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The Quest for an African Christ: An Essay on Contemporary African Christology

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THE QUEST FOR AN AFRICAN CHRIST: 
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AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION:
It was Jesus of Nazareth himself who posed the definitive Christological question when he challenged his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29 parr.). This two-millennia old question has been the leaven determining the quest to compose a coherent image of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah. This quest has burgeoned with remarkable intensity over the centuries. The result, at least in Western and Eastern Christianity, is a credo of meticulously and systematically formulated Christological titles and doctrines which have endured for several centuries, albeit not immune to evolution, reformulation and, expectedly, distortion.

This Christological quest has not been absent in the perspective of the still nascent African theology and Christianity. Inarguably, the name of Jesus, although relatively new in Africa, has gained 'popularity' on the lips of many African Christians. But it is equally true that millions of African Christians continue to grope for an appropriate Christological identity which can effectively lend support to their profession of faith, which faith is confronted with the challenges of African traditions, cultures and customs.

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The pertinence of this Christological quest cannot be underestimated. Not only is it central to the issues of faith in Africa, it also constitutes the pivotal concern of majority of contemporary African theologians. These latter are confronted with a critical exigency; that of recasting the alien and expatriate images of Christ in the mold of African worldview. In itself, this worldview is a mine of fertile and profound symbolism that is not incompatible with the presentation of the life and mission of Jesus Christ in the gospels. Simply put: the African theologian is summoned to ask whether the received Christological formulas "can be translated into concepts that can be understood in African cultures whose worldviews have been strongly influenced by African traditional religion and its New World descendants... Or might there be alternative doctrines of Christ’s divinity and humanity that move outside these metaphysical boundaries of a Christology that furthers a God who is Greek?"\(^2\)

Hence, in the theological agenda of many contemporary African Christologists, the Christological question is far from being a mere rhetorical interrogation. It is a challenge and a quest to discover an authentic and meaningful African face of Jesus Christ that will respond to questions posed by Africans themselves.\(^3\) The intensity this quest has acquired in its relatively short span makes it impossible to douse the Christological Interrogation with a merely confessional response, of the kind that has appeased Western Christianity for several centuries. So far,

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the result of their quest is a striking litany of Christological titles, models and proposals; along with an extensive job description for the African Christ: Christ as ancestor, healer, chief, guest, liberator, warrior, initiator, mediator, intermediary, brother, elder brother, ideal brother, universal brother, kin, kinsman, chief priest, chief elder, ruler, king, leader, black Messiah... Expectedly, this mosaic is far from presenting a uniform face of Christ in Africa! Hence, no African Christological model can make any pretention to absolutism. These points established, a pertinent question arises: What are we to make of the current proliferation of African Christological titles, models and proposals? The central concern of this essay revolves around this question. I begin by effecting a schematic interpretative review of contemporary African Christology.

1.1. As I mentioned earlier on, there is already a Christological born in Africa. How is one to approach this plurality of Christologies in Africa? At first glance, some of the proposals appear to be in conflict with one another. It is possible, however, to discern some clear points of convergence which allow a simple but provisional categorization of these apparently divergent proposals. Here I find Charles Nyamiti's division of African Christologies very valid. The deciding criterion, according to him, is the starting point of each Christology: Some begin by examining scriptural and Christological elements which are then marched with "relevant christological themes" discovered in the African cultural experience. Others adopt the reverse approach.¹

Cecile Kolie, for example, employs the first line of approach when he presents Jesus as Healer in the gospels and, subsequently, in Africa.²

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Francois Kabasele’s proposal, "Christ-as-Chief," provides a good illustration of the second line of approach. He begins by identifying and describing the traditional images and symbols of Bantu chiefs and, then, applies these images and symbols to Christ.\(^6\) Evidently, both lines of approach have varying degrees of advantages and disadvantages. My aim here is not to outline these. I have introduced this distinction because its application will become very obvious and significant in the following sections.

1.2. Undoubtedly, African theologians have realized the centrality of the Christological quest as it affects issues of faith in Africa. To state it clearly, borrowing some elements of Enyi B. Udoh’s thesis: "The problem of faith in Africa is fundamentally christological,"\(^7\) and it concerns essentially "the dilemma of combining the Christian principles with African traditional religion."\(^8\) The result is a "growing tension which sets the African and Christ apart, making the African the child of two worlds."\(^9\) In other words, the African Christian is neither an authentic African nor a true believer (or Christian). In my opinion, this thesis stands as the most important reason for the proliferation of Christological models in Africa. The ways in which the problem of faith described by this thesis manifests itself as a Christological problem is quite complex. I shall examine these.

1.2.1. It has become a common occurrence to find African Christians resorting to their traditional practices -- wherein they find more support (than in Christianity) -- in order to face effectively the growing stress of


\(^{7}\text{Udoh, Op. Cit., 12; Cf., 65.}\)

\(^{8}\text{Ibid., 10-11.}\)

\(^{9}\text{Ibid., 120, See also, 162.}\)
modern life. Desmond Tutu provides a very apt term for this phenomenon which he describes as "faith schizophrenia." Udoh prefers to designate it as "religious double-mindedness." In a nutshell, this means that those Africans who embraced the Christian faith with unbridled eagerness have soon discovered that the image of Jesus Christ, as it was introduced to them, is clearly insufficient. In effect, while it is convenient to declare a nominal adherence to Christianity, in times of socioeconomic and cultural distress this superficial profession of Christian faith faciley gives way to traditional religious practices which Christianity claims to supersede. The Christological import of this phenomenon, where Jesus Christ 'disappears' from crisis situations in the lives of African Christians, can hardly be denied: "A person who claims to believe in Christ, yet has recourse to other spiritual, cosmic, or metacosmic forces, has not yet succeeded in identifying who Jesus Christ is, that he or she may profess him radically."10

The implication of the foregoing is crucial to African theology: it implies that the person and mission of Jesus Christ constitute the new and actual problematic element in issues of faith in Africa. I shall elaborate.

1.2.2. If it is true --as many African theologians hold-- that Africans are notoriously religious, it means that they were already familiar with the existence and worship of God prior to the advent of Christianity and this latter's unmistakable bent on the person of Jesus Christ. Consequently,

the new element that African Christians have to deal with is the figure of Jesus Christ: "It is not the Christian God who causes problem for Afro cultures; it is the Christian Christ." Muzorewa formulates this point vividly: "Africans knew God, but they did not know God's son, Jesus Christ. As my own father always told me, 'The only new thing the missionaries brought to Africa is Jesus Christ, not God.'"

The crucial point here is the fact that African traditional religion, based on an explicit profession of belief in the existence of a transcendent reality, molded the individual and collective existence and outlook of Africans for several centuries before the advent of Christianity. But this long established propensity to religiosity has not facilitated the total conversion of Africans to Christianity, precisely because the person of Jesus Christ stands as a stumbling block on their course towards faith, a formidable obstacle which centuries of missionary endeavor have failed to dislodge.


Apparently, "it is as though the Africans are saying: God we know; ancestors we acknowledge; but who are you for us, Jesus Christ?"\textsuperscript{13} Here, again, I maintain that the Christological implication of this situation is indisputable.

If we combine the principal elements of the foregoing analysis, the current emphasis on and quest for adequate Christological models become fairly comprehensible. What African Christologists are engaged in is the arduous and imperative task of developing a clear conception of the person of Jesus Christ. Simply put: they seek to make Jesus Christ feel at home within the framework of the ordinary experience of African Christians. This preoccupation is evidenced by the nature of the models employed. The common element one discovers in these models is the fact that they are derived from categories which are authentically African and speak \textit{im}-mediately to the African's consciousness. I shall now consider three Christological proposals which draw upon familiar African images and symbolism.

2.1. First, Christ-as-Ancestor. The concept of ancestor is one that is familiar to many Africans. This assertion, general as it is, should not be taken to mean that all Africans form a uniform concept of ancestor. However, despite the perceived or real divergences, in its conception the category of ancestor is authentically African.

\textsuperscript{13} Udoh, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 92; See also, 25, 76, 80 ff. I shall return to this question of the alien character of Jesus Christ when considering the guest paradigm.
There exists what some African Christologists refer to as *ancestral christology*. Since only a few examples will suffice, I shall limit myself to a brief consideration of the ancestral model as elaborated by its two most prominent proponents, Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo.\(^\text{14}\)

The pivotal concept of Nyamiti's proposal is the concept of "brother-ancestor" which he defines 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 the supernatural status acquired through death-- he is entitled to have regular sacred communication."\(^\text{15}\)

In this definition are to be found the five essential traits of African ancestorship:\(^\text{16}\) a natural consanguineous or non-consanguineous relationship with the living members of his/her family, clan or community, which is undiminished in death; a metaphysical proximity to God following death which facilitates, thirdly, his/her mediatory role on behalf of the living family or clan members and allows, fourthly, an entitlement to mandatory and regular communication and consultation (invocation, libation, ritual offerings, etc) with the living. Finally, based on the ancestor's exemplary life on earth he/she becomes a model of good living for the entire family and community of the living. In Nyamiti's mind, the parallelism between African ancestorship and Christ's brother-ancestorship is undeniable. Structurally they are the same: Christ meets all the prerequisite conditions for the former and, therefore, qualifies


to be a brother-ancestor in the African conception of the term. As he affirms: "Christ realized in Himself -- at least in principle -- all that this definition (of brother-ancestor) entails." 17

There is, however, a considerable difference between both conceptions. Considering Christ's personality and divinity, his ancestorship subsumes and eminently transcends the restricted and common notion of brother-ancestorship: "The ancestral values found in or sought after in African ancestorship are eminently found in Christ. Indeed, our Savior's ancestorship is the perfect accomplishment of its African pendant." 18 Christ is no longer an ancestor among many others, but the universal Brother-Ancestor par excellence "of whom the African ancestors are but poor and faint images." 19

2.1.2. Bujo's approach manifests traits similar to Nyamiti's conception of ancestral christology, but he bases his proposal on the concept of "proto-ancestorship." The notion and practice of ancestrology in Africa, according to Bujo, is a ritual enactment of the ingrained belief in the perduring nature of life-force guaranteed by the bond which unites the dead and the living. What the African seeks in the cult of the ancestors is not merely a commemoration of the dead. More importantly he or she seeks a communion with the living-dead. This communion is at once narrative, soteriological and eschatological. 20

18 Ibid., 85; See also 52.
19 Ibid., 70.
Taking a retrospective look at the life of Jesus, one discovers that through his mission and ministry he clearly identifies with the soteriological role of the African ancestors. The most important dimension of this role requires the ancestor to be the source of life to all the descendants of the living-dead. Since Christ realizes this ancestor ideal in the "highest degree," elevating it to a superior level of "new fulfillment," it becomes inadequate to consider Christ as an ancestor among many others. He is the "Proto-Ancestor": "This signifies that Jesus did not only realize the authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to a new completion... Jesus Christ is the ultimate embodiment of all the virtues of the ancestors. Further still, Jesus is the Proto-Ancestor, the Proto-Life-Force, bearer in a transcendent form of the primitive 'vital union' and 'vital force'." 21

It is obvious that Bujo's and Nyamiti's ancestor paradigms conform to an authentically African mode of thought. The similarities between both approaches are glaring. However, if the starting point of both theologians appear to be the same, their aims are markedly different. Nyamiti adopts an approach which culminates in the formulation of an ancestral christology, while Bujo, taking ancestral christology as a starting point, elaborates a morality of the ancestors (la morale ancestrale) which eventually culminates in a "Proto-Ancestor Ecclesiology." 22

Similarly, both authors agree on the role of African ancestors vis-a-vis Christ. As we have seen, for Nyamiti, the other African ancestor add up to no more than "poor and faint images" of the Brother-Ancestor, Christ. Bujo is more cautious in his choice of terminology.

21 Ibid., 80-81.

For him, the African ancestors are "forerunners" of the Proto-Ancestor.\(^{23}\) Undeniably, for both Nyamiti and Bujo, the conclusion is unanimous: Christ as the unique ancestor perfects all there is in the traditional African conception of ancestorship.

2.1.3. Another prominent African Christological proposal is the model of Christ-as-Chief. The 'traditional' role of Christ as king (the other roles being priest and prophet) and certain scriptural designations of Christ (Royal Son of David, King of the Jews, Kyrios...) provide the basis for such Christological models which emphasize the chieftaincy of Christ. Here, again, we are dealing with an image that does not leave the African sensitivity apathetic.

In the African conception the ordinary denotation of the term chief is, "someone who holds some authority and who governs a part of the people."\(^{24}\) His functions cover a vast designation of duties. In general, he constitutes the primary locus of the collective identity of the community whom, by virtue of his authority, he protects and holds in constant cohesion. This function is not purely political; it overlaps with the religious functions which qualify the chief to be a mediator between the people and the deity while presiding over ritual celebrations. His relationship with the deity, as this latter's "anointed one," helps to legitimize his position of power and authority in the community. And as one vested with authority, the chief defends and protects his people and provides the needed

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\(^{24}\) Kabasele, "Christ as Chief," in Schreiter, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 104. Kabasele's proposal is based on the traditional conception of Chief by the Luba of Zaire. This does not obscure the fact that as an image it speaks to the whole of Africa.
context favorable to the increase of the communal life-force that is transmitted from one generation to the other.\textsuperscript{25}

The methodology of African Christologists who propose this model does not differ radically from that of the proceeding proposals. Having examined the traditional conception of chieftaincy, proponents of the chief paradigm conclude that the person of Christ is the one who eminently merits the application of the title of "chief." He is the real and only king and ruler: "The prerogatives of a Bantu chief are seen to have been fully realized by Jesus Christ. Power belongs superlatively to Jesus Christ because he is a mighty hero, because he is the chief's son and the chief's emissary, because he is 'strong,' because he is generous, wise, and a reconciler of human beings."\textsuperscript{26}

2.1.4. One of the latest African Christological proposal is Christ-as-Guest. So far, the only proponent of this model is Enyi B. Udoh. I shall consider the key points of his proposal. To begin with, Christianity is a "guest religion" in Africa. This signifies that as a way of life it surfaced as a meaningful alternative among the African peoples who are long used to other equally meaningful ways of life. If Christianity is a guest religion, a fortiori, its single most important personality, Jesus Christ, is a guest in Africa.


This is the starting thesis of Guest Christology: "Jesus Christ is first and foremost a guest in Africa." 27

Unfortunately, as guest or alien in Africa, Jesus Christ has not always enjoyed a good reputation. Given the hermeneutics of the Scripture adopted by some of the early Missionaries and these latters' method of "enforcing" belief in the Christ, the image of Jesus Christ invariably became deficient. Jesus Christ is not only a stranger to Africa; also, he cuts the image of someone whose domineering presence and thrust upends the accepted patterns of behavior and outlook of the Africans. 28

One of the central preoccupations of Guest Christology is to resolve the problematic element of Christ's presence: If Jesus Christ is to be accepted and proclaimed Lord and King of all, he must first be welcomed and *initiated* to Africa as a guest. To facilitate his acceptance as guest a few requirements must be met which are in keeping with the status of guest in Africa.

In the first place, a guest cannot be a guide. He/she is nescient of the worldview of the host culture, and is in dire need of initiation into the patterns of thought and ways of proceeding of his host. Consequently, any claim to divine estate by the guest would amount to a display of arrogance which could further deepen the gulf separating the guest and the host. This, precisely, defines the first step of Guest Christology: Christ-the-guest must take the *kenotic* step of relinquishing his claim to divinity. For the Africans, he cannot be man, one among them as guest, and yet claim to be God. Thus, he is accepted as a human person, and his humanity is a declaration of intent: he is an alien, liable to commit errors, but errors from which he is exonerated on the basis of his lack of full familiarity with his


host culture. There is an obvious advantage to Christ's guest status: "It offers him a world of possibilities from which he may choose freely and responsibly. Besides, the guest status of Christ offers us the most adequate prerequisite for his leadership or saving role." 29

The locus of Christ's welcome and entrance as guest is the family. For the Africans, the family is the single most important institution. It defines the life of an African as a relational being in an extended and extensive community, comprising the living and the living-dead. More importantly, for Guest Christology, it also serves as the entry point which opens up to a larger complex entity that includes homesteads, group-kin, clan, state, nation and race. It is here, also, that the rite of welcome (e.g., the kola-nut rite) and naturalization is celebrated. To say that Christ enters through the family is to say that he enters from below, a dynamic milieu wherein the commonality of the constituent members and their diversity are dialectically embraced and effectively harmonized. 30

Guest Christology argues that if Christ is accepted and welcomed as guest in and through the family, his status is no longer that of a mere alien or stranger. The cultural initiation which he has undergone alters his alien status and transforms him into a respectable citizen. In other words, he moves to the post-ritual phase of kin where his capital concern is not to destabilize the host culture, but to relate to it and participate in it as a co-sharer in its history and destiny, because his "initiation puts him on equal footing with us, not only as completely human but also as one with whom we share a common history and destiny." 31

29 Ibid., 229; See also, 223-225, 227-228, 245.
30 Ibid., 43.
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The acceptance of Jesus Christ as one among us --through the process of introduction, initiation and naturalization-- does not constitute the ultimate goal of this process. The climax of this process is his elevation to the status of Lord and Savior of and by his host community. Apparently, this elevation becomes the logical consequence of Christ’s prior kenotic act: he now takes up his divine estate (which he previously had to strip himself of to become one like us). Through the culturally sanctioned channels of initiation he is thus proclaimed as the ultimate head of the family, lives and deliberations; a "master-builder" and "life-giver" of all Africans who consent to welcoming him as a humble and unpretentious guest.32 Having presented three dominant Christological models which seek to fashion an African face for Jesus Christ, I shall now attempt to evaluate and assess briefly their worth and relevance to the Christological quest.

3.1. The ancestral christology that evolves out of the concept of brother-ancestor and proto-ancestor is one which builds upon elements that are familiar occurrences in the complex and diverse African worldview. These elements are not imported wholesale into the fabrication of the ensuing Christological model. They undergo a rite of theological and conceptual purification to make them better suited to the Christian doctrinal outlook and still be compatible with the cultural milieu from which they are derived. This process describes a style of inculturation. That is precisely why ancestral christology falls unquestionably under the category of "inculturation christology". This process of transformation and purification creates problems which are of varying order.

In the first place, since there are no two conceptions of ancestorship (where such conceptions exist in Africa) which are the same, one is therefore compelled --as are Nyamiti and Bujo-- to create a notion of

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ancestor which lays claim to a certain measure of cultural neutrality without outlining how this culturally neutral model is to be adapted in particular instances. If Christ is brother-ancestor or proto-ancestor, what does this mean for an African who bathes in a cultural milieu where ancestor veneration or worship is a constitutive element of his/her cultural identity? The larger question here is: How does Christ fit as an ancestor, that is, brother-ancestor or proto-ancestor, where the African Christian is already used to venerating 'other' famil(y)lar ancestors?

If we follow Nyamiti’s and Bujo’s lines of thought, the conclusion, as we have seen, boils down to the affirmation that Christ is the Ancestor par excellence, before whom all the other African ancestors are shadowy and pale forerunners. As a theological assertion, this position is comprehensible and logically coherent. But, the Christological quest is born out of an authentic and concrete desire to make Christ real in the lives of the African. A mere affirmation of the superiority of Christ over the other familiar ancestors falls short of attaining this goal. If anything, it amounts to a precipitated and patronizing proclamation of Christ as Lord-of-all without prior initiation into the host culture. To quote the witty but apt remark by Jean-Paul Eschlimann: "Your little Jesus there --wasn’t it only yesterday that he turned up here, while our Ancestors have been here forever?"

Here, one must recognize the potential for real confrontation that cannot be glossed over by proposing theological affirmations --as do Nyamiti and Bujo-- which translate with great difficulty into concrete situations.33

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Ancestral Christologists could argue convincingly that the African Christian is not called to make a choice between Jesus Christ (as ancestor) and his/her ancestors, but to see the former as supremely epitomizing the ideals of the latter. To be seen and considered as such Jesus Christ must produce concrete evidence of his superiority, a feat not easily achieved through bold and peremptory theological affirmations. We can reformulate the question: How does Jesus Christ supersede concretely the familiar ancestors and become himself familiar to the Africans? The deeper issue at stake here is the pastoral adaptability of ancestral christology to which I shall return later. The following point is, therefore, in order: To ascribe the full prerogatives of the supreme ancestor to Jesus Christ "who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation" may result in resentment and be perceived as a threat to the "identity and personality" of the African Christian,34 a situation that could further worsen the identity crisis of African Christians.

The question becomes further complicated when one recalls that, in Africa, it makes a difference whether one venerates or worships the ancestors as vital "focus of piety." The difference is subtle, but to say the former is to create room for the acknowledgement of others (ancestors) without abandoning any, whereas to say the latter is to risk abandoning one's ancestor for another, Jesus Christ, in this case. The veneration thesis and the worship thesis both count many advocates on their side; its resolution, which is far from achieved, could alter radically the validity and applicability of ancestral christology.35


3.2. In my opinion, the proposal, Christ-as-chief, poses the greatest difficulty. It clearly presupposes a situation which is hardly existent in contemporary Africa. Besides, methodologically, it is a defective approach: a precipitated proclamation of Christ as chief ignores the process of initiation which is absolutely necessary for a person like Jesus Christ whose personality is relatively but inarguably new in the arena of African religiosity.

In his study of the problems of chief paradigm, Bediako underlines one significant and contemporary evidence of conflict: Chiefs (rulers) are very often debarred from becoming full members of the Church due to certain religious practices which their functions and roles as chief demand. This indicates that --at least in the minds of some African Christians-- the conception of a chief suggests a conflict between traditional practice and Christianity. How, then, can they accept the model of Christ-as-Chief?

By far the most serious difficulty with this model is the fact that the image of a contemporary African chief (king, ruler or leader) is slurred by unsavory reminiscences and experiences of despotism and oppression. It is remarkable that when proponents of this model describe the African chief, they talk in the past. This outdated conception and practice of chiefship differs radically from present experience. It is not enough to say that Jesus Christ is a Chief-with-a-difference when the only tangible point of reference for the ordinary Africans is the experience of despotic chiefs who are insensitive to their needs.


37 It is interesting to note that one of the examples of an African chief we find in Kabasele's essay is Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire! Kabasele, "Christ as Chief," in Schreiter, Op. Cit., 113.
3.3. The guest paradigm, to my mind, presents the most promising African Christological model. One of its merits is that it takes cognizance of the historicity of Christianity in Africa by tracing how faith in Jesus Christ made its entry into the traditional religious life, practices and deliberations of Africans. This awareness is indispensable to the understanding of current trends in the development of Christianity as a guest religion in Africa. The advantage of this historical appreciation is crucial: If ignored, there ensures the risk of accentuating the distorted image of Christ as one who imposes his alien rule on the lives and deliberations of Africans and invalidates with impunity the vital elements of their religious and cultural worldview.

In my opinion, the guest model very well defines an interesting approach to evangelization. Instead of this latter becoming a manner of imposing alien religious beliefs and practices on Africans, it becomes an introduction of Jesus Christ as "guest" seeking time and space to be initiated and accepted as the authenticator of the African way of life. I shall not develop the full import of this point in this present essay.

Again, of all the proposals so far considered, the guest metaphor stands out as the most unequivocal, since it builds directly upon the authentic and natural experience of the African generosity and hospitality which offers a welcome to any stranger or wanderer. If Christ is presented as a stranger, he is sure to find a home in the lives and deliberations of the Africans where he is welcomed as guest, a symbol of blessing and transformation, and a new beginning in the life of the host. The allusion to Christ's kenosis here is unmistakable.

The goal of the Guest Christology is ultimately valid and scriptural, albeit at first glance its seems to confine Christ to the status of a hapless

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guest who must plod his way up the ladder of cultural acceptability. This guest status serves to facilitate his introduction and initiation into the host culture. Having been properly initiated thus, his proclamation as Lord becomes possible. It at this point that Christ’s role can be affirmed as liberator and healer, who has been "set aside for a unique role... a role which includes the social integration of the various strands and social interests as well as development of human dignity and worth. He conveys an extraordinary message about life in its totality. That message is coded in his person and work and articulated in the symbol of the kingdom of God." 39

Precisely, this last affirmation is what creates what I perceive as the most serious methodological flaw of Guest Christology. Undoubtedly, the process which leads to the proclamation of his divine lordship smacks of a questionable methodological leap. In the African worldview, within which this model is elaborated, there is no well-defined arrangement which allows an alien to become Lord and King through bilateral consent. The history of Africa is replete with the violent impositions of alien rules; and, the seeming acceptance of certain aliens rules by the Africans has turned out in the course of time to be a matter of dubious connivance between the colonialists and a clique of opportunists.

The imposing task of Guest Christology, therefore, is to overcome this methodological hindrance. One way of going about this is to emphasize the aspect of the cross. This could become the means whereby Christ takes upon himself in a concrete manner the destiny and history, pain and suffering of the African people. The natural consequence of this event is the spontaneous acclaim and exaltation of Jesus as Lord who liberates his people from the oppression and slavery of individual and social sin in a tangible way.

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CONCLUSION.

One of the underlying theses of this essay is the affirmation of the nativity of God in Africa: God is no stranger in Africa. Traditional African faith readily acclaims the existence of the omnipotent, transcendent and benevolent Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The new and problematic element in the African religious experience is the "Christian Christ". Thus, the crisis of faith, as evidenced by the inability of the African Christian to give full and effective allegiance to this young Christ, is first and foremost a Christological problem. The question is: Who is Jesus Christ for the African?

The quest to resolve this quandary has yielded promising Christological models and proposals which seek to discover and present an authentically African face of Jesus. While some of these are potentially relevant to the positive growth of Christianity in Africa, others fail to bear up under strict scrutiny.

As I argued earlier, the Christological question is ultimately a pastoral challenge: how do we make the African Christian feel and be at home in the Christian faith which he/she professes, and whose central tenets and orientation (that is, of Christianity) are defined by the person and mission of Jesus Christ? While all the models admit the implicit pastoral dimension of the Christological question, none proposes an explicit and concrete pastoral program for applying the theological response to this question. In other words, it is not sufficient to construct elaborate theological theses on the ancestorship or chiefship of Jesus; a more important step will be to outline the process of concrete application of the title in the lives of the ordinary Christian who is torn between the worship or veneration of his/her ancestor and relation to Christ who also makes a claim to a superior kind of ancestorship. The point I am making here leads me to make some concrete suggestions.
In the first place, the question of the pastoral adaptability or application of the Christological models demands that African theologians integrate the approach of Christology and that of pastoral theology. A parallel approach to the Christological question can only lead to the intensification of this alienation of Christ and Africa which is played out in the lives of hapless African Christians. It is only through such integration that one can hope to reverse the present situation whereby alluring glossy faces of an African Christ appear only on book covers, while he remains a stranger and an alien in the lives and deliberations of the millions of African Christians.

Secondly, I see the need for a Christological catechesis in Africa. The findings of African Christologists need to be systematically presented to African Christians at grassroots level, using a language that is accessible to them. The result will be a familiarity with the person of Jesus Christ using points of reference that not only appeal to but are also constitutive of the African religious experience. In this Christological catechesis, the story of Jesus Christ should be retold as an African story of Christ our ancestor, guest, liberator, healer, brother... according to the African experience of these realities. It is at this grassroots level, also, that the effective difference Christ makes in the life of the suffering and oppressed Africans can be explored and pointed out as an experience open to all Africans.

One last point is in order. To say "Christology" is to affirm the person and mission of Jesus Christ who was not simply content with counselling his followers to become absorbed in a quietistic contemplation of the lilies of the fields, but challenged the dissolute and oppressive structures of his time. A Christology that emerges from such a personality and orientation has to be functional and not merely devotional if it is to be credible and relevant to contemporary conditions of Christian life in Africa.

The difference between a functional Christology and a devotional Christology is glaring: while the former confronts and challenges us to
authentic Christian commitment and proffers a new meaning to our quest for a more just world order in keeping with the original praxis of Jesus, the latter invites a debilitating pietistic admiration of a face of Jesus that is incapable of bearing up under the pressure of the rapidly increasing contemporary realities of the world. A Christology devoid of effective soteriology is not only empty and meaningless, but more importantly is a betrayal of the true bearing of the life and mission of Jesus Christ as well as of the aspirations of African Christians in search of a more meaningful expression of their Christian faith.

Too often, African Christologists become engrossed in the task of painting an African face of Jesus Christ. But Christology, as I affirmed above, it not merely a matter of faces, it covers the whole life, mission and praxis of Jesus of Nazareth, which is not exhausted by a restricted approach of discovering his African face. Any model emanating from this methodology will no doubt remain a truncated representation of Christ. African Christology must, therefore, embrace a wider perspective which will include the entire scope of Christ’s authentic mission and praxis.
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