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## The Quest for the Christ of Africa

by Donald J. Goergen, O.P.

From January to May of 1998 I had the opportunity to teach a course at Tangaza College of the Catholic University of East Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, on who Jesus is today.<sup>1</sup> The majority of students were seminarians of varied religious institutes. Together we struggled with "an African Jesus." It was not a question of accepting or not accepting traditional images of Christ. The questions were rather how best to inculturate Christ, how best to evangelize African cultures, how to allow Africa to make its distinctive contribution to Christian theology, how to contribute to an intercultural theological dialogue and even an interreligious dialogue with African religion.

We also had to bear in mind that not every African theology is an *African* theology. African theology means doing theology with an African mindset, out of the context of Africa's cultures, history, and experience. At the same time, Africa is "in flux." Westernization is happening rapidly. Yet in many places people resort to native African traditions. In other places, many of those traditions are disappearing. The context for doing theology in Africa is complex and fluid. Sometimes there can be value to an outsider's looking in. That is what I saw myself doing. What are the African theologians saying about Christ? What were my African and non-African students thinking about Christ? How would I myself interpret Jesus for an African context? These were my questions.

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## African Theologies of Jesus

There are already several surveys of African christologies.<sup>2</sup> African theologians who have contributed to doing christology from within an African context include Abraham

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<sup>1</sup> I dedicate this article to the 24 students in my class on Jesus at Tangaza College in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Akintunde E. Akinade, "Who Do You Say That I Am?" -- An Assessment of Some Christological Constructs in Africa," Asian Journal of Theology 9, no. 1 (1995): 181-99. Ukachukwu Chris Manus, "Contemporary Images of Jesus in Africa," chap. three in his Christ, the African King (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 49-70, a good summary and survey with an excellent bibliography. Raymond Moloney, "African Christology," Theological Studies 48 (1987): 505-515. Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today," in Jesus in African Christianity, eds. J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1989): 17- 39, reprinted in Faces of Jesus in Africa, ed. Robert Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991): 3-23. J. José Alviar, "Anthropological Foundations of African Christology," African Christian Studies, Journal of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 13, no. 1 (1997): 19-27, a brief introduction. Also see J.S. Ukpong, "The Emergence of African Theologies," Theological Studies 45 (1984):501-36.

Akrong,<sup>3</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, Kwame Bediako,<sup>4</sup> Bénézet Bujo, Emilio J.M. de Carvalho, Jean-Marc Ela, Teresa Hinga, François Kabasélé, Kä Mana, R. Buana Kibougi, Cécé Kolié, Laurenti Magesa, S. Maimela, Ukachukwu Chris Manus, John Mbiti, Takatso Mofokeng, J.N.K. Mugambi, Gwinyai Muzorewa, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, A.O. Nkwoka, Albert Nolan, Charles Nyamiti,<sup>5</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Pashington Obeng, Efoé Julien Pénoukou, John Pobee, A.T. Sanon, Harry Sawyerr, Enyi Ben Udoh, P. N. Wachege, John M. Waliggo, and Douglas W. Waruta, to name only some of them.<sup>6</sup> These theologians have developed many images and names for Jesus within an African context. They include among others those of ancestor,<sup>7</sup> elder brother,<sup>8</sup> elder,<sup>9</sup> healer,<sup>10</sup> liberator,<sup>11</sup> chief,<sup>12</sup> king,<sup>13</sup> guest<sup>14</sup>, and master of initiation.<sup>15</sup> Among these many images, I have chosen four upon which to comment -- ancestor, healer, liberator, and king -- because these have been given emphasis among African theologians and have much to offer both Africa and the wider Church.

1. *Christ, Our Ancestor.* The traditions venerating ancestors in Africa are strong and widespread, even if not universal. More attention has been given to ancestor as a way of "africanizing" Jesus than to almost any other metaphor. The concept as applied to Jesus, however, needs to be qualified. Jesus is not just one of our ancestors, but ancestor par excellence, a unique ancestor. There is a pre-eminence, a priority, to Jesus' ancestorship.

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<sup>3</sup> See the bibliography on African Christology at the end of this article. Rather than document in footnotes the work of each individual theologian to whom I refer, I have chosen to include a bibliography in order to make referring to their works easier. Complete documentation on the references can be found there.

<sup>4</sup> Bediako challenges the assumption that Christianity is alien to African culture, indicates the parallels between primal religion and Christianity, and asserts the need to acknowledge and own Christianity as a non-Western religion, even more so given the shift of Christianity's center of gravity to the third world and Africa in particular. Thus Christianity has come of age in Africa as "an African religion," (*Christianity in Africa, The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 179).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor* (Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984). Nyamiti has informed me that he is revising this book and bringing out a new edition. For other contributions by Nyamiti, see the bibliography. Nyamiti's theology was the subject of the 1997 doctoral dissertation by Mika Vähäkangas at the University of Helsinki, entitled *Genuinely Catholic, Authentically African?*, containing a complete bibliography of Nyamiti's writings.

<sup>6</sup> See also the bibliography prepared by Missio, "Bibliography on Christology in Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America," *Theology in Context, Supplements* (Aachen: Institute of Missiology, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> See Akrong, Bediako, Bujo, Kabasélé, Nyamiti, Pénoukou, Pobee.

<sup>8</sup> See Kabasélé, Nkwoka, Sawyerr.

<sup>9</sup> See Wachege.

<sup>10</sup> See Kibongi, Kirwen, Kolié, Obeng, Shorter.

<sup>11</sup> See De Carvalho, Ela, Magesa, Maimela, Mofokeng, Nolan, Obeng, Oduyoye.

<sup>12</sup> See Kabasélé, Pobee.

<sup>13</sup> See Manus.

<sup>14</sup> See Udoh.

<sup>15</sup> See Sanon.

It is clear that Jesus for African Christians is not just like all the other ancestors, but it is also clear that he is not totally unlike the ancestors.<sup>16</sup>

Traditions concerning ancestors vary with different ethnic communities. It is difficult to generalize as varied conceptions exist.<sup>17</sup> Ancestors are always related by blood, as members of one's family or tribe. The ancestors of the Kikuyu in Kenya are not ancestors for the Igbo in Nigeria. Not everyone becomes an ancestor. Ordinarily only those who show exemplary qualities in life qualify as ancestors. It is important to distinguish those who are remembered and those who are not. Africa has traditions of the "living dead" -- the biologically deceased who are not really dead but considered alive as long as they are remembered. In some ethnic groups, varied rituals including the practice of divination help to determine whether someone has gained ancestral status. Ancestors have a permanent existence in an afterlife while at the same time being intimately connected with our present world. Ancestors lived exemplary lives, were model leaders in their communities, and are sources of tribal solidarity and social cohesion. Through them the life force is handed on, increased or regenerated.

An ancestor, who was once living a natural life among the people, now enjoys a quasi-supernatural or supersensible mediatorial status. He is an intermediary between God and the ancestor's people. He plays a role in the life of the people. Ancestors may become partially or nominally reincarnate in their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, sometimes even in more than one. African ancestors, however, do not reincarnate in the sense of the religions of India. Communication with the ancestors is possible; people pray and make offerings to the ancestors. There are festivals honoring them. It is important that ancestors not be displeased. The ancestor plays a role in channeling the vital force within the community and thus impacts the vitality and life of the community. The ancestor is in that sense a living member of the community, even

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<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the strongest critic of "ancestor" as a helpful christological title has been Aylward Shorter. See his "Conflicting Attitudes to Ancestor Veneration in Africa," *AFER*, 11, no. 1 (1969): 27-37. His is a positive appraisal of the role of ancestors in African Christian life, but he expresses hesitancy with respect to its value in christology. See also his "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," *AFER*, 25, no. 4 (1983): 197-203. In his 1983 article, he does write, "But, whereas the 'ancestor' concept does not illuminate or develop our understanding of the person and role of Christ, the person and role of Christ can and does illuminate and redeem the African understanding of the 'ancestor' " (202). Certainly the ancestor concept has to be 'purified' or further theologized as it is applied to Christ. It is not applied to Christ univocally. The theologian who has utilized ancestrology most extensively in theology is Nyamiti, incorporating it into a theology of the Trinity as well.

<sup>17</sup> Nyamiti, in "The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective," writes: "There is no uniform system of beliefs and practices of this cult in black Africa. In fact, one finds differences of detail even in the same ethnic group. Moreover, the ancestral veneration which will be described here is not found in each African traditional community. Nevertheless the cult belongs to the majority of the African peoples. Besides, notwithstanding the differences referred to above, there are many elements shared in common conceptions on ancestors and their cult among black Africans" (38).

though not in an ordinary earthly sense.<sup>18</sup>

African theologians have depicted or qualified Christ's ancestorship in varied ways. For example, for John S. Pobee, writing from within the context of Akan society in Ghana, Jesus is *Nana*, "the Great and Greatest Ancestor." For E.J. Pénoukou, whose society of origin is the Ewe-Mina of Togo, Christ is *ancêtre-joto*. For Bénézet Bujo of the Congo, Christ is the proto-ancestor. Charles Nyamiti, of Tanzania, has written more than most on the topic of Christ as ancestor. For him Christ is both our Brother and our Ancestor, or better our Brother-Ancestor. For François Kabasélé, also of the Congo, Christ is an elder brother-ancestor. Abraham Akrong, also from within the worldview of the Akan of Ghana, speaks of Christ as *Nana* and as warrior-ancestor and hero-ancestor. The limitations in applying the concept of ancestor to one's interpretation of Christ have been voiced, and yet the appeal to this tradition is strong. Clearly the concept of ancestor cannot be applied to Christ in a literal, non-metaphorical way. Ancestors are often not women, but this depends upon the particular ethnic community and its ancestor traditions. Among the strengths of the image is that Christ as a common ancestor can help us to overcome a destructive ethnocentrism. We are *one* family in Christ, one tribe, one community.

To avoid misunderstanding due to limitations associated with the ancestor concept, Bujo prefers the title Proto-Ancestor for Christ. The historical Jesus lived the African ancestor-ideal to the highest degree. Jesus manifested those qualities which Africans attribute to their ancestors. Yet the concept as applied to Jesus is only applied analogically. Jesus is not one ancestor among many, but *the* ancestor par excellence. The title of Proto-Ancestor "signifies that Jesus did not only realize the authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to new completion."<sup>19</sup> It is not only the earthly Jesus' exemplary life but also his death and resurrection which establish him as Proto-Ancestor. Jesus Christ's proto-ancestorship is ultimately grounded in his Incarnation as the meeting point between God and humankind.

The major strength of an ancestor christology is that it enables the development of a christology that is both thoroughly African and also thoroughly Christian.<sup>20</sup> Even if ancestor traditions wane, or become less significant in the face of westernization, the

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<sup>18</sup> Nyamiti, in "The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective," p. 41, indicates five items that are sufficiently common within the African concept of ancestor to make it theologically helpful for constructing an African theology. These are the ancestor as kin and source of life, his or her sacred status, the mediatorial role, exemplary behavior, and the ancestor's right to regular sacred communication with the earthly kin.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>20</sup> Bediako's treatment of ancestrology and ancestor christology is also particularly helpful in this regard as is his entire discussion of Christianity as a non-Western religion. Cf., Christianity in Africa, 210-33.

concept of ancestor and its accompanying world view remain particularly African.<sup>21</sup> Of course, no African theologian proposes an ancestor christology to the exclusion of traditional titles for Jesus. But "Jesus, our Ancestor," inculturates Jesus within African cultures. It inserts Jesus into African soil. It incarnates Jesus as God's Word in an African context. It is an African Jesus. Jesus is our ancestor, an ancestor of all Africans, the proto-ancestor of us all, the new Adam, our new ancestral origin.

2. *Jesus, the Healer*. It is difficult to determine which expression we should prefer, whether healer,<sup>22</sup> diviner,<sup>23</sup> medicine man, or witchdoctor.<sup>24</sup> We are dealing with the African concept of *nganga*.<sup>25</sup>

Among Christians, and in the West, some may find "witchdoctor" too strong given negative associations with the word "witch." Yet "witchdoctor" itself is not a negative word, anymore than doctor is. The witchdoctor is a doctor who treats witches, whose expertise is knowledge of witchcraft and how to deal with it. He is not a sorcerer.<sup>26</sup> In contemporary terms, he practices alternative medicine. On the other hand, it may imply an acceptability of belief in witches. Yet such belief is widespread in Africa. The causes of disease, physical and mental, as they were understood in the first century world of Jesus were not so dissimilar to those in traditional African religion. Indeed, an African or Africanist can at times more easily understand the world of the Bible than a modern Westerner can. Hence Jesus the Witchdoctor is as good an expression as Jesus the Healer. After all, the African focus on witchcraft goes to the heart of African life and

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to deny its existence and significance elsewhere, for example, in Korea. Yet it is truly and deeply African. Cf., Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim Janelli, Ancestor Worship and Korean Society (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982).

<sup>22</sup> See R. Buana Kibongi and Cécé Kolié. Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context, p. 85, considers "Healer of Healers." Also see Emmanuel Milingo, The World In Between, Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984). Milingo was the Catholic Archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia, until 1982.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Kirwen, The Missionary and the Diviner. Kirwen is a North American Maryknoll Missionary who has been in ministry in East Africa since 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Aylward Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor, An Approach to Healing and Wholeness. Shorter is a British-born Missionary of Africa. Also see his "Folk Christianity and Functional Christology," AFER 24 (1982), 133-37. For the particular relationship between this christological concept and folk Christianity, also see Schoffeleers.

<sup>25</sup> See R. Buana Kibongi as well as the excellent treatment by Matthew Schoffeleers, "Folk Christology in Africa: The Dialectics of the Nganga Paradigm," Journal of Religion in Africa, 19, no. 2 (1989): 157-83 as well as his earlier "Christ as the Medicine-man and the Medicine-man as Christ: A Tentative History of African Christological Thought," Man and Life, Journal of the Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Calcutta, vol. 8, 1 & 2, pp. 11-28. Also Obeng, Asante Catholicism, 203-5, speaks of the *duyefoo* (medicine man, healer, witchdoctor) among the Asante Roman Catholics of Ghana and how it is applied to Christ as a pan-ethnic *duyefoo* in Catholic ritual. He also speaks about Christ as *oagyefoo* (warlord or liberator) and as *kurotwiamansa* (leopard) in Asante Catholicism.

<sup>26</sup> On divination and witchcraft, see among others Laurenti Magesa, African Religion, The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life, esp. 179-91, 209-34.

cultures and is related to the biblical notion that thought can have power independent of a person.<sup>27</sup> It shows Africa's struggles with the reality of evil. In Africa, the "witch" is the most powerful image of what not to be. Thus Christ is a non-witch, an anti-witch, a witch healer or doctor, a physician who has power over the powers of evil.

There are many positive aspects to this way of naming Jesus in Africa, and it is surprising that this approach to African christology has not received even more attention. The title resonates well with what we know about the Jesus of the Gospels. Although post-Enlightenment skepticism has dismissed most of Jesus' miracles, healing was a significant dimension of Jesus' ministry.<sup>28</sup> Jesus, preacher and teacher, prophet and sage, is often given greater attention today. But healings and exorcisms are widely attested in the New Testament, and in material that meet modern critical biblical criteria. Nor should the healings and exorcisms be separated from the preaching. They were preaching -- preaching in deeds rather than words. The symbolic actions in Jesus' ministry were as important as the parabolic stories. Both reflect Jesus the healer -- healing in words and in deed -- the two always being integrated in Jesus for whom praxis was never separated from proclamation.

Here again the African Jesus offers himself to the universal church as a way to re-discover who Jesus is for us today. There is great need in Africa as well as throughout the world for personal healing -- physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. But not only for personal healing. Economic, political, social, tribal, and national wounds are staggering. Can Jesus' healing power reach these wounds? As we ponder this question, Jesus the healer becomes Jesus the liberator which expression we will consider shortly. The two are not separable. Healing need not imply only personal needs and, in an African context, always implies something communal.<sup>29</sup> The nations of Africa have been wounded by the slave trade, colonization, the post-colonial formation of the nation-states, neo-colonialism's economic dependency, intertribal violence and war, the corruption of many post-independence national leaders, and on and on. Could not the healing Jesus have a strong appeal in Africa today? Is he not what Africa needs now more than ever? How can African christology allow Jesus, the *nganga*, the witchdoctor, the diviner, the healer to speak with all the power, strength, and alternatives that are his?

Perhaps "healer" seems less comprehensive than some other African names for Jesus. Perhaps it seems to capture only one facet of who Jesus is. This, however, is the case only if we fail to have a holistic concept of a more integral healing -- which is precisely

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<sup>27</sup> See Lucy Mair, *Witchcraft* (London: World University Library, 1969), esp. 76-101.

<sup>28</sup> See Donald J. Goergen, *The Mission and Ministry of Jesus* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), a Michael Glazier Book, esp. 170-76.

<sup>29</sup> See Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community, The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South*, among others.

what Africa has as its tradition.<sup>30</sup> No one title ever says it all. That would place too great a burden on any one metaphor. Even biblically and traditionally many titles were needed to do justice to Jesus. Some were more flexible and therefore valuable (Son of God, Lord, Christ) but others equally significant even if limited (son of humanity, son of David, rabbi, prophet). So likewise in Africa, many African names are needed if Christ is to be inculturated. In one sense, Christ the Healer has its parallel in the tradition with Christ the Priest.<sup>31</sup> Priesthood is applied to Jesus biblically only in the Letter to the Hebrews. Yet the Church picked up the title as a way of speaking about the threefold ministry of Christ and the Church: Jesus as prophet, priest, and king. Michael Kirwen has indicated how, in African society, the diviner is the African equivalent of priest. Jesus Christ is the supreme priest: Jesus Christ, Healer par excellence, diviner, medicine man, witchdoctor.

3. *Jesus Christ, Liberator.* Another significant title for Jesus emerged from within praxis-oriented, context-aware, politically conscious liberation theologies. Sometimes these theologies have been placed at odds with the theologies of inculturation in Africa that undergird titles like ancestor and healer, although this is less and less true as one sees the interconnectedness between cultural analysis and social analysis. In the end one is not possible without the other. As Englebert Mveng indicated, there is an anthropological poverty that is as real as economic poverty.<sup>32</sup> Liberation must be a liberation of the African cultures as well as social and economic. At the same time, however, contemporary Africans cannot become culturally conscious, genuinely African, without addressing the human deprivations in African life. Hence there is the growing awareness that there can be no inculturation apart from socio-political liberation, and no liberation apart from inculturation and the africanization of Christianity.

The first generation of sub-Saharan theologians began to emerge in the late 1950's marked by the publication of Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent (1957).<sup>33</sup> Hopeful that Africa's independence movements and the establishment of new nation-states would remedy many of Africa's social, economic, and political troubles, these theologians chose to focus more on the recovery of African traditions, African religions, negritude, and inculturation. The strength of this first wave was cultural and religious retrieval. Independence, however, did not bear all the fruits anticipated. Hence a second wave of sub-Saharan theologians engaged in social and political analysis -- directly confronting the crises affecting African political, economic, and social life with an awareness that

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Alyward Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor; and Laurenti Magesa, African Religion.

<sup>31</sup> See R. Buana Kibongi, who translates *nganga* as priest.

<sup>32</sup> L'Afrique dans l'Eglise, Paroles d'un Croyant (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985). Also see "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World," in Paths of African Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 154-65.

<sup>33</sup> See the analysis of Josiah U. Young III in his African Theology, A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1993).

Christianity must have something to say to these issues or it has nothing to offer Africa at all. In doing so, these theologians benefited from the work of the South African liberation theologians who had been developing their own black theology along liberation lines.<sup>34</sup>

Some have maintained that sub-Saharan African theologians have not developed a specifically African theology of liberation apart from South African theology. Certainly this is no longer the case. Outside South Africa, the first efforts of African theology were not focused on liberation motifs, that is true. But today Africa has its own liberation theologians, feminist theologians, and theologians of reconstruction, the latter ones constituting something of a third wave or new generation in African theology.

A criticism of some early theologies of liberation was their almost exclusive emphasis on liberation in socio-economic terms to the neglect of the whole human person. But how can one overemphasize the need for Christian theology and the churches to be attentive to this facet of human existence? Is it not that the Church in the past spoke of salvation in almost exclusively spiritual or other-worldly terms to the neglect of the whole human person? So perhaps a shift in perspective had to go far in another direction in order to achieve a balanced appreciation of an integral liberation that is attentive to both the interiority and exteriority of human personhood.

Jean-Marc Ela, Africa's first liberation theologian of note outside South Africa, a Cameroonian and Catholic priest, has written, "The Bible, which speaks of God and human beings in the same breath, always includes in the deliverance of God's people their political, economic, and social liberation -- without, however, its being reduced to these."<sup>35</sup> Ela believes that Christians must make a one-hundred-eighty degree turn. "The faith cannot be lived atemporally: It must be inscribed in a historical context and be expressed in a praxis, for it must manifest, in comprehensible signs, the Christian message of liberation in Jesus Christ."<sup>36</sup> Inculturation isn't the only requirement for an ongoing incarnation of the gospel and of Jesus Christ in the world.

If there is a "priestly" dimension to the image of Jesus as healer, there is certainly a "prophetic" dimension to Jesus the liberator. Just as religion and society could not be separated in Jesus' world, so likewise in Africa. Religion is coterminous with life. Liberation for Jesus is grounded in a right relationship with God, but it is not confined to one's relationship with God, precisely because a relationship with God cannot be so confined. To love God with one's whole heart is to love God's people as well, to desire justice, and to stand in solidarity with those disadvantaged by the social structures of our world. Jesus reached out to social outcasts and those branded as sinners. Jesus

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<sup>34</sup> See e.g., The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa, ed Basil Moore (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973).

<sup>35</sup> African Cry, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 87.

himself stands in this prophetic tradition.<sup>37</sup>

The economically disadvantaged were not the only subjects of Jesus' liberation. Jesus gave particular attention to women and in doing so challenged the taboos of his world. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a Methodist originally from Ghana, is one of several African women pursuing feminist theology that is distinctly African.<sup>38</sup> Oduyoye is as critical of Euro-American feminism as she is of African patriarchy. North American and European feminism has focused too narrowly on gender analysis alone, leaving issues of class and race on the side. The African woman does not see the African man as her enemy, but rather as a victim of first world imperialism and neo-colonialism. Africa's women theologians see Jesus as liberating, rather than seeing his maleness as an obstacle. Jesus means freedom and equality for women as well as men. Jesus is talking about another way of being human other than that into which patriarchal societies enculturate us.

In spite of negative factors associated with Christianity in Africa, Oduyoye sees the continued appeal of Christianity in its response to the primal African cry for salvation. Christ is Savior, the *Agyenkwa*, the Rescuer.<sup>39</sup> The God of Israel, Yahweh Sabaoth, helped fight Israel's battles against human enemies. God the Savior was God the Warrior, the One who gives victory. So also in the language of the Akan, "the One Who Saves in Battle" became a name of praise for God. Jesus saves, rescues, redeems, fights our battles. Although this latter image of the Great Warrior carries with it the risk of a God who is on our side in conflicts that are all too human and sinful, and all too ethnic and tribal, Christ is both Warrior and Liberator for Oduyoye. It is He who saves, who rescues in desperate circumstances where rescue and salvation are much needed.

In addition to feminist liberation theologies, there has emerged a new moment in

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<sup>37</sup> Goergen, *The Mission and Ministry of Jesus*, 146-76. Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*.

<sup>38</sup> Besides Oduyoye, there are among others Bette Ekeya, Mary Getui, Teresa Hinga, Musimbi Kanyoro, Hannah Kinoti, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, and Nyambura Njoroge of Kenya, Teresa Okure of Nigeria, Elizabeth Amoah of Ghana, Rose Zoe, Louise Tappa, and Grace Eneme in Cameroon, Bernadette Mbuy Beya and Justine Kahungu in Zaire, and Brigalia Bam and Denise Ackerman in South Africa. There is also the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Cf., Musimbi Kanyoro, "African Women's Quest for Justice: A Review of African Women's Theology," *Pacific Journal of Theology* (1996), 77-88, reprinted in *Journal of Constructive Theology* 2(1996), 5-18. Also *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, eds. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro (Maryknoll:Orbis Books, 1992). Amoah and Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion, Third World Women Doing Theology*, eds., Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll: Orbis Books,, 1988), 35-46. *Groaning in Faith, African Women in the Household of God*, Musimbi Kanyoro and Nyambura Njoroge (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996). *Violence Against Women*, eds. Grace Wamue and Mary Getui (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996). Also see Laurenti Magesa, "Christology, African Women and Ministry."

<sup>39</sup> *Hearing and Knowing*, 98.

African theology, a new generation, a new theology, the theology of reconstruction.<sup>40</sup>  
This new movement is embodied in the work of Kä Mana.

In 1993 Kä Mana published his L'Afrique va-t-elle mourir? Essai d'éthique politique and also Théologie africaine pour temps de crise, and in 1994 Christ d'Afrique. They reflect a sojourn through political ethics to an ethical and political christology. In 1993 Kä Mana was asking what was at stake for Africa and for the world in the challenges confronting our epoch. The political, economic, cultural, social, moral and spiritual concerns of Africa's theologians are present in Kä Mana, but he also recognizes the need to move from the problematic of cultural identity and socio-economic liberation (all theologies of insurrection against the West as Kä Mana calls them) to a new vision: from insurrection to reconstruction. His theology of reconstruction integrates the motifs of identity and liberation but moves then to the need to reconstruct Africa as well as the world in accord with humane requirements. "What is humanity?" is the philosophical, theological, and ethical question raised by Kä Mana.

For Kä Mana, a theology of reconstruction requires innovative thinking about the relationship between Christians and the world. His political ethics has its starting point in the gospel. Jesus is a key moment in the conscience of humanity, the ethical impulse of history. Yet Kä Mana is quite aware of the pluralistic character of our world and the need for a dialogical approach. The Christian is called upon to be articulate in the public forum about Jesus as the horizon before whom we re-construct humanity. A Christian theology of reconstruction offers Christ to the public discussion that must take place between the "logic of the market place" and the "logic of love" as manifested by Christ. Christ poses essential questions for today's world. It is a question of substituting

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<sup>40</sup> This new moment is foreshadowed in Emmanuel Martey's African Theology, Inculturation and Liberation (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993) and John Parratt's Reinventing Christianity, African Theology Today (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995). Martey indicates the interconnectedness and complementarity between theologies of inculturation and liberation. Parratt moves to a new phase in his speech about reinventing theology in an era of reconstruction in Africa, following upon the collapse of the Soviet system and the cold war during which time Africa was a different kind of player in world politics between these two opposing systems vying for the future of humankind. Clearly suggesting a shift in the paradigm for African theology from 'liberation' to 'reconstruction' is J.N.K. Mugambi's From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995). The new theological language is also reflected in the collection The Church and Reconstruction of Africa, Theological Considerations, ed. J.N.K. Mugambi (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997). In this collection, see especially Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Half A Century of African Christian Theologies," 84-114, esp. 106-107. Also see, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke's "Recent Developments in the Christian Theologies of Africa: Towards the Twenty-First Century," Journal of Constructive Theology, vol. 2, no. 2 (1996), 33-60; and earlier "The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction, A Critical Appraisal," Missionalia 22 (1994), 245-58. J.N.K. Mugambi seems to have been the first to have initiated the idea of a theology of reconstruction. See his "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa," in The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction (Nairobi: All Africa Council of Churches), 29-50. Also see C. Villa-Vicencio, A Theology of Reconstruction (Cambridge: 1994).

an ethical world for the cynical world and of denouncing human misery. It is thus that Kä Mana proposes christology as the heart of the theology of reconstruction, not out of deference to the Christian faith but because Christ is essential to constructing a human future. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the logic of love to which the world must turn.

In his third book, Christ d'Afrique, Kä Mana reconstructs christology. After having viewed Christianity as foreign and Christ as an outsider in the previous era of African theology, we are now at a historical moment when Christ, the gospel, and Christianity are to be seen as integral and essential to Africa's future.<sup>41</sup> As the person of Christ is central to christology, and as the concept of person implies an interiority of multiple concentric levels of existence (physical, psychic, spiritual), so christology carries within it several strata, each important but incomplete by itself alone (those of attentiveness to socio-political liberation, to cultural identity and ancestral traditions, and to reconstructing the myth of African origins and destiny).

Who is Christ for Africa today, according to Kä Mana? Christ is the catalyst of reconstruction, ethical and political energy, the force of our spirit, the power of conscience (Christ d'Afrique, 103-105). Kä Mana goes beyond a concept of Christ as simply liberator. Christ is the breath of a radical renovation, "Christ our Breath and Christ our Life" (*le Christ-souffle et le Christ-vie*, 106). To do christology is to do ethics, and to do ethics with Christ as center is to transform Africa from within and to transform the world. The African Christ is "le Christ-Osiris," our brother who was put to death by the idols of the western world but is coming back to life. He is "le Christ-Akhénaton," the symbol of one God who relativizes our dogmatic systems. He is "le Christ-Moïse," the Egyptian, the African who liberates us from all pharaohonic christologies (74-79). "Je me libère, donc je suis." Or better, "Je crois en la liberté, donc je suis vivant." (77).

4. *Christ, the African King*. Some earlier christological efforts utilized the concept of the African chief as one way of naming Jesus within an African context, although the suggestion of chief has also been criticized.<sup>42</sup> Ukachukwu Chris Manus, a lay Nigerian theologian, however, has developed a "King Christology" which deserves attention.<sup>43</sup> Manus' effort is distinctive. Its weaknesses are the easily-made assumption that the title "king" carries with it a connotation of domination and triumphalism as well as the fact that the title is not particularly African. But this is why one must pay closer attention to

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<sup>41</sup> Kä Mana writes in reference to Christianity, "Il est nôtre" (Christ d'Afrique, 8). This point parallels Kwame Bediako's thesis in Christianity in Africa.

<sup>42</sup> Harry Sawyerr, an Anglican from Sierra Leone, was critical of the suggestion that Christ be presented as chief, Creative Evangelism, pp. 72-74. It must be admitted that Jesus as king will speak only to those societies with a particular tribal structure in which there were hereditary kings or chieftans. Some ethnic communities are politically structured around a council of elders.

<sup>43</sup> Ukachukwu Chris Manus, Christ, the African King, along with other articles. References in the body of the text are from the 1993 book.

the christology Manus proposes, for it is the specifically African concept of kingship which he suggests as a way of interpreting Jesus who is not simply Christ the King, but Christ the *African King*. And so what is a king within those African traditions that have had a tradition of kingship within their tribal political structures?

Manus' suggestion of kingship as a hermeneutical key is grounded in his own ethno-historical studies of African kingship as well as in New Testament studies. In neither are there traces of triumphalism, rather both share the notion of a servant-king. Manus studied in particular how kingship functioned among the Yoruba (in southwest Nigeria), the Baganda (of Uganda), the Shilluk (of southern Sudan), and the Zulu (of South Africa). He looked at the manner of selecting and installing the king in each of these cultures, the sacral nature of the kingship, the king's role as mediator between God and the people and concomitant priestly functions. African kingship is (among the Yoruba and Shilluk) and was (among the Baganda and Zulu) a sacralized institution. Incumbents fulfill their sacral duties as divine agents for the good of their subjects (71-117). The theology of kingship in the Old Testament and its understanding of Yahweh as king (e.g., Is 43:15; Pss 5:2, 10:16, 84:3), the kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching, and the New Testament's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, "the anointed servant-king" (118-167, 210-213), all manifest significant parallels with the African understanding of kingship. It is important to emphasize that "the kingship of Jesus is never exactly like any of the earthly African kingships" (233), that the kingship of Jesus transcends African traditional religious cultures (237), but that at the same time there is a complementarity between the kingship of Christ and African kingship (237).

What is the value of a christology focused on Christ as king? Naming Jesus as African king gives Jesus a home in Africa's rich spiritual universe. Jesus functions as a king *à la mode africaine*. Jesus is Servant-King or Servant-Leader. Manus' christology is as much a servant christology as it is a king christology and it offers a model for African leaders, both civil and religious. It is better to include "servant" in the title (i.e. Christ the African servant-king) because the greatest challenge facing a royal or king christology is that the title can so easily connote oppressor even in an African context. Given the concept of African kingship as interpreted by Manus, it becomes an appealing way to speak of Jesus Christ. It is biblical. It unites within it significant African themes, including the relationship of the king to the ancestors. Perhaps, rather than simply naming Christ as king, one might combine elements of African ancestrology and kingship traditions and speak of Jesus as the founding or foundational ancestral king. The king as "for the people" and yet "one of the people", shows ready application both to Jesus and to problems facing Africa today, including Kä Mana's challenge to reconstruct Africa. Can Jesus the African ancestral servant-king liberate his people as God did of old? Of course, the image of Jesus the king completes the threefold way of

speaking of Christ as prophet-liberator, priest-healer, and servant-king.<sup>44</sup>

Before leaving this section on African titles for Jesus, a word must be said with respect to all of them, how they apply and how they don't apply, as is true of all titles attributed to Jesus, whether traditional or new. Jesus Christ, the supreme priest; Jesus Christ, Healer par excellence, diviner, witchdoctor; Jesus Christ, liberator, king. These titles are applied to Jesus analogously but really. They tell us who Jesus is and can be in Africa today. Naturally this means not only applying a title, an African name, to Jesus, but also applying the name in a new way, which is the nature of metaphorical language. We must remind ourselves with all the titles, traditional and new, African or Asian or Western, that their character is metaphorical. They are not like steno-language,<sup>45</sup> one to one equations, but rather are intended to be revelatory of who Jesus is within the confines of human language. Thus they can best be understood with something of the yes-no-yes structure.<sup>46</sup> This is true of each title. We can be critical if they are applied literally, because in a very literal way Jesus is not an ancestor as we ordinarily might speak of ancestor. He is not a king, not even "the Christ," not in the way that "Christ" or "Messiah" was ordinarily understood within the Judaism of Jesus' time. So the metaphor goes through a yes-no-yes in order to fit. Yes, Jesus is an ancestor. No, Jesus is not an ancestor, not in that way. But yes, Jesus is our ancestor, both in a deeper sense of what we mean by ancestor and in the sense that JESUS is ancestor. Jesus tells us, reveals to us, as much about what it means to be ancestor as the category of ancestor tells us something about Jesus. The two illuminate each other. This is true of Jesus as healer, liberator, king, or even son of David, Christ, shepherd. Yes, Jesus is a king. No, Jesus is not a king, not in that kind of way, not that kind of king. Yes, Jesus is king, a king in this sense, and let us keep in mind that Jesus is true king, what being a king is all about. So we find out about kingship from Jesus and not simply about Jesus from our pre-conceptions of what a king is.

Jesus both is and is not "ancestor" in the African sense, both is and is not "healer-diviner" in the African sense. On the one hand, the names or titles or metaphors tell us something real and significant about who Jesus is. But on the other hand it is Jesus who tells us what being an ancestor, a healer, a liberator is all about. This is the traditional way of naming Jesus even with the biblical titles. The Epistle to the Hebrews had to re-think the meaning of priesthood in order for Jesus to fit the metaphor. The earthly Jesus was clearly not historically a priest in the sense in which that would have been literally understood within the Judaism of Jesus' day. Nevertheless to the author of the Letter to

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<sup>44</sup> Concerning this threefold paradigm in reference to African christology, see Douglas Waruta, "Who Is Jesus for Africans Today? Prophet, Priest, Potentate."

<sup>45</sup> Cf., Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1962); and The Burning Fountain, A Study in the Language of Symbolism (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1954). Also, Donald Goergen, Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, Immanuel (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 186-88.

<sup>46</sup> Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, Christ in Sacred Speech (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1986), 23-26.

Hebrews, Jesus was not only a priest, but the only true priest. Likewise with the expression Messiah or Christ as applied to Jesus: Jesus was not the Messiah in the varied ways in which that was understood within Judaism at that time. These names could not be applied to Jesus literally without any flexibility, without theologizing the names, without realizing that they were functioning as metaphors for Jesus. The content of christological titles comes as much from who Jesus himself uniquely is as from the prior understanding of them within the cultural milieu of which they were a part.

In this regard then, we might say that African christology in the future need not spend time seeking still other names or titles for Jesus, searching for the title that best fits, or contrasting the titles in order to see which might be best. Rather African Christology can do as all Christian tradition has done: theologize the titles, theologize the African names for Jesus, to name Jesus as proto-ancestor, healer, liberator, king, elder brother, etc., but not allow this to be the end of the christological process but rather its beginning. The title ties Jesus into the culture, helps to indigenize Jesus, but does not stop with doing this, but goes on to the theological task of interpreting the title.

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#### Africans Doing Christology Today

I have reviewed some of the excellent work done by African theologians in constructing an African Christology. I highlighted four images in particular: Christ, our Proto-Ancestor; Jesus the Healer; Christ-Liberator; and the African Servant-King. These represent the energy and insights of Africa's professional theologians. But there is always more to theology than the work of the professional theologians, as significant and irreplaceable as that is. There is also folk theology, oral theology, popular theology, the theology of the people and the faithful. These are contextual theologies, inductive theologies or theologies 'from below'.<sup>47</sup> Professional theology needs to be in contact with the people's theologies in order to discern what the Spirit is doing in the churches. Unfortunately I cannot make a report on behalf of the African peoples themselves, but I can share some "christologies-in-the-making" as I report how Jesus was seen and understood by my students. These were students studying theology. They came from a variety of backgrounds. How did they see Jesus?

There were 24 students, 17 Africans and 7 non-Africans, 2 women and 22 men, all religious except for one lay student. The African students came from Nigeria, Kenya, the Congo, Angola, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda. The non-Africans came from Poland, India, Spain, and the Philippines.

The students were given an assignment in four phases. The first task was to describe a relatively recent critical experience in their lives. The narrative of this significant event

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<sup>47</sup> Along this line, see Wairimu Churu, "African Christology in Process: Making a Christology within the Christian Community," *Hekima Review*, n. 18 (1997), 28-36. Also see Alyward Shorter, "Folk Christianity and Functional Christology," *Afer*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1982), 133-37.

provided the basis for the next phase, that of allowing the experience to raise questions for them. What questions did the experience raise? What were the existential questions that lay underneath their experiences? What were their questions? Then, in phase three, what was the question that lay underneath all the questions, a foundational question, perhaps the question on which most of the other questions depended. Ordinarily this question is a question with theological implications or one to which faith speaks. The final phase was to write a response to the question, "Who do you say that Jesus is for you?" or "Who is Jesus for us in Africa today?" It was an effort to link their understanding of Jesus to their own questions and experiences. Who is Jesus in the context of their lives and cultures?

Some of the experiences narrated in phase one of the assignment included being robbed, visiting a community of children who were suffering with AIDS, helping a family out in the bush of northern Kenya bury their wife and mother, the unexpected death of one's own mother, the death of an elder brother only 31 years old, assisting a man dying of cancer with his supper and his bath, a journey within a war torn zone in the Congo (former Zaire), spending Christmas in Muslim territory and sharing a Muslim-Christian celebration of Christmas, days and weeks of feeling vocationally disoriented and abandoned, loneliness and hospitalization, counseling a cousin who was contemplating another marriage and thus polygamy, intuiting and providentially escaping an accident, the almost miraculous recovery of one's father, and witnessing from across the border killings in Rwanda where a large part of his family lived .

Some of the fundamental questions raised in phase three of the assignment were: Why should innocent children suffer? Am I on the right path? Why does God allow suffering? Am I alone in life? Is there hope for the poor in Africa? Am I ready to go beyond the boundaries of my tribe and embrace all without any discrimination? Is our formation adequate so as to allow us to cope well with tribal conflicts?

The descriptions of who Jesus is were not always succinct names or titles. However, particular images did emerge. One caution the students themselves made must be called to mind. To truly "africanize" Jesus means to name Jesus in the native African languages. English or French is rarely the first language of native Africans. Nor does a translation of a word fully convey the meaning in its native context. The mother tongue is necessary and vital and so some of the students named Jesus in their native languages which carried particular nuances not always translatable. Following are the ways of naming Jesus among the African students in the order of frequency. Some had more than one name.

- a liberator (and from one speaking within a Bakongo perspective, a '*Nvuluzy*' i.e., a liberator, rescuer), (seven in total chose this name),
- my elder or eldest brother (six),
- Proto-Ancestor or Ancestor (four),

- friend, '*Enyioma*' (good friend) (three),
- healer (and from within the Bakongo perspective a '*Nganga-Nkisi*' or healer)<sup>48</sup>(two),
- a great teacher (two),
- Savior (or more specifically, '*Chinazo*,' which means 'God saves,' in Igbo) (two),
- the good mother , Mother (two),<sup>49</sup>
- neighbor (one and one for the following as well),
- a guest who is open to friendship,
- a new Moses,
- within an Igbo context, Jesus as one's true *chi* ,
- one who is present and walks with me,
- one whose life explains my own life ('*okowandum*,' among the Igbos),
- one who purifies cultures,
- the best illustrator of a genuine relationship,
- Alpha and Omega ('*Ejesia ugu*,' among the Igbos),
- the Christ of Hope,
- Jesus, my Providence,
- Jesus, the compassionate, the co-sufferer.

I have separated out the images proposed by those who were not native Africans, yet their responses were fairly similar. Their descriptions included:

- personal friend (two),
- brother-friend/elder brother-friend (two) ,
- one who walks with me, talks to me, is present to me, but does not answer all my questions (one),
- Jesus as one who intervenes in my life (one),
- Jesus as healer (one).

These emerging christologists found particular significance in titles such as brother, elder brother, and brother-friend, friend, ways of naming Jesus as personally present to them. Suffering was also a motif that entered into the explanations of the various expressions or titles.

Peter A. Nwachukwu from Nigeria emphasized three names or titles: ancestor, liberator, and eldest brother. He had this to say about Jesus as liberator: "The idea of liberator is not foreign to the African traditional way of life. Among the Igbos, the word

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<sup>48</sup> It was explained to me that the title or image of '*Nganga*,' from the Bakongo perspective, has four connotations: '*Nganga*,' meaning witchdoctor; '*Nganga Nzambi*,' referring to a priest or minister of God; '*Nganga Mbuta*,' referring to the pope; and '*Nganga Nkisi*,' meaning a healer or medicine man.

<sup>49</sup> This is an interesting choice since it had not surfaced in class discussions. Imaging Jesus as 'Mother' is more common in India, e.g., see Michael Amaladoss, "Images of Jesus in India," East Asian Pastoral Review 31, n. 1/2 (1994). Jesus (not simply God but Jesus) as mother is also present in medieval spirituality. Cf., Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother, Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley, Calif.:University of California Press, 1982).

'liberator' is 'Onye Nzoputa,' and it is used in translating the Igbo Bible. For the Igbos, a liberator is one who delivers or rescues people from their different problems and situations. This title is not limited to any sex but to any one who plays the role of a liberator. A liberator is a man/woman of the people, who has devoted his/her life for the good of others. The person gives himself/herself freely and totally for others out of love. It is rare to get such a person among the people, but if by luck a community gets a person like that, the person is more than a king. The people give him/her all the respect that he/she deserves. In fact, the person is seen as 'a living God'."

Another Igbo from Nigeria, Canice I. Azuoma, described Jesus as one's true chi. "The Igbos believe that each human person has his/her own chi. Each person's chi is inextricably tied to the core of his/her personality, that chi has also been termed one's 'other self' or one's 'transcendental self.'...One's chi owns one's life, and apertions to one his or her individuality....Jesus, strictly speaking, cannot be identified with chi as it is conceived by the Igbos. Yet chi does lend itself to a 'christologization,' at least for me....What chi was to me as an Igbo, Jesus is now to me -- and much more....Jesus is my good and benovolent chi."

Franklin C. Udenze from Nigeria wrote, "The image of Christ that has prominently featured in my life is Christ as a Savior. This image was prefigured in the kind of name I was given by my parents at birth. In Africa, a person's name is very important because it not only gives the person an identity but also tells more about the circumstances that surrounded the person's birth. Sometimes it reflects the personality and the belief or philosophy of either the person or his parents. So when I was born, I was named *Chizoba* (which means let God save) ....I was born immediately after the Nigerian civil war in which millions of people died of hunger and poverty. This did not affect my parents as such, because they stayed as refugees in one farm settlement which was constantly provided with food and clothing by the Red Cross Association. During this time my father hoped to use his accounts in the bank to start a new life at the end of the war. But unfortunately for him, when the war ended, my father's accounts were frozen or liquidated together with others and this struck my family with poverty and hunger.... This poverty continued until I was born on the Easter of that same year. As a result of the uncertainty that surrounded my survival, they named me *Chizoba*. Providentially, some weeks after my birth, God showed himself as our savior when one of my father's debtors came out of the blue to repay my father the money he borrowed from him before the war."

Tium Debesai Zewold of Ethiopia, along with other images, sees Jesus as a guest who identifies himself with his host, an extraordinary guest who never excludes anyone while still making an option for the poor, thus a guest of those who are considered as having nothing to offer, a guest whose heart is open to friendship and who accepts us as we are, a guest without bias, a guest who comes to liberate us from personal, cultural, and social forms of enslavement. He writes, "Jesus does not reject us because of what

we do but embraces us because of what we are."

Innocent Maganya Halerimana, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, states: "My reflection starts from an experience of sufferings, from a situation of troubles and endless conflicts. Thousands and thousands of people died in these conflicts. Some were relatives and close friends. The situation has left behind thousands of wounded people. I am not speaking about physical wounds but wounds from deep within. When I look at these wounded people, I see that, humanly speaking, they will never recover unless there is grace somewhere. So how does Jesus speak to me and to them in this kind of situation? Can Jesus the Christ mean anything to me and to them? Is there any image which can help us understand how Jesus takes part in these sufferings and that he does care for those who suffer?....Jesus is the one who suffers with me....Precisely because Jesus shared in our sufferings, he can be able to speak today to those who are weighed down by any type of burden. He says to them: You are not alone. I am with you. Do not be afraid for I am tender and compassionate."

In a number of responses, in various ways, there was an emphasis on the importance of Jesus' humanity. Mary Celestine from the Democratic Republic of the Congo wrote, "Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the one who teaches me what it means to be human," and "to recognize the dignity of every human being." The theme of the suffering of Christ emerged as well. Christopher Turyahikayo of Uganda saw in Christ an elder brother as well as one who suffers: "Regarding suffering, Christ our elder brother has shown us the way." Rafael Armada, from Spain, saw in Jesus a kind of accompaniment that is often a theme in Latin American and Hispanic American theology, "Someone who is accompanying me": "We search for Him and we miss Him when He seems to be detached from our lives, like we miss the presence of a real friend with whom we have enjoyed the company." Stephen Lumala from Kenya interpreted liberation as having this sense of accompaniment to it as well: "Jesus is a liberator of people towards freedom and authenticity. He not only liberates people, but also societies....He stands as one who rescues. He works along with us and in us." Juliana Karomba from Tanzania, who also spoke of Jesus as liberator, said, "Jesus is that voice from within that calls for total trust, the foundation of any freedom."

Two men chose the image of Jesus as mother, and I would like to quote from each of them. Daniel Ehigie, Nigerian, writes, "While it is generally accepted that many traditional African societies are patriarchal, the vital and unique role of mothers in the homestead cannot be denied. The place of the mother in the nurturing of the child is so essential that if it is missing in the life of the child, it will lead to personality problems. In my ethnic group (Ishans of mid-western Nigeria) for example, motherhood is very much revered. The greatest challenge to a mother now comes when there is a physically or mentally handicapped child in the family. From the traditional African perspective, with particular reference to the Ishans, a handicapped child is seen as a bad omen from the gods....Such children are either killed at birth, or when they are spared, are treated

with disdain. But the good mother goes the extra mile in meeting the needs of the child....Jesus is for me The Good Mother." Patrick Njagih, a Kenyan lay student, writes, "There are many attributes given to Jesus....But from these many, I would take Jesus to be a 'Mother.' Born twenty-eight years ago, my father passed away when I was only five years old....Now, what are some of the qualities which a mother has, which makes me take Jesus in the same image? These include: love, compassion, protection, care, providing, understanding, ready to forgive me."

There is no need to harmonize these responses. Some indicate the meaningfulness of particularly African ways of naming Jesus. Many show a personal relationship with Christ. A particular title or expression may not mean the same thing to each person who uses it. Most recognized the need for many ways of speaking about Christ. No one way is sufficient by itself alone.

### An African Christ: A Guest's Perspective

Having reflected upon who Jesus Christ is within an African context, I would like to share some African images of Jesus Christ that have come to me. I share these with hesitation since I am a non-African. Yet I have been a guest in Africa. I am not suggesting these as images of an African Jesus instead of those that are current in African theology. The following is simply my own personal response to who Jesus is in Africa.

1. *Jesus, our Host, Master of Hospitality* -- Enyi Ben Udoh of Nigeria developed a christology focused on the image of Jesus as a guest becoming kin.<sup>50</sup> Its presupposition, given the fact of Jesus' having been imposed on Africa during the colonial and missionary period, is that Christ is a stranger in Africa. Christ in Africa remains too often a Western Christ. Jesus' status in Africa is then similar to that of an illegal alien. The African has to wrestle with a double-mindedness -- a Christian identity and yet the alienness of Christ. Udoh responds to the dilemma in a positive way by proposing the image of Christ as Africa's guest. Jesus Christ as a stranger is in itself a powerful image and has been proposed by others inside and outside Africa. But "guest" welcomes the stranger into Africa, yet as a visitor from outside, since Christ has not yet become indigenized. Once acknowledged that Christ is first and foremost a guest, however, the process of naturalization can take place, the process by which Jesus, Africa's guest, becomes one of the kin. One remains an outsider until initiated into the beliefs and practices of African societies and communities. I would like to give this image a different twist, having come to Africa as an outsider myself. For me the African Christ is the host.

There are few values if any more characteristic of traditional African life than that of

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<sup>50</sup> Udoh, Guest Christology, An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa.

hospitality. This is widely acknowledged, and even emphasized in Jomo Kenyatta's Facing Mt. Kenya.<sup>51</sup> Hospitality is genuinely African. If we search for christologies that are both truly African and also truly Christian, why not begin with this pre-eminent African tradition? I do not think that I heard any word spoken in East Africa more often than that of "karibu," "welcome" in Kiswahili. It symbolizes and embodies African life. The true African is always a host. To be African is to be a host. An indigenized African Jesus is therefore also a host, indeed host par excellence, a master of hospitality.

The image of Jesus as the good host or master of hospitality carries with it the connotation of an indigenized Jesus native to Africa. I think here of Bediako's emphasis on Christianity as no longer a Western religion. Coming into its own, African christology must realize that Jesus is as African as he is anything. Yet Jesus is not only African; he is universal host. He is a genuinely African host, but a pan-ethnic host, a host to Africans and also to non-Africans. He is particularly host to the poor, those without status in society, and to women. Thus Christ the host is not only an inculturated Christ but a liberating Christ. He welcomes all into the realm of God. He welcomes all to share in God's dream for humanity.

Jesus as host is a biblical image, and various African writers have stressed the importance of the Scriptures for doing theology in Africa.<sup>52</sup> One of the fundamental characteristics of the biblical, earthly Jesus was his solidarity with people.<sup>53</sup> He welcomed them, and they felt welcomed by him. He responded to their innate human dignity, and they could sense his respect for them.<sup>54</sup> Consider Jesus' parables in which a meal to which many were invited played a significant role in his teaching about God and God's kingdom. We can recall in particular the parable of the wedding feast (Mt 22:2-10; Lk 14:15-24), as well as his own table fellowship with people. In multiplying the loaves and fish, he played host to the crowds, not only nourishing them through word but also providing for them with food. He was noted for the meals he shared.

Paul later put it this way: in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female (Gal 3: 28). So we must always wrestle with the tension between the fact that Jesus was Jewish and yet in another sense transcended Judaism while still remaining thoroughly Jewish. So Christ must also be indigenously African,

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<sup>51</sup> (Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1992), esp. 41-52. Also, in Elochukwu Uzukwu's Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship, An African Orientation (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 295, Uzukwu indicates that the experiment with the Cameroonian *ndzon-melen* Mass had its inspiration in the structure of the Beti assembly during which the host serves a meal to the assembly. Also on traditional hospitality, see Chris Nwaka Egbulem, The "Rite Zairois" in the Context of Liturgical Inculturation in Middle-Belt Africa Since the Second Vatican Council, S.T.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1989 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1989), 228-230, 300-301.

<sup>52</sup> See John Mbiti among others. Also see The Bible in African Christianity, Essays in Biblical Theology, eds. Hannah Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> See Goergen, The Mission and Ministry of Jesus, 207-281.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, esp., 278-81.

although not only African, for he transcends our human categories. In Christ there is neither Igbo nor Yoruba, neither Hutu nor Tutsi, neither Kikuyu nor Luo, neither African nor European. In Christ we all experience both our dignity and our equality. In Christ there is no superior or inferior. Christ Jesus is an African host, but a host to all of Africa, respecting while at the same time relativising tribal and ethnic identities, affirming our identities and yet challenging us to see our human identity and solidarity as well. Jesus is the universal host of all peoples.

Jesus as host may be a particularly Synoptic image of Jesus, yet the Johannine Jesus plays a significant role at the wedding in Cana. And most significant of all, we remember the final meal Jesus hosted for his disciple-friends, at which time he washed the feet of his guests and made a blood-covenant with them. We can see how African, how biblical, and how rich is all this imagery which we associate with Jesus our host particularly at the Eucharist. "Happy are we who are called to this supper," we hear as we celebrate Eucharist together with Christ our host.

The image of host can undergird both a biblical and a liturgical christology. It manifests both the generosity of God and the generosity ethic of Africans. It calls forth from us a response of gratitude. As Africans, rather than focusing on the destructive ways in which the gospel came, one can begin to let go of that past and look toward a future in which we can be grateful, not to the colonizers, but to Christ who has come to us and welcomes us in spite of the destructive ways in which he was preached among us. Christ has come to us as Africans.

Through the invitation to follow after Jesus, or to dine with him, we are invited into a living relationship with God, to dine with God, at God's table, both now and at the eschatological banquet. By being hosted by Jesus, we enter into the realm of God. Jesus' preaching and teaching were focused on the reign of God to which Jesus invites us as its host: *Karibu*. Africa's Jesus goes to the core of who Jesus is. Who do you say that I am? You, Jesus, are our host and we are your guests.

2. *Christ, our Life*. If there is a theme in African life and thought more prominent than that of hospitality, it would be that of life. Life is the overarching theme which threads its way through Placide Temple's seminal work on Bantu philosophy,<sup>55</sup> through the works of Bénézet Bujo,<sup>56</sup> up to Laurenti Magesa's recent exposition on African religion and morality.<sup>57</sup> Life, vitality, the life force become the hermeneutical keys to an African

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<sup>55</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959).

<sup>56</sup> See Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, where both community and life are woven together as foundational for an African ethics. In *African Theology in Its Social Context*, p. 34, Bujo writes, "The focus of African religion is life." See esp. pp 17-37. In relationship to liturgy and inculturation, the centrality of life is singled out by Chris Egbulem, op. cit., 209-18.

<sup>57</sup> Magesa, *African Religion, The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*.

view of the world.<sup>58</sup> If we took the previous suggestions for an African view of Christ, we would see life as central to each: ancestor, healer, liberator, king, host.

E.J. Pénoukou was one of the first to propose Christ as ancestor. For him Christ is "l'ancêtre-Joto" (a concept of the Ewe-Mina tribe of Togo), namely an ancestor who is the source of life, the ancestor who generates and re-generates life.<sup>59</sup> For both Nyamiti (1984) and Bujo (1986), the concept of ancestor is also linked to life and the transmission of the life force. The "work" or "ministry" of the healer or diviner or witchdoctor is also that of a concern for life. The liberator is concerned with the life, the quality of life, and the life-giving freedom of the people. And the African king, as described by Manus, "generated powers of fecundity and fertility."<sup>60</sup> They were concerned with the promotion of life, the fertility of the land and of the people. And Christ as host invites us to the fullness of life which is the fulfillment of the promises of God. He welcomes us to the banquet of life. Aylward Shorter, in a brief article on folk Christianity and christology, alludes to the value of "the image of the risen Christ as the Lord of Life in the Eucharist."<sup>61</sup> There is no African christological title which is unrelated to the theme of life and life itself can serve as a synthetic principle for African christology.

Kä Mana's political and ethical christology also focused on life, "la christologie de la vie en abondance," (the christology of life in abundance) and Christ's concern with the promotion of the human.<sup>62</sup> Kä Mana refers favorably to Tempels' exposition of an African anthropology of the vital force, refers to the 1992 Conference of the Churches of All Africa (CETA) which dedicated its general assembly to the question of abundant life in Jesus Christ, and even speaks in a footnote of "Christ-Vie."<sup>63</sup>

As with host, Christ our Life has potential biblically, liturgically, and ethically. It is a strong Johannine theme. The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel states unequivocally, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14: 6). An indigenous African christology can capitalize on this biblical revelation. Even earlier in the same Gospel, immediately before Jesus' self-identification as the good shepherd, Jesus says, "I came that they may

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<sup>58</sup> It would be worthwhile to study this same theme in the philosophy of Henri Bergson and later Teilhard de Chardin to see the parallels with Tempels' Bantu philosophy. Bishop T. Tshibangu recognized the value in Africans' studying Bergson and Teilhard. See his Le Propos d'une théologie africaine (1974) and La théologie africaine, Manifeste et programme (1987).

<sup>59</sup> See Pénoukou, "Réalité africaine et salut en Jésus Christ."

<sup>60</sup> Ukachukwu Chris Manus, 96.

<sup>61</sup> Shorter, "Folk Christianity and Functional Christology," 135. In the same article he speaks of the life-giving, Spirit-imparting Christ.

<sup>62</sup> KaMana, Christ d'Afrique, esp. 81-83.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 82, fn 3. He writes, "Le Christ ne pouvait être compris et accueilli en Afrique que s'il devenait Christ-Vie." I had already begun to formulate my own proposal of Life as a title for Christ in Africa when I ran across this note in Kä Mana and was delighted to see the reference. Kä Mana in the same footnote also refers to the Protestant theologian Seth Nomenyo who has made this intuition the center of his theology, but I am at this point unfamiliar with his work.

have life and have it abundantly" (10: 10). And the prologue to the Gospel of John already sees Jesus Christ as source of life. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was LIFE, and the life was the light of humankind" (1:1-4).

One needs to distinguish between Christ our Life and the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life, for the Creed states, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life." We will refer to Jesus' gift of the Spirit later, but we can see that the Johannine Jesus is the source of life and is life, true life, the fullness of life, eternal life, divine life. In both the African world view and the Gospel of John, life is understood holistically with all its connections, one might say in a cosmotheandric way.<sup>64</sup> Christ as Life is not limited to the Gospel of John. One finds similar imagery in Pauline christology which emphasizes that to live is to live in Christ. For Paul, life is Christ Jesus. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1: 21). The Letter to the Colossians also speaks of "Christ who is our life" (3:4).

A christology grounded in the metaphor of life is thoroughly African and thoroughly Christian -- the aspiration of all African Christian theology from the beginning. Africa, African theology, and African christology are all pro-life when they are most true to themselves. Jesus Christ is Life, our Life, life-giving, life-healing, life-directing, life-sharing, communal life, sacramental life, life that is both human and divine, vital, powerful, and salvific. Christ is life for Africa wherein Christ has found a home.

3. *Risen Jesus, Giver of the Spirit, Lord of the Spirits.* The centrality of "life-force" in African cultures is equalled only by the theme of the spirit-world. There is no dichotomy or antagonism between matter and spirit as in some Western philosophies. Rather the spiritual and material form one interconnected organic and cosmic whole in which there is a continuity between this world, the living dead, the ancestral spirits, and God. In an African view of the world, the Holy Spirit is at home. The Holy Spirit is promised by Jesus and given by the risen Christ. An African christology ought to be a pneumatic or Spirit Christology which shows Jesus' power over the world of spirits and his connectedness to the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> In fact, it may well be that Africa's most significant contribution to Catholic theology will be in the area of pneumatology rather than christology, an area increasingly recognized as having been neglected in the theology of the West in contrast to the theologies of the East.

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<sup>64</sup> E. J. Pénoukou, "Realite africaine et salut en Jesus Christ," speaks of a cosmotheandric tri-polarity in the African's spirituality although the cosmotheandric vision is more often associated with the Indian Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar. On the holistic, social, and cosmic understanding of life, also Alviar, "Anthropological Foundations of African Christology."

<sup>65</sup> Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 176, writes, "It is hardly surprising that the Christologies that have emerged in African theology so far are predominantly 'pneumatic', presenting a Christ who is a living power in the realm of spirit."

The Holy Spirit is Jesus' supreme gift to those who are his disciples. This is again a particularly Johannine theology, but the Holy Spirit also plays a prominent role in the Lucan and Pauline writings. Following are some texts from the Gospel of John: "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever" (14:16). "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (14:26). "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (15:26). "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (16:7). "And when he [the risen Jesus] had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (20:22). Christology is always interwoven with pneumatology and vice-versa. It was the Holy Spirit who was already present in Africa and African religions before the arrival of Christian missionaries.<sup>66</sup> It is the same Spirit who animates African religion and African Christianity. Yet this Spirit who was active in the world even before the Christian Era comes to us from the Father through the Son. He is Jesus' Spirit as well as God's Spirit. Thus he is seen as Jesus' gift to us.

Jesus is the one who gives, the generous host. Jesus gives us both himself and the Holy Spirit: this is grace, or God given to us through Christ in the Spirit. An African pneumatology accompanies African christology, for the African Jesus is one who shares (hospitably) his very own Spirit (the giver of life) totally with us. Jesus is exemplary host, source of life, and giver of the Spirit. Jesus is an African host, master of hospitality, host at the banquet of everlasting life. He is source of our life, natural and supernatural, a generous giver, the one who gives us the gift of the life-giving Spirit, who together with the Father and the Son is the Lord of all spirits. Jesus is King of the universe, Liberator and Healer of humanity, our primordial Ancestor, who promises new life to Africa. He breathes upon Africa his very own Spirit. He is the risen Jesus for whom death does not have the final word. He is Jesus, Africa's hope for the future.

It might be noted in the christological paradigms presented here that there is a lack of emphasis on the suffering Christ or crucified Christ, which theme is of great significance to Africa.<sup>67</sup> This theme is not completely absent, for it finds an essential place in theologies emphasizing Jesus as liberator and as healer. It was also present in the reflections of the students and associated among them with various images of

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<sup>66</sup> See Jacques Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), for an excellent discussion of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions of the world.

<sup>67</sup> Although not emphasized in my discussion here, indeed it is not absent in African theology, e.g., see Mofokeng, Waliggo, among others. On the notion of the suffering servant as interpretative key for Christ's death, also see Donald J. Goergen, The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 11-68.

Christ. Yet it is important to call this theme of suffering to our attention. The suffering Christ has always had a central place in traditional christologies, and africanized christologies are not intended to replace those but supplement them. Thus Africans value the traditional titles as well, such as "suffering servant" and "Immanuel"<sup>68</sup> which have particular significance for Africa and deserve to be developed further in a specifically African context. Christ, the African king, is a servant-king, and it is precisely the notion of suffering that is woven biblically into the servant theme. Thus a healthy theology of suffering is intrinsic to the christologies of Christ the servant-king, the prophetic liberator, the priestly healer. After all, who is Christ for any of us but The-One-Who-Is-With-Us, Immanuel, the one who accompanies us, also a theme brought forward by the students in the image of Christ as friend.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Ch. B. Okolo, "Christ, 'Emmanuel': An African Inquiry," *Bulletin of African Theology*, 2, no. 3 (1980): 15-22.

<sup>69</sup> See Goergen, *Jesus: Son of God, Son of Mary, Immanuel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), for a christological reflection focused on the theme of Immanuel.

In Conclusion: "Africa, Who Do You Say That I Am?"

You are Jesus, Chinazo, the one who saves (Mt 1: 21),  
Immanuel, the one who is with us (Mt 1:23; Is 7:14),  
the Christ, our Ancestor,  
a new ancestor, through the water, the blood, and the spirit,  
our Proto-Ancestor, our brother-ancestor,  
through whom, with whom, in whom we have life,  
the fullness of life, everlasting life.  
You are our Life, our Truth, our Way (Jn 14:6).

Crucified Christ, our elder brother, our friend,  
Friend of all who suffer, who suffers with us, and in us, and through us,  
Raise us up with yourself, O eternal Son of God,  
Give us hope, bless us with new life,  
Bring us true justice, bring us true peace,  
Restore to us our rightful dignity as your daughters and sons,  
Children of Africa, children of God.

You, O risen Christ, are the energy of a new Africa,  
Africa's conscience, catalyst of our reconstruction,  
the hope for a world, a continent, renewed.  
Give us again, O Giver of the Spirit, the Gift of your Holy Spirit,  
to guide us, to encourage us,  
to give us courage, to give us wisdom.

Nvuluzy, liberate us.  
Nganga Nkisi, heal us.  
Jesus, Chinazo, save us.  
Heal our wounds,  
Liberate your people,  
Liberate our communities, our countries, our continent.

Jesus, African prophet, African priest, African king  
servant of God and all humankind,  
Make of us, your peoples of Africa, your holy people,  
rich in our diversity, one in our destiny,  
Make of us, O Compassionate One, your family.

You are our Host, and we your guests,  
And you are our Guest, and we the host.  
Help us to recognize you as one of us.

Teach us to love one another as you love us.  
You are our lover, our friend, our freedom, our life.

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