CHAPTER TWO

Review of Relevant Literature

2.0 Introduction

Recent efforts in African Christian Theology have concentrated much on conceptualizing an appropriate Christology most fitting for African Christianity. There has been a plethora of literature on this subject. Many African theologians believe that developing an appropriate Christology for the African Christian context is a prime focus for Christianity in Africa, hence a concentration of efforts in this direction since the eighties. This chapter will therefore focus on the historical development of Afro-Christologies, narrowing it to the experiences of some Nigerian churches and summarising the chapter with a focus on the intent of this study.

African theologians often acknowledge that the discipline of Christology in African theology was late in arrival, as against what obtains in other areas such as the quest for Inculturation Theology and African Christian Theology. In spite of its relevance, it was not until the early eighties that African Christian theologian began emphasizing on areas of Afro-Christology. The apparent delay may not be unconnected with what Roberts Hood said of the African context, ‘It is not the Christian God who causes problems for Afro cultures; it is the Christian Christ...’¹ This is because Africans do not have much issue with explicating God the Supreme being as seen in different names explicating his activities in the world.

2.1 The concept and worship of the deity in African Traditional Religions

Virtually all African societies south of the Sahara have their traditional religion which is in most part communal in nature. This is because ‘Religion…’ according to Mbiti, ‘…is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.’² African Traditional Religion is the indigenous religion of Africans, though in different contexts but essentially almost the same beliefs and practices. It is the ancient way of communicating with the transcendent in the

African way. It is a religion that has passed from one generation to another via oral tradition. As Mbiti observes, ‘In traditional religions there are no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds are written in the heart of the individual, and each one is himself a living creed of his own religion. Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this which makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being.’ Religion for the African permeates the whole realm of human existence and is considered as a way of living.

As said earlier, there is no separation between the religious and the secular. Life exists as a continuum. Human beings are born into the community and religion, they grow and die and are continuously remembered by the living as the living dead or ancestors who live in the nether world of the spirits, acting on the behalf of living relations. Lois Fuller notes that the African Traditional Religion ‘…is not something a person decides to follow or is converted to. He meets it in the community he is born into. It is theirs, so it also becomes his…it is part of the group identity and legacy handed down from their ancestors. Its authority comes from the past, so it should not be tampered with.’

One common feature shared among traditional religions of Africa is the belief in a supreme God, unique and transcendent over all creation. He created everything in existence and has absolute power over His creation. He is often revered for His wonderful acts and intervention in human affairs. He has immense power to do and undo and all of His creation are subject to His power. But He cannot be approached directly according to their belief. In African beliefs, there are myriads of lesser gods or divinities who mediate between the supreme God and man. These divinities are lesser in power than the supreme being, but greater in power than man. They include nature spirits and the spirits of ancestors or people who once lived in the community but have transited to the world of the spirits to mediate for the living. They are considered as the ‘living dead’ who are venerated and assigned communal responsibilities.

Many names ascribed to God in African societies refer to his attributes such as his power, all surpassing wisdom, limitless reach in the world, giver and taker of life, his eternal existence,

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3 J. S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 3.
5 The term African beliefs are used in this context to refer to religious expressions in predominantly sub-Saharan Africa.
a rewarer of good and evil deeds, the ultimate judge etc. Among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria for example, the Supreme Being is known as Olodumare, the one who created and fills the earth. According to Bolaji Idowu, ‘The existence of Olodumare eternally has, for all practical purposes, been taken for granted as a fact beyond question. It is upon this basic faith that the whole superstructure of Yoruba belief rests.’ it is considered a taboo questioning the existence of God or his actions. Idowu further stated that, Olodumare in the account of creation in the Yoruba thought is considered to be ‘…the Prime mover of things by whom the origin of our inhabited earth was commissioned.’ He is the Deity that is acknowledged and worshipped in all of Yorubaland. ‘He is the head and Overlord of all in heaven and on earth; indisputably, absolutely unique and beyond comparison in majesty and fullness of attributes.’ He is known severally by other names such as Olorun, ‘the owner or Lord of heaven’; Olofin ‘the chief ruler and judge of the earth.’ Idowu summarizes the Yoruba concept of Olodumare this way ‘...venerable and majestic, aged but not ageing, with a greyness which commands awe and reverence. He speaks; He commands; He acts; He rules; He judges; He does all that a person of the Highest authority, in whose control everything is, will do…His status of supremacy is absolute. Things happen when he approves; things do not come to pass if he disapproves. In worship, the Yoruba hold him ultimately as the First and Last; in man’s daily life, He has the pre-eminence.’

The views expressed above are typical of primal religions of Africa traditional societies. The existence of a supreme deity is indisputable. However, in many of these tribal religions, the Supreme Being cannot be accessed directly only through other beings in the realm of the spirits known as divinities. The divinities mediate between the physical realm of humans and the realm of the spirits where the Supreme Being lives.

The divinities are considered to be assistants or ministers of the Supreme God and are responsible for overseeing certain functions in the world. Amongst the Yoruba people of the south-west Nigeria for example, Olodumare is the Supreme God who is the ‘…origin and ground of all that is.’ Orisa –nla is said to be the arch-divinity who presided over the creation process as directed by Olodumare. Other ministers include Sango the god of power.

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7 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*, 30
8 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*, 33
9 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*, 36
and thunder, *Ogun*, the god of iron and all trades associated with iron, *Esu*, the avenger, *Orunmila*, the god of divination etc. Images are often made to represent these divinities and have consecrated shrines for this purpose, where priests who act on behalf of these divinities preside. Rituals and sacrifices are regularly made to these gods in order to ward off evils and misfortunes. These gods can be ambivalent in disposition having the power to harm and do well. Adherents are careful to court their benevolent nature through regular sacrifices. People often make covenants with these divinities for good health, long life, progress and general well being. Herein lay the thrust of the African traditional religion that Africans worship in order to gain material blessings and well-being.

Mbiti is of the opinion that to ignore the traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices of Africans can lead to a lack of understanding of their behaviour and problems. This assertion seems to be true in all facets of life of the African whether it is in the realm of politics, economics, education, societal living or religion. The reason why some indigenous churches thrive in Nigeria may be attributed to the adaptation of certain elements of African culture and religion into their Christian faith. Such theological emphasis has become prevalent among newer churches.

More importantly is their belief in the greater power of God through Jesus Christ to undo the works of darkness just as it was during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Again in the African religion, people patronize the shrines of deities or divinities that are believed to be stronger than forces responsible for their misfortunes. Many who come to this church (MFM) come to wrestle with and vanquish the powers of the enemies manifesting in their lives through the greater power of Jesus Christ.

The African wherever he is and whatever he does believes he has some sort of faith that resonates with his traditional religious beliefs. Mbiti acknowledges the effects of modernity on these traditional beliefs, but they have by no means been obliterated, because whenever embroiled in crises, the African reaches for his religious roots.

### 2.2 The quest for African Christology

The attributes of God mentioned above in the Yoruba religion find their equivalence in the Judeo-Christian thought. But this does not apply to the Trinity or the person of Jesus.
Christ. In the primal religions of Africa, the concept of God having a Son with whom he shares same nature is considered strange. This is why Robert Hood’s assertion above that it is not the Christian God that causes problems for Afro cultures; it is the Christian Christ. However, acknowledging the person of Jesus Christ is both critical and indispensable for the Christian faith because the Christian faith is about the Christ who died and rose again to give salvation to the world as noted by Abogunrin,

The Christian faith is faith in the crucified, risen, exalted, Lord Jesus Christ who is coming again. It is the bid to explicate the person and activities of Jesus Christ that birthed the discipline of Christology. “Christology is rooted in the experience of Jesus Christ, as He was known by the Apostle; the experience recorded in the Gospels and interpreted in the Epistles…Christology refers to the doctrine of the Messiah. This includes what Jesus is to the eyes of faith. This is not just the faith of His followers, but the faith of Jesus Himself, because Christology includes what Jesus believed and taught about Himself.11

Christology is about what Jesus said of himself and what others said about him. It is our human response to what Jesus himself asked his disciples ‘Who do men say I am?’ The implication is that for every age and time, people in different cultural contexts continue to respond to this significant questions asked by Jesus.

How do African Christians perceive Jesus Christ in their various contexts? For a long time African Christian converts have thought of their saviour, Jesus from the lens or worldview of the Europeans who brought the Christian faith to Africa along with their cultural baggage and Eurocentric perceptions. This was the missionary Christology of North America and Europe that was delivered wholesale to Africans and accepted without figuring how it fits into their cultural context. Dialogue with local cultures and traditional religions were forbidden or termed syncretistic. The Christian faith thus remained superficial for a long time as their thoughts on Jesus was mediated through what were delivered or taught at mission churches’ catechisms. David Bosch cited by Stinton, described Western theology ‘...as the dominant theology, was regarded to have universal validity and was exported in its “unaltered—and unalterable—forms” to younger churches overseas.’12 At the turn of the twentieth century however, Africans began to see beyond the missionary Christology. The emergence of the African Independent Churches (AICs) on the African religious landscape

changed this way of receiving Christ into the African context. These indigenous churches encountered and appropriated Christ from the perceptions of African worldview and in conformity with their local realities. It is in this context that Afro Christology began to be defined.

Abogunrin describes Afro Christology thus; ‘Christology in African context, therefore is born out of the effort to interpret Christology in the context of Africa. It is an attempt to interpret and see Jesus with African eyes and listen with African ears, as well as employ local concepts and idioms in the course of Biblical interpretation.' Helms stated in this regard that ‘Christians in every time and culture are called to give their own response to Jesus’ question “Who do men say I am?” It can be helpful to look at answers others have given in their own situation, but if Jesus should really make a difference in our lives, we cannot just repeat what others have said, we have to give our own response.'

As theologians have accepted the reality that all theologies are contextual in nature, so also is the reality of the experience that people have of Jesus Christ, his identity and salvific acts in the lives of men culturally bound. The interpretations given in local contexts are explicated in concepts, words, idioms and language peculiar to the locality. Africans have experienced Jesus in diverse ways and in different cultures and have creatively drawn portraits of him depicting their multifaceted encounters they have had with this man of Galilee. These are the faces of Jesus in the continent of Africa. Robert Schreiter underscores this when he stated that, ‘To see the face of a person is the beginning of engaging that person in genuinely human relationship.’ To this, Sambou added that ‘in most African countries the prime theological urgency consists in discovering the true face of Jesus Christ, that Christians may have the living experience of that face, in depth and according to their own genius.’ Several African theologians have undertaken the task of finding the faces of Jesus Christ in the African continent, some of which are highlighted below. There is however a

13 S. Abogunrin, ‘Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa’, 1.
15 Vroom stated that ‘The church’s “product” or the results of theology should not be uniform or universal; instead, its understanding of the word of God should be creative and relevant, sincere and honest, responsible and contextual’, see M.A Oduyoye & H. M Vroom, One Gospel—Many Cultures—Case Studies and Reflections, 4.
17 R.J, Schreiter, ed. Faces of Jesus in Africa, ix.
consensus among these theologians of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the benchmark for the emerging African theology, just as John Mbiti stated unequivocally that

The final test for the validity and usefulness of any theological contribution is Jesus Christ. Since his incarnation, Christian Theology ought properly to be Christology, for Christology stands or falls on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ, at a given time, place and human situation.\textsuperscript{18}

The urgency of this task of discovering the true face of Jesus Christ for Africans and its importance to Afro-Christology is accentuated by the growth of Christianity in Africa. Christianity has witnessed a rapid growth across the continent of Africa, especially in nations south of the Sahara. Andrew Walls acknowledged the shift in the centre of Christianity from Europe to Africa when he said,

It is nothing less than a complete change in the centre of gravity of Christianity, so that the heartlands of the Church are no longer in Europe, decreasingly in North America, but in Latin America, in certain parts of Asia, and, most important for our present purposes, in Africa.\textsuperscript{19}

2.3 Content of African Christologies

As earlier said, Christology is the study of the doctrines of Jesus Christ as explicated by what he said about himself, his activities and what his disciples said about him in their various contexts. Some African theologians attempted defining Afro-Christology or what its content should be. For example Charles Nyamiti defines African Christology broadly as ‘discourse on Christ in accordance with the mentality and needs of the people in the black continent,” and more narrowly as the systematic and scientific elaboration of reflections on Christ in keeping with African concerns and thought forms.\textsuperscript{20} However some other theologians consider such definition as limiting and choose rather to use the term ‘Christologies’, because such reflections that Nyamiti talks about is done in several cultural situations. Benezet Bujo, quoted by Stinton, suggested that African Christology cannot be defined in the form of classical philosophy as it obtains in more developed theological contexts like Europe; because African Christology is still in its descriptive form.

On the procedure to be adopted by African Christologists in formulation of subject matter, Nyamiti observes that, hitherto, theologians have followed two approaches.

There are those who attempt to construct an African Christology by starting from the biblical teaching about Christ and strive afterwards to find from the African cultural situation the relevant Christological themes. Secondly, there are those who take the African cultural background as their point of departure for Christological elaboration.21

Robert Hood observes that classical doctrines of Christ have always moved in two directions: from ‘above toward humankind or from humankind toward above.’22 These are termed respectively as ‘high’ Christology (that is, an emphasis upon the “God-ness of Jesus Christ) and ‘low’ Christology, (that is an emphasis upon the humanness of Jesus Christ).23 The former encapsulates philosophical themes of the deity such as sovereign, omnipotent, transcendent, perfection, absolute, sinless, and not subject to the contingencies of time or history; while the later lay stress on his incarnation, living experiences, sufferings as a man, death on the cross and resurrection.

There is always the tendency in high Christology, according to Hood, to neglect the activity of Christ as man. The stress on the Logos emanating from God according to the gospel of John is of particular emphasis here. God descended and took the form of man as Jesus Christ, intervening in sinful human history in order to reconcile man to His righteous requirements. Doctrine of incarnation and ascension are very important for this type of Christology, as well as his crucifixion and redemption of mankind. Arising from this Christology is the cosmic victory of Christ and this is easily adopted by African theologians to express the popular motif of Christus Victor in Afro Christology. For example, John Mbiti sees a relevance of the idea of Christus Victor in the African context, because Christ is the conqueror of those evil forces (spirits, magic, disease, death) feared by African and is guarantor of immortality.24

The second direction in classical Christology according to Hood focuses on the anthropological attributes, ‘that is, Christ’s earthly arrangement in our human condition.’25 This kind of Christology, according to him, often neglects the majesty of Christ as divine. The emphasis is on the humanity of Jesus Christ; ‘he was born of a woman, suffered as all human creatures suffer, and died as all humanity must die. He was subject to all sinfulness of

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22 R. Hood, Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk., 147.
25 R. Hood, Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk,147.
the human condition without exception’ He died on the cross, rose triumphantly on the third day and ushered for us mortals doomed forever, a new lease of life and true humanity. Jesus, in this context acts as our mediator and our intercessor, a motif that appeal to African theologians in reimagining Jesus Christ as a proto-ancestor. This is also relevant for the schema of Liberation and Black theology models; that Jesus Christ is one with the suffering, dehumanised and oppressed people of Africa and other places experiencing similar conditions, and that just as he overcame the retrogressive forces, so will the poor be emancipated.

2.4 Christ as Divine and Human in the African Context

The Eastern Orthodox Church laid greater emphasis on high Christology, while churches of the West, according to Hood, emphasized more on the humanity of Christ, human redemption, justification, sanctification and personal salvation. This was the form of Christology that was transmitted to the churches of European colonies in Africa in the era of missionary enterprise. It was this form of Christology deriving from a form of Christianity that was aptly described as ‘White man’s religion’ in Africa. Theologians in that era discovered an urgent need to liberate African Christianity from this domineering influence of the church in the West. It was a Christological crisis that many sought an end to as typified by the statement of John V. Taylor, who lamented the situation where Africans were not allowed to think through and formulate their own form of Christology. He said that

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the church universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of her total, uninhibited humanity, would they be acceptable?27

The African Independent Churches as earlier stated had seized the initiative to have a form of Christianity instituted on their experiences of Jesus in their own cultural milieu. It is in this context that theologians have identified the true form of inculturation that had been

26R. Hood, Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk, 147.  
langed for, a struggle to appropriate Jesus authentically, ‘...in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their own mentality and experience.’ Hood however averred that the Christology that is most appropriate for African cultures, has to emphasize more on the forces and phenomena in the heavens and nature in accordance to their worldviews. Accordingly,

Christ must be understood as the Lord who affects (1) human sin and righteous living, a major concern in East Africa with its revival tradition; (2) the “natural” -world of divinities, spirits, and evil forces, a major concern in West Africa; and (3) political and social liberation, a major concern in South Africa...

Hood saw in his description above the pattern of Christology that became dominant in certain areas of Africa. For example, Liberation and Black Christology were dominant theme in Southern Africa in the apartheid era, while Spiritual warfare is a recurrent theme in Christology of West of Africa. A similar view informed the organization of Afro Christologies by Diane Stinton in a ‘way that shows that some Africans maintain a pietistic and apolitical picture of Jesus Christ (often associated with the East African Revival), while others insist on enculturation (Christ as participant in African Traditional Religions), or liberation (Christ transforming oppression, rescuing from HIV/AIDS).’

2.5 Sources of Afro-Christology

John Mbiti, cited by Stinton, had identified four rich sources for Christological formulations for the African context.

These are the Bible (regarded as the final authority on all issues bordering on the Christian faith), the theology of the older churches (referring to the tradition of the churches in Europe), the traditional African world (African cosmology and traditional thought forms) and the living experience of the African churches (particularly the AICs).

These are limits within which all Christological reflections should be done in Africa to have authentic Jesus for the African churches. Abogunrin highlighted the significance of doing such a theological reflection in the language of the people, employing the local ideas,

29 R. Hood, Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk, 147.
31 D. Stinton, Jesus of Africa, Voices of Contemporary African Christology, 22.
concepts and idioms. The effect of such endeavour will ground Christianity in the peoples’ context and allow true inculturation to take place. He referred to the chequered history of Christianity in North Africa where Christianity thrived for over four centuries and was remarkable for its rich theological education, but overrun by Islam in the 7th century, because according to Brinkman, ‘...this type of Christianity, which was so influential outside of Africa, was the classic example of failed inculturation within Africa.’

Some African theologians also caution about the danger of doing Christology in the academic context only, thus removing it from the context of the people, the grassroots as it were, where true Christologizing takes place. This concern is in line with that, which is often expressed in the wider field of African theology, as acknowledged in the final communiqué of the 1977 Pan-African Conference of the Third World Theologians held in Accra, Ghana. The communiqué of the conference stated that, ‘The African situation requires a new methodology that is different from the dominant theologies of the West. ...Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.’ Many African theologians like Bujo have decried the ivory tower tendencies of African theology, as he warned ‘that African theology to date had been too academic and therefore largely irrelevant to contemporary African society.’ In other words, the Christological task should not be confined or consigned to the academia, creating an impression of a theology ‘from above’, thus widening the gap between theologians and ordinary Christians. This was the fear expressed by the late Nigerian evangelical theologian Byang Kato, who argued for a theology in line with the ‘…church and the fulfilment of its calling in the world, rather than approbation of the academy.’

The task of doing theology in Africa should be practical and engaging as much as possible, and should through the process itself not alienate the ordinary Christians. Meyer also argues in this direction. She said ‘...Africanization, understood as appropriation of Christianity at the grassroots level, has been an integral compartment of the spread of missionary Christianity from the outset. This Africanization from below came about through

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33 D. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa,* 16.
34 D. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa,* 16.
A genuine Christology must always take into cognizance the local realities of Africans, such as the socio-political, religio-cultural and economic dynamics in the environment. These form the base upon which real and concrete everyday experiences happen, and where people grapple with the touchy issues of their faith; and as such should not be neglected.

2.6 Contemporary Christologies in Africa

From the foregoing analogy on Afro Christologies, African theologians have suggested images of Christ fitting for African contexts. These include among many others, proto ancestor, elder brother, chief, master of initiation, king, liberator, healer etc. Stinton categorized these Christologies into four main headings. These are, Jesus as life giver (especially touching on the clamour for healing in the African context), Jesus as a mediator or intercessor (particularly as ancestor), Jesus as loved one (in relation to family and friendship), Jesus as leader (as a king or chief and liberator). Some of these images or names will be discussed below.

2.6.1 Jesus as Ancestor

The image of Jesus as an ancestor derives from the perceived prominent role of the ancestor in African Traditional Religion and mythology. In many African traditional religions, the concept of mediation is prominent. It is believed that the Supreme God does not have dealings with the human society, but through mediators of lesser gods, spirits and ancestors. The ancestors are in the lower rung of this hierarchy of spirit beings ‘who mediate between the supreme divinity and the members of the tribe.’ They are the closest to the human society because of the close affinity through blood relationship with the living; and are aptly described by John Mbiti as the ‘living dead’ because they are considered to be the spirits of departed aged clan or family members who have been translated into the world of the spirits through death and are now actively involved in intercessory role on behalf of the clan and family members. It is to be noted that not all family members in death qualify or are fitting for this role, but those who lived worthy and exemplary lives on earth and died


37 M. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus*, 212.
honourably. Goergen suggested that in some ethnic groups in Africa, varied rituals including the practice of divination help to determine whether someone has attained the ancestral status.\(^{38}\) Abogunrin also stated that in some cultures in Africa, these ancestors have been deified and worshipped as divinities.

The concern for life, according to Brinkman, extends beyond death. It is hoped that after death one will be accepted among the ancestors and be able to use their powers for the well being of the family and tribal members.\(^{39}\) In many African cultures, ancestors are believed to be generally predisposed to the ultimate well being of the family and clan members, except where they suffer neglect from family members who fail to perform appropriate rituals and veneration for their continuous role as guarantors of family welfare and heritage. In such cases they are believed to visit family members with suffering and adversity. Beside this however, as Brinkman noted, they do not represent hostile powers, neither do they inspire fear. They are there to serve the living, who can call upon them for help by means of sacrifices.\(^{40}\) The role of the ancestor in the traditional African society is indispensable for the survival and continuity of the ancestral heritage. According to Goergen, the ancestor plays a role in channelling the vital force within the community and thus impacts the vitality and life of the community. Through them the life force is handed on, increased or regenerated.\(^{41}\) All the dead are still regarded as members of the family because they are believed to still be alive and guiding the fortunes of the immediate family and the clan at large.

Because of the prominence ascribed to the role and functions of the ancestor in the African traditional societies, and the indispensability of their mediatiorial role with the world of the spirits, particularly the Supreme Being, African theologians who are disposed to moving from the African realities to Christologies (one of the ways of doing African Christologies as suggested by Mbiti) found a correlation between the identity and activities of Christ and those of the African ancestors; and therefore ascribe to Jesus the title or image of an ancestor. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, the first begotten from the dead, the one who holds all things together. He is an invisible companion to members of his family (the

\(^{39}\) M. Brinkman, The Non-Western Jesus, 212.
\(^{40}\) M. Brinkman, The Non-Western Jesus, 213.
mystical body), who guides and helps them, just as the ancestor remains invisible but whose presence is felt.

African theologians have re-imaged Jesus Christ as an ancestor in several ways. Goergen cites for example, John S. Pobee, who writing from the context of Akan society in Ghana, described Jesus as *Nana*, “the Great and Greatest ancestor.” Christ is seen here as the God-man who is superior to all ancestors and all spiritual beings.  

Another theologian, E.J. Penokou who hails from Ewe-Mina tribe of Togo, said Christ is *Jete*-ancestor; ‘an ancestor who is the source of life, and the fulfilment of the cosmicipheric relationship in the world.’ For Benezet Bujo of Congo, Christ is the *proto-ancestor*-the unique ancestor, the source of life and highest model of ancestorship. Bujo aver that the image of Christ as ancestor is more meaningful to Africans than the terms Logos or Kyrios. This, according to him, is because it allows African anthropocentrism to be the source of incarnating Christianity. Such a task demands a Christology from below, for which the ancestor image is fitting. Charles Nyamiti wrote extensively on elements that constitute ancestral relationships which include kinship, superhuman status, mediation, exemplary behaviour in the society, and the right or title to frequent communication with the living through prayers and ritual offerings. He stated also that the mystery of Christ from the African ancestral and the relationship which his ancestral kinship with us bears to the Trinity leads us to see Christ as our Brother –*Ancestor par excellence.*

These theologians however acknowledge the limitations of ascribing to Christ the status of ancestor in the African setting. In no way does he compare with human ancestors, and this is why he is often described in superlative terms such as proto ancestor, jete-ancestor, and ancestor par excellence. It is because Jesus meets the ideal expectations for an ancestor that he is reimaged thus, but he is more superior to these.

### 2.6.2 Jesus as Healer

Many African theologians, like other Africans lament the appalling state of underdevelopment of many African nations since independence which has greatly diminished...
the standard of living and quality of lives of Africans. African nations have been bedevilled by stagnation in both socio-economic and political sectors, high illiteracy level, poor infrastructural base, high level of corruption and incompetence, epidemics like malaria, AIDS, cholera, low life expectancy etc. Exploitation and depletion of non-renewable resources (which are in abundance in Africa) is not commensurate with per capita income and there is high level of poverty and unemployment.

It is against this background that the quest for healing is seen as paramount in African societies. As Goergen stated, ‘there is a great need in Africa...for personal healing-physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. But it goes beyond personal healing to healing at all levels including economic, political, social, tribal and national. The demand for healing at these levels is staggering.’

It is with this knowledge that African theologians prescribe Jesus as healer in the African continent. Diane Stinton had categorized this quest for Jesus as healer under his life giving ability and what he said about his mission on earth, which is most relevant to the African context; ‘I have to give life and that in abundance.’

Jesus Christ is thus conceived by Christians as the great physician, healer and victor over worldly powers par excellence. To many, Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. But the perturbing question is where is the abundance of life, in the sufferings, poverty, oppression, strife, envy, wars and destructions in Africa?

Jesus is widely accepted as a healer or the medicine man in an African imagery or category. For example among the Bantu and Shona tribes of East Africa, Jesus Christ is given such appellation as the true Nganga; Jesus Christ as a Mundu Mugo (Chief Medicine man) in Kenya, Christ as Healer par excellence, Christ the Victor over evil spirits, etc, elsewhere in Africa. In the synoptic Gospel accounts, Jesus Christ is seen as a healer and an exorcist. Some even dare to call Him a magician and a witchdoctor. Aylward Shorter said, “Jesus was a kind of witchdoctor, if only because he adopted the practices of traditional

healers of his own time.” In ascribing to Jesus these African imageries, theologians recognise the similarities that exist between the Semitic cultures in the times of Jesus and the cultures of African societies. There are also similarities in the role and function of the Nganga, Onisegun or healer in the African context and what Jesus did in Palestine in His days.

2.6.3 Christus Victor

As a corollary to the suggestion above of Jesus as a healer, some theologians go further by naming Jesus as Christus Victor (miracle worker and risen Lord). John Mbiti sees the relevance of this image of Christ in the African context because of their primal beliefs in a world filled with both benevolent and malevolent spirits. Jesus is seen as the ‘conqueror of those evil powers (spirits, magic, disease, and death) feared by the African and is guarantor of immortality.’ The dominant theme here is the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. His final words prior to his death, his post resurrection experiences and final words to his disciples on his ascension are explicated from the perspective of vanquishing the enemies and releasing power to all who would believe in him to have mastery over evil forces.

In many African Indigenous Churches, much emphasis is on triumphant Christ. Jesus name is appropriated for exorcism, for healing and for prayers of protection from evil spirits. In no other way we see the appropriation of Jesus Christ in any context as it is here demonstrating his victory and power over the devil.

2.6.4 Jesus as Chief

John S. Pobee, A Ghanaian theologian proposed a Christology explicated in functional terms which he opines is most suitable for the African society. This form of Christology places much emphasis on the humanity of Jesus Christ. Pobee is of the ‘opinion that for the homo Africanus, the ideas of Jesus humanity are far more meaningful than metaphysical ones.’ This is more of Christology from below. Pobee on this account

48 A. Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor-An approach to healing and wholeness, Mary knoll: Orbis books, 1985,.16.
50 U.C. Manus, Christ, the African King, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993, 53.
proposes a royal-priesthood Christology wherein Jesus is conceived as ‘Okyeme – the representative of the Chief who, in public matters, is himself the Chief.’

Abogunrin alludes to the prominent roles of kings and chiefs in the (pre) colonial era as the basis of ascribing the title of Jesus as a chief. The chiefs acted as a go-between the people and their kings, as no citizen approaches the revered throne in any African cultures without intermediaries.

2.6.5 Jesus as Elder Brother

Some theologians observe the close bonding and affinity amongst African families to suggest an image of Jesus as an elder Brother. The particular reference in this regard is to the position of the son in the family. The first born in many African cultures occupies a prestigious position of influence and power as he is often regarded as the heir of the family head. Among the Edo of Nigeria for example, the firstborn inherits all that the father has and may share with others what he feels appropriate, but solely at his own discretion. Bishop Emilio de Carvalho notes that the ‘Africans, first and foremost see Jesus as a human person; the elder brother is the one who provides defence, mediation and protection to the rest of the family.’

H. Sawyer on this basis suggests calling Christ as the elder brother, ‘the firstborn among many brethren who with Him form the Church...’ In this mystical body the Church where Christ is the head and progenitor, there is no distinction on the basis of race, sex, colour or social condition. Just as it is the primary responsibility of the elder brother in African cultures to seek conciliation, peace, unity and create sense of belonging for everyone in the family, the redemptive acts of Jesus is seen from this perspective. Christ is the founder of this Great family of God that is not limited to certain class of people, race, tribe or nationality, gender or colour but for all and in all.

Accordingly, for Christians, an effort must always be made to bring home the mystical relation between Christ and the Christian that Apostle Paul emphasised in the epistles. Such bonding will ‘provide the means of overcoming the deeply ingrained feeling of

51 U.C. Manus, Christ, the African King, 53.
52 U.C. Manus, Christ, the African King, 55.
insecurity which creates acute social and psychological problems among even African Christians, and helps to refrain from “idolatrous escapisms.”

2.6.6 Jesus as Liberator

Theologians often fall into the error of formulating and restricting types of Christologies to experiences of local realities as Bohache suggests that African Christologies are formulated in the light of the effects of colonialism, AIDS, drought and famine, and apartheid. This perception had earlier been stated above in the words of Robert Hood who believes that Christologies seeking cultural relevance are confined to West Africa while Christology that focuses on political and social liberation is a concern for southern African theologies. Some other African theologians however contest this claim because according to them the African continent is bedevilled by inexplicable level of human sufferings and deprivation, poverty and mismanagement of scarce resources, disease, high level of illiteracy, oppression, corruption, social and political injustice, dehumanizing living conditions, low life expectancy, violence and inter-ethnic wars etc. Jean Marc Ela considers the suffering of the crucified Christ as a prototype of the sufferings of Africans and asserts that ‘Africa today is crucified.’ It is a continent in dire need of liberation from economic and socio-political problems for which Jesus is proffered as the ultimate Liberator. To restrict liberation Christology to the southern African context only is to underestimate the level of needs across the African continent.

Secondly, liberation is not to be seen in the realm of African theology from the perspective of spiritual liberation from sin only, but also liberation from dehumanizing socio-economic and political conditions affecting the generality of Africans. God had always revealed himself, according to Adamolekun, as one who liberates His people from oppression as seen in diverse contexts in the Old Testament. He raised prophets to decry the wanton injustice in the nation of Israel at different times. In the New Testament, the expectation of the people was hinged on the coming of the Messiah, (liberator). The New Testament reaffirms the Old Testament’s theme of liberation through Jesus himself. The conflict with

54 T. Bohache, *Christology From The Margins*, 75.
Satan and the powers, the condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the kingdom is for the poor, and the locating of the ministry among the poor—these, and other features of Jesus show that his work was directed to the oppressed for the purpose of their liberation.\footnote{J.H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott, 1979, 20.}

African Christians view Jesus as a liberator from sin and a helper of some sort; and in the Nigerian context more as a liberator from witches, demons and ancestral spirits responsible for setback in life.

Another perspective of Jesus as a Liberator is the quest by women theologians to liberate African women from what they consider as the oppressive demands of religion and culture that is bent on favouring men in Africa. A situation that short changes women in quest of their rights and dignity of selfhood and relegates them to second class citizens in their cultural context leaves much to be desired according to African female theologians. For example two prominent African female theologians Amoah and Oduyoye express their views in this regard,

Christ liberated women by being born of Mary, demanding that the woman bent double with gynaecological disorders should stand up straight. The practice of women become silent “beasts” of societies’ burdens, bent double under racism, poverty, and lack of appreciation of what fullness of womanhood should be, has been annulled and countered by Christ. Christ transcends and transforms culture and has liberated us to do the same.\footnote{Quoted in D.B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa, Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 201.}

\section{Christology in the Contemporary Nigerian Churches}

As rightly noted above, Christology was late in coming into Africa, and this applied to the Nigerian context as well. African Christian Theology was dominated by two foci before now, on the account of differences on what the content of African Christian theology should be. Indigenisation was the prime focus of early African theologians in the colonial and post-colonial era, as they made it their objective “…rediscovering the real values of their religious traditions and seeking to bring them into dialogue with their Christian faith.”\footnote{J Parrat (ed.) *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 105.}
African theologians like the Nigerian Methodist Bolaji Idowu, Fashole Luke, Harry Sawyer, Christian Baeta, John Mbiti, wrote extensively on the need for dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, arguing from an inclusive perspective, where Christianity is seen as a continuity of primal religions of Africa. There were however some discordant views on this theological position. The late evangelical Nigerian theologian Byang Kato, called for a ‘…radical discontinuity between the Gospel and African traditional religion’ in response to approaches that suggested a continuity between the two, in order to maintain the sanctity and purity of the gospel.

For a long time, these two positions expressed above became a subject of debate among African theologians especially in the sixties and seventies. Interestingly, two Nigerian foremost theologians then, Bolaji Idowu and Byang Kato, were at the forefront of these two opposing camps on what the course of African Christian theology should be. The eighties however witnessed a shift from what should be the prime focus of African theology to Christological emphasis. Abogunrin, a Nigerian evangelical theologian expressed the urgent need for African Christology when he stated that ‘the African church is in dire need of biblical theologians who are methodologically equipped to evolve a relevant but biblically based Christology.’ In the same year, 1980, another Nigerian, C. Okolo, sought the interpretation of Christ in the current religious milieu in quest for Africanisation of the Christian religion and its response to the statement of Jesus Christ, ‘But who do men say I am?’ Okolo’s contribution hinges on his suggestion that ‘Christianity becomes rooted in Africa only when Christ and his church dwell among Africans in the world of their values and meanings, not in alien signs and symbols.’

In 1983, another Nigerian Presbyterian theologian, Enyi Udoh, proposed in his doctoral dissertation presented to Princeton Theological Seminary (USA), a Christological approach –a Christ ‘from below’. He proposed a Guest Christology for the African context, where Christ appears in African symbols, at first only as a guest, afterwards as tribal kinsman, and finally as Lord. He reasoned that the level of syncretistic practices or ‘malpractices’ in many Nigerian indigenous churches can largely be attributed to the way and

60 U.C. Manus, Christ, the African King, 53.
61 U.C. Manus, Christ, the African King, 54.
manner that Christ was introduced in Africa, which ‘was largely responsible for the prevailing faith schizophrenia among African Christians. It became obvious to me that Christ must be encountered afresh within our historical and cultural context in order to make sense.’\textsuperscript{62} This proposal portrays Christ and the gospel as somewhat strange in African cultures, a situation that can be overcome through the submission of Christ to the process of inculturation.

Ukachukwu Chris Manus, another Nigerian theologian proposed years after, \textit{Christ, the African King}, mirroring the gospel of Mark’s Christology of restoring hope and faith for all who are underprivileged and subjected to all forms of structural hardship and the resultant indignity to humanity.\textsuperscript{63} He laments the barrenness of the socio-political culture; the economic as well as spiritual bankruptcies in African societies. He differentiates the kingship of Jesus from domineering and oppressive African kings. He suggests Jesus as Africa’s servant-king or servant leader who has come to liberate Africans from the numerous challenges confronting them. Since kings are highly respected personages both in Africa and the Judeo-Christian world who wield enormous authority, Jesus in his mercies and benevolence as an African king will bring hope to the people again.

Yusufu Ameh Obaje, a Nigerian Baptist theologian, suggested a Theocentric Christology as appropriate for the African context. He stated that Theocentric Christology is a doctrine of Christ which is centred on God who only is a revealer of God’s self to humankind, the One who has come as Jesus of Nazareth- fully human and fully God, without any contradiction because he is God.\textsuperscript{64} While raising concerns about the existential needs and crises bedevilling the African continent such as spiritual undernourishment, material poverty, suffering, corruption, diseases, demonic oppression, witches, wizards, wickedness, ignorance, oppression, aggressive tribalism, religious fanaticism, inter-ethnic wars, social injustice, political and social unrest, under development of human and natural resources, etc; he averred that only a theocentric Christology may suffice as a solution to the numerous needs of Africans. ‘Our Christology must present Christ in a way that does justice to Christ’s

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\item \textsuperscript{63} U.C. Manus, \textit{Christ, the African King}, 59.
\end{itemize}
authority and power to overcome and to eliminate these crises and free the convert for a meaningful and responsible daily encounter with the Lord of their life."  

He is critical of African theologians who overemphasize on Christology from below saying that Christology must always be God-centred and God-ward. He refers to Donald Guthrie commented,

Most modern approaches to Christology begin from the human on the grounds that we must begin with what we know. But too many inadequate Christologies have been built on this process, as if the belief in the divine side of the nature of Jesus was the result of the long process of development. Yet to begin with the divine pre-existent Son makes better sense of the New Testament approach, especially of Paul and John. If we begin from ‘above’ we shall take account of revelation, whereas if we begin from ‘below’ we shall be concerned with concepts within our own experience and develop them in accordance with our existent knowledge of humanity, which leaves little room for revelation.  

Obaje underscores the form of Christology popular in Nigeria that gives emphasis to the transcendent Christ, one with God, who has all power to turn impossible situations around for those who call on him. This is why the name of Jesus is applied like a magic wand to every situation in the Nigerian context which they believe is beyond the abilities of mortal man. The name of Jesus is proffered as a solution to every human need, thus the Christology in the contemporary Christianity is solution oriented. The name has become a household name with many churches, small shops and business adding the name and other titles of Jesus as appendage because they believe this will bring luck upon their endeavours. In the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Church the name Jesus is a weapon to dislodge evil forces afflicting the unsuspecting and used to bring healing for the infirmed.

A Nigerian Baptist theologian Deji Ayegboyin did a study on the Christology of the Aladura churches. The theme ‘Lo’Oruko Jesu: Aladura Grass –roots Christology’ brings out the genius of lay Nigerian Christians understanding of the meaning of Christ in their cultural context. Various names and epithets are ascribed to Jesus Christ using local idioms and symbols in their vernacular. He asserts that triumphant Christology is a dominant theme in these churches corroborating an earlier work on Afro-Christology by Robert Hood.

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A Nigerian Catholic theologian Justin Ukpong draws attention once more to the essence of Christology, which he says is faith expression in the person and activities of Jesus Christ. He said the early Christians were not particular about the articulation of their faith in the Christ nor were they concerned with ‘elaborating Christology as a theological topic. They merely expressed what they experienced to be the meaning of Jesus in their lives. Even so, they were not concerned with giving an ordered reflection on such expression in a propositional way. Hence it is that there are no sections of the New Testament where Christology is treated as a discrete topic of its own right.’

It is of utmost importance therefore that African theologians do not make complex that which for all intent and purpose is simple, and make ‘Jesus Christ to be lost in transit’, through their Christological formulations. The good news of salvation in Christ should be made comprehensible for all peoples of all cultures so that they may put their trust in him. This is why, according to Ukpong, the early Christians narrated their experiences of Jesus in stories. The subject of their experiences varied depending on the manner in which they encountered Jesus, and the means by which they expressed or narrated these special encounters also varied in accordance with their different human conditions. This factor accounted for the many Christologies of the primitive Christianity.

In 2002, a group of theologians under the aegis of Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) held a conference whose theme was ‘Christology in African Context’, at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The purpose of this conference was to interpret Christology in the context of Africa, an ‘attempt to interpret and see Jesus with African eyes, as well as employ local concepts and idioms in the course of Biblical interpretation.’ They presented academic papers at this conference on various Christological issues as it relates to the life of the Church and African societal problems.

What can be deduced from the thesis of Nigerian theologians on this subject is that they seek a relevant and contextual Christology for the African context. Since the Africans are influenced by their primal religious views that emphasise the transcendent nature of

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70 See 2 Corinthians 11:3 where Paul affirms the simplicity which is in Christ.
71 The theme of a conference on Christology in Houten, Netherlands, on October 3-5, 2007.
72 S.O Abogunrin et al., ed., Christology in African Context, iii.
religion and the gods, Christology in African context must assume a measure of transcendence, and Christ exalted as the all powerful one who through his death and resurrection conquered the enemy and proclaimed release to captives who had been subject to these evil forces. Such Christology resonates with Africans who are ever conscious of evil forces that abound in their environment. It could be a Theo-centric theology as propounded by Yusufu Obaje or Triumphant Christology as suggested by Robert Hood; both are pragmatic and relevant to the peoples’ beliefs.

2.8 Focus of Present Study

African theologians have suggested images and titles for Jesus Christ fitting for the African cultural context, ranging from the ancestor motif to Christ the African king. Culture is a common denominator here for these theologians, just as Thomas Bohache rightly observed that ‘the defining context of African-American or black Christology is race, while the defining context of African and Asian Christology is culture.’

It is to be seen however that virtually all these theologians have their backgrounds in the mission churches such as the Roman Catholic, the Anglican Communion, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist etc. For example, Charles Nyamiti is Catholic, so also are Benezet Bujo and Jean Marc Ela and are all from different parts of Africa. John Pobee, J.N.K Mugambi (Anglicans) and Mercy Oduyoye (Methodist) are from Protestant churches. As much as these theologians from the mission churches are concerned about appropriate Christological reflections using African cultural motifs, it can be seen clearly that some of their suggestions have their churches’ denominational slant. For example, it can be seen from the suggestions above that the stress is often on low Christology or the humanity of Jesus Christ, whereas the AICs most often lay emphasis on the transcendence of Jesus Christ. It is the image of Jesus as Christus Victor that comes close to the expectations of Christ image in the AICs.

There has not been much work done on the Christology of the AICs or African Pentecostal churches, probably due to little or no attention paid to theological reflections in these churches. They are somewhat too preoccupied with leveraging the existential concerns of their members than devote time to the concerns of a cultural Christology.

73 T. Bohache, Christology from the Margins, 67.
Diane Stinton in her book *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* cited John Mbiti’s recommendation of four ‘pillars’ or sources of African theological reflections as noted above. These are the Bible, theology of older churches, traditional African worldview and finally, the living experience of the African church, particularly the AICs. The AICs have been widely acknowledged as a source of lived Christology in sub-Saharan Africa and where inculturation of the gospel has been experienced. However, in carrying out her research work, Stinton chooses her sample population mainly from the Catholic and Protestant churches leaving out the AICs, which this writer consider as a vital component for such research undertaking. If the AICs are truly regarded as a source of African Christological reflections, efforts should have been made to include them in this all important research work by Stinton.

The present research work is on examining the Christology of the AICs using the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in Nigeria as a standpoint. How is Jesus Christ interpreted and appropriated in this church especially as regards the all important concern of Africans, healing? Have the suggestions above on reimaging Jesus Christ into African cultural motifs promoted growth in this church and other AICs? Can there be a balance in this cultural quest by African theologians and the belief in the AICs and the African Pentecostal churches in continuing in the apostolic tradition of baptism of the Holy Spirit, Gifts of the Spirit, divine healing and exorcism, power evangelism with signs and wonders following etc. It is left to be seen if the voices of African theologians are heard in places such as the Mountain of Fire and Miracles church, and if their Christological postulations have relevance in this context.

It shall also be seen how realistic the Christological propositions of the African theologians are when taken to church contexts. Many African Christians are still used to the images of Jesus taught at the catechisms in the older mission churches, and stick to these even when they cease to be members of these churches. How feasible it is for them to jettison images like Jesus as Lord, the Saviour, Good Shepherd, Jesus the way, the truth and life, the

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Messiah etc, for images like Jesus as Jete ancestor, master of initiation, the chief, elder brother etc because they desire something relevant to their culture?

Are there limits to Christologizing such that this critical aspect of African theology may not be an exercise in futility? In order for Afro Christology to remain relevant, it must be rooted in the experiences of the people as the Guinean theologian Cece Kolie observes, ‘It seems to me that it can only be from the experiential advent of Christ in the vital problems of our communities that a coherent theological discourse will arise and not remain superficial.’ There has always been a difference between the assumptions of some African theologians on the direction of Christology in Africa and what obtains in the communities as seen. There is always the danger of theologians removing themselves from the peoples’ context and imposing on them that which they think is fitting. The churches developed Christologies of their own based on their own experiences over time, using local idioms and imageries. Kolie further stated on the differences that exist at these two levels of doing theology,

I ask myself more and more whether, on a different level, this is not the same thing that goes on with the majority of African theologians. Since their communities cannot name Christ personally without going to the Bible or catechisms, they do just the opposite, and attribute to Christ the traditional titles of initiator, chief, great ancestor, and so on, that they would like to see him given in the communities. Once we impose on our fellow Africans the way of seeing that we have learned from our Western masters, shall we have finally gotten the prayers of the missal translated into these titles for Jesus whose real effectiveness has not really been tested in Africa?

Adopting a foreign Jesus may not be fitting for Africa. Maluleke likens this to an elitist Jesus who was introduced into Africa by the missionaries, one who associated with the colonialists against disenfranchised and dispossessed Africans. He cited the Taiwanese theologian Choang-Seng Song who lamented colonial images of Jesus as a personage of the “ruling class”, an ‘…ideological departures from the Biblical depiction of a humble, committed and prophetic Jesus.’ He further stated of Jesus in this context,

… rather than being presented as the friend of all-and particularly of the poor and humiliated, (Jesus) was pictured as emperor and lawgiver, judge,

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77 C.Kolie, ‘Jesus as Healer’, 142.

philosopher, cosmic lord and ruler of all things. And thus, as can be illustrated from art, the humble stable becomes a royal palace and the holy virgin and the good Joseph are changed into members of the royal court.79

Jesus of Africa must reflect the pains, deprivation, poverty and suffering of the people. Brinkman’s classification of the cross as a symbol of indescribable human suffering is suggestive here. The Indonesian theologian Andreas Yewangoe’s explanation of the relationship of the cross of Jesus with concrete suffering in Asia may be relevant for the African context too. He said that in particular reference to most Asian countries, ‘…the cross is not seen as the symbol of suffering but rather as the symbol of the pride and arrogance of the church.’ 80 J. Pobee warns that Africans should be wary of portraiture of Jesus that is far removed from the cultural and economic context of the people. He noted that Africa is characterized by poverty. ‘They are the poor who are not only materially deprived but also the marginalized, the bruised, and the voiceless. Christology in Africa is about how the Word has become flesh in this context of poverty. He is Christ of the poor. He is the poor Christ of Africa. He is the Christ of Poor Africans. He is the Christ, the hope of embattled Africans.’81 To portray Jesus otherwise in the African context is to see a ‘…disfigured face of Christ because we see Christ through the eyes of others, especially when the church got accommodated to the ideology of power so much that we can no longer see Christ in the face of the poor. The description of Christ is removed from the cultural, social, racial and economic reality of people’.82 Seeing Christ in the eyes of others may represent appropriating Jesus of a different cultural context (possibly economic advantaged global North) and foisting Him on disadvantaged global south communities without due regard to the prevalent economic and social context. Like Pobee puts it, the Emmaus road encounter of the two disciples is different from the road to Damascus experience of Saul. But it was same Jesus that was encountered anyway. According to him, ‘There is a reality which is interpreted variously and no two interpretations will be exactly the same or they will have different emphases.’83 This is a direct reference to how Christology should be done in various contexts.

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79 T. S. Maluleke, ‘Will Jesus Ever Be the Same Again: What Are Africans Doing To Him?’ 18.
80 M. Brinkman The Non-Western Jesus-Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer, 218.
Another issue worthy of mention here is the matter of procedure of doing Christology in the African context as suggested above. Mbiti had adopted a method of proceeding from the Christ event as narrated in the Bible into the African context, seeking to explicate the words and works of Christ by looking for cultural semblance in the African context that is appropriate or fitting. The emphasis here is on Christ identity. Other theologians like Nyamiti would rather proceed from the cultural context to the Christ event. Cultural identity seem to be the emphasis here as these theologians begin from the context of African culture and look for aspects of the Christ events that these fit into. The former was the method applied by Christ himself as he explicated divine truths of the kingdom through parables in such a way that the message of the narrative is not lost. In the latter method however, we risk losing the kernel of the message of the Christ event by dwelling so much on cultural icons and its indispensability in understanding the gospel.

This is often the fear entertained by some evangelicals like the Nigerian theologian Byang Kato who expressed concerns about the inculturation process in Africa on the grounds that it amounts to cultural romanticism as culture is enthroned at the expense of the gospel message. It is this concern that is openly exhibited by the negative attitude towards employing cultural elements in liturgy of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church, the focus of this study.

African theologians should reflect on probable methods of Christologizing without alienating African Christians who are averse to employing cultural elements to their form of Christianity. It is not enough to formulate Christologies in African categories, but it is necessary to consider existing realities and experiences of the African churches so as to make Christology thus formulated to be relevant and contextual.