as Ancestor

African Traditional Religion cannot be spoken of in the singular if it conveys the notion that African religion embodies any singular, codified system of beliefs and practices. However, there are such profound similarities in the general structure of African religions and the religious outlook of many African peoples that most scholars speak of African Traditional Religion (hereafter, ATR) in the singular. Bolaji Idowu, for example, points out that "there is a common Africanness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices of Africa."⁵⁴ Broadly speaking, therefore, ATR generally embraces a three-tiered religious system. At the highest tier is a Supreme Being, who oversees the entire cosmological system. For many Africans, this Supreme Being is a distant, vague, *deus otiosus*,⁵⁵ whereas other Africans have an articulate, more involved, conception of a Supreme Being.

In either case, the focus of the religious life in Africa is normally the second tier of power, which is inhabited by a pantheon of various divinities. This pantheon often includes nonhuman divinities as well as various divinized ancestors, whose earthly ancestry and descendants are known. This second tier is the focus of mediation between God and humanity. In ATR there is no fundamental contradiction in simultaneously embracing a Supreme Being as well as a pantheon of divinities, since

53. Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 39, as quoted in Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 73.

54. E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion* (Maryknoll,

NY: Orbis, 1973), 103.

55. Latin for "hidden" or "neutral" God, used here in the sense of a high god who has withdrawn from the details of governing the world, but has delegated this task to various mediators such as ancestors and lower level functionary divinities.

African religion distinguishes between a "deity" and a "divinity," the latter having only derived powers. Bolaji Idowu captures the image well when he refers to the second tier as an expression of "diffused monotheism."⁵⁶ Thus, ATR can be simultaneously monotheistic and polydivinistic without contradiction.

The third level is the earthly tier, which is where various expressions of ritualized power take place to maintain harmony, balance, and order. This third tier embraces a wide range of religious functionaries including traditional healers, herbalists, chiefs, and priests. This section of the chapter will examine how African Christians have seen Christ as fulfilling the aspirations embodied by the belief in ancestors and how this has influenced their Christological reflection.

African writers regularly acknowledge the central place of ancestors and mediators in the African religious consciousness. Many African cultures believe that a person should never approach God (or even an important person) directly. Instead, this should be done through some kind of mediation. ATR provides various avenues for this kind of mediation, including, but not limited to, the ancestors. In fact, the ancestors function in a wide variety of roles in Africa, including serving as supernatural mediators, liturgical companions, guardians of a particular clan, or even, more simply, as models of good behavior. The Tanzanian scholar Charles Nyamiti defines an ancestor as "a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is mediator to God, archetype of behavior, and with whom—thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death—he is entitled to have regular sacred communication."⁵⁷

In order for any persons to be declared "ancestors," they should be widely regarded as having lived a virtuous life that upheld the moral fabric of the clan, they should have left descendants who remember them, and they should have "died well" (i.e., they lived to an old age and did not die an unnatural or untimely death).⁵⁸ Once they are declared ancestors, some remain as "family" or "clan" ancestors and are venerated only by the particular families who are their descendants. Other ancestors become "glorified" and are venerated by an entire people, even by different clans who have no direct blood relation or ancestral connection with that ancestor.⁵⁹ Ancestors of all types are often referred to as the "living-dead" because even though they have physically died, they "remain united in affection and in mutual obligations with the 'living-living.'"⁶⁰

An "Ascending Christology"

In reflecting deeply on Jesus Christ within the African setting, many African laypeople and theologians began to see the image of ancestor as a bridge rather than a barrier to the expansion of the gospel in their continent. There are several nonnegotiable aspects of Christ's work and person that Africans felt the ancestor image could

56. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 1962), 204. Idowu was speaking, in particular, about the second tier among the Yoruba, but his point can be applied to many expressions of ATR.

57. Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from*

an African Perspective (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1984), 35.

58. Thomas Lawson, *Religions of Africa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 63.

59. Ibid.

60. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 94.

uniquely help explain, including the relation of Christ's humanity and deity, Christ's role as the sole and final mediator between God and humanity, and the risen, exalted Lord's role as head of the church, the redeemed community.

While this chapter has pointed out that African Christians do not use the person of Christ as the *starting* point in their Christology, it would be a mistake to conclude that their emphasis on the work of Christ is carried out untethered from the person of Christ. As noted earlier, African theologians generally hold in high esteem the ecumenical councils and the Christological formulations that emerged from them. Nevertheless, even African Christological expressions concerning the person of Christ start out "from below" and arrive at an understanding of his person through the lens of his work. This is known as an "ascending Christology," whereas the traditional, ecumenical Christological formulations are known as "descending Christologies."⁶¹

An ascending Christology starts with Jesus as a man in real history and gradually demonstrates that the works he accomplished could only be possible if he was more than a man. Indeed, deep reflection on his works demonstrates that he is the very Son of God, in a unique relationship with God the Father, fully sharing in his divine prerogatives and dignity. African theologians argue that this approach is essentially the path for Christological reflection that is modeled in the Gospels: the disciples of Jesus meet him as a man in history, gradually accept his messiahship and, eventually, as eyewitnesses of the resurrection, come to recognize his full dignity as the second person of the Trinity.

Applying this "ascending Christology" to African views of ancestorship, we can say that Jesus enters into Africa as a man, fully sharing in the suffering and pain that is central to African humanity. As the second Adam, Jesus fully assumes our humanity and, for the African, becomes the "proto"-Ancestor by becoming the head of the whole family of humanity, thus fulfilling and transcending the traditional role of the ancestor. Moreover, an examination of the life and teachings of Jesus clearly demonstrate that he is the archetype of virtuous behavior and serves in a mediating role between God and humanity. His death on the cross appeared, at first, as a tragic interruption to his work, giving him an untimely and ignominious death. However, his resurrection demonstrated that he continues as the Living One, overturning even death itself. The Gospels declare that he, in fact, "died well" since through his death he bore the sin of the world and "disarmed the principalities and powers ... triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). Through his death and resurrection he is recognized as having had supernatural status. He is, in fact, not only the "firstborn" of the living, but "the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15) as the Lord and Head of all the faithful. Just as Jesus declared that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive" (Luke 20:38), so Jesus' victory over death and his ascension into "the realm of spirit-power" allows him to be designated as "Supreme Ancestor."⁶²

61. Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 35.

62. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 217.

In conclusion, the image or model of Jesus as ancestor clearly reflects an ascending Christology, which begins with Christ's humanity and culminates in his resurrection and exaltation. John Pobee says of the humanity of Jesus,

On account of his humanity, Christ's Ancestorship is linked with Adam. This fact renders Christ a member of our race and gives his Ancestorship a transcendental connotation in virtue of which it transcends all family, clanic [sic], tribal or racial limitations.⁶³

Furthermore, through his resurrection "Jesus is not only first-born of the living as elder brother, but also first-born of the living-dead as Ancestor."⁶⁴ His full deity and relationship with the Father entitles him to our worship, and he, as the Head of a new community, has promised his ongoing guidance and participation in the life of the community through his Spirit, thus fulfilling all of the key elements of a Glorified Ancestor.

Evaluation of Christ as Ancestor

This Ancestor Christology will now be evaluated according to our fourfold criteria.

1. *Biblical criteria.* Unlike the image of Healer and Life-Giver, the term *ancestor* is never explicitly applied to Christ in biblical writings. This single fact alone is sufficient for some to reject it as an appropriate Christological image. While I think this does reduce its potential as a universal image that the whole global church can embrace, it does not necessarily render it useless for Africans and other cultures with a strong emphasis on ancestors if it can be given sufficient theological grounding.

There are three major theological anchors used by Africans who employ ancestor imagery in their Christology. First, John's use of *logos* (λόγος) in the Fourth Gospel provides a precedent for utilizing a nonbiblical word and applying it to Jesus Christ. John's contemporaries would have understood *logos* as a philosophical term referring to a rational capacity or "generative principle" that is present in all of nature. In the prologue to his Gospel, John ingeniously uses the philosophical term *logos* as his starting point, but connects it with the divine, spoken word that in Genesis brings the whole created order into being. We must recognize that, in the Hellenistic setting, because the term *logos* referred to an impersonal, all-pervading force, its semantic starting point was actually closer to a Hindu worldview than to orthodox Christianity. Yet, John roots the term in biblical revelation when he declares, "the *logos* became flesh and dwelt among us" (cf. John 1:14).

Citing John's use of *logos* as a precedent, African scholars have asked whether a nonbiblical term like *ancestors* can be redirected toward Christian ends and rooted in biblical revelation. African scholar Kwame Bediako has frequently heard Ghanians praying to *Nana Yesu* (Ancestor Jesus). Bediako explores whether or not *Nana Yesu* is a modern equivalent of the apostle John's reference to *logos*. He asks, "Can the reality

63. See Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 27.

64. John R. Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison, "Emergent

Christologies in Latin America, Asia and Africa," *The Covenant Quarterly* 52 (May 1994): 41.

and actuality of Jesus as intended in the Christian affirmation inhabit the Akan world of Nana in the same way that it could inhabit the Greek world of *logos*?⁶⁵

In other words, was the apostle John inspired to use the *logos* concept not only to communicate the reality of Jesus to the Greek world, but also to model an interpretive method that can, by extension, be applied to other languages and cultures as the church spreads around the world? If so, John's use of the *logos* is not only a sign of the theological translatability of the gospel among Greeks in his own time, but it is actually helping to train Christians today to be more effective communicators of the gospel within their own linguistic and cultural milieus. In short, many Africans find in John's *logos* an important precedent calling African Christians to "spoil the Egyptians" by taking the concept of ancestor and applying it to Jesus Christ.

A second theological connection between ancestors and Christ is the biblical role of Jesus Christ as mediator. First Timothy 2:5 declares that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." This verse clearly invokes Christ's role as mediator, which is the central role of the ancestors. Indeed, the controlling idea of all ancestor veneration in Africa is that of exalted mediators between heaven and earth.⁶⁶

Thomas Torrance, in *The Mediation of Christ*, demonstrates that this is the most important Christological image in the New Testament because only a proper doctrine of Christ as Mediator solves the "Christology from below" versus the "Christology from above" dilemma. Torrance argues that Christological vulnerabilities occurred with an either-or approach because "each approach ended up denying itself and passing over into the opposite, so that there was no solution to the problem created by their dualistic thinking of Christ."⁶⁷ Torrance goes on to say that "it was only as they allowed Jesus Christ in his whole undivided reality to disclose himself to them as the Mediator, that they were able to formulate a doctrine of Christ which did justice to the whole frame of the Gospel."⁶⁸

A third important theological connection is the biblical relationship between the life and death of the Christian community. The Apostles' Creed declares that we believe in the "communion of the saints." However, traditional Christology has tended to focus on Christ "without consideration of his mystical relationship to his members."⁶⁹ Traditional Western Christology, argues Charles Nyamiti, "paid almost exclusive attention to the Head, but not to the whole of Christ, Head and members—with the result that one does not duly investigate the theological implications which Christ's mystical union with his members have on his resurrection."⁷⁰

Indeed, all the biblical metaphors of Christology imply this connection. There can be no kingship without subjects of a kingdom; there can be no shepherd without sheep; there can be no head without a body. The African connectedness between their communities and their ancestral head gives them a strong sense of the continuity

65. Kwame Bediako, "The Doctrine of Christ and the Significance of Vernacular Terminology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 3 (July 1998): 110.

66. Raymond Moloney, "African Christology," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 510.

67. Thomas Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 63.

68. Ibid.

69. Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 48.

70. Ibid.

beyond earthly life. When Christ enters Africa, Bediako argues, "the ancestors are cut off as a means of blessing and we lay our power-lines differently."⁷¹ Thus, one of the values of Ancestor Christology is that it clarifies the place of the natural ancestors. "By making room among the 'living dead' for the Lord, the judge of both the living and the dead, it becomes more evident how they relate to Him, and He to them."⁷²

2. *Older church criteria.* Ancestor Christology arrives at the doctrine of the person of Christ as fully God and fully man through a rather particularized lens. Because the starting point of African Christology is "from below," it may be less vulnerable to the docetic tendencies more characteristic of the descending Christologies. However, an ascending Christology such as "Ancestor Christ" is likely to be vulnerable to Arian tendencies, since the basic natural paradigm of the ancestors is that they were not eternally preexistent ancestors, but *became* ancestors through their virtuous life and the dedication of their descendants.

We did explore how respect for the traditional formulas as well as the centrality of mediation in the ancestor image may mitigate this vulnerability somewhat. Nevertheless, it seems that an Ancestor Christology, particularly if articulated in isolation from the older Christologies that set forth with unmistakable clarity the precise nature of the person of Christ, could be problematic. This may explain why the negative responses to the ancestor image by African Christians themselves range between 44 percent and 63 percent, depending on the region of Africa and the pre-Christian associations with the term *ancestor*.⁷³

The difficulty in evaluating how *ancestor* is understood and responded to by the older churches is further nuanced by the keen observation of Kwame Bediako that the associations Africans attach to this English word are very different from the associations of the vernacular equivalents. For example, Bediako says that "while hardly anyone will pray in *English* to 'Ancestor Jesus' or 'Chief Jesus' many will readily pray in *Akan* to 'Nana Yesu' (Ancestor Jesus)."⁷⁴ The reason that the English word "ancestor" can never really serve as an exact equivalent of the Akan word *Nana* is because the former is a generic term whereas *Nana* "is both a title and a personal name." Thus, for a Ghanaian to speak of Christ as *Nana* carries with it a personalized description of his unique *person* rather than a generic category such as the term *ancestor*, which may strike the hearer as too vague and impersonal.

Modern-day English speakers should not forget that this same challenge occurred when the ecumenical formulations that emerged from Constantinople and Chalcedon were translated into English. The original formulation declared that God is one in *ousia*, but has three distinctions known as *hypostases*. The English restatement of the councils might best be summed up by the Westminster Confession, which declared,

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance [*homo-ousios*], power and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy

71. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 217.

72. Ibid.

73. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 123.

74. Bediako, "The Doctrine of Christ and the Significance of Vernacular Terminology," 110.

Spirit. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.⁷⁵

The three most important words found in this brief statement are *person*, *substance*, and *begotten*. Yet, all three of the corresponding Greek terms are difficult to translate into English. The word *person* is often thought of as "individual," which it cannot mean in the orthodox statement. The word *begotten* will conjure up in the mind of most English speakers some vague association with something mysteriously sexual, which the original statement would not. Finally, the word *substance* conveys in English the idea of something solid and material, which is not what was meant by the Greek word *ousia*.⁷⁶

In a similar way, it is difficult to fully evaluate the image of Ancestor Jesus, since the connotations within the local idioms may be quite different than the English counterpart. The solution, it seems, is to learn a lesson from those unnamed believers who began to "speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20). They realized that the title *messiah* would not be comprehended as good news for a pagan Greek. Instead, they utilized the title *kyrios*, which, although richly used in the biblical tradition, would certainly be associated by pagans with, for example, *kyrios Serapis* or *kyrios Adonis*, not the Lord of biblical revelation.⁷⁷ Andrew Walls points out that surely some of the brethren must have "recoiled at the syncretistic possibilities." However, Walls goes on to say that even this "daring act of metaphysical translation" succeeded because they were prepared to give the new concept "explanation, qualification, supplementation, and definition as the identity of Jesus was explored in terms of Hellenistic language and thought."⁷⁸

If we take this word of advice, then the term *ancestor* can be fully utilized in a way consistent with the earlier formulations as long as the term is accompanied by careful explanation, qualification, and supplementation such that the true identity of Jesus is manifested. Some of the obvious areas where further "explanation and qualification" would be necessary are that the ancestors have a human origin as part of the creation, whereas Jesus does not. The ancestors were sinners, Jesus was not. The ancestors are actually dead and have only achieved a symbolic and ritual victory over death, whereas Jesus is alive and truly conquered death. Clearly, if the term is to be retained and applied to Jesus, it requires significant qualifications and explanations in order to serve the church well.

75. Westminster Confession 2.3. For a full text of the Confession, see Robert L. Dabney, *The Westminster Confession and Creeds* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1983). It should be noted that prior to the Cappadocian Fathers, even the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* were sometimes used interchangeably.

76. This same phenomenon can be traced in the translation of Chalcedonian Christology into African languages. For example, the term *homoousious* translates in Yoruba as "of the same character with the Father," meaning the same reputation or ethical behavior rather than a reference to ontology. See

Onaiyekan, "Christological Trends in Contemporary African Theology," 362.

77. *Kyrios Serapis* was the Greco-Egyptian deity of the sun. He eventually was regarded as lord of healing and fertility and his worship was prominent throughout the Mediterranean world.

78. Andrew F. Walls, "Old Athens and New Jerusalem: Some Signposts for Christian Scholarship in the Early History of Mission Studies," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 4 (October 1997): 148.

3. *Traditional African worldview.* Raymond Moloney has suggested that all African Christologies can be divided into the two general categories: Christologies of liberation and Christologies of inculturation.⁷⁹ The two Christological models examined in this chapter (Christ as Healer/Life-Giver and Christ as Ancestor) belong to each of the two categories, respectively. The reason Christ as Ancestor is clearly an example of an inculturation Christology is that its very emergence among so many different African thinkers, independent of one another, testifies to how central the theme is in the traditional African worldview.

There are four major points of contact between Christ and the traditional African worldview concerning ancestors that must be taken into consideration. First, Jesus serves as the mediator between God and humankind. Second, Jesus is the founder and head of the redeemed community. Third, as the risen Lord, Jesus has an ongoing role to guide and direct the life of the community. Fourth, Jesus gives identity to and transmits life to his community.⁸⁰ Thus, for Christ to truly inhabit the African religious consciousness it seems vital that his person and work be explicitly demonstrated to be fulfilling and completing the key functions that the ancestors have traditionally occupied in African society, lest Christ enter Africa as a stranger.

Even John Mbiti has acknowledged the "deadness and rottenness" in traditional African religiosity that must be purged by the Christian faith.⁸¹ Clearly, the only way to avoid syncretism is if the "natural ancestors" are transcended by the "spiritual ancestors," and the solidarity that was once shared by the tribes through the ancestor must now be shared by all believers everywhere through the headship of Christ alone. The "power lines" of the "natural" ancestors should be replaced by the new "spiritual" ancestors, which include Abraham, Moses, David, and, indeed, the entire "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) who have gone before us, giving us what Andrew Walls calls "an Adoptive Past."⁸² Mbiti believes that "the African field is ripe for this contact to be established, and for the transposition of tribal solidarity into Christ's solidarity."⁸³

4. *Living experience of African Christians.* Another fascinating difference between Christ as Healer/Life-Giver and Christ as Ancestor is that the former is focused almost exclusively on the *work* of Christ whereas the latter, as explored above, starts "from below" with an indigenous concept, but moves in an ascending fashion ending up with more of a focus on his *person*. The result is that the image of Christ as Ancestor may not seem, on the surface, to have an overwhelming relevance in addressing African issues such as malnutrition, AIDS, political instability, discrimination, and so forth. However, after deeper reflection, it is clear that the ancestor imagery may, in fact, resonate deeply with the living experience of African Christians in several areas.

79. Moloney, "African Christology," 506.

80. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 127-29.

81. John S. Mbiti, "Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa," *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 236 (October 1970): 437.

82. Walls, "Africa and Christian Identity," 218. It should be noted that these new adoptive ancestors do not function in a mediatory role.

83. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology," 61.

First, proclaiming Christ as the second Adam who came into the world as the first-born over all creation and was heralded by African Christians as the proto-Ancestor of the human race (since it was through him that the Father created the world) fills a cultural and religious void that otherwise might continue to be filled by the traditional religion. It sends a strong message that God in Jesus Christ desires a deep and intimate involvement with Africans that no longer requires them to look to their traditional religion to fill this void, as it can be found directly in the good news of the gospel.

In the early 1990s I conducted field research among Muslims in Nigeria to determine how ATR influenced the practice of Islam in West Africa.⁸⁴ Although my research focus was Islam, I found that African Muslims and Christians alike were profoundly shaped and influenced by the traditional religious and cultural worldview. This is because, as John Pobee has observed, words do not merely enable us to communicate, they actually assume "the weight of a culture."⁸⁵ To dismiss the term *ancestor* too hastily may also serve, inadvertently, to dismiss all of the African cultural elements that also rest on the word. In contrast, a more proactive, robust engagement with this worldview may gradually help to desacralize it, eventually enabling it to function as a *preparatio evangelica* to that which it can only serve as a shadow and vague anticipation of what was to come. Christ as Ancestor is one who is "fleshed out" in terms Africans can understand.

Second, since Christ as Ancestor transcends the particularities of any specific tribal identity, this image can help to unify African Christians. Many African countries, even those with extremely high percentages of Christian affiliation, have been beset by tribal conflict, ethnic tensions, and even genocide.⁸⁶ The African kinship system creates a powerful sense of solidarity and belonging among those who share the same ethnicity and a corresponding suspicion of outsiders. But if Christ is received by African Christians as the Head of the whole body of Christ, which encompasses peoples from all tribes and languages, such a development could create the basis for a new kind of African solidarity.⁸⁷

If the nations of Africa are to be disciplined in obedience to the Great Commission, it is essential that the issue of African identity be directly addressed. What does it mean to be an African belonging to a particular ethnic group? How is that identity affected by the fact that I am now an African *Christian*? What are the *ethical* ramifications for my African brothers and sisters now that we are together in Christ and share him as our common Elder Brother? This may be one of the most important contributions of African Christianity to the stability of African societies in the twenty-first century.

This survey of Christ as Ancestor reveals that it is an image that has great potential for good in Africa as well as for serious Christological error. Three serious objections

84. Timothy C. Tennent, "Islam and African Traditional Religion: A Study of Religious Interaction in Modern Nigeria," (master's thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991).

85. Quoted by Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 72.

86. The most obvious example in recent years has been the

genocidal conflict in Rwanda between the Hutu and Tutsi.

87. This could be developed theologically in ways similar to how the apostle Paul helped first-century followers of Christ transcend their Jewish or Gentile ethnic identity and find a common identity in Christ, using a first Adam-second Adam motif.

to the African use of ancestor imagery should be noted. First, the image is so particularized for the African context that it may hamper the church's ability to bring out the true global universality of Jesus Christ. This is why, when interviewed, even many African Christians prefer to utilize only biblical images that are explicitly used of Christ in the Scriptures.⁸⁸ Second, building Christology on the foundation of African ancestor veneration creates a vulnerability to Arianism that may rob Christ of his full deity and eternal preexistence with the Father. Third, the ancestor image, as is the case with several other prominent African Christological images, including Christ as Chief and Christ as Liberator, tends to produce a *theologia gloriae*, leaving little conceptual space for a *theologia crucis*.⁸⁹ Ancestors, like chiefs, are distant and absent from most of the daily struggles of Africans and are carefully kept separate from all pain and suffering. However, the actual suffering and passion of Jesus Christ is central to any mature and fully biblical Christology.

In response to these criticisms, it has been pointed out that even an image as particularized as "Ancestor Jesus" can still resonate with classical, received orthodoxy as long as it is accompanied by appropriate clarifications and explanations. Bénédet Bujo has sought to quell these concerns by using the term "proto-Ancestor," which allows Jesus to fill the category while yet transcending any elements that do not resonate with biblical Christology. Others have suggested such terms as "Superior Ancestor" or "Ancestor with a Difference."⁹⁰ I think such an approach would satisfy the concerns noted above, particularly as this image is expressed through vernacular, rather than English, language discourse.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined Christological formulation in the African context. Even this limited study, focusing on only two of the six major Christological images, has demonstrated the challenges peculiar to all contextual Christologies. They emerge out of a certain set of cultural particularities that have often been neglected by mainstream theological discourse. The static categories of "upper side" Christology need to be balanced by some of the existential realities facing Christians in the Majority World church. Authentic African Christian reflection may help to deliver the West from the docetic tendencies that have often characterized its Christological discourse.⁹¹

These Christological images may also help to restore the biblical integration of the person and the work of Christ by shining light on the "underside" of the Christological puzzle. In today's global context where the majority of Christians live outside the West, far from the citadels of power, far from access to well-developed healthcare, and far from the comforts of affluence, we can no longer afford to take refuge in an

88. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 123–26, 130–35.

89. John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 97.

90. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 137.

91. A survey of the major heretical challenges to orthodoxy demonstrates that the tendency was to downplay the humanity of

Christ (Gnosticism, Docetism, Monophysitism, Monotheletism, etc.), although there were major challenges that downplayed his deity as well (Arianism, Adoptionism, etc.). However, the humanity of Christ was essentially assumed in the conversations, so the major Christological battles focused on the deity of Christ.

overly spiritualized Christology or an overly compartmentalized understanding of the salvation being wrought by him.

However, even beyond how African Christology may help us in the West, it is refreshing to see the African church "posing questions and problems from its own context of faith in Christ for which it received no preparation from Christianity in the West."⁹² Undoubtedly, the Africans' struggle to produce Christologies that are faithful to the biblical text and yet responsive to the particular cultural, theological, and contextual challenges they face will be no less long or difficult than it was for the church in the West.

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92. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 142.

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