CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

This concluding chapter summarizes the observations made, and the arguments developed in the foregoing chapters, and it adds concluding perspectives. This study was motivated by an interest in knowing how Jesus Christ is appropriated in some Nigerian indigenous churches, and in particular the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church. Some of the images of Jesus in these churches reflect the culture and worldview of the people. They are often at variance with perceptions of Jesus Christ in the Mission churches and those suggested by some African Christian theologians. The research question was: What could the critical analysis of the main characteristics of the Christology of the MFM Church in Nigeria contribute to the topical Christological reflection in the Mission Churches?

7.0 Summary of previous chapters

The first introductory chapter offered an outline of this research project. It provided a motivation and a specific research question and a research plan how to solve the question. The second chapter reviewed some literature germane to this study. The third chapter focused on the evolution of indigenous Christianity from the pre-colonial era to the present times. The mission churches adhered more to the creeds and practices delivered to them by the missionaries who were accountable to the mission boards at home, and hence they were least responsive to the sensibilities of African converts and agents. Indigenous churches emerged in this era as converts to the new religion responded to the Christian faith in a way fitting with their cultural environment and in consonant with certain realities of their previous African traditional religion. Indigenous Christianity flourished from the early part of the last century to the present day, because faith for the African is both dynamic and pragmatic. The vitality of these churches illustrates their dynamism. The later part of chapter three focused on the beliefs and practices of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church, the subject of this study.

Chapter four described the history, beliefs, practices and structure of the MFM Church. Healing remains a critical issue in Christianity in Nigeria, hence Chapter five of this study focused on healing practices in Nigerian churches, and how Jesus Christ is understood as healer par excellence. While Jesus is seen in the indigenous churches as the ultimate healer
and deliverer, the Pentecostal churches add to this teachings on wealth and prosperity that makes these churches appealing to the impoverished populace.

Chapter six highlights the various Christologies that have evolved over time in the indigenous and mission churches. Some of these Christologies reflect the people’s expectations of him as they grapple with the realities of their environment.

7.1 Observations

The following observations were made in the course of this study pertaining the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church. The church has its roots in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), one of the foremost African Independent churches in Nigeria. As previously stated in the earlier chapters, churches in Nigeria can be classified into three broad categories. These are the historic mission churches established by the missionaries in the colonial era; the African Independent Churches (AICs) that emerged either as splinter groups of existing mission churches or entirely as new entities in African Christianity; and the Pentecostal churches that came into Nigeria in the early decades of the twentieth century in the aftermath of a renewal of Pentecostalism in the United States of America.

The earlier AICs in the South West of Nigeria trace their roots to the founding fathers of the Aladura church movement like Shadare, Odunlami, Oshitelu, Babalola, Orimolade, etc. They take pride in the pioneering efforts and healing features of their founders in the early decades of the twentieth century. However due to the fast pace of urbanization, many of these churches are now located in rural settings and comprise mainly of not too literate members who also relish in the cultural appeals of these churches. Many of these churches are vernacular speaking and have adopted certain elements of African culture into their church tradition. The later AICs comprise of churches that metamorphosed from the Aladura churches but are now Pentecostals in outlook. The founder of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles also traces his roots to the effectual work of Apostle Babalola of the Christ Apostolic Church, another Aladura church. One distinguishing character of the older AICs is the emphasis on prayer and healing as a cardinal doctrine, whereas the newer indigenous churches lay emphasis on spiritual warfare and prosperity as a sign of release from clutches of malignant spirits in the African world. These newer indigenous churches reflect the current trend and practices in Christianity in Nigeria.
The indigenous churches have grown largely over time because of their emphasis on existential concerns. They always seek to make the Christian faith relevant to their immediate context. These churches tap into their cultural roots as they seek to explicate the works of Christ using African language, symbols and idioms, and viewing the Christian faith from their cultural worldview. Beside this, the contrasting epistemology of the world of the missionaries and that of the Africans was not helpful to the growth of the mission churches. While the mission churches’ cognitive apprehension of reality was informed by the prevailing philosophy of the Enlightenment, Africans drew from primordial understanding that take seriously the relationship between world of spirits and the material universe. The consequent lack of understanding of the past religious beliefs of the African converts proved to be a disadvantage to the mission churches and was critical in the emergence of the indigenous churches. The indigenous churches explicated the Christian faith using indigenous religious and cultural motifs and symbols in ways that makes it possible for Africans to comprehend the gospel from their cultural. This, they exploited to their advantage, thus making their churches appealing to the people and witnessing much growth at the same time. Today, the AICs and Pentecostal churches account for the largest congregations in Nigeria. On account of this, the mission churches are reinventing their doctrines and practices in order to be more relevant to the spiritual aspirations of their members. By this action they hope to stem the drift of members from their churches into the AICs and Pentecostal churches.

The observations made in the course of this study about likely factors responsible for the growth of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church (MFM) are stated below.

7.1.1 A Transcendent Perspective

One common feature in the MFM church is the resonance of the African universe in their beliefs and practices, while they at the same time try to be faithful to the Bible. The belief in the influence of the world of the spirits on the natural realm is dominant here. This church, like some other AICs recognize Africans’ belief in the transcendent world of the spirit and work accordingly to liberate human beings from the grips of these evil forces. These churches constantly teach about the power and presence of evil spirits in the world and how the believers can overcome them. Spiritual warfare and exorcism is the popular theology as it appeals to the sentiments of Africans. Songs, hymns and prayers in the liturgy in the MFM church focus on the power of Jesus to overcome Satan’s power and evil acts. According to the popular teachings in the MFM, innumerable blessings in the realm of the
spirit are being withheld. They must be brought down through the power of the Holy Spirit and fervent prayers, and most times accompanied with fasting. The emphasis is on prolonged periods of prayer and fasting, ranging from seven days, to twenty one days, forty days and even as long as seventy days, especially at the beginning of each year, to bring the power and blessings of God. The belief in mortification as a method of spiritual warfare that brings speedy answers from heaven has caught up also with the mission churches. They encourage this practice too. Prayer warfare is preached as the remedy to all human problems, as there are evil spirits bent on causing havoc. They are responsible for disasters, misfortunes, mishaps, ill luck, retrogression, sickness and diseases and every other vice prevalent in the African society. Healing is critical here because all diseases are believed to originate in the spirit realm, and therefore must be addressed spiritually.

The MFM church, like other AICs, grew comparatively to the mission churches because of what seems to be missing in the older mission churches, e.g. the emphasis on prayer and power to be able to take charge or control of the forces in one’s environment. The indigenous churches reasoned that the missionaries asked the African converts to do away with their traditional religion that guaranteed them some sort of protection and health as stated in chapter five. For example, the African traditional religion provided adherents with physical objects they could see and relate to visually like charms, amulets, fetishes etc. to ward off evil spirits. The missionaries condemned these practices as idolatry, and did not provide any substitutes, as Africans are wont to relate to the tangible in their religious beliefs. But the indigenous churches saw beyond the physical and interpreted realities in a supernatural dimension. Prayer, fasting and prophetism resonated in these churches because of the belief that God helps and intervenes through these acts of piety.

The MFM church also emphasizes the Spirit’s power for daily living and overcoming the perennial forces of evil. The believers are encouraged to experience the second baptism by the Holy Spirit, which empowers them to dominate their environment and live above fear. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the power he gives, overshadows the teaching on identity of Jesus Christ, the one who sends the Holy Spirit. This sometimes gives the impression of a weak Christology and a lacking understanding of the unity of the Trinity. Many understand the coming of Pentecostalism into the main stream of Christianity of Nigeria as providing an answer to the old quest and desire for power in order to be able to direct and control forces in the spirit's realm, in line with the African traditional religion.
It was the MFM church that rejuvenated the practice of spiritual warfare in the eighties after the prosperity teachings of Pentecostalism. While the Pentecostal emphasis shifted more to the importance of economic power, this new movement revived emphasis on spiritual warfare and demonology. The primary focus of this church is to liberate men and women from such evil spirits like the Jezebel spirits, marine spirits, water spirits, queen of the coast, mermaid spirits, familiar spirits, witches and wizards, spirits of the dead (ancestors) and the occult. They are all considered responsible for backwardness in African societies. This genus of Christianity is averse to the contextualization of the gospel because of a phobia for African culture, which is believed to be the source of evil affecting Africans. The impression is that the church is for Africans because it takes into cognisance their religious worldview and the peculiar needs in their environment.

From the foregoing, one can see the influence of the transcendent and the quest for spiritual power as a dominant factor in religion in Africa to vitiate negative influences in the environment. It is therefore evident that the churches that have grown over time are those that take into account the dominant worldview of the transcendent in African cosmology and its primal religious milieu. Churches that have created an awareness of existence of malevolent spirits and emphasize how they can be overcome, have in the past decades been the growing churches. An appropriate Christology for the African context therefore, must seek to emphasize the deity of Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of God with all power, thrones and dominion subject to him. This is because African Christians easily identify with a Christology that emphasize the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, who is able to save, heal and deliver from life diminishing forces in the environment. Churches that explicate the person and activities of Jesus Christ from the perspective of power over evil forces and tell the gospel narratives of Jesus’ encounter with and exorcising of demons, easily attract members because such Christology resonate with African cosmology.

### 7.1.2 A socio-economic perspective

Another observation made in the course of this study is the correlation between socio-economic and political dysfunctions in society and the growth of some churches like the MFM in Nigeria. These churches have been responsive to the social, economic and political dynamics within the Nigerian environment, and have adopted teachings that seek to
ameliorate challenges in their context and adapted some teachings for their growth. Churches mostly of the indigenous and Pentecostal strand have benefitted from the prevailing economic situation for rapid growth because in their teachings, they always advance causes why Christians should prosper or what negative forces are hindering individual’s prosperity, as it is the case of the MFM church.

During and in the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s, many churches emerged from the throes of the war to preach the gospel to the poor, especially to those displaced and affected negatively by the war. The gospel was redefined in this context as means of emancipating the poor from squalor and poverty that ravaged the communities after the war. Jesus was portrayed as a liberator who provides relief from suffering.

In the 1970s, after the civil war, the Nigerian economy thrived because of a leap in the price of crude oil in the world market, the main stay of the economy. This resulted in an economic boom for the country and her citizenry, a huge spending power facilitated by higher disposable income, and a great improvement in living standards. It was a decade of huge reconstruction, development of new infrastructures, new institutions and higher employment rates than previous years. In this era of economic prosperity, another church movement emerged, the Deeper Life Bible Church (of the holiness tradition), with a steep emphasis on salvation, sanctification and holiness. Jesus was preached as the true life giver in this context.

The 1980s witnessed a down turn in economic activities as the world oil prices fell. This impacted on Nigerians negatively as the economy plunged; businesses collapsed accompanied by huge job losses and increased levels of poverty. People despaired because of their social and economic conditions. The challenges of the economic crises saw the proliferation of AICs and Pentecostal churches and the emergence of new ones with emphasis on prosperity and healing (sometimes labelled as the health and wealth gospel). Many of these churches thrived because they claimed to provide an antidote and respite to the grinding poverty and problems besetting the populace. This era also witnessed the emergence of a new stratum of religious elites, Pentecostal church leaders with mega churches, towering structures, exotic vehicles and airplanes, which were considered evidence of God’s blessings. Jesus Christ was considered as a giver of riches and the good things of life. He was perceived as a passport to a better life in the face of grinding poverty on the African continent.
The later years of the decade (1980s) witnessed a revival of old traditional religious practices as a cultural response to global trends. The perceived failure of Western culture and its religion to guarantee stability in the economic and political system, in ensuring the well being of the people and alleviating their suffering, made many reach for their cultural past for alternatives. Among the churches, the emphasis on spiritual warfare, demonism, witchcraft and exorcism reawakened. In both strands (the traditional religion and renewed Christian emphasis on exorcism), focus was on an ‘enemy’ responsible for the retrogressions and poverty in the lives of people. Rather than seeing dynamics at play in the economy as causal factors, evil forces operating in one’s lineage or ancestry were held responsible. It was in this period that the MFM Church emerged with the aim of restoring the fortunes of the people through emphasis on piety, fasting and vigorous prayers to combat ‘spiritual terrorists’ that were bent on destroying and impoverishing the populace. As previously stated, the spiritual warfare and deliverance theology were the weapons in the battle. Jesus was portrayed in this context as an exorcist.

It can therefore be seen from the Nigerian historical experiences that emergence of church movements seem to have followed a cyclical pattern of socio-economic and political sway. In other words, the spiritual emphasis at any given time often reflected contextual circumstances such as crises in the economy or politics. Churches have inadvertently been driven by existential factors in their localities to formulate popular theologies and Christologies for their context. This can be said to be another form of liberation theology, using economics and politics as praxis. The oppressors in this context are not political or economic overlords, but grinding poverty, disease, misfortunes, etc. The saviour Jesus Christ in Africa does not only save from sin, but is also a liberator and healer from all that makes living difficult.

We see therefore different faces of Jesus appropriated in different ways and in different socio-economic and historical milieux. The faces of Jesus in these churches do not correspond with those advocated by African Christian theologians such as Christ the elder brother, the ancestor, chief, the medicine man etc. Nigerians are not particular about cultural relevance of these images, but Christ’s power and ability to meet the needs of the moment. They are not concerned with the cultural garb with which Jesus Christ is clothed as much as the power he evokes to neutralise negative spirits in the African environment. Religion for the Africans is utilitarian and must be made to respond to the existential concerns in their environment.
Today, the MFM church seeks to proffer solutions to the endemic economic travails by creating an awareness of an ongoing spiritual warfare. It shows why Christians must respond to current challenges in prayer and fasting and it expresses an awareness of the negative African cultural environment. Jesus Christ is portrayed in this context as a bondage breaker over evil forces that hinder prosperous and social well being. As said earlier, Jesus is an exorcist and the Christology in the MFM Church context is mainly triumphant. In addition, adherents have to battle the negative forces hindering their progress and well being in life through combative prayer, regular fasting and undergoing deliverance.

7.1.3. Possible contribution of Christology of the MFM Church to the Mission Churches

Jesus Christ is portrayed in the MFM as a deliverer and as an exorcist whose powers can neutralise evil forces that impede well being of Africans. The belief in the potency of prayer and the ability of the individual to set him of her self free through the self deliverance method practiced in the church, attracts many to the Christian faith and gives them hope of a certain future.

The mission churches stand to benefit immensely from the principles and strategies for growth employed by the MFM Church, especially in regard to the potency of prayer and the vibrancy of the faith. Religion as stated earlier is both pragmatic and of existential concern to the Africans. The Bible and its content should be made to come alive for the people and Jesus Christ and his resurrection power proclaimed in a liberating manner for Africans. As it is evident that triumphant Christology is fitting for the African church context, the mission churches should not promote a Christology that seem to confine Jesus Christ to the cathedral as alleged by a Nigerian theologian. The mission churches should proclaim the liberating power of the gospel in such a way that members of these churches will not revert to their old traditional religious practices in times of crises.

7.2 Weaknesses of the Christology of the MFM Church

The theology of power and exorcism has made Jesus Christ to be less visible in the teachings and practices of the MFM Church. There is no particular concern in their teachings about the historicity and person of Jesus Christ as the Lord of his church. The name of Jesus Christ tends to be reduced to an appendage to prayers. Emphases of the church are always on
the demonic, mainly from the ancestry and polluted environment, and the process of securing deliverance from them. This does not make for a strong Christology in this context. The weakness in the MFM Church’s Christology can be seen in other areas too as stated in the following

1. **Weak emphasis on Christian discipleship**

The Christology of the MFM Church has an obvious lack of interest in the person of Jesus Christ, and instead emphasizes the power his name evokes and the solution he proffers. The name ‘Jesus’ is synonymous with power to overcome enemies, prosperity for the seeking, and limitless blessings for all who put their trust in him. This approach is essentially utilitarian and ‘this worldly’. Discipleship that breeds strong Christian character is lacking and all attention is on ‘what Jesus can do for me’ or ‘what blessings are available to me in Christ’. The quest for material possessions as the overarching emphasis currently in Nigerian Christianity gives a wrong impression of what Christianity is about. Intimacy with Jesus Christ is not sought as a lover or loved one as in other contexts where this image of Jesus as a lover of the lost, undeserving and hopeless sinner elicits worship, adoration, loyalty and lifelong commitment to his cause. I am of the view that such a lopsided emphasis may present a flawed Christology in the long run.

2. **Near absence of teachings on Jesus Christ.**

There is a near absence on the teachings of Jesus Christ in the MFM church as earlier stated. The popular theology is on exorcism. Teachings are always on topics ranging from the influence of demons, witches, ancestral spirits, negative powers of the African environment, to ‘how to be delivered’ series etc. An evidence of this is seen in the titles of the publications of the founder and General Overseer of the church, Pastor Olukoya. The titles summarize his previous teachings, spread through the web. The orientation of this church is such that all of life and all about Christianity tend to be reduced to spiritual warfare and demonism. Little attention is given to the crucified saviour of mankind, Jesus Christ and other aspects of the Christian faith.

3. **Warped theology of suffering.**
Poverty, pain and suffering are a curse from which the believer must be delivered in the MFM. Members are taught that suffering is inevitable as a mark of one’s faith, but as saints of old, like Job in the Old Testament, suffering reaps immediate rewards of a better life. Therefore members should be armed with the same mindset to know that suffering is a passing phase, a test, which they will ultimately overcome and that they will be blessed with great rewards. In the MFM, Satanic attacks perpetuated by demons, ancestral spirits, witches etc, are responsible for human suffering from which Christians have to be delivered through fasting and concerted or violent prayers (spiritual warfare).

Other theologians especially from the mission churches reflect over the issue of suffering and see it as a evidence of the paschal mystery of the sufferings of Jesus Christ that leads to a life of sobriety, and serves as means of equipping Christians to understanding the purpose of life and to help those who suffer. Christians, they reason, are not exempted from human suffering as they live in a fallen world of sin and misery. Jesus Christ had suffered, leaving us an example, and we are to go in his footsteps.

4. Absence of Ethics of Jesus

A corollary to the above is a near absence of the ethics of Jesus Christ in these newer African churches like the MFM. The emphasis as noted previously is always on power to vitiate malignant spirits in the African setting. The vision of Jesus is blurred, as an unbalanced demand is made on the power and blessings he gives. But his ethical demands on the followers are jettisoned. This is obvious in the lifestyle of the members of these churches who always aspire to live a trouble free life, look trendy and enriched with the good things of life, but are oblivious of the sufferings and poverty of their neighbours living around them. There is no particular concern about ethics, as emphasis is on privileges and not on responsibility of the Christian towards God, his neighbour and society at large. James Dunn as earlier stated had observed that followers of Christ are called to reflect the holy otherness of God in their daily living, which is one of the terms of discipleship.

5. An overemphasis on the divinity of Jesus Christ

The quest for the out of the world experiences mediated by an all powerful and transcendent Jesus creates an insatiable desire for the miraculous, for power to turn impossible situations around, and for a resounding victory over negative forces, for a signs and wonders theology
etc, so much so that the lowly Jesus who walked on the patched dusty roads of Palestine as a mortal being is forgotten.

Jesus is made to fit into Africans’ conception of the gods who live above the realm of humans and are all-powerful to control earthly affairs. This is seen in the dominance of ‘high Christology’ or Triumphant Christology over the human or historical Jesus in the AICs theology. Jesus is both human and divine, and his two natures in one should always be held in balance in the teachings and the observance of the church. A balanced notion of the identity of Jesus Christ will engender a quest for true discipleship that promotes love and concern for others and the willingness to identify with them in their sufferings. Such solidarity following the lifestyle of Jesus will not fault the sufferers for lacking in faith to appropriate the blessings of God. The Cross of Christ is a symbol of solidarity with the poor and sufferers and not a symbol of arrogance, dominance and lack of sympathy for others.

6. Vilifying of African Culture and the concept of inculturation

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles church heightened the awareness of an ongoing spiritual warfare and prayer consciousness in Nigeria’s religious terrain. They continued in the steps of older AICs in the quest for power to overcome evil forces prevalent in Africa. Culture is demonized and churches that imbibe the philosophy of inculturation are labelled as syncretistic and ‘dead churches’. The practice of cross-cultural Christianity as evident in the New Testament is discouraged as everything about culture is seen from a negative perspective.

I consider the MFM church’s stance on culture and other churches as negative and extreme. Though human cultures are tainted with sin and abuses, we should learn to sift that which is inherently good in our cultures from that which is evil and use it for the purpose of furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ. The denigration of the local culture by the MFM church amounts to throwing away the baby and the bath water. It is a neo-colonialist posture of the missionaries, which African Christianity had long departed from. There is so much emphasis on the need for exorcism that the African environment has become a fearful place to live in as seen from the MFM perspective. Relationships with others, both in the family and society, are suspect, because everyone is considered primarily not as a neighbour to be loved, but as an agent of witchcraft, the occult, or some evil spirit of some sort.

The fears about the dangers of inculturation as expressed by the leadership of the MFM may be a cause for concern. While the inculturation of the gospel is indispensable for the growth
of African Christianity, there are however limits to this process. African Christians should be prepared at all times to decipher that which is lawful from that which is expedient as regards cultural inputs into African Christianity.

7. **Anti-Ecumenism**

Besides, the tendency to label other churches as 'dead churches' because of difference in denominational emphasis does not promote ecumenism. This development may be attributed to the low level of theological orientation and spiritual depth, as the MFM Church aligns itself only with these issues that pertain to spiritual warfare, demonology and exorcism. Teachings on other aspects of church life are critically lacking or absent entirely. It is important that denominational leaders see the active involvement of God in other denominations other than theirs, and refrain from an attitude of exclusiveness that sees God’s activity only in their denomination. Such an attitude breeds arrogance and creates schism in the body of Christ, so that we are not able to speak with one voice on issues that affect Christians in society. I believe that God has his ‘remnant’ in places that we never assume, just as Elijah learnt from God about the seven thousand prophets who had not bowed before Baal. As a Baptist minister, my denomination encourages brotherly love with those who may not share the same denominational distinctive with us, but are one with us in kindred spirit.

7.3 **Christologies of the Churches**

Christianity in Nigeria has definitely moved far away from the assertion by one Nigerian Presbyterian theologian, who considered Jesus Christ as “merely a stranger”, or an “illegal alien,” who must wait for his welcome. This theologian proposed a guest Christology paradigm to underpin his assertion and to overcome this image of Christ in Africa. From my observation of church movements in Nigeria, this proposition is a far outcry from what obtains in reality in the Nigerian churches. Herein lies the critical issue underscored in this study, that African theologians are often far removed from the realities of their context. At other times, their theological propositions seem to have been the parochial views of their denomination. For example, many of the cultural images suggested by these theologians are a reflection of Christologies of the Mission churches that emphasized the humanity of Jesus Christ. Many of the present crops of African theologians are Roman Catholics, Anglicans,
Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists; belonging to erstwhile missionary churches that have not been totally weaned from Eurocentric theological cords. Jesus is at home in Nigerian churches as they have welcomed and appropriated him as theirs since the emergence of the AICs in the early part of the past century.

This study reveals a high Christology in the AICs and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, rooted in a transcendent worldview of the African universe. The particular Christological emphasis in these church movements has always reflected a triumphant Christ victorious over spirit forces that impede a progressive and qualitative living in these African cultures; hence the proposition of a triumphant Christology by some theologians.

I consider it unrealistic to present a low Christology in a context where the religious tradition of the people emphasizes the transcendent. This is what the mission churches failed to appreciate, and which the AICs and Pentecostals have capitalized upon for their rapid growth. In my view, the Christology of a given context must reckon with what obtains in their worldview especially in meeting existential needs. A low Christology of ‘Jesus the babe in a manger’ expressing more of his humanity may not suffice for the African context filled with a myriad of malevolent spirits, as Africans believe. Africans as stated earlier, though confronted with the challenge of modernity have not discarded primal beliefs as it obtains in their traditional religions. There is always a primal consciousness about them even when they have renounced their former traditional religions. Emphasis is on power, be it economic, social, political or spiritual.

As primal religions emphasize the existence of transcendental spirits and powers, Jesus in an African context must be seen to be above these spirits. A Christology that emphasizes the humanity of Jesus is seen to portray him more as a mortal being that cannot respond positively to the existential needs of the people. Portraiture of Jesus in this form is not popular in the indigenous churches in Nigeria. This is why there is reluctance in adopting the images suggested by African theologians such as ancestor, elder brother, chief etc, because it is seen as demeaning the status of Jesus as the Son of God. Other images like *oba,* (king) *oyigigi* (an image of impregnable fortress of defence), *apata aiye r’aiye* (rock of ages) *oluwosan* (the almighty healer) are acceptable and considered more fitting, because they do not only speak of divine attributes of Christ but they resonate with biblical claims of his essence. Besides, some of the images suggested by African theologians conjure negative connotations by reason of previous associations in African communities.
In the AICs like the MFM Church, the dominant Christology is the one which portrays Jesus Christ as crucified, risen, ascended and now seated at the right hand of the Father for evermore, with powers, principalities and dominion in the invisible realm subject to him. It is an image of an all powerful and all-conquering Lord who is able to take care of the existential needs of Africans, calm their fears and deliver them from the grips of evil forces. As noted previously, prayer said ‘in Jesus name’ makes it potent and effectual and is believed to work wonders similar to what obtains in African traditional religions, where incantations can conjure and manipulate spirits. In the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, the popular phrase in their liturgy remains ‘Jesus is Lord’, a reference to Philippians 2:8-10. The text states expressly that every knee shall bow and affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ.

This study has shown regarding the Nigerian context that long before the African theologians thought about appropriate images for Jesus Christ in the African context, the people had appropriated him as their own and incorporated him into their daily experiences. They have given him names and titles befitting his exalted status in their context and expressing more of his deity. These churches have appropriated Jesus in a pragmatic way, hence a lived Christology. They are not particular about the theological claims and philosophical explanations about the identity of the person of Christ. They seek for a living Christology where Jesus Christ is brought into their context and made to respond to their existential needs. In these churches, Jesus is seen as real in their context and his presence as palpable. They seek to know the Bible and live out the experiences enunciated therein.

It is unlike what obtains in some mission churches where Christian converts often resort to their old idolatrous practices when faced with a life's crisis for lack of power to confront dire situations. The Christology of the mission churches is said to be otherworldly and cannot be depended upon to proffer solutions to existential concerns of Africans. This is why many Nigerians leave the mission churches for the newer AICs like the MFM Church, because, here the emphasis is on power to counter evil forces that the African environment is reputed for.

The experience of the Nigerian church has largely been driven by the grass roots as observed in this study. Leadership is dominated by ordinary Christians who do not possess theological education but relate and explicate the Bible literately in a manner that fits into situations in their context. They have taught, inspired and led the people to ground breaking experiences as they seek to present Jesus Christ of the New Testament, and to relive the experiences of the primitive church. These churches have contributed to the understanding of the African Jesus in a non-western context in what has become widely known as grass root
Christology. This is why spiritual warfare and exorcism are popular themes in these churches. It made their faith real, experiential and pragmatic and not superficial nor abstract. It is this pragmatism and dynamism of faith and experience that have popularized these churches in Nigeria.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

It can be stated unequivocally that the newer AICs like the MFM Church have contributed immensely to world Christianity, by reviving the New Testament experiences and making the Christian faith in the continent of Africa to be highly vibrant and responsive to the people’s needs. There is so much to learn from the waves of spirituality in these contexts, although critics are quick to point out that such spirituality is not matched by individual and societal transformation. The Nigerian state is still ridden with high levels of moral decadence, greed, violence, corruption and other social maladies. They reason that the level of spirituality and religious consciousness should transform the people and their leaders so as to make for a better society. Herein lays the paradox of the Nigerian Christianity that so much religiosity has not led to a corresponding impact on societal values. There is a dire need in this regard, not for ‘prosperity gospel’, nor ‘security gospel’ as the popular theologies are regarded, but for ‘authentic gospel’ that not only liberates and blesses, but puts believers in the path of morality, probity and true Christian discipleship, so as to influence their immediate world. Then they will truly be the salt of the Nigerian earth and light to the Nigerian world.

In summary, it can be seen from the foregoing that what has accounted for the growth of the AICs over time, has not been the emphasis of re-imaging Jesus in African cultural motifs as African theologians would suggest, but beliefs that ordinary Christians can be empowered to live well and deal with negative forces imimical to their progress in life that abound in the African space, through the giftedness of the Holy Spirit and exorcism in churches like the MFM Church.

African Christology is still at its developmental stage as churches in Africa grapple with the all-important question that Jesus once asked ‘Who do men say I am?’ We have seen different faces of Jesus in different denominational contexts and in different epoch in response to this question in Nigeria churches. This study focussed in particular on the Christology of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church with its triumphant Christology. African theologians have the onerous task of garnering responses from these churches,
especially the indigenous ones where the formulation of theology in context is an ongoing process. It is at this level that appropriate Christologies for the African context of a non-western Jesus can be evidently seen. The theologians can thereafter articulate these responses in the formulation of theological constructs.

This method of doing theology as advocated here is an empirical process based on the peoples' experiences, which will be of benefit to the African churches since it arose from their contexts. Such a Christology will be one that derives from the people, by the people and for the people. This is what is underscored in this study as this writer sought to know the experiences of the people, as the suggested images in African categories were taken into an African Independent church context and the resultant Christology that was discovered. There is room for further studies along this line considering Christology in churches of the north where Islam is predominant, and in churches with tribal inclinations, in the Niger delta where environmental issues are continually raised etc.