

Jesus in African Christianity: A Critique of Popular African Christologies

Julius Ndishua

Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary, Ndu, Cameroon

Email: ndishuajulius@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The representation of Jesus Christ in African Christianity is a complex and multifaceted issue. This article examines how Jesus Christ is perceived and interpreted in African Christianity. It analyses the diverse ways in which African Christians understand Jesus, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of some popular Christologies. The study critiques the tendency to Africanize Jesus, arguing that this approach can lead to a reduction of the universal significance of Christ. Despite the significant growth of Christianity in Africa, there is a need for a critical examination of popular African Christologies. The researcher uses the presuppositional apologetics approach. The findings revealed that these Christologies often reflect a blend of African cultural and traditional beliefs with Christian theology, but may also be influenced by Western colonialism, cultural syncretism and theological reductionism. This paper seeks to contribute to a deep understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of Jesus in African Christianity.

Keywords: African Christianity, Christology, Africanization, Critique, Popular

INTRODUCTION

African Christology is a recurring subject of debate with emphasis on its theological validity, cultural relevance and impact on African Christian communities. In an effort to place the life and teachings of Jesus Christ within the framework of African cultures and experiences, a number of Christologies have developed within African Christianity. Over time, a number of theologians in Africa have put forward these African Christologies. The majority of these theologians are from the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. Among the African Christologies are Christ the Supra Ancestor, Christ the Elder Brother, Christ the Healer, and Christ the Master Initiator.¹ According to Timothy Palmer, African Christian theologians frequently use Jesus as their ancestor in their writings.² In an effort to explain the significance and meaning of Christ's humanity and deity, these theologians have contextualised Christology in various ways.³ The main goal of this study is to critically evaluate the viewpoints of a few selected Christologies in Africa, including Charles Nyamiti's Jesus as Brother Ancestor, Kwame Bediako's Jesus as

¹ Chesosi Bonface Kimutai, "Jesus Christ, The Supra-Ancestor: The Quintessential Image of Bona Fide African Christology," A Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Contemporary Christologies and Soteriologies, *EAS Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 2, no.2 (Mar-Apr-2020):57-64; also see C.A. Aigbadumah, Jesus the Healer: A Theological Reflection on the Role of Christology in the Growth of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in Nigeria, 2011, 15-20, and Joseph G. Healey, "Three Case Studies of African Christology among the Sukuma People in Tanzania," *Tanzania Journal of Theology and Mission* (September, 2011): 2-3.; Shaibu Abraham, "Ordinary Indian Pentecostal," *A Thesis Submitted to the University of Birmingham for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* arch, 2011, 185-250.

² Timothy Palmer, "Jesus Christ: Our Ancestor," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 27, no.1 (2008), 65.

³ S.O. Abogunrin, "Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa," *Christology in African Context* S.O. Abogunrin, J.O. Akao, G.M. Toryough (eds) no 2, (Nigeria: NABIS, 2003): 9.

Ancestor, and Enyi Ben Udoh's Guest Christology. The researcher uses the presuppositional apologetics approach.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS APPROACH

The four primary methods of apologetics are evidential, experiential or story apologetics, classical, and presuppositional. Each of these approaches places a distinct emphasis on the roles that reason and special revelation play in apologetics. Cornelius Van Til, the father of presuppositionalism, argued that the Christian God exists because we must presuppose him to be rational.⁴ The presuppositional apologetics approach begins with the assumption that God exists in order to demonstrate the flaws in alternative worldviews. It emphasises how important Scripture is in proving that sin impacts the whole person and that non-Christians have preset beliefs that limit their ability to reason.⁵

SELECTED AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

The Christologies of Nyamiti, Udoh, and Bediako are the main subjects. Before outlining each proponent's points of view, the researcher gives a brief biography of each. With the exception of topics directly relevant to the discussion, the research does not guarantee that all aspects of the chosen African Christologies will be included. The researcher is aware that all theologians operate with some degree of assumption, whether they realise it or not. While some people might want to define their assumptions, others might decide not to.⁶ Thus, Jesus as 'Brother Ancestor' is discussed below.

JESUS AS BROTHER ANCESTOR BY CHARLES NYAMITI

Brief Biography of Charles Nyamiti

Charles Nyamiti was born in Tanzania in 1931. In 1962, he received training and was ordained as a priest by the Roman Catholic Church. Nyamiti received a degree in music theory, piano, and composition from Louvain University in Belgium and Vienna, as well as a PhD in Systematic/Dogmatic Theology and Cultural Anthropology. From 1976 until 1981, he taught at Kipalapala Major Seminary, his alma mater, and worked as a coworker in nearby parishes. Nyamiti later became a worldwide scholar after relocating to Nairobi.⁷

Among Nyamiti's published works are *African Christologies Today*, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, *African ancestral veneration and its relevance to the African Churches*, *The Church as Christ's Ancestral Mediator: An Essay on African Ecclesiology*, *Ancestor-Based Ecclesiology and Ministry*, and *Some Moral Implications of African Ancestral Christology*.⁸ He is a prolific writer, a scholar, and a well-read theologian. It

⁴ Joshua D. Chatraw, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/presuppositional> accessed June 8, 2025.

⁵ Chatraw, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/presuppositional> accessed June 8, 2025.

⁶ Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," *A Thesis Presented to the University of Edinburgh for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* (March 2008), 26; also see Kenneth R. Ross, "Current Christological Trends in Northern Malawi," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 27, Fasc 2 (May, 1997): 160-176, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1581684> accessed May 27, 2025.

⁷ Francis Aneke Oborji, <https://www.thecable.ng/charles-nyamiti-theology> .org Accessed May 27, 2025.

⁸ Livingstone Akijar, "Is the Interpretation of Christ as the 'Ancestor of the Church' Compatible with the Christian Doctrine? A Study of the Christology and Ecclesiology of Charles Nyamiti," A Master Thesis Submitted to the School of Theology, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Natal-Pietermaritzbury (July, 2000), 7.

is believed that the “Thomastic Philosophy” that they studied had a significant impact on his writing and methodology, which at one point caused dispute. On May 19, 2020, he passed away.⁹ Similarly, Abraham Akrong notes that Charles Nyamiti identified with Christologies of inculturation and liberation. The methodology of Christology of inculturation, according to Nyamiti, operates by identifying biblical themes and images of Jesus Christ that are particularly relevant to the African context as a hermeneutical tool for formulating African Christology.¹⁰ Nyamiti’s Christological perspective is another important consideration.

Charles Nyamiti’s View on Christology

Nyamiti applied the African understanding of ‘ancestor’ as a premise for his Christological reflection. He championed ‘Brother-ancestor’ Christology in Africa and approached the subject matter from a particular perspective. Nyamiti attributes to Christ the title of ‘Brother-ancestor’ at the biological level.¹¹ In his thesis, Livingstone Akijar notes that Nyamiti used ‘Christology from below’ to appeal to Africans, especially the Bantu.¹² He presumably ascertained that Christology, which is related to ancestor veneration, requires an approach of Christ from his human nature. Nyamiti possibly applies the human ancestral relationship to the inner life of God because he opines that one of the goals of the earthly Jesus reveal that we can call him our ‘Brother-ancestor’. He substantiates ‘Brother-ancestor’ because it is through Jesus that African Christians are considered adopted sons of God.¹³ Nyamiti believes Christ’s close relationship with Africans should be understood as a mediator between the offspring and God, and as a source of stability, morality, life, prosperity, and community cohesion, or the fulfilment of existence.¹⁴

The gap that sin brought is now bridged through our ‘Brother-ancestor’. Nyamiti is confident that Jesus is our ‘Brother-ancestor’ forever, through whom we rejoice and are glad in the presence of our heavenly ancestors. Thus, Nyamiti upholds that Christ is our ‘Brother-ancestor’ perhaps because we are reconciled with God in and through him.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Akijar notes that Nyamiti used the Bantu understanding of human descent to interpret Christ within the Bantu concept of ‘ancestralship’. He further asserts that Nyamiti formulated the ‘Brother-ancestor’ to describe our common ‘sonship’ to the shared ancestor Adam. He claims that, because of Christ’s humanity, his interpretation as an ancestor is linked to Adam. Since Christ is connected with Adam, the originator of society, everyone in the Christian community is conceptualised as a descendant of a common ancestor, Christ.¹⁶ Nyamiti used the ancestors’ role as role models for Bantu society to argue that Christ is our model in the Christian community. For example, he was considerate and compassionate; he used wisdom to handle difficult times; and he taught his community the same pattern of life. Nyamiti maintains that Christ’s death enabled his rite of passage ancestralship according to the transitional African concept of

⁹ Oborji, <https://www.thecable.ng/charles-nyamiti-theology.org> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹⁰ Abraham Akrong, “Jesus with the Face of an Ancestor,” 25; also see Charles A. Wanamaker, “Jesus the Ancestor: Reading the Story of Jesus from an African Christian Perspective,” *Scriptura* 63 (1997), 282.

¹¹ Oborji, <https://www.thecable.ng/charles-nyamiti-theology.org> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹² Akijar, “Is the Interpretation of Christ as the ‘Ancestor of the Church’ Compatible with the Christian Doctrine? A Study of the Christology and Ecclesiology of Charles Nyamiti,” 47.

¹³ Oborji, <https://www.thecable.ng/charles-nyamiti-theology.org> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹⁴ Akijar, “Is the Interpretation of Christ as the ‘Ancestor of the Church’ Compatible with the Christian Doctrine? A Study of the Christology and Ecclesiology of Charles Nyamiti,” 48.

¹⁵ Oborji, <https://www.thecable.ng/charles-nyamiti-theology.org> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹⁶ Akijar, “Is the Interpretation of Christ as the ‘Ancestor of the Church’ Compatible with the Christian Doctrine? A Study of the Christology and Ecclesiology of Charles Nyamiti,” 48-49.

transition.¹⁷ This could mean that no one can predict God's will and purpose in a given situation. God in Christ became man so that through death and resurrection, people will turn to Him. Enyi Ben Udoh's Guest Christology follows Nyamiti's Christology.

GUEST CHRISTOLOGY BY ENYI BEN UDOH

Brief Biography of Enyi Ben Udoh

Enyi Ben Udoh is a Nigerian Presbyterian theologian. He wrote his dissertation on "Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa in 1983."

Enyi Ben Udoh's View on Jesus-As-Guest

Enyi Ben Udoh is another African theologian whose Christological proposal is centred on 'Christ-as-Guest'. Emmanuel Orobator suggests that Udoh is the proponent of 'Christ-as-Guest'.¹⁸ The assumption is that Christianity is a 'Guest' religion in Africa, and its single most important personality, Jesus Christ, is a guest in Africa. Udoh's thesis focused on the fact that Jesus is a guest in Africa.¹⁹ Also, he notes that one of the cardinal points of Guest Christology is to resolve the problematic element of Christ's presence. If Jesus Christ is to be accepted and proclaimed Lord and King of all, he must first be welcomed and initiated into Africa as a guest, and this requires that the principles or standards of a guest in Africa be respected.

In Africa, a guest cannot be a guide. He aligns with the host culture's worldviews and accepts its thoughtful patterns and philosophy. Any claim to a divine state by the guest would amount to arrogance and could further estrange the guest and the host.²⁰ This means that he cannot be considered God at first value once he is among them. This is presumably Christology from 'below' because the humanity of Christ is emphasised more than His deity. Udoh argues that if Christ is accepted and welcomed as a guest in and through the family, his status is no longer that of a mere alien or stranger. He notes that the cultural initiation Christ should have undergone would have altered his unknown status and transformed him into a respectable citizen.²¹ Udoh explains how Christ was introduced into the Nigerian context and how the image of Jesus was represented by those who brought the gospel, particularly in the mission in Calabar. According to Udoh, all attempts in Guest Christology are focused on how to 'reinstate' the human face of Jesus Christ in Africa.²² Thus, he suggests that the concept of 'Guest' in Africa connotes a non-family member.

Further, Goergen notes that the proponent of Guest Christology assumes that teaching about Jesus was imposed on Africa during the 'colonial and missionary period'. Jesus is more of a stranger in Africa. He remains a Western Christ to most Africans, which suggests that Jesus's status is similar to that of an illegal alien in a community. In addition, the dilemma of Christian identity and the foreignness of Christ compel Udoh to respond positively to the fact that the

¹⁷ Akijar, "Is the Interpretation of Christ as the 'Ancestor of the Church' Compatible with the Christian Doctrine? A Study of the Christology and Ecclesiology of Charles Nyamiti," 50.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Orobator S.J., "The Quest for an African Christ: An Essay on Contemporary African Christology," *Hekima Review*, no. (September 1994):86.

¹⁹ Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," *A Thesis Presented to the University of Edinburgh for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* (March 2008), 64-65.

²⁰ Orobator, "The Quest for an African Christ: An Essay on Contemporary African Christology," 87.

²¹ Orobator, "The Quest for an African Christ: An Essay on Contemporary African Christology," 88.

²² Michael L. Cook S.J., "The African Experience of Jesus," in *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 676.

image of Christ in Africa is that of a 'Guest'.²³ This means that Christ is first a 'Guest' in Africa and should be received as such. Secondly, the status changes from a 'Guest' to a relative. The implication is that he might remain an outsider to most Africans because a 'Guest' has no place in the African lineage, and the duration of a 'Guest' in a place is temporal. In line with Georgen, Cook suggests that the missionaries brought the gospel of Jesus to Africa as part of the colonial power of Europe. These missionaries seemed sincere but culturally misguided in their attempt to help the natives overcome idolatry and adopt a true religion and a meaningful civilisation, which elicited mixed feelings. Christianity was improbable apart from the European culture and history for many missionaries.²⁴ Ezigbo notes that the perception of Jesus Christ as an 'illegal alien' and the image of Jesus Christ as a 'divine being' are two Christological problems that seem to confront African Christians. This accounts for why Udoh decided to formulate a Christology to bridge the gap between Jesus Christ and Africa.²⁵ Ezigbo maintains that, according to Udoh, Africans should play the role of the host while Jesus goes through the initiation rite to become one of the relatives. This means that Africans must be willing to allow Jesus to become one of them, and secondly, he is supposed to submit to the process of inculturation.²⁶ Also, Ezigbo asserts that for "Udoh, the image of Jesus as a divine figure or messenger is 'offensive' to many Africans because for them 'God has no need for prophets' and God cannot become a man."²⁷ The researcher concurs with Ezigbo that Udoh employs the 'Christology from below' to reach 'Christology from above,' suggesting that Christology in Africa may need to strike a balance between the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.²⁸

JESUS AS ANCESTOR BY KWAME BEDIAKO

Brief Biography of Kwame Bediako

Kwame Bediako was born in 1945 and died in June 2008 at age 63.²⁹ He was a native of Ghana and a Ghanaian Presbyterian Minister. He served as the director of the 'Akrofi-Christaller' Centre in Ghana. In this pioneering study centre, African pastors, theologians, and historians gather to pool insights into the meaning of Christianity. He was trained as a 'patrologist' and 'historian'. Bediako has authored several books and articles; for instance, he is the author of 'Theology and Identity'.³⁰

²³ Donald J. Georgen O.P. "The Quest for the Christ of Africa," in *Sedos Bulletin* Vol.34, no. 3 (March, 2002): 75.

²⁴ Cook, "The African Experience of Jesus," 673.

²⁵ Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," 66.

²⁶ Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," 67.

²⁷ Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," 68.

²⁸ Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," 68.

²⁹Tormod Engelsen, "Rev. Professor Kwame Bediako in Memoriam," *NORSK TIDSSKRIFT for MISJONSVITENSKAP* 2008, 131134.

³⁰Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1970), preface; also see Richard Gray, "Reviewed Work (s): Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion by Kwame Bediako," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 60, no. 1(1997):202-203; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/620849>, accessed October 10, 2021; and Ben Knighton, "Kwame Bediako Jesus in Africa," *Transformation an International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* (January, 2001): 1-3, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311594594> accessed May 27, 2025.

Kwame Bediako's view on Ancestor Christology

Over time, theologians in Africa have responded to Africa's Christology in various ways. Kwame Bediako, an African scholar and theologian, identified the Christological problem in Africa and offered some insight to contribute to the discourse. Bediako and Udoh used 'the historical and theological dimensions of missionaries' engagement in Africa to discover the tension between Christianity and African religion, which led to the present understanding of the deity and humanity of Jesus.³¹ Stinson opines that Bediako was uncomfortable with the manner and approach of the Western missionary agency applied during their encounter with his people, the Akan clan.³² To resolve the struggle, Bediako used a method different from Udoh's, that Jesus Christ is not a stranger to our heritage; he is the saviour of the entire universe without exception.³³ Stinson further asserts that Bediako used the Akan traditional religion to interpret the gospel. Since the concept of an ancestor is central to the Akan heritage, Bediako developed the image of Jesus as an ancestor, concluding that "Jesus Christ is the only real and true ancestor and source of life for all humanity, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors."³⁴ This means that Jesus is labelled with the identity and functions of a typical ancestor within the context of the Akan people in Ghana. However, Christ is the Lord over the living and the dead. The following section focuses on the critical evaluation of the above-mentioned Christologies of Nyamiti, Udoh and Bediako.

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE CHRISTOLOGIES OF NYAMITI, UDOH, AND BEDIAKO,

This section focuses on the critical evaluation of the Christologies of Nyamiti, Udoh and Bediako. First, Nyamiti's evaluation of Jesus as "Brother Ancestor" is explained below.

Jesus as "Brother-ancestor" by Charles Nyamiti

The term 'ancestor' is a concept that is understood across some African ethnic groups. Whenever the word 'ancestor' is mentioned, some Africans quickly connect it with the living dead, whom they consider their mediators to the gods. The use of 'Brother-ancestor' may sound strange to a typical African because ancestors are often considered elders who lived well and died at a good age, and are now venerated within the family/clan or tribe. African ancestors have a past that is either positive or negative. Applying this concept to Jesus may sound strange to a typical African because the setting of an African ancestor does not equate to the person and works of Jesus, but it appeals to African Christians. Nyamiti's explanation of how the life of Christ is supposedly impacted by what he called biological ancestors is unclear. The author left his readers without a satisfactory and convincing response to the practice.

Jebadu arguably states that not everyone is included in their ancestors' families in a typical African community. He notes that only those who meet certain conditions are eligible to be added to the list of ancestors. First, people who have attained adulthood, determined by

³¹ Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 24-25; also see Benno van den Tooren, "Kwame Bediako's Christology in its African Evangelical Context," *Koinklijke Brill, Leiden*, 1997, 219.

³² Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 219.

³³ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 25.

³⁴ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 26.

marriage and procreation, are not necessarily of a certain age. The assumption is that all the unmarried, whether young or old, are disqualified from the 'ancestorhood' list. They are disqualified because they have not transmitted life to another, and the community rates such people as useless.³⁵ Second, Jebadu submits that those whose deaths were natural and not tragic, like an accident, suicide, unclear diseases, or childbirth, are qualified to be included in the list of ancestors. Also, those who lived exemplary while on earth before their demise, following the tribal standard and traditional morality, are ancestors.³⁶ There is no point advocating for Christian ancestors in the strict sense of the word. The death in Christ cannot intercede for us because Christ is our intercessor and the one through whom we reach God the Father. The Holy Scriptures do not support the veneration of an ancestor. Mokhoathi is correct in saying that the problem with 'ancestor Christology' centres on the fact that it does not appear to do justice to the divinity and humanity of Christ. The nature of Jesus Christ and what he represents are considered two essential components of the Christian faith.³⁷ Another key concern is Jesus as Guest Christology.

JESUS AS GUEST CHRISTOLOGY

Africans are hospitable people with a deep sense of affection towards those they consider guests. This does not mean that a guest is welcome in every home in Africa. Today's changing world has taught many how and when to allow people to stay in their homes as guests. There are good and bad guests. One has the right to allow a guest to come into their home and the right to reject their invitation. The proponent of 'Guest Christology' argues that Jesus was a guest. Vtssers, a Presbyterian Pastor in Canada, affirms that Jesus was always a guest, especially in the home of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum, where He healed Peter's mother-in-law; in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus and at the house of Jairus.³⁸ Jesus lived in the land of Palestine, and he taught and preached among the Jews. The Jews and the religious leaders were uncomfortable with His teaching because it was considered strange and hard to believe. It is a fact that Jesus was received as a guest in some homes. Still, the people never treated him as a guest, nor did they initiate him as a relative, as Udoh claims that Africa should receive him as a guest first and then indigenise him as a kinsman. He is the Lord and the host to everyone, irrespective of culture. Jesus says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them and they with me" (Rev. 3:20). This text does suggest that Jesus is willing to save whoever acknowledges his sin and turns to Him for salvation. He comes into one's life not as a guest but as the host of that life.

Ezigbo notes that Udoh built his Christology on a "dubious foundation: that African indigenous religions and cultures do not have provisions for the possibility of a deity becoming human."³⁹ This assumption is faulty because God can enter the human world in the form of a human being or any form he chooses. Also, the claim that God does not have or need messengers

³⁵ Alexander Jebadu, "Ancestral Veneration and the Possibility of its Incorporation into the Judeo-Christian Faith," 3.

³⁶ Jebadu, "Ancestral Veneration and the Possibility of its Incorporation into the Judeo-Christian Faith," 4.

³⁷ Joel Mokhoathi, "Jesus Christ as an Ancestor: A Critique of Ancestor Christology in Bantu Communities," *Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 99-* (2018):1-17, [http://: www.pharosjot.com](http://www.pharosjot.com) accessed May 27, 2025.

³⁸ John A. Vtssers, "Jesus as Guest-A Biblical/Theological Reflection," *Presbyterian Connection in Canada*, no 3 (Fall, 2017): 2.

³⁹ Ezigbo, "Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity," 69.

or prophets is faulty since one of the popular Christology models in Africa is the ‘Ancestor Christology’.⁴⁰ In an attempt to construct a Christological model, Udoh undermines the divinity of Jesus Christ and the universal importance of his work. He probably did not represent the African indigenous view of the cosmos and what the biblical account represents about Jesus.⁴¹

JESUS AS ANCESTOR BY KWAME BEDIAKO

Kwame Bediako asserts that Jesus Christ is the saviour of the entire universe. He avows that Christ is not a stranger in Africa. He focuses on the Akan people’s understanding of ancestral beliefs to stress his insight into Christology. Bediako used the Akan people’s background to present Jesus as an ancestor. He concludes that Jesus Christ is the natural and authentic ancestor and the source of life for all humanity, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors.⁴² This means that Jesus is not a stranger to our African heritage, especially Ghana’s Akan people. Bediako is credited with using his Akan people’s belief system to pitch his tent. The Akan clan may share close affinities and similarities with other tribal groups in Africa. However, the contexts might differ, given the geographical and historical development of each tribe in Africa.

Abogunrin affirms that Africans see themselves as people from a common ancestor with the same blood and pattern. Hence, the worship of ancestors as divinities is allowed in some areas of Africa. They worship their ancestor because it is believed to be always present with them at each family meeting and festival. They defend the interests of the family or clan and punish those who defile the land.⁴³ However, it is essential to exercise caution when comparing Jesus Christ to any African progenitor. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega and the leader of the Church. He has the highest power and control over the universe and is the head of the Church (Eph. 1:11, 23; Col. 1:15–17; 2:19). Additionally, Christ’s blood was shed to atone for sins; by dying and rising, Jesus created “one new man in the place of the two” (Eph. 2:15).

The study notes that neither the ancestral notion employed to explain the work of Christ nor any African ancestor is competent to be ranked with Christ. Abogunrin’s reading of Jesus as the second Adam who gives supernatural life to all those regenerated in Him may not have an issue. However, it becomes problematic when Jesus is considered an ancestor in the strict sense of the word in a typical African setting.⁴⁴ Words indeed have meaning in context; thus, words should be used correctly in their contexts to avoid confusion. Jesus is our saviour, and his presence is always with us (Matt. 28:19-20). Palmer’s assertion that the majority of African Christians may not embrace the theology of Christ as an ancestor is supported by the researcher. Although he acknowledges that contextualisation is necessary and appropriate, he argues that caution must be exercised to ensure that it is truly pertinent to the needs of the African populace. Because of this, ancestor Christology is too confusing and fails to address the pastoral needs of the typical African.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Ezigbo, “Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity,” 69.

⁴¹ Ezigbo, “Contextualizing the Christ-Event: A Christological Study of the Interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity,” 71.

⁴² Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 26.

⁴³ Abogunrin, “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa,” 10.

⁴⁴ Abogunrin, “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa,” 11.

⁴⁵ Palmer, “Jesus Christ: Our Ancestor,” 73.

CONCLUSION

The researcher has examined some selected African Christologies. The findings reveal that the three chosen scholars, all with Christological views, are primarily Africans from Tanzania, Nigeria, and Ghana. They used the approach 'Christology from below' to argue their respective positions. At the same time, Nyamiti is a Roman Catholic Priest, a scholar, and a theologian, focusing on 'Brother-ancestor' as his Christological premise. Udoh and Bediako are Presbyterian ministers of Nigeria and Ghana, respectively. Udoh and Bediako were concerned with the missionary work in their respective areas and with precisely how they introduced the gospel to their people. Udoh believes that the image of Jesus is more of a stranger to his people in Calabar. At the same time, Bediako instead suggests that Jesus is not a stranger in Africa but the saviour for the entire universe. These scholars are closely related in their understanding of contextualisation and inculturation. As a result, while comparing Jesus to African ancestors, researchers must proceed with caution.

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