

Christ, the Ultimate Source of Abundant Life: A Critical Study of an African Ancestral Model of Christology

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1.1 Introduction

My goal in this paper is to present the Christology of Charles Nyamiti as one model of ancestral Christology that has been proposed in contemporary African theological systems. I shall establish the structure of his theological system; his methodological approach and his use of ancestral veneration for doing Christian theology. I wish to demonstrate in this paper that systematic theologies on the nature and person of Christ have started to emerge in Africa. Twelve factors could be easily identified as influencing the development of different African contextual theologies (African cultural traditions, African past and present history, African socio-political contexts, the advances made in contemporary African social sciences, the influence of Vatican II in encouraging an inculturated Christianity, historico-critical study of the Christian Bible, growth and diversity in the African Independent Churches, Gender Issues, Folk theology, evangelical/chrismatic church, and the crisis of culture in the West). These theologies deserve some serious attention because they are attempts by African Christians to give a reason for the faith that is taking flesh in Africa. We also wish to show the limits of contextual theologies of this kind, and the challenges they face in presenting the image of Christ that is at once theologically sound and in continuity with the historicity of the Christian faith. I shall first explore the biblical foundation for my employment of the term, 'source of abundant life' to Christ as ancestor. Our evaluation will be to establish the adequacy or inadequacy of Nyamiti's employment of ancestral Christological model in showing that Christ is the ultimate source of abundant life as exegetically established in John 10.

2.1 Abundant Life: An African Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics of John 10:10

Chapter 2-12 of the Gospel of John is generally regarded as the book of Signs because in it, John sets forth the meaning of Jesus in terms of his acts. John expounds the meaning of Jesus through seven signs (the miracle of Cana 2: 1-12, the healing of the noble man's son 4: 47-54, the healing of the sick man at the pool of Bethzatha 5: 1-16, the feeding of the five thousand 6: 1-14, the walking on the water 6: 1-14, the healing of the man born blind from birth at Siloam 9: 1-17 and the raising of Lazarus 11: 1-14)². Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John stands alone, but Raymond Brown suggests that it points the Gospel forward and serves as a transition between the words and acts of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7) and those of the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22ff). Our concern here is to understand verse 10 of this chapter within the wider development of the central theme of this chapter which is that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. This verse is widely quoted in Africa which shows its rich Christological significance for ordinary African Christians, hence the need to explore its rich biblical and theological significance. Because it has a hermeneutical key for understanding the meaning of life in Christ; because it speaks of good and bad shepherds, we see in this passage an essential biblical motif for understanding the meaning of ancestorship in Africa. We see in this chapter also a

² W. D. Davies, "The Johannine 'Signs' of Jesus" in *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology*, ed. Michael J. Taylor (NY: Alba House, 1977), 94.

theological and biblical hinge point around which we can anchor the Christological and ecclesiological status of ancestral veneration in Africa. Our survey will only be brief given the limitation of time and space. In addition, because chapter 10 unpacks important aspects of Johannine Christology, one is challenged to seek a meeting point between this passage and the African understanding of life as lived fully by the ancestors and appropriated fully by the living through ancestral communion.

The presentation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd in this chapter has been interpreted by Raymond Brown, using A. Julicher's division as having parabolic and allegoric components.³ Some other Johannine scholars like Beasley-Murray and Barrett observe that this chapter is neither a parable nor an allegory, though it is related to both forms of utterance. The chapter, they argue, is a symbolic discourse in which symbolism and straightforward statement alternate and stand side by side.⁴ We shall however, use Brown's classification as it offers us significant insights for deeper understanding. According to Brown, a parable is a simple illustration or illustrative story conveying a particular message or point about God as revealed in Christ, the human condition, creation and history. An allegory, on the other hand, is an expanded series of metaphors where the various details and persons involved all have a figurative meaning. Chapter 10 from verse 1-5 presents various parables that Jesus is the Good Shepherd; there are words about the gate, the sheepfold, the gatekeeper, the voice of the gate keeper, etc. Verses 7-18 consist of allegorical explanations. These explanations bear important Christological themes, which are of essence in understanding the meaning of life in Christ. I will concentrate on two of the themes: *Jesus as the Messianic Shepherd of God* and *Jesus as the one who gives fullness of Life*.

The fullness of life, which Jesus gives is shown in this chapter to be essentially linked to the knowledge of God or the revelation of God in Christ. Two ancient Christian documents among many show that the term 'Good Shepherd' as a Christological title, has always been identified in this chapter of John. St Ignatius writes: "He is the gate of the Father through which entered Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the apostles and the Church."⁵ The Shepherd of Hermes, writes that: "The door to the Kingdom is the Son of God."⁶ St Augustine was the one who clearly brought out the two dimensions of the Christology of this chapter on the Good Shepherd in his commentary on John's Gospel, In *Tractatus in Evangelium Ioannis*

³ See Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City, NY: Double Day and Company, Inc. 1966), 388-389.

⁴ See J. A. Du Rand, "A Syntactical and Narratological Reading of John 10 in Coherence with Chapter 9" in J. Beutler and R. T. Fortna, ed. *The Shepherd Discourse of John 10 and its Context: Studies by Members of the Johannine Writings Seminar*, 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 94-95. See also David Mark Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 93-94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 394.

⁶ *Ibid.*

(especially Tractatus chapter 45-48).⁷ Augustine writes in his sermon that the Good Shepherd image applies to Christ in two ways, as both the door to the Church through which one gains access to the Father and eternal life; and secondly as the lamb who lays down his life so that the door of life will be opened for the flock. He writes also of the voice of the shepherd speaking for all eternity before the coming of Christ in Flesh. “Before the advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he came in humility in the flesh, righteous men preceded, believing in the same way in Him who is to come, as we believe in Him who has come.”⁸

Augustine writes that there is a change in the sound of the voice of the One who has come, but that the same faith unites the righteous men and women of the past who believed that Christ will come and those who believe that he has come. The footprints of God in the past showed the Patriarchs of Israel the way of God, while prefiguring the coming of Christ, who will not be spoken of, but rather will speak of himself, to make God fully and truly present. The signs of this coming could be found in the course of history among men and women at all times who long for the fullness of life. They longed for the promises of the Good Shepherd who was to come, and therefore, share in some measure in his promises by keeping the precepts of love. If we apply this Augustinian insight to the African ancestors, one can connect the words of Hebrew 1: 1; “In the past God spoke to Africans through many African ancestors who lived good lives, who like the Good Shepherd lived life to the fullest by obeying their conscience and represented for the Africans the highest ideals of the African religious and cultural values. In our times, he speaks to us through Christ who is our Brother-Ancestor and the Original and archetypal ancestor who has brought to us the life of the Trinity, in whose life the fullness of God is manifested and in whose light we can see the salvific significance of the lives of our good ancestors.” Here we find an interesting point for biblical and theological understanding.

In the chapter under consideration, Jesus condemns the false shepherds who are descriptively presented in Ezekiel 34: 1ff “Trouble for the shepherd of Israel who feed themselves....you have failed to make the weak sheep strong, or to care for the sick ones, or bandage the wounded ones...” The point here is that whoever sets up a selfish ideal, and falls short of the completeness of self-sacrifice abridges the resources of life. He or she not only steals to satisfy his or her end, but he or she necessarily diminishes and destroys his or her own life. In the pursuit of a selfish end, the shepherds being condemned by Jesus, waste life and the sustenance of life even though they may not propose that destruction as the end of their action. This is the single truth which applies not only to the shepherds of Israel but to any guardian of the futures of life whether at the micro or macro levels.⁹ If we apply this to the African ancestors, we see that the ancestors are

⁷ *St Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John; Homilies on the First Epistle of John; Soliloquies by St. Augustine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Online edition), xlvi-xlviii.

⁸ Tractatus, XLIV, 9, 1.

⁹ See for a fuller understanding of the spiritual and universal implications of the Good Shepherd discourse Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes Vol II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 1954), 55.

those who lived well, those who founded tribes and clans, those whose lives were normative for the succeeding generations as models of truth, love, sacrifice and righteousness. Through their good lives and examples, African communities were held together before the invasion and violent intrusion of the African living space by Westerners, which polluted the African spiritual ecology and set an existential hemorrhage that has placed African societies on a perpetual life support system in all aspects of life. Jesus would most likely have seen in the lives of the African ancestors the prefigurations of what he will ultimately and perfectly bring to fulfillment: the revelation of the life of God and the radicalization of the meaning of love as the total and unstinting gift of the self.

However, the chapter shows that Jesus did not mean this parable specifically for his immediate listeners designated as the Pharisees and the Jews who were already shown to be blind (John 9:39-41) and who were even thrown into greater blindness at the end of the allegory in chapter 10:19-21 when they began to dispute among themselves not so much as to the meaning of the allegories but more about the mental state of Jesus. Deeper studies done by Schnackenburg, Barrett and Beasley-Murray show that Jesus' discourse should be taken not to refer to the specific narrative audience, but to embrace false messiahs within Judaism and redeemer gods of the pagan world as well as 'Pharisee' who claim to hold the keys to the kingdom (Mt 21: 13; Lk 11: 52).¹⁰

Francis J. Moloney in line with many other scholars like Rand and Fortna proposes that chapter 10 should be read together with the healing of the blind man in chapter 9: 39-10 if one wishes to understand the false shepherds that Jesus is referring to here who were blind to the fullness of divine glory standing before them.¹¹ The 'Jews' who came before Jesus have rejected Jesus and rejected all who move towards his revelation. This has been dramatically portrayed in 9:1-34. The claims of the 'the Jews' to be the leaders of God's people are false. They are thieves and robbers, purveyors of a messianic hope of their own making. As the response of the man born blind to their interpretation of the Mosaic tradition has shown (9: 24-33), the sheep have not listened to them.¹² Jesus is presented then as the "Mediator who will provide what the sheep need for life...Jesus is the door through which access to good pasture is made available and by means of which a sheepfold is protected. Those who enter are saved (v.9 εἰσελθε); those who go out (v.9 ἐξελευσεται) find pasture. Jesus, the door (v.7), offers both salvation and pasture and provides the sheep with abundant life (v.10)."¹³ It is through him that life came into the world (John 1: 3-4, 17). In this sense, the passing through the door has a Christological meaning because to pass through that door (Christ) is to have life. The door-words and the good shepherd word have an identical structure and are used together twice in this chapter, showing their intimate connection.

¹⁰ David Mark Ball, 96.

¹¹ Francis J. Moloney, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John Vol 4* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 300-312.

¹² *Ibid.*, 303.

¹³ *Ibid.*

J. Martin, C. Scott¹⁴ argues that the Christology of the Good Shepherd is intimately connected with the 'door' through which the sheep enter. They are complementary and not contradictory images. The whole section is about the relationship between Jesus, the Good Shepherd and his flock. What Jesus offers, the source and origin of that which Jesus offers (the father) and the nature of the relationship between the Good Shepherd and the Father, is the basis and model of the relationship between Jesus and his flock. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, and his sheep know him (9v.14), but behind the mutuality of the Good Shepherd and his sheep lies the fundamental mutuality between the Father and Jesus; as the Father knows Jesus so also does Jesus know the Father (v.15a). The use of the conjunctive (καλον...as) makes the Good Shepherd's role specific by showing that his role flows from the intimacy between the mutual knowledge of Jesus and the Father, which leads logically to the Good Shepherd laying down his life. "the thief takes the life of the sheep; the good shepherd gives his own life for the sheep."

In this image, John shows that Jesus offers something fundamentally and distinctively new from what has gone before him; his life is decisive for the future destiny of humanity. This is because even though the Davidic shepherd-messianic image is present in Jewish history, Jesus' life eclipses this because he lays down his life. In addition, the life he offers flows from his oneness with the God and the Holy Spirit. Thus, in his sacrifice and in his care for the flock, the love of the Father is fully and truly present as gift. Jesus, therefore, reveals the Father's love in its fullness and perfection. Here, we might remember the magnificent saying of Irenaeus: "*Dominus totam novitatem attulit semetipsum afferens*"-In presenting himself, the Savior brought a total newness. It is no wonder Romano Guardini writes that Jesus is the absolute beginning. "If we accept the Incarnation, we admit that a vertical intervention has taken place in history, something which cannot be illumined by the past precisely because it was an invasion of the transcendent into history."¹⁵

In John's Gospel, we see a theological articulation of the intersection between vertical line of the incarnation and the horizontal line of salvation history. At the vertical line, we see the coming of the Son of God as both a radical newness and an eschatological accomplishment. The hour of Jesus becomes the beginnings of when the shepherd who leads his sheep to green pastures bestows upon them the life of God's kingdom of salvation.¹⁶ The self-gift of the shepherd unto death has no parallel in the Jewish texts that speak of the Messianic shepherd. The historical fulfillment of Israel expressed by the prophets (esp. Ezekiel chapter 34) in which the people shall know God from the least to the greatest and in which they shall find fullness of life and safety is now realized in Jesus, especially in his laying down his life. The horizontal line also extends to all of humanity and creation in the longing for fullness of life. The newness that Jesus brings, which

¹⁴ J. Martin C. Scott, "John" in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 1186-1187.

¹⁵ Ignace De la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus According to John: Text and Spirit* trans. Dom Gregory Murray (Middlegree, Slugh: St Pual Publicatioins, 19890, 189.

¹⁶ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 106.

surpasses all our human imagination and expectation was the desire of the African ancestors, who without knowing Jesus belong to the horizontal line in salvation history. How to locate the place of the African in this line via ancestral relations is what our paper aims to show using Nyamiti's ancestral Christological model.

The fullness of life is achieved for his flock by Jesus because he lays down his life so that his flock will have this same life that has been given, which is described in John 15:15-17 as all that he has received from the Father. The verb used here of Jesus' knowledge of God (v.15) is same as the one used in John 17: 4 about eternal life which means "to know you the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent."¹⁷ Knowledge of God is not knowledge *about* God in terms of propositions, but to embrace personally, existentially and communally (as a member of a flock) in faith, the revelation of the love and truth of God in Christ. To enter into the life of Christ is to enter onto the truth and love of God. It means to enter into the superabundance of the life of the Trinity. Knowing Jesus means entering into this super-abundant life in such a way that one's cup overflows with blessing (Cf. Psalm 23).

The saving revelation of this mystery is found on the Cross wherein the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the salvation of all. The Cross stands at the centre of the history of creation as the form of the revelation of the final Word of love to humanity and all creation. In this singular saving act, we see the shattering of national boundaries, the gathering of the scattered sheep of God, the determination of the future destiny of humanity and the entire creation, and the irruption of an eschatological hope for all. The ultimacy of the life that Jesus offers is built on the simple truth of faith that the life of grace in Christ cannot be surpassed. Indeed, one can truly say that Jesus Christ is our home. In him is our hearts at rest and in him are we truly at home.

The Africans are included in this fullness of life which Jesus brings; they are also entering through the door, and belong to the sheepfold of Christ because they like all of humanity wish to have green pastures and find their true home. Unfortunately, the story of Africa within the last four decades has been a story of deaths and decay, the story of devastation by the leaders at all levels; it has been a story of fractured history and broken lives and societies. The flock of the Lord in Africa seeks for green pastures. The prophecy of Ezekiel in chapter 34 is far from being realized in Africa, instead of rain being sent like the prophet promised there are droughts in the African Sahel and in parts of the Horn of Africa; the prophet spoke of the devastation brought upon the land as they fall prey to foreigners, Africa has fallen prey to many Western powers, to the forces of globalization, and presently is being lured into the same trap by some Asian powers. Fear and anxiety fill the land as diseases, hunger, starvation and wars hunt the people by day and numb them by night. In the midst of all these, the Africans are embracing Christianity in large numbers as they search for the ultimate source of abundant life, who alone can guarantee them a future on earth. The Africans see in the lives of their ancestors the foundation of the life, peace and prosperity for today. But in

¹⁷ On the textual and grammatical analysis of the verb *ginoskw* see Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 336 and 317.

the present confusion of a double religious system, of unworkable democratic structures, the Africans are like hybrids neither holding on to the past with all the stability it offered nor having sufficient confidence in the present with all the complexities it presents.

Thus, in spite of the presence of Christianity in Africa, and the increasing number of African Christians in many churches in Africa, there is still a worrying concern about the depth and identity of the Christian faith in Africa. Who is Christ for the Africans? What is the identity of the churches in Africa? One can raise the question whether Africans have found a home with Christ in their Christian faith and in their very challenging social contexts? In the articulation of appropriate theologies in Africa, there lies a challenge of using traditional symbols and categories as interpretive keys to enter into the revelation of God in Christ. Just as there are many Christological symbols for Christ in NT (Son of God, Son of David etc) so it is possible for appropriate symbols of Christ to be employed in Africa and other parts of the world. This is particularly urgent, especially in those places where like in Africa a hermeneutical privilege has been given to Euro-centered theological systems and Christological symbols, making the new voices from the other side of history to look not only strange but even heretical. I argue that we need to demythologize a tendency in traditional Christianity to defend an essentialized Christianity that places Western theology as the epistemic model and pattern of divine revelation. According to the African theologian Benezet Bujo:

The Black African must rediscover his roots so that the ancestral tradition may enrich post-colonial people and make them adopt a critical attitude towards modern society. Then Africa will be able to breathe with a new life which neither idealizes the past, simply because one is black, nor treats the past as an idol. What is needed is a new synthesis. It is not a question of replacing the God of the Africans but rather of enthroning the God of Jesus Christ, not as the rival of the God of the ancestors, but as identical with God.¹⁸

My proposal is that the best place to begin is appropriate Christology. I am convinced that if the Church speaks more of Christ and not of herself and that if the church speaks convincingly of Christ as he is and presents him as he is, she will have more appeal not only to Africans but to the whole world. The goal of all theological enterprise especially in Africa should be to present an image of Christ whom Africans can easily recognize as one with them, who they can touch, who they can hear and follow in order to transform the continent. This is particularly important in Africa that is still in the formative phases of her theology and church life. Africa is, in my mind, the place where the future of the Christian faith is being presently defined. Fortunately, this definition is starting off with a redefinition of what it means to be a Christian and who Christ is to the Africans. As Andrew Walls, has pointed out the new religious systems of Africa are distinctively Christian in that they not only magnify the God component that has always been present in African religion, but also identify that component with the God of Israel and of the Scriptures, and with the God and Father of

¹⁸ Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 15-16.

the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to say, they bring the elements of African religious consciousness into connexion with Christ.¹⁹

Charles Nyamiti is among those pioneers in Africa who use ancestral categories as Christological symbols. He argues that Christ is the one who offers us abundant life, but Christ must be understood ancestrally if Africans will ever connect with the person of Christ. Nyamiti admits the primacy of life as the link between the ancestors and their living progenies. Indeed, this ideal of African culture is coextensive with the strengthening of the vital force in the community and the world. This ideal is one of the main reasons for ancestral cult in Africa.²⁰ Life and being are a participation in the life and being of the ancestors among the African Traditional Religionists. This life can be handed on, it can exert or be subject to vital influences; it can be increased or diminished according as one has solidarity with the ancestors in terms of following their good examples, upholding the tribal customs and traditions and performing the rites and rituals that go with ancestral veneration, which sustain the vital union with the ancestors both spiritually and materially. According to Vincent Mulago;

Vital union is the vital link which unites vertically and horizontally the living and the departed; it is the life-giving principle which is found in them all. It results from a communion or participation in the same reality, the same vital principle, which unites a number of beings with one another. What is this life? It is a whole life, individual inasmuch as it is received by each being which exists, and communal or collective inasmuch as each being draws from a common source of life.²¹

Each society, family, clan, tribe, or nation can be considered from the point of view of participation. In fact, the measure of participation in life is the norm of the hierarchy of beings and of social status. An African only counts in their own eyes and in the eyes of society to the extent that they participate in life and transmit life. The logic is quite clear on this point: whoever gives life or any means towards life to another person is to that extent superior to him or her. ²² The life of every member of society is understood in the context of shared communal life. No person lives for himself or herself within the community. Apart from the community,

¹⁹ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 129.

²⁰ Charles Nyamiti, "African Ancestral Veneration and its Relevance to the African Churches" in *ACS*, 9, no. 3 (June 1993), 14.

²¹ Vincent Mulago, "Vital Participation" in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi Dickson & Paul Ellingworth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1972), 138.

²² Vincent Mulago, "African Traditional Religion and Christianity" in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. , Jacob K. Olupona (NY: Paragon House, 1991), 121.

one's life disintegrates as one loses the means for existence. Life is a participation in the ancestral life and the preservation and continuation of life depends on the ancestors. The ancestors are commissioned by God to give life to their descendants.

However, God can positively intervene to carry out the creative work of generating new lives through the birth of children. God is the highest source of life. According to Nyamiti, when this African concept of God is transplanted into Christianity, we see that African dynamism and vitalism lead to a Christology that stresses that in God there is vital force par excellence and that through Christ's descendancy, this vital force has become economic to his human progenies so that his Living Power can be participated in by humans. God's vital force which is communicated to us in Christ, the Brother-Ancestor is available to us through the Holy Spirit. His vital force includes omnipotence, and solidarity with the human condition. It is the ground of vital participation by all created human beings and the whole cosmos in him. In sum, it is the sharing of ancestral life with the Trinity.²³ God is presented in Nyamiti's Christology as one who enters into friendship and ancestral communion with us and not as an abstract reality. Nyamiti agrees with Moltmann that the death and resurrection of Christ gives us ultimate life, because it is ultimate self-giving. God is related to the world in such a way that in all his actions he gives of himself, so that humans may be identified with him not only in his suffering but also in his fullness of life. The Resurrection is, therefore, for Nyamiti (basing on Rahner and Pannenberg) the accomplishment of the human transcendental openness to God. It is the fullness of Christ's principal ancestorship and a proleptic realization of our Christian descendancy at Pentecost and the Parousia.²⁴

Nyamiti is not the only African theologian using the ancestral category as a model of Christology. Baur notes that of all Christological symbols being developed in Africa, the ancestral model is the commonest image being employed. John Pobee calls Jesus Our great and greatest Ancestor, Lwaza calls Jesus the Universal Ancestor and Benezet Bujo calls Jesus the Proto-Ancestor. However, Nyamiti is significant in African theologies for various reasons: Nyamiti, is the first African theologian to develop a systematic theology of Christ using ancestral categories current in African Traditional Religion. Future developments of ancestral Christologies in African theology are either a commentary on Nyamiti's or a reaction against his

²³ See Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1977), 54-56.

²⁴ Peter Fulljames, *God and Creation in Cultural Perspectives: Dialogues between the Theologies of Barth, Dickson, Pobee, Nyamiti and Pannenberg* (Frankfur am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1993), 121.

theology of Christ as Brother-Ancestor. Ukachukwu Manus describes Nyamiti as “the most prolific in the thought and development of African Christology”²⁵ because he is able to show forth that African God-talk centered on ancestral Trinitology can enter into conversation with the traditional Christological titles of the Christian faith. He has been referred to by Alyward Shorter as the African Neo-Scholastic, because according to Shorter Nyamiti proceeds from a systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in its traditional sense as interpreted by the Magisterium and then works out how these could be presented using African categories. “Nyamiti’s strength is his scholarly approach; his handicap is the fear of leaving the solid ground of the traditional European theology and venturing towards new horizons.”²⁶

Nyamiti’s main contribution is the development of an inculturated theology of the Trinity that presents the traditional dogmatic definition of the Trinity, using African ancestral categories. Nyamiti did not set out *ab initio* to construct a contextual Christology, rather he wanted to develop a Trinitology and in the process discovered that it is not possible to speak of the Trinity without clarifying the nature and operations of the divine persons. Nyamiti is the first African theologian to show that there is an ancestral communion within the Trinity, this should open a rich harvest of Trinitarian theologies in Africa that could help show that the inner of the Christian God is a communal celebration of life (kinship, sacredness, ritual or ceremony of love of God’s infinite goodness, and homage to his supreme holiness and thanksgiving that flows in perpetuity to humanity and the entire cosmos). Ancestorship, in Nyamiti, according to Vahakangas, presupposes a sacred ritual communication, because without that communication or at least the right to it, no one can be an ancestor. Thus there is a ritual communication between the Parent Ancestor and the Son (the Descendant), which is realized in the spiration of love, the Holy Spirit who is the central oblation, the ritual offering, and Eucharistic and doxological celebration. The theological genius of Nyamiti, according to Vahakangas, is manifested when he observes that in,

Critically considering this theological construction, Nyamiti must be credited with creating an ingenious theory in the Trinity, connecting the central elements of traditional Augustinian-influenced Roman Catholic teaching to an African theory of ancestral relations. The greatest merit of this construction is that it succeeds in describing the intrinsic unity of the two Trinitarian processions. As such it serves at least as a complement to the traditional theological formulations on the Trinity. This speculation on the immanent Trinity is Nyamiti’s greatest contributions in the field of African theology considering the contents of doctrinal discussion.²⁷

²⁵ Ukachukwu Christ Manus, *Christ, the African King* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 60.

²⁶ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), 302-303.

²⁷ Mika Vahakangas, *In Search of Foundations: Charles Nyamiti’s Theological Methodology* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 187.

Nyamiti's main concerns are to make the Christian faith meaningful to African Christians and to make theology serve the spiritual needs of the people according to their mentality and cultural world; this motivates his commitment to African anthropological studies. He also devotes most of his writings to elaborating on the possibility of speaking about the Christian Trium God using African ancestral categories. He vigorously shows that it is possible to develop a systematic theology of God in Africa, using ancestral categories. Nyamiti achieves a synthetic presentation of the doctrine of Christ in Africa by using African ancestral mediation as a foundational category. The speculative school, whose influence is evident in his systematization,²⁸ informs his critical and philosophical approaches to African religions and cultures²⁹, and to the biblical and dogmatic traditional Christian teaching. Stress is put on the noetic aspect of theology, primarily to understand it as *intellectus fidei*. Both the Bible and Church tradition are directly confronted with African wisdom, problems and aspirations. The correct interpretation of Christ as revealed in his person, works, words, life and death, as well as in the Church, according to Nyamiti, could only be found through a correct understanding of the Trinity which he proposes should be found in the sources of revelation: Bible, Tradition and the Magisterium. African notions of God, he argues, should be purified in the light of Biblical revelation, even though he did not specify in greater detail how this could be done.

What is significant in Nyamiti is that unlike some other African theologians, who uncritically idealize African tradition, Nyamiti calls for the penetration of the African cultural experience by the Christian

²⁸ See Charles Nyamiti, "My Approach to African Theology" in *African Christian Studies*, 7, no. 4 (June 1991), 34-53.

²⁹ We must note that there are ongoing debates as to the status of African Traditional Religion in African theologies. There are Africans like Kato, Baeta, Mana who like Nyamiti calls for a more critical approach if not a total abandonment of some of the traditional beliefs and practices of Africans. Some of them, like Nyamiti, totally modify certain African beliefs and categories in order to use them for doing Christian theology. Nyamiti argued in an interview with me that when he does theology, he abandons totally his socio-anthropological method since the concerns of anthropology and theology are not the same. There are others like Bujo, Magessa, Josiah Young, among others whose unabashed criticisms of the influence of Western slavery, colonialism and the missionary movement, idealize Africa's past and long for a recovery of authentic African past in order to achieve an authentic African identity in the Christian faith as well as in the political and economic life of African nations. For a study of these conflicts in African Theology see Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 56-86; See also Ka Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 82-100; See also for a detailed study of the salvific dimension of African Traditional Religion from a Catholic dogmatic perspective, with a missiological intent Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Towards A Christian Theology of African Religion: Issues of Interpretation and Mission*, Triple Spearhead, 173-175, (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 2005), 77-98.

message in order to discover what is lacking in African theism for instance so as to show the genuine newness that encounter with Christ brings. In theological inculturation, according to Nyamiti, stress should be put not on the Christianization of African cultures rather on the Africanization of the Christian message. The Christian message comes first, and then the Africanization follows. Ancestral tradition becomes a way of understanding the African God in the light of the ancestral life of the Trinity.

Nyamiti's use of the Christological title, Brother-Ancestor, emphasizing the kinship ties in the inner life of the Trinity and the kinship ties between Christ and creation is significant. Even though the development of this theology is somewhat confused, it is a conceptual key which could be reformulated anew. This is particularly relevant in the present situation in African Christianity. Since the African Synod of 1994, the new image accepted by the African Catholic Church is that of projecting the Church as the family of God on mission towards creating God's kingdom in Africa. Many Africans will agree that the need to build a family of God in the church and African society is very urgent given the threats and conflicts that have beleaguered African nations and churches as a result of ethnic conflicts. If Christ is our brother, it follows that there is a relational bond, which ties us to Christ and to one another. In addition, the use of family terms of parents, father, mother, Son in Nyamiti's theology is capable of showing that building relationship in diverse African communities is possible by using the categories of family and kinship ties, which go beyond ethnic and clannish sentiments. Oduyoye agrees that the image of Christ which should be developed in African theology should be the one that builds on the unity of life as the cohesive principle in African communities, which could be achieved by a new theological synthesis of older Christologies and the blood-covenant that bonded African communities and clans in the past.³⁰ The blood link, which is established in ancestral relation is what Nyamiti tries to achieve by symbolizing Christ as Brother-Ancestor, who ancestrally relates to us as one sharing the same life-blood as us, but whose life-blood is infinitely transcendent because it issues not from a human and limited source, but from the infinite source of life, the Parent Ancestor. The Church seen as Christ's ancestral mediation, following the theology of Nyamiti, could become an instrument of unity and peace in African societies. This category of family and kinship, even though not coherently and consistently

³⁰ Ibid., 110.

articulated in Nyamiti, could be more systematized in a more concrete and existential theological language to make them pastorally relevant for the African churches.

Nyamiti's Christology is also an important contribution to African theology in his positive identification of God as Mother. As Rosemary Radford Ruether, has observed, Christology has been the doctrine of the Christian tradition that has been most frequently used against women. This arises when the Incarnation of God's Logos in the male is interpreted as an ontological necessity and not a historical accident.³¹ Nyamiti's identification of God as mother is capable of helping to undermine the anthropological basis on which many traditional African societies base the subordination of women. Even though Nyamiti did not develop a feminist theology based on this insight, his discovery is path-breaking. This enables Nyamiti to identify that it is possible within African culture to identify God as mother and to address him as such. Given the sad situation of women in African societies, where women emancipation is far from being realized, it is possible that building on Nyamiti's positive identification of God as Mother³², which he relates to the source of life, mercy for sinners and divine compassion, could serve as a category to dismantle the theological and anthropological foundation for the inferior status of women in African societies. Thus, it is possible to speak of women in a more positive way that stimulates respect for the dignity of women and breaks down some androcentric and gender biases that threaten the full realization of the feminine genius. God the parent ancestor (as father or mother) is the ultimate source of life that has become economic to creation through the Son, whom he made Brother-Ancestor for the entire creation.

³¹ Even though I do not accept Ruether's reasoning in this regard, I agree with her claim that the uncritical acceptance of this claim and its interpretation in absolute terms, especially in the writings of Aquinas, Augustine, De Lubac, Balthasar, and some African theologians like Bujo, Mulaga, Tshibango, Shorter and others as foundation for Christian anthropology is problematic. I do believe that the Incarnation of God in a male person is not a historical accident but part of the eternal divine plan of God. The patristic fathers who made copious use of typologies have found in many Old Testament figures a kind of type for Christ (Moses, Isaac, Abraham etc) reaching to the point of David and the exilic and post exilic periods. Our concern here, in referring to Ruether is, therefore, not because we agree with her theological presuppositions, but rather we accept her point in this citation which helps us to broaden Nyamiti's perspective—which he did not develop—that an understanding of God as Mother in some forms of African Traditional Religion could help to develop a new Christological symbol in Africa that helps the much needed liberation of African women. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 45. For some critical studies of African women theologies see Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, ed, *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudiziwa Oduyoye* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006); for an interpretation of motherhood in divinity in African theology see F. Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 135-138.

³² See Charles Nyamiti, "The African Sense of God's Motherhood in the Light of Christian Faith" in *African Ecclesial Review*, 23, no. 5 (October, 1981), 269-275.

Accordingly, we argue that Nyamiti is among the pioneers of African theology, who were multi-disciplinary in their approach to theological synthesis by the use of resources from cultural studies and anthropological data to do theology. What is problematic and I think the most central challenge for Nyamiti is how he employs the fruits of African socio-anthropology in his research. Should the conclusions drawn from socio-anthropological research in African ethnographic studies be abandoned or selectively applied in theological articulation? Is the African theologian justified in presenting an African cultural symbol in Western robes, while abandoning the intimate webs of significance and categories through which the symbols purvey meaning to the Africans? Should cultural hermeneutics not be an essential part of the theological enterprise? Nyamiti separates the method of African socio-anthropological engagement with African Traditional Religion, from his method of theological inculturation of African traditional cultural symbols and categories. What emerges is a hybrid African theology that is not faithful to the cultural categories (in this regard the meaning of ancestral tradition), and that is very strange as a pastoral and liturgical tool for spiritual nourishment and social action for the Africans.

Nyamiti's theology could be understood better if one bears in mind that his starting point is African cultural tradition, but his theological method is not informed by African cultural hermeneutics but rather the approaches to theology recommended by the official teaching of the Catholic Church. He should be judged in terms of how faithful his theology is to the manual theology in traditional Catholic teaching rather than how faithful he is to the meaning and particularities of the African cultural elements he encounters in his theology. Nyamiti does not agree with those theologians who propose that cultural hermeneutics should influence and shape theological method, and who begins theology from anthropology or the social context of the people. But Nyamiti is driven by the love he has for his Church, and while bringing innovative thinking in African ancestral theology with regard to the Trinity, the person of Christ and the Church, he is careful not to propose any theology that does not proceed from traditional approaches to Catholic theology. The conflict he has between fidelity to the theological method of the Catholic Church and fidelity to the African cultural traditions and socio-context is one which faces most African theologians today in their search for new ways of

expressing the self-same faith in ways that meets African mentality and needs. Nyamiti, like many other African theologians has not been successful in navigating the convoluted paths of this double fidelities.³³

In proposing the use of ancestral Christology in African theology, Nyamiti makes an important contribution in the evolution of new forms of expressions in African theology, which shows that life in abundance is possible if Christ, the Brother-Ancestor confers his grace of descendancy on creation. How this becomes possible is both a function of pastoral practices and a challenge to African theologians, who articulate the interaction of the Christian message with African culture and religion.

1.3 Nyamiti's Christology: Christ our Brother-Ancestor

Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is built on ancestral veneration as practiced in some traditional communities in Africa. African ancestral cult, according to Nyamiti, exists as part of a larger religious system and is a central item in African traditional religious systems. It is, therefore, Nyamiti argues, in keeping with African traditional religiosity to transform and Christianize the ancestral cult in Africa, in order to make it one of the central elements in African Christianity. Indeed, for Nyamiti, ancestral grammar if clearly articulated in Africa could become the overarching category for doing theology in Africa. Since God the ultimate and supreme reality is ancestral reality, then ancestral relationship is ultimately as essential dimension of being itself; namely; each reality is being in the measure it participates in the ultimate ancestral reality that is God.³⁴ His ancestral Christology is only one plank in his organic synthesis of Christian theology, which includes developed themes on the Trinity, ecclesiology and Christian morality. Nyamiti's Christology is built on his Trinitology.³⁵

There is an intimate ancestral communion in the Trinity which is characterized by kin relationship, superhuman sacred status , mediation, exemplarity, and title to sacred communication. The Father and the Son communicate the Holy Spirit to each other as ancestral gift and oblation in token of their mutual love, homage and gratitude. There is an inner Trinitarian celebration of ancestral communion which reflects the

³³ On how Christian theology should read culture theologically, and in an expository manner after the theodramatic events of the New Testament without and impository approach, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Interpretation" in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 41. See also, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All? Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity" in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, ed. , *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 85-126.

³⁴ See Charles Nyamiti, "African Ancestral Veneration and its Relevance to the African Churches" in *ACS* 9, No 3 (June, 1991), where he writes: "At bottom ...it is possible to explicate the entire Christian message and life from the perspective of the African ancestral conception alone." (17). See also *Studies in African Christian Theology: Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations*, 96.

³⁵ This is also consistent with Nyamiti's traditional Scholastic approach, where the treatment of God and the Trinity is followed by a treatment of Christology and the mysteries in the life of Christ, ecclesiology and Christian morality in that order.

oneness and holiness of the three person in the Trinity, a perspective Nyamiti draws on the African ancestral participation. The Father is analogically speaking the ancestor or ancestress of the Son, and the Son is a true descendant of the Father. God the Father has become our Ancestor through Christ's ancestral relationship to us. All this has taken place in the power of the Divine Spirit. Since the Incarnation is the extension of the Logos' Trinitarian relationship to the man Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnation is, therefore, the ultimate revelation of the Logos' ancestral homage and thanksgiving to the man Jesus.³⁶

Nyamiti does not significantly differ from other African theologians in his definition of 'ancestor' from African Traditional Religious perspectives. However, consistent with his methodology, he gives 'ancestor' a new definition, as a result of a new composite of meaning, which it attains through purification in the light of Christian revelation. In this regard, he applies the term 'ancestor' to God (Parent Ancestor), Christ (Brother-Ancestor) and the saints in Christian tradition and Africans who died without coming to know Christ (Christian ancestors, African Christian Ancestors, ACA). Ancestral relationship is not a mere product of human conventions, but is founded on human spiritual, bodily and societal structures. African ancestral cult is anthropocentric. It is centered on the human person, and is intended to procure human welfare in this world and in the world beyond death. In certain African cultures, where the Creator is conceived ancestrally, he is presented in anthropomorphic categories like mother.³⁷ However, ancestral cult is found in all human societies according to Nyamiti, basing his conclusions on his studies of African anthropology and the studies of Mircea Eliade of different forms of ancestral veneration in practically all human societies, in different times and places.³⁸

According to Nyamiti, 'ancestor' can be formulated to apply both to the human person and to God in the sense that: "An ancestor is a personal parent of another person, of whom he is the archetype of both nature

³⁶ Charles Nyamiti, "The Incarnation viewed from the African Understanding of Person", *ACS* 8, No 1 (March 1992), 9.

³⁷ This is one of the significant insights in Nyamiti's Christology. He broaches the idea of the motherhood of God as having provenance in African theism. He did not develop this in greater detail but his line of thought bears repeating and reformulation in the light of contemporary feminist theologies and fruitful biblical theology of the divine attributes of mercy, inclusiveness and love as fecund processions of God. This can be justified using the developed theology of divine accommodation by the Patristic Fathers. On the motherhood of God, Nyamiti writes; "Since God the Father is the Person who generates, it seems that it is therefore the First Person of the Trinity who should be called Mother. St Thomas refused to ascribe maternal functions to God because there is no passivity in God, and Thomas saw maternity as passive. This reasoning does not hold for us, because we see the mother as an active principle of offspring, not merely passive. Again, motherhood can be ascribed to the three persons together, to the divine essence, as the source of life, as infinite goodness and love. It seems to me that this is the sense which most closely resembles the African conception of divine motherhood and fatherhood." (*African Tradition and the Christian God*, 15). See also Charles Nyamiti, "The African Sense of God's Motherhood in the Light of Christian Faith" in *African Ecclesiastical Review* (hereafter *AFER*), Vol 23, No 5, 1981. See also Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience" in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Robert J. Schreiter (ed) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 70-81.

³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (NY, 1961) 8-10, Mircea Eliade (ed), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 1, pp 425-432.

and behavior, and with whom he is entitled to have regular sacred relationship through communication of some sort.”³⁹ Five elements apply to this understanding of the use of the term, namely:⁴⁰ (1) *kinship* (consanguineous or non-consanguineous) between the ancestor or ancestress and his or her earthly kin; (2) *superhuman or sacred status* of the ancestor acquired usually (but not invariably) through death. Such status includes superhuman vital force and other spiritual qualities obtained through special nearness to the Supreme Being; (3) *mediation*, the ancestor is considered as mediator between God and the ancestor’s earthly kin. However, this quality is not indispensable. Thus no mediation is ascribed to the Supreme Being who is regarded as an ancestor in some African communities; (4) *exemplarity of conduct in community*. No one is to be considered an ancestor without having lived a good life; (5) *right to regular sacred encounter with earthly kin* through ritual offerings (oblations) and prayers from the latter. Such encounter is the manifestation of love, gratitude, confidence and respect on the part of the living relatives. The ancestor is supposed to answer benevolently to such prayers and rituals, for example by bestowing health, wealth and other goods to earthly kin, in token of love, thanksgiving, faithfulness and respect towards them.

Nyamiti argues that all the elements of African ancestorship are based on aspects African worldview, a coherent and general conception of the universe, the fundamental meaning of the human person, the universe, its source and destiny. In other words, African ancestral veneration is a key to understanding the totality of the African worldview in relation to such themes as dynamism and vitalism, participation (including solidarity and totality), the sense of the sacred, and anthropocentrism. In addition, the African idea of personality⁴¹ is conceived in vitalistic terms in the sense that true personality consists in fullness of life or vital maturity and communality (observed in pubertal initiation). Such vital plenitude comprises such values as fecundity (both on the procreative and non-procreative levels), practical wisdom (implying knowledge of ancestral traditions represented in human fertility and sagacity), magico-religious sacred powers, responsibilities and rights (foundations for human responsibility accomplished through caring attention for the welfare of the community), fulfilled openness or relationality to the Supreme Being

³⁹ Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God*, 49.

⁴⁰ Charles Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today” in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Robert J. Schreier (ed) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 11.

⁴¹ According to Nyamiti; “African traditional conception of responsibility is basically vitalistic and personalistic. Accordingly, whereas the Westerner conceives free will as the ground of personal responsibility, the African bases it primarily on personal adulthood. In this way, he/she tends to consider the totality of the person-rather than one of his/her faculties alone-as the basis of responsibility. That is why although the African acknowledges psychological responsibility, his emphasis lies more on moral and legal (social) responsibility particularly the latter.” in “Divine Immanent Responsibility: An African Approach to the Mystery of the Trinity” in *ACS*, 14, No. 3 (December 1998), 4-5.

and other spirits, and to the human community (both of the living and the dead) and to the cosmos. Vital plenitude also embodies liberty-not only as emancipation from all kinds of oppression but also in the sense of consciousness or awareness of giving oneself to the others and being accepted by others.⁴² These aspects of the understanding of the human person in African religious thinking are also coextensive with aspects of African worldview.

From such a vitalistic point of view, Nyamiti elaborates a Christology of the Incarnation, in which Christ is presented as the Brother-Ancestor, who offers humanity all that Nyamiti articulates as embodied in African vitalism, which are rooted in African ancestral veneration, and are co-extensive with the fullness of the human personality. Vitalistic terms could be used to answer the overarching question in Nyamiti's theology of Christ: How does his theology show that Christ is the source of life for the Africans? The source of life is a fundamental question not only in African Traditional Religion but also in contemporary African experience. Africans generally have a functional approach to religion and so their concern is always how a religious experience increases or decreases their life both in the secular and in the sacred.⁴³

⁴² Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today" in *The Faces of Jesus in Africa*, 4-5.

⁴³This basic understanding of religion in Africa not only in traditional religion but also in Christianity as the source of abundant life has been taken up by two African theologians. See Laurenti Magesa, *African Tradition: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* where he argues that the foundation and purpose of the ethical perspective of African religion is life, life in its fullness. Every event whether in the human or cosmic world is interpreted in the light of how it gives or denies the abundance of life. The imperative of community and harmony that determines the ethical agenda of life in African religion deeply concerns the ancestors. Ancestral life is a life of communion in remembrance that is also actualization or resurrection. Laurenti Magesa, *African Tradition: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 77-114. This is also the central argument of Nkurunziza's work on a vitalistic theology in Africa. By virtue of his incarnation, resurrection, and ascension, Christ offers us the privilege of participating in the unique ancestorship of God the Father, through the spirit so that we can now according to Clement of Alexandria become descendants and inheritors of an ocean of blessing from the author of life himself who is God. See Deusdedit R. K. Nkurunziza, *Bantu Philosophy of Life in the Light of the Christian Message: A Basis for an African Vitalistic Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 253. Life for the Africans, according to Nkurunziza's interpretation of the Bantu *Muntu* (person) is not only the state of being alive but also an ongoing process which follows the pattern of birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, and procreation, old age, death and entry into the company of the ancestors. Life is also relational and communitarian not only with the human world but also the spirit world and the whole cosmic world. The cosmos is an inexhaustible source of life. Any Christology in Africa that has any future will be one that fully integrates this vitalistic insight, into the Christian understanding of Christ, so that he is seen as one who offers the fullness of life to Africa in all the dimensions of their understanding of life. For a systematic theological and anthropological discussion of the understanding of evil in African Christianity and how Jesus is the one who helps to remove these evils in the historical process in order to give fullness of life and a new existential Christology in Africa see Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to healing and Wholeness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

Two conclusions can now be drawn in elaborating Nyamiti's Christology based on the foregoing sketch: (1) ancestral grammar could be used analogously to talk about God in African theology; (2) ancestral grammar presents in an appropriate African way the traditional teaching on the divine person and nature of Christ and reveals the inner life of the Trinity. It is, therefore, theologically consistent and pastorally helpful within African Christianity, to develop the mission and life of the Church and of Christians by elucidating a theology of God as parent ancestor and Jesus as Brother-Ancestor and the Church as Christ's ancestral mediation.

With regard to the first conclusion, Nyamiti holds that the metaphysical conception of ancestral reality will lead to a new conception of the being of God.⁴⁴ He argues thus: "If the statement 'God is Ancestor' is found (implicitly of course) in the sources of Christian theology (Bible and Tradition)...this statement must be relevant not only for each and every African but for any human being whatever."⁴⁵ Ancestral terms could be used analogously of God in many ways to reflect his relationship with creation. This is clear in considering death, when one passes from human life into the supernatural life of God.⁴⁶ A fundamental determining factor of ancestorship is the passage through death to supernatural life, for it is only after death that one becomes ancestor. In this context, death is the initiation into another mode of being. After death, in African conception, one has a mystical relationship with the living and so one can say that the dead still remain alive. Death changes our status without destroying our being. The ancestors influence the life of the living by conferring on them many blessings for their wellbeing. This is consistent with the anthropocentric worldview of Africans. This kind of relationship between the living and the ancestors is analogous to that which exists through Christ between God and the Christian community.⁴⁷ Through Christ, God is the true progenitor of the community and the Church is the continuation of the Incarnation of God's Son, and God is believed to shower his love on members of the Church through Christ.

However, there are important differences between the relationship of the African ancestors and their descendants and God and humans. Kinship in God, goes beyond consanguinity, for instance to embrace all men and women beyond the thin lineage of family or tribe. Here, Nyamiti emphasizes the superiority of the new Christian ancestorship that he is introducing because of its inclusiveness. All the good qualities of the African ancestor exist in God in a perfect manner. Through Christ, God is the true Ancestor of the Christian

⁴⁴ Charles Nyamiti, "Limitations of Current African Ancestral Christologies" in ACS, 19 No. 2 (June 2003), 20.

⁴⁵ Charles Nyamiti, "The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective" in ACS 12, No. 4, (December 1996), 43.

⁴⁶ Nyamiti argues that just as death is the gateway to ancestorship in African religion, so was it decisive for Christ's ancestorship; "Now, in the African mind the death of an ancestor is not an end in itself; it is the door to a higher state of ancestorship. This agrees with the biblical teaching according to which the Lord's death was the gate to his glorification. In this way, the examination of Jesus' death in the light of the African ancestral understanding helps us to discover his glorification as a higher stage-indeed, the perfect fulfillment-of his ancestorship already acquired at the moment of his carnal conception." Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984), 81.

⁴⁷ Charles Nyamiti, *The African Tradition and the Christian God*, 46-47.

community, and since all men and women are called to become children of God in Christ, the mission of Christ is to be a medium of divine ancestorship for all humanity.

In this regard, Nyamiti's conception of ancestorship is more appropriately to be understood as "sacred kin-relationship which establishes a right or title to regular sacred communication with one's own kin through prayer and ritual offering."⁴⁸ This definition accentuates the sacredness of the kinship. Kinship is central to Nyamiti's interpretation of ancestorship from African Christian perspective. Kinship characterizes the inner life of the Trinity and explains the use of the term 'brother' in relation to Christ's ancestorship. It creates the idea of a human family in which kinship ties between God and humanity, and creation at large and the mutual kinship between us and God becomes central. The kinship with which the Father has sacred communication with his Son, demands the presence of the Holy Spirit, through whom this loving and mutual communication takes place. The divine Father-Ancestor and the divine descendant (the Son) are logically prior to the actual communication of love and are thus prior to the Holy Spirit, through whom the mutual oblation of love takes place within the inner Trinitarian life. There is however, no priority of being since the reality or substance of ancestorship and descendancy is one and identical with the Holy Spirit.

Ancestorship in the Trinity is rooted in the holiness of God, but above all in divine generation of the Son which Nyamiti calls 'descendancy'. God is Father of Jesus Christ whom he begets. This is in keeping with the African conception, wherein ancestry is intimately rooted in procreation (kinship) and necessarily and immediately connected with sacredness. Added to these, is exemplarity in which the Son perfectly kept the will of his Father. This purifies African ancestral fear in which the descendants obey the ancestors and ritually sustain a relationship with them through regular sacrifice, out of fear of punishment should they fail to do so. On the contrary, Jesus kept the Father's will not because of fear, but rather because the Logos is the perfect image of the Father, who perfectly reflects the Holy will and immanent activity or life of the Trinity. Nyamiti, basing on these foregoing five-fold ancestral life in the Trinity (ritual oblation, mediation, exemplarity, superhuman sacred status, sacred communication) draws the decisive line on his Trinitology, from which emerges the second level of his Christology when he writes:

Whereas traditional theology bases the conformity and consubstantiality of the Son's activity and the will to his father on the oneness of nature between the Father and the Son, African theology will have to reverse that order of argumentation and maintain that the Logos is consubstantial with the Father because he conforms perfectly to his will and activity (life). Hence, these considerations enable us to perceive that the traditional approach to the Father's and Son's consubstantiality is ontological and intellectualistic, whereas the African approach is vitalistic and voluntaristic. Obviously the two types of approach are not contradictory, but complementary.⁴⁹

The Holy Spirit, in Nyamiti's ancestral approach, is the reciprocal ancestral gift and Oblation of the Father and the Son and the expression of their mutual ancestral love, homage and gratitude. The Spirit is also

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁹ *Studies in African Christian Theology*, 76.

the medium and immediate principle of the infinity of the totality and intimacy of the ancestor's and descendant's self-giving, and as such is totally in the Father and the Son, just as they are in him. This is what is classically called Trinitarian *Circumincession* or *perichoresis*. What is new in Nyamiti is its ancestral connotation: it is in virtue of ancestral ritual communication that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in one another. In other words, even if they were not in one another by reason of their oneness in the divinity, they would be so on account of their ancestral encounter.⁵⁰ If one draws a logical conclusion from this, one would expect Nyamiti to develop an ancestral pneumatology that shows how the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is related to the inner ancestral life of the Trinity; and that the work of the Holy Spirit both in the life and ministry of Christ and in the birth and sustenance of the church is part of the ancestral life of the Trinity which is both immanent and economic.

Ancestorship is to be understood in God, using African ancestral veneration, as based on inner divine exchange and participation, embodying the components of ritual, sacredness, life-giving, Eucharist and pneumatic categories of oblation and mutual exchange of life and love. When Nyamiti argues that Christ is our Brother-Ancestor, he is saying in effect that from the heart of the Trinity flows ancestorship and descendancy in Christ, which can be interpreted in terms of life-giving, participation in the divine life, thanksgiving, mutual exchange and other aforementioned ancestral qualities. However, the main basis for Christ's Brother-Ancestorship is his descendancy, that is, his being the Son of the parent ancestor (God the Father or Mother). Through sanctifying grace, Christ is the ancestor of humanity; men and women are descendants of Christ and share an ancestral kinship with the Father and the Holy Spirit through him. We are brothers and sisters of Christ not simply because of descendancy as a fact, but through the dynamic vitalism, which comes from him, which grants us the grace of being sons and daughters of God. This underlies the humanity of Christ, as one from our stock. This explains the human nature of Christ.⁵¹

The Father's ancestorship to Christ is parental; hence God is called parent ancestor.⁵² He is the source of all life but the life that Jesus has is divine life because of his descendancy from the Father. Like the African ancestor, he gives life to the living, but more than the African ancestor, God gives life to all creation and he wishes to enter into relationship with all human beings from every race, language or nation. He is the source of help to creation in times of trouble, but he also punishes those who do not model their life after his exemplarity.⁵³ He is parent ancestor not as father alone but also as mother. God could have become our

⁵⁰ *Studies in African Christian Theology*, 79.

⁵¹ Charles Nyamiti, "The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective" in *ACS*, 12, No. 4, (December 1996), 49.

⁵² Nyamiti refers to God's parental ancestorship to Christ and humanity in both masculine and feminine terms hence "The Father being the Parent, would be the Ancestor, and the Son would be His Descendant. We have to add here that God the Father is also (again analogically speaking) the Mother of the Logos in the immanent Trinity. This means that if the first divine Person is ancestrally related to the Son, He is both His Ancestor and Ancestress." "The Trinity from an African Ancestral Perspective" in *ACS* 12, No. 4 (December, 1996), 47.

⁵³ *African Tradition and the Christian God*, 51.

ancestor directly without the mediation of the Incarnate Son, by bestowing his divine life directly to us. But it was God's will to establish his ancestorship to us through Christ by rooting our salvation in one like us. He thereby deepens his ancestorship to us and raises our human ancestors through Christ by uniting them with the history of Christ, which began from the beginning of time. Here Nyamiti is trying to establish the divinity of Christ as rooted in his divine origin as proceeding from the Father, who is eternally divine.

It is through Christ that God's ancestorship acquired the characteristics of human ancestorship. Just as an African Brother-Ancestor is one with whom one shares a common parent ancestor, so it is between Christ and us: Christ's divine sonship and our actual adoptive filiation determine the factuality of his Brother-Ancestorship to us. Just as human ancestors become ancestors through death, in the same way Christ ancestorship grew from the Incarnation until reaching its fullness after his death and resurrection. He now mediates between us and God, and thanks to his resurrection, he has incorporated our human ancestors into the mystical body and identified them with himself. Christ is our Brother-Ancestor because:

Through sanctifying grace, Christ is also ancestor, and we are his descendants. But our descendancy does not as such negate our brotherhood or sisterhood to him; for thanks to our grace of filiation, he is our Brother. Nevertheless sanctifying grace makes us his descendants in that through him and with him and in him, we become sons and descendants of the Father. In other words, we are descendants of Christ because he is the vital source of our grace of sonship.⁵⁴

Christ is our Brother-Ancestor in a biological sense because his relationship with us is connected with his consanguinity with us through His *Adamite* origin. But he is above all the Brother-Ancestor of men and women not only on *Adamite* account, but because of his divine-human structure, which takes into account his humanity (human-racial natural ancestorship) and his divinity (the supernatural and universal Brother-Ancestorship). Nyamiti admits of a low Christology⁵⁵ when he argues that it is on account of Christ's humanity in which his ancestorship is linked with Adam that he is our Brother-Ancestor. As a member of our race, his Brother-Ancestorship to us is rooted in his kinship with us; but being of God his ancestorship has a divine essence which transcends all family, clannish, tribal or racial limitations to embrace every man or woman on earth.⁵⁶ By assuming our *Adamitic* human nature, Christ radically vanquished our racial ailment, namely original sin. Nyamiti argues that the immediate purpose of Christ's assumption of our *Adamitic* origin was to take away the original sin.

⁵⁴ *Studies in African Christian Theology*, 73-74.

⁵⁵ "Our Christology of ancestorship demands also an approach from below, namely from the humanity of Christ...It is fitting to start from the concrete humanity of Jesus and his terrestrial activities and to show how divinity was manifested through his humanity and activities." *Christ as our Ancestor, Christology from an African Perspective*, 80.

⁵⁶ Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, 27.

Nyamiti also admits of a high Christology,⁵⁷ for a mere concentration on the humanity of Christ will only lead to a *Jesusology*; hence he argues that Christ's ancestorship was fully realized through the Paschal Mystery. It is by redeeming humanity through his Incarnation that he *realizes* his ancestorship.⁵⁸ Indeed, it is by actually restoring us to our happy and original condition of friendship with God through his redemptive obedience on Calvary that Christ *factualizes* his ancestorship:

The paschal mystery does not only affect the fullness of Christ's adulthood as our Ancestor but is also the apogee of His ancestral activity. If brother-ancestorship implies common sonship between ancestor and descendant, the fullness of Christ's ancestorship means the plenitude of His divine filiation and his brotherhood to us 'in all his power' (Rom 1: 4). Thanks to his glorified humanity and the fullness of his ancestorship he became-in the very humanity-perfect model or archetype not only of our Christian conduct but of our future glory at the end of time. This is why after his resurrection Christ insisted in a special way on his right to be followed and obeyed by all mankind, for as our ancestor in plenitude he was then fully entitled to our sacred contact with him.⁵⁹

Christ's ancestorship is thus grounded on his supernatural divine status, which he acquired through death and resurrection, which linked his humanity more closely to the divine family. In addition, the supernatural status endows Christ the man, with the supernatural powers and mediation between the Father

⁵⁷ "Our departure from the African understanding of brother-ancestor requires, in the first place, a Christology from above...the categories of sonship, mediation, exemplarity, and the title for sacred contact with one's own descendants are central in this conception of brother-ancestorship. Consequently, a Christology which takes such conception as point of departure will be immediately confronted with the subjects of Christ's divine filiation, his Incarnation and pneumatic redemptive mediation. This implies that such a Christology will be bound to start its reflections from the mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption." *Christ as our Ancestor, Christology from an African Perspective*, 80.

⁵⁸ In page 50 of his *Christ as our Ancestor*, Nyamiti admits of a growth in the hypostatic union; "Dynamically considered his Incarnation and ancestorship grew gradually and will reach their full maturity at the Parousia when the total Christ will reach the plenitude of adulthood...This fact shows the intimate link between Christ's Incarnation, Ancestorship and Redemption. It is in virtue of His soteriological activity that the Incarnation and brother-ancestorship of Jesus come to be and grow." The growth in Christ's ancestorship, or hypostatic union is very problematic because ancestorship in Christ as the proleptic realization of human destiny and history is not to be conceived in terms of growth in the subject of ancestorship (Christ) but could grow in a performative sense of our relationship with him in the objective mediation between Christ our Brother-Ancestor and we his human brothers and sisters. Nyamiti, I argue, fails to see the qualitative difference between growth or increase in the human personality based on possession of vital force, among the Bantus and the mystery of the Incarnation. Christian tradition, to which Nyamiti holds so dearly, does not teach of growth in the hypostatic union. However, there are debates in Christian theology as to whether Jesus Christ was aware of his divinity from the moment of his conception or only after his resurrection when God vindicated the claims of the man Jesus. On the consciousness or growth in the awareness of his identity, Gilles Mongeau draws attention to two fundamental facts that should be taken note of, namely: the question of Jesus' self-understanding, that is, the knowledge he has of his own identity and vocation as the Son of God; and the scriptural evidence for the manner and the extent of Jesus' knowledge of God before the resurrection. He also points out that Jesus' human knowing must be interpreted first by a proper grasp of the proper meaning of human consciousness. See Gilles Mongeau, "The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word" in *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, 12, no. 1 (2005), 30-42.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

and his human brothers and sisters. Christ in his words and deeds and by his resurrection, wherein he acquired his adulthood, is for his brothers and sisters, the model of conduct as well as the source of Christian initiation, tradition and stability.

Christ is the inner source and vital principle of Christian life. This distinguishes him radically from the African human ancestors who are extrinsic exemplars. Christ maintains regular sacred communication with his brothers and sisters through prayers and ritual offering (especially the sacrifice of the Mass) through which Christ communicates the ancestral inner divine life of the Trinity. Christ, like the African ancestors, visits his brothers and sisters on earth in a mystical way, through the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist where he as is taught by the Catholic Church is really and truly present. However, because of Christ's closeness to his Father, his ancestorship to us is superior when compared with that of the African ancestors. This raises his title to regular sacred communication to us beyond the limited clan-based mediation of the African ancestors and their descendants. Neglect of regular contact with Christ could lead to the Christian being denied Christ's sanctifying grace and ultimately demands various ritual acts (like confession, penance) to restore the broken relation. The first person of the Trinity is the common and immediate Father and Mother of Christ and his earthly brothers and sisters.⁶⁰

1.4 A Critical Theological Appraisal in the Light of Christ's Divine Identity

African ancestral Christology as articulated in Charles Nyamiti highlights the positive elements in African traditional religious systems and culture. It helps to explain the presence of the life force in the human world, which regenerates itself through the ancestors to their progenies, in an unbroken chain of horizontal and vertical relationships. These relationships are interpreted as relating to the human and the divine in an intimate and organic way. His ancestral Christology also introduces a positive and anamnestic sense of history, which could be a basis for anamnestic solidarity, as modern African Christians recall and relive the great events of the Brother-Ancestor, Christ, in his life, ministry, death and resurrection. Nyamiti, in proposing an African ancestral Christology, holds that African ancestral tradition and African religious history have a salvific value.

There are many points on which Nyamiti's Christology could be evaluated, but we wish to focus on two: his use of analogy and the place of scripture in his theology. With regard to the use of analogy, our concern is whether his use of ancestral category in an analogical sense, to frame an African Christology, is adequate in showing the unique divine identity of Christ. With regard to the scriptural evidence, we will note his failure to integrate the fruits of modern exegesis in his theology, thereby denying it the phenomenological basis on which it should have stood.

It must be admitted that from purely anthropological perspective, studies in African ancestral veneration, reveal that God is identified as an ancestor in some forms of African Traditional Religion. J. B.

⁶⁰ Ibid. , 19-21.

Danquah makes the claim that in Africa, the doctrine of God is the cult of God as the Great Ancestor, with all the other ancestors in between are the mediators. He observes that some African names of the high-God or the sky-God in South Africa mean, the 'old one' *unkulunkulu*, while some call him *Muzimu* meaning the spirit of a dead person in the special sense of a 'first ancestor.' Referring specifically to the *Akan* tribe in Ghana, Danqua observes that the human person is regarded as the offspring of *Nyame*, the first member of the triadic deity of the *Akan*--*Odomankoma* and *Nyankopon* being the other two. *Nyankopon* is regarded as the Great Ancestor and *Odomankoma* is regarded as the Ultimate Ancestor. These triadic God does not relate to the Trinity specifically, and do not represent a trinity of disparate powers each within a compartment and without connection. They perform distinct but related divine operations for the procurement of human good. All of them are, however, referred to as ancestors in specific ways with the added title of *Nana* (begetter or root or seed of life).⁶¹

The question then is why did Nyamiti use the term, ancestor, analogically when it is a proper mode of being for God in some forms of African religion? Nyamiti, as we have pointed out, claims that his application of ancestorship to God is based on Christian anthropology that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, hence there is a similarity of relations between the inner structure of God and that of the human person, such that any quality found in the human person (ancestry) is only an imperfect mirror of such quality found in God. Nyamiti, however, fails to admit the limitations of his analogical language in his Christology. He should have showed whether he is using the term, 'ancestor' as an analogy of proportion or an analogy of attribution, because specifying the primary and secondary analogates, in this regard, would have forced Nyamiti to be cautionary in over-extending the term 'ancestor' to the point of equating it with 'being.' Studies in the use of analogy in contemporary theology show some challenges which any theology that uses analogy will have to confront especially in symbolization of the divine in human discourse.⁶² As Lindbeck has demonstrated, at a symbolic level, where a doctrine (in this case the Christological formulation of Chalcedon as understood by Nyamiti) are equated with the images (in this case ancestry) in which they are expressed, the distinction between form and content is to be made not in the realm of doctrine but with regard to the adequacy of and correlation of that particular doctrine and the cultural experience to which the terms

⁶¹ Harry Sawyer, *God: Ancestor or Creator?* (London: Longmans Group Ltd, 1970), 14-15.

⁶² See for instance David B. Burrell's argument in a recent article, where he points out that Aquinas' genius lies in the fact that his use of analogy was able to show more than in Cajetan, Avicenna, Maimonides and Aristotle that there is a standard semantic distinction between what is signified (*res significata*) and the mode of signifying (*modus significandi*). It is possible, according to Aquinas, for us to justify theological language using the principle of analogy. He was able to square the syllogistic requirement of univocity with the demand internal to a knowledge of God that human discourse about the One (both transcendent and immanent) can only be analogous. See his "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language" in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notred Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 77-85. David Tracy, has also pointed out that the use of analogy in speaking of the Incarnation, for instance, does not mean that the theologian should ignore the similarities in difference among God-self-world, but rather the theologian should seek relations of proportion in that order (existus-reditus scheme) in the newly articulated, theologically reinterpreted and analogically imagined set of reality. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (NY: Crossroad, 1981), 410-411.

relate.⁶³ The problem with the use of ancestral language in African theology is that African religious discourse are not propositional or regulative, they are rather cultural-linguistic and aesthetically symbolic systems, concerned more with the functional interaction of the supernatural in daily life to bring about human wellbeing. They stem from a memorial culture, which is more intuitive and concrete in religious expressions than formal and analytical. Nyamiti's attempt, therefore, to construct an African inculturated theology of Christ is laden with a lot of difficulties. I agree with Andrew Walls that Western models of theology are too speculative, too small and too limited for African Christians.⁶⁴ It is not possible to translate the Christian message into African culture without a methodological transition in terms of hermeneutics and understanding.

The concerns of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and post-modernism are far removed from the questions that Africans are asking today about how their Christian faith can transform their social contexts and guarantee them abundant life in the present as well as in the future. Thomistic theology is a good model of theology but it needs to be properly understood and put into question with regard to the Western consciousness that gave birth to it, and the Western world that it addressed before one can directly fess African categories into it. It did not for instance address the questions about witchcraft and sorcery, widowhood practices and bridal wealth, poverty and HIV/AIDS, globalization, existential homelessness to mention but a few. Western theologies do not adequately address the concept of evil in its communal and personal dimension nor do they give an adequate account of the family structure and the after life around which African ancestral relation is built as an overarching worldview in most African societies. Thus, the Christology that emerges from Nyamiti is very logical and systematic, but the Christ he images is too far removed from the socio-context and cultural world of Africans. It is hard to see this Christ as the man of Galilee with whom most Christians will like to fall in love.

As some of his critics have pointed out, the use of speculative ancestral terms in his Christology over-extends the meaning of ancestry beyond the human world to which African traditional religious experience of ancestry relate. The ancestors are those who have died and who influence the life of the living. Ancestry cannot, therefore, be applied to one who is alive or living. The questions then that Nyamiti did not answer are: The status of Christ's ancestral life before the Incarnation, during his ministry, and after his death and glorious Resurrection? If he was an ancestor before the Incarnation, why did he come to earth and what is the difference between his ancestorship before all ages and after his Resurrection? How could someone who did not live a full life in African understanding (living to an old age and having progenies) become an ancestor? How could one who died a violent (bad death in the eyes of Africans) death (Crucifixion) become an ancestor? What is Nyamiti's understanding of the divinity of Christ vis-à-vis the sacredness of African ancestors? There

⁶³ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 93.

⁶⁴ Andrew F. Walls, "Globalization and the Study of Christian History" in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, *ibid.*, 75-76.

is thus the problem of the theological interpretation of the identity of African ancestors and how this is applied to Christ without qualification and the problem of the place of Christ as the sole mediator between humanity and God. Indeed, the theological interpretation that Nyamiti gives to ancestry is such a totally new formulation that it does not mean the same thing for the African Christian. Nyamiti justifies this new language as the fruits of his purification of ancestral veneration in African Traditional Religion. But does this justification help African Christians to appropriate the fruits of such a Christological formulation in their liturgical life and social context?

Some of these limitations in Nyamiti's theological formulation could have been vitiated, if he gave greater attention to the biblical evidence on the nature and person of Christ. Nyamiti never gave serious attention to what the biblical evidence says about Christology. Nyamiti could have used the commitment of Luke, for instance, to genealogies to show that the horizontal aspect of salvation history reaches down to the African ancestors. This is because Luke places the story of Jesus and the Church in the context of world history. He connects not only the history of Israel as we find in Lk 1: 5, but also the larger *oikoumene*, the civilized world of Hellenism. He alone of the evangelists provides chronological references for key events (Lk 1: 5; 2:1-2; 3: 1-2, Acts 18: 12 etc.). Luke alone makes references to rulers and powerful figures from Palestine, Asia Minor, Ethiopia and in Europe among others. Luke's narrative is essentially linear moving the readers from one event to another in an ordered fashion. The Greek, *kathexes* – 'in order' which is used in the prologue shows that Luke is concerned with historical connections between events so that a thread of purpose runs through his entire narrative.

I see in this an opening which could be a meeting point between Johannine Christology of the Good Shepherd who provides fullness of life for his sheep, and Lukan Christology of genealogies which shows the prefiguration of the good shepherd in the diverse histories of the world. Luke seeks to present an ordered form of the events that have happened, the deeds and word of Christ, in a linear form going back to the foundation of Israel and reaching out beyond Israel. These deeds refer to the revelation in Christ of the Trinitarian life which gives abundant life to all who receive the knowledge of God which is the personal love of God in the Holy Spirit. Is it not possible that this fullness of life in Christ was what the ancestors sought for in African traditional religion? Is it not possible that the fullness of life which the African is seeking through his ancestors in the Sangoma is that which Christ wishes to give him or her? The task left for those who follow Nyamiti and other theologians of African ancestral Christology is to show how the horizontal and the vertical intersect. This, from the biblical theological perspective, is shown vertically in Johannine Christology and horizontally in Lukan Christology. Ancestral Christology must show how Christ is God because Christ is not a racial hero or a tribal titular divinity, Christ came establish a universal kingdom of God into which everyone is a first born son or daughter. He is not just Lord of all but Lord for all.

Nyamiti's attempt to explain the universality of Christ by admitting that Christ's ancestral status is rooted in his descendant from Adam is very complicated. His major commitment was to construct an African

ancestral Christology through the use of traditional Catholic dogmatic manuals. This approach is not bad in itself, but it requires a complementary biblical foundation. Indeed, the Thomistic account of our human awareness of God, of the goal of theology and the human ontology is being understood in new ways as theologians and philosophers begin to develop a greater sense of critical history. As Richard Bauckham has shown, contemporary crisis in Christology stems from this lack of comprehensive approach leading to the often confusing battle over high and low Christology. According to him, the understanding of Jewish monotheism should serve as a hermeneutical key to understand the way in which the New Testament texts relate to Jesus Christ.

The New Testament writers did not see their Jewish monotheistic heritage as in any way an obstacle to the inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity; they used its resources extensively in order precisely to include Jesus in the divine identity; and they saw in this inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity the fulfillment of eschatological expectation of Jewish monotheism that the one God will be universally acknowledged as such in his universal rule over all things.⁶⁵ N. T. Wright has also argued that first century Judaism understood the claims of Jesus with regard to the interpretation of history, his mission and his messiahship. Jesus believed as did many of his contemporaries that his vocation would be accomplished through Israel's history reaching a great climax in which Israel herself will be saved from her enemies and through which the creator, God, the covenant God, would at last bring his love and justice, his mercy and truth, to bear upon the whole world, bringing renewal and healing to all creation.⁶⁶ It is important that African Christologies should show clearly employing every tool of theology, biblical and cultural hermeneutics how the image of Christ in Africa is continuous with the history of the man of Galilee who walked this earth and made a home with every man or woman, from every language, tribe, and nation.

Nyamiti's only moment of employment of biblical terms was with the interpretation of Jesus as the Second Adam, which he did not convincingly relate to his theology of Christ as Brother-Ancestor. However, Nyamiti fails to address deeply the many complexities that come with this formulation: Is Christ our mediator by reason of his humanity or by reason of his divinity? In what nature of Christ consists his mediatory role? Is his racial Adamite origin not limited to his Jewish Palestinian world? How can Christ have a consanguineous tie with Africans and the rest of the world if his biological ancestry in the human world is taken into full account? Nyamiti, in order to show that 'Brother-Ancestor' is the best way of showing our relationship with God, his solidarity with our human condition and the universal salvation in Christ, fails to do justice to the anthropological basis of ancestral Christology. This failure stems from his theological caution not to exaggerate the human in trying to interpret the hypostatic union, using the African category of ancestry.

⁶⁵ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 27.

⁶⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 35.

Nyamiti's insistence on the 'Adamite' origin of Christ is because he takes seriously the doctrine of original sin. Thus, following the Patristic Fathers he argues that what Christ did not assume he did not save. If through the sin of Adam, the human race lost original grace, it was necessary that someone from the human race (Christ) should vanquish original sin which Nyamiti calls 'our racial ailment'. Christ took to himself, according to Nyamiti, our Adamite origin primarily in order to destroy the sin we incurred through that origin. This was the immediate purpose of Christ's assumption of Adam's descendancy. Closer look at Nyamiti's theological interpretation of Adam in his Brother-Ancestor Christology will reveal his attempt to use the thoughts of Aquinas to justify his theology. Unfortunately, his use of ancestral terms makes it more difficult to understand his borrowing of Scholastic thoughts here.

In the sixth article, in part III of his *Summa Theologica*, Q 4, Art 6, Thomas devotes some time to answer this question: "Whether it was fitting for the son of God to assume human nature of the stock of Adam?" Aquinas based his answer on a quotation from Augustine's *De Trinitate*, where he writes: "God was able to assume human nature elsewhere than from the stock of Adam, who by his sin had fettered the whole human race; yet God judged it better to assume human nature from the vanquished race, and thus to vanquish the enemy of the human race." Aquinas gives three reasons for this which we find also adapted by Nyamiti: (1) it belongs to justice that he who sinned should make amends and from the nature that he corrupted should be assumed that whereby satisfaction was to be made; (2) it pertains to man's greater dignity that the conqueror of the devil should spring from the stock conquered by the devil; (3) God's power is made more manifest by his transforming that which is corrupt in human nature to that which is mighty and glorious. Aquinas argues that assumption of human nature does not diminish the dignity of the Godhead. He however does not associate Christ with Adam biologically as Nyamiti does, rather he writes:

It behooved him who came to take away sins to be separated from sinners as regards sin, to which Adam was subject, whom Christ brought out of sin...For it behooved him who came to cleanse all not to need cleansing himself; just as in every genus of motion the first mover is immovable as regards that motion, and the first to alter is itself unalterable. Hence it was not fitting that he should assume human nature in Adam himself.⁶⁷

Nyamiti has made a significant achievement in moving African theology from common sense to theory. Nyamiti's attempt to integrate African symbols and categories in order to interpret the revelation of God in Christ for the African people was done on the level of theory by the use of Aquinas' analogy of being. His movement from the realm of common sense (ie intuitive and concrete religious language and categories) by a differentiation of consciousness to the level of interiority, could have helped his hypostatization of

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IV, Q. 5, Art 6, Pt III, Reply to Obj. 2, (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics), 1948.

ancestral symbols. Nyamiti stopped at the level of theory. His ontological goal was to discover the inner life of God and the economic life of the Trinity using ancestral categories. His attempt to link Christ's brother ancestorship with the rest of humanity was articulated as a biological link, thus his admission that Christ saves that which he assumes. Interiority would have established the link between Christ and the rest of humanity in a new way through the structure of human consciousness. According to Bernard Lonergan and expanded by Bob Doran, the structure of human consciousness in intentionality and psyche is cross-cultural – the unifying symbols that constitute the psyche are shared by all human beings and, therefore, transcend the divisions of race, gender and creed. They also form the structure by which each human spirit searches for truth, meaning, love, and value. In the realm of interiority, the constants of intentionality and psyche have been termed *humanum*. This *humanum* is what Christ's humanity shares in common with the rest of humanity and, therefore, could provide the structure from which to interpret the nature of Christ through African category as 'brother-ancestor.'

1.5 Conclusion

Our attempt in this essay has been to show that some serious theological reflection is taking place in Africa. These theological reflections stem from the attempt by African theologians to address the challenges that face contemporary African Christians. We identified Charles Nyamiti as a leading Catholic theologian in Africa today hence our choice of his Christology of Christ as Brother-Ancestor for consideration. His theology of Christ as Brother-Ancestor is based on his use of the principle of analogy to appropriate the African ancestral tradition, which is common in African Traditional Religion. Nyamiti shows that it is possible to use kinship terms to understand the person of Christ. He envisions a new image of Christ which unifies, recapitulates and appropriates the positive values of traditional African ancestors. Nyamiti's approach is innovative as it shows the possibility of an inculturated theology that could positively influence theological discourse and pastoral practice in Africa. His Christology is open to further elaboration and revision with regard to some of the limitations of his language and method.

The challenge that faces African theology and African Christianity is how Africa could find its voice in global Christianity. There is the dismissive mentality among Africans themselves about the depth and relevance of theologies that have provenance in the African continent. Our attempt is only to systematize Nyamiti's Christology and open the door for collaborative search on how to present the image of Christ to contemporary African Christians in such a way that it shows the divinity of Christ, it presents an image that is perceptible to Africa's consciousness and is not narrowed down to an image of Christ that is the creation of cultural identities or theological ingenuity. Whatever Christology is being proposed today for Africa, African theologians must be conscious of the fact that Africa needs an answer for the faith which they have embraced. They need to experience the liberating presence and power of Christ, which will empower them to change the debilitating reality of pain and pleasure, joy and sorrows; and the darkness and splendor that have all been the color and shape of the Face of Africa.