JESUS WITH THE FACE OF AN ANCESTOR

Abraham Akrong

Abstract: This article attempts to work out a conceptual scheme for the appropriation and understanding of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation from the perspective of the status, roles and functions of ancestors. The author contends that Christ does not require Africans to reject their identity and ignore their deep concerns in order to receive a prefabricated image of Jesus Christ from elsewhere. He opts for a Christology of empowerment from a post-colonial African perspective and argues that interweaving the concerns raised by the Christologies of enculturation and liberation can help us to reclaim our identity as God's children who are called into a discipleship that liberates and transforms. The author proposes the methodology of analogical correlation based on the premise that God deals with us in our various cultural contexts in plural forms. He illustrates this point with examples from the Ghanaian context.

1. Introduction

Jaraslov Pelican in his very important study of the portrayal of Jesus Christ in different cultural contexts and epochs in his book, *Jesus Throughout the Centuries*, persuasively argues that the concepts and images of Jesus Christ are constructed from specific cultural contexts shaped by the salvation concerns of each local context.¹ In theological terms, we can say that Jesus Christ the Son of God became the Son of man so that we can receive him according to our local customs and even give him a local name that will allow us to identify with him and his message of salvation.² In welcoming and giving Jesus Christ a local name, we operate from our local cosmological and soteriological assumptions as the framework within which we receive and give Jesus a name that reflects our deepest wishes and aspirations. For this reason, Pelican asserted emphatically that the different Christologies across the centuries deal with existential and salvation questions constructed within specific cosmological and soteriological structures.³

The purpose of this paper is to work out a conceptual scheme for the appropriation and understanding of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation from the point of view of the status, roles and functions of our ancestors which captures for us the responses to our fundamental existential needs that defines for us the content of our understanding of salvation. In constructing an ancestral Christology of Jesus with the face our ancestors, therefore, we have to examine the cosmological presuppositions of the African worldview, which raises specific soteriological questions and concerns for which the salvation work of Jesus Christ in the tradition of the ancestors can become the pre-eminent symbol of salvation and wholeness.

2. Prolegomena to Ancestral Christology

We shall attempt an interpretation of the principle of the African worldview to see how the dynamics of the African worldview give rise to specific salvation questions and concerns that can influence and shape the symbols by which African Christians can appropriate and interpret

Jaroslav Pelikan, Jesus Through the Centuries (New York : Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 232-233

² Abraham Akrong, 'An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology', Ph.D Dissertation, (Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 1991), p. 129.

³Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Christian Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 203.

the salvation work of Christ. Most of the time, the cosmological and soteriological assumptions that inform our understanding of salvation are ignored in favour some universal Christological principles that are often peripheral to the vital concerns of African Christians. In this way, the socalled universal Christological principles impose soteriological and cosmological assumptions which though peripheral to the African experience and reality are nevertheless made normative for the African understanding of the salvation work of Christ in the name of theological integrity or confessional correctness. The result is that much of our Christologies operate on premises and assumptions that are far removed from our experience and reality. Suffice it to say, we have to follow tradition and the rigors of theological methods but not at the expense of the integrity of African culture and the vital salvation concerns of the African context. African theologies which therefore ignore these common pitfalls will end up building beautiful edifices of African theology but with little or no relevance to the real concerns of African Christians.

3. An Interpretation of the African Worldview

In what follows, I shall present a brief analysis of principles of the African worldview with examples from the *Akan* principally and other African communities. The African view of the world could be described as a *cosmotheandric* vision of reality in which God, human beings and nature are symbiotically related. This view of the world leads to an ontology or theory of being based on relationships.⁴ Thus, the relationship between God and the world is described in terms of family relationships: God in *Akan* thought is addressed as the great ancestor of the human race, the husband of the earth, the father of the divinities and the guardian of creation.⁵ This leads to a view of reality that could be described as relational ontology. The relational ontology postulates a worldview in which relationship is fundamental to being. This view of reality allows for a conception of the cosmos as a dynamic arena of a complex web of physical and spiritual relationships and interactions. The cosmos in this sense is therefore not a brute matter but rather a life process with meaning and purpose that could be traced to God its originator, architect and moulder. The wise person is the one who is able to discern the presence of this cosmic vitality in the hidden message of God's creation through the observation of animals, vegetation life and such entities like rivers, mountains etc.

The quest for the full life includes placing one's life in harmony with the vital forces that control the cosmos. In so doing, one's life can conforms to the vitalities of the rhythms of nature through which one can have access to the creative and sustaining powers of the cosmos. In this sense, the cosmos is perceived as a sacred life process in which human and divine interaction are made possible at different levels of relationship either through the cycles of generational life in the family or with nature through rituals of cosmic renewal and revitalization especial during festivals.⁶ The belief in the active spiritual presence in the cosmos is the logic of the sense of reverence for all life which is often pejoratively described by Western anthropologists as animism. The cosmos in this sense is seen as a living reality pulsated by the breadth of divine vitality which comes to expression in human life and nature. For this reason, Africans do not need specially crafted temples to capture or contain divine presence; rather the cosmos which displays and manifests divine presence is the temple of God. Thus the *Akan* proverb says: "No

⁴ Charles Nyamiti, Christ as our Ancestor (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984), 4.

⁵ Abraham Akrong, "An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology" p. 168

⁶ Cecil Koli. 'Jesus as Healer', in Robert Schreiter (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 132-133.

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one points God to the child", or as another proverb puts it: "If you want to speak to God, speak to the wind". In the same vein, a Zambian myth from the *Illa* speaks of a woman who travelled for many miles to look for God only to be told that God is actually behind her back. Since the whole cosmos is the temple of God, the true worship of God is not necessarily tied to special occasions; instead God is worshiped through what could be described as a primordial kinship obligation to treat each other with respect and as members of one human family. Indeed, this primordial moral obligation is what defines the essence of what it means to be human. It is for this reason that qualities like generosity, kindness, hospitality and gratitude are among the cardinal virtues of the African society.

From the point of view of African worldview reality comes in plural forms symbiotically related, and ontologically dependent on God as its origin and source of vitality. In the final analysis, one could say that Africans postulate a worldview made up of a complex web of interactions between the material and the spiritual inter-penetrated by the divine life force, which gives form to existence. Human existence is located in this complex of interaction between the material and the spiritual which, to a large extent, influences and determines one's fortune in life. To live the full life requires one to live in harmony with the cosmic process that gives us the spiritual power needed to deal with the challenges of life. And to achieve one's destiny or God-given goal in life, one must live in accordance with both the cosmic laws and the social norms that govern the life of the community.

The socialization process — rites of passage — integrate the life of the individual into the cycles of generational life which comes from God, the great ancestor of the human race, through the ancestors, elders, parents and all the social relationships that define our place in the world. The cycles of generational life contain the gestae of all our ancestors and thus become the moral norm and social ideals to which we must aspire in order to achieve our God-given destinies. By attaining our goals in life we become worthy candidates who can attain the status of ancestorhood, the goal of life or life in its fullness. The goal of life is to aspire to attain the full life which qualifies one to attain to the status of ancestorhood because it represents life in its fullness and the possibilities of reincarnation that keeps one in the cycles of generational life forever. For this reason, when one mentions the name of the ancestor one is also invoking the pre-eminent symbol of what it means to be human and live the full life according to one's God-given potentials. The ancestral symbol as a basic structure that orders society is deeply rooted in our social world supported by social values and rituals that define for us the ultimate goal of life.⁷

The rites of passage then become the social and spiritual metamorphosis that leads to ancestorhood; it is a social process that confers status and identity; it provides the social norms by which we measure our life progress towards its fulfilment. In this sense, the rites of passage could be described as the engine that propels one's destiny on it its path of fulfilment. The God-given destiny described by the Akan as *Nkrabea* is the quintessential symbol of the intimate relationship between God and individual human beings because it contains the decree that brings individuals into existence and what God wants one to become. For this reason, one's destiny is the only unique identity that marks human beings as unique individuals; it is the stamp of God that carries the unique identity of one's mission in the world. This destiny could also be described as the road map that is supposed to guide humans to their goals. Therefore, anything that may disturb the socialization process militates against the actualisation of human destiny.

⁷ E.R. MacCormac, 'Religious Metaphor: Linguistic Expression of Cognitive Process', in J.P Moppen (ed.), *Metaphor and Religion* (Brussels: Study Series of Vrije University No 12, 1983), p. 83.

The fulfilment of the moral and social obligations appropriate to each one's station in life brings the individual dignity and respect. Going through the rites of passage is an indication that one is making progress in one's life journey towards the attainment of the goal of life contained in one's destiny. The progress towards one's goal in life includes fulfilling the roles of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, parenthood and eldership. The fulfilment of these roles is what defines life in its fullness for which ancestorhood stands as the ideal. The socialization process through the rites of passage therefore provides the means by which the individual goes through the necessary spiritual and moral maturity that leads to self-fulfilment.

In this sense, the rites of passage is the channel through which the life of the individual becomes integrated into the cycles of generational life which runs through the ancestor, the living and the yet unborn. Outside the family and cycles of the generational life, therefore, there is nothing but evil and destruction. Thus the *Akan* say: "*ebusua ye dom*" - the group is like a legion that protects the individual.

4. The Concept of Ancestorhood

The ancestors are regarded as the origin and foundation of the community and also the mediators of the divine vitality that comes to the individual through the cycles of generational life. They are the roots and source of the relationships that define the identity of community. The ancestors are the source of life of the community and custodians of its moral ideals. The ancestral symbol stands for fertility, security, prosperity, social and moral obligations, protection and well-being. In this sense, the ancestors symbolize the necessary conditions which make life in its fullness possible. Precisely because of the pre-eminence of the ancestral symbol as the source of life and wholeness, the Akan refer to God as the greatest of the human race: Nana Nyame. The designation of God as the ancestor locates African conception of God not in the metaphysics of being or in absolute sovereignty but in the most basic of all human relationships the parentchildren relationships of the family. God the great ancestor of the human race is the parent of all human beings.⁸ And human beings are related through their earthly ancestors to God the great ancestor of the human race. Therefore, all human beings are relatives because of God their common ancestor. Thus the Akan claim that all human beings are brothers and sisters - Onipa nua ne nipa.

This parental model of relationship between God and human beings is what defines the range of ideas of God in Africa. Fundamental to this notion of God is God as a community of relations who gives identity to the whole of creation through different levels of relationships. God therefore as the community of relationships does not have one name, because no one relationship can exhaust the multiple levels of relationships that express the reality of God. God has many names, which describe the different levels of relationships which manifest the reality of God in the cosmos. Knowledge of God does not come from speculation, but from discernment of divine presence in the cosmic process. This discernment is what constitutes wisdom, the true knowledge that can guide human existence. The precepts and wise sayings which come from the continuing dialogue with the cosmos are codified into proverbs, which contain precepts for life.

God is a community of relations because God is the master of the destiny which one receives at birth; God is the consort of the earth which represents the fecundity of the vitalities of creation; God is the father of the divinities who mediate the divine vitalities which sustain and preserve the life of the cosmos; God is related to the whole of creation as its origin, architect and

⁸ Akrong, 'An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology', pp. 171-172.

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moulder. Since God is a community of relations, God is never conceived in isolation from these relationships. This is what has led some students of African religion to describe the relationality of the nature of the African God in terms of either polytheism, diffused monotheism or bureaucratic theism etc. God is known by many names because of the different levels of relationship that define His being.

The emphasis on protection and empowerment that undergird the African view of wholeness leads to a theory of evil which could be described as privation of life. This means that anything which disrupts the life process or one's personal life's journey is evil. For this reason human existence is often described as a struggle within a complex web of interaction between spiritual and material forces which include evil spirits of all kinds: witches, sorcerers, and vengeful spirits etc. Thus the Akan say that life is a struggle - *obra ye ko*. In a world where human beings are condemned to struggle against evil spirits, adverse material conditions and oppressive socio-political structures of human existence the need for spiritual power for protection, preservation and fulfilment is fundamental to existence.

The concerns for wholeness in life's struggles are security, protection from evil spirits and empowerment that will ensure access to the means of winning the battles of life. These concerns which are related to the problems of human existence become the main salvation concerns of African Christians. These are the perpetuation of cosmic life so that vegetation life will support fertility; protection from evil spirits that would like to disrupt life; restoration and rehabilitation of life from debilitation and illness that may result from the causalities sustained in the struggles of life.⁹ The nature and the framework of the soteriological concern of African Christians require access to a power source that can protect, empower and preserve life and thus enables human beings to win the battles and struggles of life in the fashion of the ancestors. The power through which one manages the battles and struggles is the foundation of the salvation concerns of African Christians.

This is precisely the argument for a Christology that focuses on the power of Christ that can protect, heal, empower and preserve life like our ancestors. These salvation requirements call for a figure of Christ in the tradition of our ancestors who can mediate the divine power that can sustain and protect the individual and community. Christ in the fashion of our ancestors then should be the key spiritual resource that can empower the individual and community to work for the creation of conditions that will support the fulfilment of the God-given purposes for human beings in all aspects of life. Jesus Christ therefore in the figure of our ancestors with their known qualities of compassionate and overwhelming parental care will then become the symbol of salvation and wholeness which comes from the African quest for life in its fullness. We can thus appropriate Jesus Christ like the ancestors who will be able to walk with us in the struggles and challenges of life to empower us to deal with the numerous challenges that confront us today. This should make it possible for us to approach, address, and relate to Jesus Christ as the divine ancestor sent by God for human salvation and well-being. Jesus Christ then becomes for us the divine ancestor sent by God, the great ancestor of the human race, to deal with our special concerns and questions. When African Christians are able to appropriate Jesus Christ in the mould of their benevolent ancestor then they can be convinced that Christ can fulfil all the salvation and well-being concerns which hitherto were addressed to their ancestors. Relating to Christ like their benevolent ancestors should help African Christians to see Christianity in a new light as a religion of salvation in which Jesus Christ in the figure of their ancestors will be close to their needs because He understands them like a parent would.

⁹ Akrong, ibid., pp. 194 -195.

5. Types of Christological Hermeneutic in African Theology

At this juncture, we shall examine the methodologies and the presuppositions that have informed the different types of Christologies in Africa today. Charles Nyamiti has identified two main trends in African contemporary Christology. These are Christologies of inculturation and christologies of liberation.¹⁰ Under the heading of Christologies of inculturation we have what he calls 'from Bible to African reality' and 'from African reality to Christology'.¹¹ The Christologies of liberation, he argues, are mostly from South Africa which dealt with the implications of the struggles against the then apartheid political systems. These Christologies of liberation are akin to the theology of liberation of James Cone which deals with Black American identity and racism as a theological problem.¹²

According to Nyamiti, the methodologies of Christologies of enculturation operate on finding Biblical themes and images of Jesus Christ that would be of particular relevance to the African context as a hermeneutic key for constructing African Christology. J. S. Mbiti's Christology is a typical example of this type of Christology.¹³ Mbiti identifies the Biblical theme of Christus Victor as a point of departure for a Christology that relates to the African need to conquer spiritual forces that threaten and destroy life.¹⁴ In the same vein, Kofi Appia-Kubi sees the point of departure for his African Christology in the Biblical theme of liberation which views Jesus Christ more as redeemer, savour, healer, power and liberator.¹⁵ The other subgroup of Christology of enculturation - 'from African reality to Christology' - is the type of Christology developed in the light of the African worldview or some particular theme taken from the African worldview and culture.¹⁶ This approach to Christology is by far the most widely used by African theologians. This brand of African Christology uses an incarnational hermeneutics where themes related to the eldership-ancestral roles that deal with wholeness and well-being are used to describe the salvation work of Jesus. In this approach, the titles of Jesus Christ are correlated to roles and functions of the ancestors and other eldership offices which deal with salvation and wholeness. For example, Efoe Penouku from the Ewe-Mina context describes Jesus as Jete ancestor, meaning Jesus Christ is the source of life in the manner of the ancestors.¹⁷

In the scheme of J. S. Pobee, Jesus Christ becomes the great ancestor because Jesus Christ shares the divinity with God the great ancestor of the human race.¹⁸ In my scheme which will be discussed later, Jesus becomes the hero-ancestor because he is the one through whom all human beings trace their ancestry, through their own human ancestors to God the great ancestor

¹⁵ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, 'Jesus Christ: Some Christological Aspects from Africa Perspectives', in J.S. Mbiti (ed.), African and Asian contribution to Contemporary theology (Geneva : Bossy Institute), pp. 7-20,

 ¹⁶ Charles Nyamiti, 'African Christology Today', p. 13.
¹⁷ E.J. Efoe-Pounekou, 'Christology au Village', in F. Kabaseale et. al. (eds.), *Chemin de Christologie Africaine* (Paris: Besclee, 1986), pp. 66-106. ¹⁸ J.S Pobee, *Towards An African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), pp. 81-89.

¹⁰ Charles Nyamiti, 'African Christology Today', in Robert Shreiter (ed.), Faces of Jesus in Africa (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹² Ibid., p. 4.

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁴ J.S. Mbiti, 'Africanische Beitratrage sur Christolotgie', in P.Beyerhause et. al. (eds.), Theologische Stimmen aus Asien Afrika und Latinamerika (Munich : Peter Lang, 1968), pp. 72-85.

of the human race¹⁹. And for Benezet Bujo, Jesus Christ is the proto-ancestor because he is the source of life.²⁰

Other African theologians employ similar titles and descriptive terms from the eldership – ancestral functional roles: Harry Sawyer, for example, describes Jesus Christ as the elders' brother.²¹ So also is Francois Kabasele who describes Jesus as chief and elder brother because Jesus is the protector of life.²² For Anselme Sanon, Jesus Christ is the initiation master who is responsible for the initiation of the individual in the life processes that propel one towards the fulfilment of one's destiny.²³ For Ceci Kolie, Jesus Christ is the Healer through whom we can heal both the personal and collective ills that cause disharmony and disruption in life.²⁴ For Alyward Shorter, Jesus Christ must be the wounded healer who heals by participating the suffering of those wounded both physically and spiritually.²⁵

For the purposes of analysis and closer look at the methodological presuppositions of these Christologies, one can divide the various Christologies into two main groups: the accommodationist and incarnational approaches. In the accommodationist approach certain Biblical or theological themes that are presumed to be relevant to the African experience are used as the basis of constructing Christological paradigms supposed to be able to relate the Christ event to the African context. Examples of this as noted earlier are Mbiti's Christus Victor Christology and Kofi Appiah-Kubi's redeemer - liberator Christology. In this same camp we can put Alyward Shorter's wounded healer Christology. The strength of this approach is that it tries to construct African Christology within the concepts and categories that are already well known in the Christian tradition. However, its very strengths opens it up for some weaknesses. The fear of deviation from tradition leads this approach to try to accommodate African experiences to certain biblical and theological themes of salvation which end up imposing prefabricated christological models on the African experience. Invariably these models of Christology ignore vital concerns of the African context, not to mention how some of them may even be far removed from the basic experiences of the African context. While the other approach which may be called the incarnational model is always prone to the charge of syncretistism, it attempts to construct Christology on the basis of the questions and concerns that are vital to the African context. These Christologies which attempt to interpret the Christ event on the basis of the ancestral - eldership functions related to wholeness locate the Christ event at the core of the African experience that calls for salvation. In this way, it creatively opens up new ways of viewing the Christ event and understanding the meaning of salvation in the African context. These approaches characteristically try to deal with the Christological question from within the African worldview and the contemporary experience of pain and suffering in post independent Africa. Within this incarnational model of Christology that starts from the African worldview there is a subtle differentiated emphasis. There is, for example, what might be called traditionalists emphasis in which the attempt is made to interpret Christ in terms of African

¹⁹ Akrong, 'An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology', p. 250.

²⁰ Benezet Bujo, 'Pour en Ethnique Africano- Christocentrique', *Bullentin de la Theologie Africaine*, (Vol B No5), pp. 41-55.

²¹ Harry Sawyer, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (London: S.C.M Press, 1968), p. 72f.

²² F. Kabasele, "Le Christ comme Africetre et Aine", in F. Kabasele *et al* (eds.), *Chemin de Christotogie Africaine*, p. 127ff.

²³ A. J. Sanon, 'Jesus, Maitre d' initiation', in F. Kabasele et. al. (eds.), pp. 143-166.

²⁴ Ceci Kolie, 'Jesus as Healer' in Robert Schreiter (ed.), Faces of Jesus in Africa, pp. 128-150.

²⁵ Alyward Shorter, 'Healing and Traditional Medicine in Africa', Kerygma, 20 (1986), pp. 51-88.

traditional functions of ancestors and elders that lead to salvation and wholeness. The other emphasis with a contemporary accent attempts to construct a Christology that deals specifically with contemporary post-independent socio-political issues of poverty, political oppression, corruption, military brutality, economic exploitation and the death structures that rule the life of the many people in Africa. It must be noted that this distinction is by no means a neat one. There are Christologies that combine both emphases. A good example of this is Namitis's Christology and, to large extent, that of Cici Koli.

In what could be described as pure traditionalist emphasis, we may put together the Christologies of J. S. Pobee, Anselm Sanon, Francois Kabasele, Benezet Bujo and Efow Penonukou. On the other hand, in the purely contemporary emphasis, one might put together Anne Nasimiyu–Wasike's Christology from feminist perspective, Luarenti Magesa's Christ of liberation and John Waligoo's Christology of suffering.²⁶

These Christologies of inculturation that operate from the African worldview to Christology identify Jesus Christ with functions and roles that deal with the needs and concerns of African Christians. This approach legitimatizes the salvation concern of African Christians in the light of the Christ event. One implication for Christology in this vein is that Jesus Christ must be divine in order to save human beings from the machinations of evils spirits and empower human beings to overcome the challenges of life. Jesus must also be human and near enough so that we can relate to him as parent, elder, and an ancestor who can listen to us. For this reason, even the Christologies which start from below or operate functionally always maintain the divine nature of Christ because his divinity is the necessary efficient cause that can deal with the fundamental African salvation concerns that confront African Christians. Thus, John Pobee's approach allows him to construct his Christology on the basis of Akan kinship relationships while at the same time preserving the divinity of Jesus Christ within the framework of the Chalcedonian formula. For this same concern, about the divinity of Christ Pobee rejects the characterization of Jesus Christ as a chief on the grounds that this may lead to a theology of glory without the cross which will be inconsistent with the Christian understanding of the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Anselm Sanon's Christology, which describes Jesus Christ as the master of initiation, has implications for the divinity of Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who initiates the individual into the dynamics of generational life of the family which directs the ontological and the social metamorphosis of the rites of passage to its goal. Similarly, E. J. Penoukou, Benezet Bujo and Cici Koli, who define Jesus Christ as source of life in the tradition of the ancestors, point to Jesus Christ as the ultimate access to the life force that vitalizes the whole creation and empowers human beings to face the challenges of life. In this way, Jesus Christ becomes the power both at work in human life and in the cosmos, the divine logos which created the world and continues to sustain human life..

The Christology of Nyamiti needs a special mention here because of the creative way in which he combines a high ontological Christology with functional Christology within the economic trinity to produce a Christology of liberation. He achieves this by interpreting the inner life of the trinity on the African kinship system. This allows him to maintain the integrity of the inner life of the Trinity, while at the same time relating the life of the Godhead to the economic function of liberation. For Nyamiti God the Father is the ancestor of the Son. The Son is the descendent of the Father and these two persons live their ancestral kinship through the

²⁶ Robert Schreiter (ed.), Faces of Jesus in Africa, pp. 151-164.

Holy Spirit with whom they mutually communicate in their ancestral oblation and Eucharist.²⁷ This high Christology becomes the basis on which we can call Jesus Christ as the brotherancestor whose functions and roles in our lives brings about salvation and wholeness. And it is this gracious gift of God that we celebrate in the Eucharist as our ancestral ritual because we are all children of God through Jesus Christ our brother and ancestor. This confidence in the love of God which we experience as the transforming power of the Eucharist is the source of empowerment that leads us to active engagement in the struggle for peace and justice²⁸.

Finally, Alyward Shorter's wounded healer's Christology calls Christians to discipleship on the pattern of the suffering servant of God through whose suffering we are made whole. In this divine initiative we are called to become wounded healers in our community bringing peace, justice and reconciliation that the African society sorely needs today.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of these theologians is their approach and methods, which arise out of and are responsible to the African context, yet in continuity with the Christian tradition. This demonstrates that quite contrary to what we have been made to believe by missionaries and propagators of European civilization, one can be African and Christian at the same time and even use our own categories to appropriate the salvation work in Christ. This points to the fact that Christianity can embrace all human local contexts and avenues in which God is at work for human salvation and wholeness.

The Christologies of these African theologians are not attempts to satisfy some metaphysical theory of God, or to conform to an ideology of progress, nor come to terms with a positivistic historiography, but simply to allow the Jesus Christ proclaimed by the Gospel and attested by tradition to speak to African Christians who are yearning for salvation and wholeness. This Christ does not require Africans to reject their identity and ignore their deep concerns in order to receive a prefabricated image of Jesus Christ from the outside.

My own Christology of empowerment which presents Jesus Christ with the face of our ancestor is the reinterpretation of the functions and role of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the salvation issues of post-colonial Africa. This perspective attempts to bring about a spiritual and an existential conversion and transformation, which can open up new possibilities for existence. It tries to present an image of Christ that gives the oppressed the power and the knowledge to reinterpret reality in the light of the Christ event which can give them access to new life and a new way of viewing themselves. This new understanding is the power, which can transform them into new creations and make them see themselves as new beings with the energy to act in ways hitherto unknown. This is suppose to a joyful celebration of the new life in Christ as children of God.

Christology of empowerment in the fashion of our ancestors therefore combines the concerns of both the Christologies of enculturation and liberation under the rubric of the transforming power of Christ which alone gives us the power to reclaim our identity as children of God who are called to discipleship praxis of liberations and transformation. Christology of empowerment is based on the logic of an incarnational hermeneutics that allows Christ to assume and fulfil the functions which our eldership-ancestor roles symbolize. In this way, the African Christians can see the faces of their elders and ancestors in the face of Christ. For this reason this Christology is neither functional Christology nor ontological Christology because the African context does not share the metaphysical concern that pretends to be able to separate the nature of

²⁷ Charles Nyamiti, 'African Christologies Today', p. 11f.

²⁸ Abraham Akrong, 'Christology from an African Perspective' in J.S Pobee (ed.), *Exploring Afro –Christology* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 122.

Christ from his functions. For us Jesus Christ is God at work for our salvation and wholeness in real life –situations in the fashion of our ancestors and therefore the salvation of Christ is real to us because it touches at the deepest levels of our concerns and needs.

Again the Christology of empowerment in the fashion of our ancestors is neither a Christology from above nor from below because we do not share the dualism between God and human beings which these Christologies assume. Our knowledge of God as saviour comes through Jesus Christ whose work of redemption must relate to all aspects of life because for us the meaning of God's work of salvation in Christ must show in real life. Finally, the distinction between the Jesus of history and Christ of faith is of no value for us because we start our reflections from the perspective of the witnesses of scripture who attest that Jesus Christ is human yet in him God was at work. In this sense the Christology of empowerment is in continuity with current theological reflections in Africa because it arises out of the African context yet in continuity with the Christian tradition.

However, I believe that there is the need for the development of a more rigorous methodological procedure for ancestral Christology. The need for a more rigorous methodology comes from some critical questions that the present methodologies raise. For example, when we describe Jesus Christ in the categories of the African eldership-ancestor functions are we describing the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the African context analogically or correlatively? If the incarnation is a once and for all event then we have to describe its use in the African context as analogical or correlative. The next question is, can our analogical or correlative uses of the incarnation make room for the uniqueness and divinity of Christ when the traditional titles we use for Christ do not carry the same connotations of divinity as we have in the Christian tradition? Or, how does the use of African traditional titles for Christ allow for Jesus to challenge, transform and fulfil the ideals of these titles, especially today, when many of the traditional titles have been misused and distorted? What kind of methodology will allow us to subject our traditional titles to the judgement and scrutiny of the Gospel so that they could be transformed to transcend their narrow confines and fulfil their life-giving roles? How can these titles become adequate symbols that can speak to the African context while at the same time serve as a witness to the universality of God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ for all human beings? Finally, what theological assumptions allow a historical continuity between the salvation work of God in Christ and African traditional institutions and symbols related to wholeness and salvation?

I propose a methodology called *analogical correlation* which I hope will deal with some of the initial questions raised by ancestral Christology in Africa today.

The concept of *analogical correlation* is based on the idea that God deals with us in our various cultural contexts in plural forms. In this way, plurality becomes God's way of dealing with human beings in their cultural contexts. Plurality of cultures therefore provides avenues in which divine presence in the cosmos is mediated in different local cultural contexts. The incarnation in this scheme is the specific way in which God's work of salvation in Christ brings to fruition the fulfilment of human aspirations embedded in our local human cultures and contexts. This establishes a relationship between the incarnation and human history which allows us to view human history as salvation history. From this theological view of history, the incarnation becomes the unfolding of God's will to save all human beings which has been kept alive by the symbols associated with salvation and wholeness in the history of religions. Human history and especially history of religions become the arenas of the unfolding of God's will for human salvation and wholeness. From this perspective we can see in the sacramental rituals and

symbols of wholeness in the history of religion as the institutional way in which God's will to save all human beings is kept alive so that the human quest and yearning for salvation does not run into despair. The rituals and the sacramental institutions of history of religions adumbrate God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ. In this way, Christology helps us to see, in retrospect, the different ways and forms in which God's will for human wholeness and the human quest for salvation have been kept alive.

The method of analogical correlation provides us with a theoretical scheme within which we can establish a correlation between Jesus Christ's work of salvation and the eldershipancestor functional roles, which deal with wholeness. The concept of analogy - in the sense of Thomas Aquinas' via anologia — allows us to postulate a relationship of similarity between Christ and our eldership-ancestor functionaries and at the same time maintain a qualitative distinction between Christ and our elder and ancestor because Jesus is God and unique. In the same way, correlation in the scheme of Paul Tillich's theory of Correlation helps us to see our traditional functional roles associated with salvation and wholeness as our own instituationlization of the common human quest for salvation that finds its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The correlation of the salvation work of Jesus Christ to the analogy of our traditional roles and functions that deal with salvation means Jesus Christ becomes an ancestor in the context of the offices and functions related to the ancestors and elders. This means that Jesus Christ who fulfils these roles in the scheme of salvation history becomes the norm and standard on the basis of which these offices are judged and evaluated. In this way, these traditional roles and offices could be critiqued and challenged to change so that they could transcend their narrow traditional forms and functions to accommodate the functions and roles that the incarnation of Jesus Christ into the African context will require. Jesus Christ in terms of what Paul Tiilich describes as the "concrete universal" shows the ability of Christ to take on any human form without losing his transcendence. Furthermore, analogical correlation will allow us to create new roles and titles to the extent that they are legitimate roles and offices consistent with the understanding of the salvation work of God in Jesus Christ. For example, we can call Jesus Christ elder brother or sister interchangeable as is often the case in most African societies where either the elder sister or brother can corporately represent the rest of the children in the family. And Jesus Christ as our elder brother can represent us before God as our high priest because He is the first born of all creation and therefore our ancestor through whom all of us trace our ancestry to God the ultimate ancestor of the human race.

We can also call Jesus Christ the ideal parent who fulfils the ideals of parenthood as a function in the eldership-ancestral roles and offices. Jesus Christ the first born of all creation (Col 1:15-16) becomes *ipso facto* our first ancestor and therefore our ideal parent in the fashion of the founding ancestors of the African society. Similarly, since Jesus Christ has analogically become the ideal fulfilment of all the roles and functions associated with salvation in the African society he can therefore correlatively become the ideal norm and standard for all these offices. These offices have been abused and misused in the contemporary African society and they stand in need of redemption and transformation. In this way, in the midst of doubts, unfulfilled aspirations and dreams because of the abuse and misuse of the offices associated with salvation and wholeness, Africans can lift up Jesus Christ as the ideal elder parent, chief and ancestor who has been sent by God to redeem and to fulfil all the roles and functions of these offices. This redemptive function of Jesus will recommend Jesus Christ to the African as the saviour of the world and the one they can call on in all situations. The African situation needs such a new

moral vision of leadership for the simple reason that in all aspects of life, leaders have abandoned the caring and protective mandates of the ancestors for well-being and wholeness.

6. Ancestral Christology

The Akans call the ancestors *nananom nsamannfo* - departed elders of the community who though dead, are alive and active in the life of the community. Thus Mbiti calls the ancestors the "living dead." ²⁹ Ancestorhood is a position of high honour reserved only for those elders whose lives are worthy of emulation. The title *nana* (singular for of the plural *nananom*) is the conceptualisation of the high moral and social ideals of the ancestors.³⁰ Therefore it is not any dead person who becomes an ancestor. Indeed, in the Akan society there are specific conditions for becoming an ancestor.

The fist necessary requirement for ancestorhood is one must have lived an exemplary life worthy of emulation. The first mark of the exemplary life is to marry and have children which makes it possible for one to fulfil the vocation of parenthood. Thus bachelorhood or spinsterhood disqualifies one from becoming an ancestor because staying in this state is regarded as a liminal stage between adulthood and parenthood which does not fulfil the goal of the parenthood vocation as a proto-eldership office that leads to ancestorhood. However, unmarried persons who have lived heroic lives like sacrificing oneself for the sake of the community could become ancestors.

A potential ancestor person must also enjoy good health and must not suffer from diseases such as leprosy, madness, epilepsy etc. Such diseases are believed to be the punishment for evildoers. Furthermore, since the ancestors stand for source of life and wholeness, a potential ancestor should not display any diminishing of life. In a sense, one must be righteous, pious and whole *in toto*.

The potential ancestor must die at a ripe old age. Such deaths as suicide by drowning or any kind of accidental death except in war or defending the community are signs of bad life. Those who die defending the community no matter their status automatically become ancestors. Bravery is therefore a mark of the status of ancestorhood. Natural death is regarded as a gateway to the world of the ancestor by one who has fulfilled his or her destiny and lived the good life. To die a natural death is believed to be an indication that one has lived an honest and just life and therefore ready to go on to the next stage of life: ancestorhood.

A potential ancestor must be morally upright, should respect the elders; should not steal; not take other people's wives; must not be talkative, alcoholic or extravagant. On the positive side, he must be hardworking, kind, loving, hospitable, gentle, generous, merciful and trustworthy. These are the qualities that people need in their lives so that they may fulfil their God-given destiny and return to God as ancestors.

Generally, wealth does not quality one or disqualify from becoming an ancestor. Rather it is the liberal and generous use of wealth that qualifies one to become an ancestor. For this reason, the quality of sharing, generosity and hospitality are inculcated in children at an early age so that they may lead the good life, which leads to wholeness of life.

²⁹ J.S. Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy (New York: Doublyday and Co., 1996), p. 107.

³⁰ Peter Sarpong, The Sacred Stools of Ghana (Accra - Tema : Ghana Publishing Corp., 1971), 54.

The conditions for becoming an ancestor reflect the moral ideal and the goals of life of the African society. At the same time, these conditions contain moral norms and precepts that are supposed to guide one through one's life's journey. The rites of passage present the individual with sets of duties and obligations that will help each individual to fulfil the goals of each station in life so that he or she can attain the full life and then become an ancestor.

Among the Akans, the occupant of the stool – the chief – is the symbol of the spiritual link between the founding fathers and the living. The stool of the chief therefore becomes the locus of the collective spirit of the founding fathers which is the source of the authority that legitimizes the office of the chief. The spirit and personality of the ancestors are transmitted to the chief as the occupant of the stool and the one who rules in the shoes of the ancestors. In this way, the chief inherits the moral and social personality of the ancestors.³¹ The ritual of enstoolment is the rite that transforms the personality of chief to conform to the demands of the office as a representative of the ancestors. The enstoolment of the chief thus becomes an ancestor from the moment of his enstoolment and therefore must be addressed as *Nana* – the title for an ancestor. The chief now becomes a *de jure* ancestor and by virtue of the ritual of enstoolment he can now share the qualities of the ancestors.

The chief as the *de jure* representative of the ancestors must continue the parental function of the ancestors as the protector and defender of the people. The chief as a representative of the ancestor must lead and serve the people, judge fairly and show mercy as a concerned parent; he also must legislate wisely in accordance with the precepts of the ancestors. Finally, the chief who rules in the shoes of the ancestors, must exhibit the same moral values that ancestorhood represents for the society. For this reasons, he is expected to be benevolent, just, honest, sober, fair, kind, respectful and humble. This means that the life of the chief must reflect those moral ideals of the society which are symbolized by ancestorhood. Therefore, anytime the conduct of the chief becomes incompatible with the ideals of the office, he ceases to be the representative of the ancestors and has to be destooled (removed from office).

The chief in the context of elderhip roles that deal with well-being functions like a parent or an elder who perform roles which deal with the well-being of the society on behalf of the ancestors. The chief in his capacity as an elder performs priestly roles that make him a representative of the people before the ancestors. The ancestors are regarded as the parents and guardians of the living and are therefore believed to be actively involved in the lives of their living descendants as the mediators of divine vitality that makes well-being and wholeness possible. The power of the ancestors is present in the rituals for cosmic harmony against the forces of chaos performed by the chief at festivals for the renewal of ties with the ancestors (*addae*).³² The ancestors are also the power behind the vegetation rituals for fecundity performed during the festivals of the revitalization of nature (*odwira*).³³ The ancestors are the power which protects and therefore guarantees the individual's smooth transition from one station of life to another during the process of the rites of passage. They also protect the living against evil that may disrupt life on the whole. They thus become a the source of power and healing for all

³¹ George Hagan, 'The Golden stool and oath to the king of Ashanti', *Research Review*, 4 (1968), p. 4.

³² Addae is a forty-day cycle ritual that ensures social harmony and the constant renewal of the ties between the ancestors and the living.

³³ Odwira is a festival that combines the ritual of the revitalization of the vegetational, the preservation of cosmic order, the cleansing of the society to ward off evil and the celebration of the benevolence of the ancestors.

infirmities that come from both the spiritual and physical casualties of the struggles and battle for life. The ancestors as parents protect the living against the machinations of evil spirits (witches, sorcerers, vengeful and whimsical spirits) which might to destroy or disrupt the life of the individual and the community. The *Odwira* festival prayer below brings home the message that the ancestors are the source of the power that creates the condition for wholeness:

Here is food: all of you ancestors receive and eat The year has come around again Today we celebrate it. Bring blessing; Blessing to the Chief who sits on your stool; Health to all the people; Let women bear children Let men prosper in their undertakings We thank you for good harvest; For standing behind us (guarding and protecting us).³⁴



The analysis of the Akan worldview as a representative African worldview leads us to the conclusion that the ancestral symbol is the pre-eminent source of the power that brings wholeness. Therefore, any talk about empowerment and wholeness invokes in the African mind the image and functions of the ancestors. Since the ancestors mediate the divine vitality that brings empowerment and wholeness we can describe Jesus Christ as God's agent for human empowerment like the ancestors. Analogically, in the context of the ideal fulfilment of all the functions and roles of our parents, elders and ancestors related to empowerment and wholeness, God the great ancestor is present in Jesus Christ. As an ancestor in the fashion of our founding ancestor, Jesus could be designated as the first born of all creation and the pre-eminent Son of God who has become our ancestor (Col:15-16). Therefore, Jesus Christ the first-born of all creation then becomes the ancestor in whom all human beings are related to God as children of God (John 1:12-13). As the first-born of all creation, Jesus Christ is our elder brother on account of whom all human beings are related to one other as relatives. Jesus Christ in his capacity as our first ancestor and elder brother could be the ideal representative of humanity and thus can define for us what it means to be human. To be human on the pattern of Jesus Christ our first ancestor, Edikan Brempong (the first ancestor whose life benefits all human beings), means we could be related to God in a filial relationship and to all human beings as relatives (John 1:12-13). In trinitarian terms we state that God our ultimate ancestor lives his ancestral life in Jesus Christ our first ancestor, Edikan Brempong, in and through the life of the Holy Spirit who is God at work in the world and in us.35

Jesus Christ our first ancestor represents all human beings before God our ultimate ancestor and our elder (*Ebusua Dupon*). In this capacity as our elder, he acts as our high priest in the fashion of the priestly role of our elders before the ancestors. In this role, Jesus Christ our elder and therefore high priest presents our supplications before God, our ultimate ancestor and also intercedes on our behalf. In this priestly and mediatorial role of Jesus Christ as *Ebusua Dupon* (the root of the family of humankind), he intercedes for all humans before God. And

³⁴ Daryll Forde (ed.), African Worlds (London : Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 204.

³⁵ Jon Kirby (ed.), Efua Kuma Ayeyi ne Mpaebo (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1980), p. 17.

since Jesus Christ is both the Son of God and our family head, we can trust Him because in Him we have access to God.^{36}

Again Jesus Christ as the first-born of creation and our first ancestor is the Son of God (Mk 1:1) who inherits the functions and the personality of God. And as the Son of God He becomes our chief (*nana*) who rules in the shoes of God the ultimate ancestor of the human race. The incarnation becomes for us the divine enstoolment of Jesus Christ by which he manifests the personality and performs the functions of God in the flesh. Therefore, in Jesus Christ our chief we experience the abiding presence of divine life of God himself which empowers and brings wholeness.

Jesus Christ the Son of God is our chief because he has been appointed by God our ultimate ancestor to sit on the divine stool from eternity. He is our chief who rules with God our ultimate ancestor, the source of all being whose power pervades all reality. Jesus Christ as the occupant of the divine stool is the one in whom God manifests the power and functions for our salvation. In Jesus Christ the occupant of the divine stool God is at work for our sustenance and preservation. We can therefore give Jesus the title *Ananse Kokuroko*, the great spider the spins the wheels of creation).³⁷

Jesus Christ who in the Gospel of John is presented as the logos of God can be given the title Nyame Gayasehene—the steward and custodian of the creative process which preserves and sustains the life of the cosmos (John 1:1). Jesus Christ, the Gayasehene of God is the one who performs the rituals of divine addae which preserves and safeguards the cosmos against chaos and destruction. Thus Jesus Christ the Gayasehene of God becomes the symbol for the continuation and the preservation of the cosmos (John 1:4). Jesus Christ, the Gayasehene who performs the priestly functions of Odwira rites which fertilize vegetation life for human nourishment, can be called Amproyinam, the one who provides human beings with the essentials of life. We can also give Jesus the title of Odokotobonnuase, the divine farmer who turns barren land into fertile land because Jesus Christ the logos and agent of creation is the one through whom God gives us the gifts of nourishment, sustenance and replenishment and experience the sustaining and loving care of God our ultimate ancestor.³⁸

Jesus Christ as the first-born of all creation becomes our elder brother and *de facto* high priest who corporately represents all human beings before God. In this role and capacity as our high priest, his self-sacrifice on the cross can effectively cleanse us from all curses, evil spells and any other evil contagions that may disrupt our well-being. This allows us to claim his cross as the power through which we are liberated from the bondage of the devil and freed from all destructive curses that may destroy our lives. Jesus Christ in his royal function as our high priest (*Osofopon*), does not only cleanse us from evil contagions, but protects, defends and leads us to the path of authentic existence that leads to wholeness. Jesus Christ as our elder brother is also our strongman (*Adubasapon*) (Mk 3:27) who fights, binds and overcomes the evil forces that disturb our lives (evil spirits, witches, vengeful spirits etc.). For this reason, he is our *Kosebotoe*, the defender and protector who shields us from all evil because he is the impenetrable fortress that guards us against the devil. In his fight against evil forces he becomes our *Adontehene*, the general who leads us through the battles. Jesus leads and goes before us like *Totrobonsu*, the great elephant who clears the path of struggles of life so that we may not be distracted from the

³⁷ Ibid. p. 11.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 10.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

path of wholeness by evil forces. As our *Adontehene* he protects us and helps us in our lives journey so that we can achieve our destinies.³⁹

The functions and roles that Jesus Christ performs in the fashion of our ancestors qualifies him to be called our saviour – *Osagyefo* and *Agyekwa*—because his work of salvation brings us wholeness. The evil forces that torment us are still around us but they will be totally vanquished when Jesus Christ will return in power as *Anuonyamhene*, the triumphant king of glory. But even now the evil forces do not have any power over us because we are subjects of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *Okourokohene*, the invincible king whose presence and the mere mention of his name drives away the devil and his agents.⁴⁰

In the salvation work of God in Jesus Christ, our chief (nana), the nature and character of God is revealed to us. God the ultimate ancestor of the human race meets us in Jesus Christ as the source of all life, Twirediapong, the one on whom all life depends. In the creative, sustaining and providential functions of Jesus Christ, God our ultimate ancestor, Nana Nyame, is revealed to us as a caring parent who is deeply concerned about human well-being and wholeness. In the same vein. Jesus Christ. our Gavasehene, points us to God the creator, Borebore, who provides human beings with all the necessary conditions and gifts that make life possible. Finally, in the sustaining function of Jesus Christ as our Gavasehene, we are led to a God who is the ultimate source of replenishment, Amaomee, the one whose creative vitality gives us rain, sunshine, and all the necessary things that support vegetation life and our nourishment. In the same way, through the sustaining work of Jesus Christ, our Gayasehene, we can experience God our ultimate ancestor, Odomankoma, the merciful, kind, generous, benevolent parent who is full of grace; Brekvirehunade, the one whose watchful eyes protect human beings; Abommuafra; the one to whom we run in times of crisis. Jesus Christ, like our ancestors, points us to the omnipresence of God the ultimate ancestor of the human race whose benevolent care sustains all human beings. The Akan proverb says: "God takes care of everybody even the tailless animal."

The functions and roles of Jesus Christ our elder brother, ancestor, chief (*Gayasehene* and *Adotehene*) reveal to us the power behind the universe, God, as *Korebortoe*, the limitless and boundless power which justifies us to give God these praise names: *Okokuroko* protector, *Otumfuo*, the source of all power; *Damfo Edu* the clever one whose wisdom and intelligence runs the processes of creation; *Daasebre*, the one who deserves our ceaseless thanks and, finally, *Onyamkropong*, the one true God worthy of praise and worship.⁴¹

7. Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been to argue for the contextualization of categories and the language of Christological discourse to reflect the cosmological and the soteriological assumptions of the African society. This approach is to remind African theologians that approaches to Christology that are far removed from the African experience do not recommend Christianity to Africa Christians as a religion of salvation that can deal with their concerns. The history of the development of the Christological tradition in Christianity shows that in every epoch and culture Christ is appropriated and given a local name that reflects the deep needs and concerns of the local context. In trying to be faithful to the African, we have used local symbols that deal with salvation and wholeness. This method has helped us to expand the semantic domain of the inherited Christological language and categories that have allowed us to attribute names and

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 10-13.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 11.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 5.

titles that bring Christ close to us like our ancestors. The local names we have given to Jesus Him our ancestor because He can perform all the functions which we hitherto reserved for our ancestors and more, Jesus with the face an ancestor can therefore bring the salvation work of Christ and His message really close to us.

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" Ibid. pp. 10-13.

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