

**CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN
PERSPECTIVES ON JESUS' CROSS AND
HUMAN SUFFERING:
A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF
AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any University for a degree.

Signature

Date

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the problem: do contemporary African Christologies reflect the portrayal of the personhood and the significance of the Cross of Christ in the New Testament? It explores the Christological views of African theologians in Black Theology, African Theology and African Women's Theology, and the fundamental presuppositions of these forms of Christologies rather than providing a detailed treatment of the individual Christological views of these theologians.

The research argues that the methodological assumptions of African theologians, specifically, their hermeneutical starting point and convictions, deeply influence their Christological thoughts and constructions. Therefore, this research examines contemporary African hermeneutical methods, particularly searching for their congruence with the original and characteristic Protestant hermeneutical conviction of *Sola Scriptura*.

As a comparative study, this research deliberately compares these contemporary and representative African Christologies with Paul's view of Jesus Christ and the significance of his Cross, thereby inquiring specifically after the role of Christian Soteriology in these African Christological approaches and comparing them with Paul.

The research argues that, looking at dominant contemporary African Christologies from the perspective of Pauline Protology and Soteriology, they do not always fully reflect the New Testament portrayal of the personhood and the Cross of Christ in the New Testament.

For future work on African Christologies, the research concludes and suggests that African Christologies be critically evaluated based on their congruence with the Protestant hermeneutical principle of *Sola Scriptura*.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie stel ondersoek in na die vraag: Hoe reflekteer hedendaagse Afrika-Christologieë die persoonskap en betekenis van die Kruis van Christus soos voorgestel in die Nuwe Testament? Dit bestudeer die Christologiese sienings van Afrika-teoloë in Swart Teologie, Afrika Teologie en Afrika Vroue-Teologie. Die klem val op die grondliggende voorveronderstellings van hierdie Christologieë eerder as op 'n gedetailleerde hantering van die onderskeie Christologiese sienings van hierdie teoloë.

Die navorsing voer aan dat die metodologiese aannames van Afrika-teoloë, spesifiek in hul hermeneutiese vertrekpunt en oortuigings, 'n diepgaande invloed uitoefen op hul Christologiese denke en konstruksies. Derhalwe bestudeer hierdie navorsing hedendaagse hermeneutiese metodes in Afrika, in besonder wat betref hulle ooreenkoms met die oorspronklike en kenmerkende Protestantse hermeneutiese oortuiging van Sola Scriptura.

As 'n vergelykende studie word hierdie hedendaagse en verteenwoordigende Afrika-Christologieë gemeet teen Paulus se siening van Jesus Christus en die betekenis van die Kruis. Die ondersoek gaan dus veral in op die rol van Christelike soteriologie in hierdie Afrika-Christologiese benaderings, en vergelyk dit dan met Paulus.

Die navorsing voer aan dat dominante hedendaagse Afrika-Christologieë, bestudeer vanuit die oogpunt van Christelike soteriologie, nie altyd die Nuwe Testamentiese voorstelling van die persoonskap en die Kruis van Christus voldoende reflekteer nie. Dit blyk veral uit 'n ondersoek van die Briewe van Paulus.

Ter afsluiting doen die studie aan die hand dat toekomstige werk oor Afrika-Christologieë krities geëvalueer word ooreenkomstig hul ooreenstemming met die Protestantse hermeneutiese beginsel van Sola Scriptura.

"In suggesting a hermeneutical point for African theology, one should bear in mind the requirement that makes it imperative for such a pivot to qualify as a theological constant. In African theology, the organizing factors should be as constant as Jesus and his Cross are to the New Testament" (Aka0 2002:343).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

This work is divided into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the research, stating the research problem and area of study, the methodology that guides the research and procedure, and the nature of the research - a literature review, interpretation and evaluation.

Chapters Two to Four offer a critical review of representative and authoritative works of theologians in each of the three Christological approaches examined. These are African Christology, Black Christology and African Women's Christology. The research does not, and did not intend to, discuss explicitly individual views in any of the three African Christologies outlined in detail. The purpose is to outline the general convictions, the presuppositions and characteristics of the Christological reflections and developments of major theological trends in the sub-Saharan region of Africa, and not the individual Christological views of specific individual theologians in any of the theological trends under review. These theological trends are African Theology, Black Theology¹ and African Women's Theology.

In order to evaluate these viewpoints, the research attempts to develop the Protestant hermeneutical principle of *Sola Scriptura* in Chapter Five. The legal hermeneutics of Ronald Dworkin, a philosopher of law as appropriated by Linell Cady of Arizona State University to Feminist Theologies of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Ruether is used as a helpful typology for clarifying and developing the *Sola Scriptura* principle. The research employs the *Sola Scriptura* method to evaluate the methodological self-consciousness that guides African Christological reflections in each of the Christologies discussed.

It suggests that the methodological assumptions of African theologians in the various theological trends mentioned above influence their various Christological views. Thus, a Christology that reflects the New Testament portrayal of Jesus Christ, and the role of the Cross in Christian Soteriology, will need a methodological starting point

¹ Although the Christological thought of Black Theology is reviewed, the focus is only on representatives of this approach in Africa and not in other parts of the world.

that assumes the authority of Scripture. Therefore, *Sola Scriptura*, a hermeneutical conviction that sees Scripture as arbiter of truth and the rule for faith and life, is suggested as a guideline for African Christological reflections.

Finally, Chapter Six critically evaluates the various Christologies reviewed in Chapters Two to Four in the light of the argument developed in Chapter Five on the ground of the main emphasis of Christology and Soteriology in the New Testament. It argues that these dominant contemporary African Christologies often fail to appreciate fully the uniqueness of New Testament Christology and Christian Soteriology as preached and defended in the New Testament, specifically by Paul in Pauline literature.

Therefore, it is suggested that from a Protestant perspective, African Christological reflections and developments should more consciously take place in continuity with the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and Christian Soteriology, using Paul as a paradigm.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AREA OF STUDY

Three trends emerged in African Christian thought in the twentieth century, argues the Ghanaian Presbyterian Kwame Bediako in an authoritative and very instructive overview (1997:426-443). One is the theological dimension, says Bediako (1997:426), to the struggle for political and social transformation of the conditions of inequality and oppression in South Africa (*Black Theology*). The second trend is the theological exploration of pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religious traditions and cultures of the indigenous people (*African Theology*). The third trend of African Christian thought finds its major expression in the women's revolution which the Ghanaian Womanist theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1998) calls *African Women's Theology*.

Central to these three trends of theological thought is the problem of Christology – who is Jesus to African people and what does his salvation mean to them (Maimela 1992:31; Oduyoye 1998:363)? *Black Theology*, *African Theology*, and *African Women's Theology* approach the question of who Jesus is in different ways. Each of these theological trends develops its own Christology. *African Theology* develops *African Christology*; *Black Theology* develops *Black Christology* and *African Women's Theology* develops *African Women's Christology*.

Black Christology with its stress on liberation sees Jesus as a liberator of the oppressed black Africans. *African Christology* sees Jesus as an Ancestor, master initiator and a great healer – titles akin to those in African traditional mythologies. For

the African Women's Christology Jesus is seen as one who shares in the agony of women in what they experience as "dehumanizing" situations (Oduyoye 1998: 359-371).

It is immediately clear that the notion of suffering plays a key role in all three these contemporary African Christologies. They are all attempts to relate the person of Jesus and his Cross to (black) Africans' experiences of suffering.

In the New Testament, especially in Paul, the Cross of Christ and its saving significance also plays a key role. In other words, the suffering of his person, and its salvific relation to human suffering, is also central to New Testament, and specifically Pauline thought and proclamation.

The question of this inquiry is therefore: **do these African perceptions of Jesus and how they relate his Cross to human suffering, reflect the portrayal of the personhood and the Cross of Christ in the New Testament?**

Careful readers may have already noticed that the research question and the nature of the research problem presuppose a hermeneutical solution as well as a theological solution. A hermeneutical solution is needed, because all the three dominant contemporary African Christologies are informed by, and are products of, certain hermeneutical convictions, presuppositions and conclusions arrived at through a process of extensive reflection on what the meaning of the biblical and theological texts is or should be in the African context. A theological solution is needed because, the research seeks to inquire if the three African Christologies adequately reflect the person of Jesus Christ and the salvific role of his Cross in the New Testament.

Therefore, this research will argue that contemporary Christological reflections in Africa should take place in continuity with the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the Soteriological significance of his Cross. This implies that, in determining the hermeneutical point for African Christologies, care should be taken to ensure that such a hermeneutical pivot is as central as Jesus and his Cross are to the New Testament (Akaio 2002:342-343). Since the Protestant hermeneutical conviction presupposes and argues for the central position of Scripture in all theological development and constructions, this research will argue that contemporary African Christologies should be critically evaluated on the basis of their congruence with the Protestant hermeneutical conviction of *Sola Scriptura*. In the next chapter, this research will commence the discussion of African Christologies with the Christology of the first major theological trend in sub-Saharan Africa, African Theology.

CHAPTER TWO

JESUS AND HUMAN SUFFERING IN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

The Cross of Christ plays a key role in the New Testament while the African Situation (African Traditional Religions and philosophy, suffering and African culture) plays a key role in African Christological reflections and developments.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One, it was mentioned that Christological reflection in Sub-Saharan Africa is done within specific theological trends. African Theology was mentioned as one of these trends. This Chapter will explore some major Christological views of leading African theologians within African Theology in Sub-Saharan Africa. This research asserted in section 1.2 that the African situation, specifically, the notion of suffering plays a key role in African Christological debates and constructions. This chapter will argue this point further by first exploring the major developments that constitute the situation of the African experience that sets the stage for the Christological discussions in the African context.

Such discussions are grounded on specific and fundamental presuppositions. Therefore, this chapter will further explore the African religious, social and cultural factors upon which those presuppositions are based. In order to do this, it will be useful to survey the major theological developments culminating in the emergence of African Theology, a theological trend within which Christological reflections in Africa are done. Such developments include some major paradigm shifts, both in methodology and, consequently, in hermeneutic that occurred in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. Specifically, this chapter will discuss how these major paradigm shifts contribute to contemporary African perceptions of the personhood and work of

Christ. Since this is not a study in African Theology in general,¹ but specifically, African Christology, no detail discussion of African Theology is intended.²

2.2 BACKGROUND TO AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

The 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference's official declaration³ that African Tradition Religions (ATRs) do not contain any preparation for Christianity raised great concern among African theologians. Bediako reports that the Edinburgh Conference met under what he describes as "the prevailing European value setting of the Christian faith" (1997:426). Thus, the quest for political independence in Africa went with it, a growing concern, and a radical agitation for deliberate and conscious efforts to extradite African Christianity and theology from those "prevailing European

¹ Mbiti defines African Theology "without apology or embarrassment, to mean theological reflections and expression by African Christians" (1978:83). It has been argued that John Samuel Mbiti is an African theologian, Anglican pastor, a professor of theology and most importantly, the father of contemporary African theology. As the father of contemporary African Theology, it will be useful to note some major developments in Mbiti's life that may have shaped his theological convictions. Mbiti was born to his parents, Mutuvi and Mbandi of the Akamba people in 1931. He received his first degree from Makerere University in Uganda as far back as 1953. He grew up in a village among his Akamba people raising sheep and goats and cattle, an experience that helped him developed interest in the study of African Traditional Religions and philosophy. At the time Cambridge conferred on him the degree of doctor of philosophy in New Testament (1963), he had already made significant progress in his study of African traditional religious worldviews, hence, his PhD dissertation was on New Testament Eschatology from the Background of African Traditional Religions which was published eight years later with the title: *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts*. Mbiti is married to Verena and they are living in Switzerland. He will retire as professor of theology in the year 2004. Mbiti has written several works on African Theology, a number of his essays and books are used extensively in this research, since he is the founder of this trend of theology (http://www.gospelcom.net/dacb/stories/kenya/mbiti_john.html viewed on 2003/08/29).

² A substantial literature on African Theology already exists. See for example; Appiah-Kubi, K. 1979. (ed). *African Theology en route* Maryknoll-New York: Orbis Books. This book is a collection of conference articles presented at a Pan African Conference in Ghana 1977. Bediako, K. 1988 "African Christian Theology; Theology of African Independent Churches; Black Theology; Culture" in Ferguson and Wright,(eds) *New Dictionary of theology* Leicester: IVP, 1992. *Theology and Identity: the Impact of Culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa* Oxford: Regnum. A detailed discussion of Christianity and African culture. 1995 *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of Non-Western Religion* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Dickson, K. 1984 *Theology in Africa* London: Longman and Todd.; Frostin, P. 1988 *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* Lund: Lund University Press. A concise interpretation of Liberation Theology in Africa; Hastings, A. 1976 *African Christianity* New York: The Seabury Press. A history of the church in Africa written from Eurocentric Missionary perspective with a debateable analysis of the unhealthy contact between Christianity and African culture. Fabella, V.M. and Torres, S (eds). 1978 *The Emergent Gospel theology from the underside of History* London: Geoffrey Champson, mimeographs from EATWOT conference in Dar 'es Salaam; Pobee, J.S. 1979 *Toward an African Theology* Nashville: Abingdon. A basic introduction to African Theology.

³ The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions: The World Missionary Conference 1910, Report of Commission IV Edinburgh and London 1910 p.24; see also Bediako, (1997:426-427).

values" protected and defended on the floor of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh.

The "broad aim" of the call for a shift away from the Euro-centric missionary paradigm, says Bediako, "has been to achieve some integration between the African pre-Christian religious experience and African Christian commitment in ways that would ensure the integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood" (1996:33).⁴ The 1955 Ghana Conference on "Christianity and African Culture" was a step toward achieving this goal (Frostin 1988:14). The Swedish theologian, Per Frostin (1988:14) reports that the Ghana Conference made significant moves in the direction of the quest for cultural and spiritual liberation. Since then, Frostin continues, the theological climate changed in both the academic and ecclesiastical lives of African theologians. A new theological trend emerged. This theological trend preoccupied itself with the issue of "identity". Bediako reports that this "emerging" theology has "been pursued as a self-consciously Christian and theological activity, it may be said to have been an endeavour at demonstrating the character of African Christian identity" (1997:428).

⁴ The Gambian born Lamin Sanneh criticizes the Eurocentric approach to African cultures and argues that even those missionaries who attempted to dismantle African cultures as a way of penetrating African hearts and society with the Gospel did not abandon their own cultures. Rather, they preserved and promoted such cultures to the extent of presenting the Gospel in the context and values of their own cultures in Africa. He writes "The deep logical inconsistency between the claim that culture is independent of Christianity on the one hand, and, on the other, that the religion is reducible to its cultural forms, is connected to an unexamined assumption about the intrinsic innocence of indigenous cultures whose primitive purity has been contaminated by imperialist missions. With indigenous society's culture and contact viewed as detrimental, while in the West such contact is proof of religion as cultural phenomenon, while in its Western origins the religion is an idealized myth which evaporates once it is demythologized" (1993:15 cf. his 1989). Sanneh asserts that Africans, and by implication the Western Christians, need to "transcend this approach to the subject in order to deal with the phenomenon of world Christianity and with the extraordinary movements of cultural renewal taking place under its shadow". This is because the conviction of Sanneh, and also of other African Christian theologians as it will soon be clear, is that "It would not be possible to uncouple religion from culture. On the contrary, Christianity has entered a renewed destiny with its affirmation of cultural particularity, and vice versa" (1993:15). Sanneh claims that modern African Christians who are Christians today belong to particular brand of Christianity, one "mediated to them by the West", but as Christianity continues to penetrate the nooks and corners of Africa, and African culture specifically, its success has been and will continue to be on its assimilation into the local idiom (1993:16). The Ghanaian Kwame Bediako would argue that even the second century patristic theologians like Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, among others, were successful in their theological career and task based on their assimilation of Christianity and theology in the then African cultures and values (1992:*Part One*). His *Christianity in African Culture: the Renewal of a non-Western Religion* (1995) argues for the central role African cultures play in the rapid spread of Christianity on the continent which is why Christianity has become an African religion after been stripped of all the shackles of Euro-centrism. Hence, to him, the modern Africa cannot help but seek to do the same. At this point, it begins to be clear that there have not just been calls for a move away from the Western missionary paradigm, but there has been a growing challenge of that paradigm and subsequently, a shift away from it, with major emphasizes laid on African situation and culture.

The general concerns are that the African primal religions belong to what Bediako calls "the African religious past" (1997:428). The history of religious consciousness of the Africans is what typifies this ontological past, Bediako maintains (1997:428). For Bediako, "the point of the theological importance of such an ontological past consists in the fact that it belongs together with the profession of the Christian faith in giving account of the same entity, namely the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian" (1997:428). This being the case, Bediako further reports that "the theological concern with the African pre-Christian religious heritage became an effort aimed at clarifying the nature and meaning of African identity" (1997:428). Such a theological activity is treated under what is generally called *African Theology*.

The meaning and nature of African identity in this sense involves what Kenneth Cragg is reported to have described as "integrity in conversion" (Bediako 1997:428), where the African's past is seen as "genuinely integrated into the present commitment, so that the crisis of repentance and faith that make us Christian really integrates what we have been in what we become" (Bediako 1997:428). Hence, the new perspective offered by the "theology of identity" in Africa rejected the 1910 Edinburgh "presumption of the European value-settings for the Christian faith", which led to the exclusion of any 'preparation for Christianity' (Bediako 1997:428) as *problematik* (Mbiti 1972:51). Disagreeing with the Edinburgh presupposition, Mbiti went ahead and declared African Traditional Religions "*Preparatio Evangelica*" (Mbiti 1970:36). Arguing for a similar position, the Nigerian Methodist theologian, Bolaji Idowu, seeing the biases of the missionaries' ethnocentric approach, argued long before Sanneh (1993) that the church in Nigeria is losing its relevance by clinging to the Western style and values, and not responding to the specific tasks of its call to Nigeria. His conviction was that:

The time is now overdue for the Church in Nigeria to look at herself; to examine her own soul. Several factors combined in the fact that the church in Nigeria is on trial: she is being called upon to justify her existence in the country; to answer in precise terms the question as to whether her purpose in Nigeria is not to serve as an effective tool of imperialism, a veritable means of softening Nigerians for the purpose of convenient exploitation by Europeans. Involved in the indictment against her is also the question as to whether the aim of religious educators in Nigeria was to make Christians or to 'Westernize' Nigerians; whether, in fact, Christianity and 'Westernism' are not synonyms in their evangelistic vocabulary (1965:1).

In the light of the above, it was possible for Idowu to ask a further question as to "whether what we have in Nigeria today is in fact Christianity, and not in fact only transplantations from a European cult the various ramifications of which are designated Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventists, and so forth" (Idowu 1965:1).⁵ All the questions raised in the above quotes arose from the basic concern, which is currently prevalent in African theological circles, as to whether "Christianity is not, after all, a European institution which has no beneficial relevance for Nigerians, but which has nevertheless been imposed upon them as an engine of colonial policy by their European overlords" (Idowu 1965:1). This question is now broadened to cover the whole of Africa and Third World in general. It centres on the relevancy of the Western brand of Christianity with no essential regard to African culture and values. The people of Africa and the Third World are seeking for a brand of Christianity clothed with African culture and philosophy, one with its own kind of ministers, separate in ideology, approach and practice from the Western missionary Christianity. The conviction of Idowu, and later of most African theologians and theologians of the so-called Third World, was that there was no need theologizing under the detects of the Western missionaries years after independence; especially when colonial structures had "collapsed under the colonial impact of nationalism" (Idowu 1965:2). To the African theologians, a new world order has emerged with different tasks and ideological interests and needs which calls for new commitments on the part of African Christians if Christianity is indeed, to remain relevant to Africans in this era. The next section will introduce the birth of the new world order in theological perspective and explore the paradigm shift necessitated by the new world order.

2.3 THE BIRTH OF A NEW WORLD ORDER AND PARADIGM SHIFT

The previous section pointed out that a growing concern for a new way of thinking and understanding of Christianity and theology in Africa was started when African countries began to gain political independence from their Western imperialists. It was

⁵ At present, many Nigerian churches have changed names given to them by their European and American missionary founders. The Anglican Church of Nigeria, for example, has recently changed its name to "Church of Nigeria –Anglican Communion". This shows that the question of African Christian identity is still receiving a very serious attention in theory and praxis in Africa.

briefly mentioned that Africans began to view Western Christianity with a critical eye in the years following their countries' political independence. This section will discuss the development of such concerns into theological themes, practice and hermeneutics in the light of what has been discussed in the previous section.

The birth of the new world order was announced at the Dar' es Salaam 1976 conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) which took the ideas of Idowu and Mbiti further. Those who met at this conference sought after what Frostin describes as "a second independence" (1988:15). The quest for this second independence was necessitated by the perceived need to address "the problems of neo-colonialism on the cultural, socio-economic and political levels" (Frostin 1988:15). Hence, the EATWOT conference announced the birth of a "New World Order" in its solemn declaration:

We, a group of theologians of the Third World gathered at Dar' es Salaam, August 5-12, 1976, having spent a week together in common study of our role in the contemporary world, are convinced that those who bear the name of Christ have a special service to render to the people of the whole world who are now in an agonizing search for a new world order based on justice, fraternity, and freedom (Torres & Fabella 1978:259).

In its final statement, the EATWOT theologians further emphasized "We seriously take cognisance of the cultural and religious heritage of the peoples of the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (Torres & Fabella 1978:259). The Tanzanian Nyamiti describes the mood of those present at the Dar' es Salaam conference with the following words: "the modern socio-political changes that have taken place on our continent have inevitably led to a 'new vision' hardly suspected a few decades ago" (Nyamiti 1978:31). He further stresses that "the new wave of radicalism" (Frostin 1988:15) that ushered in a "new vision" which is characterized by radical socio-political changes sparks a self-realization on the side of the Africans that "political independence goes hand in hand with new tasks and responsibilities" (Nyamiti 1978:31). Cultural adaptation and the great value of the African cultures, says Nyamiti, form significant currents of the "new tasks" undertaken by the African theologian. This involves, among other things, argues Bediako, "the incorporation of the African pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religious experience into the present" (1996:33, 1997:426).

Keeping with the spirit of Dar' es Salaam, African theologians insist "There is much continuity in the relationship between Africa's pre-Christian traditional religious heritage and its present Christian identity. It let the Gospel encounter be shaped by the African experience" (Bediako 1996:33). One begins to notice movement for a shift away from tradition to the African experience which is shaping the Gospel encounter with African traditional religious heritage (cf. Bediako 1992, 1995, 1996, 2000). This conviction made African theologians who met in Dar' es Salaam to view African Theology as a relevant theology that could provide answers to the questions that an African would ask, a religion that meets the needs of the Africans – one that respects African culture. African theologians in the new world order, therefore, reject as irrelevant, the former European missionary to Africa, Adrian Hasting's assertion that "the chief non-biblical reality with which the African theologian must struggle is the non-Christian religious tradition of his own people", arguing that such a "non-biblical reality" does not exist in African Christian thought categories (Hasting 1976:50-51).

It is argued that the primal focus of African religious scholarship in the "new world order" (Turaki 1999:10) is to "address the question of Western ethnocentrism in its approach to the study of the African Traditional Religions and cultures, on the one hand, and the quest for an African theology and identity on the other" (cf. Bediako 1992).⁶ The Nigerian Evangelical theologian, Yusufu Turaki asserts that "African advocates believed that the mode, form and content of Christianity must be cast in the new African constructs so as to remove its foreignness and grant it its African indigeneity" (1999:18). The African Roman Catholic theologian, Fashole-Luke argues that the contemporary quest for African Christian theologies attempts to clarify that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity. He argues that

⁶ Bediako (1992:64-67) argues that there is a significant point of convergence between the circumstances surrounding the birth of modern African theology and those that attended the rise of the Christian theological tradition in Greco-Roman culture (1992:65). He asserts that it was the common awareness of a common cultural heritage and the interaction of Christian self-consciousness in 2nd century Greco-Roman religion by early Christian writers like Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian that was the motivation for the vindication of Christianity in the 2nd century AD. In the same way, Bediako thinks it is the common awareness of a common African pre-Christian religious heritage on the one hand, and on the other, a "heightened sense of Christian self-consciousness" that is the motivation for the vindication of Christianity as a non-Western religion by African theologians in modern Africa (cf. Bediako 1992, 1995 with Maluleke 1997:210-219). Underlying such an assertion is the view that Christianity and African pre-Christian religious heritage should not be treated as mutually exclusive, just as Justin and Clement refused to treat Christian revelation and the 'non Christian' tradition as mutually exclusive systems. Bediako argues that it is the African pre-Christian religious heritage, what he refers to as "the so-called non-Christian religions" that validates Christian claims about God, man and the Gospel (1992:40). It will soon be clear later in this chapter how the above presupposition influences Bediako's Christological thought.

should Christianity cease to be a foreign Western religion it will have to incarnate in the life and thought of Africans and its theology must reflect African self-identity, culture and reflection (1975:267-268).

In Turaki's assessment, "the merit of this movement lies in the fact that Africans do not have to become Westerners in outlook in order to become Christians" (1999:18). Thus, he thinks, "all that is necessary is for Africans to embrace in faith Jesus the messiah as their Lord and Saviour" (1999:18). Turaki's suggestion may leave the impression that the contemporary African quest for cultural adaptation and the quest for African Christian identity and theology is at the expense of the central Christian Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. However, this is not the case. The Dar' es Salaam conference re-iterated the commitment of EATWOT to faith in Jesus Christ. In its final statement, EATWOT stated categorically "We affirm our faith in Christ our Lord, whom we celebrate with joy and without whose strength and wisdom our theology would be valueless and even destructive" (Torres & Fabella 1978:269).

The Ghanaian African theologian, John Pobee asserts that from the perspective of African Theology, "the heart of the encounter between Christianity and African culture is the subject of Christology" (1979:81). He also reports that the concern of African Theology is specifically "to attempt to use African concepts in an African ethos as vehicles for the communication of the gospel" of Jesus Christ in an African context (1979:39). Hence, the question of who Jesus is in the context of African religious worldview and culture is crucial for African theological discussions.

To avoid the errors of the European missionaries, African Theology had to develop a new methodology for an effective communication of the Gospel that suits the African situation (context). This called for a paradigm shift – a new methodology – which necessitated a new hermeneutic as the "axis" upon which African theological reflections in the new world order rotates. This chapter will discuss in the following section, some hermeneutic currents in African Theology in the new world order.

2.4 BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

As Frostin observes (1988:3), the 1976 Dar' es Salaam EATWOT meeting, and to some extent the 1977 Ghana Pan African Conference, "persistently argued for a new

methodology of doing theology".⁷ Both conferences rejected the academic theology as well as the Western biblical and theological hermeneutics, which African theologians described in the two conferences as "divorced from action". The EATWOT final statement launched the birth of a new methodology when it stated that

The theologies from Europe and North America that are dominant today in our churches represent one form of cultural domination. They must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must not be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the gospel and to our peoples, reflect on the realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology that makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the third world (Torres & Fabella 1978:269; Frostin 1988:3).

The Ghanaian Methodist African theologian, Kofi Appiah-Kubi describes the commitment of the 1977 Ghana conference in the following words: "We demand to serve the Lord in our own terms and without being turned into Euro-American or Semitic bastards before we do so. That the Gospel has come to remain in Africa cannot be denied, but now our theological reflections must be addressed to the real contextual African situations" (1979:viii). He further reports that the conference insisted that African theologians'

question must not be what Karl Rahner, or any other Karl has to say, but rather what God would have us do in our living concrete condition ... the struggle of African theologians, scholars, and other Christians in ventures such as this consultation is to find a theology that speaks to our people where we are, to enable us to answer the critical question of our Lord Jesus Christ: who do you (African Christians) say that I am? (Appiah-Kubi 1977:viii).⁸

⁷ See also Gerald West, "Recovering the Suppressed Past and Reconstructing the Future: Historical Consciousness in Biblical and Theological Liberation Hermeneutics" unpublished paper read at a Seminar organized by Human Sciences Research Council, Center for Research Methodology, Pretoria (hereafter Sc. and vision Conf.).

⁸ The goal of African theologians present at the conference was to remove theology from the hands of academic and make it relevant to the realities faced by ordinary Africans (Appiah-Kubi 1979:viii). Appiah-Kubi emphasises that "The challenging question posed by millions of poor people to present day Christianity is: 'where is the abundant life' for they see nothing but ignorance oppression, discrimination, fortune rejection and dehumanization all around them" (1979:viii). It immediately begins to be clear that the question of who Jesus Christ is to Africans is discussed from the perspective of African socio-political, religious, cultural and economic realities.

Two crucial points mark the two quotations above: (i) the stress on epistemology in the new methodology – a self-understanding to "challenge the present existing framework" with respect to biblical and theological hermeneutics. Hence, the new methodology seeks a break away from the Western hermeneutical methods in favour of "relevance to the context of Africans". (ii) The experience of oppression and the struggle for liberation are fundamental in the new methodology (Frostin, 1988:4-6; West Sc. and vision Conf. 1-2). Both Frostin and West argue for the second point in their exposition, since their primary concern is with liberation hermeneutics. This chapter will explore the first point noted above namely, the stress on the radical break in epistemology, especially with respect to the major emphasis on the following five crucial points advanced by both Dar' es Salaam and Ghana Pan African Conference: (i) the God of the poor, (ii) the new epistemological approach, (iii) praxis, faith, and theological reflection, (iv) A different ecumenism and (v) worship of God and service of neighbour (Torres & Fabella 1978:5-6).

It may be noted that the 1977 Ghana conference inaugurates the new world order proposed by Dar' es Salaam and sets forth a "new (theological) perspective" for African theological hermeneutics. The conference in Ghana states:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African peoples to shape a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present. The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject, therefore, the prefabricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people (Kofi-Appiah-Kubi 1977:5-6).

This quote points to the fact that the new methodology, the "radical break in epistemology", ushers in a new hermeneutic that serves as an interpretive grid for African Christological reflections and theology in general. With much stress on the African situation, the rediscovery of the agency of the African historical consciousness implies that the Bible cannot be the only source for theology.

In the final communiqué issued at the end of the 1977 Ghana conference, five sources were identified for African Theology: (i) the Bible and Christian heritage, (ii) African

anthropology, (iii) African Traditional Religions, (iv) African Independent Churches and (v) Other African realities (Torres & Fabella 1978:192-193). This chapter will explore the "hermeneutical contours" (West 2002a:23) of the new paradigm under two designations: (i) *from the Bible to African reality* and (ii) *from African reality to the Bible* approaches.

2.4.1 From the Bible to African reality

The stress that the radical break in epistemology – the new hermeneutic – puts on African culture should not mean that the Bible does not have any key role to play in African theological argumentations. For the final communiqué issued at the end of Pan-African conference in Ghana affirms the central role that the Bible plays in African theological reflections in the "new world order". The Ghana conference states: "The Bible is the basic source of African theology because it is the witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ" (Appiah-Kubi 1979:192). While contending that the "Bible is the basic source of African Theology", however, the "rediscovery of African agency" also plays a vital role in the interpretive process of African Theology. Mbiti, for example, insists that the "Gospel was revealed to the world in the context and language of culture, and not in an empty vacuum" (1979:27). This revelation, says Mbiti, "took place in a specific people, the Jews, at a specific moment, two thousand years ago". This being the case, Mbiti contends, "God gave us the Gospel and Man gives us culture" (1977:26). Therefore, Mbiti asserts that Christianity results when the Gospel and culture meet. This implies that the Bible must be interpreted in the light of the culture interpreting it. The question remains as to how this could, and is done in African Theology. The notion of the Bible as a *Bola* explains the how.

2.4.2 The Bible as *Bola*

West gives what he calls a "historical exploration" of one of the encounters between the indigenous Tlhaping and the London Missionary Society (LMS) in order to discover from the narrative how the 'ordinary' Africans, young and old, receive, apprehend and transact with the Bible in the "formative" years of its (Bible) reception in the region (2002a:23-37). West points out that the *bola* is dice that the old among Tlhaping people hang on their necks (especially diviners), which is reported to be source of their knowledge and power.

West reports that the encounter between LMS through Campbell and Southern African people points to the fact that the Bible was received as a *bola* since the Bible was seen as the source of knowledge and power of the white man just as the *bola* was to the Tlhaping people (2002a:29). This being the case, West asserts that the 'ordinary' untrained Africans read the Bible in a similar way in Africa. For this reason West calls for a 'reading' of the Bible as *bola* as the basis for understanding how the Bible was apprehended in the missionary era. For he thinks "biblical interpretation among African people begins with the Bible as a Bola" (2002a:30).

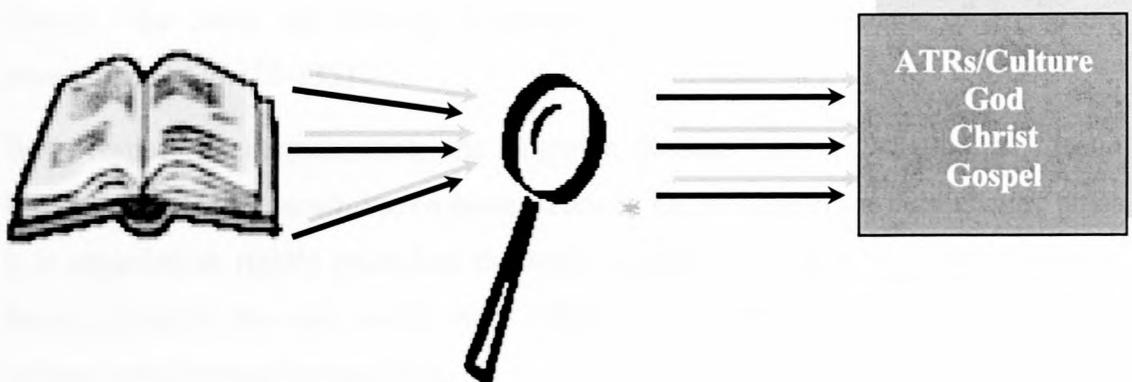
West is motivated and impressed by the work of African American Vincent Wimbush (1991). Wimbush gives an incisive historical exploration of African Americans' encounter with the Bible in the hands of their masters and mistresses. To the African Americans the Bible was a source of power as well as agent of oppression. Through experience and observation, the African Americans learned to read the Bible differently. The Bible was no longer regarded as the book of the masters. Nevertheless, African Americans came to regard it as source of power for struggle and hope for liberation. West argues:

What Wimbush's work suggests, and its contribution lies in its heuristic capacity rather than in its detail, is that ordinary African American readers of the Bible embody long history of biblical hermeneutical strategies that can be traced back to the formative encounter with the Bible they encountered in the hands of their masters and mistresses, and which they began to appropriate, both by watching how Whites used this book and by forging their own interpretive resources so that they could wrest control of this potentially powerful object from them (2002a:34-35).

The precise point West and Wimbush are trying to put across is that Africans received, appropriated and interpreted the Bible in their historical context, using tools like their experience, culture, beliefs as sources for developing their hermeneutical strategies (West 2002a:35).⁹ These ordinary Africans, as West calls them, read the Bible in the context of their pre-Christian experiences and belief systems, hence, to them, the Bible is equal to their *bola*. The interpretive process here becomes an

⁹ It may appear on the surface that West's call for a return to the Bible as a *bola* hermeneutic is an attempt to understand how Africans of the past received, understood and appropriated the Bible in its formative years of reception. However, a closer look at this call, especially in the context of West's overall hermeneutical point of departure, will reveal that West is here arguing for a shift of emphasis from the text to the reader. A number of his essays speak in support of this point (1991:87-110, 1992a:35-49, 1992b:3-13, 1995:60-69, 1996:21-40, 1999 and 2002b:147-162).

interaction between the experiences of the African and the biblical text. Mbiti, for example, takes this approach in the construction of his African Christology (1992:51-54). Mbiti argues that the Bible provides the lenses with which Christianity could be seen in African Traditional Religions. Hence, he argues that as Christ was hidden in the Old Testament but later revealed through incarnation in the New Testament, so was Jesus worshipped in African Traditional Religions in a hidden way before Christianity revealed him. In this way, the story of the Bible provides, according to Mbiti, the lenses for Africans to see Jesus Christ and the Gospel in African traditional religions and cultures as can be represented as follows:



Still, some African theologians will begin with the present African reality and try to fuse biblical themes into those realities. This research designates this approach as a "from African reality to the Bible hermeneutic".

2.4.3 From African reality to the Bible

It was argued in section 2.3 that the birth of a new world order called for a new paradigm shift in theology and in hermeneutic based on the experience of the Third World. Frostin notes the experience of the Third World sets the new paradigm apart from established (traditional) theology in two main respects: (i) the social relations as opposed to ideas is chosen as "the main crossroad in theology" and (ii) the question of "interlocutors is given a new answer, a preferential option for the poor" (1988:6). In other words, in the new paradigm, the question has been who is it that is asking the questions theologians are trying to answer and not what questions African theologians must seek to (provide) answer. In African Theology, the ordinary Africans and their

experiences are the interlocutors of theology. This implies that for African theologians, the pre-Christian religious and the current socio-political and economic experiences - the African reality – is the interlocutor of theological discussions in the African context. This means the hermeneutical process in the new paradigm begins and ends with the African reality. The African situation provides the tools and epistemological lenses with which the Gospel is understood in the African context. Nyamiti describes this process as a theological examination of African traditional beliefs on, say, ancestors, king, priest, prophet, among others in order to find out how these beliefs could be utilized for the purpose of Christian theology and practice (1984:7). This is what Mbiti has in mind when he writes that African Traditional Religions prepared Africans for the reception and understanding of the Christian Gospel - the claim that African Traditional Religions has the status of *preparatio evangelica* (1976:125-135).¹⁰

With respect to hermeneutics, the Nigerian Roman Catholic theologian, Justin Ukpong asserts that *inculturation hermeneutic* is the most relevant hermeneutic since it is regarded as rightly providing the tools needed to address theologically, issues facing Africa in the new world order (1995:3-14). The following section explores African inculturation hermeneutic.

2.4.4 Inculturation hermeneutic

Inculturation is defined as an "honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time" (Waligo 1986 in Judith Bahemeka 1998:14). With respect to Christology, Ukpong remarks that the central issue that preoccupies inculturation hermeneutics is

¹⁰ West (2000:29) argues that African reality has made a significant impact on the Bible. In what seems to be his reaction to Bediako's assumption that "further development in African Christianity will test the depth of the impact that the Bible has made upon Africa" (1994:252), West asserts that Bediako's claim leave the impression that the "encounter between the Bible and Africa is in one direction: from the Bible to Africa" (2000:29). For this, he continues, may appear as though the Bible is the subject and Africa is the object that is acted upon. The Bible it would seem "is static and has an essential and self-evident message which has had a series of effects upon Africa" (2000:29). West's point is that while the Bible may have made a significant impact upon Africa, Africa has also made a significant impact on the Bible as it has played a key role in the interpretation and construction of the Bible (2000:29). Without any attempt to evaluate West's claim, it is a reality that African theologians have sought to influence the message of the nature of the Bible by re-constructing it with African tools like culture and religious beliefs. The various ramifications of this reconstruction are manifested in the two approaches to theology: from the Bible to African reality and from African reality to the Bible discussed in the previous section and in this one.

stated thus: "if Jesus is alive today, as indeed he is having risen from death, how do we make him and his message challenge contemporary society and the life of individuals?" He continues, "What does the Christian life in Jesus mean in the African socio-cultural context in the light of the gospel message?" (1995:4-6).

A variety of such questions could be asked but Ukpong says they would eventually all come to this: "how to make the Word of God alive and active in contemporary African societies and in the lives of individual Christians within their socio-cultural contexts" (1995:4).

Ukpong asserts "new questions have arisen about the Bible which cannot be answered by the present mode of reading the Bible" (1995:4). Therefore, an inculturation hermeneutic insists that what "is demanded is not a return to a literal reading of the Bible, but a reading that would be critical in its own way paying attention to the African socio-cultural context and the questions that arise there from" (1995:4). This being the case, the focus of an inculturation hermeneutic is "on reader/interpreter and his/her context in relation to the text and its context" (1995:4, 2000:4).¹¹ It becomes clear that the movement from text and traditional theology to African reality advocated by Dar' es Salaam and Ghana (cf. section 2.3) have taken shape and it is in full expression in the movement from African reality to the Bible hermeneutical approach.

The stress on the African situation in inculturation hermeneutic inevitably calls for an African interpreter from the culture and context from and for which the interpretation is done. In the words of Ukpong, inculturation hermeneutic demands that the reader

¹¹ The Nigerian David T. Adamo of Delta State University argues for a similar position. In an essay "African Cultural Hermeneutics", what he also refers to as "Vernacular Hermeneutics" (1999:67), what may also be referred to as "Afro-centric Hermeneutics" (Yorke 1995:145-158) Adamo explores the use of Psalms in African indigenous churches in Nigeria. He argues that the Western missionaries discarded the African indigenous cultural means for dealing successfully with African traditional religious problems like diseases, sorceries, witches and enemies in the name of Christianity without providing an alternative means of dealing with those problems (1999:66). He says that protective use of Psalms has recently been adopted as a means of dealing with cosmological problems in the Nigerian African indigenous churches which the missionaries overlooked (1999:71). He attempts to prove that the way the book of Psalms is divided by Western scholars in various types has no relevance to African Christianity because they fail to recognize the importance that Africans attach to "protection" against evil spirit, witches and enemies (1999:71). As a way forward therefore, Adamo proposes that cultural hermeneutics be adapted in order to reclaim the book of Psalms, for example, as a means of protection against evils. Again, one sees in Adamo's quest, a commitment to incorporate rather than discard African traditional religious worldview into Christianity and a rejection of what African theologians refer to as Euro-centric approach to theology and Gospel in the presentation of Christianity to African indigenous cultures.

be an "insider" in the culture that is the subject of interpretation (1995:4; cf. Bediako 1992, 1995).

The emphasis on culture in inculturation hermeneutic necessitates that African resources must be utilized as interpretive tools. Among such resources, African anthropology, the theology of African Independent Churches, African Primal Religions, and other African resources jointly constitute an "interpretive grid" for inculturation hermeneutics (Appiah-Kubi 1977:192-193). West simply describes the integration of those African pre-Christian interpretive resources as "African historical past in continuity with the present" (1997:99-115; Draper 2000:39-56). The African pre-Christian notion that the dead "are human persons who now exist in the invisible realm of the world" (Ukpong 1995:9) plays a key role in African analogical Christologies of Nyamiti, Waruta, and Bediako, to mention a few.¹²

Other African theologians base their arguments on African pre-Christian anthropology, where a person was seen as existing for the sake of his or her "past, present and future generations to form one community" (Oduyoye 1979:110 Ukpong 1995:9). Given such a belief, Ukpong reports, "problems and issues in the community are seen and treated not as a function of the actions and dispositions of the individuals concerned, but primarily as a function of the structure of the relationships within the community" (1995:9). This anthropological view is fused into the Bible and it influences how Jesus is perceived in African Theology. For Ukpong all the aforementioned resources "lie at the basis of the African's experience of the Bible". In turn, he continues, "they inform the understanding and methodology of inculturation hermeneutics" (1995:9).

Generally, from the African reality to the Bible approach involves a process of "bringing to bear on an area that is theological, the perspectives of anthropology, sociology, philosophy and semiotics in an intercultural and interdisciplinary manner" (Ukpong 1995:13).

Methodologically the point of departure for African theological reflections is "the need so strongly felt" to read the Bible in a way that reflects the viewpoints and life situation of African Christians, Ukpong contends (1995:13). African theologians in their Christological reflections broadly use the above mode of interpretation. In the

¹² Their views are discussed below.

next section, some methodological approaches informed by the above hermeneutical approaches will be explored.

2.5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

In the previous section, it was argued that the paradigm shift from the traditional way of doing theology brought about new ways of interpreting the Bible in Africa. This new way of reading the Bible in the African context brought about a variety of ways that Africans perceive the person and work of Jesus Christ in the African context. This section will discuss some of these methodological approaches to Christology in Africa.

Nyamiti (1998:17-39) argues that there are varieties of African Christologies that correspond to what he calls "schools of Contemporary African Theology" (1998:17). He further stresses, "There are two main types of African Theology today". The more famous of the two is what Nyamiti calls an "African Theology of Inculturation" where a frantic effort is made to "incarnate the Gospel message in the African cultures on the theological level" (1998:17). According to Nyamiti, most contemporary African Christologies belong to this line of thought (1998:17). The second school Nyamiti mentions is "liberation theologies". This school, according to him, tries to fit Christ in the political and sociological "life crises" of the Africans (1998:17).

From the inculturation School, Nyamiti says, there are also two different approaches (1998:17). There are those who attempt to construct an African Christology from the stand point of biblical affirmations about Christ and then try to locate in what Nyamiti refers to as "African cultural situations", the relevant Christological themes (1998:17), on the one hand. In addition, there are also those who, Nyamiti says, "take the African cultural background as their point of departure for Christological elaborations" on the other hand (1998:17). The difference between the two approaches is their point of departure.

Nyamiti mentions John Mbiti and Kofi Appiah-Kubi as major expositors of this approach (1998:18). He contends that those theologians normally "confront the New Testament teaching on Christ with an African worldview" (1998:18). They usually use themes like "Son of God," "Redeemer," and "Servant of God" in the New

Testament that really correspond with what Nyamiti describes as "Africans' life crisis" (1998:18). African theologians assume New Testament themes like baptism, death, bodily resurrection and birth (circumcision) are analogous to initiation rituals and life after death concepts in African traditional worldview.

Nyamiti further claims that there is a second approach to Christology which finds its major expression in Charles Nyamiti, the Togolese theologian Penoukou, Pobee, Bediako and Kwasi Dickson (1998:18-23). In this second approach, these African theologians normally examine the "mystery of Christ either from the perspective of the African worldview, or from the angle of some particular themes taken from the African worldview or culture" (Nyamiti, 1998:18).

For Ukpong, there are five different approaches to inculturation Christology. The first is the incarnation approach, which is "based on the eternal Word of God taking human nature" (1994:41). The logic of this approach, according to Ukpong is that as God became man (human) in the Christ event, so the word of God (Bible) and the Christian faith must be "incarnated in the human cultures and find expression through those cultures so that the redemption brought by Christ may be actualised in these cultures" (1994:41). For those African theologians who take this approach to Christology, Ukpong says, the "mystery of incarnation" provides the "Christological model for the inculturation" (1994:41).

The next approach in Ukpong's view is the "*logos Spermatikos*" (seed of the Word). The idea here is that Christ as the eternal Word "pervades" all cultures and he is, therefore "from the beginning of creation in solidarity with all creation" (Ukpong 1994:42). Since Jesus is in solidarity with all of creation, cultures need to be opened to the Gospel for the purpose of conversion to Jesus the incarnate Word of God and Jesus also needs to open up for human cultures for the purpose of attaining meaning, Ukpong maintains (1994:42).

The functional analogical approach, which for Nyamiti is a "comparative analogical approach" (1994:71-2) is the third approach to African inculturation Christology. In this approach, African theologians normally describe "Jesus' redemptive functions in terms of analogous African thought categories" (Ukpong 1994:41).

The fourth classification is the paschal mystery approach. In this approach, says Ukpong, African theologians "take the resurrection of Jesus as the starting point for

understanding the Christological basis for inculturation" (1994:42). He further explains that those who take this approach defend their position on the ground that Jesus in his earthly ministry was "limited in his contact with many cultures" but in his glorification through the resurrection, he belongs to all cultures and can identify with them through the proclamation of the Good News" (1994:42).

The last approach in Ukpong's classification is the traditional approach, which he maintains is based on New Testament teaching about the "universal dimension of Christ and Jesus' identity with the Father" (Ukpong 1994:43). This view maintains that Jesus existed before Abraham and as such has been worshipped in a "hidden" way in African traditional religions before the advent of Christianity through the missionaries.

Ukpong asserts that none of these approaches really captures his own scheme. He proposes a new approach that he calls a biblical approach. In this approach, Ukpong wishes to take into consideration, "the ministry of Jesus" as a whole, as a ground for inculturation Christology (1994:43). Ukpong's exposition of the methodological approaches of African Christology explains the point that there are diverse approaches to inculturation Christology just as there are diverse cultures and religious belief systems on the continent of Africa. Hence, Nyamiti has a different approach from inculturation Christologies already mentioned.

For Nyamiti, African Theology as the "understanding and expression of the Christian faith in accordance with Africa needs and mentality" corresponds to African Christology in a manner he describes as "broadest sense" (1994:63). Therefore, Nyamiti sees African Christology as "a discourse on Christ in accordance with the mentality and needs of the people in the black continent" (1994:63). For him, Christology on the African continent must take place within the religious and epistemological understanding of the Africans.

Nyamiti proposes that in formulating such a Christology, a distinction must be made between African traditional Christology that is "the discourse on the hidden Christ in African Traditional Religions and cultures" (1994:63), on the one hand, and the "expression of the gospel message in keeping with African needs and mentality" on the other (Nyamiti 1994:63).

Within Christian Theology, there are various approaches to the question of Christology arising from denominational, cultural, personal, political and theological convictions of the theologians themselves (Nyamiti 1994:63-4). Thus, African theologians have recently employed, Nyamiti asserts, only "inculturation" and "liberation" approaches to Christology.

With respect to the inculturation approach, Nyamiti contends that a variety of approaches also exists, but he maintains that his contemporary analogical method offers the best way forward, hence many African theologians adopt this approach (1994:70). Nyamiti describes the analogical method as "intrinsic employment of African cultural items or categories with the Christian mysteries" (1994:70). The "employment" of African cultural items permits, says Nyamiti, African culture to enter inwardly into the theological debate and in the formulation of Christian mysteries (1994:70).

Identification as a second process, Nyamiti asserts, is realized after the said African themes "fuse" well with the "Christian mystery" in order to form one single entity such as is expressed in the statement "Christ is our Ancestor" (1994:70). For Nyamiti this identification is "analogical" (1994:70-71).

Explication, on the other hand, "involves the effort to understand the implications" that underlay the identification of the African themes that "fuse" together with "Christian mystery" for one single theological entity, Nyamiti maintains (1994:71). For him this type of approach provides an indispensable guide for the formulation of inculturation Christologies. Nyamiti uses this approach in his African Christology, as will be seen below.

2.6 AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGICAL VIEWS

In the previous section, Nyamiti and Ukpong offered a broad but incisive categorization of the different methodological approaches to African inculturation Christology. The two main approaches were said to be a movement from African reality to the Bible, on the one hand, and a movement from the Bible to African reality on the other. In this section, African Christological views will be discussed based on these two approaches.

2.6.1 From the African religious life situation to the Bible Christology

Nyamiti and Bediako are arguably the most expositors of a movement from African reality to the Bible Christological reflections and construction. Therefore, their views will be the focus of discussion of the African Christological views in this section.

Stephen Munga, a Tanzanian born Lutheran and graduate of Lund University notes Nyamiti's theological methodology is conditioned by what he considers to be the two sources of African theology (1998:124). Nyamiti asserts that in a broad sense, African theology have two sources i) the Christian sources which include the Bible and Tradition, and ii) non-Christian sources which he refers to as the African situation (Munga 1998:124).¹³ Nyamiti claims that the Christian sources are superior to the non-Christian sources; hence, his task in African theology is to "Christianize" African religious beliefs and cultures and not to "Africanize" Christianity (Munga 1998:125). In his Christology, therefore, Nyamiti attempts to construct what he calls 'ancestral Christology' from African context, utilizing African conceptions on brother-ancestors (1984:7). The purpose of this ancestral Christology is to explore the possibility of utilizing African beliefs about ancestors in order to explain the nature of Christ's relationship to Christians.

Central to the idea of African ancestral beliefs is the notion of a "living dead". For those African societies and cultures that believe in ancestral veneration,¹⁴ there is a belief widely heard that certain individuals, especially those who lived morally good lives while on earth are endowed with supernatural powers once dead, thereby, interfering in the affairs of their living relatives (Nyamiti 1984:15).

Nyamiti asserts that two elements characterize African beliefs on ancestors i) the *natural relationship* between ancestors and their living relatives, ii) *the supernatural*

¹³ It may worth noticing that Nyamiti agrees with the view of African theologians who met in Ghana for the Pan African Conference of third world theologians that the Bible is not the only source of theology (see Appiah Kubi 1979:192-193). Again this is in line with the thoughts of EATWOT meeting in Dar' es Salaam a year before the Ghana Conference (see the papers presented at the Dar' es Salaam Conference and the communiqué issued at the end of the conference in Torres, S and Fabella, V. (eds.) 1978).

¹⁴ As Nyamiti, observes, not all African tribes and societies believe in ancestral veneration (1984:15). The researcher comes from the Tiv tribe of north-central Nigeria who do not believe that there is life after death, and so, the idea of a living dead is not in their traditional religious belief system. Nyamiti also notes that the Masai of Eastern Africa also do not believe in ancestral veneration (1984:15). However, where such beliefs exist, there is almost a unanimous conception of the role of ancestors in the lives of their living relatives. Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is based on such beliefs.

or sacred status acquired by the ancestors through death (1984:15). The natural relationship, he explains, can be based either on parenthood or brotherhood, hence, parent or brother-ancestorship (1984:15). The natural relationship can be founded on common lineage by clan, tribe, religious or secret society, among others between the ancestors and their relatives. Hence, Nyamiti speaks of 'consanguineous' and 'non-consanguineous' ties between ancestors and their living relatives.¹⁵

Five elements in African conceptions of brother-ancestorship play key roles in Nyamiti's ancestral Christology: i) natural relationship which can be consanguineous or non-consanguineous as mentioned above, ii) the supernatural status that ancestors are believed to acquire through death, iii) the mediation between their relatives and God; iv) title to regular sacred communication with their earthly relatives; v) exemplarity and models for moral conduct to their living relatives (1984:16). Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is based mostly on the relationship that ancestors are believed to have with their living brothers and sisters in a nuclear family, hence, the Brother-Ancestorship of Christ. This is because Nyamiti thinks that the analogy of African brother-ancestor is the closest to Christ's Brother-Ancestorship. Nyamiti then draws the similarities between African brother-ancestor relationship with their living relatives and Christ's Brother-Ancestorship with Christians. The comparison below is based on the five elements that characterize African beliefs on ancestors mentioned earlier.

- i) The ancestorship of the dead brothers is founded on consanguineous ties with the living relatives. It is also based on the supernatural status which ancestors acquire through death by being closer to God. In a similar way, Nyamiti claims that Christ's relationship with Christians is connected with his consanguinity with them through his adamite origin. It is also grounded, according to Nyamiti, on his supernatural status he acquired through his death and resurrection which linked him more closely to the divine

¹⁵ It becomes immediately clear as Mbiti asserts that there is an inseparable connection between African religious life and family, diary, eating, farming, moral and communal life of the Africans. Every aspect of the African life, according to Mbiti, is religious. Hence there is no time that Africans are not religious. This being the case, Africans are born religious and one is not converted to African traditional religions but is born into African religious life hence, the religious as well as the social life of Africans is communal. One does not believe in a traditional religion as an individual, just as one does not live as an individual but as a society or community (1969:4-5). This implies that salvation is a communal activity in the traditional religious life of the Africans. Hence, ancestors though dead, live for their relatives as a community. It remains to be seen how this view of salvation and philosophy of life fits into the ancestral Christology of Charles Nyamiti and other African theologians.

- ii) the supernatural status of the ancestors endows them with superhuman powers and mediation between God and their relatives. Nyamiti thinks that the supernatural status endows Christ the man, the supernatural powers with which he mediates between God and the brethren
- iii) the ancestors when they die as adult become models of good moral behaviour for their relatives. Christ, according to Nyamiti, by virtue of his resurrection through which he acquires his adulthood is a model of conduct as well as source of Christian tradition and its stability for the brethren
- iv) there is a regular sacred communication between ancestors and their relatives. Christ maintains regular communication with his followers through prayers and ritual offerings like the sacrifice of the mass¹⁶ and Christ communicates to them supernatural and bodily benefits
- v) neglect of ancestors by their relatives attracts punishment to relatives by ancestors. Ancestors may send calamities as a way of revenge to their negligent relatives. Similarly, Nyamiti asserts that lack of contact by Christians with Christ is offence punishable by Christ. This may attract punishment of the negligent brethren. Such brethren may appease Christ by prayer and other ritual activities accompanied by a sincere change of heart
- vi) ancestors visit their relatives through other beings like hyena and snakes, though they have places of preference like trees and graveyards. Christ, Nyamiti would say, visits his living brethren through other beings like priests, prophets and other fellow Christians. He even contact directly his living relatives during Eucharist in the form of bread and wine
- vii) the ancestors and their living relatives have a common immediate father. The first person of Trinity, says Nyamiti, is the common and immediate Father and Mother of Christ and his earthly members (1984:19-20).

Nyamiti says that the above similarities coexist shoulder to shoulder with profound differences between the two types of relationship. According to him, the "primary root of these divergences is Christ's theandric structure and his redemptive mediation" (1984:20). It is interesting to note that all the above elements of similarity between the

¹⁶ It is useful to note that Nyamiti is hereby influenced by his Roman Catholic view of the mass as sacrifice.

two relationships are also, the elements of divergences. Nyamiti explains that the relationship between African brother-ancestors is not salvific but Christ's Brother-Ancessorship is redemptive. He maintains that Christ is God-man. By virtue of his hypostatic union (union of the two natures namely, God and man), Christ is both the mediator and Brother. But Christ's consanguineous ties with the brethren are beyond family, tribal and racial limitations, hence different from African brother-ancestor ties with their relatives.

Nyamiti emphasises the fact that Christ's Sonship is to the Father whereas his followers are sons of God through adoption; hence, there is an essential difference between Christ's Sonship and that of the brethren. This implies that his Brotherhood to Christians and that of African brother is also radically different (1984:21). Christ according to Nyamiti is not just a model for moral behaviour, but he is the "*inner* source and *vital* principle of Christian life" (1984:21). Nyamiti continues to show how in all the five elements, Christ's relationship to Christians is different from African brother-ancestor relationship with the living relatives (1984:21-23). If so, why must Nyamiti insist on the analogy of ancestors, given the major differences that exist between the two relationships?

Nyamiti says that despite the major differences, there are enough similarities in structure between Christ's brother-relationship to human being and that of the African brother-ancestor. The divergences, he asserts, "indicate the essential difference of the levels on which this structure is situated and the way according to which it is found in both types of relationship" (1984:23). While the African brother-ancestor is found on family ties and human level, Christ's brother-relationship to Christians is divine and supernatural (1984:23). However, Nyamiti thinks that the basic structure of the two relationships is the same. Hence, he attempts to formulate a working definition of brother-ancestor which he asserts can be applied to Christ and to African ancestors. He defines brother-ancestor as follows: "A brother-ancestor is a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is mediator to God, archetype of behaviour and with whom thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death he is entitled to have regular sacred communication" (1984:23). This working definition puts together the five elements that characterize African beliefs on brother-ancestor.

The idea of a person acquiring supernatural powers after death plays a key role in all the five elements and in Nyamiti's working definition of brother-ancestor. This leaves the impression that Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is built upon the African belief of the dead acquiring supernatural powers with which they execute their mediatorial roles after they died.¹⁷ This theme surfaces throughout Nyamiti's ancestral Christological discussion especially with respect to Christ's role as the mediator of God and humanity. His words:

Mediation is important. It implies the ancestor's nearness to God and distance from his living relatives in virtue of the supernatural status acquired through death and (on the part of Christ) through the hypostatic union. This supernatural status is the basis for the ancestor's title to sacred communication with his relative. Brother-ancestors (especially when they died as adults) are commonly considered as sources of stability of tradition and, hence, as prototypes of conduct for the living. Christ, being God-man, is the prototype of both nature and behaviour of His Brother-descendants, since – as will be shown later – these become His descendants through participation in His eternal Descendancy and are, by that very fact, expected to behave according to his model (1984:24).

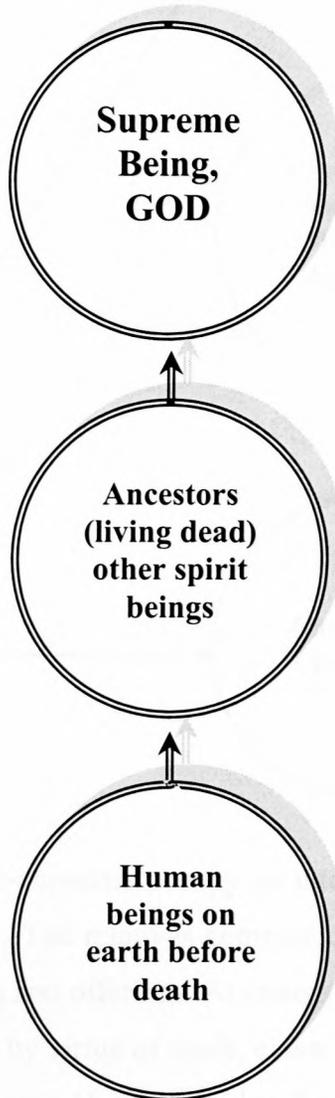
It is clear from the above quote that Nyamiti attempts to explain the remoteness and nearness of God, what is called in traditional theology "transcendence and immanence of God" from the perspective of African conception of brother-ancestors' mediation between God and their living relatives. For Nyamiti the ancestors occupy what Bediako (1984:104) calls "the existential gulf" between God and the earth. Since Christ is the mediator between God and humanity, it is believed that the idea of ancestors mediating between God and their living relatives is the best analogy for Christ's role as the mediator of his people. The first figure below illustrates the position and relationship of African brother-ancestors as mediators with their relatives

¹⁷ Munga, a specialist in Nyamiti's African Christian Theology of Inculturation also observes that Nyamiti based his ancestral Christology on the notion of death as a means for acquiring supernatural powers. Munga observes, "What I gather from that outline is that he takes as his starting point the African understanding of death. Death, according to Nyamiti, is the doorway to the supernatural status of the African brother-ancestralship, 'for it is only through death that one attains the supernatural status which brings him closer to God and renders him ancestor of his living relatives'. Nyamiti thereby parallels this view to the death of Christ, and interprets what Paul said in Ephesians 4:9-10 as referring to Christ's real death and his company with the dead, and also showing that his supernatural exaltation implies not only his heavenly condition, power and nearness to God, but his superiority to the African ancestors as well" (1998:152).

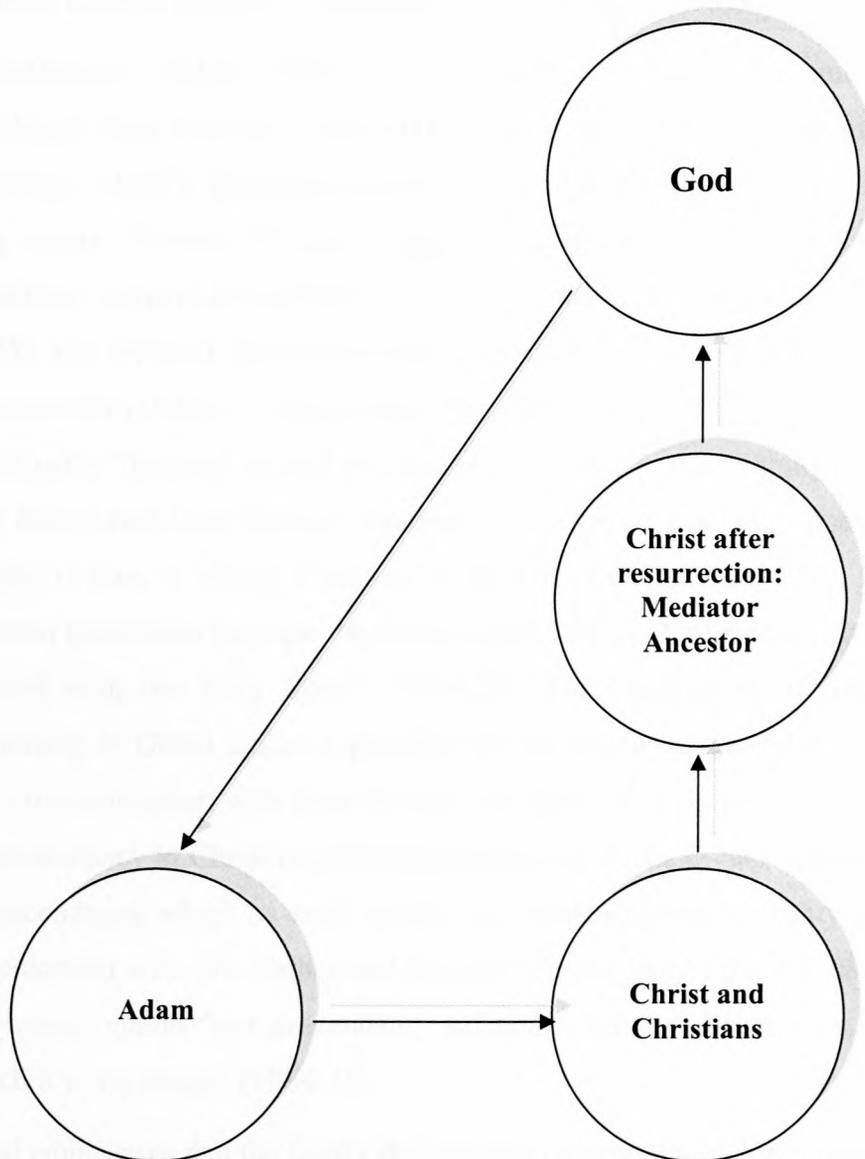
Nyamiti's view of purgatory as a place where the dead stay for sometimes to be purified before passing into heaven also influences his view of Christ as the greatest ancestor of both his living brethren, the saints and those in purgatory who are yet to meet the saints in heaven (1984:24).

and the second figure illustrates that of Christ and his relationship as the mediator with Christians.

An African worldview upon which Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is founded consists of three worlds namely, the world of the Supreme Being sometimes referred to as God, the intermediary world between the earth and the Supreme Being occupied by ancestors and other spirit beings and the earth which all living beings (including human beings) inhabit. An African cosmology is represented as follows:



The structure of Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is represented as follows:



In the first figure above, brother-ancestors occupy an intermediary position between God and their relatives on earth. The relatives communicate with ancestors through invocation during rituals, prayers and offerings. Ancestors then mediate between their relatives and God since they are, by virtue of death, closer to God than are their living relatives. In this way, ancestors, says Nyamiti, bridge the gap between God and their relatives on earth. Again, it is only after death that one becomes an ancestor; hence, it is after death that one is believed to have acquired the supernatural powers to mediate between God and one's relatives on earth. The second diagram illustrates that Christ occupies a similar intermediary position after his death and resurrection, having thus acquired the supernatural powers necessarily for mediation, Nyamiti says he is the

mediator of his people (1984:24). This idea of Christ acquiring supernatural powers after death is closely linked to incarnation in Nyamiti's ancestral Christology.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is an important concept in Nyamiti's analogical Christology. From what has been said so far, it is clear that in Nyamiti's ancestral Christology, Christ's Brother-Ancestorship is founded both on his divine and on human nature. Viewed from the angle of his divinity, Nyamiti asserts "Christ's Ancestorship appears as one with his eternal immanent Descendancy" (1977:49-50, 1984:25). For Nyamiti, Christ has shared his divine "Descendancy" with us through his incarnation (1984:25). This means that Christ is our ancestor by virtue of what Nyamiti calls "first and second procession" of Christ in the "Trinity" (1984:25). He further asserts that Jesus' title of "Ancestor" is "rooted in his first procession", which, according to him, is "divine filiations on the part of Christ" (1984:25). It is rooted in the second procession because, Nyamiti claims, "being Descendancy, it is essentially connected with the Holy Spirit" (1984:25). The implication of this is that the Ancestorship of Christ makes it possible for his brother-descendants to have regular sacred communication with him through his Spirit. This is because Nyamiti thinks "our descendancy in Christ is participation not only in His divine Sonship, but also in His Descendancy which as such implies his immanent responsibility to have ritual communication with His Father and Ancestor in the Holy Spirit" (1984:25). In this way, Nyamiti claims "our descendancy reflects faithfully Christ's own Descendancy of which it is the image" (1984:25).

Nyamiti emphasises that the Lord's Ancestorship essentially includes mediation which is based on his humanity (1984:25). This is because it is in his nature as human being that Christ is the mediator of his people. Christ's role as a mediator is demonstrated in his death and subsequent resurrection (Nyamiti 1984:25-26). Nyamiti refers to Christ's death and resurrection as *paschal mystery* (1984:25). Since these two events took place for the salvation of humanity, Nyamiti asserts that Christ's Ancestorship has redemptive connotations (1984:26). This implies that Christ the Redeemer's Ancestorship is closely linked to his *prophetic, mediative, redemptive, pastoral* or *royal* and *sacerdotal* connotations of Christ's ministry on earth (Nyamiti 1984:26).

Concerning the Cross and the resurrection of Christ, Nyamiti asserts that they both have ancestral value (1984:42; cf. Munga 1998:198). Nyamiti claims that the consequence of the paschal mystery is that through it, Christ's Ancestorship achieved

its full maturity (1984:42). The qualification for one to become an ancestor in African traditional worldview is through his death. Therefore, for Nyamiti, Christ became an Ancestor after his death and resurrection. Since the mediator cannot be seen living among his people but is believed to have occupied an intermediary world of spirits between God and earth, Nyamiti asserts that Christ became a mediator only after his resurrection. It was after the resurrection, Nyamiti asserts, that Christ ascended to his throne as the mediator. His words:

it is only after His resurrection that the Messiah could fully exercise his ancestral mediation by sending to us the plenitude of his Spirit. As Scripture teaches through his death He ransomed us and removed our sins and through his resurrection He restored to us our lost adoptive Sonship and Descendancy, and thus bridged the gap caused by our sins and reconciled us to God His Father and our Father in the Spirit. Hence the paschal mystery does not only effect the fullness of Christ's adulthood as our Ancestor but is also *the apogee of his ancestral activity*. If brother-ancestralship implies common Sonship between ancestor and descendant, the fullness of Christ's Ancestralship means the plenitude of his divine Filiation and his Brotherhood to us 'in his power' (Rom. 1:4) Thanks to his glorified humanity – the perfect model or archetype not only of our Christian conduct but of our future glory at the end of time (1984:42).

As Munga notes, "the accomplishment of Christ's ancestralship constitutes the accomplishment of his personality in Nyamiti's ancestral Christology."¹⁸ The fullness of Christ's adulthood suggests that he is "entitled to unconditional and full ancestral rights and to our spiritual communication with him, as the founder of Christian tradition which is stable and unchangeable" (Munga 1998:198-199; Nyamiti 1984:43). Therefore, it is clear that Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is grounded on the idea of death as the path to ancestralship and mediation.

¹⁸ Nyamiti's view of Christ's incarnation and death as a path to full ancestral rights, hence, accomplishment of Christ's personality is founded on African concept of "vitalistic personality". In African worldview, personality is conceived in what Nyamiti refers to as "vitalistic terms" (1998:19). This means that, in African anthropology, true personality consists in fullness of life or vital maturity. One accomplishes fullness of personality through practical wisdom which comprise of the knowledge of ancestral tradition, magico-religious sacred powers, responsibilities, rights, fulfilled openness or relationship to Supreme Being and other spirits, liberty which involves one's emancipation from oppressive powers and a conscious awareness of the need for one to give his or her life for others and being accepted by those for whose sake he or she gave his or her life (Nyamiti 1998:19). It is from such vitalistic point of departure, says Nyamiti, that "it is possible to elaborate an African theology of the mystery of Incarnation" hence, he sees the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of personality (1998:20).

Drawing on the German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, Nyamiti applies the notion of brother-ancestors as models for moral behaviour for their relatives to the theology of the Cross (Moltman 1974:126-159; Nyamiti 1984:43; Munga 1998:199).¹⁹ Nyamiti integrates Moltmann's theology of the Cross into his ancestral Christology and argues "By dying for God's justice and for liberation of the poor Jesus meant to show us the way that leads to such Sonship and, indeed, what that Sonship implies" (1984:43). For God's Sonship, he continues, is one of justice and true liberty. Nyamiti asserts that, as an ancestor, Jesus' "crucifixion saved us, in principle, from tyranny of the law as well as from social and political oppression. For just as his death for our sins redeemed us from the same sins, so also his crucifixion for political oppression and servitude of the law saved us from these same evils" (1984:43). This implies that Christ as the saviour of his people has given them a perfect example for Christian behaviour, which demands, "not only verbal opposition to evil but even giving one's own life for the sake of God's justice and welfare of neighbour" (Nyamiti 1984:143-144). Thus, according to Nyamiti, the Cross of Christ reveals him as "our true Brother" in God, who is also the archetype for Christian conduct, meaning, it reveals Christ as our true Brother-Ancestor (1984:44).

Looking at Nyamiti's ancestral Christology, one can conclude that his discussion of Ancestorship of Christ from an African perspective of brother-ancestor is a clear demonstration of the first approach to African Christology, namely, from African situation to the Bible mentioned at the end of the last section. He begins his discussion from African religious beliefs and then attempts to discuss who Christ is to the African Christians. In this way, he has attempted to incarnate Christology in African religious beliefs, thereby, making the person and work of Jesus Christ understandable to the Africans who believe in the notion of ancestors as the dead living.

In as much as Nyamiti uses African concepts, beliefs and philosophy of life to discuss the person and work of Christ, he does not want to allow these to water down the

¹⁹ Moltmann argues that the Cross of Christ is connected to his 'terrestrial' ministry, message, claim to authority and general behaviour. He asserts that Jesus Christ was crucified on the account of the aforementioned factors. For Moltmann, the earthly life and ministry of Jesus was a forward march to the Cross. This march was marked by three fundamental characteristics i) Jesus' view of the Law, ii) the then political power and iii) his relationship to God as God. For Moltmann, Jesus' rejection of Jewish moralism and emphasizing justification by faith provoked the Jews who sought after his death and killed him. The death of Jesus Christ, Moltmann asserts, was a sacrifice for justice for the sake of the oppressed who had no justice before Christ. In this sense, the death of Christ was for the sake of God's justice as his opposition to profane powers cost him death. Hence, to Moltmann, God himself was involved in the Cross event (Moltman 1974:126-159).

biblical teaching on Christ. Hence, Nyamiti draws a comparison between African conception on brother-ancestors and Christ's relationship to his believers, pointing out clearly, major points of convergence and divergence. Not only that, Nyamiti also makes the point clear that African beliefs about ancestors are superficial, but Christ's relationship to his people is real and superior to brother-ancestors relationship with their living relatives. Christ is not an Ancestor to his followers in the same way and sense as African ancestors are to their living relatives (1984:69). While Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is founded on African traditional religious beliefs about ancestors, he intends it to be biblically based. Therefore, the African beliefs on ancestors are windows into the understanding of his ancestral and "personalistic vitality" Christology. Hence, Nyamiti does not allow the fundamental structural similarities between African brother-ancestors relationship to their living relatives with Christ's relationship to Christians to annul the profound differences that exist between the two relationships.

Methodologically, one sees in Nyamiti's Christological discussion, the stress on the African situation as the starting point for theology. Hence, to Nyamiti, methodological the move from African reality to the Bible is very important for an effective understanding of biblical teaching in African societies. In this way, one sees in Nyamiti, the spirit of Dar' es Salaam (1976) which laid major stress on methodology as a way of making the Gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to the people of Third World (cf. Frostin 1988:3; Torres 1978:259). The interlocutor of theology is the African reality in Nyamiti's Christological discussion.

Hermeneutically the African beliefs provide the epistemological lens with which Nyamiti seeks to interpret the biblical teaching about Christ's relationship to Christians (cf. section 2.4.2). Nyamiti sees his goal for exploring African religious situation as to see where they can be utilized for theology and practice, but the African situation is the foundation upon which Africans could build their understanding of Christ in Nyamiti's Christology. This implies that, it is the African situation that interprets the biblical reality, a view closely related to the conviction of Dar' es Salaam and Ghana conferences (cf. Torres 1978 and Appiah-Kubi 1979 for papers presented at these conferences especially their final statements).

Overall, it can be argued that Nyamiti attempts to provide a relevant distinctively African Christology on the one hand, and a complex biblical Christology on the other.

His Christology is African and liberative yet biblical and still, he will consider it redemptive.²⁰ However, a number of issues need clarification for Nyamiti's analogical ancestral Christology to be useful to the 21st century Christian theology in Africa. A closer look at Nyamiti's ancestral Christology will reveal that the analogy of ancestors and their referent, Jesus Christ is at best an illusion. While the categories of ancestors may manifest some important similarities, as it has been argued (cf. Ernst Wendland 1991:14), of form and structure, as Nyamiti asserts, they do not reflect the reality of Christ in every detail as he himself notes (1998:18). The category of ancestors may convey some useful information for understanding the nature and work of Jesus Christ. However, as it can be argued, a worldly resemblance is not the same as the biblical images they attempt to reflect. Hence, the realities which the concept of ancestors represents in African Traditional Religions may not necessarily reflect fully the person and nature of Jesus Christ and his ministry as may be intended. Perhaps Nyamiti realizes this. Fourteen years after the publication of his *Christ as our Ancestor*, he wrote another article in which he describes the use of ancestors and other African images in Christology as "too superficial" (1998:18-19). Furthermore, Nyamiti's use of the African concept of personalistic vitality, a notion of a person achieving full maturity through rites of passage to explain the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as events, which accomplished Christ's personhood and maturity is problematic to say the least. In African worldview, the supreme being often referred to as God is never called an ancestor. Where Nyamiti refers to God the Father as a Great Ancestor will be misleading even if Africans are to use their idea of ancestors to understand biblical teachings about Christ and God. Nyamiti is not alone in the construction of ancestral Christology in the African context. The idea of Christ as ancestor is also central to the Christological discussion of the Presbyterian theologian, Bediako.

It is argued that while the Kenyan born John S. Mbiti is the father of contemporary African Theology, the Ghanaian Kwame Bediako is arguably one of the most innovative and major exponents of contemporary African Christology (Maluleke

²⁰ This is not to say that Nyamiti's ancestral Christology fully reflects the New Testament Christology. A number of complex issues are overlooked by Nyamiti in his ancestral and incarnation Christology. Noticeable among them is the omission of the concept of original sin which is the cause of Christ's death. His view of common descendancy of Christ with Christians in what he calls the first and second procession makes the doctrine of Trinity too complex since the doctrine of incarnation does not involve divination of humanity.

1996:3-4). In fact, it has been argued that the "discussion between Christ and African culture has taken place in the life of Bediako himself" (Benno van den Toren 1997:218-232).

Gillian Bediako, the wife of Kwame Bediako, provides a brief but incisive biography of Bediako in the introductory pages of Bediako's *Jesus in Africa: the Christian Gospel in African history and experience* (2000:vii-x). For Gillian Bediako, an idea into Bediako's early life is "the key to understanding his ideas", especially his Christological views (Bediako 2000:vii).

Bediako was born to his Akan family in Accra, Ghana on 7 July 1945. He received his education at the University of Ghana, Legon and University of Bordeaux, France - where he received a doctorate degree (1973) in French literature and African Literature in French (Bediako 2000:vii). Between 1945 and 1969, Bediako was under pressure from his parents to take part in shrine rituals for protection (cf. Adamo 1999). Gillian emphasises that Kwame Bediako, at a certain stage in his education carrier, "actually disputed Christian claims with Christian student friends", until 1970, in Bordeaux, France, where and when he met Christ (2000:vii). Bediako received a PhD degree in theology from the University of Aberdeen under the guidance of the Church historian and missiologist, Andrew Walls, as far back as 1983 (2000:viii). Looking at his early life, it is little wonder that Bediako appreciates the contributions of African primal religions to the Christian experience of Africans.

As one born into an Akan family that adhered to the religion of African ancestors (Du Toren 1997:218), and as one converted from ancestral worship to "Western Christianity", Bediako is able to offer what Du Toren calls an "unusual combination of a positively open and appreciative context and at the same time a solid Christocentric stance" (1997:21). Bediako's incorporation of elements of African primal religions into Christian affirmations of Jesus Christ is informed by his pre-Christian experience. Thus, the pre-Christian religious experience of Bediako is indeed a key to the understanding of his Christological views explored in this work.

Bediako (1984:81) claims that the missionaries neglected the 'uniqueness' of Christ "admits African religions" in their proclamation of the Good News. This notwithstanding, Bediako believes his native Akan people were able to receive Christianity in their "personally experienced religious need" (1984:81; cf. S.G.

Williamson 1965:138ff). Williamson (1965:138) and Bediako (1984:98) contend that Christ was presented as "the answer to the question which a white man would ask", and ask what "Christ would look like" if he were to appear today to provide an answer to the questions that Africans would ask.

Grieved with the missionary approach, Bediako seeks to present Christ as an answer to the questions (religious) that Africans would ask today. Bediako disagrees with Mbiti (1972:51) on the latter's assertion that no concepts of Christ exist in African Traditional Religions. For Bediako, some concepts of Christ exist in African traditional religious worldview. Hence, he believes that Jesus is, seen from the perspective of an Akan religious worldview, our "ancestor" and "our Savior" (1984:98).

For Bediako the biblical affirmation that Jesus is our Saviour and the incorporation of that affirmation in our "spiritual universe" based on our needs necessitates what he refers to as "a spirit power Christology" (1984:98). This is based on Bediako's assumption that Jesus Christ is not a stranger in African heritage (1984:101). His fundamental premise, as he calls it, is "the primacy of the universality of Jesus Christ, as against his particularity as a Jew" (1984:101). For Bediako, Jesus Christ as a universal Saviour of the world makes him "at home" in every culture and context. "The authenticity of any particular perception of Jesus", says Bediako, is not defective on the basis of the context in question, but on the basis of "whether such a Christological understanding faithfully reflects biblical revelation and is rooted in authentic Christian experience" (1984:98).

However, Bediako would rather contend "biblical teaching affirms that Jesus is who he is" because he is "Saviour" and because of "what he has done and can do" (1984:98). This means that we know from the Bible, according to Bediako, the person of Jesus through his work as a Saviour. Therefore, for Bediako, Jesus must be understood in his "salvific" work. Thus, Bediako insists that any "Christology divorced of Soteriology" is no Christology (1984:98).

Bediako contends that any authentic Christology must conform to an African traditional worldview of salvation (1984:98). Therefore, he writes: "Since salvation in the Africa traditional world view involves a certain perception of the realm of spirit-power and its effects upon the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence,

Christology must address itself to the questions posed by such a worldview" (1984:98).

For Bediako, the needs of Africans (political, religious and salvific) require a Christology that rightly addresses these needs. He maintains "The needs of the African would require a Christology that meets those needs" (1984:98). Therefore, for Bediako, Christ must be one who meets the needs of the Africans.

Similar to Black Christology's contention (cf. Boesak 1976, 1978, 1984; Cone 1997; Mofokeng 1983, 1989; Maimela 1992), Bediako contends, "who Jesus is in African spiritual universe must not be separated from what he does and can do in that world" (1984:98). It is because of this contention that Bediako advocates a Christology of "Ancestralship". For he believes, just as Nyamiti does, that only ancestor Christology can capture the "thought categories" of his Akan "spirit-fathers" which for him blends well with the New Testament category of Jesus Christ as glorified in heaven and yet dwelling among his believing community. Thus, Bediako thinks "the way in which Jesus relates to the perceived importance and function of the spirit fathers or ancestors is crucial for such Christology" (1984:98), the Christology that he identifies as that which perceives Jesus in terms of what he does and can do for the world.

Bediako believes that his Akan native worldview of the "spirit world" is the ground of human existence (1984:98). The Akan spirit consists of God the Supreme Being, *Onyame*, who, according to Bediako, is the "creator and sustainer of the universe" in Akan cosmology (1984:98). For the Akan, says Bediako, there are subordinate gods called "*abosom*", who perform functions on behalf of the Supreme God. It is these subordinate gods that are sometimes referred to in the Akan traditional religious worldview as "children of God" and as "ancestors" or "spirit fathers", Bediako claims. For Bediako the Akan spirit fathers or ancestors occupy the position of Jesus in New Testament terms (1984:100).²¹ This is because he thinks the "universality of Jesus" over against "his particularity as a Jew" would permit us to believe that Jesus is one among the Akan people (1984:101). Moreover, Jesus is an ancestor – belonging to the realm of the spirit fathers category in the "chain of beings" of the Akan traditional

²¹ Here, Bediako supports the view of Bishop Peter Sarpong when the latter maintains that "while God's power surpasses all others, the ancestors would appear to tilt the scale in their favour if their power could be weighed against that of the lesser gods" (1974:43; cf. Pobee 1979:48).

religious world view – which when 'baptized' with Bediako's Christology becomes, in his view, not just a Christian, but a "biblical world view" (1984:101).

Closely related to the ancestor Christology is the idea of Jesus as "Elder Brother", as sole mediator of the Africans. Bediako contends that the idea of God's existence is already a given in the worldview of the Africans. More so, the seemingly "remoteness" of God from the Africans is remedied by Jesus Christ (1984:102).

He insists "the existential gulf between the intense awareness of the existence of God, and also paradoxically of his remoteness, is bridged in Christ alone" (1983:104). To support this claim, Bediako alludes to Hebrews 9:15, where it is written: "There has been a death which sets people free for the wrongs they did while the first covenant was in force". To Bediako, this celebrated verse lays bare the mediatorial role of Christ in the life of Africans. This is because as "sin" is viewed in African worldview as "antisocial" and, thus against humanity and community, the "Good News" of Jesus as elder brother introduces the valid insight about the nature of sin and brings the need for "explication into the wider context" (1984:103). According to Bediako, Christ has provided this explication in the wider context.

About the gravity of sin in human society, Bediako stresses that humankind is created in God's image and a sin against another person is indeed sin against God (1984:103). Bediako alludes to the Cain and Abel story in Genesis 4 and says, as the death of Abel in the hands of Cain was a sin against humanity, so it was a sin against God, hence, God's displeasure with Cain. Therefore, for Bediako, the fact that sin against a fellow human is sin against God sets forth the need for explication of sin in African human life, which, according to Bediako's construction, will bring reconciliation between humans and God, on the one hand, and among humans themselves, on the other (1984:103-104).

Therefore, as Christ is able to meet such a reconciling need of the Africans, he is not only "our Saviour", not just the one who has "become one of us", but one who "died for us" (Bediako 1984:103). The death of Christ for us in the thoughts of Bediako has "an eternal sacrificial significance for us" since it deals with what Bediako calls "our moral failures and the infringements of our social relationships" (1984:103). Thus, Bediako asserts, "Jesus is our 'Elder Brother' who has participated with us in our

African experience in every respect, except in our sin and alienation with which our myths of origins makes us only too familiar" (1984:103).

By virtue of Jesus' elder brotherhood to Christians, Bediako perceives him as one who is before God as his 'Father' as he dispenses his mediatorial function of what Bediako calls "our natural spirit fathers" (1984:103). These spirit fathers, Bediako contends, "originated from us originally". Hence, they are in need of salvation from Jesus the mediator and elder brother (1984:103).

However, the mediatorial role of Jesus as "Elder Brother" and "Ancestor" poses a problem for Bediako's perception of Jesus in terms of what he describes as "desacralization of political power which the chiefs occupy in the Akan world view" (1984:108). For in the Akan worldview, Bediako reports, the chiefs are regarded as "sitting on the stool of the ancestors" (1984:108). This is because in the religious cosmology which under-girded Akan social organization, the power of the reigning chief as the channel through which cosmic forces operated for the well-being of the society was based on the latter's position as one "who sits on the stool of the ancestors" (1984:108). This implies that, a Christology, Bediako contends, which undermines and removes the power of the ancestors over the living, by the same token desacralizes the power of the reigning chief or king" (1984:108).

Bediako insists that a "Christology which alters so radically the nature and source of power carries inevitable, immense implication for politics in our societies" (1984:108). Bediako contends that Christology must meet the needs of Africans as "its subjects". Hence, he insists that authentic Christology must avoid altering "so radically" the sacred power of the chief in African societies (1984:108). He wonders what the fate of the African chief would be, given that he (African chief) is converted to Christianity, in which case Christ will displace the sacred position of the traditional (Akan) chief in this new religion namely, Christianity (1984:108)

Bediako asks: "What happens when the spirit-fathers who assume such power to the reigning king become subservient to Christ the Lord?" He continues, "what happens to the position of the chief who sits on the stool of the ancestors when it becomes evident that Christ himself is the Great Ancestor of all mankind, the mediator of all divine blessing, the judge of all mankind, and that access to him is not dependant on inherent right through royal lineage but through common energies of grace and faith

and repentance from the heart?" (1984:109). He asks if the chief will still be "a man among men, honoured but not worshipped" in lieu of the fact that Jesus displaces his position as the reigning king (1984:109).²²

Bediako contends, "Africans can not escape from religious and spiritual issues which African Traditional Religions raise for us" (Bediako 1996:27). For Bediako the issues that African Traditional Religions raise for us are "from the cultural background of the Christian faith of most African Christians" (1996:31).

Furthermore, Bediako (1999:31) insists that "Christian affirmations" make sense only in their relation to other alternative affirmations that may exist alongside those Christian affirmations (1996:31). For this reason Bediako thinks that the idea of the uniqueness of Christ, whether in its New Testament affirmation or as it is affirmed and proclaimed by Christians today, must also take place within the context of what African Tradition Religions affirm. He regrets that within the Christian circles, it is not often remembered that "affirmations about Christ" make sense not based on what Christians say, but especially because of what other contesting affirmations understand about Christ as proclaimed by Christians (1996:31). To put it in Bediako's own words:

It is not often recognized in the Christian circles that theological affirmations about Christ are meaningful ultimately not in terms of what Christians say, but in the terms of what persons of other faith understand those affirmations to be, that the uniqueness of Christ achieve their real impact when they are subjected to test to establish their credentials and validity not only in terms of the religious and spiritual universe in which Christians habitually operate but also and indeed especially, in terms of the religions which persons of other faiths inhabit (1996:31, 2000:37).

Moreover, for Bediako "it is only in those other worlds that the true meaning of the unique Christ is meant to become apparent and validated" (1996:31). This means that Christology in Africa will be validated when placed on the table and tested based on its congruence with the "genius" of the African traditional religious worldview. Thus in Bediako's thought, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is grounded in the fact of His uniqueness in terms of ancestor, elder brother, spirit fathers, and lordship categories

²² In this essay, Bediako did not seek to provide answers to any of the above intriguing questions he has raised. The question his negligence – that of not providing answers to such controversial questions – could raise is whether his motivation in raising such "Christological" questions still reflects the universalistic Christology that Bediako himself proposed earlier in the essay (Du Toren 1997:218-232).

dominant in his Akan traditional worldview.²³ For it is after all, says Bediako, in the "other world religions that the true meaning of the unique Christ is meant to become apparent and validated" (1996:31).

Bediako concludes that "Christian affirmations about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ are not assertions, but rather invitations to recognition" (1996:34). What this means is that "The truth of biblical revelation, therefore, is not just truth to be 'believed in' as by mute intellectual or mental assent; it is truth to be 'participated in'" (2000:38). Bediako says this in response to what he describes as a "general tendency in Christian circles to treat Christian affirmations as essentially theological data" (2000:38) dogmatically as though they are "a sort of fixed grid of doctrinal positions which have an inherent meaning in and of themselves" (2000:38). In other words, some Christians take biblical affirmations as having meaning inherently in themselves to such an extent that they are devoid of interpretation and explanations in contexts other than those of the original writers and readers. Bediako thinks that affirmations about Jesus Christ are unfortunately regarded in such manner. He says "the truth of biblical revelation is the *truth not of assertion, but of recognition*" (2000:38). This being the case, a biblical affirmation about the uniqueness of Christ, in Bediako's view, "is not an arbitrary claim or assertion made a priori in the interest of, or for the benefit of any particular community, not even the Christian" community (2000:38). But the affirmation is a product of recognition, he contends.

Bediako asserts that affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ is "intended to find its true significance in its application to the totality of human kind" (2000:38). In other words, through affirmation, an opportunity is intended to be provided for "others to produce or recognise its significance for them" (2000:38-39). Bediako alludes to his mentor, Andrew Walls, when the latter maintains that:

... true Christian analogy with the Qur'an is not the Bible but Christ. Christ for Christians the Qur'an for Muslims is the Eternal word of God, but Christ is word translated. That fact is the sign that the contingent Scriptures (also as Word of God), unlike the Qur'an, may and should constantly be translated ... when God in Christ became man, divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language ..." (1990:24 in Bediako 2000:39).

²³ Contrary to Bediako's view, the Nigerian Yusufu Turaki presents the uniqueness of Christ in a different way. See his *The Unique Christ for our Salvation: The Challenge of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures*.

Drawing on Walls Bediako asserts that "the principle of recognition focusing as it does on seeing Christ as God incarnate and accessible becomes of crucial importance for understanding the true character of the Christian affirmation concerning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ" (2000:39). However, it is not clear what difference it makes between "Christian affirmations about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ" not being assertions, on the one hand, and being an "invitation to recognition", on the other. What does the uniqueness of Christian affirmations as assertion really entail? Bediako did not address this question precisely in his works but moves on to explain "what it is that in Christ confronts us, which calls for our recognition" (2000:39), arguing that it is a fundamental question that regards the "status of the unique Christ amid the plurality of religions" (2000:39). He asserts that the status of the uniqueness of Christ among other religions cannot be determined by Christian claims alone, and so by implication not by biblical claims alone, but also, he insists, "by conclusions arrived at through working with the inward meanings of the religious words of other faiths" (2000:40). The reason is that Jesus as Lord is able to inhabit this other religions as well; Bediako maintains (2000:40). It leaves the question unanswered as to what really constitutes this uniqueness of Christ if he inhabits and he is indeed, as Bediako claims, the Lord of all world religions.

For Bediako the religion of men and women is the central focus and the "encounter" between Christian affirmations about Christ, on the one hand, and what he sees as the "so-called" 'non-Christian religions', on the other (2000:40). He believes that "it would be false to conceive of the meeting of Christian affirmations with the religious meanings of other faiths in terms of mutually exclusive systems, or even of creedal formulations" (2000:40). But if Christianity blends so well with multiple world religions to such an extent that they are mutually inclusive in the sense Bediako portrays above, one wonders if there is any need at all to convert to Christianity granted that one already believes in any of the other world religions.

2.6.2 An analysis of the movement from African reality to the Bible Christology

The discussion of African Christological construction in this section exposes the influence the methodological assumptions of Bediako and Nyamiti have on their Christological thought. The contention that biblical affirmations about Christ must be

validated by affirmations of other religions, especially African primal religions, informs their belief that biblical Christological concepts have corollaries in African primal religions.

Like the indigenous people of Southern Africa who could apprehend the Bible as a *bola* (West 2002), Bediako and Nyamiti think that New Testament concepts of Christ could be contextualized with African traditional religious concepts like ancestors, priest, king among others. Their starting point is arguably the African traditional beliefs.

This research does not intend to call into question the various concerns of Bediako and Nyamiti, among others, to make the Gospel or the person of Jesus Christ known and more understandable to African indigenous people. This is indeed a worthwhile task. However, the unusual "equivalence of biblical titles for Jesus in local languages and the resonance's of those equivalents" (Bediako 1998:110) raises the question as to whether the meaning that these African traditional concepts have in African religious worldview reflect the same person of Jesus Christ preached in the New Testament. What would the concept of spirit fathers mean to the New Testament proclamation of the high priestly activity of Christ in heaven? Is Christ's mediation similar to that of African ancestors? Would an African traditional religious practitioner agree that Jesus is his ancestor? Would the category of ancestor and traditional sacred chief facilitate an acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world in African traditional worldview?

This is why the Nigerian John Akao of the University of Ibadan, could write, "Much as the titles or some of them may help the reflection of the African as he or she struggles to relate the Bible to his or her community and existential circumstances, the fact remains that Jesus can not be seen to actually fit the picture painted of him". This makes, Akao continues, "the enterprise too philosophical to adequately address the stark reality of the theological needs of the African. The preferred analogies or anthropocentric models cannot meaningfully address the dual nature of Jesus, human and divine" (2002:341-343).

The root of the problem, as argued in the previous sections, is the methodological self-consciousness that ATRs do contribute and have the capacity to prepare Africans for reception of Christianity, and that ATRs have much in common both in concepts

and in terminologies with Christianity and the Bible. Perhaps Nyamiti is less sympathetic to African traditional worldview than Bediako. For Bediako, not only do African Traditional Religions provide the tool for understanding Christian thoughts about Christ, they among other religions validate Christian claims. In the light of this conviction, one cannot agree more with Maluleke that it is not as though African Traditional Religions were waiting to be fulfilled by Christianity (1997:216). One could say the same of Christianity: Christianity was not, and is not a body of traditions waiting for African Traditional Religions or other world religions for its fulfilment. Christianity is an independent and essentially separate religion with its own thoughts, philosophy and purpose in this world from African Traditional Religions (Maluleke 1997:216). To the culture and society of the researcher, Christianity is a rival religion to African Traditional Religions. In a situation such as this, is it still possible that African traditional beliefs can accept Christ as their ancestor, priest, chief, master initiation, among other images?

The concern of Bediako, among others who take the above approach to Christology has been self-consciously to present Christ in such a way that he could meet the needs of the Africans. The question is does his Christology really meet those needs? What are the needs of Africans? Are Africans' needs African Christian identify? How does an African brand of Christology or the notion that Jesus is an ancestor address the problem of hunger, destitution, poverty, HIV/AIDS and genocide committed by the very African Christian brothers and sisters, or convert more Africans to Christianity (Maluleke 1997:217)? The prevalence of some of these situations calls into question the quality of African Christianity after the cold war.

If relevance is the reason for the emergence of an African ancestral Christology, then with the publication of Maluleke's essay (1998:324-340), African theologians would need another approach to Christology or another Christological idiom. As an African Christian, one does not yet see the much that an "African" Christology or African brand of Christianity for that matter would accomplish if their present forms are not revisited. It has been argued that African Christianity is confusing and distorting the Christian Gospel more than it clarifies (Maluleke 1997:218-219). Nyamiti admits this. Reflecting on the achievements of African Christologies, Nyamiti says "With exception, perhaps, of Black Christology in South Africa, none of the existing African Christologies has had any appreciable influence in the life of the African churches"

(1998:18). If this is the case, it will be useful, as a way forward, to search again from Scripture, the best way of presenting Christ to the Africans. In the light of this, the next section will explore the movement from the Bible to African reality approach to Christology.

2.6.3 From the Bible to African reality Christologies

The previous section discussed the approach to Christology, which has as its starting point, African traditional worldview. It was argued that this hermeneutical point of departure led African theologians like Nyamiti and Bediako to their conclusions about the person and work of Jesus Christ in the African context. This section will discuss those Christologies that take the approach to Christology of a movement from the Bible to African reality. The point of departure here is the New Testament teaching about Christ. In this approach, African theologians seek to confront the New Testament teaching about Christ with African traditional religious worldview. It is worth noticing that certain terms and concepts from African traditional religious worldview are employed in the Christological construction of African theologians taking this approach to Christology, just as they were employed by Nyamiti and Bediako. However, the difference here is that it is the New Testament that provides the epistemological lenses with which these African theologians seek to locate Christ in African traditional worldview, and not the African traditional worldview that shapes their understanding of Christ, as it was the view in the previous approach.

Judith M. Bahemuka, a sociologist and former chair of the department of Sociology at the University of Nairobi, Kenya (1998:1-16) argues "Jesus is our ancestor". She uses the term "Elder Brother" for her analogical Christology. Bahemuka thinks that, since "the African is a child of God", Jesus as a senior child of God becomes the African's elder brother. Contending with Nyamiti (1984:12), Bahemuka says, "Christ is our ancestor because He is our Brother, the spoken Word" (1998:13). She further asserts that Christ reveals himself in African beliefs through symbolism (1998:13). The presence of Christ, Bahemuka continues, can be discovered through African religious symbols like "saliva" and "water" which, according to her, symbolize fire and cleansing respectively (1998:13). However, it is not clearly explained how the presence of Christ could be seen in those "religious" symbols.

For the Kenyan theologian Douglas Waruta (1998:40-53), a one-time secretary of Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa, Africans "understand Jesus in the context of their own religious consciousness" (1998:40). The context, Waruta maintains, is their search for a Jesus that would play a "mediatorial role" between "humanity and divinity"²⁴ (1998:40-41).

In African traditional worldview, says Waruta, mediation between "humanity and divinity" requires three religious figures for it to be accomplished. This involves a prophet, a priest and the sacred king ruler, or a potentate widely accepted for such a duty (1998:41). In a similar manner Christ, being a mediator is a priest, prophet and king, Waruta contends that He fits well into the religious thought category of the Africans, thus Christ's three offices of King, Priest and Prophet blend well with the idea of a priest, potentate and prophet in the religious worldview of Africans. Therefore, to him, Jesus is prophet, king, priest and potentate of the Africans.

This particular perception of Christ will hopefully, do justice to his work, according to Waruta, "that is often neglected in traditional Christologies" which often emphasize only his person. Waruta says, "In our attempt to understand Christ as prophet, priest and king as a key to an African Christology, the work of Christ rather than his person will have priority" (1998:42; cf. Bediako 1984:103-104). The king, prophet, priest Christology, Waruta believes, will "translate Jesus Christ to the tongue, style, genius, character and cultures of the African people" (1998:45).

A prophet in African traditional worldview, Waruta says, is known by several names; sometimes the prophet is called a "diviner" sometimes as a "revealer of secrets" and at times he or she may be referred to as "possessor of spirits" (1998:46). But in each of these roles that the prophet plays, according to Waruta, he or she occupies an important position in the religious lives of his or her people because he or she is regarded as responding spontaneously to the needs of the community either through healing, revealing some secrets for them or through interaction with the divine during rituals.

Since in Waruta's view, Jesus performs similar functions in the religious lives of his believing community, the Christian perception of Jesus as a prophet and the African perception of Jesus as a prophet "blend well" (1998:48). As a priest, Waruta says that

²⁴ Compare the Decandancy analogy in Nyamiti's Christological construction.

Jesus is "seen as the medium through which the life giving power of God comes to man" (1998:48). He further asserts that the priest in ATRs "contains within him the 'life force', which he uses to mediate for his people". For this reason, Waruta says that Africans go to the priest with living hopes that their fears about particular witches and sufferings will be given proper attention. The priest, Waruta further explains, makes sacrifices to appease God to intervene in life situations of the religious believing community that the traditional priest serves (1998:48). Since it is the belief among Christians that Jesus is a priest who offered sacrifice and mediates between Christians - most especially that Christians pray to God through him - Waruta believes that Jesus is a priest per excellence for the Africans (1998:51-52).

The Ghanaian Pobee (1979:79-102) did not use the analogy of priest, prophet or king for Jesus. However, he perceives Jesus in terms of his Akan traditional worldview as a healer, who sometimes exercises some supernatural powers tapped from the "supreme being" for healing (1979:92). With the "antisocial" and "harmful" perception of sin in the Akan worldview and society, Jesus as the expiator of sin and the repairer of broken relationship "blends well" with the Akan traditional worldview of a healer, Pobee contends.

However, Pobee asserts that to take such an analogical approach to Christology, two problems will be faced: (i) in the Akan worldview, both the healer and the healed at one point or the other did sin, where as Jesus at no point sinned; (ii) Jesus has the divine power always in him while the traditional healer only has an "occasional experience" of similar divine power (1979:93). Seeing this incompatibility, Pobee resolves, "Our approach would be to look at Jesus as a "Great Ancestor" which in Akan language is called *Nana* (1998:94). In Pobee's construction, Jesus has power over living Africans, but also their ancestors, the whole world including "cosmic powers" which Pobee refers to as "spirit beings" (1979:94). Furthermore, Pobee says Jesus is closer to God than the other cosmic powers and ancestors; hence, he is superior to all other powers that reside on earth (1979:94). Therefore for Pobee Jesus as a Great Ancestor must be seen as God (1979:94). What is not clear about Pobee's Christology is whether it is possible to solve the two problems he identifies confront any attempt to portray Jesus Christ as ancestor by simply referring to Jesus as Great Ancestor? The problem here is not the hierarchy of ancestors in the realm of 'spirits

fathers', but whether the category of ancestor is not an illusionary analogy to its referent, Jesus Christ.

Pobee also think of Jesus in terms of the Akan *Okyeame* who he says is a "linguist" that serves the Akan community, in public matters, as a "Chief, God and as the first officer of the State" namely, the world (1979:95). This conviction leads Pobee to contend that Jesus, as *Okyeame*, reflects the portrait of Jesus in Johannine literature as the "*Logos*" (1979:95). The *Okyeame* as a *logos* in Pobee's Christology is sometimes human, and, therefore, subservient to God, and sometimes he is divine and so, God himself. Pobee also thinks that a portrait of Jesus as a chief or the *Okyeame* in Akan traditional worldview would help clarify the concept of Jesus' incarnation, in that, as the sacred chief or *Okyeame* is just as human as his or her subjects, so Jesus shares common humanity with the rest of humanity (1979:95). He, however, admits that the priestly role of Christ is both here on earth and in heaven but that of the Akan *Okyeame* is only on earth. Pobee further stresses that the priestly sacrificial role of Jesus on earth is salvific. But that of the Akan *Okyeame* or chief is not salvific (1979:95).

Finally, Pobee believes that as the Akan chief is the head of his community so Jesus is the head of his believing community (1979:96). However, Pobee admits that there is a great deficiency in the comparison of the chief as head of his African community and Jesus as the head of the Church analogy. He argues that regrettably the "chief analogy is dangerous because it is a *theologia gloria* lacking a *theologia crucis* [*my italics*]" (1979:97). This means that, in the Akan traditional worldview, the chief derives his sacred power from a "supreme upper", the power that he exercises only on earth without any pains, whereas Christ's glorification was one attained through suffering. Therefore, the Akan chief Christology, in Pobee's view is only very loosely analogous to the New Testament portrait of Christ and his work (1979:97; cf. Nyamiti 1984), which is missing - especially the aspect of the Cross - in Akan chief Christology.

Reflecting on the differences between Akan mystical Christology (discussed above) and the person of Christ, Pobee says "the latter is a fact of history", while the former is not (1979:98). Hence, Pobee like Nyamiti (c. Section 2.6.2) admits that those African Christological constructions are illusionary and superficial. As Mbiti rightly observes, "one must here safeguard against a nationalistic view of Jesus, thus reducing him to fit into an atonal image, whether Greek, German, African, or Asia"

(1972:58). Mbiti sounds this warning because he believes that the biblical titles of Jesus do not and cannot properly bear any relevance to African traditional religious worldview. So Mbiti writes that "these major titles of Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Man have no special relevance to the traditional African concepts" (1972:58). Mbiti further contends that some of these Christological titles in the Bible are either "historically rooted" or are "bound up with the Jewish eschatological hopes" and hence, do not have direct "parallels in African thought forms, histories and traditions" (1972:58).

However, Mbiti thinks that some of the biblical titles like "Son of God" the "Servant of God", and in a sense, the concept of "Saviour or Redeemer" have relevance to African traditional background and could convey some meanings to Africans (1972:58). He argues that the concepts of "Father – Son" in the Godhead is common to Africans. An example of such is the Shilluk of Sudan, who refers to their king as the "first born of God". A similar example could be seen, says Mbiti, in the Bokina Faso Dogon tribe's concept of *Nommo*, the Son of God (1972:58).

The concept of "Lord" also finds a corollary in the thought forms of the Africans, says Mbiti. This is so, Mbiti argues, because "it is not difficult to make contact with traditional thought forms in considering the title of Lord (*kurios*) as applied to Jesus" (1972:59). The reason is that those African traditional societies that have rulers like chiefs and kings already have a background idea of lordship. This is because in these societies those rulers are sometimes called lords, Mbiti, maintains. He further emphasizes that for such societies, the idea of God as Lord or Master is not foreign, so Christ as Lord will never be strange to them (1972:59).

For Mbiti, the God of the Bible is the God that is known in African Traditional Religions (1992:21). Therefore, he believes that it is possible and legitimate to explore Jesus in ATRs because Jesus Christ is God and could be known wherever God is known and this includes ATRs. For Mbiti, Jesus is the "property of the church and we cannot find full portrait of him in the Old Testament" (1992:22). He contends that we can only interpret certain Old Testament passages as pointing to Jesus but Jesus is taught explicitly only in the New Testament. Just as he is hidden in the Old Testament, so Mbiti says, Jesus is hidden in ATRs' God. Mbiti admits that one cannot seek to find full portrait of Jesus in ATRs either. A faint knowledge about him can be

found in ATRs but this cannot reflect fully, the person and work of Jesus as they are explicitly taught in the New Testament (1992:22-29).

Mbiti (1973) further maintains that Africans perhaps experience "our savior" radically in the "capacity of his myth and mystique" than they would if they had a historical grasp of Jesus and a spiritualized conception of salvation. Mbiti sees Christ here as a deliverer from evil powers (Parratt 1995:79). Similarly, from his Togolese background, John Penoukou (1991) argues that Christ as the mediator between God and the whole of creation is the liberator of human beliefs from fear of evil spirits. Therefore, for Penoukou, Christ is the God who is ontologically in solidarity with the human destiny.

2.6.4 An analysis of the approach to Christology of a movement from the Bible to African reality

Compare to the previous approach, this approach to Christology makes contributions that are more meaningful to African Christian thoughts. Perhaps the reason is their methodological starting point and assumptions. They do not assume as African theologians in the other approach assume, that Christianity is essentially an African religion (cf. Bediako 1984, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, with Maluleke 1997, 1998). Hence, they do not attempt to argue as though African traditional worldview do in and of themselves contain Christian Gospel latter to be fulfilled by Christianity. Although African Christological constructions of some African theologians discussed in this approach employ African traditional concepts of ancestors and priest among others, their purpose for such a theological activity varies from the earlier approach. It is not to incarnate Christ in African traditional religious experience, but to illumine the understanding of Africans about the person and Work of Jesus Christ. Mbiti's approach to Christology is worth emulating. Where African concepts of Christ do not exist, he does not attempt to fuse New Testament concepts of Christ into African traditional religious concepts like ancestor, priest etc. Bahamuka would need to revisit her use of ancestor, king and priest to explain the New Testament teaching about Christ's work of redemption. For as Mbiti argues, these African concepts are arguably not the concepts of Christ. They do not fully describe the person and work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament as Akao have argued (2002:342-343). Hence, it will be misleading to say that Jesus is Africans' Elder Brother, ancestor, or Chief. These

concepts mean different things for Africans than they would for the New Testament. Should the category of ancestors and elder brother confuse more than clarify the Africans' understanding of Christ, it will be better not to employ them in Christological reflections. If any thing, one would take Mbiti's approach to Christology.

2.7 CONCLUSION

Despite the differences in approach to Christology of African theologians, there is a common understanding among them: the emphasis on the African situation (religious experience, suffering and political independence). There is a unanimous agreement among them that there should be a new way of doing theology in Africa that is different from the European and American traditional way of theologizing. The crux of this concern is the quest for a theology and Christian Gospel that is relevant to the needs of the Africans. Viewed from this standpoint, Christology is just one aspect of the whole quest for African Christian identity and selfhood.

The discussion of African Christology in this chapter reveals that some work remain to be done if the present Christological constructions in the African context could adequately reflect the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and if they are to meaningfully address, as intended, the saving needs of the Africans. The present efforts, as was pointed out in the previous sections, are commendable, but they need a new starting point and hermeneutical assumption in order to reflect adequately, the Christ of the New Testament. This calls for a revisiting of African hermeneutics advocated by Dar' es Salaam and Ghana which are currently been employed in the contemporary African Christological construction. Therefore, the problem that needs addressing with respect to African Christological discussions is a hermeneutical one. It is the question of how to relate the Christ of the New Testament to the Africans. This leads to the question of whether the African situation should play a key role in the Christological developments in Africa or the New Testament. Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, it can be argued that the situation of the African plays a key role in the Christological constructions of contemporary African theologians. This chapter discussed inculturation Christologies. The next chapter will begin the discussion of the second aspect of African Christologies namely, the liberation aspect with Black Christology.

CHAPTER THREE

JESUS' CROSS AND HUMAN SUFFERING IN BLACK CHRISTOLOGY

While Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross plays a key role in the New Testament, the notion of suffering plays a key role in Black Christological reflections in South Africa.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In section 2.5, it was mentioned that Nyamiti classifies African Christologies into i) African inculturation Christologies and ii) African liberation Christologies (Nyamiti 1998:17). The last chapter discussed the former. This chapter will discuss one of African liberation Christologies namely, Black Christology in the South African context. Since Black Christology is a liberation Christology,¹ this chapter will discuss

¹ The South African black theologian, Allan Boesak described Black Theology as a theology of liberation and argued that it is not only part of the Gospel, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself (1978b:76). This being the case, Black Theology, he argued, "takes seriously the black experience, the black situation". He emphasized that "Black Theology believes that in Jesus Christ the total liberation of all people has come. It refuses to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the narrow, racist ideology white Christians have made of it. Black Christians cannot believe that the last word about Christianity is that it is a 'white man's religion', a 'slave religion' designed for the oppression of the poor" (1978b:76). Black Theology was also regarded as voice for the black people of South Africa, hence, Boesak claimed it was "cry unto to God" on behalf of the people (1978b:76). Among questions that Black Theology sought to address was the question of "how can one be black and Christian? What has faith in Jesus Christ as Lord to do with the struggle for black liberation?" (1978b:76). Attempts to answer the above questions formed the content of Black Christology in the South African context. Among issues that Black Theology sought to address was the question of black answers to black questions, hence, a quest to extradite Black Theology from White Theology during the struggles for black liberation in South Africa (1978b:76). Boesak argued that since the Gospel in South Africa was distorted by white ideology, "Black Theology knows that it is not only people who need to be liberated; the gospel too, so abused and exploited needs to be liberated" (1978b:77). Thus, as in African Christology, Black Christology also sought a break away from Western ideology in methodology, content of theology and hermeneutic in order to liberate God, the Bible and Jesus Christ from the abuses of the white during apartheid. It immediately becomes clear that the situation of the suffering of the oppressed blacks in South African played a key role in the Christological constructions of Black Theology.

it from the perspective of the blacks' struggle for liberation under the apartheid era. The chapter will attempt to expound how black theologians related Jesus Christ and his Cross to the situation of suffering caused by oppression and injustice during apartheid. This implies that Black Christology in the South African context cannot be understood meaningfully without an adequate understanding of the context within which it emerged. Therefore, this chapter will also attempt to explore the socio-political context within which Black Theology emerged,² a theological trend that opened up the whole debate about who Jesus Christ is to the oppressed black South Africans. The next section will discuss the context of Black Christological thought in the South African context.

² Black Theology in South Africa have roots traceable to North American Black Theology identified with the work of its American founder, James H. Cone of Union Theological Seminary, New York. Boesak argued that Black Theology in South Africa is related to Black Theology in the USA (1978b:77). He said that "Not only has there been a black theology as long as white Christians have been preaching to blacks, but there have always been strong ties between some churches in South Africa and the United States confirm this" (1978b:77). However, he maintained that "One of the major differences between black theology in South Africa and that in the United States is one of background: In contrast to the U.S. blacks, South Africans have almost no historical documents from the hands of blacks themselves with regard to black history and black theology" (1978b:79-80). Mokgethi Motlhabi, one of the founding fathers of Black Theology project in South Africa argued that there are numerous similarities between Black Theology in South Africa and Black Theology in the USA. He said: "black South Africans recognized that the situation addressed through Black Theology in America was very similar to their own and hence, if Black Theology proved meaningful there, it could equally be adapted to produce fruits in South Africa" (1986:46). He believed that the situation of blacks in the USA then was similar to what the situation of black South Africans during apartheid. What characterized the situation of the two groups was oppression and the message of Black Theology in USA and South Africa was the need to "set the downtrodden free" (1986:46). Black theologians in South Africa agree on the point that the name Black Theology was imported from USA, but the content and specific situation of Black Theology in South African is different from Black Theology in the States.

A substantial literature on Black Theology in South Africa, and the historical roots of Black Theology in South Africa with Black Theology in the USA exist as the following works suggest: Moore, B. (1973) (ed). *The challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* Atlanta: John Knox Press. This book is a collection of essays (mostly authored by South African theologians) introducing the Black Theology project (as it was then called) and its relationship with the North American Black Theology. Boesak's (1976) *Farewell to Innocence* Braamfontein: Skotaville is a social political interpretation of the system of injustice in South Africa during apartheid and the role of Black Theology therein. His *Black Theology and Black Power* (1978a) is similar in content to his *Farewell to Innocence* but with more emphasis on the connection between Black Theology as a theology of resistance and Black Power as a quest for blacks' participation in the political governance of their State. James H. Cone's ground breaking book, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) Maryknoll: Orbis Books is a general introduction of Black Theology. His *God of the Oppressed* (1975 repr. 1997) argues that God is the God of liberation, and the Bible (Exodus) preached God as being on the side of the oppressed; the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of liberation for the oppressed. James Cone and G. Wilmore (1979) (eds.) *Black Theology: A Documentary History* is a collection of essays written by Third World theologians. Desmond Tutu's article in this volume argues that African Theology and Black Theology are soul mates and not antagonist (pp 76-98). There are other materials too but the above are good for a start for readers who might be interested in Black Theology. The rest of the discussion in this chapter will focus mainly on Black Christology and Black Theology will not be discussed in detail.

3.2 THE CONTEXT OF BLACK CHRISTOLOGICAL THOUGHT

No work done in Black Christology could make perfect sense without an overview of the political and social context within which it developed. As the black South African theologian, Takatso Mofokeng rightly observes, the various theological trends that have emerged in South Africa are products of the "interventions of social forces and events" (1989:38). These social forces and events, he continues, "have evidently succeeded to redirect theological thinking or even radically alter theological agendas and priorities and introduce new ones which occupy positions of priority until the next forceful intervention by other social forces and processes" (1989:38). Black Christology for one is a theological product of the intervention by such social forces and processes. Therefore, any deliberate attempt to discuss Black Christology in South Africa must inevitably include the historical and social forces and processes that contributed to an emergence of a Black Christology in South Africa.

If one is to take the words of Russel Botman of the University of Stellenbosch seriously, one will note that "nothing academic has a future if it does not consider history" (2000:105). Work done in Black Christology cannot be an exception. The Ghanaian African theologian, Pobee argues for a similar position when he contends that "Christology in Africa cannot exist meaningfully without the social context" (1992:17). The African American feminist, Jacquelyn Grant (1992:68-71) and one of the leading South African black theologians, Allan Boesak (1978:11-13) identify the social context of Black Christology as the blacks' experience of oppression and the struggle against it.

It is with the above inspiring observations that this research attempts a survey of the social, political and religious circumstances that culminated in the black liberation struggles that gave rise to Black Theology from which Black Christology evolved in South Africa. In the following section the various black struggles against which the emergence and development of Black Theology in South Africa should be understood will be explored.

3.2.1 The socio-political context of Black Christological thought in South Africa

A glance at South African history (political and religious) will reveal the frequent reference to the Afrikaners' belief in a divine calling (Van Jaarsveld 1977:16). This sense of divine calling on the side of the Afrikaners marked the beginning of South Africa's political journey that culminated in the political legitimization of apartheid in 1948, an ideology that Black Theology criticized as a heresy.

John de Gruchy reported that Ignatius of Antioch declared in the second century: "heresy is the denial of the simple truth about Jesus Christ" (1983:81). Since then, De Gruchy maintained, heresy came to mean for Christians, "the distortion of the truth revealed in Jesus Christ and something that not only leads to division within the church but also to a false witness in the world" (1983:81).

Similarly, the former Archbishop Desmond Tutu argued that "apartheid, separate development, parallel democracy, or whatever this racist ideology is currently called is evil: totally and without remainder" (1983:39). Tutu believed that "the Bible reveals that God's intention for all his creation and for all humankind is harmony, peace, unity, fellowship, friendship, justice and righteousness – conditions summed up in the almost untranslatable Hebrew word 'shalom'" (1983:39). Since apartheid, Tutu contended, denied blacks of all the above, it denied not only this biblical truth, but "more astonishingly denies the central act of reconciliation which the New Testament declares was achieved by God in His son, Jesus Christ" (1983:40).

For Tutu, reconciliation is arguably "the sum of our Lord's ministry and achievement. To deny that He effected this is to deny not just a peripheral and fairly insignificant Christian truth, but the heart of the Christian message" (1983:40). Therefore, Tutu contended that apartheid is a heresy because it denied the above biblical truth. Tutu's conviction about apartheid is summarized in the following words of his: "For my part, its [apartheid] most vicious, indeed, its most blasphemous aspect, is not the great suffering it causes its victims, but that it can make a child of God doubt that he is a child of God. For that alone, it deserves to be condemned as a heresy" (1983:46-47).

While black theologians like Tutu condemned apartheid as heresy, some theologians within the white circles defended apartheid on biblical grounds. John de Gruchy traced the then South African English speaking churches' journey with apartheid

following its inception in 1948, pointing out various church statements that supported and defended apartheid in South Africa (1983:75-93). Russel Botman is more specific in his analysis of the church's journey with apartheid in South Africa. In an essay "The Church Partitioned or the Church Reconciled? South Africa's Theological and historical Dilemma", Botman explored the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa's journey with apartheid.³

It will be useful to our study, in the light of what has been said above, to explore some major developments within South African history that culminated in apartheid - the ideology of separate development that sparked both socio-political and theological crises in the South African context. Such an exploration will provide major insights into the various theological debates in South Africa of which Black Christology in South Africa is an integral part.

The work that immediately comes to mind is the exploration by the Afrikaner historian, Van Jaarsveld of the Afrikaners' understanding of their calling to South Africa since the beginning of the 19th century. This understanding, Van Jaarsveld says, marked the beginning of South African historical and theological dilemma (Botman 2000:105).

Van Jaarsveld (1977:16) reports that at the beginning of 19th century, the Afrikaners perceived a sense of divine calling to bring Western civilization and Christianity to the *Bantu* (people) of Southern Africa. He notes that this idea of a "calling" was not new in the 19th century. He asserts that, as it was the case with other European nations, North America and Russia, the Afrikaners of South Africa too were inspired by the conception of a 'special destiny'. This special identity, Van Jaarsveld maintains, developed into "a historical legend" and a "national ideology" (1977:16-17).

To fulfil their perceived calling, Van Jaarsveld reports that the Afrikaners in the 19th century embarked on an inward penetration of the Bantu lands, a move known as the Great Trek. Beneath the Great Trek was the idea that the *Boers* (farmers of Afrikaans

³ For a more detailed discussion on the use of the Bible in apartheid-theology, see Smit (forthcoming, "Rhetoric and ethics? a Reformed perspective on the politics of reading the Bible", 17 hereafter Rhetoric and Ethics?); see also Johann Kinghorn (1986), and a comprehensive comparison of the use of the Bible in apartheid theology and Black Theology by J.A. Loubser (1987). In this research, the focus is on the use of the Bible, and specifically the salvific meaning of the person and Cross of Jesus Christ according to the *Sola Scriptura* principle, in Black Theology as an anti-apartheid theology, a theology that arose in the struggle against apartheid. There is, however, a vast literature available on the (mis) use of the Bible in apartheid theology, as these works demonstrate: Vorster, W.S. (1984b), Smit, D.J. (1991).

race) are like the Israelites of the Old Testament with a specific calling by God. The blacks are the children of Ham and therefore the Canaanites. In addition, the British who opposed the Great Trek were to the Boers, the "Pharaohs of Egypt –and so the Exodus to the Promised Land was undertaken in the Great Trek" (1977:17). Also in the Great Trek, the "emigrants" Boers, says Van Jaarsveld (1977:17), "exterminate and enslave the non-whites so as to possess themselves of land".

The South African president Thabo Mbeki laments the situation with a Marxist historical interpretation of it. He traced the reason for the Great Trek and the subsequent seizure of land by the Boers back to the European capitalist ideology of the 19th century in the following way:

And there we have the reason why Europe carried out this early accumulation at home and abroad with such merciless enthusiasm and passion – because the process assured men of property stupendous and immediate profit. Brought up in this European hothouse of rapine, the settlers in South Africa could not but continue this process in their colony. The result was that when England abolished the slave trade in 1834, nearly two centuries after the arrival of the first batch of slaves, the descendants of the original colonists rebelled against this decision. Judging themselves too weak to re-impose slavery by arms, the Boers resolved to take themselves out of the area of British jurisdiction. Thus, began the so-called Great Trek of the Boers into the interior of our country. Of course, all along, the Boers were determined that again they would have to seize our land and livestock and enslave our people. We see therefore that the methods and practices of primitive accumulation which represented a transitional phase in the development of capital in Europe, assumed permanence in the South African economy and life-style of the Boers. They acquired a fixity characteristic of feudal society, legitimised by the use of force and sanctified by a supposedly Calvinistic Christianity (1978:1).⁴

It is little wonder then, that black theologians like the former Archbishop Desmond Tutu could look at this whole process of disinheritance leading to separate development as a heresy.

Next to the land issue was the political factor. Van Jaarsveld says that the Afrikaners secured political domination over English-speaking and black South Africans. It was after the Second World War that the Afrikaners faced heavy opposition from the black population of Southern Africa. Van Jaarsveld further contends that after the

⁴ "The Historical Injustice", A Speech delivered by Thabo Mbeki as member of the National Executive Committee of African National Congress, at a Seminar held in Ottawa, Canada, February 19 to 22, 1978. See www.anc.org.za viewed 2003/10/25

Second World War, there was a remarkable change that "crumbled the foundation of security beneath the feet of the Afrikaners". The Afrikaners realized after the war that the "non-whites had weight of numbers and that a concession of 'one man one vote' which the other side of the world claim could lead to a black South Africa" (Van Jaarsveld 1977:23). To decisively deal with the threat that a black South Africa might emerge, an ideology known as *apartheid* was declared by the government of the then National Party in 1948 (Van Jaarsveld 1977:23; Motlhabi 1988:1, 12).⁵

Through apartheid, Motlhabi reports, South African society was divided hierarchically into four major population groups according to their different shades of skin colour. Whites occupy the top rank, followed by 'Coloureds' and Indians in the middle, with Africans at the bottom of the ladder (1988:1, 12-13).

The principle of separate development, according to Van Jaarsveld (1977:23-24), became the *modus operandi* whereby whites were separated from blacks. This ideology of separate development brought untold hardships to Africans. Motlhabi (1988:11-15) reports several laws were made for the blacks. Blacks living in urban areas were turned into labourers of the Boers and many, because of old age, or for other reasons, were removed from urban areas to places designated as "homelands" and their urban "homes bull-dozed to prevent lingering". Among such legislations was the "Pass law". Under the pass law, blacks had to seek permission and receive a pass before they could visit places designated "Whites Only" (Motlhabi 1988:17).

There was much opposition on the side of the blacks. On 21 March 1960, many blacks marched in protest against the pass law in Sharpeville. De Gruchy reports that about 69 blacks were shot dead by the police and many others wounded (1979:62). He notes that the apartheid government because of the Sharpeville massacre (De Gruchy 1979:62) also declared a state of emergency. Under the state of emergency thousands of blacks were arrested; many were jailed, including former president Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe. This event, according to De Gruchy, was the decisive turning point in the history of South Africa (1979:63).

After the Sharpeville incident, there was the 1976 student demonstration in Soweto, where many children between the ages of eight and eighteen took to the streets to

⁵ Motlhabi (1988:1) described apartheid as a legalized form of racial discrimination. It advocated the separation of people at all levels of society on the basis of skin colour.

protest against the education policies of the apartheid government. Many of these students, as reported, were killed and imprisoned.

The death in prison of Steve Biko in September 1977 was another important point that generated serious opposition to the apartheid government around the globe (De Gruchy 1979:63-68). At the Universities, the South African Students Association (SASO) and the University Christian Ministries (UCM) were organized opposition movements against the apartheid government (Leatt 1986). The SASO and UCM launched what was then known as the "Black Consciousness Movement" that created awareness on the part of the blacks as to what constitute their humanity and dignity (Biko 1978; Boesak 1976, 1978). It is argued that the black response to black oppression led to the Black Consciousness Movement among University black students, on the one hand, and to the theological articulation of black resistance in Black Theology among seminarians, on the other (cf. Munga 1998:238-240).

It was widely believed among South African blacks that colonial missionary Christianity brought the "prevailing alienation of the black man and his activity from God and also alienation between God the creator of man and the black man and his society" (Mofokeng 1983:14). The task of UCM was to criticize this theology of alienation and to create a new theological language for the Christian community of the poor and oppressed in South Africa (Mofokeng 1983:14-17). To execute this task effectively, UCM established a Black Theology project under its main body in 1971 (West 1991:37). The Black Theology project came into being as a "cultural tool of struggle" organized as a structural force of the young black South Africans who were deeply influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement ideology identified with the late former University of Natal medical student, Steve Bantu Biko (West 1991:37).⁶

The target of the Black Theology project was churches. The goal was to challenge the churches to action because the perceived silence of the churches was seen as contributing to, or reproducing, the basic inequalities imposed by apartheid ideology, thereby, deepening the hardship of the poor and oppressed (West 1991:38). Young blacks who entered theological seminaries and Christian churches under the Black

⁶ On the surface, it may seem that the formation of SASO and UCM was simply an attempt to bring South African students and student Christians together. But this was not the case. The formation of these two organizations, or at least, the SASO was motivated by a deliberate and organized attempt by their founders to resist the then prevailing black oppression. In other words, SASO and UCM were instruments of resistance. For details, see Leatt, J. et al., eds. (1986). *Contending Ideologies in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Theology project with the above inspiration for liberation sought a break away from "foreign theological language" (Mofokeng 1983:14) and dependence and so became critical of Western theology and Christianity in their entire theological career. Their various activities within the Black Theology project grew into a structural theological forum, later to be called Black Theology. Hence, the argument that SASO and UCM produced Black Theology in South Africa.

In the next section the activities of Black Theology as a theological weapon for the struggle for liberation will be discussed as a context of Black Christological thought in South Africa.

3.2.2 The theological context of Black Christological thought in South Africa

While the aforementioned political opposition to the policy that put in place inequalities among South Africans was intensifying, the church had to seek to come to terms with the gospel truth that Christ's death liberates 'all'. The blacks had to seek to know if in the midst of their oppression, there was any basis for hope for their liberation (Maimela 1992). This was the beginning of a theological dimension, says Bediako (1997:426), to the struggle for political and social transformation of the conditions of inequality and oppression in South Africa.

This dimension came to be known as *Black Theology*. Within the contours of Black Theology, theodicy, the justification of God amidst human suffering (Louw 2000:9) emerged. Theodicy became the pivot around which the whole question about the relevance of Jesus' Cross to the suffering of Africans rotates. Black Christology was aimed at dealing with the question of how Jesus' Cross fits into the "equation" (Nolte 2000:35) of black people's experience of suffering, on the one hand, and the Soteriological significance of Jesus' Cross to the Africans on the other. To address this issue, Black Theology developed a hermeneutic that could aid it in retrieving anew, the message of the Bible that could sufficiently address what was being experienced in South Africa (Kairos Document 1985:1). As it was argued in the previous chapter, hermeneutic played a key role in the development of Black Christology in South Africa. The next section will explore the main discussions in the hermeneutic of Black Theology in the South African context to inquire how hermeneutic was employed for

the development of Black Christology of liberation in the then struggles for blacks' liberation.

3.3 BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF LIBERATION IN BLACK THEOLOGY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

It is already clear from the previous sections that the socio-political crises in South Africa impelled black theologians to inquire about the Jesus Christ for blacks' liberation in South Africa (cf. Boesak 1976, 1978; Pobee 1992). The deepening socio-political crises also impel us, says the Kairos Document, to return to the Bible in search for a message that is relevant to the black situation in South Africa (West 1991:31).

In other words, the socio-political crisis in black Africa called for not only a new method of doing theology, but also for a new method of biblical interpretation that could retrieve a new message in Scripture relevant to the poor and oppressed black South Africans. The Kairos Document described the then South African state of affairs with the following words:

The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations, and there is every indication that the crisis has only begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the Church and all other faiths and religions (1986:1).

As West notes, this socio-political crisis inevitably led to historical, theological and interpretive crises (1991:31).

As it was seen in section 3.2.1, Van Jaarsveld (1977:16-28) reports of the South African historical crisis which began with the Afrikaners' understanding of his calling that eventually led to the Great Trek and its numerous political consequences. West notes that the historical crisis in South Africa was still evident after the reforms of the 1990s in the "struggle between 'Prophetic Theology' on the one hand, and 'State Theology' and 'Church Theology' on the other hand" (1991:31). In the light of what Van Jaarsveld and West have observed, from the perspective of hermeneutics, it is useful to agree with West that "as important as it is to hear the call to return to the Bible, it is equally important to recognize that a crucial part of the South African crisis is an interpretive crisis" (1991:31).

One begins to gain some insights into the nature of this interpretive crisis, especially when one understands the role the Bible played in the historical, socio-political and interpretive crises in South Africa during apartheid. This is expressed more clearly in a summary form in an anecdote well known in black South African circles. The anecdote, which first appears in Mofokeng, goes: "When the white man came into our country, he had the bible and we had the land. The white man said to us 'let us pray'. After prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible (*sic*)" (1988:34). Both young and old among the black people know this story, Mofokeng reports.

He further asserts that in this anecdote black people in South Africa, both young and the old, point to three dialectically related realities: first, they show the central role that the Bible played in the then ongoing process of colonization, national oppression and exploitation. They also confess, Mofokeng claims, "the incomprehensible paradox of being colonized by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting the Bible, their ideological instrument of colonization, oppression and exploitation". Lastly, they express the historical commitment, says Mofokeng, "to terminate disinheritance and eradicate exploitation of humans by other humans" (1988:31).

A closer look at the Kairos statement, the anecdote and the three realities to which the anecdote points reveals that the historical, socio-political and theological crises that were experienced in South Africa inevitably led to, and shaped the interpretive crisis in South Africa.⁷ This is because, in these crises, the Bible is said to have provided the

⁷ Reflecting on the state of affairs with respect to biblical scholarship in South Africa, Dirkie Smit, now of the University of Stellenbosch writes: "Reading the Bible has been very controversial in South Africa's recent history. This has also been the case in, and to large extent because of, Reformed churches and theology. During the last days of the struggle against apartheid, the Bible was sometimes called 'a site of struggle'" ("Rhetoric and Ethics? A Reformed Perspective on the Politics of Reading the Bible," 17).

Writing in the context of apartheid, Mofokeng (1988) echoed the same sentiments as Smit when he argued consistently that the Bible can be a problem for people who indeed want to be free because it is a site of struggle. Mosala (1989) also contended that the Bible is torn asunder just as the South African society was torn asunder during apartheid. In a situation such as this, Mosala argued that the whole Bible cannot be claimed for liberation as Black Theology would think. Seven years later, Maluleke (1996) re-iterated that looking at the way the Bible has been appropriated in Africa, it is difficult to argue consistently that it can fully be appropriated as the 'Word of God' in the sense Black Theology seems to have done. The above references attest to the truth that the act of reading the Bible in Africa, especially in South Africa has been a "political activity" (Smit, Rhetoric and Ethics?, 1).

grounds for the justification of all ideologies - black, white, oppressed and oppressor - that deepened the crises.⁸

Two groups are identified in the South African context that played key roles in the various crises experienced in the region: the white dominant colonial/missionary oppressors (cf. Mofokeng 1988), on the one hand, and the black oppressed peasants on the other hand. Both whites and blacks played crucial roles in the interpretive crisis unlike in the socio-political crisis where the blacks were mostly on the receiving end of oppression and exploitation as well as disinheritance (Mbeki 1978). Whites and blacks, in the interpretive crisis, played crucial roles in that they both engage in what Cox calls "the age-old hermeneutical class struggle" which Mofokeng describes as a "struggle to resist and contest the interpretation of Scripture by theologians who represent Christianity of the dominant race and political orders" (1988:39).

In South Africa, the white "academy" represented, broadly speaking (because not all whites South African biblical scholars belong to this group), theologians of the dominant race and political order. Black Theology represented the oppositional Christian group of the oppressed black masses. As West argues, a "crisis of interpretation within any tradition eventually becomes a demand to interpret the very process of interpretation" (1991:31). Hence, there is need to interpret both the process of interpretation expressed in the white academy and in Black Theology in South Africa. It is beyond the scope of this chapter and essay to discuss in detail the history and nature of biblical scholarship and interpretation in South Africa.

Therefore, this work will attempt, briefly, to outline the interpretive *ethos* in the (mostly) white academy as Dirkie Smit introduces it. The purpose will be to set the stage for a more viable exploration of the interpretive crisis in black South African circles. The next section will offer an overview of biblical interpretation in the mostly white academy, a school of biblical interpretation that sought to respond and interpret the reading of the Bible for the purpose of legitimization of apartheid ideology in the then South Africa.

⁸ Compare the following works: West (1996:21-41, 1997:99-115), Maluleke (1996:3-19), and Mofokeng (1988:34-42).

3.3.1 Biblical hermeneutics in the white academy

As West notes, Smit offers an incisive analysis of biblical scholarship in the white Reformed circles, "the dominant form of biblical scholarship in South Africa" (1991:32). Smit's analysis consists of three periods. A period of biblical scholarship and the legitimization of apartheid;⁹ a period when a deliberate movement was started in white Reformed circles to read the Bible with socio-political purposes; and lastly, a period during which methodology became all important, and hardly any attention was given to ecclesial, theological and socio-political interpretation (Smit 1990:29).

Responding to W.S. Vorster, a late professor of biblical studies, University of South Africa in Pretoria, Smit addresses the question as to whether this "new social awareness represents a paradigm shift in scholarly method and ethos or not" (1990:29). He contends that Thiselton, Tracy, Wuellner and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (the first two from the tradition of hermeneutics and the last two from rhetorical criticism), biblical scholars from the USA, argue persistently for a value-based biblical scholarship. They maintain, says Smit, "biblical scholarship is not or must not be value free kind of scientism". Rather, it should be of a "responsible, life-oriented human praxis that is conscious of its own socio-political role and frictions of power" (1990:29).

Smit argues that this socio-political hermeneutical conviction also finds its roots in South African biblical scholarship (1990:29). He notes that a movement was started in white Reformed circles to read the Bible with socio-political purposes within the fifty years preceding the democratic election that put Nelson Mandela in power in 1994. During that time, the crucial concern within the white Reformed academy was to read the Bible for the purpose of the legitimization of apartheid (1990:30). In the words of Smit:

The need arose at that stage to legitimate the growing socio-political reality of *apartheid* or separate development, not only because of the important role of religion and especially the Bible in society, but also because of the fact that some theologians, like Ben Marais and the late B.B. Keet, explicitly denied the biblical basis of apartheid. Since the beginning of the forties, several theologians, biblical scholars, church

⁹For detail studies on the use of the Bible in apartheid theology, see Johann Kinghorn ed. (1986:211-234) for Afrikaans readers. For studies in English, a good reference material on the subject will be J.A. Loubser (1987).

leaders and church meetings contributed to provide such theological legitimation (1990:30).

Most important about this 'reading' of the Bible to legitimize apartheid was the view then in the Reformed academics that *Reformed* meant *biblical*. This implied a Reformed legitimization of apartheid meant a biblical legitimization, Smit reports (1990:30).

With such a conviction as described above, one begins to see the central role the Bible played in the then "ongoing process of colonization and exploitation" (Mofokeng 1988:34). West explains this last point when he maintains that the socio-political crisis experienced in South Africa inevitably led to an "interpretive" crisis in the South African context (1991:30). Again, not all "socially engaged" (West 1999:49-66) biblical scholars within white Reformed biblical scholarship read the Bible to legitimate apartheid.

Smit reports that among Afrikaner circles there were also biblical scholars who read the Bible socially to criticize the legitimization of apartheid ideology (1990:29-43). He writes: "The interesting fact is that this present criticism of what I have called a first phase of overtly socio-political scholarship is exercised in the context of a criticism of apartheid, and its theological legitimization" (1990:31).

The point Smit argues is that both those who were critical of the apartheid style of reading and those who read the Bible to legitimate apartheid read from "the view point of a new socio-political ethos" - similar to the perspective of Tracy, Thiselton, Wuellner and Schüssler Fiorenza from the USA (1990:29). Hence, he argues that it is not new that South African black theologians use the Bible to support the struggles for liberation during apartheid era.

In the light of what is said above, it becomes clear that the different perspectives involved in the socially engaged reading in the South African context deepened the interpretive crisis in the region before, during, and after apartheid.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is interesting to note as Smit reports that Willem S. Vorster (1983:94-111) argues that both those who read the Bible to defend apartheid and those who read to criticize it read and use the Bible in the same way, "according to self-same paradigm" (Smit, *Rhetoric and Ethics?*, 18). However, Vorster further explains that the political values of defenders of apartheid ideology and anti-apartheid propagandists were different, in that the readings of the two groups were characterized by a *for* and *against* apartheid readings. In the thoughts of Vorster, pro-apartheid and anti-apartheid apologists both acknowledged that there is a Bible with a message and that this message is still relevant and could be appropriated to church and ethical issues today. For this reason, Vorster wants to argue that there was

In the next section this chapter explores the interpretive strategies from within Black Theology of liberation. This is referred to as a biblical hermeneutics of liberation of Black Theology in South Africa.

3.3.2 Biblical hermeneutics of liberation of Black Theology in South Africa

The use of the Bible to legitimate apartheid in the white circles raised questions among South African black youths as to why they should read the Bible at all, as it was regarded by them as the ideological weapon of colonization and disinheritance of the white oppressors (West 1991:33-34). Meanwhile, Black Theology, which represented the voice of the poor black South African masses, had the Bible as its weapon of struggle for liberation of the black oppressed in South Africa (Mofokeng 1988:34-38; West 1991:34). However, as the Kairos Document states, the deepening political crises in South Africa made the black theologians to cry out for a return to the Bible to read anew from it a new message for the liberation of black peasants in South Africa (West 1991:34). For Black Theology, not only the black masses that needed to be liberated, but also, the Bible and the Gospel of Christ needed to be liberated from the abuses of white theology during apartheid (Boesak 1978:77).

As West observes, Mofokeng's interpretation of the well-known anecdote indicates two dialectically related interpretive crises within Black Theology: first, the historical crisis where, the "focus is on the role of the Bible in South African history both as an instrument of social control and an instrument of social struggle" (West 1991:35). John de Gruchy's *The Church's Struggle in South Africa* deals precisely with the historical perspective of this crisis. Secondly is the methodological crisis where the focus is "on the biblical interpretation and the Bible itself as both a problem and a solution" (West 1991:35). Mofokeng elaborates on this last point when he contends

something in common in the readings of defenders of apartheid and anti-apartheid strugglers. Vorster, however, it seems, overlooked the fact that the two groups understood the message of the Bible differently. With the publication of Mosala's "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," (1986) Mofokeng's "Black Christian, the Bible and Liberation" (1988), and Maluleke's "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from own Wells" (1996), it is clear that the message of the Bible, or even the Bible itself meant different things for pro-apartheid and anti-apartheid apologists. Smit puts it better: "What was at stake, was the political reading of the Bible, the question what the Bible is, to which polis it belongs, and according to whose and which presuppositions it could be read, if at all, in fact, if it was – still – meaningful to talk of 'the' Bible in any way" (Rhetoric and Ethics?, 18). The two groups mentioned above approached these issues differently.

that the "Bible in the contemporary religious paradox: the paradox of racist oppression and exploitation of black people by white people is both a problem and a solution" (Mofokeng 1988:34-36). The problem is that, he continues, "the overwhelming number of people from both races are Christians who swear on the bible (*sic*) and pledge allegiance to Jesus the Messiah and his teachings" (1988:39). According to Mofokeng, when blacks saw that the Bible was being used to "pacify" black resistance to oppression, to justify white supremacy over black slaves, they realized more and more that the Bible itself was "indeed a serious problem to people who want to be free" (1988:37).

It is little wonder, then, in the light of what Mofokeng reports, that black people of South Africa in the midst of these comprehensive historical and interpretive crises sought after an alternative method of biblical interpretation that could equip them to read anew, the message of Scripture relevant to what they were experiencing in South Africa.

In the midst of these crises, methodology became very important - the problem of how the Bible could be interpreted in Black Theology circles so that it could become a truly liberating force in the black community (Mosala 1986, 1989), knowing that the Bible itself was a "problem for people who want to be free" (Mofokeng 1988:37). The question of how to read the Bible in such a way that it could serve as a liberating force for the black working-class peasants within the Black Theology circles posed a methodological crisis within black biblical scholarship. Where some resorted to a literary reading of Scripture for the purpose of liberation, with the conviction that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, others criticized that approach as serving only the interest of the oppressor and opted for a historical materialist reading of Scripture (Mosala 1986, 1989).

Boesak, for example, led the group of black theologians that viewed the Bible as the 'Word of God'. He sought to locate the liberation of the oppressed blacks in South Africa in the text of the Bible (West 1991). Mosala (1986, 1989), Mofokeng (1988), and later, Maluleke (1996) argue that the notion of the Bible as the 'Word of God' did more harm than good in the course of struggle for liberation of blacks in South Africa. As a remedy, Mosala called for an alternative method of hermeneutic: the historical materialist reading of Scripture which sought to read the Bible sociologically by locating the black struggles from behind the text of Scripture (West 1991). Boesak

and Mosala represented different but related modes of reading the Bible in the Black Theology circles: the literary and the historical materialist readings of the Bible for black liberation.¹¹ An important point to note in the two readings is the stress on the reader in liberation hermeneutics.¹²

3.3.2.1 *The literal reading of Allan Boesak*

Black Theology finds one of its major expressions in South Africa in the works of a black Reformed theologian, Allan Boesak, a cleric of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa. He contended that liberation of the oppressed blacks is proclaimed in Jesus Christ (1976:14). Writing on Black Theology, Boesak said that "Black Theology believes that liberation is not only 'part of the gospel', it is the content and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1976:14).

For Boesak, Black Theology arose out of the community of the poor and oppressed blacks. Therefore, he contended, it takes the situation of the poor and oppressed seriously (1976:14-15). For Boesak the theology of liberation is "not a new theology, it is simply the proclamation of the age-old gospel, but now liberated from the deadly hold of the mighty and the powerful and made relevant to the situation of the

¹¹ Gerald O. West (1991) has done an extensive work in analysing the different modes of reading the Bible in the South African context in his work, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. What is presented in this chapter is a brief overview of the methodological crises within the South African black circle that inform black Christological thought in Black Theology of liberation.

¹² It has been argued that a "number of related theoretical and pragmatic factors have turn the focus onto the relationship between the text and the reader" in contemporary contextual hermeneutics (West 1991:42). This has given rise to a hermeneutical process that involves investigation into the nature of i) the world behind the text, ii) the text, iii) and the world in front of the text. An investigation into the world behind the text includes identifying the kind of speaker, the kind of audience and the socio-cultural situation that produced the text. Smit (Class notes, December 2003, 16-18) says that a thorough socio-cultural investigation help build an image of the world of that time of the text formation. It also, Smit asserts, "help us to build up an image of the dynamic *process* – historical and social- which were in operation, within which the speaker and the audience functioned but of which they were *unaware*. If we understand this social and historical dynamic, we could possibly even understand matters much 'better' that the speaker and the audience understood it themselves!" An investigation of the text has to do with attempt to understand in what literary genre the text is written, this is necessary because it believed that "the genre determines the way in which the words must be written" (Smit 2003:10). This also includes an investigation into the historical questions that the text raises. Such questions include: is the original correct and complete text? What are the intentions of the author(s)? The grammatical questions may be what do the words, expressions and sentence mean? (Smit 2003:13). An investigation into the world in front of the text involves an inquiry into how the text was received. What were the circumstances within which the written text was received? In other words, the world in front of the text describes the tradition within which the text originated, the influence of the text's history which together with the tradition that brought the text constitute the "framework within which the text is understood" (Smit 2003:22). These three parameters of the interpretive process will form the framework of the hermeneutical arguments of this work.

oppressed and the poor" (1976:15). By this Boesak intended to say that liberation itself was the "gospel" for the poor and oppressed blacks in South Africa. Thus, he believed that "the God of the Bible is the God of liberation" (1976:15).

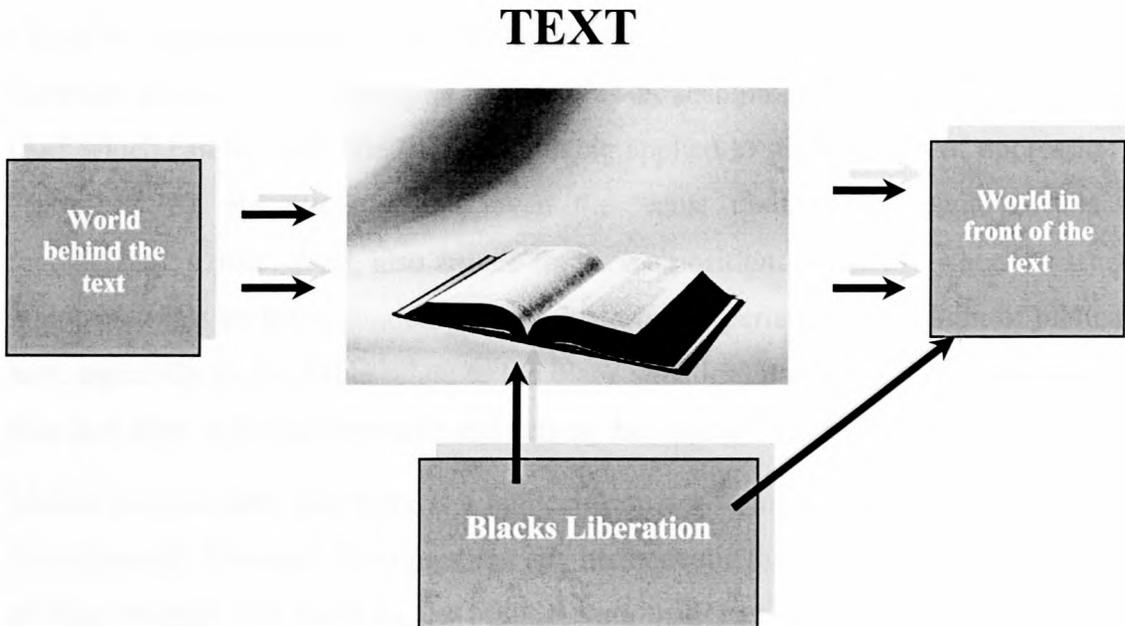
Since God, according to Boesak "reveals Himself in a situation", he maintained, "the Word is being heard in the situation, thereby giving meaning to the situation". This meant that the Bible (the Word of God) gives meaning and makes sense of the situation of the oppressed. Hence, Boesak believed that "the black experience provides the framework within which blacks understand the revelation of God in Jesus. No more, no less" (1976:16).

This revelation of God in Jesus, Boesak argued, is manifested in the situation of black experience. Therefore, for him, the situation of blacks' experience is the epistemological starting point of Black Theology (1976:17). This is because Black Theology, he argued, "seeks to interpret the gospel in such a way that the situation of blacks will begin to make sense" (1976:17).

Beginning with the story of Exodus, Boesak believed that the Bible is essentially a book of liberation. He wrote, "Nothing is more central to the Old Testament proclamation than the message of liberation" (1976:20). Boesak contended that "God's history with Israel is a history of liberation. Yahweh's great act of liberation forms the content of the life and faith, the history and confession of Israel. As a liberator, Yahweh has revealed Himself to Moses and Israel, and by this name He wants to be evoked for all generations (Ex 3:15)" (1976:24). Boesak went on to argue that the Exodus event is as central to the Old Testament as resurrection is to the New Testament (1976:20). He notes that the "Exodus event was the beginning of the proclamation of God's love to His people. This love of God is proclaimed throughout the Old Testament" (1976:20-21).

Black Theology takes its inspiration from the Exodus event. Thus, Boesak asserted, it "refuses to let go of the truth that one cannot speak about God's love without also speaking of his righteousness, his justice, which became concrete in his relation to human beings and the relations of people among themselves" (1976:21). Boesak concluded that "God's righteousness and love became manifest in his deeds of liberation" (1976:21-22).

In summary, Boesak identified black experience of oppression with the experience of Israel in the Exodus event. He identified black liberation with the liberation proclaimed by God in the Exodus event. Therefore, Boesak located blacks' liberation in the text and in front of Scripture as can be illustrated as follows:



Mosala thought this hermeneutical process only helped to promote the interest of the white hermeneutic. As a way forward, he thought that a historical materialist hermeneutic was more capable of serving as a material force for blacks' liberation in South Africa. In what follows, his materialist interpretation will be explored.

3.3.2.2 The historical materialist reading of Mosala

Mosala presupposed the contribution made by Black Theology to human knowledge in general but to the black struggle for liberation in particular (1986:176). Nevertheless, he took up issue with Black Theology for not "taking its own criticism of white theology seriously enough" (1986:176). For Mosala, the fact that Black Theology "exposed the cultural assumptions of white theology" showed its link with white values and so, it "exploded the [same] myth of rational objectivity in theology" as white theology, but especially with respect to Black Theology's use of the Bible (1976:176).

Mosala argued, "Black Theology's exegetical starting point expresses itself in the notion that the Bible is the revealed 'Word of God'". The task of black theologians,

Mosala note, would then be to recognize "God's Word to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world" (1986:177).

For Mosala, Black Theology's notion of the Bible as the 'Word of God' implies "there is such a thing as a non-ideological appropriation of Scripture" (1986:177). He argued further that while black theologians condemn white people's view of God and Jesus Christ as transcending political ideologies, they inconsistently maintain a view of Scripture similar to white people: Scripture as an absolute, non-ideological 'Word of God' which can be made ideological by being applied to the situation of oppression" (1986:177-78). He regretted that even the "most theoretically astute of black theologians", Cornel West, also argued for such a position, especially when the latter maintained that an interpretation of black historical experience in the light of biblical text, especially as the Bible relate to the black situation, presumed the "biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed and acts on their behalf" (1986:178).

Mosala did not deny that there is a biblical truth according to which God sides with the oppressed. However, he argues, "as any hermeneutic that derives from the crucible of class struggle will attest to, the biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed is only one of the biblical truths". The other truth, he continues, "is that the struggle between Yahweh and Baal is not simply an ideological warfare taking place in the minds and hearts of believers, but a struggle between the God of the Israelite landless peasants and subdued slaves and the God of the Israelite royal, noble, landlord and priestly classes" (1986:178). This being the case, Mosala argued, it is clear that "the Bible [itself] is as rent apart by the antagonistic struggles of the warring classes of Israelite society as our life is torn asunder by the class divisions of our society" (1986:178).

He argued that the notion of the Bible as the 'Word of God' carries the implication that the Bible cannot be criticized. This would mean that even the "law and order God of David and Solomon cannot be the object of criticism in the light of the black experience". The black struggle, according to the notion that the Bible is the 'Word of God', cannot, Mosala asserted be hermeneutically connected with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited Israelites against the economic and political domination of the Israelite monarchic state which was eulogised by the ideology of the Davidic-Zionist covenant (2 Samuel 7) (1986:178). One asks whether black theologians' use of the Bible as the 'Word of God' carries that import.

Mosala argued that the attempt by black theologians to claim the whole Bible in support of Black Theology is misdirected since it ignores, he asserted, the result of biblical scholarship over the last century that is rooted in ruling class ideology. Mosala referred to the "activity on the part of dominant classes of society by which they seek to establish hegemonic control over other classes through a rationalising universalization of what are in effect sectional class interests" (1986:179).¹³ Thus, the insistence on the notion that the Bible is the 'Word of God,' Mosala argued, "must be seen for what it is: an ideological manoeuvre whereby ruling class interests in the Bible as in our society are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual and economic divisions". In this way, Mosala continued, "the Bible becomes an historical interclassist document" (1986:180).

Drawing on the Latin American liberation theologian, Sergio Rostagno, Mosala concluded that the church has always been the church of the bourgeois theology and exegesis. It is therefore, his emphasis, "a tragedy that rebel theologies like Black Theology and Liberation Theology should adopt uncritically the biblical hermeneutics of bourgeois theology". Mosala alluded to Rostagno and maintained, "Bourgeois exegesis shows the sterility of its historicism" (1986:180). This is because, Mosala asserted, the belief in the Bible as the 'Word of God' is "*pro-humanity* but anti-black working class and black women" (1986:180).

For Black Theology to become a "material force capable of gripping the black working class peasant masses", Mosala, insisted that it needs a new exegetical starting point (1986:181). He asserted that such a starting point "needs to be rooted in the kind of epistemology that underlies the words of Marx and Engels when they declared: "The task of history therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to

¹³ Elelwani Farisani, an Old Testament scholar at the University of Natal's School of Theology made a similar argument in his critique of Villa – Vicencio (1992) and the Kenyan Jese Mugambi (1995) for their uncritical use of the Ezra-Nehemiah text in quest for a theology of reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa and after the cold war respectively. Farisani argues that the Ezra-Nehemiah text is not value-free and must not be appropriated as though it is a non-ideological and apolitical text (2003:30-69). He backed up his argument with the view that an ideology exists behind the conflict between the returned exiles and the *am haaretz*. Farisani argues that a "careful reading of the text of Ezra-Nehemiah demonstrates that there is a contestation between at least two groups, namely the returned exiles and the *am haaretz*" - the people of the land - Israelites who did not go to exile (2003:30). It follows, his emphasis, "therefore that if Ezra-Nehemiah is to be used in a theology of reconstruction, it should not be used as representing the voice of one group i.e. that of the returned exiles. The suppressed voices of the *am haaretz* have to be heard as well." Farisani regrets, "Unfortunately Villa-Vicencio's use of Ezra-Nehemiah suppresses the voice of the *am haaretz*, in that he neither identifies nor analyses critically the ideology within the text, an ideology which is biased against the *am haaretz*" (2003:30). He makes the same arguments against Jese Mugambi.

establish the truth of this world" (Mosala 1986:181). Hence, Mosala maintained, "The social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a Black Theology of liberation" (1986:181).

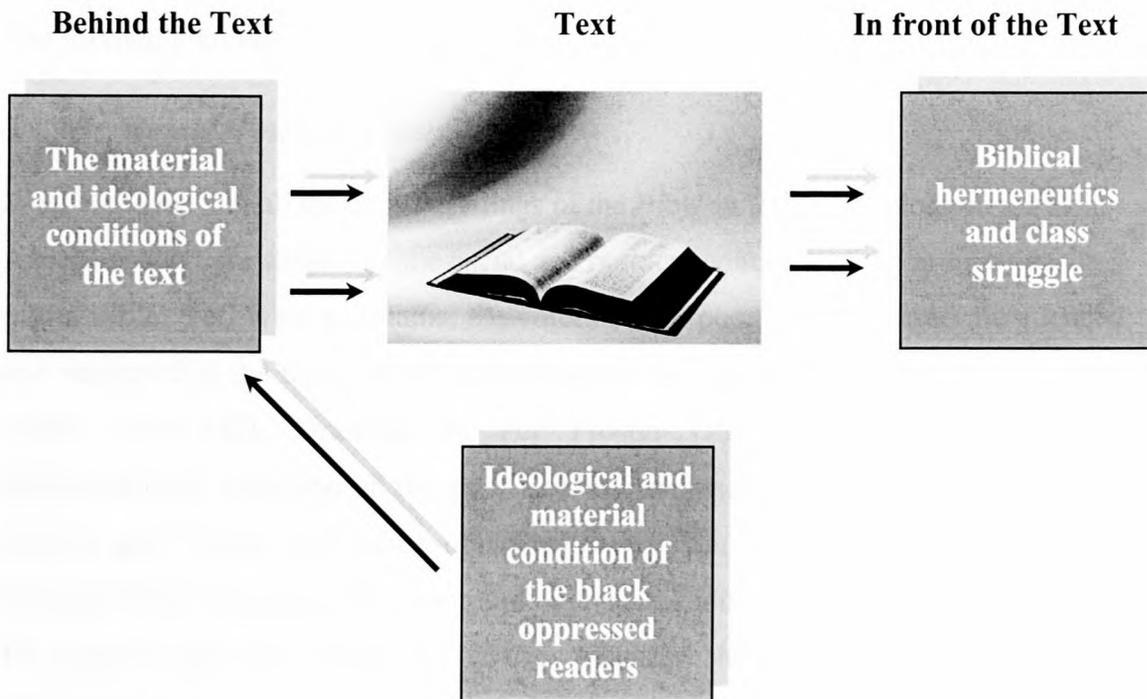
Drawing on Marx and Engels, Mosala argued that Black Theology for its part "will have to rediscover black working class and poor peasant culture in order to find for itself a materialist hermeneutical starting point" (1986:185). He then developed a materialist hermeneutics as an alternative to Black Theology's hermeneutics that based its arguments on the notion that the Bible is the revealed 'Word of God'.

Mosala stated that "the most basic concept of a materialist approach is the mode of production" (1986:186). By the mode of production, he meant the combination of forces and relations of production. Forces of production refer to the means of production like land, cattle, trees, raw materials, tools, and factories, plus human labour. The relations of production, Mosala explained, refer to the places occupied by people in the process of production. He added that "The nature of these places is determined by the nature of the division of labour in the society". Whether there are classes or not in the society depends on "whether the process of production is characterized by a social division of labour or not" (1986:186).

Mosala suggested that any approach "that seeks to employ a materialist method must inquire" into the following: i) the nature of the mode of production, ii) the constellation of the mode of the classes necessitated by that mode, and iii) the nature of the ideological manifestations arising out of and referring back to that mode of production (1986:187). In developing a materialist hermeneutics, Mosala suggests the following points for consideration:

1. Material conditions of the biblical text
2. Ideological conditions of the text
3. Material conditions of the biblical reader
4. Ideological conditions of the biblical reader
5. Biblical hermeneutics and the class struggle
6. The historical-cultural specificity of the class struggle and the biblical hermeneutics - toward a black theology of liberation

Mosala proceeded and developed a historical materialist hermeneutics from the book of Micah (1986, 1989). The argument of Mosala was that before the Bible could be claimed in support of blacks' liberation, one needed to first inquire about the world behind the text. In other words, Mosala located black liberation behind the text of Scripture. The following illustrates his argument:



It is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate the materialist hermeneutic of Mosala and the literal hermeneutic of Boesak. It is worth noticing, however, that Boesak's literally reading enabled him, and those for whom he spoke, to see Scripture as revealing Jesus as the liberator of the oppressed people of South Africa. Boesak was also able to read of the meaning of liberation in Scripture. However, it is to be seen how Jesus could be the liberator of the oppressed, given the tools needed to employ the materialist reading of Scripture. Again, one sees the influence the situation of the reader has on his or her Christological and hermeneutical conviction. From the perspective of Dar' es Salaam, both Boesak and Mosala rejected the Western "gospel" and method of doing theology. This is seen in their hermeneutical conviction. They were both convinced that given the situation in front of the text, it was not possible to continue to understand the Bible, God, Jesus Christ and the Christian Gospel in white terms. While Boesak sought to redefine and reclaim the Gospel from the abuses of tradition, Mosala rejected this tradition through what may be referred to as

hermeneutic of suspicion, which led him to question the legitimacy of claiming the whole Bible in support of liberation. This implies that Mosala did not only question the tradition within which the biblical text was received in the black South African circles, but also was suspicious of some biblical text, arguing that they serve only the interest of the oppressors. Mediating between Mosala and Boesak's readings is the proposal of a white Anglican biblical scholar at Natal University, Gerald O. West. The following section will outline his proposal.

3.3.2.3 *Gerald West's proposal*

West contends that all the above readings of the Bible in Black Theology in the South African context are shaped by the social and political concerns of the ordinary readers of the Bible. Yet, West maintains, the voices of the poor and oppressed are silenced and neglected in the three modes of readings in the South African context discussed earlier (1991:142). Drawing on Per Frostin (1988), West argues for an epistemological privilege of the poor and the oppressed. In a paper he read at a Science and Vision conference organised by Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, West insists that "the poor and oppressed cannot and will not be ignored".¹⁴ He suggests that we recover the past by "reading" the Bible within at least three parameters i) the ideological nature of the biblical text, ii) accountability to ordinary readers of the Bible in present communities of faith and struggle in South Africa, iii) continuity with the ordinary people in the past communities of faith and struggle in and behind the biblical text (1991:143-163; Sc. and Vision Conf.:3; 1992:4; 1991s:87-110).

Like Mosala and Mofokeng, West argues, "Whether one stands within a mainstream biblical studies, or within a liberation paradigm, or within a post-modern perspective, the ideological nature of all interpretation and all texts, including the Bible, is impossible to dispute" (Sc. and Vision Conf.:3). He agrees with Gustavo Gutierrez (1973) from liberation hermeneutics, and Michael Foucault from post-modernism, among others, that "absolute objectivity and neutrality is impossible."¹⁵ West notes, "The influence of reader-response criticism in biblical studies, the commitment to an option for the poor and oppressed in the liberation paradigm, and the consensus in the

¹⁴ "Recovering the Suppressed Past and Reconstructing the Future: Historical Consciousness in biblical theological Liberation Hermeneutics.

¹⁵ West did not define what he means by post-modernism.

post-modernism that there is no epistemologically privileged position, variously challenge us with the voices of the poor and oppressed. The poor and oppressed cannot and will not be ignored" (Sc. and Vision Conf.:3, see also his argument in 1991:140-180).¹⁶

West argues that the decision to grant an epistemologically privileged position to the poor and oppressed is ethical. Given the post-modern shape that the situation of the poor and the oppressed takes, West argues, it will be out of place to think that the option for the poor and oppressed is an epistemological question and not an ethical one, as Frostin argues (1988:6, West Sc. and Vision Conf.:2-3).

Hence, West holds, "there are no objective and universal grounds on which to grant the poor and oppressed an epistemological privilege; rather the decision to grant the poor and oppressed an epistemological privilege is an ethical decision" (Sc. And Vision Conf.:3). However, he does not state the objective and universal grounds upon which the ethical decision to opt for the oppressed is based. Rather, he argues that "Whereas Western biblical and theological hermeneutics would see such a decision as too particularistic, liberation hermeneutics embrace the particular historical consciousness of the poor and oppressed". (Sc and Vision Conf.:2). He pitches tent with Welch (1995) and argues that such a choice is an "ethic of risk" but adds quickly, "from a post-modern perspective, the risk lays not in having made a particular choice, but in taking sides and standing in solidarity with marginal communities." This is because, for West and Welch, "those who choose to stand with the universal humanity tend to stand with the status quo and an 'ethic of control'" (Sc. and Vision Conf.:2-3). West argues in favour of liberation hermeneutics and insists that the "epistemological privilege" of the poor and oppressed is his starting point.

Therefore, he identifies two moments of the poor and oppressed in liberation hermeneutics. They are "continuity and accountability to present communities of the poor and oppressed" (Sc. and Vision Conf.:2). Within the matrix of continuity and accountability, West attempts an exploration of the role of historical consciousness in liberation hermeneutics from two perspectives. First, he does so from the perspective of "the role of the suppressed or subjugated historical consciousness in the development of biblical tradition". Secondly, he does so from the perspective of "the

¹⁶ But if there is no epistemologically privileged position, what is the basis for granting an epistemologically privileged position to the poor and oppressed?

place of subjugated historical consciousness in the development of a constructive hermeneutics for a transformed South Africa" (Sc. and Vision Conf.:2).

With the above proposal West attempts to replace what is "missing", according to him, in his South African context: the "voice(s) of the poor" or the voices of those whom he calls "the ordinary reader" (1991s:87-110). In an essay, "The relationship between Different Modes of Reading (the Bible) and the Ordinary Reader" (1991s:87-110), West provides what he calls an "interface between the trained reader and the ordinary reader". Put in another way, he explores the "responses of ordinary readers to the different modes of reading emerging from biblical scholarship" (1991s:87). Hence, West proposes that liberation hermeneutics should take place within the parameters of ideological nature of the biblical text, continuity with past and present communities of faith from behind the text and accountability to the present communities of faith (1991, 1991s, 1992).¹⁷

Methodologically, West suggests that we begin by identifying with ordinary readers of any given community of faith. He contends that ordinary readers of the Bible (at least a majority of them) read the Bible "pre-critically". This is because ordinary readers, West argues, have little choice in how they read the Bible (1991s:90, 1992:8-12). He further argues that ordinary readers in the South African context read the Bible pre-critically because they have not been trained "in critical modes of reading" (1991s:90). Regarding the relationship between the ordinary readers and 'experts' readers, West argues thus: "although there are important similarities between the modes of reading of ordinary readers and the modes of reading of 'expert' readers,

¹⁷ The terms "modes of reading", the "ordinary reader" and the relationship between the readings -- "behind the text", "the text" and "in front of the text" -- are not self-explanatory. Before one attempts any further exploration of West's proposal, it is important to first define briefly, what these terms mean. Modes of reading the text refer to the different sociological and historical readings of the biblical text. In West's categorization these readings would include reading behind the text, reading the text and reading in front of the text (1991s:88). The ordinary reader is used to allude "to the shift in hermeneutics towards the reader" (1991s:89). West uses the phrase "reader" metaphorically also to include "the many who are illiterate, but who listen to discussions and retell the Bible" (1991s:89). The term "ordinary" is used generally and specifically to include "all readers who read the Bible pre-critically" and to "designate a particular sector of pre-critical readers, these readers who are poor and oppressed (of course including women)" (1991s:89). The liberation paradigmatic shape of West's hermeneutical method gives the "particular usage precedence over the general usage" (1991s:89). The "relationship between" refers to the differences and similarities that exist between the ordinary untrained (non-persons) reader and the trained biblical readers (1991:139-141, 1991:89-91, 1992:5-10). The reading behind the text includes historical and sociological modes of readings. The focus here, says West, is "on historical and sociological reconstructions themselves". Put differently, "reading the text in the light of historical and sociological reconstructions" or, as in the case of Mosala (1989), a "particular historical and sociological analysis of method" (West 1991:88). Reading in front of the text focuses "on the themes of the biblical world produced and projected by the text" (1991s:89).

there are nevertheless crucial differences, namely, that ordinary readers read the Bible pre-critically, while the three modes of reading I have outlined are all critical (or post-critical) readings of the Bible" (1991s:90). In this way, West concurs with Mofokeng (1988) that the historical materialist mode of reading proposed by Mosala (1986, 1989) is too advanced for the ordinary working class peasants of South Africa.¹⁸ He uses the term ordinary readers sometimes to designate the poor and oppressed and the ordinary working class peasants (1992:10). He argues based on the results obtained from the research conducted by his Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) that ordinary people appropriate the Bible literary (pre-critically).¹⁹ They read the Bible in the context of their perceived reality, with commitment to the Bible community and to socio-political transformation (1992:10-11).²⁰

Emphasising the role of the ordinary reader, West suggests that for a proper understanding of how the ordinary Africans read, received and appropriated the Bible, we need to return to the early contact of the African indigenous people with the Bible in its formative years (2002a:23-37). He argues in this essay (2002a:23-37) that in the early reception of the Bible the Africans appropriated the Bible to their culture literally. West shows in that essay how the people of Southern Africa received the Bible as a *Bola* (see section 2.4.2).²¹

West and Frostin argue for the commitment to the past and present communities of faith (Frostin 1988:6-10; West 1991, 1991s; Sc. and Vision Conf.). For them the epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed, beginning with their view of

¹⁸ Compare a similar comment made by Maluleke (1996).

¹⁹ Responding to the view that "critical" is a Western concept and not an African concept, West argues that "critical is a Western concept in so far as it refers to the legacy of modernity, characterized by various forms of criticisms like critical thinking, historical critical biblical scholarship and so on" (2002b:147-148). If this is so, why is West using the concept critical to describe the way the ordinary Africans read the Bible? If the concept critical is understood as modern critical thinking and historical criticism that are obviously removed from African constructs and way of thinking, how could one imagine that Africans were to read the Bible critically? In addition, if this is not expected of Africans, then is it fair to say that they read the Bible pre-critically or un-critically? Can there be another way of describing African way of reading the Scriptures without necessarily using Western criteria to determine their ability and the lack thereof for reading the Bible? Just because Africans do not read the Bible critically in the Western sense of the word does not necessarily mean that they read the Bible literally.

²⁰ If ordinary Africans read the Bible in the context of their perceived reality, is it not to say that they are reading the Bible 'critically,' or better put, in an African 'critical' way? Perhaps they will raise questions as to what the texts have to say to their perceived realities. This is in a way critical thinking.

²¹ A *Bola* is a dice that the old indigenous Southern African people hang on their neck to enable them to see and predict the future. Since the Bible speaks about the future hope and life of the Christian, the Africans regarded the Bible as the Bola of the White man.

reality and their experiences, needs and questions, is the starting point for theological hermeneutics of liberation in Africa (West 1992:11). Hence, West proposes that the historical understanding of how the indigenous poor and oppressed people of South Africa received and appropriated the Bible is crucial for liberation hermeneutics in the South African context.

Since West opts for an interpretation of how the poor and oppressed in Africa read and appropriated the Bible in its formative years, he also argues that an African biblical hermeneutics should take place within the parameters of continuity with the past and present communities of faith. The present realities of the poor and the oppressed communities of faith should be linked, West suggests, to the realities of the poor and oppressed communities of faith silenced in the text, but retrievable through the 'behind the text' mode of reading (1991s:96). Thus, West contends that identification of the ideological nature of the biblical text is *sine qua non* for a viable hermeneutics of the poor and oppressed.

A reading behind the text is important to the poor and oppressed communities of faith in Africa because it helps, among other things, to check the abuses of the text by the poor and others, West asserts (1991s:90-96). He notes from the report of ISB that "it was felt that some knowledge of the historical and socio-political context of the text would empower the communities not only to interpret the text against their background themselves, but also to identify when others misuse the text against them" (1991s:96). He states, however, that the 'behind the text' reading require resources and training that the ordinary reader communities do not have. The danger is that the ordinary readers will have to depend on conclusions drawn by 'experts' with all the manipulations of the "outside expert input" (1991s:96).

According to the report, the reading of the text facilitates accountability to the ordinary readers. This is because reading the text "starts with the text as ordinary people know it, and would read the text as it is which is the way in which most ordinary readers read the text" (1991:142-163, 1991s:96, 2003:23-23-37; cf. Draper 2002:39-56). The reading of the text also, according to the report, encourages the critical reading of the Bible that will further discourage selective uses of the Bible among ordinary readers' communities and by their oppressors (1991s:97). One problem with the reading of the text is that there might still be a problem in engaging the communities of the poor with the text, especially as it may be difficult to

determine the relevance of the text to the contexts of the communities of the poor and the oppressed (1991s:97).

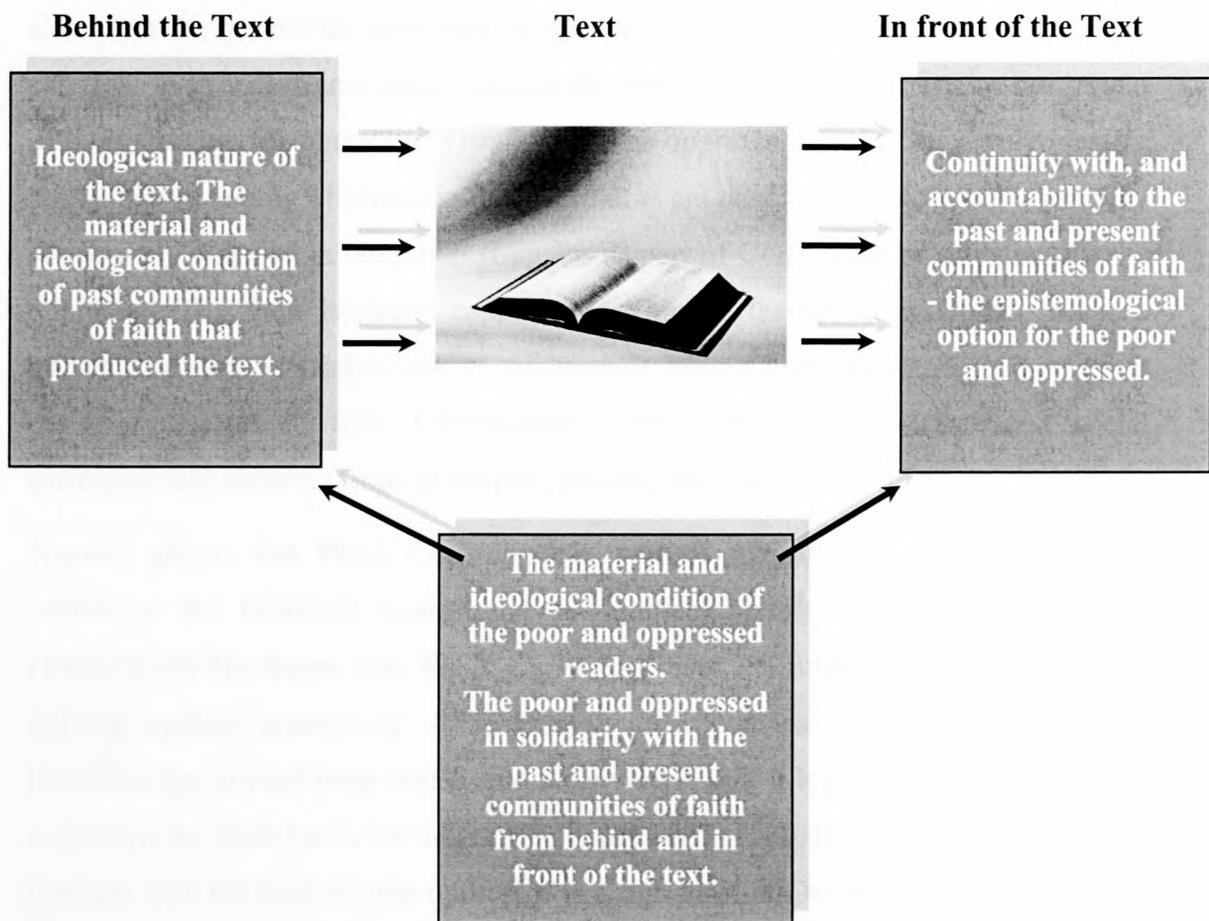
The reading 'in front of' the text encourages ordinary readers to concentrate on specific themes visible in the text. This facilitates easy appropriation of the text to the readers' context (1991s:98). The weakness of this mode of reading, says the report, is that unless the ordinary readers read the Bible as a whole, the 'in front of' the text reading selects themes in an isolated text and would not promote the dominant theme of liberation from the 'in front of' the text mode of reading (1991s:98). For continuity with the past and present communities and future reconstruction, West suggests that it is crucial to provide a discourse on the poor and the dominated through an interpretation that takes place within the parameters he outlined earlier.

As a way forward in the ongoing process of reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa, West believes (cf. Cochrane 1991:63) that "there is no hope where the memory of suffering is silenced, leaving 'traces of suppressed dialogue, festering in the bloodstreams of the social whole'" (Sc. and Vision Conf.:8). Therefore, He maintains:

At this time in our history, the church in South Africa is in need of a prophetic vision which goes beyond protest and which is prepared to be selective. Neither the Kairos Document nor the Road to Damascus really go beyond protest, yet our present situation calls for a prophetic vision of the future, which arises from and is constituted by the historical consciousness of the poor and oppressed. In the same way that the poor and the oppressed (including women) interpreters of the Bible have reconstructed or refurbished (Cady 1986:467) their Christian faith through the reconstruction, recovery, and arousal of their suppressed past, so too the suppressed past of the poor and oppressed (including women) in South Africa must play a significant role in the reconstruction of our society (Sc. and Vision conf.:9).

With the above point West contends that the task of the church (and by implication that of the biblical interpreter) is not only to identify and constantly remember the "dangerous memoirs" of the poor and oppressed subjugated people of Africa, but to also reconstruct them in hope for the future. Hence, West insists that biblical interpretation in Africa should take place within the matrix of accountability to the past and present communities of faith and the reconstruction for future communities of faith (1991, 1991s, 1992, 1996, 2002b).

Looking at West's proposal, one notices that he has placed the readings of Boesak and Mosala in a continuum: From historical materialist reading to literally reading. However, he has placed more emphases on the ideological condition of the text and attempts linking the condition of the poor and oppressed in South Africa with the poor and oppressed from behind and in front of the text. It is clear from his argument that he is more on the side of Mosala since he also contends that the Bible contains various ideologies, just as Mosala (cf. his three essays: 1991s, 1992, 2002b with Mosala 1986, 1989). Important to note in his liberation hermeneutics is the shift of focus from the text to the reader. His decision to give an epistemological option for the poor as his starting point in the hermeneutical process implies that the reader determines the meaning of the text in the hermeneutical process. Hence, like other African theologians, the situation of the poor and oppressed provides the tools for determining the meaning of the text. West's proposal can be illustrated as follows:



The next section will explore the Christological constructions and reflections of black theologians informed by the hermeneutical convictions discussed earlier.

3.4 THE CROSS AS THE BASIS AND PRAXIS FOR LIBERATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

It is true what the German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann writes, namely that "the Cross is not and cannot be loved. Yet only the crucified Christ can bring freedom which changes the world because it is no longer afraid of death" (1993:1). Similarly, the African people of colour could not have loved the Cross without locating meaning in their suffering as their Cross. The meaning they see in their Cross (suffering) is the liberating significance which the Cross of Christ bears on their current experiences. It is precisely this point that the American James Cone intends to underscore when he says, "Jesus Christ in his humanity and diversity is the point of departure for a black theologian's analysis of the meaning of liberation" (1997:127).

Cone sees the ground for liberation struggle in Jesus Christ. He writes: "Black people can fight for freedom and justice because the one who is their future is also the ground of their struggle for liberation" (1997:129). The oppressed blacks can rightly identify with God's economy of salvation in the Christ event despite their suffering when they are actively engaged in liberation struggles as part of God's work of salvation for the oppressed. This view is clearly expressed by Cone in the following words: "because human liberation is God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ, its source and meaning cannot be separated from Christology's source (Scripture, tradition, and social existence) and content (Jesus in his past, present, and future)" (1997:127).

Nyamiti asserts that Black Christology as part of African liberation theology put "stress on the historical background and biblical texts" concerning Jesus Christ (1998:28-29) He argues that Black Christology sees the mission of Jesus as that of fighting against oppression. Allan Boesak clearly states "the black struggle for liberation has always been rooted in the conviction that it is just for if God would be anywhere, he must be on the side of the oppressed" (1978:43). The solidarity, which God has with the poor and the oppressed is a sign that he is with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, Boesak (1978:43) maintains. He further contends, "In Jesus Christ, the total liberation of all people has come" (1978:10). From such a conviction, Black Christology (at least as expressed by Boesak) believes "liberation is not only

part of the gospel; it is the content and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1978:10). In this way, it is arguably the contention of Black Christological thought that liberation brings the saving significance of the Cross of Christ to bear on the daily life experiences of black Africans, and hence, on their faith.

Liberation, according to Boesak (1978:1), creates consciousness in the minds of the blacks, which gives them a new perspective on their humanity. They no longer feel any sense of shame knowing fully well that their "humanity is constituted by their blackness." They are no longer angry with God for the fact that they are blacks. For the blacks, Maimela says, have seen a sense in the reason for their oppression, namely, sin (1992:38-41). It is no longer the point that God has no salvation plan for the poor and the oppressed, but that this salvation is "emasculated" (to use Mofokeng's word) by the "sin of human division" (Maimela 1992:34). Mofokeng writes:

When they [blacks] bear the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the latter pulls up their own story from the hidden depths of an oppressed consciousness to the surface and expose its liberating elements. They can clearly attest to the presence of God of all creation in their African past and understand that it was through the grace of such a God that they survived and progressed as a people (1983:23).

This is a clear mark of a turning point in the minds of black Christians. They will no longer live to hate God and the Christian religion. For they have experienced a change in attitude of their hearts. Boesak states this "gospel" truth when he writes with enthusiasm that "the blacks refuse to believe that the gospel is the narrow, racist ideology white Christians have made of it. Black Christians cannot believe that the last word about Christianity is that it is a 'white man's religion' or a 'slave religion' designed for the oppression of the poor" (1978:10, 11).

It is in the context of the above that the University of South Africa don, Takatso Mofokeng contends that the struggles of the oppressed and the poor "for true humanity is taken up in God's event of salvation of man and the creation of the new world and new heavens" (1983:235). This cosmic renewal is done within the praxis of liberation for the oppressed. Mofokeng asserts that the struggle for liberation of the oppressed is given a "universal significance" in the Cross event (1983:235). For, he asserts, it becomes the liberation struggle for "impoverishers and oppressors of black people as well as for the entire humankind" (1983:235).

If the Cross and its universal saving significance are to have any meaningful bearing on the whole humankind, Mofokeng believes that the liberation stimulus, which the Cross creates, cannot be limited to selected blacks, but must apply to the whole of humankind. In this way, Mofokeng admits the universality of Christ's salvation, but he, nevertheless, asserts that the liberation which the Cross brings to the oppressed blacks brings with it a "new birth" (Mofokeng 1983:235-6). In their new birth, says Mofokeng, the "blacks are believed to be reconciled to their ancestors from whom they have been alienated, and who were virtually dead for the suffering black people" (1983:236). Thus, the Cross with its liberating ethos becomes an agent for reconciliation and reconstruction, Mofokeng contends.

It is not clear how the Cross is indeed a symbol of suffering for the oppressed blacks of South Africa, on the one hand, and at the same time, a symbol of reconciliation among blacks, living and departed, on the other. It is imperative for Mofokeng to show how the Cross liberates all of humanity (including the oppressors) while still remaining a symbol of hope and reconciliation with God for the oppressed alone. The following section explores the Cross as an agent of reconciliation and reconstruction.

3.5 THE CROSS AS AN AGENT FOR RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

The Cross is not given a one dimensional interpretation in Black Christology. While it is a symbol of suffering for the oppressed blacks, it is, in another sense, seen as an agent of reconciliation between God and humanity. The South African black theologian, Simon Maimela of the University of South Africa in Pretoria explains how this takes place. He says that when the Cross is not interpreted in terms of the "opium of the people with a view of encouraging the victims of oppression to accept in fatalistic resignation, their suffering as their fate, a way of life", but as a way of hope, knowing that their situation is temporal as God is in Christ fighting for their liberation, then the oppressed look at their suffering in a new perspective (1994).

This "new perspective", Maimela believes will enable the poor and the oppressed to think and hope for their forthcoming liberation and their sufferings (Cross) are transformed from being agent of violence to an agent of reconciliation. The black South African theologian, Manas Buthelezi supports this view when he writes, "through the Cross God transformed the instrument of violence, vengeance, and death

into a vehicle of divine restoration to new life" (1977:53). Buthelezi differs from Maimela in that, Buthelezi maintains that it is the Cross of Christ that transforms the Cross (suffering) of the oppressed as instrument of violence into hope, but Maimela insists it is the suffering of the poor and oppressed that need to be transformed into the instrument of hope for the oppressed.

For Maimela, it is when such transformation takes place that the poor and oppressed take a prophetic look at their situation. They no longer look at it as the end of life. They do not look at it as their fate determined by others, but they see their suffering as a way of communicating God's saving message to the world in their life experience (cf. Hosea 1).

Buthelezi writes: "Beyond prophecy lies the Cross. Suffering is power beyond words. You can shut your ears to words, but you can never escape the impact of a redemptive life, because it simply bangs itself on you" (1977:53). When this meaning is seen in suffering, the victims do not turn to violence and vengeance, but to love. Buthelezi claims that reconciliation between God and humankind is the result in most cases. Perhaps, black theologians could argue that the issue is not whether suffering should be endured or not, but that it should not be interpreted as the final human destiny of the poor and oppressed blacks. However, will it not be reasonable to seek to understand the meaning and relevance of the Cross of Christ inherently in itself without necessarily connecting it to the physical suffering of the poor and oppressed? If so, why not take the meaning and significance of the Cross of Christ from the New Testament, and then seek to interpret the suffering of the poor and oppressed from the New Testament, each independent from the other?

Buthelezi would argue further that awareness on the side of the poor and the oppressed that "victory does not always mean the complete wiping out of the visible marks of defeat" draws them to seek reconciliation with God (1977:53). This is because they will no longer have to ask how "God could be justified before blacks' suffering" (Maimela 1994:36). For healing, says Buthelezi (1977:53), is not experienced suddenly as victory is won. It is a process. "Victory happens even while the struggle continues" (1977:53). Therefore, Black Christology must not only look at the Cross as an instrument of oppression, as a sign of the wrath of God on a select group of people (blacks). But it can look at the Cross as an instrument of reconciliation with God. In this case then, the Cross of Christ will no longer be the

"Cross" of the oppressed blacks of South Africa. Boesak and Buthelezi rightly support this last point. Black Theology also seeks to link the suffering of the oppressed blacks to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, arguing that the latter makes sense by giving hope in the light of the former. This is discussed in the following section.

3.6 JESUS' RESURRECTION AND SUFFERING IN BLACK CHRISTOLOGICAL THOUGHT

If the historical Jesus had remained on the Cross, there would not have been any hope for the people dead in their transgression. Similarly, by simply identifying their pains with the Cross of Christ alone, the poor and oppressed are not automatically assured of hope for a brighter future. Neither does their active engagement in the liberation struggles definitively bring to an end their daily sufferings. It is the resurrection of Jesus which gives the blacks of Africa meaningful hope to write home about it. So goes the argument of Mofokeng (1983:39-41).

The "organic" unity which the Cross of the poor and the oppressed Africans have with the Cross of Christ is further manifested in the resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent hope it brings to bear on the life and faith of black Africans. Black Christological thought views the resurrection of Jesus as the power to overcome the evil of suffering caused by oppression and deprivation and exploitation. Tesfai (1994:*introduction*) echoes this contention when he writes, "the Cross relates to the resurrection in a paradoxical way. The two cannot exist one without the other. The cry from the Cross and the hope of the resurrection shape each other in a dialectical way". The one interprets and gives meaning to the other. It is the resurrection that makes meaning of the Cross and it is the Cross that paves way for the resurrection. This is what the apostle Paul has in mind when he says, "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of contentment and your faith is empty too" (I Cor. 15:14).

Tesfai (1994:16) contends that the "resurrection vindicates the Cross by revealing the ultimate meaning of its pain". This contention may be connected to the Pauline idea of the significance of the good news which the resurrection brings to believers. When Paul says, "Christ was raised up for our justification" (Rom 4:25), he brings to the mind of Tesfai (1994:16) the hope for conquest, a victory proclaimed for the oppressed and the poor. Tesfai writes that "the resurrection leaves open the

possibilities of the final conquest and removal of the Cross" (1994:16) which the poor and the oppressed bear.

If the suffering of "Jesus must be considered as the suffering and death of the poor and the oppressed" (Ela 1994) or the 'Crosses' of Africans are to become the Cross of Christ (Nolte 2000:34), then the resurrection of Christ into the new life must also become the resurrection of the poor and the oppressed.

The American New Testament scholar, Cousar (1990:90), contends that a "theology that rings loudly the joyful note of Easter without the sobering, dissonant sounds of Good Friday inevitably tends toward triumphalism". He further stresses that in such a situation the "Cross of human pain, rejection, and death exposed in Jesus' passion are modulated by the exuberance of 'he is risen'". As black theologians express this contention, they also agree with Cousar (1990:91) that "a Good Friday divorced from Easter ceases to be good".

In Black Christological thought there is an emphasis on the inseparable connection between the suffering and passion of Christ, culminating on the Cross on the one hand, and the resurrection of Christ and the end of suffering and victory of the oppressed over their oppressors, on the other. The African American feminist, Jacquelyn Grant (1992:71) expresses this when she writes, "the historical Jesus is significant because it is here that we find evidence of those with whom God identifies. It was with the humiliated, the poor, and the disenfranchised that Jesus identifies". Grant further maintains that "the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ signifies that these lowly conditions are not the end. As Jesus conquered death, so will the oppressed conquer oppression." Tesfai (1994:8) agrees with Grant when he says that "the African life marked by suffering is a continuous participation in a passion story characterized by daily crucifixion imposed from outside". In a situation like this, says Tesfai, the Cross as an expression of suffering is not only a past event, but also one that determines life in the present. He, therefore, notices a 'tension' between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the crucifixion and the resurrection.

For Tesfai the problem arises where there is a deliberate attempt to view from the perspective of the resurrection a life that does not yet know any resurrection (1994). He could not see Easter "in a kind of situation, where millions of people are given up to real deaths by hunger, famine, drought and economic exploitation" (1994:4; cf. Ela

1988:110). To Tesfai and Ela the resurrection is as "remote" to Africans as the "crucifixion is real" to them. Tesfai maintains that the resurrection "will become a reality only when the oppression that denies their humanity that subjects them to crucifixion is overcome once for all and they can share in the fruits of the resurrection, that is, in freedom from the threat of daily death". Ela re-iterates that "the resurrection is real and complete only when the poor pass from death to life" (1994:4).

Ela and Tesfai's contention is that, as long as suffering, injustice, deprivation, poverty, and oppression remain a reality for Africans, the latter are yet to experience the resurrection. Buthelezi (1977) holds a different view when he contends that victory does not always mean the complete wiping out of the visible marks of defeat. It does not always mean the experience of a sudden healing. For Buthelezi, victory happens even while the struggle continues.

Therefore, the poor and the oppressed must not wait for all to be perfected before they shout 'He is risen'. But they can see in the resurrection the anchoring of the "promise of God's future", Nolte maintains (2000:35). Mofokeng maintains that "the Cross and the resurrection are seen to be one event, i.e. the event of the resurrection is included in the Cross as a necessity in solving the problem of reluctance to make a start in view of the bourgeois atmosphere in which the oppressed are living" (1983:40). He believes that the event of "the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth sustains the struggling community of the oppressed during their protracted hanging on their cross" (*sic*) (1983:41).

Yet Mofokeng is able to see in the resurrection a base for hope of the poor and the oppressed. He believes that the "truth will triumph over the lie, that liberation will be a reality" (1983:41). This hope is strengthened when the oppressed and the poor are able to read in the message of Christ's resurrection the good news that "the God who raised Jesus is at work in their period of hanging on the cross (*sic*), affirming black humanity and raising a new life" (Mofokeng 1983:40-41).

The God of the Cross cannot be different from the God of the resurrection. Nolte believes that the "God of the Cross is also the God of resurrection, and, therefore, is the God of hope and victory over evil, injustice and despotism" (2000:33). For Maimela, there are two perspectives in the Christ event. The perspective of the Cross where Christ shares in the pains caused by injustice - where he suffers with "humanity

as one of outcast, the poor the rejected and the oppressed" (1992:35) - and the perspective of the resurrection where the "darkness of Good Friday was defeated" (1992:35). In this latter perspective Christ demonstrates that the "divine power" overcomes sin. It is in this second perspective that of the resurrection and the victory won by it, that an "outstanding human future, the triumphant human glory and victory over sin and the perverted social relations" is revealed (Maimela 1992:35).

Maimela contends that in the resurrection the goodness of "Jesus Christ proclaims loudly that in Christ, humanity is given the possibility and the power to overcome their perverted, polarized and often conflict-ridden relations on this side of the grave" (1992:36). It is the goodness which proclaims that Christ identifies with the poor, the suffering and the oppressed, or as Maimela puts, "it is the message that springs from the conviction that the Christian God is not satisfied merely with pitying humanity and providing bandages for the causalities of the oppression and the injustice" (1992:35). But it is a message that God is willing and able to defeat not only "spiritual sins", but is "powerful enough to bring about fundamental transformations in the social-economic institutions of this world so that humanity could be accorded dignity and social justice" (Maimela 1992:35).

Maimela believes that the problem that confronts Africa is that of sin, of human divisions between the rich and the poor; between oppressor and the oppressed. Therefore, he argues that it is the story of Easter Sunday that loudly proclaims that the victorious Christ has decisively disarmed the evil powers that enslaved humanity in its individual and corporate existence (1992:33-36). If this is the case, then, the question remains as to why untold suffering persists in Africa. It will be mere pretension to think that war victims in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the victims of land reforms in Zimbabwe, and the victims of the Benue, Taraba and Plateau states of Nigeria's communal crises; the families of the victims of Benue massacre of 2001 - when hundreds of innocent civilians were massacred by Nigerian Government troops - will not ask in what sense the glories of the resurrection event proclaimed in Black Christological thought fit in their situation.

James Cone would respond to the above concern by saying that "the biblical view that God suffers for us and has defeated the powers of evil decisively in the Cross and resurrection of Jesus does not mean that suffering no longer exists" (1997:177). Similarly, Buthelezi argues that "the Bible does not promise Christians undisturbed

peace. Vicarious living means allowing the unrest and violence of the sinful world to disturb our Christian peace" (1977:51). Maimela contends the fact that Christ died and was raised from the dead as the first sign of the future victory of human history means that sin and its powers can be defeated and overcome (1992:38). Therefore, despite the "persistence of sinful structures", the believer can still see the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the event that opens up all kinds of possibilities for humans in the hands of God who promises to make all things new (Rev. 21:5), Maimela maintains (1992:38).

For Africans who might still be waiting to see the day that resurrection would bring social transformations (Ela 1994), Maimela advises that "in the light of this historical evidence that sin and its consequences for human lives can be overcome by ordinary human beings whom God empowers, it seems reasonable to believe that Christ is the liberator and hope even for such Africans" (1992:38-39).

God in his "unconditional acceptance of sinners" is willing and committed to raise Africans of "good conscience, of character, of leadership talent ... who could inspire and mobilize human resources, in the economic, political and social sphere," Maimela maintains (1992:39). This, according to Maimela, is the hope that the Easter Sunday story brings to Africans.

In the next section the relationship between the cross/resurrection dialectic and black liberation in Black Christology will be explored. The precise question that will concern this study in the next section will be how the Cross-resurrection of Christ relates to the liberation of blacks.

3.7 THE CROSS-RESURRECTION DIALECTIC AND BLACK LIBERATION IN BLACK CHRISTOLOGY

From what has been said so far, it is evident that the suffering of the black people of South Africa is identified with the suffering of Christ, with the Cross as a symbol for both. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is seen as the decisive event where victory over suffering is achieved. In this section the relationship between the Cross and the resurrection dialectic with black liberation in the South African context will be explored. Mofokeng is the main exponent of the Cross-resurrection dialectic in black liberation theology. Therefore, it is useful to explore his views here, since he speaks for many in black theological circles in the South African context.

Mofokeng contends that "The cross is the concentration point or climax of the test of the tenacity of God's love for suffering and perishing mankind" (1983:38). However, he argues that the view that evil has been overthrown and decisively destroyed "once for all" and that the purpose of liberating humanity has been achieved is not at all "self-evident" (1983:38-39). For, Mofokeng argues, the cry of Jesus on the Cross was a cry of despair (1983:39). Therefore, for him, it will be a contradiction to maintain that liberation of humanity was achieved through Christ's victory on the Cross, while still contending "Jesus died with a loud cry of protest against his abandonment by God, i.e. against the absence of God" (1983:39; cf. Alister McGrath 1987:23-36). Thus, he says "it is in the power of the retrospective light of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus that this victory becomes visible" (1983:39). Hence Mofokeng believes the resurrection vindicates what he referred to as the "tenacity of God's love" (1983:39). In the event of the resurrection the perception of the Cross (suffering) of the oppressed blacks is transformed from despair to victory, from "an instrument of violence" to the "vehicle of divine love and restoration to new life" (Buthelezi 1977:53; Mofokeng 1983:39). Where the cry of Christ on the Cross appeared to be an acknowledgement of "defeat and despair", Mofokeng says, "the resurrection event was and still is, 'the triumphant shout of a victorious hero'" (Mofokeng 1983:39).

From the standpoint of liberation, Mofokeng argues, "the cross and resurrection event is a living paradigmatic event for the liberation effort of the oppressed" (1983:39). The blacks oppressed are to follow, he contends, the "footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth" (1983:39). Following in the paradigmatic event of the Cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "suffering as an ultimate act of a historical love becomes power beyond words" (1983:39). As the suffering of Christ was severe but not in vain, so the suffering of the oppressed in South Africa will not be in vain. It will be crowned, Mofokeng claims, with victory. This hope empowers the oppressed and encourages them to "make a start in view of the bourgeoisies intimidating atmosphere within which the oppressed live" (1983:40). Mofokeng sees the life and death of the black South African, Mapethla Mohapi as "paradigmatic to others in the community of the oppressed", following the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth (1983:40). Mofokeng claims that Mohapi reminds blacks of Jesus' life and death (1983:41).

Mofokeng is willing to admit that the Cross as a symbol of suffering will remain with some for an unspecified time. Buthelezi argues for the same position when he writes

that "There are many for whom the whole of life time seems to be a long Good Friday" (1977:53). This being the case, Mofokeng argues that "even though there is hope for victory, for the resurrection, there is no naiveté about the unpredictability of the actual time of arrival of this event" (1983:41). Therefore Easter should not be mistakenly thought of as "always a dramatic feast that comes three days after Good Friday for most people" (Buthelezi 1977:53). Nevertheless, as Boesak argues (1976:8-16), Mofokeng contends that the "vicarious power of this suffering and death of the oppressed is the struggle derived from the presence of God with the oppressed in their struggle for actualizing their gift of being created in the image of God" (1983:41). The presence of God in the struggle of the oppressed, according to Mofokeng, is God's own struggle (1983:41). In other words, Mofokeng argues, "the historicity of Jesus goes on in the struggle of the oppressed who rise to affirm themselves. He is present there among them even though submerged. The event of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth sustains the struggling community of the oppressed during their protracted hanging on their cross" (1983:41). This, Mofokeng asserts, constitutes the basis for hope of the oppressed "that liberation will be a reality" (1983:41). Their hope is that as the purpose of the resurrection was achieved in the Christ's event, so liberation from oppression will be achieved in the event of the oppressed. This means that as resurrection marks the victory of Christ over death (evil, suffering), so liberation for the oppressed blacks be achieved as victory over the oppressor. Resurrection becomes a symbol of hope for liberation and victory for the oppressed blacks (Mofokeng 1983:42-44). In the next section the relationship between liberation of the oppressed and salvation in Black Christology in South Africa will be explored.

3.8 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIBERATION AND SALVATION IN BLACK CHRISTOLOGY

The concept of salvation is given a new interpretation in the context of the struggle for liberation. Mofokeng contends that with the need to respond to the cry of the "oppressed and disinherited", salvation cannot be "postponed for sometime in the future and in another world" (1983:52). Salvation, he argues, is a "historical reality which embraces all the dimensions of human existence and all people irrespective of their subjective disposition" (1983:52). It is, therefore, by virtue of the above "dynamic" and "transformations that orientate human reality towards its future

fullness", Mofokeng maintains (1983:52). What is in the future is by this view "already here and happening" in view of the presence of the Lord in the liberation struggle (1983:52). The concept of salvation gives the liberation struggle special significance and authenticates it (1983:52). Mofokeng is willing to admit that liberation does not in itself mean "absolute salvation for the oppressed". For he says, "This view of salvation does not imply a total identification of salvation here and now with the absolute salvation. Neither is salvation here and now absolute". This is because, he argues, "life and the struggle for life is still under the eschatological horizon and this makes a certain reserve that does not alienate from, nor relativize the here and now, but rather emphasizes the importance of the temporal-historical sphere" (1983:52). He further cautions that the success of liberation struggles should not be "idolized nor should the failures lead to a mystique of suffering" (1983:52-53). Yet it is confusing to know what the salvation obtained "here and now" through the liberation struggle of the oppressed entails. What is the relationship, it may be asked, between the salvation believers have through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross, and the temporal-historical salvation of the oppressed in Mofokeng's Soteriology?

Drawing on the Latin American liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, Mofokeng argues from the standpoint of the Exodus event that the political liberation of Israel in the Exodus event was "simultaneously a saving act of God without its concreteness being diminished" (1983:53). This would mean that the presence of God in the political struggles of the poor and oppressed is the temporal salvation of the poor and oppressed, while the eschatological salvation remains in abeyance (1983:53). The implication of this view, with the qualification given notwithstanding, is that once you are poor and oppressed, God is on your side and your struggle for liberation is encompassed in the partial salvation typified in the Exodus event viewed from the perspective of Israel. This would imply that the oppressor, as Boesak argues (1984:140), has no place in God's kingdom and plan of salvation.

3.9 AN ANALYSIS OF BLACK CHRISTOLOGY

Black Christology's starting point may be problematic but its presupposition of Scripture as the basis for a Christology of liberation in the South African context makes it a biblical Christology. Unlike African Christology, where many sources were identified for Christological reflections and constructions, Black Christology

used only Scripture as its source for Christological reflections and constructions. Of course the situation of oppression is the organising factor, but the story of God's works of salvation from creation through the Exodus event, culminating in Jesus Christ is the ground for Black Christological reflections on the situation of the suffering of the oppressed. (cf. Boesak 1976, 1978; Buthelezi 1977; Mofokeng 1983, 1987, 1993; Maimela 1992). In addition, Black Christology did not employ African traditional religious concepts in its Christological discussions as was the case in African Christology. Perhaps the reason may be that Black Christology had no interest in imaging Jesus Christ *per se*, but mostly concerned itself with the application of the work of Christ to the situation of oppression in the then South African context.

The way Black theologians like Boesak, Mofokeng, Buthelezi and Maimela relate theory to praxis makes Black Christology relevant to the blacks' experience in the South African context. In that way, they helped the black population during apartheid era to see Christ in their daily life situations. However, black theologians needed to make a clear distinction between the salvific significance of the Cross and resurrection of Christ, and political liberation of the black oppressed. This distinction is important as the lack of it may create the impression that political liberation means eternal salvation and vice versa. Although Buthelezi and Mofokeng (see section 3.6 to 3.8) seem to have acknowledged this, they nevertheless argued as though the suffering of the oppressed and the Cross of Christ have similar or even the same effects. This made them to conclude that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is of more significance and value (relevance) for the struggle for liberation than the Cross of Christ.

3.10 CONCLUSION

Although the discussions in this chapter show that there are some differences between the Christological views of black theologians, some general concluding remarks may not necessarily be out of place. At least they all agree on some fundamental presuppositions like the situation of the suffering of the black oppressed as the starting point for their Christological reflections, also, they all claim God's dealing with humanity in his plan of salvation as the basis for their Christological constructions. On this point, they are of one voice. Keeping with the spirit of Dar' es Salaam, Black theologians like African theologians sought to depart from the Western

method of doing theology. This is also true of Black Theology's hermeneutics of liberation. As was seen in African Christological reflections, the notion of suffering also plays a key role in Black Christological discussions. In fact, the situation of black oppressed in South Africa is the main organizing factor in Black Christological reflections. Far from being a different form of Christology, Black Christology is an integral part of African Christology, just as Black Theology, as it was argued (section 3.1), is an integral part of African Theology. The specific situation and context within which Black Christology developed called for its different content from that of African Christology, just as the situation of African women theologians call for a different content of their Christological reflections from the rest of the other two trends discussed. In the next chapter, African Women's Christology will be explored.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICAN WOMEN'S CHRISTOLOGY

While the savioric significance of Jesus' Cross plays a key role in the New Testament, the situation of African women plays a key role in African Women's Christological reflections and developments.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It was mentioned in the conclusion of Chapter Two that the next chapter (Chapter Three) will commence the discussion of the liberation trend of African Christologies. The last chapter explored the liberation Christologies of Black Theology within the specific situation of blacks' oppression in the South African context. Careful readers may have noticed that neither in the first trend, African Christologies of inculturation nor in the last chapter that dealt with liberation trend in the South African context was the specific situation of the subjugation and marginalization of women given attention. This was one of the factors that led to the emergence of African Women's Theology on the continent.

This chapter will discuss the Christological reflections and constructions of African women theologians. Specifically, it will focus on the Christological reflections of African women within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, the theological forum of African women theologians. The chapter examines the context within which such Christological reflections are done. The hermeneutical principle(s) that guides African women's Christological reflections, and lastly, who Jesus Christ is to them, given their mundane context. First, this chapter looks at the background of African Women's Christology.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S CHRISTOLOGY

One can hardly find any theological trend that has emerged within Christendom that does not have traceable roots to other theological or social developments in the history of the church or society. African Women's Theology is not an exception. This section gives an overview of the major theological and socio-political, economic and religious developments that spark the questions raised by African women theologians about Christianity, God and Jesus Christ.

African Women's Christological reflections are done within a broader theological category designated as African Women's Theology. According to Marie-Henry Keane (1998:122) African Women's Theology is an extension of Feminist and Womanist Theology from the United States that arose out of the women's social movements of the 1960s. The Kenyan Theresa Hinga (1995:84) supports this claim when she writes, "African feminism is broadly an extension of Western feminism". Keane reports, "Just as Black Theology arose out of the Black Consciousness Movements of the 1950s and 1960s, Feminist Theology developed from the secular women's movements of the 1960s" (1998:122). She further explains that feminist and womanist theologians strive to "awaken theologians to the problems related to race and gender and oblige them to reflect on these dilemmas from the perspective of faith" (1998:122).

Feminism, it is argued, "originally meant having the qualities of females" (Keane 1998:122). But later on, Keane maintains, it was identified with the movement for liberation of women. At that time, she adds, major issues addressed were "women's experience of being treated as second class citizens", a situation where feminists saw male opinions as becoming the yardstick for measuring what Keane describes as "excellence". Keane asserts that Feminist Theology "draws its inspiration from the secular Feminist Movement" (1998:122).

The awareness of women in Christian Theology of their own place in Church and society sparks critical questions from the former about issues in both church and society as they affect women (Keane 1998:122). She laments that women's situation in the church is not any different from that of other women outside the church, since the "injustices perpetrated against them in their social, political and economic life are also, in one form or the other, present in the church". Keane (1998:122-24) identifies

the exclusion of women in certain ecclesiastical offices and the language used in liturgy as examples of male biases. Since women are not willing to conform to what Keane sees as "stereotypes of patriarchal culture" (1998:123), they have no choice but to develop a theology that will liberate and strip them of all the shackles of *mosogism*.

Historically it is argued that Womanist Theology, as a child of Feminist Theology, arose in 1979 when the American Feminist, Alice Walker coined the term "Womanist" (Keane 1998:132). Keane traces the term "Womanist" back to "Black folk culture" (1998:132). As the term implies, mothers used the term 'Womanist' to describe daughters who were very courageous, outrageous and wilful (Keane 1998:132).

As in Feminist Theology, Womanist Theology takes the experience of women seriously and it reflects on women's experience theologically, Keane contends. It is reported that, since black women were doubly discriminated against based on race, gender and social status, Womanist Theology, as a theology that particularly concerns itself with those issues, was mainly practiced by black women (Keane 1998:132). This explains why the African American womanist theologian, Jacquelyn Grant argues against Feminist Theology. She argues in her *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* that Feminist Theology is limited by its entanglement with race and the sources it uses. She then sees Womanist Theology as an alternative to white Feminist Theology.

The South African Christina Landman insists that African Women's Theology must be distinguished from Womanist Theology in North America since, she contends, the situation and experiences of black women in America is different from that of African women (1998:137). She further maintains that African Women's Theology addresses issues that centres on what she describes as "redefining the nature of theology" in terms relevant to the "African women's experiences and re-analyzing the relation between traditional theology and culture with reference to patriarchy as an unhealthy contact point between the two" (1998:137). By traditional theology, Landman means theology as practised within the corridors of mainline churches established under what African theologians would call "Western value-setting for the faith, and for the religious experience of African Christians" (cf. Bediako 1997:426).

The white South African, Denise Ackermann reports that African Women Theology is practised within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,¹ which, according to her, arose from the various concerns and initiatives of the Ghanaian Amba Oduyoye to have the voices of African women in print. This concern of Oduyoye led to a first conference of African Women Theologians in Ghana in 1989. It was at this meeting that the Circle was formally inaugurated (Ackermann, Getman, Kotze, & Tobler 2000:6). The goal of the Circle was to encourage women to publish theological materials, to conduct research projects that, according to Oduyoye, would uncover "positive and negative cultural factors, religious beliefs and myths which affect women's lives and hamper women's development" (2001:10). For Oduyoye (and other women in the Circle), life as lived by African women provides the resources and context for African women's Theology.

Although works of other women theologians will be alluded to from time to time in this chapter, Christological reflections of women within the Circle are the focus of this chapter. In the following section, the exploration of African women Christology will begin with a brief overview of the context within which such Christological reflections are done in the Circle.

4.3 THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGY

All the major theological trends that emerged in Africa after the Cold War are in one form or another response to a particular dominant theology, political ideology, life experience and/or hermeneutic. Since Dar' es Salaam (1976 EATWOT Conference), Third World theologians (and this includes African women theologians) have been insisting that the situation of the theologian or the biblical interpreter provides the context within which such a theologian theologizes.

The North American feminist, Rosemary Ruether writes, "Clarified hermeneutics lies in being conscious of the questions one brings from one's own situation and the response that one reads from Scripture, either negatively or positively, about these concerns" (1981:3). This is true of African women's Christological reflections.

¹ The term "African" is used in the Circle to refer to black sub-Saharan Africa. But within the Circle there are also white women. Women like Prof. Ackermann are white, yet members of the Circle.

But what is women's experience or situation? Grant defines black women's experience as a "complex of events, feelings and struggles which are shared by women in various circumstances of life" (1989:9). Womanist Theology, Grant (1997:345) says, "begins with the experience of black women as its point of departure". The tri-dimensional experiences of women – sexism, class and racism provide the context within which womanists reflect on the person of Christ" (1997:345). Since the circumstances of women in America are, though similar, not the same (Oduyoye, 1998:359) as those of African women, the specific situations and circumstances of African women raises questions that are different from those of African American women.

The Christological reflection of African women is done within a different context to that found in the States. For African women, their daily cries prompt them to ask unique questions about who Jesus is to them (Hinga 1998:183).

This is why Oduyoye (1998:337) contends, "any effort related to theology anywhere and especially in Africa, has to state clearly the religious and other contexts". This means that African Women's Christological reflections must also be done within a specific context. For Grant (1997:337), theology in the Third World has demonstrated that "theology is not unrelated to socio-political realities of existence, and that historically it has been used to maintain the social and political advantages of the status quo". African women's Christological reflections are done with this conviction in mind (cf. Boesak 1984:22).

African Women's Christological reflections fall into the "mould of those women who are doubly and triply burdened-women whose humanity needs to be proclaimed" (Oduyoye, 1998:359). Oduyoye contends that the struggle against oppressive forces, hunger and sheer destitution as well as conscious efforts made to challenge what she sees as traditional attitudes "stretches the energy and imagination of the majority of African women". In such struggles, as in the Black Theology of liberation (cf. Boesak 1984:22-30), African women theologians unavoidably reflect on the person and work of Jesus Christ, asking questions such as: who is Jesus Christ to us? What does his liberation of humanity mean to us African women (Oduyoye 1998:363)?

In other words, African women's perceived experience of humiliation through subjugation, destitution, discrimination on the basis of sex and their struggle not only to liberate themselves from these, but also to "challenge the life style of men and

communities, and usher in an era of dignity and respect for all" (Oduyoye 1998:363), provides the context for African women's Christological reflections (cf. Grant 1997:343). African women develop a method that guides their Christological reflections. In the next section the methodology of African Women's Christology will be explored.

4.4 METHODOLOGY OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S CHRISTOLOGY

Writing within her African American context, Grant contends that "Because it is important to distinguish Black and White women's experiences, it is also important to note these differences in theological and Christological reflections" (1989:209). She further maintains that black women must do theology out of what she calls "tri-dimensional experience of racism, sexism, and classism". Grant contends with Black American James Cone (1975), and Black South African Allan Boesak (1984) that black women must maintain God is on the side of the oppressed. This means in the context of black women that God is in solidarity with those who are on the other side of humanity. In their Christological reflections, therefore, Grant contends that the experience of black women must be the starting point.

Cultural differences necessitate a methodological difference between African American Womanist Theology and African Women's Theology. Thus, unlike African American womanists, the method of African women theologians is described as a story-telling methodology. These are stories about African women's life experiences, stories that according to them "testify to hope as well as to anger, to laughter and sorrow alike, to liberation and oppression" (Landman 1998:138). Hence the Nigerian Roman Catholic theologian, Theresa Okure claims that "African women (and men for that matter) do not as a cultural rule start with the issue of methodology. Their primary consciousness in doing theology is not method but life concerns, their own and that of their own peoples" (1993:77). This may explain why African women adopt the story telling method as their method of theologizing in the African context. In telling their stories, African women in the Circle reflect on life-oriented issues that affect women and men in Africa. They are concerned primarily with life as it is lived in Africa from the perspective of faith. Story telling then is a way of learning more about the different experiences of women about life in African societies.

Oduyoye asserts that story telling is the method adopted by African Women in their theological reflections. She writes, "African women accept story as the source of theology and so do tell their own stories as well as study the experiences of other women including those outside their own continent but especially those in Africa whose stories remain unwritten" (2001:10). For Oduyoye, there are those African women whose stories are not written, yet they are sources of women's views on life as it is lived in Africa. Okure also asserts that at present, Africa cannot yet boast of many "professionally" trained women biblical scholars. Hence, "the description of their methodology, characteristic features, and the areas of application must be called for the most part from the Bible study records and general theological views and reflections" (1993:77). Therefore, Oduyoye says, "the creative writings of Africa women have furnished a rich source of women's views on life as lived in Africa". As such, these stories provide theologians with "a perspective on the context in which African women theologize" (2001:10).

When African women speak of story telling as their theological method, they mean their own stories, told either as their personal life experience, or as a description of their faith journey. Usually, African women would tell a story and then reflect on it theologically. Oduyoye describes African women's method in the following way:

In doing theology African women adapt a perspective approach rather than analysis and critique of existing work. They grant that there are insights that come from individuals from contexts other than one's own and that there is something to be stimulants and not points of argument aimed at establishing what is definitive. Rather, the approach is that of dialogue as women aim at affirmations, continued questioning of tradition in view of contemporary challenges, and as they struggle making their own contribution to the creation of theologies that respond to the demands of spirituality. There is a very little refutation and apologetic to be gained from African Women's Theology (2001:11).

The merit of the story telling method is described in terms of solidarity. By telling their stories, African women are said to be reminded of the episode in which Mary visited Elizabeth (Okure 1993:77-79, Oduyoye 2001:51). In that visitation the moment of the two women swapping pregnancy announcements is a precious one for African women, Oduyoye contends. Drawing from that episode, African women theologize by telling their stories to each other, hence, promoting what they refer to as

"motherhood agenda" - described in terms of solidarity with other women and the communities they serve (Oduyoye 2001:51) through life giving (birth).

Generally, reflecting on such stories through asking theological questions such as where is God or Christ in the experiences of African women characterizes African women's methodology. Hence, as in Black Theology, the experience (situation) of the African Women is the starting point for African Women's Theology. This being the case, it will not be out of place to give an exposition of how African women theologians bring the stories in the Bible - about God, Christ and salvation - to bear on their life situation, that is, their hermeneutics. Below is an overview of African women's hermeneutics.

4.5 AFRICAN WOMEN'S HERMENEUTIC

The genius of liberation theology is its commitment to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Scripture to bear on the lives of the people (Boesak 1984:22). It deals precisely with the experiences, the situation of those concerned from their context. African Women's Theology as a hopeful liberative theology deals precisely with the situation of women in Africa by responding to their context (Oduyoye 2001:20). From America where African women draw their inspiration, African American women are reported to have "forged their own hermeneutical approach" based on their life experiences (Ackermann 1998:354). Similarly, the social, cultural and religious experiences of African women have inevitably prompted them to forge their own hermeneutic. Okure argues that "from the literature available, if one were to coin an expression that would best describe African women's distinctive approach to biblical interpretation, it would be 'doing theology from women's perspective'" (1993:77). The strength of this approach says Okure, is its "distinctive inclusiveness" (1993:77). This means, "it describes the efforts of women and men to interpret the Scriptures as they relate to women, in a common search for new inclusive meanings. In this respect, it differs from the strictly feminist approach, which excludes the possibility of men being able to offer a valid interpretation of Scripture as it relates to women" (1993:77). Masenya of the University of the North speaks of African women hermeneutic as cultural hermeneutics (1995 cf. Kanyoro 1995:21).² Oduyoye speaks

² Okure argues that "African women are aware of the fact that the bible is fundamentally a community book". This means that "its message is addressed to both men and women, who together form the

of African women's hermeneutic as follows: "The hermeneutical and fundamental principles of our interpretation of Scripture and culture are related to distinguishing the good - that is the liberation from the evil that is oppression - and domesticating which puts limitations where none are necessary. We are re-reading our world, the texts that history has set before and around us" (2001:20).

In other words, the hermeneutical approach of African women theologians is that of searching from Scripture to extract from it those passages that respect what African women theologians would consider the "full humanity" of women and grant them authenticity, thereby, rejecting as irrelevant, those that denies, in their own opinion, the humanity of women (Masenya 1995:189-201). Ruether is quoted as contending, "whatever dimities or denies the full humanity of women must be viewed as not reflecting the divine or as not including the authentic nature of things or as being the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption" (Masenya 1995:190). By this hermeneutical approach, the divine in Scripture is that which promotes the full humanity of women. This implies that that which, according to Ruther, does not promotes the full humanity of women is by the same token, evil and thus, does not reflect the "true nature of things" (Masenya 1995:190).

Oduyoye describes the Circle's hermeneutic in terms similar to those reported by Masenya. Within the Circle, the hermeneutical approach is referred to as "cultural hermeneutics" (Kanyoro 1995:21; Okure 1993:77). The process here involves reflecting on those African cultures, religious rituals, etc. and extracting from these what seems to the Circle theologians to promote the full humanity of women and encouraging it over against those cultural elements that simply serve as a tool for

community of the people of God and who, together must form the community of its interpretation" (1993:78). However, they also recognized that, she continues, "this message is ultimately not about gender but about life and the relationship of human beings to God, to one another and to creation" (1993:78). Therefore, for Okure, a "predominantly matriarchal reading of the Bible would be as distorting as the patriarchal one has been over the centuries" (1993:78). Hence, she argues for a "reading of the new creation" whereby, men and women would re-examine together Christian traditions by confronting those traditions that "domesticate women" in Africa (1993:78). Okure's conviction is founded on the ground that in Africa, "the comprehensive framework for doing theology", as can be seen in the discussion of the other two theological trends in Africa, "is survival of the people of the continent (1993:78). Frankly speaking, life oriented problems in Africa are "rooted not only in gender but also in race and class" (Okure 1993:78; cf. Maluleke 1997 & 1998). Okure notes that both men and women in Africa are victims of hunger and diseases; political, economic and religious exploitations which according to Okure are affected by colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa (1993:78). Therefore, African women like black theologians in South Africa, feel a special responsibility to search together with men, a liberating and life-giving theology for the distressed people of Africa (Okure 1993:78). Viewed from the perspective expressed by Okure, one could see that African Women's Theology is a theology of liberation.

oppression and the subjugation of women (cf. Oduyoye 1992:4, 1998:359-362; Kanyoro 1995:21-27).

The diversity of African culture in itself affects uniformity and dialogue among African women's hermeneutical approaches. The Kenyan Kanyoro supports the above claim when she maintains, "Recognition of the universality of women's subordination and oppression is the basis of feminist work. But divergences in the direction of the feminist critique of culture and in the priorities of the struggle on issues of culture have divided and silenced women" (1995:21). She asserts that "cultural hermeneutics can open our eyes to possibilities which might move us to different commitments" (1995:21).

Despite the apparent lack of uniformity in the hermeneutical approaches, there seems to be a general agreement among African women theologians in the Circle on a cultural hermeneutical approach because it has "the potentials" which they think can enable them to "develop a vision for mature cultural dialogues" (Kanyoro 1995:21). This involves a process of, Okure describes, "identifying a woman's situation in African culture and society, describing and critically analyzing it, then looking at the Gospels to see how Jesus and the women of his time handled similar situations". Implications are, Okure continues, "drawn from this Gospel evidence from addressing the contemporary women's situation which often goes beyond women's particular interest to that of the African society in general" (1993:82). In this way, far from being an entirely different theology, African Women's Theology is simply an African Theology done from the perspective of African women as Okure asserts (1993:78). This is clear from the motherhood agenda of nurturing and caring for the entire people of Africa, which is given much attention in African women's Christological reflections.

In their reflections on the person and work of Jesus Christ as he relates to them as African women, however, African women seem to employ loosely a hermeneutic of pragmatic reductionism -- take what works for you and leave out what you think does not work for you. With such an approach, African women in a variety of ways interpret Scripture, culture and religious values, specifically from the perspective of their life experiences as African women. The same is the case in their Christological reflections. The next section explores African Women's Christology.

4.6 AFRICAN WOMEN'S CHRISTOLOGY

Sections 4.1 to 4.5 introduced the reader to the origin, context, method and hermeneutics of African women theologians. This introductory information was not an end in itself, but a means to an end – that of discussing the Christology of African women. The background information gives the reader an idea as to why African women are asking the questions they are asking, and why they are writing what they are writing. What follows is an exposition of African Women's Christology.

The feminist Rosemary Leonard insists that "the image of Christ is ambiguous for many contemporary women, serving both as a source of life and as the legitimation of oppression" (1997:318). She contends that, while women continue to find comfort, strength, and courage through their faith in Christ, the image of Christ "can be interpreted as a symbol of male dominance and female submission". She finds what she sees as the "patriarchal and androcentric" nature of Christianity as bias – favouring male dominance. This kind of bias raises questions, according to her, about the nature of Christ and humanity. Leonard asks, "What is the importance of the maleness of Jesus? Is it possible to develop a Christology, which is non-androcentric, a Christology that is truly inclusive of women and men?" (1997:318). Leonard's answer to these questions is that the history of Christian theology presented Christ only as "the male revealer of a male God whose divine authority supports the patriarchal structures of church and society" (1997:318). She says that the portrait of Christ in an art gallery where the mother Mary is "portrayed on her knees before her infant son, while the sorrowful mother stands with other women at the foot of the Cross", is a typical example of symbols of Christ that serve the purpose of patriarchal dominance.

In the light of the above andro-centric Christology, Leonard could understand why contemporary women contend that there is no place for Christ in women's struggles for emancipation. She cites a German feminist, Naomi Goldenberg (1979:22) as an example of women that express the above frustration. She quotes Goldenberg as saying, "Jesus Christ cannot symbolize the liberation of women. A culture that maintains a masculine image for its highest divinity cannot allow its women to experience themselves as the equals of its men. In order to develop a theology of women's liberation, feminists have to leave Christ and the Bible behind" (Leonard 1997:319).

However, Leonard asks, can women who have found and experienced Christ as a "source of life" abandon their symbol of faith in the circumstances of struggle for justice and liberation (1997:319)? She admits that "women's experience of oppression is the context within which some confront images of Christ". She acknowledges that such oppression takes different shapes in every culture and situation all over the world. However, she contends, "the common question arises from reflection on the experience of oppression" (1997:321). The question remains: "Does the image of Christ encourage a passive acceptance of suffering, or does it provide energy to engage in the struggle against evil?" Writing about Third World response to the above question, Leonard says "Other world" women "turn to Christ as One who was despised, died a criminal death, one in solidarity with the marginalized including women" (1997:322). They turn also, Leonard says, to Mary the mother of Jesus who at best was a poor woman a refugee in Egypt and sees themselves "not only as standing by the Cross, but as on the Cross" (1997:322). This implies that African women link their experiences of suffering – subjugation, discrimination, and oppression – or share the destitution of the Cross of Christ. This means that for the African women, the daily "cross" they bear is a replica of the Cross of Christ. The salvation merited on the Cross by Jesus is taken as the salvation of African women to be typified by elimination of injustices and the establishment of a just world order (cf. Ruether 1999:174-175).

The theological conviction of African women in the Circle is best captured by Ruether's words: "... the God who speaks through Christ is one who calls Africans to create societies of justice and well-being for all overseeing cultural and social patterns which mandate white or male domination at the expense of African women" (1999:175). The "dynamic promise" of African women theologians, says Ruether, is the faith that "Christ is on their side against all forms of oppression that have come to them from African traditional culture, the church, and the West seems unshakable" (1999:175). More so, African women interpret their suffering in the light of the "story of the historical Jesus" and "salvific risk on behalf of their communities" (Ruether 1999:175). In these ways, Ruether then, sums it all when she asserts "the relationship of Christ to the redemption of African society from sexism and all injustices is open-ended, pointing forward to expanding future hopes, rather than confine to static African or Christian pasts" (1999:175).

Grant expresses this kind of hope clearly: "Black women have said that Jesus Christ is one of us. When we see Jesus Christ, we see both the particular Jesus of Nazareth and the universal Christ of faith. In Jesus Christ, we see an oppressed experience and at the same time we see liberation" (1992:78). She contends that the life experience of black women is a replica of Jesus' suffering for "each of the dynamics of oppression that characterizes their reality of broader community" (1992:78). In this way black women share all the tri-dimensional reality of sexism, racism, and classism with Third World people, Grant maintains (1992:79).

Within the Circle the term Christology does not surface that much in the thought of ordinary uneducated African Christian women. Women in the Circle make frequent references to Jesus Christ in terms of his solidarity with women and how he is related to women's specific social context of oppression and marginalization. But no conscious effort is made to discuss the person of Jesus Christ from the perspective of faith. Oduyoye supports this claim when she contends that: "The word 'Christology' is not in the vocabulary of African Christian Women unless they have had a theological education; but they talk of Jesus the son of Man and testify to what Jesus has done for them" (2001:51).

In the Circle, Oduyoye reports, "the story that characterizes African women's Christology is not the meaning of the incarnation, not the annunciation, the meeting of Mary and the angel, but what is usually referred to as the 'visitation'- the episode in which Mary visited Elizabeth in the anonymous Judea town in the hill country" (2001:51). Hence, Christological reflections in the African women's theology are done mostly within the context of solidarity – the context of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. Oduyoye expresses this contention with the following words: "It will be like Mary and Elizabeth sharing stories of salvation, for in general, Africa theology tends to treat Christology from the stand point of Soteriology" (2001:51). African women identify their experiences (social cultural, religious or economic) with the life and work of Jesus Christ, not on the basis of whether he is divine or human, as was the case with Chalcedon, and as it is the concern of Protestant and Roman Catholic mainline Churches, but with how Jesus Christ fits in the mundane life experiences of the African women is the crux of their Christology.

The Kenyan Theresa Hinga (1992:184) adopts the story-telling method to classify images of Christ as seen through the eyes of African women, namely: i) Jesus as a

personal saviour and friend of all those who believe - accepting them as they are, not subjugating them (cf. Black Theology); ii) Christ as an embodiment of the spirit, the power of God – as the one endowed with God's power who dispenses same to his followers (cf. African Theology); iii) Christ as 'iconoclastic prophet', an image of Christ that portrays him as a critic of the status quo, particularly when it engenders social injustices and the marginalization of some in society (1992:191-192).

From these images of Christ, Hinga asserts that African women are finding Christ "useful in their quest" for true humanity and liberation in the same images (1989:191). Hinga claims that with the above three images of Jesus Christ, African women are able to find a relevant Christology – the one that seeks to address the situation of African women. She maintains that "for Christ to become meaningful in the context of women's search for emancipation, he would need to be a concrete and personal figure who engenders hope in the oppressed by taking their (in this case the African women's) side, to give them confidence and courage to persevere" (1992:192). Hinga further contends that Christ "would also need to be on the side of the powerless by giving them power and a voice to speak for themselves". It is the conviction of Hinga that the "Christ whom African women look for is one who is actively concerned with the lot of victims of social structures" (1992:192). For Hinga, such a Christ is expected to be on the side of women as they fight for the dismantling of sexism in society, sexism that has oppressed them through the ages (1992:192). She calls for a rejection of any kind of Christology that, according to her, "smirks of sexism, or that functions to entrench lopsided gender relations" (1992:192). It is by so doing that Hinga thinks African women will be able to "confidently confess Christ as their liberator, as partisan in their search for emancipation" (1992:192).

In the search for such a Christ that will emancipate women, that will liberate women, Oduyoye contends that "such a Christ must be a humble Christ, the Jesus of Nazareth, the servant who washes the disciples' feet, the God who leads only to green pastures, to the kingdom of God" (1989:44). She further stresses that the "Jesus of Nazareth is the servant who agreed to be God's sacrificial Lamb, the one who was anointed by a woman with expensive oil" (1989:44). For only then, says Oduyoye, that Jesus will be the one in "whom things are hold together". Therefore, the integrity of women too is ensured in this Christ, Oduyoye contends (1989:44). With the above qualities enumerated by Oduyoye and Hinga, Christ becomes to African women, "truly friend

and companion, liberating women from assumption of patriarchal societies and honouring, accepting and sanctifying the single life as well as the married life, parenthood as well as the absence of progeny" (Oduyoye & Amoah 1989:45). For these women, Christ upholds what they refer to as the "motherhood roles of bringing out the best in all around them" (1989:45).

The Kenyan co-editor of *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity*, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, states that the "African woman's experience calls for a Christology that is based on a wholistic view of life. She needs the Christ who effects the whole of her life, whose presence is felt in every corner of the village and who participates in everything and every body's daily life" (1998:130). Nasimiyu-Wasike contends that with the nature of African woman's experience, the African woman will need a "God that can be reached through the spirit and the living dead or through direct intercession" (1998:130). Christ, Nasimiyu-Wasike believes, is this God, since Christ takes on the conditions of the African woman which according to her, are (among others) weakness, misery, injustice and oppression (1998:130).

Nasimiyu-Wasike asserts that Jesus Christ in His life ministry on earth rejected the androcentric culture of the Jews and takes up, she claims, a "counter-cultural" mission, an act on the side of Christ which demonstrates Christ's meekness noticed in his humility, his accommodation of beggars, sinners, tax collectors and ritually unclean people (1998:130). She argues that most of these categories of people were women. Thus, Nasimiyu-Wasike believes that the mission of Jesus on earth was to "heal broken humanity" (1998:130). She contends that Jesus healed broken humanity by empowering and enabling the downtrodden of society to realize their authentic human existence as being made in the image of God (1998:130-131).³ Jesus, Nasimiyu-Wasike, asserts, gave discourse to women in his life ministry, thus, women were empowered by him to realize their authentic self. This can be seen in Jesus' repeated dialogue with women, Nasimiyu-Wasike maintains (1998:131).

She argues that Jesus inaugurated what she calls the "restoration of individual and societies to wholeness" that has liberating "currents" in the life of Christians and women (1998:131). Thus, she contends that Christ meets African women in their own cultural, physical, environmental, political and economic variations, though, she

³ Black Theology echoes a similar view. See for example, Mofokeng (1983 Chapter One and Two).

asserts at the beginning of her essay that the mission of Jesus on earth was "counter-cultural" (1998:130). The Kenyan female theologian argues further that Christ is the liberator of the sufferers, the restorer of all those who are broken, the giver of hope and the courage to be (1998:134). She, like black theologians in South Africa, maintains that the ministry of Jesus on earth was essentially that of liberation.

For the Cameroonian Theresa Souga, Jesus Christ is sensitive to the "misery and oppression of the weak". This is why, according to Souga, in the incarnation of Jesus, "Jesus takes upon Himself all these situations of meekness and injustice as we would see that he was born and laid in the manger; was a carpenter's son, parents offering was with the modest pain of turtle doves (Lk. 2:22-24)" (1989:28). Hence, in this situation, Souga continues, "Jesus bears in His person the condition of the weak, and hence that of women" (1989:28). For her, then, it is in a situation such as this that Jesus is truly the God-man, hence takes the condition of African women. Souga contends that "Jesus shows a great deal of interest in women" which explains why women are very interested in Jesus, she maintains. Thus, Souga says "the question of the relationship between women and Jesus leads us to discover that Jesus reveals God in the various kinds of bonds connecting him to women throughout the Gospels" (1989:28). She asserts that "God wants to confound man by choosing to come into this world by way of women. 'What is weak in the eyes of the world' has delivered us from our prejudices, and Jesus has chosen this way for coming into the world" (1989:28-9). Thinking of Jesus in these terms, from the vantage point of women of Third World, "and without forcing anything, Jesus is truly Good News for the women of Africa," Souga contends.

On the cultural side, Souga asserts that African women's attempt to "re-appropriate faith in Christ" within their context brings African women's question to take "active role in the Christological debate" (Souga 1989:29). This according to Souga goes a long way in "rooting the faith in our culture and in our continent" (1989:29). Oduyoye also contends that cultural Christology is important in the whole process of women's emancipation. For her, the Western missionaries did not take into consideration the realities of Africa in inaugurating their Christology. She writes:

But the Western Missionary enterprise in Africa inaugurated a Christology that took no account of Africa's realities beyond the existence of numerous divinities and ancestral spirits. The emphasis,

therefore, was Jesus as the only way to God, Jesus, the mediator and high priest, has been consistently preached in the Western churches in Africa, that is, in Roman Catholic churches and churches of the Reformation (2001:54).

This kind of Christology, Oduyoye contends, is limited, since the basic cultural issues needed to boost faith in African women are left out in the missionary scheme. She maintains that "Death and life and life-denying forces are the experiences of women" and so, the "Christ who countered their powers and gave back the widow of Main's child to her, is the African women's Christ" (Oduyoye 2001:55). This is the type of Christ that could provide the context within which African women could "read their lives"; Oduyoye contends (2001:55).

Reflecting on African women stories, Oduyoye describes their perception of Christ as "the liberator from the burden of diseases and from taboos that restrict women's participation in their communities" (2001:55). She identifies the triple burdens as racism, poverty and marginalization, which according to her, are countered by claims that Christ liberates from oppressive cultures (2001:55). For Oduyoye, African women see Christ in terms of one "who voluntarily lived a life that was life giving for others and even died for the same" (2001:55). In their case, however, African women insist that both women and men must be willing to make this costly sacrifice.

4.7 THE CROSS OF CHRIST IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S CHRISTOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Concerning the Cross of Christ, African women contend that the Cross has been used negatively as a weapon to suppress women's quest for liberation. The sufferings of women are said to be their cross which they must bear as Christ did. In an interview with Oduyoye in Legon, Ghana (May 5, 2003), she maintains that the theology of the Cross does not play any key role in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. However, she said that women could identify their daily life experiences, as sacrifices similar to the passion of Jesus Christ. In telling their stories, African women place their bitter experiences side by side with the life lived by Jesus for others (cf. the story of Bette Ekeya in Oduyoye 2001:56-57). But African women see it as a duty of both men and women to live for others as well.

On the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Souga maintains "the resurrection of Christ has overturned the religious world of the ancient church and has liberated women from all situations that exclude them" (1989:29). For her, the resurrection puts African women into the faith in a society that otherwise ignores them (Souga 1989:29). The hope that the resurrection gives to African women encourages them to grow in faith in a patriarchal society that often ignores them (Souga 1989:29).

4.8 AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S CHRISTOLOGY

Viewed from the perspective of Dar' es Salaam and Ghana (see section 2.3), African Women's Theology is no doubt a theology of liberation as African women themselves have argued (Okure 1993:77-83, Kanyoro 1995:21-22). African women theologians in the Circle reflect on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the situation of women in Africa. Therefore, they also reflect on the cultural, socio-political, and economic situations of the people of Africa - similar to the concern and approach of black theologians in South Africa.

However, unlike African theologians but similar to black theologians, African women do not attempt to re-image Jesus Christ using African traditional religious images like ancestors, priests, elder brother, among others in their Christological reflections. Although they also reflect on the issue of African culture, they do not seek to incorporate it into Christianity, rather, they attempt to understand from the New Testament how Jesus would have responded to these cultures with the aim of criticising African cultures that seek to domesticate women. Given the strong interest of African women to care for the people of Africa, men and women, their goal in theology is to seek for liberating message in the life of Jesus Christ for the liberation of all African people. In this way, they really take up the challenge to serve as mothers of the African peoples.

To do this, African women believe that the Word of God is "capable of fulfilling what it promises", to them, Scripture has the necessary message of liberation to be applied to African socio-political and religious problems (Okure 1993:83). Hence, searching from Scripture, the message for the liberation of Africa is their hope for the way forward. Hence, they are convinced that although Scripture contains patriarchal traditions, its message is not essentially to promote patriarchal traditions and it is clear

from the life of Jesus, as Scripture being the norm, and Jesus the head and the model for Christian living, African women attempt to address the issue of culture and patriarchy from the perspective of the life style of Jesus. Instead of rejecting the biblical tradition because of its adro-centric nature, African women embrace it, arguing that the message of Scripture is self-liberative and good exegesis will uncover this message. Therefore, African women theologians assert that the problem is not with Scripture, but with men and women's ability to give it the correct interpretation. Hence, Okure suggests that feminist hermeneutic is the best way forward toward retrieving the liberative message of Jesus Christ from Scripture.

Hermeneutically, their story telling method, a doing theology the Jesus way as they would call it is a helpful way forward for contemporary theological argumentation in Africa. It provides healing to the afflicted women and men of African who through telling their stories are able to receive console and encouragement from the life of Jesus as he lived for others. This approach helps overcome the problem of searching solutions to spiritual and socio-political problems outside of Scripture. For African women, the story telling method enables them to reflect on the life of Jesus Christ and they seek to get answers from the New Testament by seeking to know how Jesus would have addressed those issues. With respect to relevance, their life oriented and life giving approach to theological issues helps address real life issues that affect Africans today, which is the goal of contemporary theology in the African context since Dar' es Salaam.

If all African women theologians would take the approach proposed by Masenya, Okure and Kanyoro, then their hermeneutic could serve as a model for the other two theological trends discussed in Chapter Two and Three. But since other women in the Circle arguably take the approach of selective use of Scripture in support of women liberation, their hermeneutic is more likely to distort the central message of Scripture as Okure and Masenya warned (1993, 1995). However the hermeneutical conviction of African women in the Circle, especially as expressed by Oduyoye, the founder and leading theologian of the Circle reflects the selective authentication and use of isolated texts and Scriptural traditions in support of women liberation. In this way then, African women like other theologians discussed in the previous chapters may stand the risk of ideological misuse of Scriptures.

Although Okure seems to be saying that African women are not primarily concerned about gender related issues, she also did not dispute the claim that the question of patriarchy also occupies a privileged position in African women's Christological reflections. They are clearly trying to understand whether Jesus Christ domesticated and subjugated women, as it is the case in Africa, or not. Their question seems to be if Jesus Christ was in solidarity with women, why not African men? A deep reflection on this question leads African women in the Circle to the ethical decision to grant an epistemological privilege to the situation of the biblical reader and interpreter in the interpretive process. Hence, there is the possibility to distort the New Testament teaching about Christ in support of the ideological interest of the reader. One hopes that African women in the Circle will avoid this.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to show that African Women's Theology is rooted in North American Feminist and African American Womanist Theology. However, African women have given their own theology its own content different from those in the USA. In any case, their convictions about the patriarchal distortions of the biblical traditions are similar. Methodologically, African women like their male colleagues in the other two theological trends, begin with their situation. The situation of African women is their starting point. In their Christological reflections, they take the liberation approach and see Jesus Christ being in solidarity with women of his time, as the liberator of the oppressed women (and may be people) of Africa. In the strict sense of the term, African Women's Christology is by far, less developed than the other two African Christological trends. It is at best, and this is how it is intended to be (cf. Oduyoye 2001:51-52), a simple Sunday school type discussion on the person of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the experiences of the African women. This is essentially because of the epistemological privilege they grant to the situation of women's oppression in Africa. However, their Christological approach is more practical than the movement from African reality to the Bible Christologies discussed in Chapter Two. Their emphasis on the life oriented and life-giving issues being reflected upon from the stand point of Jesus addresses the African reality more directly than the movement from African reality to the Bible approach to Christology. However, this does not come without a cost. Their selective use of Scripture, as it has

been argued above, needs revisiting as African women also take this approach in their Christological reflections. Thus, one notes that the selective use of Scripture in support of one ideology and tradition or the other has been a major factor in the hermeneutical debate in all the three African theological trends. Therefore, it is imperative to address more carefully, the issue of hermeneutic in order to create a certain level of trust in Scripture above other traditions and contexts in contemporary African theological hermeneutics. The next chapter will attempt to develop the *Sola Scriptura* principle as a way forward toward solving the problem of selective use of isolated texts in support of particular traditions and ideological interest of the reader/interpreter which inevitably have influence the Christological constructions in Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS FOR AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES – SOLA SCRIPTURA

"In suggesting a hermeneutical point for African theology, one should bear in mind the requirement that makes it imperative for such a pivot to qualify as a theological constant ..." (Akao 2002:343).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

It is clear from the previous chapters (Chapter Two to Four) that the hermeneutical conviction of African theologians plays a key role in their Christological reflections. This is evident in the methodological starting point of all the major Christological trends discussed. The notion that the situation of the African – suffering, marginalization, discrimination and pre-Christian religious experience – should be the context of contemporary African Christological constructions, reflections and developments informed the various conclusions reached by the three Christological trends discussed in Chapters Two to Four. At the end of the discussion of each of the three Christological trends, the question was left unanswered as to whether they adequately reflect Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross as proclaimed by the New Testament.

To answer this question is to evaluate African Christologies. This means that there has to be a criterion for evaluating African Christologies. In determining what criteria to use, the suggestion of the Nigerian theologian, John Akao of the University of Ibadan comes to mind. He says, "In suggesting a hermeneutical point for African theology, one should bear in mind the requirement that makes it imperative for such pivot to qualify as a theological constant" (2002:343). This is because, as situations change, the mode of theologising also changes along with them. Therefore, "in African

theology, the organizing factor should be as constant as Jesus and the Cross are to New Testament Theology irrespective of the context in which the theologization is done" (Akao 2002:343).

From the discussion of contemporary African Christologies, it was argued that in African Christological reflections, the organising factor is the African situation. This chapter will argue that for contemporary African Christologies to reflect fully the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross, their construction and developments must take place in continuity with the New Testament proclamation of Jesus and his Cross.

If Akao's argument that the "organising factor should be as constant as Jesus and his Cross are to New Testament" is any thing to go by, an attempt to evaluate contemporary African Christologies should inquire if such Christologies reflect the New Testament proclamation of Jesus and his Cross. Therefore, the hermeneutical pivot to use must also qualify as a "theological constant" (Akao 2002:343). This chapter suggests that African theologians should employ the Protestant hermeneutical conviction of *Sola Scriptura* as a hermeneutical pivot in their Christological reflections and developments.

Thus, this chapter seeks to develop the *Sola Scriptura* method to be employed in the next chapter to evaluate African Christologies. However, not every theologian understands the *Sola Scriptura* conviction in the same way or uses it in the same sense.¹ Therefore, this chapter will explore the legal hermeneutics of Ronald Dworkin, a philosopher of law, as the American feminist theologian, Cady appropriates it to interpret the feminist theologies of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Ruether (American feminists). It will develop *Sola Scriptura* in the sense of the *conventionalism* school of judicial adjudication under Dworkin's typology. The focus will be, specifically, on the methodological assumptions of the approach of conventionalism and *Sola Scriptura*. Cady's work is useful for this purpose because of

¹ While theologians like the Dutch born theologian, G.C. Berkouwer (1975), Stephen Fowl (2000), among others, insist that *Sola Scriptura* entails that the Bible is the only source and authority for life, faith and intelligibility, others like the American moral theologian, Stanley Hauerwas would reject the use of *Sola Scriptura* in that sense. In a response to a comment made by Gerhard Ebeling (in Hauerwas 1993:27) on the achievements of *Sola Scriptura*, Hauerwas says thus, "When *Sola Scriptura* is used to underwrite the distinction between text and interpretation, then it seems clear to me that *Sola Scriptura* is a heresy rather than a help in the Church. When this distinction persists, *Sola Scriptura* becomes the seedbed of fundamentalism, as well as biblical criticism. It assumes that the text of the Scripture makes sense separate from a Church that gives it sense" (1993:27).

the deepened debate over the role and status of tradition (including the Bible) in contemporary theological argumentation in Africa.

It was argued in Chapter Two (section 2.2) that as early as 1965, the Nigerian theologian, Bolaji Idowu called into question the legitimacy of the continued dependence and use of Western theology together with its ideological imperialist interest and context in African churches and theology (1965:1-3). It was also argued that John Mbiti (1970, 1973a) led African theologians who rejected the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference's official declaration that African Primal Religions do not have the perceived status of *preparatio evangelica*. Just a few years after Mbiti gave African Traditional Religions back their status of *preparatio evangelica* (1973), the Dar' es Salaam EATWOT declared the birth of a new world order. This new world order called for a break away from Western traditional method of doing theology and argued persistently for a contextual approach to theology that could readily address the socio-political needs and cultural interest of the people of Third World. This meant a call for a new hermeneutic for Third World countries and theologies (cf. Lategan 1990, 1994; Smit 1994). Since then, as was argued in the discussions of the three theological trends in Africa, there has been in African theological circles, a movement from text to context. The hermeneutical process, what the German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer is reported to have described in his famous pregnant phrase, "the conversation that we are ..." (Smit & Pauw 2003:19) involves the relationship between the reader, the reader/interpreter's context and the text (Ukpong 1995:3-14, Adamo 1999:66-90). It has become a common hermeneutical practice in African theological circles, as was argued in the previous chapters, not to ask a general question: what does the text mean but to ask precisely the question what does the text mean to the African in his or her particular contemporary situation or context?

With the growing concern over the situation of blacks' oppression in South Africa between 1970 and 1994, the question of the nature of the biblical text, the tradition within which the biblical text was received in the black South African circles and the relationship between the ordinary South African readers and text also arose. This development created a skepticism regarding not only the "European hermeneutical tradition and its ability to provide the basis for an effective hermeneutics" for the black South Africans (Lategan 1990:3), but the nature of the ideology of the biblical

text itself (Mosala, 1986, 1989; Mofokeng 1988; cf. Maluleke 1996; West 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2002a, 2002b, 2003). This skepticism raised some doubts as to whether the whole Bible can and indeed, should be claimed in support of liberation.

At the other side of African theological reflection were the African women asking whether the way theological and biblical interpretation was done in African Theology and Black Theology in South Africa have any relevance to the situation of women in Africa. Seen that the hermeneutics of these two trends of theology did not seek to address the situation of patriarchy that is also the concern of African women, African women theologians decided to forge their own hermeneutic and seek to apply the Bible to their specific situation and life experiences (see Chapter Four). What is at stake in the hermeneutics of all the three contemporary African theologies is the integrity of the Bible – can the Bible provide the necessary message for the liberation of the Africans or not; or should other sources be used?

Now it is arguably clear that both the Bible and the Western tradition within which the Bible was received in Africa in its formative years are called into question in African theological argumentations. The identification of other sources for theology alongside the Bible in 1977 Ghana conference was a deliberate attempt to fuse the African context into the hermeneutical debate. It is imperative therefore in the light of these developments to create a *hermeneutic of trust* in African theological argumentation before it will be meaningful to evaluate any theological development in Africa in the light of Scripture. An exploration of Cady's use of legal hermeneutics will be useful especially as it will help develop criteria for determining the legitimacy of Sola Scriptura that this research suggests as a pivot around which all theological argumentations in Africa should rotate.² First, it is important to seek to understand what is been called Sola Scriptura.

² No detailed treatment of any of these sections is intended. The purpose of this chapter is to develop biblical criteria that could be used in evaluating African hermeneutical convictions and Christological reflections. It is the assumption of this research that African hermeneutical principles inform African Christologies. Therefore, there can be no justification in evaluating African Christologies without first evaluating African hermeneutical convictions.

5.2 WHAT IS SOLA SCRIPTURA?

The *HarperCollins Encyclopaedia of Catholicism* defines Sola Scriptura as a "foundational principle of Protestantism that Scripture as God's word mediates faith and is the final arbiter of theology. Other correlative authorities such as tradition, reason, and experience are not independent sources of revelation but assist in the interpretation of Scripture" (McBrien 1995:1206). This means that Scripture is sufficient in itself to provide necessary guidance on matters of faith and life arising from a particular life situation, culture, political and religious forms of oppressions. This implies that, while these situations and contexts provide interpretive tools for understanding the message of the biblical texts, they do not inherently contain the message of the biblical text.³ In other words, culture and experience, for example, provide the contexts to which the biblical message can be applied. While experience and context may shape the way in which the biblical message could be understood and appropriated, they are not to be elevated to the status of hermeneutical principle to the extent that they determine the meaning of a biblical text.⁴

The precise point is not to deny, as this chapter already argues above, that experiences, contexts, and cultures illuminate and shape the understanding of the biblical message. They serve as vehicles that transport the redemptive message of a biblical text to the various communities of faith around the world. They bring the text to the corridors of the receptive communities in their culture, context, and life situation. This means that, through the agency of experience and culture, the biblical text speaks to its recipients in the language they understand therefore meets their

³ It is true, as the German Reformed theologian, Michael Welker notes, that "The biblical traditions critically engage a broad diversity of cultures, norms, and powers of their time". They call into question, he continues, "a great variety of political, social, and cultural contexts" (2003:380). This implies that, looking at the diverse political, cultural, and social contexts of African Christological reflections, the very nature of the biblical traditions calls into question the legitimacy of letting these contexts interpret the biblical text. For as the "multi-contextual and pluralistic constructions of the biblical canon enables it to respond in a differentiated way to such diverse contexts, rationalities, and thematic clusters" (Welker 2003:389), so the multi-contextual and pluralistic nature of contemporary African Theologies warrants the use of the biblical traditions to respond to these cultures. Later in this chapter, Welker's fourfold sense of Scripture will be used to develop a hermeneutic of trust for future African theological argumentations.

⁴ Fowl (1998:64-65) argues in response to Mosala (1989) that "to think of texts as having ideologies is to think of ideology as the property of a text." On this view, he continues, "an ideology is seen as something hidden, inserted, or naturally occurring in a text." The danger of this conviction is that the interpreter may go to the extreme of imposing his or her own ideology on that of the text. Hence, the meaning of a text will be determined solely by the imaginative interest of the interpreter.

redemptive needs. Nevertheless, where the culture and the religious experiences of any given community contradict the redemptive message of Scripture, Scripture should serve as the norm since only Scripture offers the redemptive message of God to the people of every nation and culture. The apostle Paul throughout his ministry speaks to Jews and Gentiles in their specific religious, ethical, and political needs. But he did not allow the socio-political needs of these people to occupy a central position in his ministry, but specifically stresses the need for the receptive nations to use their situation, either of oppression (then persecution), poverty, or discrimination (in case of the Gentile Christians), to accept the saving message of Jesus Christ.

The problem with contextual theologizing, as Larkin (1988:153) states, is that it "laid great stress on the ideological control exercises by the world-view of the majority culture whether oppressor or Western, over the interpreter's hermeneutic". This is also true of the major theological trends discussed. Larkin notes further, "Through a hermeneutic of suspicion, and engagement with text and context, these theologies contrived ways for the biblical text to serve contemporary praxiological concerns especially liberation." The major difference between *Sola Scriptura* and this praxiological paradigm is that it (the praxiological paradigm) determines which message a biblical text should carry and bring to bear on the needs of the people. The new hermeneutic often employed by African contextual theologians begins by identifying what the needs of the receptive communities are. Then it proceeds through an extensive search for a specific biblical message that will adequately address these needs (cf. Boesak 1984; Mosala 1986; Mofokeng 1988; Maluleke 1996; Oduyoye 1998, 2001; Hinga 1992).

Since there are varieties of cultural, socio-political and religious needs, the liberation paradigm insists that there is no universal applicable principle (method) for biblical interpretation since each context develops its own hermeneutic according to its unique needs (Frostin 1988, West 1992).

The situation exists where African theologians engage some extra-biblical sources in their theological argumentation, creating the impression that the Bible alone does not serve the purpose of interpretation (cf. Appiah-Kubi 1978). The 1977 Ghana Pan-African Conference, for example, in its final statement identified four sources of theology alongside the Bible to give African Christianity its own distinctive identity (see Chapter Two).

This research proposes that we begin our hermeneutical process with the text, not the situation or the poor and the oppressed. From the text, the central message of the Bible could be retrieved and applied to the various socio-political, cultural and religious needs of the receptive communities (cf. Okure 1993:77-83). Through this process it will be easy, this study claims, to see where the receptive cultural understandings and experiences need to be reshaped and converted to the biblical message. This is important because, as Carson observes, hermeneutics, however defined, "is not an end in itself, but a means to the end" (1984:11) - that of "growing into even deeper communion with triune God and with others". (Fowl 1984:11) This would mean that "as Christians and Christian communities struggle to interpret and embody Scripture in contexts in which they live, they will be judge successful to the extent that they faithfully live and worship before God" (Fowl 2002:45).

While not specifically stressing the view point of Fowl in his quote above, it is important to note that contemporary African theologians are reminded that the primary goal of theology is to deal with sin by returning to God through Christ. Since contexts and experiences only expose the gravity and nature of that sin, they stand in need of conversion and cannot occupy a "privileged" position in the interpretive process. Hence, in their Christological discussions, the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross should be the organizing factor.

Nevertheless, since context is the object that normally receives the Gospel about the gravity of sin and the need for its expiation, it is useful to seek to theologize and interpret specifically from the perspective of, and for addressing the specific needs arising from particular African contexts. Hence, instead of rejecting as irrelevant, the Africans' call to interpret within specific context, it will be important to employ and develop some of the hermeneutical currents in contemporary African contextual hermeneutics. In this case, the approach of the movement from the Bible to context (see section 2.4.1) appears helpful especially where the conviction is that Scripture is the norm and arbiter as it will further be argued later in this chapter. The view points of Boesak (1976, 1978) and Masenya (1995) discussed earlier in this work are also commendable.

Thus, this research argues that, based on the normative authority of Scripture as the inspired Word of God (Berkouwer 1965; Frame 1997; Poythres 1988; Fowl 2000), the

text of Scripture is the ideal hermeneutical starting point for all theological and biblical hermeneutics. To argue this point further, it will be useful to stress the urgency of *Sola Scriptura* as a hermeneutical conviction for Christological reflections and development in Africa. The next section will discuss this.

5.3 THE URGENCY OF SOLA SCRIPTURA AS A HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE FOR AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

It is claimed that the task of Christology in Africa is to present the person and work of Jesus Christ in such a way that is relevant to African socio-cultural and political needs (Nyamiti 1984; Ukpong 1996). From the literature reviewed (Chapter Two to Four), it is evident that while the Bible is identified as the major source of African Christologies,⁵ the various contexts and situations of the African often occupy the primary position in the process of theological and biblical interpretation and argumentation in most of the African Christologies discussed in the previous chapters.

⁵ As it is clear from the discussions of the hermeneutics of the three Christological trends, the Bible is the main source of African Christologies. The dispute however is on the role of biblical witness and the interpretation and use of Scripture in the process of Christological constructions of the trends (Fashole-Luke 1975:263; cf. Mosala 1986, 1989, Mofokeng 1988, West 1991). This resulted in the skepticism as mentioned earlier in this chapter, concerning the role of the past Western tradition in the reception of the written Word in Africa and its consequences for contemporary theological argumentation in Africa. This to some extent, has led to an unhealthy combination of the Bible and African Traditional Religions as contending sources for theologization in Africa as evidenced from the final statements of Dar' es Salaam and Ghana. The 1966 Consultation of African theologians held at Ibadan made a very disturbing resolution with a great impact of the authority of the Bible and tradition in the contemporary African theological circles. The Consultation stated: "We believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of heaven and earth, Lord of history, has been dealing with mankind at all times and in all parts of the world.

It is with this conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African peoples, and we have evidence that they know of him and worship. We recognize the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; and yet it is because of this revelation we can discern what is truly of God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of him" (in Fashole-Luke 1975:263).

It becomes immediately clear that the stress on African pre-Christian experience echoes a move to incorporate African culture and religions into Christianity. Four years later (1969), Pope John Paul is reported to have declared in his visit to Uganda: "The expression, that is the language and mode of manifesting the one Faith, may be manifold; hence it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of the one who professes this one Faith. From this point of view, a certain pluralism is not only legitimate but desirable. An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not possible but favoured by the Church. The liturgical renewal is a living example of this. And in this sense you may and you must have an African Christianity" (in Shorter 1973:219). It is little wonder then, that almost three decades after Ibadan Consultation and papal declaration in Uganda, Bediako leads the way in the intense quest for an African Christian identity which implies an incorporation of the African pre-Christian religious experience into Christianity (see section 2.6.1). Here again, the need to create a hermeneutic of trust in African theological argumentation becomes imperative.

A number of innovative methods are developed in an attempt to arrive at the meaning of the Cross of Christ, the person and the saving work of Jesus to the Africans. This research argues for the primacy of Scripture in this section so that, while such innovative developments have their strengths and usefulness, especially for the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ in the receptive African contexts, there are other compelling reasons arising from these contexts to decide for the primacy of Scripture. Some of these are briefly discussed below.

5.3.1 The problem of pre-understanding

The hermeneutical process in liberation hermeneutics begins with the historical consciousness of the biblical interpreter. For Dar' es Salaam, identification of the interlocutors of theology is the key to any successful hermeneutical task in the Third World theology (Frostin 1988:6). In Black Theology, the experience of the working class peasants is the hermeneutical starting point. This is based on the conviction that "God reveals himself in a situation" (Boesak 1976:14). The task of the interpreter in black hermeneutics is to locate liberation in Scripture for the oppressed. African Theology, on the other hand, emphasizes culture and the African pre-Christian religious experience as the starting point. For the African women, it is the experience of women in Africa that is the starting point. Contextualization of the gospel is the term often used for such a theological activity. The Argentine theologian, René Padilla (1978:15) expresses the conviction here when he asserts that theology is never done in a vacuum. It is always done within a context. Contextualization involves bringing to bear the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the lives of the people. Contextualization defined in this way informs Padilla's strong conviction that "absolute objectivity is impossible" (1978:15). It is argued that the contextual biblical interpreter usually brings his or her pre-understanding into the horizon of understanding of the texts' writer (Carson 1984). Black and African theologians assume that experiences and other forms of contexts are self-evident. Their insistence that the situation of the biblical interpreter or the receptor culture of a biblical message provides the epistemological lens with which the theologian must read the Bible neglects the other side of the issue: that the task of interpreting "historical,

social, material and other contexts" is not easier than interpreting Scripture texts (Fowl 2002:45-58).⁶

The task of identifying what Frostin calls "social relations" (1988:6) in Black liberation hermeneutics, on the one hand, and that of identifying ideological interests and class of authors of biblical texts - whether behind, in and in front of the text - on the other hand, is not always self-evident (West 1991). The variation exists between the culture, dominant ideology, other social and religious contexts of the biblical text writers, and the rationale for composing those biblical texts and those of the biblical interpreter. The presence of such variations, when ignored, may lead to an imposition of an existing context, experience and ideological interest arising from the context of the interpreter on the text. An elevation of the dominant interest that forms the interpreter's horizon of understanding above the central meaning and message of the biblical texts may lead to a discontentment with the biblical text when the latter fails to address sufficiently the interpretive interest of the interpreter.⁷

As Bernard Lategan (1990:3) has clearly pointed out, "the epistemological relationship between experience and thought, between text and application remains unclear, making it impossible to inform and guide the process of interpretation". This is where *Sola Scriptura* serves as an interpretive guide.⁸

⁶ It may worth the noticing here that Mosala (1986, 1989) rejected the traditional dominant hermeneutic utilized by Black Theology, especially as expressed by Boesak and Cornel West on the ground that it failed to give discourse to the masses. Hence, Mosala calls for an ideological materialist reading of the Bible, which locates the struggle for liberation of the working class peasants in Africa, behind the text of Scripture (West 1991). For Mosala thinks that the Bible comes to us via the experiences of the oppressor and so, the experience of the oppressed peasants is absent in the text of Scripture. Therefore, the true ideological nature of the biblical texts themselves can only be retrieved from behind the texts of Scripture.

⁷ Mosala (1986, 1989), Mofokeng (1988), and recently Maluleke (1996) have expressed this discontentment in various ways and forms.

⁸ It may be argued that even *Sola Scriptura* as a hermeneutical principle does not remove the above-mentioned complexities. Nevertheless, Welker (2003:15-16) offers a helpful way of looking at *Sola Scriptura* which, when properly employed, could minimize, if not remove completely, the above-mentioned perplexities. He observes that if we want to elucidate the *Sola Scriptura*, what he calls "the so-called Scripture principle," for people today, "then we should speak of a four-fold or even seven-fold weight of Scripture." The four-fold weight of Scripture includes, i) the historical, ii) the cultural, iii) the canonical, and iv) the theological weight of Scripture (2003:15-16). Putting these four-fold weights of Scripture together, one will begin to see that Scripture must be interpreted as a "whole" in order to elucidate the *Sola Scriptura* principle. In applying *Sola Scriptura* principle in theological argumentation in Africa, the four-fold weight of Scripture should constitute the interpretive grid. Smit writes of a situation that existed in the New Testament Society of South Africa when the "conviction became widespread that interpretation was more than merely the application of methods. Understanding was more than exegesis. The horizons had to fuse. The horizon of the reader's existential pre-understanding had to meet the horizon of the meaning of the text" (1994:266). This was

5.3.2 Access to Scripture

Sola Scriptura as hermeneutical method assumes the centrality of Jesus Christ as the one in whom the whole of God's plan of redemption unfolds. This implies that the biblical interpreter cannot afford to come to God's Word without the one that is the embodiment of Scripture. Thus, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is crucial in the interpretive process. This being the case, it is hard to understand how the interpreter's situation (context) forms the crux of African inculturation and liberation hermeneutics, especially when one realizes that interpretation is a transaction between the text and its interpreter (West 1997:99). Interpretation understood in this way is an interaction between the "sacred text and the sanctified heart" (Weaver 1998:367). This means, as the American Roman Catholic Weaver reports, "the text gains admission in the heart as the interpreter reads it, meditates on it. In the same way, the heart comes to inhabit the text as the interpreter seeks to experience through imagination and action the world the text describes" (1998:367). In this way, then, "the heart of the interpreter must first be prepared and even purified, and rendered receptive to the searching light of grace."⁹ Of course, this requires that the interpreter must be willing to accept Scripture as the Word of God.

This means that an understanding of what Welker calls fourfold weight of Scripture is necessarily for a hermeneutic of trust. Welker speaks of the *historical*, the *cultural*,

the situation in the first phase, the story of the phase, which Smit refers to as "Emphasizing interpretation versus method" within the New Testament Society in South Africa (1994:266). On the surface, it appears that this particular period in the history of contextual hermeneutics in NTSSA marks the demise of method and the elevation of interpretation, a view of method as an inferior way of transacting with Scripture (see *Neothestamentica* Vols. 4, 1970; 14, 1981; and 18, 1984 for details). This implies that the methodologies themselves need interpretation and this is precisely what Smit reports NTSSA was committed to in the first phase of their story of contextual hermeneutics. This was also the conviction and task of African theologians that met at Dar' es Salaam and Ghana, which is currently widely held by theologians of the three theological trends under review in this work. Given the above described conviction, it may appear as though the emphasis of this chapter that methodology is all important, and specifically that a particular use of Sola Scriptura principle is recommended for theological and biblical hermeneutics and for African theological argumentation, may face two possible objections. The first will be what are the hermeneutical contours that make Sola Scriptura the ideal principle for hermeneutics of contemporary African theologies? The second and related objection would be the role of the reader and his or her contextual horizon in the whole process of interpretation, should Sola Scriptura hold the key to, or be the window into, the understanding, interpretation, and application of Scripture in Africa. However, as it will soon become clear, the above apparent objections do not render the Sola Scriptura principle contra-productive for African contextual hermeneutics. Rather, it addresses precisely its concerns in a biblical perspective, while remaining distinctively "African" and yet biblical.

⁹ It must be pointed out that Weaver is here narrating the way the early church fathers, especially Cassian, understood interpretation of Scripture based on their conviction that Scripture is the inspired Word of God.

the *canonical* and the *theological* weight of Scriptural traditions (2003:378-383). It is necessary to recognize, says Welker, the fact that the biblical traditions were prepared, compared with one another, related with one another and even checked over against one another for a period of one thousand five hundred years (2003:378). This means that biblical traditions are records of people of the past's search for faith in God, and God's interaction with them for centuries before the present generations. Hence, they are records of people's faith journey with God together with their shortfalls, personal needs, interests, afflictions, desperation, hope and liberation (2003:378). In this way, the records of biblical traditions are not far removed from the present reader's life and spiritual experiences and could be applied to their situations in a meaningful manner. With this great historical weight, Welker argues, "both individual and societal human existence, the Bible has developed a two thousand year of effects" (2003:379). Therefore, neither the individual and society interests, nor the presence of the human elements in the biblical traditions, or the distance between the events recorded in the biblical traditions and the readers render the biblical traditions less authoritative. Rather, they add to the historical richness and weight of the biblical traditions.

It is also the point that the biblical traditions bear several marks of the cultures of their time of formation. Hence, one cannot deny the existence of the use of biblical traditions ideologically, either to support oppression and the promotion of capitalist-imperialist interest or for the struggle against it (cf. Idowu 1965, Fashole-Luke 1975, Boesak 1978, Sanneh 1993, Oduyoye 1995, 2001). The presence of oppression, of patriarchy, of struggle for liberation in the biblical tradition attest to the presence and redemptive influential control of God, and testimony to God's judgement for sin and reward for righteousness in human history. Hence, it is in the background of this cultural weight of biblical traditions that contemporary readers are able to know of the divine will for humanity. Therefore, the presence or lack of certain cultural traditions must not be reason to undermine or misuse the biblical authority as supporting a particular cultural interest of the societies that make the biblical traditions (cf. Ruether 1983; Mosala 1986, 1989; Cady 1986). Welker explains it all in the following words:

We find testimonies for Israel's existence as a nation, and from Israel's existence after the collapse of the nation: testimonies of normative stability, of normative crises. We find the unexamined assumptions of an ancient slaveholding society as well as important steps toward calling slavery into question and gradually doing away with it. We find

many expressions of patriarchy and ethno-centrism and powers and voices that propagate new, liberating forms of shared human life. The biblical traditions critically engage a broad diversity of cultures, norms and powers of their time. They offer orientation and consolation in a great variety of situations of individual and communal development, formation, and crisis (2003:380).

Therefore, the continuity and discontinuity that characterize the cultural diversity of the biblical tradition provide great testimonies of faith that form the content of the biblical Gospel that is proclaimed in every culture of any generation. This makes it possible to take into consideration, the factors that make up the canonical weight of the biblical traditions. The multiplicity of cultures and ideological interests and counter-interest of the biblical traditions do not provide a unified and single principle to adopt for their interpretation. It must be recognized that the biblical traditions evaluate, criticise, improve and fulfil themselves (Welker 2003:380). Hence, it will be unfortunate to isolate certain biblical traditions and read them as though they contain the central message, and hence, the last word about the Word of God in human language, which is generally called Scripture. Therefore, in the process of reading and interpretation, one must not turn to isolated texts for support of his or her theological or even ideological interest in any particular context and culture of the biblical texts. It is only when the biblical traditions are taken and read as a whole that one gets the central teaching of God on particular Christian doctrines. Hence, the canonization of Scripture is seen as "the preservation, in fixed collections of texts, of memories of broad and enduring scope and comprehensive, normative standards" (Welker 2003:380).

This being the case, the German theologian, Jan Assmann is quoted as saying, "the need for canonization arises when human beings suffer radical collapse and disintegration" (Welker 2003:380). Human beings are disintegrated in their theological thinking and hermeneutics, as can be seen from the discussion of the three theological trends in Africa, because they have chosen to disintegrate the biblical traditions in desperate search for support of specific cultural and contextual or even ideological interests. Therefore, the canon of the biblical traditions gives Scripture its weight of unity in diversity. Important in the canonical weight of Scripture is the idea that there is no further development of the biblical revelation. It is closed. Hence, no one should expect that modern cultures will or ought to be used by God for the purpose of revelation. Such cultures could only expect to receive and apply the biblical revelation given through other cultures.

The other three weights of Scripture are all grounded in the fact that God through creation and redemption intervened in human history (2003:381). This is why it is possible to speak of the fourth weight of Scripture, the theological weight. Scripture, Welker asserts, "guides historical, cultural, and ecclesiastical learning and growth in the knowledge of God. On the basis of its canonical composition and its theological weight, Scripture prevents premature (or final) closure on the memories and anticipations, learning and growth" (2003:381-382). The major reference of the biblical testimonies is the living God, the God of Israel and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This reference then gives coherence, weight and power to the testimonies of the biblical traditions (Welker 2003:382). Therefore, in theologizing, the fourfold weight of Scripture surfaces and one must be willing to recognize all the fourfold weights of Scripture to effectively understand and rightly use the biblical traditions. Hence, it is important to understand that biblical traditions with their historical, cultural, canonical and theological weight make up the Scripture, the Word of God. This implies that, in the search for meaning, interpretation and application of the biblical traditions to particular contexts, it must be recognized that God gave his Word to humanity through a process: from God-traditions-humanity. The following illustrates how the Bible as the Word of God comes to human being:



This means that while there is the possibility that in the above process, the human factor (element) may in one way or the other, create doubt on the legitimacy of granting the infallible status to Scripture for the reason of historical, cultural, canonical and theological inaccuracies and manipulations, the Word of God itself is not fallible and, thus remains authoritative. Therefore, while one may question the authority of the various traditions and the circumstances within which the biblical message has been received; it is not legitimate to extend this doubt to the central message of God itself. Hence, a high level of trust in the central message as the authoritative and normative Word of God to humanity is inevitable for avoiding the ideological misuse of the biblical traditions.

One of the challenges of contemporary theological argumentation in Africa is the inability of many African theologians to view Scripture in its fourfold weight. There is a tendency, as can be seen from the previous chapters, to argue as though the historical, or the cultural or the canonical aspect of the biblical tradition is all that is. Some argue as though the traditions and the circumstances within which the Bible was received in Africa are capable of determining what message Scripture have or should be. Hence, their suspicion of such traditions inevitably leads them to suspect the biblical traditions themselves. Therefore, it may not be out of place to examine the role and use of the past traditions in contemporary African theological hermeneutics. What follows is an exploration of Cady's appropriation of Dworkin's typology to theological hermeneutics.

5.4 CADY'S HERMENEUTICS

For those readers who may be unfamiliar with the issues the American feminist theologian, Linell E. Cady is proposing to address, it may worth the effort to give a brief overview of the growing debate over the role and status of the past in theological argumentation which Cady has examined in her essay.

The post-Enlightenment emphasis on rationalism has challenged the role and status of tradition in theological hermeneutics (Strimple 1994). Post-modern Christianity, brewed from the "polarization of authoritative tradition and the freedom of reason" (West 1991:80), is faced with a "growing debate concerning the status of tradition in theological argumentation" (Cady 1986 in West 1991:80). The rise of historical

consciousness brought about the known historical critical method based on the erring assumption that autonomous human reason free from the influence of revelation was "sufficient to know reality and to guide life" (Larkin 1988:30).

The historical critical method, says Larkin, supposedly freed biblical interpretation from the shackles of supernaturalism and ecclesiastical tradition which before then, arbitrarily, it asserts, dictated how reality would be understood and interpreted based solely on "the belief that Scripture was divine revelation, fully inerrant and finally authoritative" (Larkin 1988:30). The historical critical method raises doubt over "the appropriate warrants" to appeal to the past in theological argumentation (Cady 1986:440). The crux of the debate is whether "tradition and Scripture carry any normative status vis-à-vis contemporary theological construction or is theology free from the constraints imposed by the past" (Cady 1986:440; cf. Mosala 1986, 1989; Mofokeng 1988). Commenting on the strength of the historical critical method, Cady says that the "modern trajectory which has dethroned the past from its role as arbiter of current theologizing is a two-edged sword" (1986:440). On one side of the sword, Cady contends, it has achieved the desired goal of freeing theology from the constraints and "biases of previous generations, acknowledging that theological perspectives of another place and time are not in and of themselves adequate criteria for contemporary theologizing" (1986:440). However, Cady observes, the break from the past, the illusionary freedom from the past achieved by historical critical method "has not come without a cost" (1986:440): it raises suspicion about any appeal to Scripture and tradition.¹⁰ Mofokeng (1988), Mosala (1986) and Maluleke (1996) express this suspicion in various ways. Another cost of the break from the past is the easy "slipping" into what Cady describes as "a historical isolation from all previous theological interpretation" (1986:440). A point in reference is the growing rise of scepticism and suspicion regarding the European hermeneutical tradition and its ability to provide the basis for an effective hermeneutic in a Third World context (Lategan 1990:3; cf. Sanneh 1993; Idowu 1965; Mosala 1986, 1989; Bediako 1984, 1995, 1997; Adamo 1999).

At this point, it may begin to dawn on the reader that the role and status of tradition is not a problem in the Western theological tradition alone, but also to Africa.

¹⁰ One asks with the Dutch theologian, G.C. Berkouwer, whether in view of this suspicion and criticism, it is still possible to rely on the words of Scripture in life and in death (1975:13).

Since the German Philosopher, Gadamer is influenced by post-Enlightenment theology and hermeneutics, especially with respect to its challenge of objectivity, Cady suggests "We begin to get some clarity about the role and status of tradition in theological argumentation by considering the hermeneutical philosophy of Gadamer" (1984:441).¹¹ Thus, Cady proposes that we adapt "Gadamer's proposal that we consider legal interpretation as the most appropriate paradigm for hermeneutical understanding" (West 1991:81).

Drawing on Heidegger, Gadamer (1975:25) rejects the model of objectivity and attempted, Cady reports, to show that all understanding is necessarily perspectival, an interpretation directly influenced by the assumptions, needs and interests of the interpreter (1986:441-442). Gadamer promotes Heidegger's model of the hermeneutical circle by attempting to show that all understanding takes place in and through dialogue (Cady 1986:442; West 1991:81). This means that an interpreter approaches a text with a certain pre-understanding and attempts to develop an appropriate interpretation through a process of a "to-and-fro engagement with the subject matter" (Cady 1986:442).

For Gadamer, the interpreter's horizon makes understanding an integral process of interpretation; hence, understanding and interpretation cannot be separated into sequential moments. More so, application is not a secondary practical concern. In Gadamer's method, it is "an intrinsic component of the one hermeneutic act of understanding/application/interpretation (Cady 1986:442). This is based on Gadamer's conviction that interpretation of a text always presupposes the horizon of the interpreter. The horizon of the interpreter is described in black and African hermeneutics as the situation and culture (context) of the interpreter. Alternatively,

¹¹ J.C. Pauw and D.J. Smit have argued that Gadamer directly or indirectly have influence the ecumenical church, especially as his influence can be noticed from the way the "present-day ecumenism uses hermeneutical categories and convictions underscores Gadamer's own insight that 'theologians see in my work a confirmation of their own needs'" (2003:19). In the essay, "The Conversation that we are ... - Reflections on Ecumenical Hermeneutics" written as a theological tribute to Gadamer, Pauw and Smit reflect on what they describe as the "complex and often ambiguous nature of his relationship with theology and theologians, and with issues of faith and religions" (2003:19-24). In the second section, they attempt to illustrate how Gadamer's description of hermeneutics as the "conversation that we are ..." is currently employed in the discussion of ecumenical hermeneutics in the World Council of Churches (2003:24-30). In the last section, the authors try to underline some similarities between the ecumenical hermeneutics of WCC and Gadamer's understanding of his own life project (2003:31-33).

Cady describes it as "the situation *from* and *for* which an interpretation takes place [*italics mine*] (1986:442).

Gadamer notes with dismay the eclipse of the centrality of application in hermeneutical understanding in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when historical and literary studies began to set themselves up as the hermeneutical paradigm (Cady 1986:442). When this took place, historical and literary studies failed to recognize the "determinative influence of the interpreter's interests, questions, and assumptions" (Cady 1986).

Gadamer's proposal that we consider legal hermeneutics as the most appropriate paradigm for hermeneutical understanding is intended precisely to rectify this error. For in making a legal decision, the judge is attempting to interpret the law as it applies to a specific given situation (case). Since situational interests and needs shape interpretation in Gadamer's view, his model better illustrates, according to Cady, the fundamental hermeneutical unity of understanding/interpretation/application (1986:442). Hence, Gadamer asserts that his legal hermeneutics provide the needed model for the relationship between the past and present that is sought (see his *Truth and Method*).

Drawing on Gadamer's suggestion about the "paradigmatic character of legal hermeneutics", Cady begins her study with an exploration of legal hermeneutics, arguing that legal hermeneutics can shed light on some of the vexing debates concerning the role of the past in contemporary theological argumentation (Cady 1986:443). Cady pursues legal hermeneutics by following the typology developed by Dworkin, a philosopher of law. She hopes to clarify the various uses of the past in contemporary theological argumentation through exploration and appropriation of alternative forms of legal hermeneutics (1986:443).

Cady's exploration is useful especially when one acknowledges that a careful consideration of "methodological approaches in different but analogous fields can be illuminating", specifically because, it creates a distance away from the interpreter's pre-understanding which encourages a move, dispassionate and a tolerant consideration of the alternative methods on the side of the interpreter, as Madipoane Masenya suggests (1995:189).

Dworkin's typology consists of three major approaches: conventionalism, naturalism and instrumentalism (Cady 1986:443). The way the past constrains or does not constrain, and to what extent, legal decisions set these three approaches apart. Conventionalism describes that school of judicial adjudication in which decisions are made based on past precedents. Here, the task of the judge is to identify the authoritative precedents in any given authority. The judge will then proceed to "investigate whether such lawful authority have established a rule which unambiguously applies to the current case" (Cady 1986:443-444). If such a law exists, then the judge is constrained to follow it. If not, then the new ruling of the judge over the case will become "part of the authoritative precedents which guides later decisions", Cady reports (1986:444). This implies that the judge has the prerogative to make "novel decisions" when the past does not "set a precedent for how such cases are to be decided" (1986:444).

Naturalism assumes that judicial interpretation must be based upon past decisions, but it further states that a precedent is never determinative in isolation but should be interpreted in a wider context "in order to view the best political order" (1986:445). This means that, under naturalism, the judge is obliged to make a decision that "fits" past rulings. But those past rulings must be interpreted not in isolation, but in the widest possible context that makes the best sense of the law and the political order as a whole" (1986:446). The latter structure sets naturalism apart from conventionalism.

Instrumentalism suggests that the judge should concern himself or herself with the future in making judicial decisions. According to instrumentalism, "judges should always look to the truth to try and make the community as good and wise and best a community as it can be, with no essential regard to what it has been until now" (Cady 1986:445). Therefore, instrumentalism differs with naturalism in the extent to which the past constrains current judicial decisions (Cady 1986:445). Cady notes that, even though instrumentalism "refuses to let the past necessary delimit judicial decisions, this approach concedes that there may be strategic reasons for taking the past into account in making judicial decisions" (1986:447). This is evident in the instrumentalist's insistence that the judge should avoid societal chaos by not making rules that will set themselves up against other existing laws which the judge cannot overrule (Cady 1986:447). Therefore, instrumentalism emphasises "what will

facilitate a more just society and the past only has a pragmatic role in determining the correct decision" (Cady 1986:447).

In summary, the above three types of judicial interpretation are based upon "differing uses of the past" (Cady 1986:448). Cady contends that conventionalism separates moral assessment and prior decisions, giving the latter the privilege of precedent. Naturalism combines "fact and value or description and evaluations" in contending that "prior decisions are to be interpreted in the widest possible context and weighed in terms of substantive ideals of justice" (1986:448). Hence, the "make fit" with the past characteristics of naturalism's perspective is justified on the ground that the "political order ought to be fairly applied to all persons". Instrumentalism takes naturalism further by not only allowing moral decisions to guide judicial decisions, but it also radically extends this "by denying that past decisions have any intrinsic constraint upon such moral and political considerations" (Cady 1986:448).

As West (1991:84) suggests, it is useful to follow Cady as she applies Dworkin's typology to the feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Ruether. Cady says that she attempts to appropriate Dworkin's typology to Feminist Theology for two main reasons: first, because Feminist Theology is still in its youthful stage in the "exploration of methodological issues in any systematic way". The second reason is that Feminist Theology, Cady contends, more than any other theological area has perhaps "generated the most acrimonious debates covering the prayer role of the past in theology" (1986:449). Before now Feminist Theology, says Cady, functioned as a critique of inherited tradition.

Cady notes that even the most recent attempt to "retrieve the tradition from a feminist perspective" is often viewed with suspicion by some women who argue that such an attempt minimizes "the depth and extent of the distortion reflected in the Scriptures and tradition of patriarchal religion" (1986:449). Cady thinks that applying Dworkin's typology will help clarify major methodological alternatives in Feminist Theology (1986:449).

Cady notes "Feminist Theology does not reflect the conventionalist approach to the past." For even the conservative evangelical feminists conclude that "positivistic conception of revelation inevitably sanctifies the patriarchal distortions of the Ancient Near East" (1986:451).

Instead of resorting to a mere citing of "isolated Scriptural tests", Cady suggests that feminist biblical scholars must interpret the biblical message as a whole (1986:451). The Evangelical feminist, Virginia Mallenkott, supports Cady's position when she contends that, since patriarchy is "the cultural background of the Scriptures", it is "basic to any feminist reading of the bible [sic] that one cannot absolutize the culture in which the bible was written". Hence, Mallenkott insists that it is necessarily to distinguish between what is "for an age" and what is "for all time" (1979:222).

Cady argues that in making such a distinction, "Mallenkott concludes that we are in error to absolutize anything that denies the trust of the entire bible toward individual wholeness and harmonious community, toward oneness in Christ" (1986:451). Rosemary Ruether argues for a similar position, Cady says, when she contends, "Although the Bible contains ideological distortions of patriarchy, she claims it also contains a more control thrust which undermines such distortions" (1986:451).

Before going any further, it worth exploring briefly the methodological assumptions upon which Ruether bases her arguments. This will help not only to put her argument into its context, but will also illuminate our understanding into Ruether's overall theological convictions.

In her celebrated work, *Sexism and God Talk*, Ruether explains her task in that work as seeking what she calls a "working paradigm of human situation drawn from a sufficiently large sample of experience that can eventually stimulate dialogue and lead to yet another further synthesis" (1983:21). Ruether's methodology assumes that "God is not a Christian or Jew rather than a pagan, not white rather than Asian or African" (1983:21). Hence, theological reflections, she argues, drawn from Judean Christian or even the Near-Eastern-Mediterranean-European traditions are not related to God, to truth, or to "authentic humanity" over others like Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism (1983:21). Ruether contends that what sets apart feminism drawn from other cultural contexts such as the aforementioned ones is not self-evident. Yet Ruether accords equal value to all Feminist Theologies irrespective of their cultural origin.

Ruether draws what she sees as tradition from Scripture, both Hebrew and Christian, marginalized or "heretical" Christian tradition such as Gnosticism and Montanism, the primary theological themes of classical Christian Theology, orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. Others are Near Eastern and Greco-Roman religion and philosophy and,

lastly, critical post-Christian worldviews such as liberation, Romanticism and Marxism (1983:22).

According to Ruether, all these traditions are sexist in that they all provide "equivalence and mutuality" between men and women, between class and races, yet in her view, "these alternatives exist in forms distorted by Sexism" (1983:22). Ruether believes that only by subjecting each of these to a "feminist critique and bringing them together in a new relationship" can they potentially aid us in our imagination of "new humanity" (1983:22). She suggests that "allowing Canaanite religion to criticise Hebrew religion rather than the reverse" by allowing minority or marginalized religions to criticize the dominant traditions, we could "discover lost critical principles" (1983:22).

Ruether admits, "There is no question that patriarchy is the social context for both the Old and New Testament and that this social context has been incorporated into religious ideology on many levels" (1983:22). However, she contends that the Bible also provides resources for the critique of patriarchy and its religious sanctification (1983:22). This being the case, Ruether insists, "Feminism must not use the critical prophetic principles in biblical religion to apologize for or cover up patriarchal ideology." Instead, she argues, the "prophetic liberating traditions can be appropriated by feminism only as normative principles of biblical faith which criticize and reject patriarchal ideology" (1983:22-23). She believes that by appropriating her prophetic liberating framework, patriarchal ideology could lose its normative character and fulfil the obligation to denounce the normative character of patriarchal ideology instead of clearing it up or explaining it away (1983:23).

Ruether asserts, "Feminism appropriates the prophetic principles in ways that biblical writers in the most part do not" namely, to criticize what she sees as the "unexamined framework" (1983:23). This means that Feminist Theology that draws on biblical principles can only be a possible alternative through correct exegesis - by rejecting the elevation of one social group over against others as image of God and the use of God to justify social domination (1983:23). Therefore, Ruether argues, "Feminist reading of the Bible can discern a norm according to which biblical texts themselves can be criticized", but only to the extent to which biblical texts reflect this normative principle will they be regarded as authoritative (1983:230). Thus, she contends that

many aspects of the Bible are on that basis "to be frankly set aside and rejected" (1983:23).

This selective authentication of biblical texts in Ruether's framework is not all new. Ruether argues "all theologies, regardless of their claims that the Bible is totally the work of inspiration, in fact never consider all parts of the Bible equally authoritative." Rather, they use the text's "implicit or explicit assumptions about the normative development of Biblical faith" (1983:23). It is no wonder then that Ruether says, "Feminism, in claiming the prophetic liberating tradition of biblical faith as a norm through which to criticize the Bible, does not choose an arbitrary or marginal idea in the Bible" (1983:24). It chooses, she continues, "a tradition that can be fairly claimed on the basis of generally accepted biblical scholarship, to get the central tradition, the tradition by which biblical faith constantly criticizes and renews itself and its own vision" (1983:24). She notes that what is "innovative in feminist hermeneutics is not the prophetic norm *for women*" (1983: 24).

Ruether reports that feminism claims that women as the oppressed are also included among those oppressed whom God came to liberate and vindicate. In this way, then, Ruether thinks that feminism has apparently seen what male prophetic thought had not seen. She describes her prophetic liberating tradition in a thematic way: 1) God's defence and vindication of the oppressed; 2) Critique of dominant power and power-holders; 3) the vision of the glories of new age to come in which the present unjust social system is overcome and peace and justice under the reign of God installed in history; 4) finally, the critique of ideology or religion, since ideology in this sense is primarily religious (1983:24).

As West (1991:85) reports, Ruether argues that these four themes are "central to the prophets and to the mission of Jesus" (1983:24). Ruether then tries to demonstrate from the New Testament the centrality of the four themes in the ministry of Jesus.

At this point the reader should be able to follow Cady's appropriation of Dworkin's typology to Ruether's feminist prophetic liberating tradition to which this research will now turn.

Cady's impression of Ruether is that she (Ruether) "attempts to isolate the critical liberating thrust of Scriptures and echoed it beyond its original application, arguing that such a move is entirely consistent with the meaning of the prophetic ideal"

(1986:452). For Ruether argues that the Bible, when correctly interpreted, can function as a "liberating power" for oppressed women (compare the view of African women in Chapter Three). On method, Cady argues that both Ruether's and Mallenkott's positions appeal to the naturalist theory of judicial adjudication under Dworkin's typology; however, they differ in their rationale for appropriating the past (1986:452).

While Ruether's motif for appropriating the past is to situate "oneself meaningfully in history" – the *make fit* of naturalism - Mallenkott bases one's position on the past because "she writes as though the Bible is authoritative and hence must inevitably contain truths for all time" (Cady 1986:452). According to Cady, this puts Mallenkott's position closer to conventionalism, but Cady nevertheless maintains that Mallenkott's "self-conscious procedure in interpreting the bible falls within a naturalist framework" (1986:452).

Since what is at stake here is methodological self-consciousness, it will be better to examine the works of Ruether and Mallenkott based on their rationale for appropriating the past, as Cady suggests. She argues "it is more useful to place these differing approaches in a continuum" (West 1991:87). Placing the three approaches in a continuum beginning with conventionalism through naturalism to instrumentalism, then, Mallenkott will be closer, according to Cady, to conventionalism than Ruether is (West 1991:87). Cady draws on Dworkin as she examines Schüssler Fiorenza's criticism of Ruether and Mallenkott.

In her classical work, *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that feminist hermeneutics is deficient in that "it depends upon distinguishing the essentials from the non-essentials, from the content, or the external truth from the historical variables in Scripture" (Cady 1983:450).¹² Through such a process, feminist hermeneutics are said to have attempted to uncover and reject the patriarchal delimitation of Scripture and to resume the text through the identification of its true or proper meaning (Cady 1983:453). Cady reports that, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, "such feminist hermeneutics reflect a neo-orthodox orientating which confers an unwarranted authority upon the biblical text" (1986:17).

¹² This is also true of African Women Christology. See Oduyoye (2001).

As an alternative to Ruether's prophetic liberating method, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, "instead of granting revelatory status to Scripture a feminist hermeneutics must be more radical in exposing the androcentric character of the biblical writings" (1986:453). Schüssler Fiorenza contends that these "biblical writings, whichever way taken, reflect patriarchal biases of the individual authors and the church which proclaimed and canonized them" (Cady 1986:453).

Schüssler Fiorenza insists that women should move from behind the text to a "historical reconstruction of the life situation from which the texts emerged" (1986:453; West 1991:88). This is because the patriarchal texts, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, do not reflect the historical and social contexts from which they came, but offer a selective and perspectival picture of the early Christian communities" (1986:56).¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza asserts, "The information found on women in the surviving canonical texts and the writing of patristic orthodoxy are not value neutral." What is handed down to us in form of finished Scriptural canon is, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, "incorrect inadequate information about what went on in the patristic era" (1986:56). If we must know what actually took place, we must "broaden the sources and information we use as a historical and theological basis for the reconstruction of early Christian beginnings and formulating the meaning of the church" (1986:56). Schüssler Fiorenza pursues this last task in the rest of her *In Memory of Her*.

Following Dworkin's typology, Cady places Schüssler Fiorenza's alternative feminist hermeneutic in the naturalist scheme. Cady says that, far from disagreeing with this approach, Schüssler Fiorenza is "rather attempting to apply its methods more rigorously - we have seen that the naturalist hermeneutical style rejects conventionalism for extracting isolated bits and pieces of the past rather than interpreting it as a whole" (1986:454).

Cady concludes that "by resting with suspicion and retrieval of a text", Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutics is neither "radical enough in its suspicion of androcentric texts nor able to retrieve the heritage of women which lies behind the text" (Cady 1986:454). This means that far from rejecting naturalism, Schüssler Fiorenza is

¹³ Compare the argument of Mosala (1986, 1989).

making a useful "contribution to an adequate understanding of what it entails in interpretation of the past 'as a whole'" (Cady 1986:454).

It is not difficult to notice that Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza and Cady's appropriation of Dworkin's typology reflect the influence that the interpreter's pre-understanding has in the process of interpretation. In summary, Cady's study provides some insights into the role of the past in theological argumentations using legal hermeneutics. She helps uncover the way that legal hermeneutics could be used in evaluating the role of Scripture and tradition (the past) in theological argumentation. By using Dworkin's typology, it is easy to evaluate the role and status of the past in any theological argument.

The three perspectives outlined by Dworkin in Cady's study show the different levels on which the past functions in any given theological argumentation. For the purpose of this chapter, Cady's study lays the foundation for this research to build on in interpreting and clarifying the Sola Scriptura hermeneutical principle for evaluating African theologies' use of the past in theological argumentations.

In the next section, this chapter will attempt to apply Dworkin's typology to the understanding of Sola Scriptura conviction discussed earlier, searching specifically, for how Dworkin's typology can be applied to the procedural framework of Sola Scriptura principle.

5.5 DWORKIN'S LEGAL HERMENEUTICS AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

Before this chapter employs the Sola Scriptura method to evaluate the methodological assumptions of the hermeneutics of the three major theological trends, it will be useful to attempt to apply Dworkin's legal hermeneutics to the Protestant principle of Sola Scriptura. Methodologically, such an exercise will help ease the task of this chapter, especially with respect to critically evaluating African hermeneutics' congruence with the Sola Scriptura method.

Applying Dworkin's typology not only helps "sort out the alternative methodological approaches" in contemporary African hermeneutics (Cady 1986:448). It will also facilitate "a closer consideration of the assumptions and issues which are at stake in these diverse approaches" (Cady 1986:448), especially as the choice of one method in

effect leads to a particular view of Scripture and Christian Theology in general, but specifically, Christology and Soteriology in the contemporary African context.¹⁴

While it will be an over-statement of the case to assume that there is a one-to-one correlation between legal hermeneutics and biblical and theological hermeneutics, there are, nevertheless, some similarities especially regarding the use of methodologies from two analogous disciplines (cf. Lategan 1980:107-126).

Dworkin's legal hermeneutic provides a procedure for judges to interpret the past in deciding current cases in a courtroom setting. *Sola Scriptura* provides a guide to interpreters to employ the Scriptures in making important daily theological decisions in a theological context.

Under Dworkin's typology, a judge's particular use of the past determines whether he or she is to be constrained by the past or not in making judicial decisions on current cases. In theological argumentation, the role and status of biblical and theological (church) traditions informs the convictions of the theologian(s) in contemporary theological argumentation.

In legal hermeneutics it is the law or the past rulings of courts of higher status that the judges interpret and apply to the present case before them. In theological argumentation it is the biblical text, and sometimes a church theological tradition (confessions, church orders, council decisions, or acts of general assemblies), that is evoked for a decision in the contemporary theological debate or case.

The question would be how the individual schools of judicial adjudication in Dworkin's typology relate to *Sola Scriptura*?

Naturalism assumes that "judicial decision must be based on past decisions. However, according to naturalism, a precedent is never determinative in isolation but it must be interpreted in as wide a context as possible in order to view it in the best political order" (Cady 1986:445). This being the case, Dworkin asserts, naturalism insists that "a judge should decide fresh cases in the spirit of a novelist in the chain writing of a fresh chapter" (1982:168). As in literature, the judge, says Dworkin, "must make creative decisions 'going on as before' rather than by starting in a new direction as if

¹⁴ A closer look at the literature review in Chapters Two through to Four will unearth the truth of this claim. Boesak (1976, 1984) and Mosala (1986, 1989), for example, have different views of Scripture based on their methodological self-consciousness of what is essentially the Bible.

he is writing on a clean slate" (1982:168). Naturalism does not rule out, it could be argued, the possibility of any creative imagination in the process of adjudication, but insists rather that such creativity fits in the chain of judicial proceedings. Dworkin explains that naturalism requires that the judge "must read through (or have some good idea through his legal training and experience) what other judges in the past have written, not simply to discover what these other judges have said or their state of mind when they said it" but, Dworkin continues, "to read an opinion about what they have collectively *done* in the way that each of the novelists formed an opinion about the collective novel so written" (1982:168).

As in naturalism, *Sola Scriptura* does not rule out any creativity on the side of the interpreter. In theological argumentation the theologian may make use of the available tools to illumine the understanding of the situation and the biblical text or church deposits of the past. However, like the judge operating under naturalism, he or she must not make any theological decision at odds with what Scripture approves or disapproves implicitly or explicitly. For it is the biblical text that is interpreted as a "whole" in the theological issue that theologians seek to address. The contexts might be different, but theological problems arising from such a context must be interpreted in the light of the overall theological framework.

Similar to the constraints imposed by naturalism, the theologian is obliged to 'read' from the Scripture and from what other theologians within his/her tradition (Reformed or Catholic, Methodists, Anglican etc) have said about such a theological problem, or in case of the Bible, about the meaning of a particular text. In this case, then, any fresh theological development must be in continuity with the past biblical tradition of faith.¹⁵

Naturalism insists that "the best interpretation of past judicial decisions is the interpretation that shows these in the best light, not aesthetically, but politically, as

¹⁵ At this point, as Smit notes with respect to interpretation in the divided church, scholarly methodology alone cannot deliver a right interpretation (2003:26). As was argued in the previous chapters, "the nature of the process of reading and appropriation" is more complicated than it is ever appreciated (Smit 2003:23). There are of course other factors that have to be taken into consideration. A theoretical consensus will not be practical at this point, since the various theological traditions and church deposits may come up with different conclusions on practical application of whatever method of interpretation developed (cf. Cartwright 2002:513 cited by Smit, *Ecumenical hermeneutics?*, 4). However, a diverse but a particular method that respect the authority of Scripture will maintain and facilitate the application of the original meaning of Scripture, even if interpretation, understanding and application are taken as one ground event. This is the strength of the *Sola Scriptura* principle.

covering as close to the correct ideas of just legal system as possible" (Dworkin 1982:168). Sola Scriptura, like naturalism, insists that the best interpretation of the text is the one that reads the text in its immediate and as broad a context as possible, covering as much as possible, the overall history of God's redemptive plan in the whole of Scripture. This means that a particular biblical text is an integral part of, and a continuation of the history of God's redemptive plan of salvation. Therefore, its meaning must be determined from the perspective of the rest of the history of redemption revealed the whole of Scripture. Hence, a theological decision must reflect the overall purpose of God's redemptive plan in biblical texts and history.

Naturalism maintains that the judge's decision, no matter what his/her political convictions are, must 'fit' the past ruling of other judges by not contravening them. Sola Scriptura also insists that the theological conviction of the theologian, notwithstanding, must not decide contrary to the ruling of Scripture. It insists that the theologian's view "fits" the norms of Scripture. Alternatively, his or her interpretation should fit the overall trust of the whole meaning of Scripture.

In naturalism, a judge may be forced to "reject a politically attributive interpretation, we supposed, simply because he did not believe it fits the record well enough" (Dworkin 1982:170). A theologian operating under the Sola Scriptura method would reject a socio-political or culturally "attributive" interpretation, because it is not faithful to the biblical text, or because such an interpretation does not fit in the overall purpose of God's plan of redemption in Christ.

Dworkin (1982:170) notes that, as naturalism insists, "if fit is indeed an independent dimension of success in interpretation, then any judge using this approach would include some tacit conception of what 'fit' is , and of how well a particular interpretation must fit the record of judicial and other legal decisions in order to count as acceptable." In theological interpretation, the success of the interpreter will depend on a "tacit" conception of what constitutes Scripture or what it means to be faithful to Scripture.

Under such circumstances, it may be necessary to state more clearly what Sola Scriptura as a hermeneutical principle really entails. Consider, for example, two theologians operating from two different theological traditions, such as broadly Evangelical and Catholic. They will have different conceptions of what constitutes

Scripture. To the mind of the Evangelical, Scripture is the sixty-six books of the Bible. The Roman Catholics believe that the sixty-six books and the books of the Apocrypha (or hidden books) constitute the Scripture. Hence, where the Catholic theologian argues based on what is commended in the Apocryphal books, he may be convinced within his/her tradition that he/she is faithful to Scripture. The Evangelical does not recognize the Apocryphal books as canonical and thus to him or her they cannot be alluded to with any degree of authority for any theological argumentation. This is an example of two different tacit conceptions of what Scripture is and what it means to be faithful to Scripture based on the differing views of what constitutes Scripture.

Another problem may arise out of the lack of uniformity of different theologians as to what God's overall plan of Salvation is. A person who believes in universalism that at the end all are going to be saved (cf. Byang Kato 1975) will read texts like Romans 8:28-31 differently from a traditional Calvinist who believes only the elect are saved. Theologians from these two theological traditions will argue for or against universalism using the above text based on what they think Scripture is saying. From the methodological perspectives of naturalism, all may be operating under differing views of *Sola Scriptura*, but different meanings of the same text, based on their different conception of salvation.¹⁶

¹⁶ This kind of problem exists within the fellowship of the World Council of Churches. Concerning Ecumenical hermeneutics with the WCC, the Montreal Consultation is reported to have attempted to address the issue (Smit 2003:24). The major issue will be the relationship between church traditions and Scripture. Smit reports that Montreal tried to resolve this issue by suggesting that they are not two independent, separate entities. Rather, Scripture is the internal norm of Tradition, and Tradition is the proper context for reading Scripture (2003:24). But is it not also true that the above statement distinguishes between the role and authority of Scripture and Tradition? Perhaps it may be useful to quote from the Montreal document itself: "Our starting-point is that we are all living in a Tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament, and are all indebted to that Tradition in as much as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *Keryma*), testified in Scripture, transmitted in, and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition taken in this sense is actualized in the preaching of the Word, in the administration of the Sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness of tradition is the Christian faith, not only as a sum of tenants, but as a living reality transmitted through the operation of the Holy Spirit. We can speak of the Christian Tradition, whose content is God's revelation and self-giving in Christ, present in the live of the Church" (Rodger & Vischer 1964:50-511, Report & 45-46 in Smit 2003:24). This kind of view of the relationship between Tradition and Scripture is quite ambiguous and if theological argumentations were to be based on it, theologians may not ever reach a consensus on any thing. This may even be worse in Africa. Therefore, a resort to *Sola Scriptura* in the sense of the conventionalism way of judicial adjudication will help ease the problem.

Dworkin notes that some layers may say "no one interpretation of the legal record can be objectively the correct interpretation" (1982:175).¹⁷ For since two judges may disagree on what is the best or correct interpretation of the past, they may also disagree on what constitutes the best "political ideal" for a just society. This type of scepticism exists in theological argumentation. Some Third World theologians like Padilla (1977, Mbiti 1975, 2003, Oduyoye 2001), for example, have consistently argued that there is no objective interpretation of Scripture. However, *Sola Scriptura* goes beyond the scope of the perspective of naturalism: it is not just a hermeneutical method, but also a hermeneutical conviction that emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit, the author of Scripture, in the over all process of interpretation (Van Poythress 1998; Fowl 2002).¹⁸ But how does conventionalism provides a remedy to naturalism in *Sola Scriptura*?

Conventionalism insists that judges must base their decision on the existing laid down laws. In a situation where such laws do not exist and no judicial precedents, "whose language unambiguously covers the case at hand", the judge may create the "best rule for the future, and apply [it to the current case] retrospectively" (Dworkin 1982:178). For those passages generally regarded as *adiaphora* (things without a difference), conventionalism in that perspective could, loosely, be applied to *Sola Scriptura*. The following illustration may help explain the relationship between conventionalism and *Sola Scriptura* in the context of *adiaphora* texts.

It may be argued that in the institution of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:22ff), Jesus commands his disciples to partake of the bread and the wine in remembrance of him. He does not spell out clearly how often they should do so. He simply conjoins Christians to do that until his return. In such a situation it is up to Christians, base on their interpretation of the text, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, whether quarterly, as it is the practice of some churches in continental Dutch Reformed tradition, or weekly

¹⁷Reflecting on the Montreal document and the hermeneutical challenge to ecumenism, Smit makes a similar comment that "all traditions and churches, whether they claim to find the principle of interpretation somehow in Scripture or somehow outside of Scriptures still also claim that theirs is the right way to interpret Scripture-which leads to the ecumenical challenge of diversity" (Ecumenical hermeneutics, 8).

¹⁸At Montreal, it was argued that even the interpretation guided by Scripture is not a self-defining activity. Smit says, "The solution to the problem of a criterion therefore lies in Holy Scriptures 'rightly interpreted' – but what does *this* mean? Even this confession concerning the role of the Holy Spirit 'does not solve the problem of criterion,' which clearly means, according to Montreal, that 'we arrive at the quest for a hermeneutical principle'" (Smit 2003:26).

as it is inconsistently done within some Roman Catholic circles, or monthly as most Anglicans do. Hence, in conventionalism's perspective, the decision to celebrate the Lord's Supper four times a year or not is based on the conviction that there is no inherent restriction in Scripture stipulating how often the act could be done. A particular church tradition is, then, at liberty to decide how often their churches should celebrate the Super. When such a decision is made, it may be used for the church in future practices.

Nevertheless, broadly, conventionalism is closer to Sola Scriptura method than naturalism. Conventionalism's perspective is the approach, Cady argues (1986:449), which depends most heavily and explicitly upon the past. This methodological approach looks to the past to "determine if any legitimate authorities have rule upon similar case, whereupon it is constrained to follow such a precedent" (1986:449).

In a similar way, Sola Scriptura insists that the theologian looks to the biblical tradition to determine if Scriptural authority has rule upon whatever theological issue is in view, where upon, he or she is constrained unconditionally to follow it. In a more strict sense, Sola Scriptura rules out the possibility of the theologian to make any theological decision on a theological topic and life without seeking to know if there is a Scriptural warrant for it. Under Sola Scriptura approach, the theologian is expected to look first through Scripture for its warrant before making any theological decision. Take, for instance, a debate about whether a polygamist should be allowed to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In making a decision to allow or not to allow him to part take of the table will be based on whether there is a Scriptural warrant for it or not. If there is no such warrant in Scripture, then no church tradition, under Sola Scriptura principle, is allowed to do so. If there is such a warrant in Scripture, then whether it is ethically wrong to allow polygamists to part take of the Lord's Table or not, the church will be constrained to decide for polygamists.

Another example may go this way: supposing a debate arises in a theological tradition whether African Traditional Religions should be incorporated into the Christian faith. The decision to allow that or not will be determined on the basis of whether Scripture allows the practice of non-biblical religious worldviews to be incorporated into Christianity or not. If there is no such ruling in Scripture, then, according to Sola Scriptura, theologians are constrained by Scripture from incorporating African Traditional Religions into the Christian faith.

The above examples fit *Sola Scriptura* into the methodological perspectives of conventionalism in the sense that the past biblical tradition constrains theological decisions in any theological argumentation. Hence, on methodological grounds, conventionalism captures the framework and convictions of *Sola Scriptura* more than naturalism in Dworkin's typology.

Dworkin (1982:181) claims that instrumentalism encourages "judges to always look to the future: to try and make the community as good and wise and just a community as it can be, with no essential regard to what it has been until now." *Sola Scriptura* encourages interpreters to look back to Scripture for an interpretation that will best promote the course of God's redemptive plan in Christ for the best Christian life for the community of faith as possible. Hence, *Sola Scriptura* will reject the pretensions of instrumentalism that a just and good a community can be produced by rejecting the past. For under *Sola Scriptura*, it is the past biblical tradition that produces the future; it is the biblical tradition that rules for a just and wise community in the present for the future. Where instrumentalism rejects, Dworkin says, "judges should be constrained by the past in any pragmatic way ..." (1982:181), *Sola Scriptura* insists that theologians must not only interpret the past for its application to the present situation, but also, that the past must be the norm for all theological argumentation and development at all times in all places.

In summary, it is argued that the methodological perspective of conventionalism is closer to the *Sola Scriptura* principle, especially when the latter maintains a "positivist's conception of revelation as the disclosure of divine truths through religious authorities" (Cady 1986:450). Naturalism, on the other hand, as Cady argues, "refuses to locate revelation in any specific sayings, decrees, or practices of the tradition." When used at all, revelation, under naturalism "becomes identified with the transforming power of a way of life disclosed within a religious tradition" (1986:450). If Cady's argument is to be followed, then naturalism is a rebuttal of *Sola Scriptura*. Since instrumentalism insists on ethical grounds that judicial decisions must not be constrained by the past, and in theological perspectives, that revelation has any role to play in contemporary theological argumentation, instrumentalism examined from the theological perspective does not fit into the *Sola Scriptura* scheme. In light of the above, African hermeneutics will be evaluated, searching specifically on their congruence with *Sola Scriptura* principles.

5.6 AFRICAN HERMENEUTICS AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

The hermeneutical conviction of African theologians in all the major theological trends discussed in this essay calls into question two dominant traditions: the Scriptural tradition, on the one hand, and the dominant Eurocentric theological tradition, on the other. The role and status of both traditions in hermeneutics in the African context form the crux of the methodological crisis in the three African hermeneutics discussed.

In Black Theology, for example, both Mosala and Boesak reject the hermeneutical tradition of the white oppressor in the South African context. Boesak argued for a break away from the whites' method of doing theology and insisted that "there is a biblical truth according to which God sides with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation" (1978:14). Mosala agreed with Boesak that there is every need for Black Theology to part from the dominant white theology of the oppressor, but rejected Boesak hermeneutical starting point that the Bible is essentially a book of liberation.

For Mosala, the Bible is rent apart by the society in much the same way as our world is torn asunder by society's class, cultural, racial, and gender divisions (1986, 1989). Mofokeng argued for a similar position that there are biblical passages that offer themselves for oppressive interpretation and serve only the interest of the oppressor. For such passages, Mofokeng argues, no theological "manoeuvre or semantic gymnastics" could change their oppressive tendencies (1988:35-38). Hence, Mosala (1986) and recently Maluleke (1996) reject the ideological aura that sees the Bible as the 'Word of God', arguing that it simply affirms and promotes what in effect should be rejected.

Therefore, Mosala argued that the "universal abstract starting point derived presumably from the biblical message will not do for a biblical hermeneutics of liberation" (1989:18). Hence, the Bible itself must be seen, according to Mosala, for what it is: an ideological manoeuvre where ruling class interests are turned into articles of faith (1989:18). Thus, Mosala contends, "the Bible viewed in this way becomes an historical, interclassist document" (1989:18).

Methodologically, then, Mosala and Boesak take the perspective of naturalism in rejecting the past tradition of the dominant white theology. However, they differ on the methodological perspective of Sola Scriptura in their use of the biblical tradition.

Where Boesak accepts and uses the biblical tradition for liberation in the South African context, Mosala is not only unclear about his view of the biblical tradition, as West kindly notes (1991), but he rejects the biblical tradition (cf. Mosala 1986, 1989).

Where Boesak seek to locate the struggle for liberation on the basis of the biblical message, claiming that such an activity is not only warranted by Scripture, but it is actually the 'Gospel' truth of Scripture (1976, 1984), Mosala rejects this as unobtainable from the biblical message and insists that the situation of the black working class peasants must be reclaimed from behind the text of Scripture (cf. West 1991, 1991s, 1992).¹⁹ Nevertheless, since Boesak made use of isolated liberating texts of Scripture, it can be argued that his use of the past biblical tradition is closer to *Sola Scriptura* in a naturalistic way.

West's hermeneutic, when placed in Dworkin's typology, reflects, methodologically, the convictions of Mosala. The present struggle and situation of the poor and oppressed provide the methodological starting point for West's hermeneutic. Therefore, he attempts to link the ideological condition of the poor and oppressed communities of South Africa with the past and marginalized communities of faith from behind the text of Scripture, exactly the same as proposed by Mosala. The present struggle of the poor and oppressed blacks in South Africa is not just linked to the struggle of the poor and oppressed in the text and behind the text, but is in continuity with the past struggle of the community of faith in the text and in front of the text. Hence, the ethical choice to grant the epistemological privileged position to the poor and the oppressed in West's hermeneutic reflects the basic framework of instrumentalism under Dworkin's typology. The situation of the oppressed must be given a privileged position, West asserts, in the interpretive process, regardless of what the past tradition have done and said, granting that such an action will facilitate the reconstruction of the future life of the oppressed²⁰ (see West Sc. and Vision Conf.). Therefore, based on what has been argued in Chapter Three and in this section, it can be argued that West's methodological assumptions do not fully reflect the basic conviction of *Sola Scriptura* since the situation of the oppressed influence how the text can and should be interpreted.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion on the role and status of the past in Boesak and Mosala, see West's *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation modes of reading the Bible in the South African context*.

²⁰ West argues for this position consistently in his essay presented at the Science and Vision Conference referred to earlier.

African Theology's hermeneutic reclaim and reject the past in two perspectives: first, the African pre-Christian past is reclaimed and interpreted for the better understanding and contextualization of the Gospel. Bediako, for example, contends that African primal religions belong to what he refers to as "African religious past," and he goes on to argue that the importance of the African "ontological past consists in the fact that it belongs together with the profession of the Christian faith in giving account of the same entity, namely, the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian" (1997:428).

The preoccupation with the African pre-Christian past according to Bediako is aimed at clarifying the nature and meaning of African identity (1997:428). Therefore, the African pre-Christian religious worldview is interpreted and incorporated for the understanding of the African Christian reality in the present. Mbiti argues for a similar position (see his 1970, 1972, 1973, and 2003).

Nevertheless, African hermeneutics reject the past tradition of the European-American value setting and opt for a new method of doing theology divorced completely from that imposed by the Western missionaries. In his book, *Encountering the West*, the Gambian-born Lamin Sanneh expresses the above contention vehemently when he writes:

The deeper logical inconsistency between the claim that culture is independent of Christianity on the one hand, and, on the other, that the religion is reducible to its cultural forms, is connected to an unexamined assumption about the intrinsic innocence of indigenous cultures whose primitive purity has been contaminated by imperialist missions. With indigenous societies, culture contact is viewed as detrimental, while in the West such contact is proof of religion as a cultural flag of convenience. In either case, Christianity is bought within range of a double-barrelled attack: its extension in mission is a cultural phenomenon, while in its Western origins; the religion is an idealized myth, which evaporates once it is demythologized (1993:15).

With the above expression of discontentment with the Western missionary's hypocritical approach, it may be said, to missions, Sanneh suggests that Africans should "transcend this approach to the subject in order to deal with the phenomenon of world Christianity and with the extraordinary movements of cultural renewal taking place under its shadows." He further maintains that it will not be "possible or desirable in these circumstances to uncouple religion from culture" (1993:15).

Dar' es Salaam argues for the same position more aggressively in its final statement, "We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action, we are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the third world" (Appiah-Kubi 1978:192). Rejection of the Western theological tradition is also a feature of the 1977 Ghana Pan African conference, which demands, "we serve the Lord in our own terms without being turned into Euro-American or Semitic bastards before we do so" (Appiah-Kubi 1977: viii). The radical position taken by the two conferences echoes a clear rejection on the side of African theologians meeting under African value setting, of the dominant theological tradition of the West. Therefore, it may be argued that from the perspective of methodology, African theological hermeneutics is persistent in its attempt to reclaim African pre-Christian religious tradition, but rejects as irrelevant the Western missionary theological tradition passed on to the present African Christian generation.

If examined from the methodological perspective of Dworkin's legal hermeneutics, then African hermeneutics will be closer to naturalism in its use of the past in the first instance, but will reject any use of the past tradition of Western missionaries in the second instance, hence reflecting the epistemological and ethical presuppositions of instrumentalism in the second sense. A point in reference is the position maintained by the Pan African theologians:

The question must not be what Karl Rahner, or any other Karl has to say, but rather what God would have us do in our living concrete conditions ... the struggle of African theologians, scholars, and other Christians in ventures such as this consultation is to find a theology that speaks to our people where we are, to enable us to answer the critical question of our Lord Jesus Christ: who do you say that I am? (Appiah-Kubi 1977: viii)

This is a clear rejection of any role of the past Western tradition in contemporary theological argumentation on purely ethical and epistemological grounds similar to the assumptions of instrumentalism in legal hermeneutics. From the perspective of Sola Scriptura, this study argues that the discovery and employment of additional sources of theology to the Bible sets African hermeneutical assumptions apart from the Sola Scriptura conviction. Where Sola Scriptura insists that Scripture alone is the final arbiter for truth and other matters of life, African hermeneutic assumes that

African anthropology, ATRs, AIC and other anonymous African realities are equally valid sources for theology and could serve in an unspecified way as arbiters of theology with an equal level of legitimacy as Scripture.²¹

African Women's hermeneutic, drawing on the thought and methods of Rosemary Ruether and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, is closer to naturalism than conventionalism and instrumentalism under Dworkin's typology. With respect to *Sola Scriptura*, African women attempt, like Boesak, to reclaim the biblical text in their argument for liberation of women from cultural domination and patriarchy. Oduyoye puts it clearly, when she reports that "The hermeneutical and fundamental principles of our interpretation of Scripture and culture related to distinguishing the good – that is the liberating from the evil, that is oppression, and domesticating which puts limitations where one is necessary. We are re-reading our world, the texts that history has set before and around us" (2001:20). If this is the hermeneutical assumptions of African women in the Circle, then African women's hermeneutics reflect *Sola Scriptura* only in the perspective of naturalism. The biblical tradition is to be interpreted as a "whole", they claim, but the rationale for reclaiming the biblical tradition is liberation through isolation of biblical texts that are liberating from those that are not.

However, the making of a canon within the canon (Carson 1984:20-24) through isolation of some biblical text and extending it, as Cady (1986:452) argues, beyond its original application for the purpose of addressing the oppressive situation of women in Africa reflects the naturalistic perspective of the "make fit" with the past approach. Since African women are willing to reject the patriarchal tradition of the biblical text themselves, it would be impossible to say that they cherish the fundamental convictions, at least on a methodological level, of *Sola Scriptura* (cf. Oduyoye 1992:4, 1988:359-362; Kanyoro 1995:21-27). However, considering the arguments of Theresa Okure (1993) and Madiope Masenya (1995), viewed from the perspective of conventionalism under Dworkin's typology, it can be argued that they reflect partially, the basic conviction of *Sola Scriptura* in the form of conventionalism. Okure and Masenya argue that in as much as there are footprints of the influence of the cultures of the societies that make the biblical tradition, the central message of Scripture is not

²¹ See *African Theology en route*, 192. Compare also the Nigerian Byang Kato's critique of this kind of conviction in his *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*.

distorted by the presence of such traditions in Scripture, hence, Scripture itself could readily be claimed for reflections on the situation of women and men in African today. With this conviction, Okure and Masenya reject an isolated use of Scriptural text and tradition in support of one theological point or the other (cf. Welker 2003).

In summary, from what has been said so far it can be seen that some African theologians implicitly and sometimes explicitly question the adequacy of Scripture, therefore questioning the status of Scriptural tradition in their hermeneutical assumptions. Hence, with the exception of Boesak, Masenya and Okure as argued above, they do not always embrace fully the Protestant convictions of *Sola Scriptura*, at least not in the conventionalism way of judicial adjudication under Dworkin's typology.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has tried to develop the Protestant hermeneutical principle of *Sola Scriptura*. It draws on Ronald Dworkin's typology to help clarify and interpret the *Sola Scriptura* principle. The chapter argued that, because contemporary African theologians are suspicious of the influence of Western tradition, and because their convictions are that the Bible itself is not free of ideologies and cultural influence of the biblical writers, they employ African cultural tools to interpret the Scriptures and consequently the New Testament teachings about Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross. Hence, they argue that the hermeneutical starting point for Christological reflections and developments must be the context and situation of the Africans.

This chapter attempted to show that African realities – situations, experiences, cultures and pre-Christian heritage – changes with time, therefore, they cannot be central and constant as Jesus Christ and the Cross are in the New Testament. Hence, the chapter argued that the New Testament should be the starting point of all Christologies including the dominant contemporary African Christologies. It is suggested that the *Sola Scriptura* principle that presupposes the normative authority of Scripture in theological argumentation and constructions be the hermeneutical conviction of African theologians in their Christological reflections and developments.

Drawing on Welker, the chapter attempted to argue for a hermeneutic of trust by suggesting that African theologians should recognize the fourfold weight of Scripture namely, the historical, cultural, canonical and theological weights of Scripture. In this way, it will be clear that the four weights give authority to the message of God for the salvation of the world embodied in Scripture. Hence, one need not develop skepticism about Scripture based on the inadequacy of just one of the four weights of Scripture, but Scripture must be understood in its entire fourfold weights. Important about the canonical weight of Scripture, it was argued, is that biblical revelation came to the world through particular and specific cultures according to God's sovereign choice, and since, from the Protestant perspective, the biblical revelation is closed, God is no longer using cultures for the purpose of forming the biblical revelation. This means that contemporary cultures of the world, including African cultures, will only have to receive biblical revelation as it is and apply it to their respective cultural, religious, political and spiritual needs.

Therefore, African Christological reflections and developments should take place in continuity with the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross. This implies that only reflections and imaging of Jesus Christ that fully reflect the person of Jesus Christ and the role of Christian Soteriology in the New Testament must be pursued. This is what it entails to employ *Sola Scriptura* in the conventionalism way of judicial adjudication in Christological reflections and developments. In the next chapter therefore, this research will evaluate African Christologies, searching specifically, how the dominant contemporary African Christologies reflect Pauline Soteriology based on the hermeneutical principle developed in this chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES AND PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY

"In African theology, the organizing factors should be as constant as Jesus and his Cross are to the New Testament" (Akao 2002:343).

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, it was argued that African Christologies should reflect the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross in the form of the conventionalism school of judicial adjudication under Dworkin's typology. This means that African Christological developments and reflections are constrained to follow the New Testament imaging and proclamation of Jesus Christ and the significance of his Cross. The purpose of this chapter is to employ the hermeneutical point suggested in the previous chapter to evaluate African Christologies, specifically inquiring whether they reflect the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the role of his Cross in Christian Soteriology. For this purpose therefore, Pauline Christology will be used. The reason for this choice being that Paul, more than the Gospel writers, has become the main reference for the discussion of New Testament Soteriology in both contextual and traditional theologies (McGrath 1987; Cousar 1990).

Although some similarities and differences were drawn between the three major Christological trends, it will be useful to, in a more organized way, compare African Christologies to see where they converse and diverse. This is necessary in order to minimize apparent confusion and complexities that may arise owing to the differences that exist between the Christologies when they will finally be compared (as a whole)

with Pauline Christology. Therefore, the next section will briefly discuss the similarities and differences between African Christologies.

6.2 A BRIEF COMPARISON OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

Black Christology in the South African context is similar to African Women's Christology in a number of ways, but it also differs in a number of ways from African Women's Christology. In both Christological approaches there is an emphasis on the situation of the oppressed. But where both men and women are the subject of oppression stressed in Black Christology in South Africa, the oppression of women by men through cultural taboos and other religious rituals, or the question of patriarchy, occupies the larger space in African Women's Christological reflections and developments. Nevertheless, the interlocutors of theology are so-called non-persons or, put differently, the downtrodden of the society in both approaches (cf. Mofokeng 1983, 1992; Boesak 1976, 1984; Maimela 1992; Oduyoye 1992, 1995; Kanyoro 1995; Hinga 1992).

In Black Christology, the experience of oppression by the poor and blacks is the starting point. In African Women's Christology, the situation of cultural domination, discrimination and religious taboos that oppress women in Africa is the starting point (Oduyoye 2000). The situation of oppression and suffering sparks the questions that are being asked in both Black and African Women's Christological reflections.

Since the situation of oppression is the pivot around which Christological reflections in both Black and African Women's Christologies revolves, Christ is perceived as the liberator of the oppressed in each approach. The common conviction and presupposition is that Jesus is in solidarity with the poor and oppressed (Boesak 1978; Oduyoye 2000).

In both approaches there is an expression of the need to link the present realities of oppression and suffering of blacks (including women) in Africa to the passion and death of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Thus Black Christology and African Women's Christology see the suffering of Jesus as analogous to the suffering of Africans, and see the passion of Jesus to save fallen humans as a call to praxis, that is, struggle for liberation. This is why Mofokeng could write that "...the liberation, which the Cross brings to the oppressed blacks, brings with it a 'new birth'. In their

new birth, blacks are believed to be reconciled to their ancestors from whom they have been alienated, and who were virtually dead for the suffering black people" (1983:236). Oduyoye argues for a similar view when she contends that African women identify with Christ, especially with respect to how Jesus Christ fits into the mundane life experiences of African women (2001:51). This implies that "for Christ to become meaningful in the context of women's search for emancipation, he would need to be a concrete and personal figure who engenders hope to the oppressed by taking their side, to give them confidence and courage to persevere" (Hinga 1992:192). The contention is that Christ gives the powerless, the downtrodden "power to speak for themselves" (Hinga 1992:192).

For Mofokeng, as Christ brings reconciliation to the whole world, so does the suffering bring reconciliation between the oppressed blacks and their alienated ancestors. It remains to be seen how that reconciliation takes place and what precisely is involved in this reconciliation — that is, the nature of this reconciliation.

In Black Christology the victory for the oppressed is achieved in the resurrection and not in the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. For African women the whole life and ministry of Jesus is seen as victory achieved for the liberation of women. Black Christology does not pay any particular attention to African cultural values, the question of patriarchy and other gender-related forms of oppression. Yet African women see these as crucial and as the basis for their liberation Christology. This is where Oduyoye will argue that, while Christianity is able to convert the African man, it has failed to convert his culture (1995). However, the fact remains that both Black Christology and African Women's Christology allude to Jesus Christ, arguing that he is a prototype to be followed in the struggle for liberation. This is because he is seen as the liberator of the oppressed black people of Africa (Hinga 1992:183-192; Cone 1997:129; Boesak 1978:10).

Black Christology seeks to address the situation of oppression from the perspective of the Cross, arguing that the Cross of Christ is analogous to the suffering of the poor and oppressed black people of South Africa. African women in the Circle omit almost entirely the issue of the Cross in their Christological reflections and developments, arguing that they are concerned with the motherhood agenda that depict African woman as the giver of life; just as Jesus is the giver of life. Hence, they could not be seen reflecting on the difficulties involved in having to nurse that life. Reflecting on

the Cross as a symbol of sacrifice for others, African women contend that both men and women should bear that Cross. It should not be something that women should be expected to do alone (Oduyoye 2001:55).

In Black Christology there is an attempt to relate liberation to salvation, arguing that the latter must express itself in the former. This is why Mofokeng could argue that with the need to respond to the cry of the oppressed and disinherited, "Salvation cannot be postponed for some time in the future and in another world" (1983:52). It must embrace liberation as one of the dimensions of human existence (1983:52). African women are also willing to accept that salvation in Christ is attained and received though suffering and oppression is still a reality in Africa. However, for the women, while patriarchy persists, salvation in Christ abounds for all who believe. It is in the midst of oppression that women see the need to look to Jesus as they struggle to liberate themselves from oppressive forces that seek to silence them.

On methodological assumptions, both Black Christology and African Women's Christology assume that the Bible provides the theological tools for the struggle against oppression. It is out of the need to liberate God's people that the Exodus event took place. In addition, for the women it is precisely the point for women emancipation that Christ demonstrated his love for women by taking their side to give them freedom.

On the basis of these similarities and dissimilarities, one could argue that there are areas in which Black Christology and African Women's Christology converge and diverge. The stress on liberation and the epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed make the two approaches similar and therefore both could be described as liberation Christologies.

Since African Christology takes a different approach to dealing with the person of Jesus Christ, namely, from the perspective of African culture and religious worldview, African Christology is set apart from the two approaches discussed above. There is therefore a need to compare Black and African Women's Christology with African Christology more carefully.

While Black Christology and African Women's Christology deal with the question of Jesus Christ and the struggle for liberation, African Christology takes a rather different approach. It is a reflection on the person of Jesus Christ from the perspective

of African pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religious experience. There is a deliberate attempt in African Christology to incorporate the African religious worldview into Christianity. Although African theologians like Bediako (1998) recognize that equivalents of biblical titles for Jesus Christ can hardly be found in African cultures and local languages, it is still maintained that Jesus Christ could best be understood when given titles related to Africa traditional worldviews (Bediako 1998:110).

Terms such as ancestor, chief (among others) are used in place of biblical titles like saviour, Lord, Logos (among others). This is not the case, it can be argued, with Black Christology or African Women's Christology. The incorporation of African pre-Christian religious experience into Christianity has identified multiple sources for an African Christological reflection and development.

The stress on culture undermines the biblical tradition that the Bible is the only authority in matters of faith and life. The Pan African Conference in Ghana in 1977 identified five sources of theology, as was discussed in Chapter Two and re-examined in Chapter Five. These sources inevitably become sources for all theology done under the umbrella of African Theology. Largely, this is one of the greatest differences that exist between African Theology and Black Theology. It also differs considerably from African Women's Theology for the same reasons.

Before this research attempt to evaluate African Christologies in the light of the New Testament, it is useful to briefly and in a more cursory way explore their contributions to Christian Theology and mission in Africa. This research hastens to say that all three Christologies have some contributions to make, especially to Christian missions in Africa. Black Christology, for example, attempt to show that the poor and oppressed have hope, their situation notwithstanding. It did so from the background of its understanding of God's plan for the salvation of the poor and oppressed in biblical history. It is true that much of that is done from the perspective of Christian ethics (and this is the crux of the matter) and not from the perspective of Christian Soteriology, as Paul does. Nevertheless, salvation of the poor and oppressed is proclaimed by Black Christology, specifically, in the light of the history of God's dealing with the poor and oppressed in Scripture (cf. Boesak 1978, 1984).

Black Theology restored confidence in the hearts of the poor and oppressed in South Africa in the apartheid era with the message that Jesus is not the narrow ideology that white theology made of him, argues Boesak, but that in Christ the complete liberation

of the poor and oppressed is proclaimed.¹ Therefore, the poor and oppressed were exhorted not to take up arms against God or, as Tutu puts it, doubt that they are children of God (1983), but to love and embrace God as the God of their liberation. The missiological import of this idea and approach to the situation of the poor and oppressed is enormous.

Similarly, African Women's Christology has tried to help African Christians realize that Christ showed love to all, men and women. His life ministry was a ministry of sacrifice for others. He lived for others. This point will help African men to revisit their view of women, specifically, the role of women in church and society especially as Oduyoye argues that the role of African women in African society is based on the model of Christ (2001:51-55). She argues that African women live a costly life of sacrifice as givers and nurturers of life, just as Christ's life was in his earthly ministry. He ate and preached with women. The New Testament record accounts of women's participation in the ministry of mercy and in the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. For African Women Christology to remind the Church of Jesus Christ in Africa about these is to contribute to the theology and mission in Africa, especially as it call men to revisit their understanding of the mission of the Church to Africa and the role of African women therein (cf. Oduyoye 1992, 1995, 2002). African Women's Christological constructions may not fully reflect Paul's construction of the same, but there is definitely something of value to be learned from African Women's Christological reflections and developments.

A closer look at African Christology will also reveal the rich variety of the religious backgrounds or worldview of the Africans, which can be positively utilized to preach the person and work of Jesus Christ. As Nyamiti (1998), Bediako (1992, 1995, 1998), among others, have argued, the idea of a departed man acting on behalf of his living relatives paves the way, or set the stage, for the discussion of Jesus Christ's continued heavenly high priestly activity proclaimed in Hebrews. As Waruta attests, the notion of healing by a priest already well known in African traditional religious worldview facilitates the preaching of Christ as the one who heals Christians of their wounds, the one that washes their sins. One cannot imagine how difficult it could have been to get Africans to understand that one could wash and make clean an unclean person without the idea of cleansing already in their minds. The point is that a missionary to an African receptive culture that knows about cleansing as a necessary role of a priest

will not begin as a *tabula rasa* when presenting Christ to such people as the saviour of the world who takes away the sins of humanity. This is the argument of African Theology, namely that African Traditional Religions have the epistemological privilege as *preparatio evangelica* to the Christian Gospel, specifically in African receptive cultures. Therefore, it should not be taken as though this research does not appreciate any contributions made by African theologians in their Christological reflections and developments, especially as the following sections will attempt to critically evaluate African Christologies from the perspective of Paul. The next section will explore Pauline Christology.

6.3 AN OUTLINE OF PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY

Although this research presupposes the readers' knowledge of Pauline theology, it may be unfair to those readers who may be unfamiliar with Pauline Christology and Soteriology if this research will just proceed now and evaluate African Christologies in the light of Pauline Christology without first discussing at least briefly, Paul's view of Christ and the salvific role of his Cross. Hence, this research will outline in this section, Paul's Christology.

It is useful to note from the onset that Paul had a specific purpose in his Christological discussion in the Jewish and the Gentile contexts. This means that Paul had two cultural contexts within which he proclaimed Christ: The Jewish and the Gentile contexts. These two cultures had different perceptions about the role of the deity in their life experiences (Greene 1992:48; Fuller 1974:6-7). Paul's concerns over the perceptions of the Jews and Gentile believers of Jesus Christ and the salvific role of his Cross inevitably "affect his understanding and presentation of the person and work of Jesus Christ" (Fuller 1974:5). Hence, an investigation into some of the main concerns of Paul will elucidate the understanding of how he employed certain terms and concepts in his Christology and Soteriology, which will in turn, help the readers to see if African theologians did the same in their Christological discussions (Fuller 1974:5). It has been argued that "each term was employed by Paul with a specific purpose, and that this purpose allows us, the readers, to gain access into Paul's understanding of God's scheme of salvation and the role of CHRIST therein" (Greene 1992:45).

Paul did not begin his Christological inquiry as a *tabula rasa*. He did use some "earliest available thoughts on the Christological problem" (Greene 1992:47) from the two cultural traditions mentioned earlier, the Jewish and the Gentile traditions. The Pharisaic Jews contemporary to Paul understood the workings of their deity in the world to have taken place in specific forms and modes because of specific needs that Israel at one time or the other manifested (Greene 1992:48). The deity's dealing with the purpose of Israel in one way or the other had influenced the way the Pharisaic Jews thought about him. John Greene, a New Testament Scholar argues that the deity's acts had caused him to be viewed by the Jews sometimes as a liberator, a divine warrior, a state deity and sometimes a divine king-in-perpetuity, a judge, a punisher, a problem-solver, among others. The conviction then was that the deity, so understood, performed a number of functions for his people (Greene 1992:48). This understanding of the deity was grounded on the conviction that the deity is not after all a far distance away from his people since his activities are readily noticeable at all times among his people (Greene 1992:48). The deity's continued activities in the created world were seen as a demonstration that he is present in the world (Greene 1992:48).

The Gentiles influenced by Greek philosophy on the other hand thought of Christ in his exalted state as the giver of *gnosis* and *sophia* (Fuller 1974:6). Reginald Fuller, a New Testament scholar explains that by *gnosis* and *sophia*, the Corinthians whose Christology is hereby in view, meant a knowledge of their heavenly origin which in turn gave them knowledge that enabled them to "recover the true existence from which they had fallen by becoming enmeshed in the fleshly body" (1974:6). In 1 Cor. 1-4, therefore, Paul contrasted this teaching by presenting Jesus as human who through incarnation lived on earth before his exaltation. Therefore, the view of the gnosists that man descended from heaven to earth with the implication of heavenly origin of knowledge was confronted with the soteric doctrine of incarnation. Hence, Paul addressed the question of the nearness of God in the Jewish tradition, on the one hand. And on the other he addressed the view of the heavenly origin of man and knowledge, espoused by the Corinthians with his purposeful employment of the terms "Jesus", "Christ", "Lord", "Jesus Christ", "Lord Jesus", and "Lord Jesus Christ" in his Christological discussion. Paul, specifically, stressed the salvific implication of Jesus as a man on the one hand, and on the other, the role of the exalted Christ in the lives

of the believers in his purposeful and stylistic employment of these Christological titles (Greene 1992:47-48; Fuller 1974:6-17; also see Greene 1992:49-50 for context and various occurrences of these Christological titles in Romans 1-8).

At this point, it will be meaningful to explore how Paul employed his Christological titles and the implication of each of the titles used by Paul to his over all theological conviction, salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles alike. It should be remembered that Paul's purpose in Christology is to present the Gospel of salvation in Christ. This is clear from what has become known as the pre-Pauline formula (See Rom 1:3-4; cf. Fuller 1974:9).

Greene and Fuller argue that Paul used "Jesus" to allude to the earthly Jesus who lived on earth (1992:49-53, 1974:7-8). Fuller, for example, argues that the Corinthian Christians were obsessed about the exalted Lord who continues to impart gnosis and sophia to the extent that the Galilean Jew, the earthly Jesus who lived on earth was almost forgotten or no longer thought of in the Corinthian church. Against this view of Jesus, Fuller argues that "Paul asserts: Kyrios Iesous!" (Lord Jesus) (1974:7). The implication of Paul's assertion was that it was the earthly Jesus that later died the death of a sinner in his crucifixion on the Cross. Having raised and exalted into heaven, he became the risen Lord, hence, Lord Jesus. Thus, in Pauline Christology, the exalted Lord is not different from the earthly humiliated Jesus. The humiliated Jesus became Lord in his glorification. With this view, Paul underscored the salvific significance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ through which he became man on the one hand, and on the other, his glory as the Lord God. Within the matrix of the humiliated earthly Jesus and the exalted Lord Jesus, Paul presented the redeemer as both man and God. For Fuller, with the purposeful and stylistic use of Lord Jesus, Paul was able to show that the Kyrios, the Lord meant "the presence of the Crucified One in the kerygma and the sacraments" (1974:7). This was meant, the argument goes, to settle the dispute on the continued presence of the deity among his people which the Corinthian enthusiasts reportedly attempted to address by apparent declaration of "*anathema Iesous*" (Jesus be condemned) in I Cor 12:3 in order to promote the exalted "Christ Lord" since the heavenly exalted one was more important and accepted by the primitive Greek view of a heavenly giver of gnosis and sophia (Fuller 1974:77).

The Jewish Christians would rather identify Jesus with other miraculous figures like Moses and so, turn to perceive Jesus as a miracle worker (Fuller 1974:7). To be fair to this group of Jews, they had a central place for the earthly Jesus contrary to the view maintained by the Corinthian enthusiasts. However, Fuller argues that the Jesus of the Jewish Christians was not the "Crucified One, but rather a miracle working, ecstatic visionary like themselves" (1974:7). This group of Christian Jews, Paul called false apostles (2 Cor 11:4). Fuller notes that Paul generally referred to the Christ of these false apostles as Christ according to the flesh and pleaded for the Christ according to the Spirit (1974:8). Paul thereby combined the earthly "Jesus" with the exalted "Christ", who is the Crucified Lord and pleaded for faith in "Jesus Christ", the Crucified One. Jesus Christ according to Paul is known according to the Spirit and not according to flesh (Fuller 1974:8). One sees therefore that Paul's combination of Jesus with Christ underscores his Gospel that the earthly Jesus took away the sins of the world (cf. Paul's idea of Jesus as the second Adam in Rom 3). It was through the event of the Cross that the earthly Jesus merited salvation for the world in which both Jew and Gentile believers now have through faith in him. Greene notes:

Paul's pattern of usage is discernable indeed. One now sees that 'Jesus' referred to the Galilean Jew who was Messiah, or at least a Messiah, and who in purely human form, Paul never met. That was the purely human, earthly mode, Jesus. 'Jesus Christ' was for Paul the above mentioned Jesus combined with the Spirit of Christ, who, being nailed to a Cross (or laid on a tree), took human sin and its consequent sentence of death with (the earthly entity combined with the Spirit mode), and who when taken down there from, had succeeded in taking permanent sin and death out of the lives of those who would come to believe in the efficiency of the deity's plan of salvation through his cross (tree) experience (1992:57).

Therefore, like Fuller, Greene asserts that Paul employed "Jesus" to allude, specifically, to the earthly Jesus, the mode used by the deity to save the world, and "Jesus Christ" referred to the Crucified Christ.

The point is that Paul employed specific Christological titles to explain God's plan of salvation espoused in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Hence, Greene and Fuller argue that Jesus, Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ and Christ Jesus are demonstrable modes of CHRIST for Paul (1992:5-8, 1974:6-10).

An important point to note in Fuller and Greene's discussion of Pauline Christology is their insistence that Paul's understanding of God's plan of salvation accomplished in Christ was the foundation and overall trust of his Christology. In other words, they argue that Soteriology was the reason for Paul's Christology as was mentioned at the beginning of this section. Paul argued that humanity after fallen to sin needed salvation and so God was in Christ redeeming fallen humanity to himself. Hence, Paul's modal usage of the various Christological titles to demonstrate how Jesus Christ performed at different stages God's redeeming activity on earth (cf. Rom 3-8). For Paul then, Christ was God's hand extended into the world that had raised the question of whether God still cared about his created order. God had responded to the question. "But far from having taken the form of a fist in divine punishment of such impudence, God's hand was encountered by Paul as outstretched with the fingers 'Jesus', 'Jesus Christ', 'Christ Jesus' and 'Lord Jesus Christ', and 'Christ Jesus' the exalted Son of God" slightly spread apart in an invitation to fellowship, sonship, daughtership, and all of the attending privileges" (Greene 1992:58; cf. Fuller 1974:7-17).

In this way, it could be argued that Paul's Christological discussion was indeed in his preaching of the Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul linked his Christology to his doctrine of justification as Fuller argues (1974:9). Paul did this by first defining the Gospel in Christological terms, a point in reference is the so-called pre-Pauline formula (Rom 1:16-17). Secondly, Paul defined the Gospel again in terms of justification (Fuller 1974:9). Fuller argues that the "Christological formula expresses the gospel from the aspect of the *extra nos*, the justification theology in terms of the *pro nobis*. To have emphasized the pro nobis aspect is perhaps Paul's major contribution to Christology" (1974:9). This means that the central theme in Paul's Christology is justification. The various Christological terms used as it was argued (above) by Paul was to demonstrate in who and how and still, for whom had the act of justification taken place. Fuller argues that Paul's doctrine of justification is an interpretation of the traditional title, "Son of God" in Soteriological terms. His demonstration of "Jesus as the Son of God in power at his resurrection" is to announce Jesus' vindication in which the sinner saved through the activity of Christ participates (1974:9). Thus, Paul spoke of believers as sons of God through adoption because they do participate in the vindication of the resurrected Christ (Fuller 1974:9).

Therefore, as it will be argued later in this chapter, the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are just parts of one grand activity of God's act of redemption for Paul. The Cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ both vindicate and save sinners with all the blessings merited through the events. Hence, Paul treats the Cross and the resurrection events not as separate entities, but a unified saving act of God in Jesus Christ for the sinner. For Paul then, the Cross interprets and makes possible the resurrection and the resurrection makes sense of the Cross and applies the benefits achieved on the Cross to the lives of the believers.

In Paul's theology, therefore, there is a constant shift of statement about resurrection to the Cross and the Cross to the resurrection. The same is true of the Cross and justification, justification and the resurrection. Fuller writes:

The first gloss is tacked on to the two words which describe the death on the cross as the saving event, *hilasterion* and *haima*. The same shift of statements about justification from the resurrection to the cross may be seen in Romans 5:9, 'since we are now justified by his blood'. It is equally discernible in the argument about the 'curse' in Galatians 3:10-14. It is on the 'tree' that Christ submits to the curse of the law and by submitting to that curse exhausts its relevance and so justifies those who are under the curse. The same association of justification with the cross occurs finally in 2 Corinthians 5:21, 'For our sake he (God) made Jesus to be sin'. God placed his Son in the situation of sinners, although he knew no sin, so that the believers might become the righteousness of God, or, in other words, be justified.

Here one notes that the reason that God made Jesus to be sin was the justification of sinners. Moreover, by placing Jesus in the position of sinners, believers were made righteous through that act. This means that the death of Jesus on the Cross was for the justification of sinners (note the titles Paul employed in his argument in the passages mentioned earlier). Therefore, as Fuller argues, the purpose of Pauline Christology is Soteriology. In what follows, the Pauline doctrine of Soteriology with respect to his Christology will be explored, relating it critically to the three major contemporary African Christological trends discussed in Chapters Two to Four.

6.4 PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY/SOTERIOLOGY AND AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Chapters Two to Four consistently raised the unanswered question of whether the African portrayal and perception of Jesus Christ reflect New Testament treatment of

the same. As it has been argued (Greene 1992:44-58), "each term was employed by Paul with a specific purpose, and that this purpose allows us, the readers, to gain access into Paul's understanding of God's scheme of salvation and the role of Christ therein" (1992: 45). Therefore, if Jesus could be understood and portrayed either as a liberator of oppressed people of South Africa, or as an ancestor in African receptive cultures, or as the liberator of African women, it must be clearly stated how these titles reflect the Pauline purpose of God's scheme of salvation (Greene 1992:45). Understanding Jesus Christ in this way would mean to understand Jesus Christ from the perspective of the fall of humankind to sin and the subsequent alienation of humanity from God as the result of that fall. It would be necessary too to examine the removal of that sin through the atoning death of Jesus on the Cross and the subsequent salvation and reconciliation which God achieved through that atonement.

This is precisely what the Nigerian Roman Catholic Sister, Theresa Okure, has in mind when she suggests that "the question of the global Jesus needs to be situated first and foremost within the context of biblical history and faith where it rightly belongs, and from which it derives its fundamental identity" (2001:237). Specifically, Theresa Okure speaks of the global Jesus from the perspective of "biblical records of creation and fall (Protology) as well as salvation and redemption (Soteriology), seen comprehensively as God's work of love and mercy for humanity" (2001: 237). A Christological approach that sees Jesus from the perspective of Protology and Soteriology portrays Christ as the love of God and mercy for all, blacks and whites, oppressor and oppressed, so-called First World and Third World. The approach to Christology that Okure suggests above has the potentials of portraying a Jesus of salvation history that could be claimed globally.

Within the matrix of Protology and Soteriology, Paul preached Christ as the second Adam. In doing this, Paul did not seek to satisfy the Jewish contention of an early notion of a political Messiah who could give political independence to the Jews (Acts 1:6). Paul did not seek after a Roman or Gentile Christ who merely met the socio-political or cultural needs of these people. Rather, Paul preached Jesus as a 'federal' head of humankind, just as Adam was the federal head in the fall episode. This is the only way Paul thought the fall of Adam could be the fall of all, and the obedience of Jesus Christ will be the obedience of all who believe. A further discussion of Paul's treatment of the case will reveal the truth that Jesus Christ does not fit into the picture

made of him in African Christological reflections and developments (Akao 2002:343).

In reflecting on the person and work of Jesus Christ, Africans must not be hospitable to the notion of Christ's solidarity with the oppressed alone, but more importantly, they must be hospitable to the notion of solidarity in sin and guilt (Murray 1959:5). Thus, African Christians must be willing to "represent sin as a dominant force and humanity as bond together in solidarity of guilt" (Bruner 1934:79).

In this solidarity of guilt, humankind does not only share in total the guilt of Adam, but humans are "bound together in a solidarity of guilt" with Adam (Murray 1959:5). This implies that Adam's sin is the sin of the race, the whole of the human race. When the author of Genesis report that Adam sinned (Gen 3), he is not reporting an act of sin committed by one historical figure, but the sin of all of humankind including the present generations, blacks and whites, oppressed and oppressor, the rich and the poor.

Thus, from the perspective of Paul, as the sin of Adam is in effect the sin of all, so the obedience of Christ is the obedience of all (Rom 5:12-14, 18, 19).¹ The argument of Paul is that by the trespass of this one man, Adam, the many of his descendants found death (Rom 5:15), the judgement being unto condemnation (v16); hence, death reigned through the trespass of this one man (v17). The universal sway of sin and condemnation arose out of the sin of Adam (Murray 1959:11). In addition, the universal sway of grace and justification (Rom 5:1) proceeds from the obedience of this one, Jesus Christ. The analogy here is that of a contrast between two federal heads: Adam leading to sin and condemnation, on the one hand, and Jesus Christ leading to obedience and righteousness meriting justification of the human race, on the other hand (Rom 5:18, 19).

Paul was here underscoring the classic doctrine of justification by the free grace of God through the obedient righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is free in the sense that it does not require the self-righteousness of any human being as an individual through good works. This is clear from the perspective of condemnation through Adamic sin through which death reigned over all, including those who do not sin in the similitude

¹ All references, except where otherwise stated, are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

of Adam. This implies that, as all sinned because Adam sinned, all are saved through Christ's obedient righteousness. This being the case, it will be difficult to fit into Paul's thinking the contention of Black Christology that if God should be anywhere, he must be on the side of the oppressed. This leaves the impression that the situation of oppression attracts God's mercy and thus salvation is for the oppressed, while the oppressor is ostracized.² This might be true for Paul as far as it goes that the situation of oppression is the situation of sin typified by the reign of death through condemnation arising from the sin of Adam.

However, Black Christology was not willing to say this. For even when black theologians like Maimela (1992) are willing to admit that the problem with humanity is sin, they mean the sin of human divisions based on race, resulting in oppression and exploitation. However, if Christ must be identified as liberator from the perspective of God's plan of salvation, then he must be viewed from the perspective of the sin of Adam and the reign of death arising from that disobedience. When viewed from that perspective, the whole of the human race is oppressed in their bondage to guilt and condemnation proceeding from the disobedience of Adam, and not their individual sin of divisions, as Maimela limits it in his argument.

The view that God is on the side of the oppressed blacks in his economy of salvation carries the import that once politically oppressed, God is on your side. This neglects the truth that death reined over all, even the black oppressed as well as the white oppressors. Only when this truth is acknowledged by African Christians will the salvation achieved through Christ's obedience and righteousness be meaningful to all, black oppressed and white oppressors alike.³

² To be fair to Boesak, he was not speaking of salvation per se when he asserted that the oppressor has no place in God's plan for the kingdom. However, Boesak seems to suggest that the oppressed have a place in God's kingdom, and alluded quickly to the birth of Seth as a blessing and consolation that God brings to the family of the oppressed. But Cain, the oppressor, he argued, is cursed and will remain a wanderer (Boesak 1984:140 -146). Now what did Boesak mean by "the oppressor has no place" in God's plan for the kingdom? If salvation means the transformation of the individual self as one of the blessings of the past resurrection of believers, following Christ's resurrection, as Gaffin (1978) argues, and then one would expect Boesak to argue further that the oppressors, unless they repent, will not have a place in God's plan for the kingdom. To leave it the way he did, it leaves the impression that the sin of oppression rules out the oppressor from God's plan for the kingdom while the oppressed unconditionally apart from the fact of their oppression, have access to this kingdom. This vagueness remains even if everyone understands, as the researcher does, that Boesak is speaking of political liberation, and not salvation.

³ It must be understood that when Black Theology speak of God's preferential option for the poor, it does not necessarily mean the exclusion of others who are not poor and oppressed. For it will be misleading to say that blacks consider the liberation of the oppressed as the beginning point for the

From the perspective of Paul, the argument that the oppressors (whites) have no place in the kingdom of God is not compelling since they have their own share in the Adamic guilt. If God's plan of salvation is following the guilt proceeding from Adam's sin and the universal sway of death and condemnation resulting from that sin, then it is reasonable to believe that even the white oppressors will have a place in God's kingdom in as much as they believe in Christ. The bottom line is not the reality of oppression or the lack of it, but the reality of the fall and its consequence, on the one hand, and the righteousness of Christ with the bestowal of grace arising from it which gives justification to sinners while yet helpless in sin and trespasses, on the other.

From what has been said so far, it is arguably clear that if Jesus in Paul is to be understood as the second Adam, his role as a liberator would be liberation from sin and reign of death over humanity. This being the case, Africans must seek to understand and apprehend Christ from the perspective of the fall and redemption from sin and death merited by the passive and active obedience of Jesus on the Cross. This implies that the liberation from which Christ liberates humankind is liberation from sin and death. Similarly, the view that Jesus is an ancestor would have to be re-examined from the perspective of Paul in which Jesus is contrasted with the first Adam – pointing out that Jesus, as the second Adam achieved what the first Adam could not achieve. In picturing Jesus as ancestor, Bediako (1984:98) attempts to stress the existence of a spiritual world of "spirit fathers" that are departed as believed in some African traditional worldviews. They dispense certain mediational functions on behalf of their relatives. These spirit fathers (ancestors), Bediako claims, occupy the place of Jesus in the New Testament (1984:100).

The question is what mediatorial roles do ancestors play that make them fit in the picture of Jesus' mediational role? It must be pointed out that even in Akan cosmogony, where ancestors are believed to be occupying what Bediako would call the "existential gulf" between God and Africans; they are believed to intercede only in the affairs of close relatives – not the rest of humankind, not even Africans in general. In fact, it is believed that ancestors, to some extent, protect their living relatives from

perdition of the oppressor. God's preferential option for the poor simply means that God's mercy is for the poor and the afflicted, and he (God) has taken the initiative to intervene in their course in the presence of suffering and oppression in the Christ's event (see Gutierrez 1973; Smit 1988; Koopman 2002).

harm by their "dangerous" neighbours. If this were the belief about the mediational role of ancestors, an understanding of Jesus as ancestor in a receptive culture that holds that view of ancestors would not be the Jesus that everyone claims for their salvation. For the only people that Jesus will stand for will be his Jewish people. Nevertheless, Bediako contends that Jesus is one among Akan people (1984:101) because of "his universality against his particularity" as a Jew. It then begs the question why Jesus is still an ancestor when ancestors intercede only for their living relatives.⁴

The nature of the intercession that ancestors perform for their living relatives also calls into question the claim that ancestors occupy the place of Jesus in the New Testament. For when Paul says Christ is interceding for believers, he says he intercedes to give them hope, that they should persevere until they are glorified with him at the end of the age. This alludes to the ministry of reconciliation on the side of Christ that believers may be reconciled with God. This is why Paul could say,

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand ... For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:1-3, 10, 11).

If ancestors could only interfere in the affairs of their living relatives, then we could not look at them as performing reconciling roles in the similitude of Jesus Christ, who does it for the whole of human race. Although ancestors are not believed to be reconciling their living relatives with God; they nevertheless are sometimes believed to harm others for one reason or another (cf. Nyamiti 1984 in section 2.6.1).

The ministry of Christ is the ministry of reconciliation between fallen men and women with God. When Paul spoke of Christ's ministry as the ministry of reconciliation, he does so from the perspective of the fall. For Paul the cause of humankind's alienation from God is sin. Bediako is willing to accept this (1984:101-4). Jesus through his obedience and righteous sacrifice on the Cross removes this sin,

⁴ It would have been better for Bediako to argue that the idea of a departed acting on behalf of his relatives is already in his Akan pre-Christian religious worldview. Hence it is not difficult to preach Christ's resurrection and exhortation in such a culture.

thus re-uniting humankind with God. Bediako did not contest this truth either. For he says that the death of Christ has "an eternal sacrificial significance for us" (1984:103). But to maintain such a view and yet contend that Jesus is an ancestor in the Akan religious worldview that never believed Jesus to have died any sacrificial death to remove the sins of others makes one wonder in what sense Jesus is an ancestor of the Akan people?

It is more confusing when Bediako contends, "Because ancestors originate from us, they like us, are in need of salvation from Jesus Christ" (1984:103). The question would be that if ancestors like us are in need of salvation from this Jesus, how could the same Jesus again be seen as an ancestor?

Perhaps Bediako intends to protect the position of a traditional chief in his Akan religious cosmogony – where the chief is believed to be sitting "on the stool of the ancestors" (1984:108) as he performs his political functions. A Christology that presents Christ in such a way that a conversion to Christianity alters the position of ancestors and "de-sacralizes the power of the reigning chief or king" destroys, according to Bediako, the politics of his Akan society (1984:108). The point is that African Christological developments should preserve the culture of the Africans like the Akan concept of the chief, Bediako insists (1984:108).

However, is it not more reasonable that the truth about Christ be told to people so that faith in him will be faith unto salvation? What is the point preaching Christ to the people who at the end need not give up their faith in animism for Christ? Will it not be the gospel that conversion means, among other things, turning away from idols (sin) to righteousness (faith) in Christ? If so, why must the idea of sacred ancestors, chiefs or kings be preserved and protected, while still maintaining that Jesus is the saviour and that salvation is in Christ alone? This is not to say that African cultures and values should be dismantled, but like Paul, when such values are contradictory to the truth about the salvific work of Christ, Africans should be willing to confront them with the biblical message of Christ as Paul did to the Jews and the Gentiles cultures.

For the Africans, a belief in Christ as ancestor is not the same as the belief in Christ as a second Adam in Paul. For Africans do not see ancestors as God nor do they think of them as taking away their sins. Certainly, Africans would not contend that ancestors

would intercede between them and the Supreme God. They simply look at ancestors as the departed who now occupy a spiritual realm with all sorts of spirits in a world between God and men. This is why Mbiti (1975) would claim that ancestors are not worshipped but venerated, since Africans as monotheists would not want to worship multiple gods including men, because ancestors are human beings.

Bahemuka argues that since "Africans are children of God, Christ as a senior child of God becomes the African's elder brother" (1998:13). This argument is not compelling either. African believers, according to Paul, are children of God through faith in Christ. This is why Paul could say; "you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:26, 27). If they are children of God through Christ, then they cannot be brothers and sisters of Jesus, but children bought by Jesus with his blood. This means Jesus is Africans' Lord and saviour and not elder brother. The understanding of the concept of "brother" in African societies does not mirror Christ as the Lord of his believing community. Hence, the concept "elder brother" will be a misleading representation of Jesus Christ in African receptive cultures (Fuller 1974:15-17).

Waruta would want Africans to look at Jesus as their priest. She says a priest is "seen as the medium through which the life giving power of God comes to man" (1998:48). She reports that Africans go to a priest with hopes that their fears about witches and sufferings will be properly given attention (1998:48). Making sacrifices on their behalf is one of the major functions a priest would perform for his/her people.

It would be necessary to spell out the nature and scope of priesthood in the African traditional worldview and the priesthood of Christ. What immediately comes to mind in this regard is that the priest in the African traditional worldview does not offer himself or herself on behalf of, or for the sins of, his or her people. However, this is precisely what Jesus Christ did for his believing community. The writer of Hebrews made this clear when he contrasts Jesus' priestly activity with the Old Testament Levitical priests, who were the type of Jesus, the high priest. He says, "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 8:12).

While the sacrifices of an African traditional priest are offered with birds and goats, the sacrifice of Christ is with his own blood. Presenting Christ to African receptive

cultures as a priest without defining the manner Christ is a priest to the Africans would leave them with the idea of a man or woman, a diviner who performs rituals for his people. One could argue that the point is to present the basic idea of priest as already known in African religious life. If so, it should be stated clearly how Jesus' sacrifice differs in nature and efficacy with those of African traditional priest. One learns from the religious life of Bediako that certain pre-Christian beliefs of Africans sometime remain with them after conversion to Christianity (cf. Bediako 2000:iv-x). For Waruta, and this may be true of other African theologians, the idea of Jesus Christ as an African priest gives a basic idea about the person of Jesus Christ. However, such a basic idea will remain in the mind of the African for the unforeseeable future. Illustrations in theology are meant to add meaning to the point in view. If illustrations would cause more confusion than throw light on the theological theme it is intended to throw, then it would be better to eliminate such illustrations and present the truth as it is. Such should be the approach to Christology in Africa.

If, as Waruta argues, an African priest acts on behalf of his or her object to protect them from witches and for healing of diseases believed to have been caused by some other evil persons in the society (Waruta 1998:48, Pobee 1979:79-102), then the idea of Jesus as a priest to an African who understands the role of a priest in this way would be this super-witch whose power surpasses other witches that could offer protection to people against witches. A young Christian with such a worldview may confuse the person of Christ with a super-witch in African traditional worldview.

The fact that the ministry of African traditional priests lasts as long as they live alone calls into question how it could be compared to the heavenly priestly activity of Jesus. What must one make of the following words from Hebrews? "Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to do it completely for those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (7:23-25).

This shows the efficacy of the sacrifices which Christ as High Priest offer for his people. It is done once for all but efficacious in atoning for the sins of many. Not only that, but also, Christ in his exalted state continues his priestly activities for his people until the end of time. Murray cannot agree more with this last point, as it is clear from the following quote:

There is not only this multiformity of aspects derived from the epistle to the Hebrews but there is confirmation and addition supplied by other New Testament data. In Johannine usage, the term that closely corresponds to the advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). Therefore, Jesus in heaven is the pleader, the helper, and the comforter of those who come to God through him. This must be referred to the priestly activity of the saviour is surely borne out by the analogy of the teaching in the epistles to the Hebrews, particularly that Jesus appears in the presence of God for us and dispenses salvation in his capacity as the high priest, tormented with the feeling of our infirmities. It is also borne out by the fact that the heavenly advocacy is in John 2, as in Hebrews 2:17, 18 directly related to the propitiation which Jesus Christ the righteous one has performed and which he ever continues to be. So, the activity as *Paraclete* should most suitably be viewed based upon his finished priestly action in making propitiation (1958:4-5).

Murray points out a number of things in this quote: the fact that Jesus' High Priestly ministry as a *Paraclete* is the act of propitiation, an idea completely foreign to the African traditional priest. The book of Hebrews proclaims that, in his exalted state, Jesus is before God the Father in heaven comforting us, on the one hand, and pleading for our cause before the Father, on the other, which are functions completely absent in the African traditional priest. As a *Paraclete*, Jesus is the second Adam Paul speaks of in Romans 5:12-19. That African traditional priest's sacrifices are not able, and they are not meant to, eradicate the sins of people by giving them salvation; it is argued that even the efficacy of that sacrifice cannot be juxtaposed with the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the argument of this essay is that Jesus cannot be the priest in the sense thought of in African traditional worldviews. In the next section the Soteriological significance of the Cross of Christ and the reality of suffering will be discussed.

6.4.1 Human suffering and the Cross of Christ – a question of Soteriology

It was argued in Chapter Two that the question of the saving significance of the Cross of Christ is re-examined in Black Christology from the perspective of the reality of suffering, exploitation, poverty, injustices and the commitment to struggle for the purpose of eradicating these sufferings through liberation praxis. These realities of suffering leave the deep impression among Africans that from the perspective of liberation, Africans are still standing on the Cross. For, they ask, "How do we speak

about God in the living conditions of the poor in African societies torn apart by many forms of neo-colonial violence?" (Ela 1988: xii).

Reflecting on the situation of suffering in South Africa, former Archbishop Desmond Tutu asks, "Why [does] a human being suffer humiliation, slavery, and denial of basic human rights, segregation, famine, displacement, refugee situations, and extreme violence?" (Tesfai 1994:10).

In the midst of these almost unbearable situations, there is no doubt why there is a growing awareness among Africans that the "challenge that needs to be addressed is to reflect on the relationship of the Cross of Jesus and the immense suffering to which millions of the people are subjected in the contemporary world" (Tesfai 1994:3). For the contemporary African theologian, the most relevant question would be: "What do the Cross and suffering mean in the context of such a tragedy and unacknowledged genocide?" (1994:3).

Similar to all Third World theology, the above question is addressed in the context of the "contemporaneity" of the Cross of Jesus in the present sufferings of the poor and oppressed (Tesfai 1994:10; Mofokeng 1983:235-240). This is better expressed in what Tesfai, also a Third World liberation theologian, calls "the pregnant phrase 'the crucified people'" (1994:10). The phrase means, among other things, to "convey the idea that the Cross of Jesus continues its presence in the current manifestations of suffering that afflict people" (1994:10). The implication of this is, as pointed out in Chapter Two, that the Cross of Jesus and the suffering of the poor and oppressed are identical. "The identities of the Cross of Jesus and those of the poor are not sharply divided", rather, they are united in the suffering Jesus and the crucified people as one subject" (Tesfai 1994:10; Mofokeng 1993; Maimela 1992).

Although Black Christology sees meaningful hope in the Cross, it still contends that liberation is assured only in the resurrection of Jesus. This is why Mofokeng argues that it is the resurrection of Jesus, which gives the blacks of Africa meaningful hope (1983:39-41). The question to be answered is whether Paul views the Cross of Jesus in the same way. What is Paul's view of the Cross amidst human suffering? When is liberation achieved in Paul? Was it achieved on the event of the Cross or later in the resurrection? Of course, the last question has to do with whether Paul meant the same

when he speaks of liberation as in African Christologies. From what are believers liberated?

In attempting to answer the above questions, it is imperative to note that the present realities of suffering and oppression in Africa were already in one form or the other present in Pauline era. The circumstances that occasioned Paul's exhortation in Romans 8:16-28 suggest the above claim. For why would Paul speak of the surpassing glory that could be revealed to believers in eschatological terms (in the future)? Is it not to suggest that there is immense suffering in the present, but that believers should not give up hope that in the end they will be exalted into the glory which is never to be compared with the present realities of suffering (cf. Rom. 8:16-28)?

That Paul does not interpret the significance of the Cross of Christ from the perspective of the reality of suffering, as it is the case in African Christologies, is not an oversight on the side of Paul. Neither is it the case that suffering was absent in the life and experience of Paul's ministry (cf. Acts 10). That Paul understands the Cross as the most miserable of all deaths is to state the obvious (Gorman 2001:5). For crucifixion, Gorman reports, "was first-century Rome's most insidious and intimidating instrument of power and political control" (2001: 5) – similar to the way the Cross is understood in Black Christology.⁵

For the Romans who were contemporaries of Paul and his ministry, to suffer crucifixion was to suffer the most shameful death ever contemplated, because it was a death reserved for those who were perceived to threaten the empire's peace and security (Gorman 2001:5). In this way the "terror of the Cross" was not new to anyone in the then Roman world (Gorman 2001:5). The Jews for their part had long understood the death sentence by way of the Cross as the death of a cursed person (Deut. 21:23). This explains why for the Jews, the death of a cursed person on the Cross such as Jesus' cannot be a sacrificial death capable of reconciling people with God as Paul claims (Rom 3, 5, 6). For them, death on the Cross is an abominable death and so inherently irreligious. Thus, the death of Jesus on the Cross could not be for the Jews "the focus of devotion and the paradigm for life in this world" (Gorman 2001:5).

⁵ See for example the works of the following black theologians: Buthelezi (1977), Mofokeng (1983, 1992), Tesfai (1994).

Yet, in Pauline thought, the death on the Cross is the decisive act on the side of Christ, an event of victory for the oppressed (sinners) dead in trespasses (Rom 5:21, 6:17; Gal 4:8). The total liberation of the oppressed (sinners), while suffering remains a reality. The reason for this is that Paul understood the death of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the human condition as necessitating the death. Thus, Gorman asserts, "Paul's story of the Cross, then, is a story of faith, love, power and hope" (2001:94).

In these senses, Christology in Africa arguably reflects partially Pauline Christology.⁶ For it is the demonstration of God's love that Christ died for, and identifies with, the poor and oppressed. Moreover, it is by taking the side of the poor and oppressed that the Christian grows in deep faith, with the hope that suffering will one day be history. Similarly, the concept of healing as argued above, in African traditional religions could be developed to explain the New Testament proclamation that the blood of Christ on the Cross heal our wounds. The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ before the event of the Cross proclaims that Jesus was a healer who cared about the physical and material needs of the poor. The event of John 2, where Jesus provides wine at a wedding feast in Galilee, the feeding of five thousand people and the healing of the paralytic all attest the truth that Jesus' ministry provides both spiritual and physical needs of his people. For African theologians (this includes women) to call the church in Africa to undertake a wholistic ministry that takes care of the material needs of the people which includes ministry of the poor, one that shows respect and empower women is to proclaim the grace of Jesus through these works of mercy. All these aspects of church ministry build hope, faith and confidence in the African believer. Thus, African theologians also recognized, as Paul does, that the story of the Cross is the story of faith, love and power.

However, there is tension between the Pauline view of the Cross and the African Christologies in the accomplishment of the desired victory for the poor and the oppressed people of Africa (including women). That is where to locate the liberation of the poor and oppressed – is it on the Cross or in the resurrection? In Paul the Cross of Jesus and his resurrection cannot be divided as two sequential events to be interpreted separately. The achievements of the Cross are further proclaimed in the resurrection and the Cross necessitates the benefits derived from the resurrection. Black Christology seeks to understand these two events from the perspective of

⁶ Compare the argument in 6.3 above.

suffering and this creates an apparent dichotomy between the Cross and the resurrection in Black Christology.

Paul did not seek to explain the Cross of Christ from the perspective of suffering. He interprets the Cross of Christ from the perspective of its purpose, namely, to atone for the sins of humanity. This being the case, the reality of suffering of believers is given an eschatological explanation by Paul. That it is temporal (Rom 8:16-18). Believers will be glorified with Christ at the end of the age if they could hope for this in faith through perseverance (Rom 8:23-26).

For Paul the death of Christ on the Cross removes the sins of the world, thereby giving life to those united with him in his death and resurrection (Rom 6). Thus, Paul could write that "the death that Christ died, He died to sin and the life He lives He lives to glory" (Rom 6:10). This implies that human despair reigned as death and condemnation reigned until the Cross of Christ put an end to that despair. Therefore, for Paul, while the Cross was painful to bear from the side of Christ, it is sign of joy and victory for those for whom he died. Thus, instead of mourning for the death of Christ, believers rejoice in his death because of what the death has accomplished for them — eternal salvation.

Paul makes it clear that at the Cross, the forces of evil, the reign of death through condemnation as a consequence of sin, are defeated and liberation of believers who were oppressed by sin (lost to sin) achieved (Rom 5:1, 6-10, 8:1). The death of Jesus on the Cross merited believers' justification in Paul. Therefore, for Paul, liberation of believers was achieved on the Cross of Calvary where sin was overcome by righteousness, where disobedience was replaced with obedience, where sin was washed away and removed completely, and the "new humanity" created.

Since the liberation of which Paul speaks is liberation from the evil power of sin and subsequent condemnation of Adam's descendants, the death of Christ for sinners definitively removes that bondage of sinners to sin. Therefore Paul locates liberation of the oppressed (sinners) on the Cross of Calvary and in the resurrection as two aspects of this grand event, the victory of believers. Black Christology, because it emphasises Christ's liberation as political liberation from the perspective of the socio-political and economic situation of the black oppressed, locates the victory of the oppressed mainly in the resurrection.

6.4.2 The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the victory of the oppressed

The point has been made that the liberation of believers that Paul spoke about is the liberation from sin. The death of Jesus on the Cross and atoning death gave victory over sin to the oppressed. This being the case, from the perspective of Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaims the victory of those so set free from the reign of sin and condemnation over the power of death. Thus for Paul the victory which the resurrection proclaims for the oppressed (sinners) is victory over the power of death. A closer look at Paul's view of the resurrection reveals that Paul saw the resurrection as victory of believers over the death in eschatological terms — as Christ is raised, so also are believers raised from the dead.

Richard Gaffin of the Westminster Theological Seminary explains Paul's doctrine of the resurrection as the victory of believers in terms of two structural poles: the resurrection of Jesus as past resurrection of believers and the resurrection of Jesus as future resurrection of believers (178:59). With these two structural poles, the resurrection of Jesus as victory for the oppressed will be discussed.

6.4.3 The resurrection of Jesus as the past resurrection of believers

The argument of Black Christology in Chapter Two is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the decisive event where victory over suffering is achieved. In the resurrection, Black Christology contends, the "darkness of Good Friday was defeated" (Maimela 1992:35). In this decisive victory the "triumphant human glory and victory over sin and the perverted social relations is revealed" (1992:35). In addition, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is viewed in Black Christology as proclaiming loudly the victory of the oppressed. For in Christ, Black Christology says, "humanity is given the possibility and the power to overcome their perverted, polarized and often conflict-ridden relations on this side of the grave" (Maimela 1992:36). This implies that the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives hope for the victory of the oppressed, since it proclaims "loudly" that the situation of the oppressed typified by the "Good Friday" event is surely going to be defeated in the near future.

Paul did not contest the claim that suffering here on earth is temporal. He attest to the fact that even those who have the "first fruits of the Spirit" also groan with the earth. And for Paul, this is according to God's will (Rom 8:18-26). But he also assures

believers of the surpassing glory that will be revealed to them in the future. The intercession of the Holy Spirit is to help believers to persevere in this present frustration until the future glory is revealed (v. 26-28). The future glory for Paul is certain because of what Christ accomplished for believers on the Cross. The suffering of Christ is the suffering of believers in that it was done for them. Therefore, the Cross of Christ is not the daily experiences of the poor and oppressed in Africa in the sense pictured in *Black Christology*. Hence, while victory over sin is achieved on the Cross, the reality of suffering persists.

Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus is the past resurrection of believers because the resurrection of Jesus was for believers. This does not give the impression that victory over political oppression is assured, because the earth is still under the curse of God, and as such, all forms of suffering will still be endured until the future glory is revealed to believers. In this way, the presence of suffering will not be interpreted as the failure of the resurrection to deliver the goods needed of it, namely, to eradicate all forms of suffering.

When Paul spoke of the resurrection of Jesus as the past resurrection of believers, he meant the transformation of believers. African Christians (this includes women) can identify with Jesus' resurrection as a decisive act that transforms their situation of poverty, oppression and discrimination. For the resurrection, according to Paul, has transformed them together with their situations, their despair has been turned into hope. African Christians could sit and reflect back on their pre-Christian religious life and see transformation going on in their new life, a life transformed by Christ's resurrection. When African Christians see the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an event that transforms their pre-Christian lives, they will not necessarily have to seek to incorporate their pre-Christian religious experiences into the present (cf. Bediako 1992 1995, 1997, 2000), but will see the present as a necessary consequence of conversion from the past. Gaffin argues for this position when he contends that "resurrection with Christ refers to the transition in the actual life history of the individual Christian from being by nature an object of wrath (Eph 2:3) to being a recipient of God's mercy and love (v.4)" (1978:43). This is because believers were lost to sin, and so under God's wrath and thus dead in transgression. Paul referred to the transformation of those dead to sin to life in righteousness as new men and women as the past resurrection of believers.

He demonstrated this by first arguing that believers were dead in their transgressions and sin. Being thus dead, believers were enslaved to death and the forces of this evil world. Thus, they are being oppressed and made to gratify the "cravings of our sinful nature" and following its desires and thoughts (Eph 2:3). This made believers operating under the economy of sin and transgression objects of divine wrath (v. 3). In this way, believers were dead primarily to their individual moral depravity (Gaffin 1978:43) until the resurrection raised them from that death.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brought victory over that death by transforming believers from objects of wrath under the reign of death and condemnation to heirs of God's kingdom through grace by faith in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:17). Therefore, in the argument of Paul, believers were dead in transgression and sin until God through his love, has raised them up with Christ and seated them with him in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:4-6).

In that way the resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the decisive victory of believers over death in transgression and sin, with the antecedent results of transformation from the old self to the new (Gal 5:19-21). While the death of Jesus removes sin and meets the requirement of the law, that men and women are now justified before the Lord, the resurrection effects life transformation in the individual lives of believers.

Since the death to sin took place in the individual life of believers, the resurrection into the newness of life also takes place in the individual life of believers (Gaffin 1978:45). Hence, through union with Christ in baptism, believers were raised with Christ in the newness of life (Rom 6:3). The purpose of the double union between Christ and believers in his death and resurrection is to raise believers with Christ. This way, Paul says, we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father; we too may live a new life (Rom 6:4). This implies that, for Paul, with the resurrection of Christ, the sinner has been transformed from object of wrath into heir of God's kingdom through faith in Christ Jesus. The presence of suffering after Good Friday persists even after the resurrection.

The victory of the oppressed sinner on the Cross of Calvary is reiterated in the resurrection with the benefit of new life for believers. For Paul there is an inseparable unity between the Cross and the resurrection. One interprets the other; the

achievement of the former necessitates the benefits to be derived from the event of the latter. Therefore, for Paul, since believers have been justified through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the future resurrection of believers.

6.4.4 The resurrection of Jesus as future resurrection of believers

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is captured in Paul's description of Christ resurrection as the "first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Cor 15:23). The idea of "first fruits" in the Old Testament administration of offering sets the stage for Paul's use of "first fruits" in I Corinthians 15:23. Gaffin argues that "There can be little question that the Septuagint provides the background for its use here. There, with few exceptions, 'first fruits' has a specifically cultic significance of 'first fruits' offerings of grains, wine, cattle, and the like, appointed by Moses" (1978:34).⁷

As Gaffin rightly observes, "the point to these sacrifices is that they are not offered up for their own sake, as it were, but as representative of the total harvest, the entire flock, and so forth and thanksgiving that the whole, has been given by God" (1978:34). In this way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the resurrection of believers does not simply have a temporal force (Gaffin 1978:34). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an "initial portion" of the harvest as part of the "whole" harvest to be completed in the resurrection of believers in the age to come.

Gaffin says, "'First fruits' express the notion of organic connection and unity, the inseparability of the initial quantity from the whole. This aspect, it may be argued, gives these sacrifices their significance" (1978:34). This is why Cousar puts it weakly, as he admits, but incisively, "Jesus resurrection *opens the door to* and *assures* the resurrection of the dead" (1990:98).

Therefore, there is an "organic unity" between the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the future resurrection of believers. This is expressed in the cultic connotation of the Septuagint usage (Gaffin 1978:34) of the "first fruits" offering which is only an initial part and forms part of the whole grain given by God. The complete idea of the Septuagint usage of "first fruits" is dominant in Pauline theology. In Romans 8 Paul speaks of believers as those who have the "first fruits of the Spirit", who also groans

⁷ Compare passages such as Ex 23:19 and Lev. 23:10.

with the whole of creation (v. 23). This gives evidence in support of the view that "first fruits" in I Corinthians 15:20 is "not simply an indication of temporal priority" as G. Delling argues in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) 1:486 (in Gaffin 1978:34). The description of Jesus' resurrection as the "first fruits" of believers' resurrection stresses the point that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the "representative beginning of the resurrection of believers" (Gaffin 1978:34).

It must be stated here that the resurrection of which Paul speaks about here is bodily resurrection, the raising from the dead of "those who are asleep". The argument of Paul in the context of I Corinthians 15:20 is that there are bodily resurrections. For if, there is no bodily resurrection, then "not even Christ was raised" (v.13), he argues. That Christ was raised means there is bodily resurrection. Thus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ has the bodily resurrection of believers as its consequence (Gaffin 1978:35). This implies that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not simply a guarantee that suffering and oppression are temporal, as Black Christology would argue, but in a more emphatic sense, "it is a pledge in the sense that it is the actual beginning of the general event" (Gaffin 1978:35) of bodily resurrection. Therefore, the mortal bodies will continue to endure suffering and pains until after the future resurrection of believers in the age to come. Between now and then, Paul does not give any hope for eradication of pains and suffering as one of the goods the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ should deliver to the poor and oppressed of Africa.

The idea of the resurrection of Jesus as the "first fruits" of the future resurrection of believers is aimed among other groups, "at the fatigued, who border on hopelessness, whose weariness" with oppression and despair to discover that Jesus Christ was raised in hope" (Cousar 1990:101) that the whole earth will be liberated (Rom 8:21), while believers groan and wait with eager expectation for adoption as sons (Rom 8:23). Now that believers are anticipating their future resurrection that is "pledged" in the resurrection of Christ, groaning may abound. However, the groaning will endure until the future resurrection of believers in the age to come after which is glory for believers.

In summary, Paul speaks of the resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of Adam. As death reigned through one man Adam, so are believers raised through the resurrection of one man, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:21-22). Through the union of believers with Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the "existential" resurrection

of believers, on the one hand, and the future resurrection of believers, on the other hand. This makes Christ and the significance of his Cross unique in the sense that Paul espoused them from the perspective of Christian Soteriology. Should African theologians in their Christological formulations wish to present Jesus Christ and the significance of his Cross in their contexts, it is imperative that they do so from the perspective of Christian Soteriology, as Paul has done. This research, therefore, makes the following recommendations.

6.5 A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES WITH PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY

In Chapter Five, it was mentioned that African Christologies will be evaluated in this chapter on the basis of whether they reflect the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross in the manner described in conventionalism school of judicial adjudication under Dworkin's typology. This means that Pauline Christology could meaningfully be applied to the present spiritual and contextual needs of the Africans, hence, African Christological constructions and reflections are constrained to take place in continuity with Pauline Christology, given the conviction that Scripture is the rule for faith and intelligibility. In this section, this chapter will attempt to evaluate African Christologies in the light of what has been said above.

Looking at African Christologies and Pauline Christology and Soteriology, one could notice some similarities, but there are also some major differences between the two kinds of Christologies. One important thing to note is the contexts of the two types of Christologies. Paul was addressing the concerns of a group of believers from diverse cultures and understanding about the role of the deity in the mundane life experiences of the people. The Gentiles and Jews were both concerned about the nearness and presence of the deity among his people. African theologians were also concerned about the nearness or the meaning of the presence of God (Jesus to be specific) in the African situation of deprivation, oppression, cultural imperialism, patriarchy and poverty. African theologians more specifically attempted, as was discussed in Chapter Two, to bridge the existential gulf between God and humanity in their Christological Constructions (cf. the discussion of Nyamiti and Bediako's Christological views in

Chapter Two). This implies that Paul like African theologians was influenced by his context in his Christological reflections.

Paul's purpose for Christological discussion was to preach salvation to the Jews and the Gentiles. Although African theologians claimed that inculturation hermeneutics was aimed at clarifying the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the Africans' experiences, they did not however espoused that clearly in their Christological construction. Unlike Paul, their main aim was to address the cultural and African pre-Christian religious experience over against the Western ethnocentrism. This can clearly be seen in their incorporation of African pre-Christian religious themes into Christianity, an approach very contrarily to Paul. Whereas Paul developed his Christology to criticise and evaluate the then existing cultural and religious perception of the deity, by presenting the unique Christ for the salvation of the world, African theologians more or less welcome African pre-Christian religious worldview, and also, in case of Black Christology and African Women Christology, the socio-political and cultural life experiences of the Africans deeply form the framework of those Christologies.

Another important point to note is the focus of these Christologies. For Paul, it was the fall of humanity and God's redemptive intervention through the life and death of Jesus Christ. For the African theologians, their Christological reflections were mostly founded on the African reality. It was also argued in sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 that the African concepts employed in Christological discussions do not always fully reflect Jesus Christ as the redeemer of the whole world. In case of Black Christology, the view that the suffering of the oppressed should be understood from the perspective of the Cross of Christ does not reflect the achievement and vindication of the Cross of Christ preached by Paul. Whereas Paul saw the Cross as the turning point in human history, and the vindication of Jesus Christ for it was the justifying event for the sinners, Black Christology portrayed the Cross as agent of oppression, suffering and destitution. For Black Christology therefore the resurrection was the turning point of hope for the blacks oppressed. This may imply that the achievement of Jesus Christ ought to be seen in the struggles of humanity. Where there is suffering, the Cross is eminent, where there is liberation and hope, humanity is on the side of the resurrection. This destroys the organic unity between the Cross and the resurrection as part of one grand event of the redeeming act of God in Christ. This will further affect

the blessings of the Cross and the resurrection as can clearly be seen in Black Christology's treatment of the Cross and the resurrection. It was argued in 6.3.2 that Paul linked both the Cross and the resurrection to justification of believers in Jesus Christ with all the antecedent privileges.

For since African Christologies did not begin their Christological quest from the perspective of Protology, they could not address the question of Soteriology, hence, African Christologies were more developed from below with major stress on the situation of the African or African reality. This being the case, the situation of the African as a sinner and the salvific role of Jesus Christ as the redeemer are eclipsed in African Christologies. However, Paul dealt precisely with the situation of the sin of the Jews and Gentiles and God's saving activity in Jesus Christ to redeemed them from that sin, thus, Paul Christologized in his preaching of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus for the whole world, an all encompassing Gospel meant for the whole world. This aspect of Christology is completely omitted in African Christologies.

Since Paul's goal in Christology was Soteriology, and since he did not arbitrary chose his Christological titles, all his Christological titles, as was argued in section 6.3, reflect specific modes of God's redeeming activity in Jesus Christ. African Christologies employed Christological titles that only serve the purpose of cultural adaptation, African pre-Christian religious experience and political and cultural liberation. As Maluleke's essay (1998) suggest, what Africans' need is authentic biblical Christianity that will manifest the Jesus Christ of Paul in their daily living as Christians. African needs the Christ that transcends economic, political, cultural and situational ideologies. Since this is not yet evident in the Christologies discussed, from the perspective of Paul, this research will argue that African Christologies do not fully reflect Pauline Christology and Soteriology in the manner described by the conventionalism school of judicial adjudication in Dwokin's typology.

GENERAL SUMMARY

The purpose of this research was to investigate the problem of whether African Christologies reflect the personhood and the significance of the Cross of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. This research hypothesized in Chapter One that to adequately address the research problem, it will be imperative to investigate also the

hermeneutical problem since African Christologies are founded on the hermeneutical conviction of African theologians.

Chapter Two traced the development of African Christologies back to the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference. The chapter argued that the Edinburgh's official declaration that African Traditional Religions did not have the perceive status of *preparatio evangelica* opened the debate about the need for an African brand of Christianity. The Ibadan 1966 Conference was a step forward in the development of African Christian identity and selfhood. The question of the right hermeneutic became all important in the Dar' es Salaam 1976 Conference and the Ghana 1977 Conference. The Achievement of the two conferences was the birth of a new world order, which rejected the past Eurocentric approach to theology in the biblical Christianity in Africa. The result of this move was the emergence of incultural hermeneutic and identification of multiple sources for theology among which African experience and pre-Christian religious worldview were eminent. Each of the above mentioned developments contributed to the view that African traditional religious concepts should be employed in African Christological constructions which led to the Christological titles like Jesus our ancestor, priest, master of initiation, king, sacred chief, among others.

Chapter Three discussed the influence of the situation of inequality and oppression in South Africa, which led to the emergence of Black Theology that produced Black Christology. Here too, it was argued that the hermeneutical conviction of black theologians influenced their Christological developments. The view that God is on the side of the oppressed, and that the liberation of Israel and the Cross of Christ meant political liberation for the blacks oppressed in the South African context informed the view that Christ is the liberator of the oppressed. In addition, it was clear from the discussion of Black Christology that the situation of oppression and the struggle for liberation of the blacks oppressed were linked to the Cross of Christ and his resurrection.

Chapter Four also addressed the question of the meaning of Jesus Christ and the liberation of the Africans. However, this chapter attempted to discuss this question from the perspective of the experience of African women. Here too it was clear that the situation of women in Africa played a key role in the Christological reflections and developments. The hermeneutical point of departure was the problem of

patriarchy and the domestication of women. The chapter argued that this hermeneutical point of departure led in one way or the other to the isolation of biblical texts that seemed to African women as supporting women emancipation over against texts that encourage patriarchal distortions of the biblical traditions.

In Chapter Five, a hermeneutical point was developed for African Christological reflections and constructions. The legal hermeneutic of Ronald Dworkin as the feminist theologian, Linell Cady attempted to appropriate it to interpret and evaluate the feminist theologies of Schüssler Fiorenza and Elizabeth Ruether was employed to clarify and interpret the *Sola Scriptura* principle. It was argued that in order to avoid the problem of over stressing of situations over against Scripture, Welker's fourfold weight of Scripture must be acknowledged in all theological discussions. This means that Scripture must be interpreted as whole and applied to contemporary situations so that current situations will not determine what Scripture's message should be, or what Scripture should say in any given situation. In African Christological developments, therefore, the starting point should be the New Testament, and the New Testament must be employed in such Christological developments in the way described by the conventionalism school of judicial adjudication under Dworkin's typology.

Chapter Six first compared the three major African Christological trends. Secondly, it outlined Pauline Christology, arguing that Paul did not arbitrarily choose his Christological titles, and that each term employed by Paul demonstrates Paul's over all purpose in theology, the Gospel for the salvation of the Jews and Gentiles alike. The chapter also demonstrated how Paul linked his Christology to Soteriology in the interface between the Cross-resurrection and the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone. The chapter showed that central to Paul's Christology is Protology and Soteriology. Therefore, Jesus and the Cross were central to Paul's Christological discussion. It was argued that looking at African Christologies from the perspective of Paul's Protology and Soteriology, they do not fully reflect the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvific significance of his Cross.

In a sentence, the argument of African theologians as espoused in the preceding chapters has been that Jesus Christ, and the Gospel in general, must be presented in such a way that they meet the need of the Africans (this includes women). In doing so, African theologians sought not only to redefine Christianity, but the context, source

and method of theology and the Christian Gospel. Turaki (2001:102) describes the situation with the following words:

No doubt, we are fully aware that the theological method and the output of African Theology for over three decades cannot escape serious theological concerns and questions on what has been overlooked or over emphasized, especially the centrality of the Bible and the Gospel of Christ in African theological discourse. The critics of the methods employed in doing African Theology, here observed their weakness in neglecting their primary mission agenda of the Gospel, while placing a very high premium and priority on the cultural and the ideological agenda ..."

While not agreeing with Turaki completely, the fact remains that there is an over-stressing of praxis of suffering and oppression (in case of Black Theology and African Women Theology), and African Christian identity and anthropology (in the case of African Theology), over a diligent and deliberate search in the New Testament for the unique Christ for Christological reflection. It is true that in both approaches there is a keen interest in the use of Scripture to support the political and ideological views and cultural agenda of African theologians. Yet there is "the profound influence of the cultural agenda and political ideology [that] weakens the presentation of the Gospel of Christ" as the unique Christ for the salvation of the whole world as Lord and saviour (Turaki 2001:103). Hence, the needs to revisit the way African theologians present Christ in Africa.

While not necessarily overlooking the need to "contextualize" the message of the Bible, and this includes Christological constructions and developments, there is every need, as has been argued earlier, to confess and proclaim Christ as the unique Lord and Saviour of the whole world, one that could transform ATRs, viewed from the perspective of Protology and Soteriology as Paul has done. Only in this way will Christ be claimed globally (Orkure 2001:240-241). Paul did not preach a Christ for the Jews separate from the Christ of the Gentiles. Africans should not either. For unless, as Turaki argues,

Christ's Lordship, authority, power and supremacy are of universal value and impact as attested to and affirmed by the Holy Scriptures, the prophets and the apostles, our involvement as Christians with evangelism and ethical issues in the world lack any credibility and legitimacy. Jesus the Messiah cannot offer the world His salvation, peace and justice if He Himself does not have any universal statue, value and impact (2001:116).

However, as Maluleke (1997:188) rightly observes, "portrayals and the re-imaging of Jesus can neither be banned nor halted. These need not be, and have indeed not always been done consciously, deliberately or maliciously".⁸ However, such portrayals, re-imaging and reflections on the person and work of Jesus should be done in continuity with the New Testament. African theologians should be careful not to paint a picture of Jesus that does not do justice to his nature as God and man (Akao 2003:143). For if Christ could continue to take different shapes as there are faces of Jesus in Africa, Asia and so on, it will be hard to make sense of this unique Jesus for the salvation of the whole world proclaimed in Scripture. Situations and contexts will continue to differ, but as Scripture does not, and will not, it is important to hang on to the unique Christ of Scripture Who is the same today and forever in every situation and context.

As long as men and women are Adam's descendants, Christ as the second Adam will be relevant to them irrespective of their situation and context. Thus, African theologians need not find another Christ with a different image from that pictured of him in the New Testament for the sake of contextualization.

Instead of only preoccupying themselves with the question of who is Jesus Christ to the Africans (including African women), African theologians should also seek to ask who is the Jesus Christ that Africans must embrace in order to be saved. For those Africans concerned with liberation, the question should not only be what Christ will do for them in their situation of oppression and poverty,⁹ but also what Christ has

⁸ Maluleke notes that the root of most Christologies is "adoration, worship and proclamation of Christ and of Christianity in specific circumstances and contexts" (1997:188). This is also true of African Christologies as it is arguably of the New Testament (1997:188). But the question will remain, as Maluleke (1997:188) rightly notes: "what happens to Jesus every time he is *proclaimed* or re-imaged?" For African Christologies, however, viewed from the perspective of Christian Soteriology, Jesus is not always the same as he is in the New Testament. Maluleke admits that the most authoritative resource for Christological reflection is the New Testament. However, he retrospectively contends that the question of whether Jesus, when re-imaged in Africa, is "portrayed" or "betrayed", "cannot be settled on the Bible alone because the task of constructing a standard Christology," he argues, is a "hermeneutical one." Perhaps Maluleke makes the above observation in the light of the numerous cultures and contexts in which Jesus Christ is adored, worshipped, portrayed and proclaimed in Africa. These make it difficult to come up with a unanimous standard for Christological constructions and reflections in Africa. In such circumstances interpretation within a particular context, the interpreter's pre-understanding plays a key role. But as it is argued in the previous chapters, such an approach is more likely to "betray" Jesus than "portray" him in Africa. Thus the argument that "*Christologising*" (Maluleke 1997:188) in Africa should take place in the light of the New Testament.

⁹ This is not to say that Africans cannot reflect on the work of Jesus from the perspective of their situation, but that such reflections should point to the fact that "all" has been accomplished by Christ in his life, death and resurrection.

done for them. Should these be the approach in contemporary African Christological reflections, Jesus Christ will hopefully, no longer take the shape made of him at present in the Christologies discussed in this research.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

As it was hypothesized in Chapter One, the question of whether African Christologies reflect the person and the salvific significance of his Cross in the New Testament is a hermeneutical one. From the discussion of all the major Christological trends, it was clear that the hermeneutical convictions of African theologians inform their Christological views. Their view that a theological quest must begin with the African situation led them to think that African Christological quest must also begin and end with African reality. However, the Christological concepts they employed from African realities do not always fully reflect the portrayal of Jesus Christ and the significance of his Cross, specifically, the role of the Cross in Christian Soteriology in Pauline theology.

Therefore, for further study, African Christological reflections and developments should take place in continuity with the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ, specifically as in Pauline Epistles. Every effort should be made to ensure that such Christological developments and reflections are in congruence with the Protestant hermeneutical principle of *Sola Scriptura*.

Sola Deo

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