

# Developing a Christian Apologetics Based On the African Christological Themes

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## 9.1 Abstract

In the Researcher's view, Africa is no longer a dark continent characterized by people who are physically and spiritually obscure and that therefore nothing good could come out of her. As it were, the imagination of the westerners conspired with ignorance and prejudice to an understanding that gives Africa a false image on the religious global platform. On the contrary, Africa should and is capable of developing her own Christology and soteriology that appeal and endorses the religious curiosity of her people. African Christianity has the right to answer the question posed by Jesus in the scripture based on her own understanding of who Christ really is in the African world view. Therefore in this paper, the researcher is poised to provide an apologia to the text in (Mark 8:27-29) based on the African Christological themes. "Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets"* "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:27-31 NIV). To the African Christians, Jesus is the Savior, but yet pictured in several ways as provided for in different communities. In essence Jesus Christ is to be defined and propagated based on his role in meeting diverse needs in the African society. In addition, this paper is an attempt to pursue the continuous African response to the quest for a renewed understanding that seeks to revive the old age African interaction of the gospel as perpetuated by the first and second century apostolic fathers. It seeks to continue the rich African Christian heritage and legacy as founded by key Apologists of African origin such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen. In addition as indicated by O'Donovan, "the historical fact is that Christianity came to Africa before it came to Europe and North America. This can be seen in the story of the Ethiopian official in Acts 8:27-39." (2009, 5). The paper subsequently examines the different themes ascribed to Christ and how these themes can provide A Christological Apologia in the African context. The paper discusses how Jesus fits into the African perception of Christ as the Great Ancestor, priest or Prophet and Mediator cum intermediary. He is also perceived as Chief/ King, Redeemer or deliverer and Liberator.

**Key words: Christological themes, Apologia, soteriology, African Christianity, Ancestor, Salvific.**

## 9.2 Introduction

Africa, a continent that is just re-organizing her- self and healing from the post-colonial effects, is experiencing enormous challenges. The problem of refugees, hunger and disease, political instability and in some countries dictatorship forms a strong base for their belief and trust in the divine. In addition, Africa is indeed a mother of all religious groupings as Mbiti has said "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible

always to isolate it.” (Mbiti, 1969, 1) Therefore based on this truth, Africa stands vulnerable to all sought of religious abuses as expressed in the many interested religious groups represented by among others, African indigenous religions, Islam, Hinduism, and a wide variety of countless Christian sects. Such experiences do form the basis for developing an apologetic response to her view of Christ. In essence, the emphasis that Jesus Christ is accorded should show one whose solidarity with the people is unquestionable. He should be one that identifies with those people who suffer, who are oppressed, who are hungry, and who are weak and yet provide an answer to the many distortions in the orthodox Christianity as seen in her religious experiences.

### **9.3 Background information**

McGrath, in his book ‘Bridge Building’ defines Christian apologetics as “...an *apologia* for the Christian faith- a presentation and defence of its claims to truth and relevance in the great marketplace of ideas.”(1992, 9), and as Dyrness says, “The need to defend Christianity against its accusers is as great today as at any other time in its history. On every hand one hears complains of secularism and tales of the great success of cults and new faiths. Such dangers continue to make apologetics necessary.” (1983, 12) Therefore based on this truth, an attempt from an African view to answer the question “Who is Jesus?” as in (Mark 8:27-29), is an attempt to form a thesis of an African Christology and interpretation. This paper is based on biblical teachings about Christ and the cultural relevancy from an African perspective as revealed through Christological themes of her cultures. It is based on the understanding that Africa has every right to formulate her own Christology and response to who Christ is but yet her interpretation of who he is should not be one that undermines who he really is in the orthodox faith. Schreiter in answer to the question as who Jesus is and should be to the African people says;

If Peter understood Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of the Contemporary Jewish thought, the African response to the above question must reflect African consciousness. The efforts by forces of colonialism to exterminate and suppress the African religious consciousness have not succeeded, and today African people are asserting their own experience of God and their own reflection of how that God relates to them. In African religious tradition, God relates to people in concrete, experiential, and practical terms rather than in mystical and spiritual manner (Schreiter, 1991, 56).

In the same light, the Ghanaian protestant clergyman Emmanuel Martey, as quoted by Stinton, echoes the same sentiments as he pointed to the same Christological question that Jesus stressed to his disciples in Mark 8: who others and then who they themselves thought he was. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets, as well as Messiah- was all derived from Judaism.

His disciples used their religious understanding and experience to answer the reality of Jesus. So what African theologians are arguing is that in answering the Christological question, one cannot ignore one’s previous religious understanding and experience. That’s why some of us go back into African traditional religion and African culture, to see what symbols are there, which will help us to understand who Jesus Christ is for the African. (Stinton, 160)

It is on this understanding that the researcher intends to critically isolate Christological themes as expressed in the African cultures and way of worship, as a basis of their understanding as to who Jesus Christ is, and in addition make it a point of departure for the Christian apologetics.

### **9.4 Christological themes in African cultures and their apologetic response**

As Healey and Donald have said “African tradition and values can indeed broaden, deepen and enrich the universal Christian faith and praxis. At the same time the Christian faith and gospel message challenge and illuminate African culture and traditions” (1996, 27) in the same light, the

African Christological themes can form a reliable basis for apologetics in her continent and beyond. And as Archbishop Tutu has said in Kwame Bediako's book

...It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitations of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God, and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith. (Bediako, 1999, 2)

Understanding the Christological themes in African perspective towards the aspect of 'Jesus of Africa' is key in pursuit to answering the great question of "who is Jesus?"

The African perspective as revealed in different phases will give several answers. In Africa, Jesus is seen and believed among many as the healer, Liberator, Redeemer/Saviour, Chief/king, the great ancestor, Mediator/ intermediary and prophet/priest, among others. As Robert J. Schreiter says;

The concept[s] of Christology of such traditional African Christians are practical, dynamic, living and basically based on real-life experience, and a comprehensive African notion of religion and of God taking off faithfully from the gospel message and African culture and notion of man...their concepts of Christology revolve around genealogy, rites of passage - birth, baptism, Eucharist, and death; kinship and community aspects; such titles as mediators, redeemer, saviour, liberator and healer are pregnant with meaning for these indigenous African Christians. (1991, 62)

This paper shall critically look at each of these aspects as clearly seen and understood in Africa.

However this is done with an understanding that Jesus is more than all the perspectives presented in the understanding of who He really is in this African view. Just like what C.F.D Moule as quoted by Diane B. Stinton says;

Just as, in the new testament period, Christ was recognized, indeed, in terms of various familiar categories and yet each time proved to be too big for that category and burst out of it in startling ways, so one might deduce, by extrapolation from this, that he would continue to confront each generation in the same way -familiar, yet startling, recognizable yet always transcending recognition, always ahead, as well as abreast: the ultimate from whom each generation is equidistant. (2004, 64)

## **9.5 Jesus Christ as Healer**

Sickness in Africa is viewed and attributed to breaking of a taboo or plot of departed ancestral spirits. It could also be associated to witchcraft, as John Parratt says, "illness in African society is often attributed to breaking of a taboo or machination of malicious or sometimes displeased ancestral spirits. Other causes may be 'the evil eye', witchcraft, possession by an evil spirit or a curse by a sorcerer or an offended neighbour." (1997, 71) In essence sickness will always have a cause or origin. It will always have a bearing on relationships of the patient to supper natural world, or with the members of the society. Essentially it's a disconnection in relationships either with human or divine. As Schreiter says "Fundamentally, for the African person, being ill is an alteration in the equilibrium of the human organism, but it is also, and especially, a rent in the social fabric" (1991, 132). Parratt adds and echoes this view by saying that "The victim may not be the offender, but may suffer from the mistake or offense of a kinsman, or relative. Sickness has a direct bearing on the relationship of the patient with the spiritual or supernatural world, and with the members of the society". (1997, 71)

When sickness strikes, usually people ask two main questions, "how did it happen? And why did it happen?" as Schreiter says "the cause and meaning of illness are of far greater importance than their clinical symptoms. To be consistent, the development of a traditional nosology must not only begin with a general discourse on illness, but also, and especially, continue in terms of autochthonous socio- and ethno-clinical data". (1991, 133) The view expressed here is that the cause of sickness should be checked and analysed beyond the clinic.

Based on these views, religion is upheld largely as a means of reinforcing life. Religion serves as a precaution against powers and forces that may destroy them. As Parratt says “ In this case Jesus is conceived by many Africans Christians as the great physician, healer and victor over worldly powers...Christ is seen as being more powerful than any evil power, even though they recognize the existence of such evil power.” (1997, 72)

Throughout the continent, the belief in Jesus as Healer is seen through names and phrases used to explain the places of worship. In Christian run clinics and hospital one will find such sign posts as Jehovah Rapha Medical centre, Miracle and Healing Ministries, Jesus the Rock healing Ministry etc. As well seen and identified, most African Churches are not only churches but Clinics or hospitals. They believe that medical practitioners treat, but God heals. Parratt echoes these view when he implies that many people join specific Churches simply because they received their healing miracles in those Churches. “The commonest reply one gets to the question ‘why did you join this or that indigenous African Church?’ is ‘I was ill for a long time, I was advised by a friend to go to prophet so and so. I did and now I am better praise God’ ” (1997, 73)

The successful ministry in Africa is one which is accompanied by the working of miracles. As Schreiter says “Jesus also works miracles in ‘the context of his teaching’ Thus, the miracle becomes an illustration of the gospel message” (1991, 130)

Jesus’ crucifixion is used as a symbol of healing and by it the root of sickness is stamped out. As Schreiter says, “in order to be credible, our Gospel proclamation must strike root where human beings suffer, struggle, debate among themselves, and oppose the new forces of evil in Africa... we must examine the case of the healing charismas of our ancestors, while maintaining contact with the Spirit of Pentecost.” (1991, 144) To Africans, Jesus does not only heal but rather gives meaning to his cures. “Not only does Jesus heal, but also, and especially, he gives a meaning to his cures, and consequently to suffering and evil. For Jesus, healing comes from God. It is not an end in itself, but a starting point.” (ibid)

Based on this strong believe in the Jesus who heals as seen through the images accorded to the divine, it is therefore necessary to develop an apologia that re-defines and aligns it to the Orthodox teachings about Christ as the healer and in return answer the questions in the doubters. Therefore in answering the question “who do you say that I am?” (Mk.8:29) the African man will comfortably answer in the words of Bishop Boniface Tshosa as quoted by Healey& Donald, “ we answer, ‘ you are one of us, sharing our pain and leading us in an African dance of new life” (Healey & Donald, 1996,76) indeed our task in this is as Bidiako has said “ our task in Christian apologetics is to demonstrate how the scriptural witness to the life and ministry Jesus Christ, illuminated by the holy Spirit is the clue to the yearnings and quests in the religious lives of people.” ( Bidiako, 2004, 41) and in the same breath, quoting Bishop Kenneth Gragg, he says “ ‘the critical question for the Christian’ is ‘how to have the meanings of Christ become operative in human hearts’ ” ( Ibid) . In real sense, the point of departure in this argument is that Jesus is the real healer of not only the African man but all mankind. And as Healey & Donald have said, “Portraying Jesus as the “Supreme Healer” speaks deeply to African cultural traditions and is a good way of explaining Christ to Africans” (1996, 300)

## **9.6 Jesus as the great Ancestor**

Africa has a strong foundational heritage in ancestors and even some times ancestors are worshiped and therefore the ancestral concept is significant in their understanding of Christ. Pobeey says that “ whereas the gods may be treated with contempt if they fail to deliver the goods expected of them,

the ancestors, like the supreme being, are always held in reverence or even worshipped” (Pobee, 1979, 46)

Usually ancestors are viewed as a source of life and similarly Jesus is viewed that way. J. Mutiso- Mbinda as quoted by Schreiter says that “The ancestors are important for the preservation of stability and progress of community of the living and the living dead. From this Mutiso- Mbinda concludes that Christ, being our ancestor par excellence, becomes our mediator who continues to intercede for us as our ancestor, Christ, becomes the new source of human lineage” (Robert J. Schreiter, 1991, 67). Pobee referring to African ancestors stresses this same view when he says that “By virtue of being the part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, they are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and influence it for good or ill. They ... provide the sanctions for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate or reward the living as the case may be.” (1979, 46) Schreiter echoes this view when he re-defines the sayings of Jesus in the light of how it can be interpreted in African context. “Jesus said to Thomas ‘I am the way, and the truth. No one goes to the father but by me’ (John 14:6). These words recall to a Muntu’s mind the persons who are the source of life and obligatory route to Supreme Being: the ancestors.” (Schreiter, 1991, 116). Bujo as quoted in Stinton proposes the image of Jesus as the *proto- ancestor*. “If we look back on the historical Jesus of Nazareth, we can see in him, not only one who lived the African ancestor –ideal in the highest degree, but one who brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfilment. Jesus worked miracles, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead to life. In short, he brought life, and *life-force*, in its fullness” (Diane B. Stinton, 2004, 142)

His argument is that Jesus provided a model for living and from whom we can learn how to be a human being. He strengthens such an understanding by saying, “In this sense Jesus Christ is the proto-ancestor for the Africans. The law for living as good and wise Africans came to us by the intermediary of ancestors; the divine grace and wisdom to clothe us with the new man have come to us by Jesus Christ.” (ibid) Schreiter talking about the relationship of Jesus to Ancestorship among the Bantu people equates the message of (Mathew 28:20b) which says ‘and behold, I am with you always’ to their belief and says that

The Bantu Ancestors are not dead but alive...but the Bantu ancestors are invoked, on every important occasion. One converses with them, one shares with them the food and drink of the communion meals of family or clan, which are often held in their homes. The Ancestors are the principal ‘allies’ of the earthly beings. Ever attentive to all of the dangers that lie in wait for their descendants, they fight at their side, their mighty champions, for the triumph of life over death. (Robert J. Schreiter, 1991, 120)

The argument here is that Christ is truly the real ancestor because of the qualifications he holds in his capacity as the eternal son of God. And he finds real relevancy among African people if pictured and addressed in that way. An example is given by Bidiako when elaborating on how Christ is viewed and worshiped in the rural parts of Ghana as expressed in the song by the illiterate woman and in the Researcher’s view such a view of Jesus forms the basis for Christian apologetics among us.

Our ancestors did not know *Onyankopon*, the Great God  
They served lesser gods and spirits and became tired.  
But as for us, we have seen holy men and prophets.  
We have gone to tell the angels  
How Jehovah helped us reach this place.  
Jehovah has helped us come this far;  
With gratitude we come before Jesus,

The one who gives everlasting life (Bidiako, 2004, 10)

Indeed looking at the image expressed in this song as sung by the illiterate woman, points to how Jesus can be given a new understanding among the rural African person. It turns the wheel into the right perception of who Jesus real is among us. In addition Bidiako says that

It is known from African missionary history that one of the first actions of new converts was to pray for their ancestors who had passed on before the Gospel was proclaimed. This is an important testimony to the depth of their understanding of Jesus as sole Lord and saviour. Jesus Christ, 'the Second Adam' from heaven (1Corinthians 15:47) becomes for us the only mediator between God and ourselves (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). He is the 'mediator of a better covenant' (Hebrews 8:6), relating our human destiny directly to God. He is truly our high priest who meets our needs to the full. (2004, 26)

The bottom line in this argument is that using the images and descriptions of an ancestor in the African perception of the divine can form a good starting point of an authentic apology for Jesus Christ.

### **9.7 Jesus as Priest/ prophet**

Just in the same way that the disciples of Jesus saw him as a prophet in the line of Moses, Elijah, and other pre-exilic prophets, equally in the African mind, Christ stands out as a great prophet and priest. And as Schreiter says "Jesus the man and Jesus the prophet cannot be separated. Jesus understood himself and was also understood by others to be not just a prophet but also the prophet from God. This prophetic office of Jesus could be one important aspect in the development of an African Christology" (1991, 54)

On the other hand, the priest in African religion was seen as a medium through which the life giving power of God comes to man. And as expressed and implied by Schreiter, the priest contains within himself the 'life force' which he mediates to his people and that they go to him with the hope of allaying their fears and sufferings. And in the light of this, Christ forms the basis of belief that he is the true priest. Bidiako talking on Christ's priestly function says that

As himself God-Man, Jesus bridges the gulf between the Holy God and sinful humanity, achieving for humanity the harmonious fellowship with God that all human priestly mediations only approximate ...The meeting of the perfect sacrifice with the perfect priestly mediation in one person, Jesus Christ, means that having identified with humanity (Hebrews 2:14-15), he has opened the way for all who identify with him to be with him in the divine presence (Hebrews 10:19-20). This unique achievement renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness. (Bidiako, 2004, 29)

In essence Jesus being the true priest and prophet and that all others serving as a shadow of this reality forms an apologetic approach to the biblical truth. This can comfortably be equated to the story implied in (Acts 17:23) where Paul challenged the Athenians that what they worshiped as something unknown, he was going to make known to them. "*For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an Altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship- and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*"(NIV) The point of departure therefore is that Jesus is the Chief Priest and Prophet of the African man.

### **9.8 Jesus Christ as A mediator/ Intermediary**

In most African cultures as implied by Parratt, the King or Chief does not generally speak directly to the people, and the people also normally do not approach the king or Chief directly except through a linguist. The linguist receives and transmits the message from the king to the people and vice versa. Such a trend or order is socially accepted and expected by the people. An impress of

such a view makes the intermediary or mediatory role of Christ very relevant to many African communities. Parratt talking about the concept of the intermediary concept of Jesus among indigenous Churches, says

The King or the Chief also mediates between the living and God. This idea therefore makes the intermediary role of Christ among the members of the indigenous African Christian Churches meaningful...the concept of Christ, I submit, is very different from the classical Christian idea of a mediator, who not only provides communications, but also removes the barriers of sin and guilt which separates man from God, such concept of sin is far removed from African understanding of God and therefore of Christ (John Parratt, 1997, 67)

In essence, the Biblical concept that views Jesus Christ as the mediator and one who stands between Man and God and one that intercedes for humanity serves as a good pointer to his role as a true mediator. The holy Bible clearly indicates that Jesus Christ is alive so as to intercede for humanity in their limitations. Kwame Bediako says that:

Our savior is our elder brother who has shared in our African Experience in every respect, except our sin and alienation from God, an alienation with which our myths of origins make us only too familiar. Being our true elder brother now in the presence of his father and our father, he displaces the mediatorial function of our natural 'spirit- fathers' for these themselves need saving, having originated from among us. (2004, 26)

The bottom line is that by understanding the world view of the African Man in relation to his belief about divine mediatory role, can be a good starting point to point them to the truth as found in Christ Jesus as the real mediator and intermediary between man and God in line with the message of (Heb.8:6) which says that *"But the Ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promise."* (NIV) Christ's position as mediator of the new covenant is based on his sacrificial death and such liberating truth is what can point the African man to the salvation as found in Him.

### **9.9 Jesus viewed as Chief/king**

In African community the Chief is a symbol of leadership and John Pobee in Stinton's book, says, "while various African communities have different ideas and practices of authority, whatever the leadership concept and practice, they can be a very powerful avenue for articulating the answer to the question 'who do you Africans say that I am'" (Diane B. Stinton, 2004, 199).

In 1Tim.6:15 Jesus is referred to as the only ruler, the king of kings and Lord of Lords and referred to in similar manor in other themes of the Bible. He is as Schreiter says "he is the eschatological 'son of David' (Mark 10:46-52, Mathew 20:29-34) who is destined to come and establish the glorious reign of David over God's people Israel (Psalms2:7)." (1991, 55) He also adds that, "in Jesus of Nazareth, God speaks to his people as prophet, relates to them as priest, and establish his rule not only in the world to come but in this present world also. A Christology which revolves around the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and potentate is not only soundly biblical but will be most comprehensible to African Christians" (Ibid). In other words the concept of Christ being king or ruler among African communities is quite in order and is well understood. For example talking about the Bantu view of Christ Schreiter also says that "The prerogative of a Bantu Chief are seen to have been fully realized by Jesus Christ, Power belongs superlatively to Jesus Christ because he is a mighty hero, because he is the Chief's son and Chief's emissary, because he is "strong," because he is generous, wise, and a reconciler of human beings" (1991, 105).

Based on this understanding, the nature of Christ and the role he plays in the Christendom truly qualifies him as a Chief and king in the African mind set. "Christ is called the 'Chief' by the

Bantus first of all because he has conquered- because he has triumphed over Satan. The figure of the Bantu Chief is closely associated with that of a hero. The later indeed performs one of the roles of the chief, that of defender and protector of the people. (Ibid) The idea here is that for most African communities the chief is considered a noble man that leads and reconciles people, and therefore to them Christ has come to do the same roles.

Christ as a chief that brings peace in the African communities is also echoed by Parratt when he says that “For the Average African, peaceful living with one’s neighbor is, by far, more important than any western Christian teaching about sin” (1997, 67). In other words Christ’s mediatory as well as Chiefly role is well seen and articulated in the images of Jesus Christ among the African people.

The kingship theme is loudly expressed and seen in the many worship services across the continent. For example in the song *‘Bayete Inkosi’* meaning *‘King of kings’* from among the Zulu people has a stanza that says

You are crowned king of Africa

You are crowned lord of lords

You are crowned king of Africa

Who can deny you are crowned lord of Lords. (Stinton, 2004, 202)

The implication is that the kingship and Lordship of Jesus Christ and symbolism goes beyond particular people groups and encompasses people beyond all borders and in this case, Jesus is seen in the light of being king of Africa.

Equally from what Stinton says

Contextual evidence from Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana points to the kingship of Jesus being a prevalent theme in local expressions of Christianity. Participant observation in a wide variety of Churches exposed numerous references to Jesus as king in songs, prayer, liturgy, and preaching...yet, clearly, traditional leadership symbolism further informs Christological images of kingship/chieftaincy. (ibid)

In essence, in the African mode and forms of worship, this theme seems to have a convictional head way and therefore many people do identify well with Christ when referring to Him as a king or Chief.

In his book *‘Jesus and the Gospel in Africa’* Bediako once again paints an image of Christ as Chief of all Chiefs as expressed in the poem sung by the illiterate Ghanaian woman- Afua Kume

Children rush to meet Him, Crowds of young people

Rush about to make Him welcome, Chief of young women:

They are covered with precious beads, and hung it around your neck

So we go before you, shouting your praise, *ose, ose*

Chief of young men: they are covered with precious beads

and gold pendants worn by princes. They follow you, playing musical instruments.

Chief of all strong men: king of the valiant

You have placed your royal sword in our right hand, and the flag of victory in our left hand

While we lead your firing canons. Chief of all chiefs

He says the chiefs are the wise men of the land, and let his judgment stand

The one who lays his worries there and says, ‘Lord, judge for me’

Is the only one that God can help; God’s wisdom sets him free.(Bediako, 2004, 14)

The bottom line in this argument is that in the African mind, the theme of Chief and kingship is a reality that brings the biblical reality so close to the African world. And as Bediako comments on this poem “by giving ancestral and royal titles to Jesus, these prayers and praises indicate how deeply Madam Afua Kuma has apprehended the all-pervasive lordship of Jesus, in the ancestral realm of spirit power, and in the realm of the living community under reigning kings.” (Ibid)

In line with Stinton's view while quoting Aboagye- Mensah on Akan Christianity says "Akan Christianity has no hesitation in transferring to Jesus Christ descriptions and titles which were used for our traditional kings. More strikingly, in this form of transposition they also portray Jesus Christ as one greater and superior to them. They are mere chiefs/kings in comparison to Jesus Christ. Jesus is their leader and is sovereign among them" (2004, 202). The apologetic response therefore is that in Africa Jesus is crowned king of kings and Chief of all Chiefs and should be interpreted in the light of (1Tim.6 :15) where the bible calls him "...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the king of kings and Lord of Lords"( NIV) among other similar biblical symbols accorded to Him.

### **9.10 Jesus as Redeemer/ Deliverer**

The African view of Jesus is one that pictures him as a redeemer. To them God is the final authority to whom they turn to when all help and comfort flee. Parratt says, "For many African Christians, redemption from physical dilemma, or evil forces is their main pre- occupation." (1997,68). The implication here is that the African man always looks forward for a moment of freedom from what has hindered his progress. Parratt continues to echo this while talking about worship in independent African Churches, he says that; "The idea of deliverance is the commonest theme in the hymns, prayers, and catechisms of these indigenous African Churches. They address themselves to complete personal and community deliverance from the forces of evil, witchcraft, death, drought, floods, sickness or any epidemic. This idea ties in with the traditional African concept of religion and therefore God and Christ" (ibid)

The redemptive themes are qualified even in the names given to worship places. For instance in some places one will find the Churches by the name Redeemed Gospel, Deliverance Church, Liberty ministries etc. all these names have a bearing on the Christological themes and beliefs of the African people and points at Jesus as their redeemer- deliverer. And as Parrate continues to say, "The attraction and therefore power of these Christians is that the saviour is dynamic, practical, and invitation therefore is 'bring all your worries of unemployment, poverty, witch graft, ill-luck, enemy, barrenness, sickness, blindness, lameness, sorrow, Jesus is ready to save all who come to him in belief and faith'" (1991, 70)

The point of departure therefore is that the idea of Christ being crowned as deliverer or redeemer finds real meaning in the African form of worship and can easily be accepted and quickly understood by the common person.

### **9.11 Jesus as a Liberator**

Liberation is the removal of all those things that keep people in bondage and in this case the African man. "It's liberation from fear, uncertainty, sickness, evil powers, foreign domination and oppression, distortion of his humanity, poverty and want" (Parratt, 1997, 70)

In Africa, it is believed that the reason why many people do not attain what God intended them to have is because of oppression by evil powers in keeping them in bondage. As Mugambi as quoted by Parrat says, "it is not just one of the issues, but rather, all issues are aimed at liberating the African from all forces that hinder him from living fully as a human being. In the African context, and in the bible, salvation as a theological concept cannot be complete without liberation as a socio- political concept." (Parrat, 1997, 70) The same view is shared by the resolutions reached by the African Theologians during the 1977 Pan African conference of third world Theologians in Accra, which expressed among other issues that "we stand against oppression in any form because the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all forms

of dehumanization.” (Stinton, 2004, 216). The African continent still pursues the liberation phenomena as a way of escape for her people who are faced with many needs. With the current situations of refugees, poverty, political instability and other related problems of the continent, the liberation theology forms a relevant and pivotal concept of Jesus Christ. As expressed through the primary questions presented by Mugambi and Magesa:

Can the title *Liberator* be applied to Christ? Is it justifiable in terms of the contemporary situation of the African continent? In other words, is Jesus seen as the “one who makes people free”? Is he preached as such? Indeed, what is the “image” of Christ? What “image” of God are the suffering people of Africa presented with? Particularly, from the perspective of African women’s painful existential experience, what is liberation as applied to the power and authority of Christ in the African world.(Diane B. Stinton, 2004, 216)

The message expressed in this set of questions is one that identify with the desire for liberation in the African mind. Amba Oduyoyo equates the liberation of Africans to the act of God liberating the Jews from Egypt. In other words the liberation theology makes sense to the African man when she says;

Liberating Israel from slavery in Egypt was a salvific act born out of God’s grace. (Ex.15:13). This is what makes the historic exodus so fascinating. It is clear from that political deliverance that the redemption of a community from unjust systems is not outside God’s providence, that what God found necessary to do for Israel, God has found necessary to do for the colonized peoples of Africa, and is doing for those held in bondage inside Africa. (Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 2002, 22)

The relevance of this is found in the Africans act of depending on God for holistic liberation. The Archbishop Desmond Tutu echoes similar feelings when he maintains, as quoted by Parratt that;

Liberation is a serious preoccupation at the present time and it is not seen as being an alternative to personal salvation in Jesus Christ, No, it is seen in Africa as the inescapable consequence of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ seriously. Only a spiritually, socially and economically free Africa, where Christianity today is expanding faster than anywhere else, in the world, can make a distinctive contribution to the life of the body of Jesus Christ and the world community as a whole. (John Parratt, 1991, 71)

In essence the liberation theology forms the basis for the fast growth of Christianity in Africa. The theme of Christ as A liberator is pictured among African cultures through symbolisms that picture Christ as A mighty liberator. Talking about Christological themes in Africa, Marc Ela in Diane’s book asks:

‘in this context, what does a Christ dressed in a leopard’s Skin like a Bantu chief signify?’ the context referred to is that of Africa at large, described as ‘a grouping of societies that have suffered,’ and which remains ‘a land of poverty, oppression, and violence’ for Ela’s emphasis on the need for Africans to express the gospel according to their own cultural symbolism...the ‘urgent problems of contemporary Africa becomes the obligatory locus of theological research. Ela therefore advocates a critical approach with point of departure in African culture, economics and politics in order to discern and address the mechanisms and structures of oppression at work... (Stinton, 216)

The message in this argument is that the relevance of the gospel to the African man is one which penetrates through the fabrics of society by bringing liberation from issues that has put people under bondage and that is what Africa has experienced in her encounter with the gospel of Christ. In her encounter, Christ, has been well pictured as a liberator. Jesus’ own self- identification with the poor and needy makes his proclamation in the words ‘I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10) meaningful and relevant to African Christianity. Parratt, egos this when he says that;

The pivot therefore of the African concept of Christ as a liberator is in His own words ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind. To release the

oppressed, to proclaim the year of the lord's favour' (Lk.4:18-19), to the many displaced and refugees in Africa this is more than a solace." (1991, 70)

An apology that is based on such truth will ultimately find headway into the hearts of the African man since they already have the basic concepts.

### **9.12 Conclusion**

The Jesus of Africa means all things to the Africans given the scope of what the continent is going through. To the refugees and the hunger - stricken, he is their comforter and provider. To those experiencing internal wars and tribal conflicts, he is the peace maker. To those oppressed by the dictatorship governments, he is the deliverer, liberator and true king. To the sick and weak, he is the healer and strengthener. To those hungering for longevity, he is the great ancestor who stretches life from eternity past to eternity to come.

This is echoed by Stinton when he says that;

Some times what Jesus is to somebody can be seen by what the person is going through. There are some people who see Jesus only as a healer, because they are sick. There are some people who, because they are poor, want Jesus to change stones into bread for them. So if you don't take care, you will be kind of parochial in your thinking about Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ embodies everything. So there is that danger, of losing sight of who Jesus is. You're only thinking of who Jesus is in reference to your problem, the situation in which you find yourself. (Stinton, 2004, 96)

Therefore as an African theologian, it is the Researcher's view and desire to avoid any form of departure from the truth embodied in the person of Christ. The rich Christian heritage which is richly manifested and expressed in African mythologies, pictures, symbolisms and mode of worship need to form an authentic Christology in answer to the question of who Christ really is.

Such Christological symbolism provides a strong base for Africa's belief in Jesus and forms a strong living link in the apologetic response to the spiritual needs of Africa. And as McGrath has suggested and implied, the Christian dialogue as in confronting the African themes of Christology should not be aimed at showing how wrong they have been but rather the apologist should show the relevancy of the Christian claims to the African man but in love.

In real sense, there is need for a global inter-Christian dialogue that seeks to approve and authenticate African Christological themes apart from confronting them as has been the old age trend. "Part of the attraction of Christianity is that it is both exciting and true. But it is to be aware that truth-claims can, through human weakness and fallibility, very easily be presented or perceived in seriously confrontational terms." (McGrath, 1992, 128) Thus, the Christian claims about the Christological themes of Jesus should not be confrontational to the African themes but rather should aim at relevancy. As O'Donovan has rightly put it; "The need is not to mix the truth of the Bible with the teachings of other religions but to state the biblical truth in ways that are true to African life and experience. In other words theology must be truly Christian but also truly African in expression." (2009, 5)

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