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In current-day African theology, probably the most developed area is that of Christology, which treats the Person and the identity of Jesus Christ. This is logical, because evangelization in Africa is centred on the Person of Christ.

The Incarnation of Christ -genuine and definitive divine intervention in human history, apex of God’s self-communication to man in space and time- is the bed-rock of Christianity. It is a beacon which sheds multiple lights upon humanity. The Son of God became incarnate within the context of the Jewish people, assuming their mentality, customs, and traditional ways of life. The second Vatican Council states that the Church is to follow the example of Christ in order to effectively evangelize the cultures and make the Gospel message penetrate those cultures.

In line with this specific mission of the Church, African theologians have embarked on an enterprise which has come to be called «African theology». A theology whose aim is to give expression to Christianity in valid African terms; a theology which intends to make African culture become enlightened by the Gospel message and yields an African vision of Christianity; a theology which in communion with the whole Catholic tradition, hopes to contribute to an understanding of the faith which has unity in pluralism; finally, a theology whose goal is to help the Africans at the approach of the Third Millennium to live out Christianity authentically within their cultural milieu; in other words, constantly to re-actualize the «Incarnation» of the Word.

This thesis thus aims at pointing to a long-felt need of theology which will interpret Christ to the African in such a delicate way that he feels fully «at home» in the Catholic faith. It is also a work which attempts to speak to the actual questions that Africans are asking in the midst of their dilemmas, doubts, despair, suffering, hopes and aspirations.

The extract contains what originally were chapters three and four of the thesis, which focus on the African thinking on Christ. Chapter three studies the specific perspectives which arise from the concrete African context where the Gospel is inculturated. For the African,
Christ is not an abstract expression, but a living reality with vital connection with the African present existence. Who is Christ to the people of Africa? How do African eyes and minds look upon Christ? From this central question we can derive other questions: What should be the ideal and most relevant image of Christ to the contemporary people of Africa? These questions are not at the periphery but at the centre of meaningful Christology, for the first and all-inclusive question that Christians must ask about Jesus is: What difference does Jesus make?

Chapter four analyzes the anthropological foundations of African Christology. It identifies certain elements of the African concept of man which are constantly - though not always consciously - utilised by Africans in developing their Christology.

I have included at the beginning of this excerpt the table of contents of the entire thesis. This is to give the reader, right from the start, an idea of the development of African theology.

To give thanks is a sign of goodwill and appreciation for 'good' or 'help' received. Hence I thank all those who helped in the realization of this work: my bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. G.O. Ochiagha, my moderator, Prof. Dr. José Alviar, who has followed the development of this work; all the Professors of the University of Navarre who contributed much to my academic formation in diverse ways, especially Professor José Morales, whose concern in African theology helped me discover many books. I sincerely appreciate the scholarship granted to me by the Vasconia Foundation to study in Spain.

Finally, to my parents and all the members of my family, I say thank you for your love and sharing with me the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Into God's hands I commend this work on African Christology.
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A. AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

We shall focus on four areas of Christology where we feel African authors have contributed new, interesting perspectives.

In the first section, an attempt will be made to identify those elements that enrich our understanding of Jesus’ divine Person, immersed in Trinitarian life. We shall also investigate whether this picture has an impact on African Christians’ way of practicing ecclesial communion.

African Christology also opens interesting ecclesiological perspectives. In the second section, we will examine the peculiar African notion of Christ’s mystical Body.

The third section focuses on the soteriological perspectives suggested by African Christologians. Africans not only care for the soul but also for the body. The African concept of life deeply affects the view of Christ’s saving function. (Attempts to understand Christ from what he does rather than who he is have become dominant in recent years, particularly with the emergence of the theologies of liberation. We must take them into consideration).

The last section focuses on the pastoral perspectives opened by African Christology.

I. TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVES

Christian life is nothing but living out the intrinsic claims of our quality as sons and daughters of the Father, and true brothers and sisters of the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity teaches that the Godhead consists of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and that the three Persons are indivisibly one.

African theologians have focused their attention on Christ’s mystery as the Second Divine Person. In doing so, the majority of them stress communication as one of the fundamental elements of Christ’s divine personality. Let us now examine this idea in greater detail.

The traditional African sees the universe as a kind of organic whole consisting of a mystical supra-sensible communion. There is a kind of mystical identity between him and other beings, especially those to which he is emotionally attached.
In Western thinking, the category of «participation» attempts to express this one-sharing-in being; however, such participation is based on philosophical reflection, and more objective, emphasising participation as it is realized in individuals, whereas in African thinking, participation is primarily seen as a uniting factor, which produces a unitary reality. The emphasis is not on sharing a part of a whole but on communion. In other words, to participate is not firstly to appropriate to oneself a part of a whole, but rather to belong to that whole, to make with it a certain totality of communion.

Such ideas, applied by African theologians to the Trinity, implies picturing the communication of the one single divine life and power among the three Persons. This, we may say, in no way implies having a «part» of the divine life or power: the Father shares his entire being with the Son and the Spirit. Here the African sense of communion seems closer to the truth than the Western «pars capere», to have a part. This is why, with regard to the Trinity, the words communion and communication are preferred to the word participation. It is a question of having communion in the same divine life shared equally and totally among the divine Persons who are, as a consequence, one and identical in life, nature and power. This way of looking at the divine Persons, as relatedness, sharing, and oneness, contrasts with notions commonly introduced nowadays by Westerners in connection with the Trinity and Christology, such as: consciousness, freedom, and being a centre of activity\(^1\). Nyamiti observes that «all these belong more to the individuality of the person rather than to his openness and relatedness to others\(^2\). They tend to tone down the unity of the Trinity's reality.

Indeed, theologians have hardly begun to profit from the findings of modern personalism to expound the doctrine of the Trinity, and the approach to this Mystery, as we can see, is still mainly individualistic, which is contrary to the reality of the Trinity. As Appiah-Kubi suggests, we must present the doctrine on the Trinity in a more practical, dynamic, living way, based on the real life experience of person - as - communicable\(^3\).

Charles Nyamiti takes the ideas of communion and participation further, by showing their applicability to salvation. According to him, man is saved insofar as Christ gives him a share in the Trinitarian life.
Jesus, as the proto-Ancestor who takes care of us, presents himself as the one who has come so that his followers may have life and have it in abundance (Jn 10, 10).

We may point out here that participation and communion, though stressed by African theologians, are not yet fully realized in the African Church, and in Igboland in particular. (An example is in the sacrament of baptism where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are fully present. «If the Christian sacrament of baptism were presented to the African as a bond of participation and solidarity that ties the people together in union among themselves and with the Church and Christ, then Africans would more easily grasp the type of commitment expected of the baptized and see baptism as an introduction into a life long struggle of witness and of defending the gospel message in words and deeds within the holy family of the Trinity. They will understand baptism and other Christian sacraments as containing a vocation to build up a community of participation, a community of communion»).

Another consequence of the Trinitarian communion doctrine which has yet to find widespread application to African Christians' lives has to do with imitating Christ. The highest form of participation found in creation is the incarnation, whereby human nature became partaker of the divine. In this way the purpose of man's creation was brought to light, - to partake in the life of the Trinity, through Christ. As St. Paul says: «All things are yours and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's».

Now, for a true participation in the Divine life of Christ, Africans must learn selflessness and self-surrender as one of the fundamental elements of the divine personality; African theology must stress self-sacrificing love as seen in the Trinitarian life. Africans have a sense of sharing, friendship and love, but all these are yet self-centred.

The implication of this lacuna in African life shows that the African trinitarian explanation of the inner life of Christ does not yet correspond exactly to the words of Jesus in St. John's Gospel: «All that the Father has is mine: therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you» (16:15). The African search for participation in divine power and life must include the quest for divine selflessness and service.
Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Tanzania is worried on African failure to understand the Trinity in their lives, and asks: «Have you ever considered why Christianity is different from all other religions? All great religions believe in one God. It is only Christianity which believes that this one God is three persons. Why should God have revealed this mystery to us?» Mwoleka holds that Africans have not yet come to appreciate the Trinitarian mystery, since they do not see how it applies to their daily life. He suggests that the Christian religion be presented as a sharing or participating in Christ's life, a vital mirroring of Christ's full sharing in the Father's and Spirit's life.

Along the same line suggested by Mwoleka, Bujo suggests that the Spirit may be understood as the vital power uniting Father and Son, and constituting the inner strength of the Trinity. The Spirit likewise creates a new community of renewed individuals. Christ, raised from the dead to a new life by the power of the Spirit, by sharing that same power with men, becomes constituted as a source, or Proto-Ancestor. He is now the fount of that power together with the Father, he gives in abundance the vitality which he shares with the Father, and that vitality leads the community as Church to fullness of life and eschatological completion.

All this idea of the Father sharing all with the Son and the Son generously sharing his life with man leads to practical consequences. We may recall from our first chapter how communitarian life was spelt out by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, with his proposals of Ujamaa. Nyerere believed that the benefit of community life results when the rich as well as the poor are completely secured in society, and no one starves either of food or human dignity because of personal want or wealth. He may depend on the resources possessed by the community of which he is a member.

Camilus Lyimo of Tanzania also takes hold of the Swahili concept of Ujamaa which for him means «relationship», «brotherhood», to suggest a social consequence. «Sharing», as Lyimo explains, is a key concept in Ujamaa, and is more an attitude, a way of life, than anything else. According to Lyimo, the perfect ujamma is the Trinity, since there is in God an economic and essential sharing among persons who are one. Likewise, Christians should unite efforts to achieve a common goal.
(A further attempt to apply the idea of the Trinity's unified life and action may be found in some theologians' efforts to create an indigenous «theology of development». John Mutiso Mbinda of Kenya symbolizes it in his article: «a theology of Harambee». *Harambee* is a Swahili word meaning «to pull together». It is a catch word used in the context of communal labour to encourage people to work together. It expresses basically the idea of co-operation both on the community and family levels. It also includes the idea of unison in Ecclesial action).

The idea of communion did not escape the Fathers of the African Church in the last African Synod when they highlighted that the African sense of family solidarity affords a valuable base on which to build an ecclesiology of the Church as the «Family of God» on earth. The Fathers state:

> living Christian communities form cells within which love of God is inseparable from love of neighbour, and in which the tendencies to disunity, egoism, tribalism, etc., are discerned and overcome.

Thus, we say, both African churchmen and theologians assert that the ingrained solidarity in African traditional life may well form the basis for the mutual aid among the members of a Christian community, and provide an incentive to a much larger solidarity going beyond tribe, town, or nation.

As a final observation, it must be added that African traditional ideas on community and solidarity also need some purification in order to be of use as valid instruments of analogy for speaking of the Trinity and the Church. We may say that the African way of thinking of solidarity is in some respects «individualistic». It is sometimes wrongly understood, and used, as an instrument of oppression. People in influential positions use their power to procure exclusive privileges for their own kinsfolk and clan at the expense of outsiders. (It often happens that doctors are really only interested in their relatives, and may demand bribes from people they do not know. Politicians may even channel developments to their native villages or districts when other areas are in much greater need).
II. ECCLESIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Africans believe that the universe is made up of a web of relationships, and thus forms a cosmic family. In African traditional society, to be human is to be with others, and to be because of them. For outside the communal relationships life is meaningless. To be religious is to be so in and with the community. Seen from that perspective, many African Christians are convinced that it is not by our making that we come to God, but through the Church, membered to Christ and each other. It is within this communitarian reality that we experience the religious reality and express it.

It is in this sense that the Church as an «Assembly», «Ecclesia», «Convocation», «Gathering» is a reality both old and new to the African. In the case of Christianity it is no longer by their initiative that the Africans come together or gather. Henceforth African believers gather because God the Father willed their coming together; they gather because God the Son called them to form a community. They are directly called by God through Christ in the Spirit. The Church in the African context is therefore a «New rallying Ground». Just as Africans used to gather in the village squares for important matters and events, so do the Christians gather in the «New Square» called the Church for an important matter, namely to hear the word of God. The Church's bell that signals the Christians, is the "town Crier" in the village that convokes Africans in the village square. The «Town Crier» is Jesus Christ the Lord, who came from God, with a message from God, the message of salvation.

We must point out here that the major difference between Jesus the Lord and the African town crier, is that while the town criers are only messengers, the «New Town Crier», Jesus, is God. He came with a message which is his. Jesus is not only a Messenger, he is the Message as well. While the African messenger gives his message and retires, Jesus, after his ascension to the Father, as Lord, continues to summon us and deliver his message through the persons whom He appointed to speak in his name in the community.

In this sense African community becomes a new community, a new «people of God», the «Body of Christ», the «Mystical Body». In his own way, God called Africans together in a community endowed
with innumerable gifts of grace. In the physical absence of Christ now, this community - the Church - remains the evidence of his continuous presence among men. Men receive and learn the codes of new life from the Church through the Word, and Sacraments. The external forms of the Church are means which God uses to communicate his life to his people. Hence, to encounter the believing community is to encounter the Lord and vice versa, and to be religious is to be so in, with and through the believing community. In other words, whoever seeks Christ must look for Him within the believing community. She is the Christ-bearer.

How does an ordinary African understand the nature and structure of the Church founded by Christ? Just as an African who wished to find a fulfilling life normally resorted to the community, so should Christians resort to the Church community. God calls all and sundry through Christ to form a new community and remain in it. Refusal to respond to this call and to participate in the life of the new community or absenteeism means a self-deprival of the benefits in this community. Described in the African categories, the Church is a great family, far greater than any extended family. She is the greatest imaginable extended family, united around one family head, God himself.

But how does each member of the Church relate to Christ? What specific effects does union with him imply? African Christologians reply to this question by portraying Christ within the context of communion with the living and with the dead. The most outstanding category they employ to describe Christ in his central role within this vast «communion» of beings is that of Ancestor.

The African concept of ancestor has been modified by many authors to cite Jesus Christ as the «Great Ancestor», from which we have ancestral christology. Among the proponents of this position are Bujo, Pobee, Pénoukou, Milingo, Mbinda, and Nyamiti.

Bujo presents Jesus as the (proto-ancestre) proto-ancestor; he maintains that the title, "Ancestor", surely signifies more for Africans than the titles Logos and Lord. These latter titles, according to him, will never be forsaken, but Africans may adopt other titles that are more meaningful to them.
Pobee, for his part, defines Christ as the «great ancestor», while for Pénoukou he is the Jete-Ancestor. Milingo also defends the appropriateness of comparing Jesus with the ancestors:

Giving Jesus the title of Ancestor is not just giving Him an honorary title. Jesus fits perfectly into the African understanding of ancestor. He is more than that; we can see in Him all that we Africans are looking for in our ancestors. This is a very noble title, because when we consider Jesus as an ancestor, it means that he is to us an elder in the community.

Mbinda argues this thought-category from the point of view of African ancestors as being mediators and intermediaries. The ancestors, according to him, are important for the preservation of stability and progress of a community of the living and the living-dead. From this, Mbinda concludes that Christ is our ancestor par excellence, because he is the source and support of the new human lineage.

Nyamiti shares the same view with Mbinda, and is perhaps the one who has most popularized this type of Christology. He uses the analogy of ancestral relationship to read various mysteries of the Christian faith, particularly the Trinity, and the Communion of the Saints. Such a venture is possible, says Nyamiti, because of the elasticity of the African concept of ancestorship. According to him, the following elements constitute the ancestral relationship:

Kinship (consanguineous or non-consanguineous) between the dead and the living kin. The ancestor constitutes, as progenitor, the source of life for the earthly relatives.

Superhuman status and other superhuman qualities.

Mediation between God and the earthly kin. Christ is the synthesis of all mediations (Cfr. Heb. 8). Africans are convinced that no one has ever seen God, and that God nevertheless maintains contact with created beings. Contact with God is made by way of certain divine envoys and delegates, or intermediaries, who are precisely the beings closest to the source of life - beings who, by a particular gift of God, have been endowed with a special communication with God. Christ himself proclaimed his mediation between human beings and his Father. He is the «door» of access to the Father (Jn. 10:9).
Exemplarity of behaviour in community and family. Right of title to frequent sacred communication with the living kin through prayers and ritual offerings (oblation).  

Developing his thesis further, Nyamiti maintains that Christ is our «Brother-Ancestor par excellence». Through Him, God the Father has become our Ancestor. Thus, our bodies are sacred living shrines inhabited by our divine Ancestors, (God the Father and Christ in the divine Spirit). And as for the saints in «heaven and purgatory», these, he says, are in different degrees «ancestors in Christ». They are related to us through their «participation in the ancestral status of the Redeemer». Among them are to be counted the African ancestors who died in friendship with God, for, «in addition to being our consanguineous kin, they are our ancestors in Christ».  

Following the above observations, we can resume thus: Jesus possesses precisely those qualities and virtues which Africans like to attribute to their ancestors and which lead them to invoke the ancestors in their daily lives. Thus the title of Ancestor is a useful category to employ in analogies dealing with Christ’s identity.  

African theologians suggest that Christ may be understood to occupy a special place in the web of communion: He is the meeting-point of the Church Militant; He is the centrepiece of the communion among the Saints of the Church triumphant; and, finally, he is the nexus between the living and the dead members of the Church. Now, this «centrality» may be expressed in term of the African cultural category of «Ancestorship»; for an ancestor is one who has preceded the member of his family into the state of bliss, and lives in communion with other excellent members of the family; at the same time he remains an active part of the family upon earth, exercising a beneficial influence upon the living members. The ancestor is, in a sense, immersed in the regions of the dead and of the living - a unifying link between two worlds.  

III. Soteriological Perspectives  

Africans have a peculiar notion of man and human fulfilment. Man is not just a soul, he is also a body. He longs not just for holiness but for wholeness, which includes freedom from all forms of misery
and oppression. It is within this African thirst of human «wholeness» that Christologists depict Christ and his role: as liberator, as Saviour and Healer.

1. Christ as a Liberator

This title cannot be overlooked in any consideration of African Christology. Many of the writers we have surveyed agree in identifying Africa as a continent full of all kinds of problems. Mbiti, for example, describes her as a continent full of crises like warfare, famines, epidemics, locust invasions and many changes in the weather, all of which provoke a revival of religious activities or innovation of new ones. It is under this aspect of needfulness in Africa that the face of a liberator is sought.

From the Gospel, it is clear that Jesus was not neutral to the condition of the poor, the sick, the alienated. In his inaugural sermon, he declared that his ministry was one of preaching the good news to the poor, heralding freedom to the captives, sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed. Such a message, when related to the African situation, may be validly understood to mean that the salvation and liberation which Jesus announced was a comprehensive package.

During his life on earth, Christ not only preached the kingdom and forgave sins, he also went around curing the sick, feeding the hungry, consoling the suffering, showing justice and mercy. St. Matthew writes that Jesus travelled all of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every illness among the people (Matt. 4: 23). And St. Mark places these words on Jesus’ lips, presenting the ultimate meaning of his whole life: «The Son of Man himself has come not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life in ransom for a multitude» (Mk. 10: 45). Christ, St. John will say, has come that humanity may have life, and have it in fullness.

From what we have seen from the evangelists’ description of Christ’s ministry to man, it follows that disease, physical and mental handicaps, are contrary to life and are included in Christ’s messianic mission. From all this, is there any doubt that Africans should seek the face of Jesus as a liberator in their perennial problems? It is a global, unitary kind of «liberation» that Africans hunger for.
African Christological discourse on Christ’s liberating role has taken on an added dimension, in the course of development of African theology. It is no longer «liberation», in the exclusive South African liberation theology sense that is spoken of, but liberation understood in its «totality», as a removal of all that which keeps the African in bondage, all that makes him less than what God intended him to be. It connotes the total idea of liberation from sinfulness, moral weakness, evil powers, external forces, distortion of one’s humanity, poverty and want. It includes the liberation of women from inferior treatment; it also includes salvation from physical illness.

2. Christ as a Saviour

Closely related to the African Christian concept of Christ as Liberator is the firm belief that Jesus is a Saviour. Although this title has no parallel in African tradition, salvation in traditional African religion implies wholeness of life, as many African theologians indicate. It entails social equilibrium - harmony with the living and the dead. It also entails personal equilibrium - inner harmony that produces physical well-being.

Jesus as a saviour of Africans does more than procure for them an eternal destiny. He assumes responsibility for their total well-being. Thus the gospel proclamation of a saviour offers a true future, providing Africans with answers to their deepest aspirations.

Mbiti associates the notion of "Saviour" with that of Christ: he is the one who cures all illness, expels evil spirits and frees prisoners and the oppressed. Mbiti calls for a holistic view of salvation which includes both spiritual and physical aspects. He observes that some missionaries «proclaimed a restrictive understanding of salvation from sin and largely for the soul». Mbiti largely contends that for the Gospel to be meaningful to the African people, «salvation has to embrace their total world, both physical and spiritual».

Manas Buthelezi expresses a similar view when he points out that the traditional African world-view emphasizes the "wholeness of life": all life was sacramental and therefore was the meeting place of man with God. As to what this "wholeness of life" means, Buthelezi states that man discovers that his self is in caricature form: he realizes that he is neither what he thought he was nor what he would like to be.
Out of this mental and emotional torture crop up a number of existential questions: After all, who am I? What is the destiny of my being and mode of existence? These, and other similar self examinations are, in essence, the quest for full or authentic humanity; a cry for human liberation in the face of the colonization of the self by outside factors. Christ is our saviour in the sense that he aids us to become fully what we are called to be.

Cyril Okorocha, narrating various kinds of salvation among the Igbo, adds that salvation includes the concept of justice as well as other goods - called Ezi-Ndu (viable life). God's salvation also includes, for instance, the gift of children so that the family name will not be obliterated (a kind of immortality on earth); deliverance from misfortunes, poverty, and interpersonal conflict; and the promise of justice and equity.

The Old Testament concept of salvation had its roots in concrete experiences and situations. The emphasis was on deliverance by Yahweh from unfaithfulness to the covenant and from specific situations such as slavery in Egypt. Salvation in the context of the African Christological scheme is analogously a dynamic process by which man is delivered from all the negative forces binding him, be they physical, social, economic or spiritual. In this regard, Sawyerr adds that salvation in African culture carries with it the idea of deliverance, rescue from a powerless or helpless situation, gained through purification rites and propitiation of the divinities and the spirits. Generally speaking, he continues, there are three major situations or forces from which the African seeks salvation or deliverance: (1) daily hardships, such as crop failure due to the weather, everyday conflicts, infant mortality, and female infertility; (2) evil spirits, forces, and persons, such as witches and sorcerers; and (3) lack of good relationships with ancestral spirits and the divinities. Thus when Africans are beset with any of these crucial existential problems, they have recourse to God and the spirits to beg for deliverance.

In the final analysis, the African psychology seeks a complete form of salvation, even though at a particular moment in time the need may be particular. Therefore the quest for better living conditions, achieved by increased harvest, falls within the African's thirst for salvation; likewise, the quest for social status through initiation, and
the quest for the perpetuation of the family lineage through offspring, who keep in constant communion with the ancestors. Thus Christ is presented by African theologians as a saviour who has come to rescue man from a powerless and helpless situation. He is the prince of justice for those who look upon Him.

From what we have seen, African Christological authors affirm that Christ's salvation of man is never limited to the spirit alone but to the body. Hence, African theology tends to accentuate the idea that salvation for the African has both physical and spiritual dimensions. Salvation achieved by Christ is thus a total healing or liberation. The belief that «the whole person is ill» is very prominent in the healing process in Africa, and the action of Jesus is hoped for the salvation and liberation of the man. This aspect means careful application to preaching the Gospel in Africa. In particular, it implies a prudent application to the idea of the so-called «healing» ministries, so popular among Christian and non-Christian communities.

Finally, to talk of salvation in the African context is inevitably to include talk of emancipating the masses from their unhygienic conditions and unchristian customs and habits. It is to save them from the destructive tribalism which is rife among many groups. In short, it is to talk of a total solution, though part of that solution will only come, as the Christian faith teaches, in the eschatological phase.

The specific accent that we can identify in African theological discussion on the notion of «salvation» may be stated in one word: "totality".

3. Christ as a Healer

The notion of Christ as a liberator is often understandably linked with that of Christ -as a Healer. Many African authors have written books and articles on healing, and some like Appiah-Kubi, Cécé Kolié, Bujo, have attributed the title of healer to Christ. This is understandable. Healing power is an important quality in African traditional belief. In African tradition healers are a very useful source of help to the communities. Mbiti says that every African village has a medicine-man within reach and he is a friend of this community, for he is accessible to everybody and at almost all times. (Other names associated to healer are "herbalist" or "traditional doctor").
It is therefore appropriate and even useful to examine Christ’s healing function especially because Holy Scripture allots to this function a place of importance in the life of Jesus.

Since the belief that «the whole person is ill» is very prominent in the healing process in Africa, theologians explain the action of Jesus as always directed to the salvation and liberation of the whole man\textsuperscript{51}.

The goal of Christ’s redemptive and ancestral mission, they say, was to restore the original peace and harmony disturbed by the sinful separation between God and men. The consequence of this separation included man’s spiritual and bodily disturbance and the dominion of the devil. Hence, in combating these evils as He did during His earthly life, Jesus was fulfilling His soteriological mission to re-establish the original happy condition of mankind by removing the unhappy consequences of the Fall. Indeed, he is a Healer.

African theologians caution that although «healer» is useful for referring to Christ, this traditional figure also needs purification. While magic is attributed to the healing power of the African healer, Christianity totally excludes the idea of magic from Christ’s power or activity. Christ’s healings are efficacious signs of His salvation. Furthermore, although there are instances where Christ healed men in answer to their petition this was not invariably so. It is always Christ’s primary and free initiative that is the source of the miraculous healing, either by inspiring men to ask for such healing, or through gratuitous healing without any petition on the part of those concerned.

To conclude, we may affirm that the awareness that sickness is experienced in a religious context in Africa indicates the importance of the figure of «Jesus-Healer» for the Christian communities. African churches have rediscovered the ministry of healing exercised by Jesus Christ and have succeeded in making it a relevant dimension of man’s deliverance\textsuperscript{52}.

IV. Pastoral Perspectives

1. Christ as Model Ancestor

Many African theologians whom we have surveyed are inclined to use the concept of ancestor also to open fresh pastoral perspectives in Africa\textsuperscript{53}. 
Christ as Ancestor not only is the source of life, but also the model of his lineage. The question then arises: How is Christ a model? Perhaps, suggest theologians, to develop a viable African Christian theology, adapted to the African mentality, there is a need to work out a moral theology centred on Jesus Christ as Ancestor.

Bénézet Bujo, one of the exponents of this ancestry belief, (proto-ancêtre), says that Jesus Christ should be presented as the most ideal Ancestor. It should be understood from the outset that when we speak of Jesus as our «Model», we do not mean that he is to be regarded as a kind of prototype to be slavishly imitated. Here, Bujo clarifies that:

The term «model» has to be understood in the way narrative ethics uses it. Those who contemplate Jesus can find values and norms which can be integrated into their own lives so that they provide inspiration for responsible conduct.

In fact, adds Bujo, the Gospel readings portray Christ as possessing those attributes that Africans look up to in their ancestors. For instance, the Gospels show Christ vigorously defending the rights of the weak, of women, of children, and identifying himself with outcasts and sinners.

Africans interact with ancestors because of their moving moral example. This emulation takes place to a supreme degree in Christ’s case. In this new perspective, Christ becomes the constitutive principle of African Christian ethics. Bujo indicates that morality centred on Christ may help to check corruption in Africa. The same is to be said of the way authority is exercised, which often involves enriching oneself and exploiting the weak. Corruption, abuse of power and the like can be overcome in our perspective if Jesus Christ is upheld for the faithful as Proto-Ancestor.

In fact, the exercise of any function, any investment with public office, may be referred to Jesus Christ as model. This is because Christ’s title of «Lord» excludes despotic behaviour towards others, for of the disciples of Jesus it is explicitly said, «it is not to be so among you» (Cfr. Lk 22: 24-27; Mk 20: 25-26). Imitation of Christ’s «authority» involves total renunciation of exhibitionism, and humility to the point
of «self-emptying» (Cfr. Phil 2: 6-11; Mk 10: 45; Mt 22: 28). Thus Christ's example incides upon the African traditional ways of conceiving structures of authority and the different roles played by people in the governing of a community.

2. Christ as a Chief

One thing that strikes a foreigner is the great awe people in Africa have for their traditional leaders, be they kings or chiefs. These are not simply political leaders, Mbiti points out, they are also the religious heads, the divine symbol of their people's health and welfare. The individual chief may not even have outstanding talents or abilities, but his office is the link between human rule and spiritual government.

Why have the Africans placed Christ in the category of Chief? For one, because Christian revelation exalts him (Phil. 2). But there is something more. The prerogatives of an African chief are seen to have been fully realized by Jesus Christ. Power belongs superlatively to Jesus Christ because he is «strong», generous, wise, and reconciler of human beings.

Christ is called «Chief» because he has triumphed over satan. The figure of the African Chief is closely associated with that of the victors; as a chief, Christ is the defender and protector of His people. One often hears Christ described as one who battles for his people. He is the «rainbow that ends the rain». (The rainbow in the African thought is one of the cosmic powers; it is associated with the image of the hero: as the rainbow arrests the most threatening rains, so do mighty persons thrust back the most redoubtable enemies).

Christ is likewise called Chief because he is the child of the Chief, of God - the Chief's Emissary. That Christ is the Son of God, Africans have learned only through Christian revelation. But that God is the Chief of the universe, the ultimate recourse, they know by their ancestral faith.

As a Chief Christ is the head of a community, namely the Church. The chief not only represents the community, but also in him the community stands. The chief is the guardian of a community, one person who embodies the religious and political aspirations of the tribe. He is the soul of a people, symbolizing their identity, unity,
and continuity. And that community owes allegiance to him. For that reason he is their judge and exercises authority over them and their lives. All these apply to Jesus’ chieftainship. But there is one new element in the case of Jesus - the community over which Jesus is King cuts across tribal and political boundaries and, indeed, embraces all mankind.58

Christ, finally, is Chief in African understanding by reason of his generosity and wisdom. He is generous in the distribution of his gifts: he satiated the hungering crowd beyond its expectations. He addresses his call to all, good and wicked. He is always present and available, he is called «Emmanuel» (Matt. 1:24), the shepherd who abides with the flock. Christ serves and governs in the interest of all. As a Chief, He brought life, and life-force, in fullness. He lived his mission for his fellow-humans in an altogether matchless way, and further, left to his disciples, as his final commandment, the law of love. «If, then, I have washed your feet, I, the Lord and Master...» (John 13:14).

As may be seen, from many angles Christ is considered as the idealized or plenified version of the traditional notion of «Chief». African theologians value the practical import of this figure, since they hope Christ’s example to transform Africans’ imperfect ways of conceiving leadership and power - both in the ecclesiastical and the secular sphere.59

B. ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

In this brief chapter, we would like to offer a more selective but even deeper look at African Christology. After our general overview of Christological authors and works, and our identification of specific, fresh perspectives they suggest, it seems now possible to attempt a preliminary characterization of African Christology. To phrase it in the form of a question: Are we able to single out the anthropological underpinnings, if any exist, of African Christology? Is it feasible to identify those conceptions on man which, in spite of the confusing
variety of African Christological proposals, serve as common pillars for African theological construction?

We think that it is valid to affirm that at least two major anthropological tenets indeed exert a pervading and constant influence on African Christology (and perhaps African theology at large). We enumerate them thus: (1) the conception of the human person as a non-solitary being; and (2) the holistic conception of human nature and fulfilment. In this brief analytical chapter, we would like to discuss these two suppositions underlying African Christology.

I. FUNDAMENTAL AFRICAN NOTION ON MAN

1. Man as a being-in-communion

It will be noted that quite a number of the proposed African ways of defining Christ are in fact relational categories: Christ as Ancestor; as Elder Brother; as Chief. Such terms indicate that the authors (and their corresponding public) tend to conceive Christ preferentially in His relationship to men.

In turn, that tendency reveals one typical note of the African conception of human nature. In contrast with the modern Western accent on human nature in terms of liberty, self-determination, autonomy, and self-fulfilment, the African mind refuses to conceive the human being separately from his social and cosmic environment. Viewed cosmically, man is a force in the universe full of forces. Man, (the Igbo word, Mmadu) is best seen as life-force interacting with the life-forces in the universe. He is endowed with different principles which link and allow him to interact with other beings in the world. Viewed anthropologically, man is seen as a being who «belongs». As Muzorewa says:

African humanity is primarily defined by a sense of belonging, serving one’s own folk, and kinship. For the African, it is not enough to be a human being; unless one shares a sense of community, one can easily turn out to be an enemy ... humanity is to be conceived as ‘being in relation’.
A man is, truly is, in the measure in which he simultaneously belongs to a community and to the universe. The solidity or completeness of existence consists not solely in strong internal coherence but also in immersion in a web of relationships with nature, with the supreme Being, and, in a special way, with fellow men. Human nature, in this perspective, appears as «being-situated-in» a mesh of interrelationships among discrete existence which, taken together, make up a unified whole. Personality and individuality, in this light, are reaffirmed not when a person looses himself from family, tribal, and religious bonds, but rather when he intensifies his links with fellow beings. In a similar way, subtraction from the web of relationships is unthinkable, as it can only lead to disaster (as occurs, for instance, when an individual is excluded from the community of the living or of the dead ancestors).

Existence in relation sums up the pattern of the African way of life. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family, and the cosmos. Into each avenue he enters with his whole being, without essentially distinguishing the existence of any boundaries dividing one from the other.

Western authors have, in fact, also attempted to develop the notion of person as relation, inspired in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but Africans seem to be more spontaneously at home with the notion. This co-naturality is rooted in African vital experience and tradition, which include such strong values as the extended family, initiation rites into a community, and intense community support of individuals.

This concept of being as «being-related» profoundly determines the nature and direction of present-day African Christology. The traditional Christian description of Christ as the Son of the Father, for example, seems assimilated with greater ease by Africans, since tight family bonds are a familiar phenomenon to them.

In fact, as we have had occasion to point previously, the dogma of the Trinity is understood by Africans with additional strong shades. For them, membership in a family implies a particular manner of existing, implying deep bonds of unity, sharing or communing in all of the family's goods, and active commitment to working in unison. This contrasts somewhat with some modern Western conceptions of
the family, where stress is laid upon the individual members' dignity and capacity for self-realization. Within the African perspective, we might say, Christ's Person is seen in a metaphysical and dynamic unity with the Father and the Spirit. From such a viewpoint, the affirmation of the Son sharing the Father's own divine substance and activity does not imply such an enormous leap for the human mind. (As it did for strongly monotheistic Jews).

From an ecclesiological viewpoint, the New Testament metaphor of Christ's body closely parallels the organic relationality in which Africans understand themselves. The church is union and communion with Christ. It is being-in-Christ, and has the tremendous task of initiating more and more people into the mysteries of the new humanity - in - Christ.

The historical reality of Christianity as a fragmented body provides a poor paradigm for the ideal of humanness. This is the urgent challenge facing African Christian churches today: they must overcome their divisions in order to be truly the one church. In Jesus, we are meant to become and we do indeed become one large, multi-ethnic, extended family, clan, nation, and race of humanity.

Other terms used to designate Jesus' identity within the Trinity prove less easy to grasp on the part of the Africans: Logos, Wisdom, etc. are terms abstract and somewhat farther removed from the African frame of mind. Thus we see such terms employed by African Christologians to a lesser degree. Once again, this phenomenon is highly significative of how the selection of terms by Africans reveals their own subconscious or semiconscious anthropological framework.

The African description of Christ within the divine economy of salvation is also rich in relational concepts. Think of the term "Elder Brother", which has been suggested by a number of authors to describe Christ's role on behalf of men. The term is intensely relational. It indicates, on the one hand, his sharing with others of authentic human nature (with its finitude and its suffering); and on the other hand, Christ's pre-eminent role among humans as guide and authority. Thus the term underlines both Christ's nearness to, and superior rank over, the rest of men. In a way this category fuses what occidental theologians would describe as the «vertical» and «horizontal» relationships between Christ and men.
A similar category, which we have spoken of, the tribal one of Elder or Chief, serves a similar «relating» function. It expresses the fact that Christ is part of a community, (namely the Church), and at the same time exercises a role above that of ordinary members of the community: he is judge, leader, and centre of unity. He is the one who bears the brunt of the responsibility of the people’s welfare. Note once again that the election of this term reveals how Africans tend to conceive Christ as genuinely human, immersed in the reality of a «people». He is the Son of God, true, and in that sense he is above man; but he is also truly «one of us».

Let us consider another proposed category of African Christology, that of initiator. As we have already seen, traditional African communities conceive a human being’s life as passing through different stages, each requiring a specific «initiation», which not only marks the individual's interior maturation but also his greater insertion into the community and his assuming further responsibilities related to the common good. The title of Initiator, applied to Christ, again reveals how the Africans think of Christ’s role in its relational or social dimension - as inserting humans deeper and deeper into a «communion of saints».

As a member of a community, the initiate shares in all that pertains to the community: the joys and sorrows, hardships and fortunes, sufferings and happiness. He also identifies himself with the community by rendering service and contributing to the building up and strengthening of the bond of communion in the society. This conception facilitates the understanding of baptism as uniting a person with the members of the mystical body, the Church, in the life of faith, and lets him use the divine gifts received in the work of building up the Church.

This attitude of involvement, we may say, is a practical way of expressing solidarity within the Church, whose members are bound strongly together through a common «initiation». (If the Christian sacraments of initiation are presented to the Africans as a bond of solidarity that ties the people together in union among themselves and with the Church and Christ, through charity, Africans would more easily grasp the type of commitment expected of an initiate during baptism, and see baptism as an introduction into a life-long
struggle of witness and of defending the gospel message in words and deeds within the solidarity of the people of God).

We may thus affirm that African theologians possess a powerful social view of the Christian, and in consequence conceive Christ's positive role as that of strengthening the human being's relationship with a «community of salvation». Man is not saved alone, and it is Christ's task to incorporate him into the group of the elect.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to detain ourselves, on two more African Christological designations, those of Ancestor and Chief, which, being also «relational», lay special stress on one further aspect. We might call it the «vertical dimension» of Christ's mediation.

In the first place, let us take the African proposal of conceiving Christ as Ancestor. Again it will be noted that this idea is essentially relational, since for Africans the «ancestor» is a human being who, though «dead», continues to exercise influence upon the living members of the family. African conviction in the continued existence of individuals beyond death, together with belief in their continued assistance of the living members of their family, yields a picture similar to what Christians denominate «the communion of saints», whose structure embraces both the living and the dead.

It will be noted that the notion of Ancestor further reveals the wide expanse of the African's view of human communion, which reaches beyond time and space to include members of the family who have gone ahead to a more perfect existence. Communion, in this light, is not an earth-bound phenomenon but rather one that includes a linkage among individuals on either side of death's boundary line. Applied to the Christian worldview, this implies that Christ's role is not limited to its «horizontal» dimension, i.e. his accompanying present-day Christians as «Emmanuel»; it also contains a «vertical» dimension, since Christ is the «First-Born» into glory, or the Head which has preceded the Body into glory. He is the principal part of that family which, throughout history, is gradually achieving the number of plenitude.

One of the special advantages of this model for Christology lies in the way it helps to make more understandable the relationship of Christ the head to the whole body of the Church. Christ, in other words, is not only immersed in the relational web of the Church on
earth; he is also immersed in the relational web of the company of saints in heaven. He thus appears as a meeting-point for two worlds, the junction and hinge of «this life» and «eschatology». To express it even more precisely, from his position in the world of the ancestors (as Proto-Ancestor), Christ pulls individuals up from the world of the living, to permit their entry into the growing body of definitively saved individuals.

Similar lines of thought run through African Christologians referring to Christ as Chief. This idea, as we have stated above, contains the double note of belonging to a given group and enjoying a higher rank. We may now further add that the notion points to a «vertical» dimension of Christ's function as well. In African traditional mentality, a chief is not only the centre of unity of a group, but also the representative of that group before the ancestors. The Chief's prominent role in public religious rites means that the he is not only the apex of a human collectivity, but also the anchor-point of that collectivity with a higher world.

Thus the application of the notion of Chief to Christ appears as one more indication of Africans' wide view of human communion. Man is a relational being, but that relational side of his nature is not confined to the here and now. Rather, man is in some way immersed in the whole river of humanity. He is part of an unbroken line of beings that stretches out from the past, through the present, and to the future.

2. The holistic view of human nature and fulfilment

We now come to the second anthropological element underlying most of African Christology. We choose to denominate it as the «holistic view» of man's nature. To express it in other words: man is a multi-dimensional being; if he is saved by Christ he must be saved in all of those dimensions, not just one. More concretely, African theologians repeatedly stress that man is not just spirit, but also corporeal; not just individual but cosmic; and that the salvation he hungers for is a total one.

To see these ideas in closer detail, let us first focus on the African Christological suggestion of Christ as Healer. Our Lord's attitude to healing, as represented in the Gospels, is marked by an integral
approach: that is to say, he heals on several levels at once, physical, emotional, psychic, social, religious. It would seem that this manner of speaking of Christ has found acceptance among Africans because it echoes what they instinctively think regarding human nature and happiness. In the course of time, this sense of integral healing seems to have receded in the Western world which tends to separate healing dimensions. Generally the Church's ministry has concentrated on the moral and spiritual aspects, leaving the physical to exceptional persons and places, unless of course it is simply handed over to the medical profession. Interest in a more comprehensive prospect of healing is thus growing among African theologians.

While cognizant that salvation of the soul is an essential dimension of beatitude, the African mentality suspects exclusively «spiritual» preaching as introducing a dichotomy in human reality. If the whole person is saved, his tears must be wiped away.

As we can see, man is not just a soul; his body is just as real and intrinsic to his being as is his spirit. Thus evangelization, when centred exclusively on the soul's salvation, has often encountered limited success among the African audience. More modern, eschatologically-charged expositions, which take care to include the vision of the Resurrection of the Body and the transformation of the cosmos, find more ready acceptance in Africa. Again, this sounds logical, since such descriptions of beatitude include both man's corporeal and cosmic dimensions - a holistic fulfilment, in other words.

From this point of view, it becomes clear why Christ as Healer should prove to be quite attractive a category for African theology, as it pictures Christ's work not only in terms of spiritual cleansing or healing from sin, but also in terms of bodily benefits. And indeed, the Gospel incidents show how Christ's saving power pervaded all of human reality, both spirit and matter. To speak of Christ as healer in Africa, therefore, helps bring home the idea that union with Christ promises to bestowed ultimate total happiness upon man, through divinization of his whole nature.

However, it must be admitted that the use of this category is a delicate matter, and could easily mislead African Christians. The total impact of Christ's salvation, we must recall, will only be felt by man and the world at time's end. Thus perfection of the body and of
man's surroundings will arrive only as an eschatological event. Presenting Christ as Healer implies the risk of bringing forward the contents of the final picture into the present, and thus of fostering a premature hope of bodily health. That would diminish the value of another of Christ's teachings, namely, the co-redemptive value of human suffering. The risk exists that the faithful might be misled to include, in their hope in Christ-Saviour, the expectation of immediate solution of their ailments, a hope which does not coincide with the actual stage of the divine economy.

Let us turn now to the second category by which African Christologists may be said to describe Christ's «holistic» saving role: that of liberator. This concept, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, includes not just a freeing from sin but from all oppression and all conditions that impede human realization (such as natural disasters, poverty, and exploitation). Underneath this manner of speaking about Christ we may perceive a fundamental habit of the African mind: that of picturing the human being in his total situation, including his insertion within the physical cosmos and the fabric of society. Man, conceived in this fashion, cannot call himself «whole» simply because he has achieved interior fullness or perfection; he must ensure besides that he also is protected from harm coming from the outside. Total salvation occurs for the African only when his situation in the web of beings has become an absolutely safe and tranquil one.

From this perspective it again becomes easier to understand why the preaching of exclusively spiritual perfection to Africans has met with only medium acceptance: the public feels more attracted to the notion of a global form of salvation, which necessarily includes relief from the evil forces of oppression, want, poverty, natural disaster, etc.

As in the case of Christ as Healer, the category of Liberator contains its own risks. In applying this title to Christ, African theologians should take care not to impoverish the conception of Christ's mission. For Salvation is worked in men by Christ in a stepwise fashion - on earth, through grace; in a fuller way, in heaven; at the end of time, totally, when all creation will be transfigured in glory and God will be all in all. Thus liberation by Christ in the complete sense or in all dimensions does not occur all at once, and much less so during earthly existence. It occurs, first, in the intimate dimension of liberation from sin and
vice, and gradually pervades all of man’s existence. To preach Christ as Liberator could foster a mistaken hope in people of a total freeing from all human limitation and social injustice even in earthly life. That would be equivalent to bringing heaven, or the eschatological universe, down to earth. That would also mean ignoring the basic law of the kingdom Christ came to establish among men - a kingdom that grows and spreads gradually in the course of history, like the grain of mustard seed.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the idea of Christ as liberator also contains interesting possibilities, since it reminds hearers that one of the signs of the kingdom’s presence on earth consists in the efforts of Christians to transform society into a more just sphere of existence. The figure of Christ as liberator thus serves like a call that awakens men from slumber, reminding them that Christian discipleship means not only individual betterment but intervention in social reform as well.

II. IMPACT OF CHRISTOLOGY ON THE AFRICAN NOTION OF MAN

So far, our discussion has limited itself to analyzing the two anthropological pillars that support most of African Christological constructions. It is feasible, however, to turn the issue the other way around, and formulate one final question: Granted that certain tenets of African anthropology supply elements that enrich our conception of Christ, might it not happen that the figure of Christ also sheds light upon native African conceptions, and lets Africans contemplate them in a new light? In other words, might not there be a mutual enlightening between the doctrine of Christ and traditional African ideas? In this final portion of our chapter, we would like to argue that this is indeed the case.

Let us briefly turn once again to the first African concept discussed: that of being as relatedness. Christ’s divine identity as Son of God reveals to Africans the unsuspected extent which family relatedness might reach, since Christ as the Son co-possesses the divine substance and nature of the father, at the same time that He, as Son, lives a total self-surrender to his Father’s will. Thus Christ’s figure points out a
new, infinite measure to family relationship, which demands more generosity on the part of both children and parents. Sharing and obedience, within the African Christian family, should faithfully mirror the Trinity's own life.

Likewise, African hierarchical categories such as Chief or Elder, once applied to Christ, are in turn illumined by Him. Christ's performance of his high role turned out to be a service, not a tyrannical dominion; for he came «to serve and not to be served», and to «give up his life as a ransom for many». His example thus serves to purify the notions of individual supremacy in African communities, by stressing the servicial or diaconal dimension of leadership. The leader - whether he be a part of the Church hierarchy or simply the leader of a human aggregation - is called upon to sacrifice himself for the good of the community. The highest leadership is not one of honour but of *diakonia*, service.

Let us now return to the second idea, namely the African's global conception of human nature, as expressed in the descriptions of Christ as Healer or Liberator. Here we find a similar illumination of African concepts. Christ, the «Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world», reminds men strongly of sin's reality and the need to free oneself from this evil. Christ's coming to earth to save us reveals the existence of evils in our life that are deeper than mere physical or economic evils. There is a profounder, darker misery from which human beings suffer. Christian revelation points to a mysterious link between the history of sin and the history of all the rest of the ills that affect mankind. That revelation reinforces the African intuition that goodness and health are somehow bound together; one cannot exist stably without the other.

Thus Africans, who are admittedly immersed in numerous problematic situations of health, financing, and development, are reminded by the Saviour that these are not the only evil in their lives to which they must seek a solution. They must look to a more complete salvation or liberation, one which includes the spiritual dimension, and this is possible only through union with Christ and the transforming action of His grace. The Saviour's promise of global salvation and healing, we might say, lifts Africans from their limited gaze of a liberation exclusively «here-and-now», a two-dimensional
pursuit that cannot possibly satisfy all their deepest longings (and which is therefore, in the last analysis impoverishing). Christ said: «I have come that they may have Life, and have it abundantly».

To end, we may affirm that African traditional culture is a particularly interesting test-case for the application of the tenet of inculturation. We can see, in this particular case, how a dynamic intercourse is occurring between the revealed elements about Christ, and the traditional categories of Africans. In the case of the Black continent, what calls our attention is the real existence of a simple but coherent world-view, a world-view whose centre stage is occupied by man, conceived as a being which is «relation» and «totality». («Being-in-communion with other beings»; «being with soul-body-environment»).

The discovery of the existence of these highly consistent views on man and the cosmos obliges theologians desirous of developing an «African Christology» to take a previous step. They must first gain a deeper reflexive knowledge of the African view of man. As one prominent theologian states:

> The concept of humanity, which has largely determined all other African cosmological concepts, is central in traditional religion. How African humanity has traditionally perceived itself is of primary importance to a developing African theology.
18. The word Church, due to the problem of translation of a biblical word into the African vernacular, is very confusing. Many a time, one hears: «We have finished our church», «our church is very big», «our church has fallen», etc. The danger of a «materialized» entity exists.


20. John Mbiti for instance, agrees that the African concept of the family includes the departed, whom he identifies as the living-dead, and the unborn members whom he says are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished. (Cfr. African Religions and Philosophy, Heinemann, London 1969, p. 106). Appiah-Kubi likewise says that «the true community in the African mind embraces the dead (past), the living (present), and the yet-unborn (future). Thus the past, present and the future generations form one community». (Cfr. Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism, Maryknoll, New York 1981, p. 123).

21. Ancestors are not just the forefathers as the term is understood in its first nuance. Nor are they ghosts or simple past heroes or patriots. Ancestors are those past Africans (men and women) who are believed to have lived well, who feared God, obeyed his laws, and loved their community of brothers and sisters, thus leaving behind the example of a good life, and for whom, above all, proper burial and funeral rites have been made. In fact, the spirit of those that lived bad lives are never considered to have reached the land of the dead. They are said to hover about somewhere as ghosts and to harass and molest people, especially their relations and their friends. They can only settle down in peace after their relations have offered sacrifices to make amends for the evil which they committed when they were alive. (An inkling of the Christian idea of Purgatory?)


29. This term, living-dead, was aptly coined by J. S. Mbiti to express the fact that the deceased members are not totally dead. Rather they are alive in the spirit and from there exercise a strong influence on their living kin and community. Cfr. Mbiti, J. S., African Religions and Philosophy, Heinemann, London 1969, p. 107.


33. Ibid.


35. Cécé Kolie states that our concern for the suffering sick is not only that they be consoled, but also that they be prepared for either reintegration into the family, or for entry into a new collectivity, that of the ancestor. Cfr. «Jesus as Healer», in Faces of Jesus in Africa, Orbis Books, New York 1991, p. 147.

36. The end result here is that man reacts emotionally, mentally and physically to what goes on around him, and hence seeks to explain what happens to him as well as to control its causes.


39. Ibid.

40. BUTHELEZI, M., «Salvation as Wholeness», in A Reader in African Theology, ed. Parrat J., SPCK, London 1987, pp. 95-102. The concept of wholeness is found very clearly in African traditional religion. The rigid dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, secular and the religious, the material and the immaterial is artificial. A human person is a composite of spirit and body and must be treated as such.


42. In referring to the Yoruba word salvation, as 'Olugbala', 'nzoputa' for the Igbo, John Oナイkehran points out it has the connotation of that which guarantees safety and survival. That is what Christ represents for the believer. Cfr. «Tendencias Cristológicas en la Teología Africana Contemporánea: estudio y valoración provisión», en ScrTh 21, (1981), p. 175.


44. The recourse to God and spirits to beg for deliverance has a special place in the Igbo prayer: (Enyemaka anyi di n'ahaa Osehuruwa). Our help is in the name of the Lord. This belief explains that there is no other place from where salvation may come except God. No wonder Christianity developed so rapidly in Igboland because of the early missionary system of evangelization. Onuora Nzekwu gives a very good picture of this phenomenon when he writes that: «For many years they (the missionaries) first came and offered us the Bible and preached to us about heaven and hell. We found them and their sermons unattractive and boring; but still we went and listened to them because, at the end of each religious service or lecture, they distributed dresses,
bottles of kerosene, heads of tabacco and items of household use to us» (See NzEkwu, O., Blade Among The Boys, Heinemann, London 1962, p. 129).

45. E. UZUKWU is correct when he makes a distinction between the salvation of the soul and salvation of the body. The former, according to him, is the oldest, most popular, and most pervasive theology used by missionaries, while the latter, occupied Africans’ thought. (See «Missiology Today», in Religion and African Culture. Inculturation, A Nigerian Perspective, ed. Elochukwu Uzukwu, SNAAP Press, Enugu-Nigeria 1988, p. 151). The Igbo like his fellow Africans is convinced that man is made of both body and spirit. The early missionaries would have failed in their evangelization if they had not realized this in their approach to the Igbo. Much emphasis was on spirit. But the Igbo look down before looking up.


47. APPIAH-KUBI, K., «Christology», in A Reader in African Christian Theology, ed. by Parrat J. SPCK, London 1987, p. 69. For Appiah-Kubi, Christ is the healer of physical sickness. Such a dynamic understanding of Jesus, Appiah-Kubi regards as the real African contribution to Christology.

48. CÉCÉ, K., «Jesus as Healer», in Faces of Jesus in Africa, p. 12. The African preoccupation with healing, set forth by Kolié CéCé grows out of this sense from which African seek liberation. CéCé believes that Christ is a healer for those suffering, and he shares their pains and struggling.

49. Bujo mentions Christ as the healer of healers, but he relates it with the functions of the ancestors like others in our study. Africans believe that their ancestors adhere to their pleadings in times of need, as Christ hears the cry of the afflicted. This adherence of the ancestors is healing of the mind which the Igbo say Ntusi obi ndi no n’ahuhu (Comfort of the afflicted). See Bujo, African Theology in Its Social Context, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1992, p. 85.

50. He not only heals, he gives comfort. African understanding of healing does not necessarily entail only medicine, but solidarity with the patient. Kolié CéCé writing on «Jesus as a healer», indicates that his role as a healer quickly changes to that of being one of the sick. He passes from the pole of healer in relationship with the sick, to the opposite extreme of the polarity and functions in the relationship of the sick toward the healer. Cfr. CÉCÉ, K., op. cit., p. 132.


52. Charles Nyamiti finds some similarities between Christ’s healing function and that of the African healer. The medicine-man not only is a doctor but also pastor to the sick person. NYAMITI, C., Christ As Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective, p. 55.

53. The African Independent Churches took over this aspect from the role of the medicine-man and express it in their prayers for the sick and the practice of exorcism. The most significant elements in these movements are that they seek to fulfil that which is lacking in the European-led churches, that is, to give Africans a form of worship which will «satisfy» both spiritually and emotionally, and to make Christianity cover every area of human life and fulfil all human needs. Cfr. IDOWU, E. B., «The Predicament of the Church in Africa», in Christianity in Tropical Africa, ed. C. G. BAETA, Oxford University Press, London 1968, pp. 434-435.

54. Moloney, for instance, says that of the various conceptions, those concerned with Christ as Healer and as Ancestor are the ones most adapted to immediate pastoral
61. Mbiti writes: «Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am». See African Religions and Philosophy, p. 108.
63. Cfr. SAWYERR, H., «Jesus Christ - Universal Brother», in African Christian Spirituality, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1978, pp. 65-67. In traditional African society, the elder is one who instructs the members of the clan, settles their disputes, brings peace among them, and leads them to the shrine of the ancestors to pray. He also teaches them the techniques of work: to find the good soil for the different kinds of crops, and to use the proper seedlings, etc. In a word, he is the bond of unity in the community, and through and with him the community grows up.
64. François Kabasélé states that Christ is called Chief because He is the vessel of a life force which, when shared, strengthens the life of a group and its individuals. His strength is not precisely a «muscular» one. It is rather the strength of a «participation in being». Cfr. «Christ as Chief», in Faces of Jesus in Africa, p. 111.
66. This is a view explored by Bishop Anselm Sanon, of Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. His reason is that Jesus unfolds the meaning of initiation as the ongoing process from childhood to ancestorhood that makes us progressively more fully human. Jesus, the master of initiation, has gone before us in the process and knows all that we must endure. See «Jesus, Master of Initiation», in Faces of Jesus in Africa, pp. 85-102.
67. In the traditional African community, the individual who is part of the whole, is immersed into a religious participation, consciously or unconsciously, from the cradle to the grave and even beyond death as he enters the spiritual world. We find ourselves caught up in a religious «web» that forms a pattern of our lives as individuals and members of the wider corporate society.
68. The most systematic treatment of the subject to date is that by the Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamititi in his book Christ As Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective, Mambo Press, Gwete-Zimbabwe 1984. Cfr. also F. Kabasélé "Christ as Ancestro and Elder Brother", in Faces of Jesus in Africa, pp. 116-127; and Bujo, B., African Theology In its Social Context, p. 79ff. A negative judgement on the whole concept has been given by Aylward Shorter. His argument is that ancestors are primarily


72. Eugene Uzukwu, a Catholic priest from Nigeria makes this point clear by emphasizing that this theology (salvation of souls) is inadequate. It contains a deviant soteriology and eschatology; in addition, it is based on an alien (i.e. non-African) anthropology. African spirituality, Uzukwu maintains, is notoriously this-world; and African anthropology (doctrine of man) understands the self as a unity - corporeal but also invisible. The dualism body-soul, matter-spirit does not exist for the African. Cfr. E. E. UZUKWU, ed. «Salvation of Souls», in *Religion and African Culture: A Nigerian Perspective*, SNAAP Press, Enugu-Nigeria 1988, pp. 151-152.

73. This reminds us of the Igbo saying: *Onye aguru na-agu anaghi ekwe alleluia* (He who is hungry does not sing alleluia).


75. In fact, many African ministers have expressed caution in relation to this category. See MILINGO, E., *The Church In Between*, p. 5.


77. John Mbiti, for example, says that man is at the very centre of existence, and African peoples see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man. Cfr. MBITI, J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.92.

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