Ancestor Christology and Jesus' identity: a study based on the Epistle to the Hebrews

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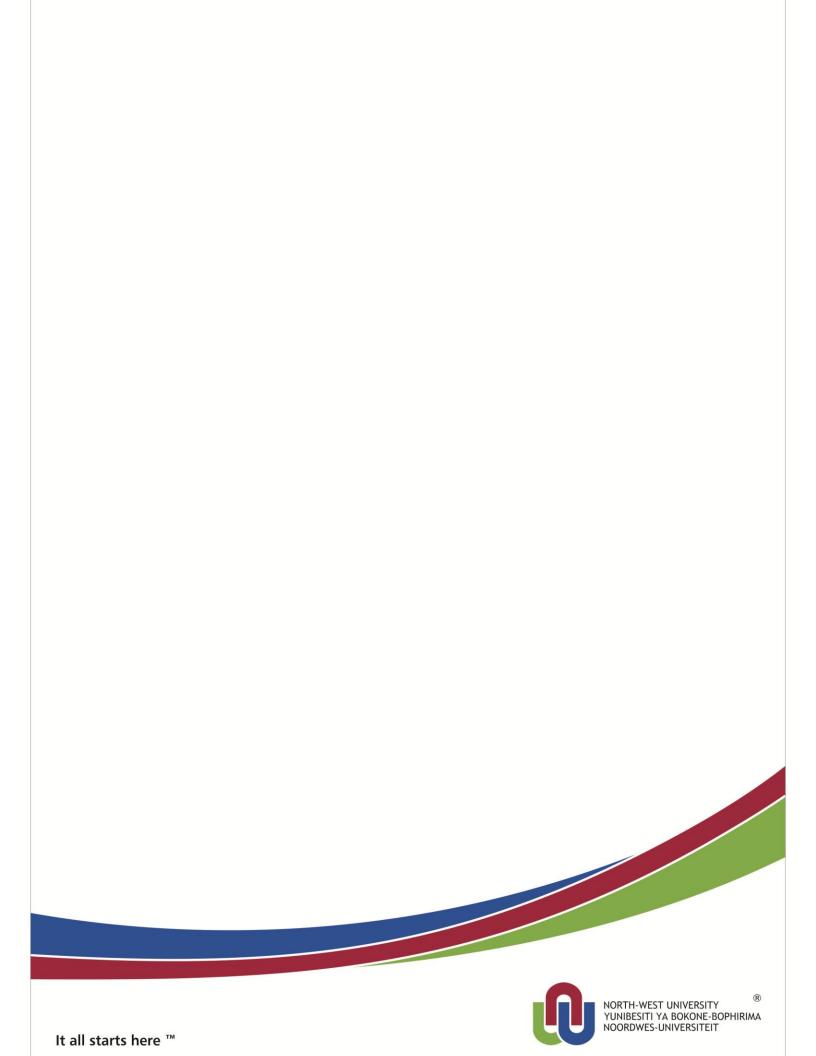
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It all starts here ™

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ABSTRACT

The aim in this thesis is to determine whether African ancestor Christology, a contextual attempt to explicate the identity of Jesus within African theology, adequately correlates with and captures the identity of Jesus presented in the *exordium* of Hebrews 1:1-4. Ancestor Christology utilises the pre-existing notion of the traditional African ancestors as a frame of reference. Consequently, understanding the place and function of the ancestors is essential to this research.

This research undertakes a critical and analytical review of ancestor Christology presented in the works of some of the proponents of the concept including Pobee (1979), Nyamiti (1984), Bujo (1992), Bediako (1980, 2004) and Nyende (2005), among others. Using a combination of historical-grammatical exegesis and theological interpretation, this dissertation undertakes an investigation of Hebrews 1:1-4 to evaluate ancestor Christology. 12:1 is examined to determine the place and function of the ancestors in Hebrews.

Though this research noted the value of the ancestor Christology concept as a worthwhile attempt towards contextual Christology in Africa, the research argues that the concept is counterproductive because the failure of the concept to capture important aspects of Jesus' identity outlined in the *exordium* translates to presenting Him inadequately. This applies especially to his identity as the summation and perfection of mediation, whose scope of mediation is salvific and redemptive and whose mediation is without an end as signified by his linkage in Hebrews to the king-priest Melchizedek. Furthermore, conceptualising Jesus using ancestor categories has the potential of exasperating the perennial problem of belief in both Jesus and the ancestors as mediators between God and men.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie tesis is om te bepaal of Afrika voorvader Christologie, 'n kontekstuele poging in Afrika teologie om die identiteit van Jesus te verklaar, voldoende met die identiteit van Jesus soos in die *exordium*van Hebreërs 1:1-4 ooreenstem en vasvang. Voorvader Christologie gebruik die bestaande idee van tradisionele Afrika voorvaders as 'n verwysingsraamwerk. Gevolglik is dit noodsaaklik, ter wille van hierdie navorsing, om die plek en rol van die voorvaders te verstaan.

Hierdie navorsing onderneem 'n kritiese en analitiese hersiening van voorvader Christologie soos wat dit in die werke van hierdie teorie se voorstanders aangebied word, onder anderePobee (1979), Nyamiti (1984), Bujo (1992), Bediako (1980, 2004) en Nyende (2005).Hierdie tesis onderneem verder om deur 'n kombinasie van histories-grammatikale eksegese en teologiese interpretasie Hebreërs 1:1-4 te ondersoek, sodat voorvader Christologie in die lig daarvan evalueer kan word. Hebreërs 12:1 word ondersoek om die plek en rol van voorvaders in Hebreërs te bepaal.

Terwyl hierdie navorsing die waarde van voorvader Christologie as 'n poging tot 'n kontekstuele Christologie in Afrika erken, beredeneer hierdie navorsing dat die konsep teenproduktief is, omdat die konsep daarin misluk om belangrike aspekte van Jesus se identiteit soos in die *exordium* vas te vang en Hom gevolglik wanvoorstel. Hierdie is veral van toepassing op sy identiteit as die opsomming en volkomenheid van bemiddeling, waarvan die omvang reddend en verlossend en die duur sonder einde is soos die verband met die koning-priester Melgisedek in Hebreërs duidelik maak. Verder vererger die konseptualisering van Jesus in voorvader kategorieë die probleem van die aanbidding van beide Jesus en die voorvaders as middelaars tussen God en die mens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not submitted it previously in its entirety at any University for a degree.

NOVERMBER 2013

Signature

Date

KEY TERMS

Ancestor Christology

African Christology

African theology

African Ancestors

Christology

Hebrews

Identity

Jesus

Mediator

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Introduction

1. Personal interest

The seed for this research was planted in me over the course of over 18 years of continuous ministry in Africa among various churches across denominational lines[1]. This ministry exposure brought to the fore the fact that many African Christians struggle to understand Jesus in a way that will encourage them to break away from their ancestral dependence. Ghanaian professor of theology, Nkansah-Obrempong[2] (2010:298) rightly notes that a significant dilemma African theologians face is how to develop an African Christianity that is authentically African and truly biblical. My experience in ministry correlates with Nkansah-Obrempong's observation. This research is therefore driven largely by theological and pastoral concerns. These arise from my immediate African context and experience where the need exist to have biblical answers to the question of the identity of Jesus and the place of ancestors in the lives of the followers of Jesus.

1.1.1. Study background

The importance of Jesus as the epicentre of the Christian faith, and the fact that the essential nature of Christianity depends on one's understanding of the person of Jesus, are not in dispute. Interest and discussion concerning the person of Jesus is varied and diverse and stretches beyond the confines of Christian orthodoxy. McKnight (2004:149-150) makes an interesting point when he says , 'everyone wants Jesus on his or her side – traditionalists and revisionists, fundamentalists and liberals, feminists and chauvinists, mystics and empiricists, cinematographers and novelists, Christians, Jews, Muslims and New Age proponents'. He concludes that Jesus is alive and well as far as the level of interest generated in studies and

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[1]Reference is made here to the author's involvement in leading an evangelical congregation in Gombe, a region in North-East Nigeria. This is alongside involvement in ministry with churches across denominational lines.

[2] James Nkansah-Obrempong is professor of theology at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School Kenya, and the Vice-Chairman of World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) theological Commission.

discussions about Him is. However, he points out that many such enthusiasts end up with the identity of a Jesus that is dissimilar to the Jesus of Scriptures.

Identity is generally understood to be the distinct personality of an individual and the person's continuing characterisation. According to Frei (1975:37-38), identity, if loosely defined, could be said to refer to the very 'core' of a person toward which everything else is directed. He further clarifies 'identity' as 'the specific uniqueness of a person' and 'what really counts about him'. From his perspective, that which defines a persons' identity is so unique that it goes 'beyond the possibility of contrast or comparison with others'. Though it may include an integration of all physical properties and personal characteristics, a person's identity is 'self-referential' and thus essentially abstract and located in the inner self, so to speak. Taking Frei's observation further at a philosophical level could raise the question as to how (if at all) one can truly know the identity of the other or even that of oneself, since that can only happen by accessing the 'core' of the self that really defines identity.

Given that a formal psychological analysis of 'identity' is outside the scope of this research, pushing the discussion further in a purely psychological fashion may be beside the point. However, the point that should be well taken is that identity may include an integration of personal properties that refer back essentially to the core of the person. Insofar as this understanding is looked at from the purview of Christian theology and as it relates particularly to the identity of Jesus, the theological enterprise - especially as this research attempts to do - is itself an effort towards identifying that integrating core that defines who Jesus is. The underlying assumption here is that Jesus' self-revelation in Scripture forms the core of his self-identity which theology labours to access. This is buttressed by Gaventa and Hays (2008) who demonstrate that in the quest to know the identity of Jesus, the testimony of the biblical witness as the primary source among other sources is indispensable.

Studies and discussion of the identity of Jesus occupy a place of importance and are ongoing in Africa. Nigerian theologian Yusuf Obaje[3] (1992:43) notes that, the present day theological

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[3] Yusuf Obaje is a professor of theology at Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, Nigeria.

question, 'Who is Jesus Christ'? is far from being a theological novelty. According to him, the importance of this question hinges on the fact that, 'the overwhelming nature of the presence of Jesus challenges or commands every man everywhere and in every generation to raise the question afresh "who is this?"

Engaging the question of the identity of Jesus from a biblical perspective remains crucial because failure to do so leaves room for constructing a fictional Jesus. The task is important for individuals as much as it is important for the theological endeavour in general. The point is well captured by John Mbiti (1971:190) who stated that 'theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ at a given time, place or human situation'.

Taylor (1963:16) who is not an African by birth, but lived and worked in Uganda, raised a question the relevance of which is seen by the many references to it as a starting point for engagement with issues of African theology and Christology by a number of African theologians[4]. His question is worth citing at length:

> Christ has been presented as the answer to the question a white man would ask,
> the solution to the needs the western man would feel, the saviour of the world of
> the European world view, the object of the 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
> cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognized
> by the church universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of
> her total uninhibited humanity, would it be acceptable?

In African Christological discourse, theologians have sought to develop models and concepts that are familiar to the African people. Models such as 'Jesus the Liberator', 'Jesus the African King'; Jesus the healer; Jesus the ancestor have been variously proffered (Oborji, 2008:16).

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[4] See (among others) Hans Visser, Gillian Bediako, and Kwame Bediako in the same work: in *Jesus and the gospel in Africa: history and experience*. Mary knoll, N.Y., Orbis Books. p20. See Also, Waliggo, J. M. (1986). *Inculturation: its meaning and urgency*. Kampala, Uganda, St. Paul Publications. Also Wendland, E. R. (1991). "Who do people say I am?" Contextualizing Christology in Africa. In *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 10(2), 13-32.

Other Christological models proposed by theologians according to Folarin (2002)[5] include 'Jesus the medicine Man'; 'Christ the chief' ; 'Christ the Witch-Doctor' ; 'Christ the Nganga' ; and 'Christ the Are-Onakakanfo' (literally, the chief commander of all the warriors).

Among the various models and concepts, ancestor Christology occupies an important place in contemporary African Christological discourse (Akper 2007:225). There are various reasons for according the concept such prominence, chief among which is the fact that ancestral belief and practices in varying forms and degree occupy a central place in the socio-religious thought of many people in present day Africa. People in Africa would seem to have an easy familiarity with a discussion that has to do with ancestors.

Africa is a vast, complex and widely diverse continent, and as Maluleke (2005:486) cautions, one should not pretend to speak comprehensively about Africa as if it is a single country. However, two key reasons make it valid to engage in this discussion from an Africa-wide platform as this research intends to. First, ancestry and kinship which serve as the core upon which ancestor Christology is built, are traditional ethical value-beliefs that resonate soundly across the African landscape. Secondly, key contributions conceptualising Christ in ancestor categories are found across the continent and are not confined to a particular part of Africa. This places the discussion within the wider Africa framework, though care will be taken to point out particularities in beliefs and practices relating to ancestors where such exist.

1.1.2. Why the Epistle to the Hebrews as a basis for the analysis?

A New Testament investigation into the identity of Jesus could be carried out from almost any book of the New Testament. However, the Epistle to the Hebrews seems well suited to the present endeavour for a number of reasons.

The first obvious reason is that the epistle is clearly Christological in nature, covering both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. As Grieb (2008:200) boldly asserts, the Epistle has arguably

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[5] Dr. George Folarin made this assertion in a paper presented at the 15th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Association of biblical studies at the University of Port Harcourt, 9th -12th July 2002.

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'more intense Christological reflection per square inch than any other extant Christian writing'. Secondly, the epistle was written to those whose Christology was not adequate. They were subject to various tensions and may possibly have considered focusing more on their sacrificial systems and revered personalities than on Jesus. (Heb 1:1-4; 2:8-10; 5:4-10; 9; 12:2). Their Christology was not adequate and was subject to tensions and pressures because of this. Consequently, there exist some grounds for arguing that there are similarities between the epistle and the African context. These similarities are rooted in the fact that both the original and the present day African recipients of the epistle are in a situation where 'turning away' or looking away from Christ was, and is, a real possibility; while the author of the epistle admonishes them to fix their gaze on Jesus (Heb12:2). Bediako (2000:28) sums it up well:

> The value for us in the presentation of Jesus in Hebrews stems from its relevance to a society like ours with its deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestral function. In relation to each of these features of our religious heritage, Hebrews shows Jesus to be the answer to the spiritual longings and the aspiration that our people have sought to meet through our traditions

In my view, all of these validate the need to place the study within the context of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

1.2 Problem statement and substantiation

1.2.1 Formulation of the problem

Seminal works conceptualising Christ in ancestral terms are evidenced by works such as those of John Pobee (1979, Ghana, West Africa), Charles Nyamiti (1984, Tanzania, East Africa), Benezet Bujo (1992, Central Africa) Wanamaker (1997, South Africa) and Kwame Bediako (2004, Ghana, West Africa) among others.

This evidences the spread and appeal of the image of Christ in ancestral terms across major parts of the continent. These authors have all espoused the model to varying degrees as a valid and necessary form of doing Christology, though they differ in method, emphasis and conclusions.

The earliest published work with a focused Chapter on Christology appears to be by John Pobee. In his book, 'Toward an African Theology' (1979) in which he espoused the concept, he speaks of Jesus as 'the great and greatest ancestor'. Pobee emphasises the need to keep the Bible at the centre of the African theological endeavour and insists that the cross, the humanity and divinity of Christ are essential to Christologising and that they are not negotiable. In his approach however, the starting point was not the Bible. Rather, as a deliberate step in moving away from what he terms the Greco-Roman culture that engender 'the tendency to discuss Christology in metaphysical terms' Pobee (1979:82) takes the Akan traditional worldview, particularly Akan proverbs, as his starting point.[6] Pobee however is quick to highlight the limitation of his conceptualization by indicating that though his approach sees Jesus in ancestral terms; Jesus remains 'nonpareil', meaning that Jesus remains eminent beyond and above comparison. Pobee's own observation in my opinion brings to light the problem of the comparability of Jesus to the ancestors as a point worth investigating more closely.

In a review of Pobee's work, Bediako (1980:236), a fellow Ghanaian, disagrees with Pobee in the latter's use of 'Akan wisdom literature' as the basis for conceptualising Jesus as ancestor. Bediako questions whether Akan 'wisdom literature' on its own gives an adequate account of the Akan world-view and is sufficient enough for it to be the basis of an attempt to couch essential Christianity into African categories and thought-forms. In a later work, Bediako (2004) opined that more than the issue of the accuracy of the concept, the question is whether such an understanding faithfully reflects biblical revelation and is rooted in true Christian experience. He however goes ahead to propose speaking of Jesus as 'Ancestor and sole mediator'. Bediako grounds his proposition in a theological reflection of a number of biblical passages chiefly among them, the Epistle to the Hebrews which he fondly referred to as 'our Epistle'. He however left much to be desired in terms of an exegetical engagement with specific passages in the epistle to further buttress his assertion.

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[6]Pobee clarifies that the targeted context for his proposition is the Akan of Ghana. Beyond that however, he expects value and meaning for his proposition "to many other groups in West Africa as a whole and to other citizens of the world outside Africa" (1979:19).

Charles Nyamiti's (1984) *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspectiv*e has been described as the watershed in the development of African Christology (Ritchie, 1994). Following a methodology which takes African culture as the point of departure, Nyamiti uses the African cultural situation and experience as the basis for his Christological conceptualization and proposes presenting Jesus as 'Brother Ancestor'. In Nyamiti's thought, while "brother" relates to the humanity of Jesus, "ancestor" relates to his divinity. This conceptualization raises a number of questions.

Benezet Bujo's 1992 extended published work on the Ancestor concept conceptualised Jesus as 'the proto-ancestor'. Though Bujo and Nyamiti are agreed on the need for Christological formulation that is of relevance to Africans, and Nyamiti even mentions that a 1981 article by Bujo inspired his development of the 'Brother-Ancestor' concept,[7] Nyamiti and Bujo disagree in their method and conclusions. While Nyamiti bases his conceptualisation on a so called 'Inculturation method'[8], Bujo bases his on post colonial liberation theology and African anthropocentrism; Bujo therefore disagrees with Nyamiti's approach and criticises it as being speculative and rooted in 'European scholastic and neo-scholastic thought' (1992:91).

What emerges from the above survey is that major African scholars are in agreement that the ancestor concept be used, though they differ in methods and articulation. Among the surveyed scholars, it again becomes clear that not much is done towards addressing the real and potential consequence of such a conceptualisation. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that there exists a real tendency among African scholars to be more culture and context driven as opposed to being biblically and exegetically driven in the Christological endeavour. Maluleke (1997:188-201) in '*Will Jesus ever be the same again: What are the Africans doing to him?'* particularly laments

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[7]See Nyamiti, 1984: 7

[8]'Inculturation' is a term mostly used within the Roman Catholic tradition to describe the method of adapting the teachings of the church to non Christian cultures. See Nyamiti, C. (2005). In *Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: methodological and Trinitarian foundations; also (1998); in* African Christologies Today

that some African theologians are unsettling rather than enlightening African Christians in their employment of African religious concepts in Christologising.

Drawing on Bediako's observation above, the critical issue at stake remains whether the concept faithfully reflects biblical revelation and is rooted in true Christian experience. In seeking to answer the question of Jesus' identity, it is evident that more biblical and exegetical attention needs to be given to the task, as this research intends to do.

1.2.2. The Problem

From the outline of efforts above, the following problem emerges in summary:

1. The ancestor model is geared towards answering the crucial Christological question of the identity of Jesus in language and terms familiar to African Christians, and such conceptualisations are generally inferred to have some biblical basis. The problem however is that these conceptualizations are not based on sound exegesis of a biblical text. As indicated above, these conceptualizations immediately bring into view matters addressed in certain passages in the book of Hebrews. Yet up to date no convincing attempt to an exegetical investigation of the text of Hebrews in this regard has been made[9];

2. In tandem, because presenting Jesus in ancestor categories utilises the traditional African ancestor framework, it naturally raises an important question regarding the place of ancestors and how a Christian should view them along with prevalent practices in the course of relating with those ancestors. This problem remains insufficiently attended to in the examined works.

In view of the above, a study of this nature that is text-based, exegetically and theologically driven becomes necessary.

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[9]Nyende (2007) appears to be the only one so far to have exegetically engaged the concept from an exegetical standpoint of the Epistle to the Hebrews in which he affirmed that: "there is no reason why ancestors should not be used as such to conceive and speak of Christ as the mediator in Africa" (2007:378). Following the expression of his qualified proclivity toward the concept, Nyende then postulated speaking of Jesus as 'the greatest ancestor'.

1.2.3. Key Research question

The key question that engages this research is therefore:

How does the identity of Jesus in Hebrews impact on the conceptualisation of Jesus in ancestral terms in the African ancestor Christology (AAC) concept?

The key research question necessitates the following related questions:

1. What is the identity of Jesus in the AAC and what constitutes the basis of the model?

2. What is the identity of Jesus and the place of ancestors in Hebrews?

3. What implications for the African ancestor Christology concept does the biblical evidence portend?

1.3. Research aims and objectives

1.3.1 Aim

The aim of this research is to study the teaching of Hebrews on the identity of Jesus especially in the *exordium*, and to investigate whether the African ancestor Christology concept correlates to and adequately conceptualises the identity of Jesus.

1.3.2. Specific objectives

To achieve the above aim, the following specific objectives will have to be met

1. Study and analyse the African ancestor Christology concept

2. Study the identity of Jesus and the place and function of ancestors in Hebrews, paying particular attention to the *exordium* in Hebrews 1 and 12.

3. Evaluate the concept and highlight some implications based on the biblical evidence, including an evaluation of the traditional African ancestor framework.

4. Present preliminary suggestions based the conclusion of the research

1.4 Central theoretical argument

The basic hypothesis that underlies this research is that the identity of Jesus especially in the *exordium* of Hebrews shows that the conceptualisation of Jesus in ancestor categories fails to capture important aspects of his identity such as creator, heir, possessor of the same ὑπόστασις with the father and the revealer of the father as the ἀπαύγασμα of the father's glory, thus affirming his incomparably unique divine identity. It is this divine identity that sets apart His mediation as salvific, redemptive and eternal. Conceptualising him in ancestor categories is inadequate and inadvertently accommodates belief in ancestors as mediators as opposed to the Epistle's portrayal of the exclusivity of Jesus as the greatest, as well as its pointing to the finality of mediation between God and man. Though a plausible effort, the AAC concept is counterproductive and has the potential to encourage the perennial problem among some African Christians of looking to both Jesus and the ancestors as the source of salvific and existential blessings of peace, prosperity and security.

1.4.1 Delineation/Limitations

This study is not poised to answer all questions relating to Jesus' identity and African ancestors in general. The discussion of Jesus' identity and the ancestors here is that seen from the viewpoint of Hebrews. At this stage, the concern and scope of this study will be to identify, analyse and interpret relevant data relating to the identity of Jesus especially in Hebrews 1:1-4 and the African ancestor Christology concept and to evaluate such in the light of some key ideas in the Epistle. Implications will be highlighted and some limited suggestions will be offered at the end. Possibly, a PhD could afford the opportunity to further widen the scope of this research.

1.5 Method of Research.

This study will be done from the perspective of the evangelical reformed tradition and exegesis of some selected relevant biblical passages will be done according to the historical-grammatical method as espoused and explained by Kaiser and Silva (1994). The historical-grammatical

method primarily concerns itself with the author's intended meaning. The research is essentially a New Testament biblical study that is purposefully driven exegetically, while utilising theological interpretation[10] and analysis. The necessity of the systematisation of this research reflects relatedness to dogmatics.[11]

The primary focus of exegesis will be Hebrews 1:1-4 and therefore attention will be paid to interpretative approaches and methods specific to the Epistle as explained by Attridge (1989); Koester (2001); and Witherington (2007) among others.

For the purpose of analysis and integration of the aspect of this research that falls within African theology, cognisance will be given to Ukpong (1999)[12] who highlights various methods in African biblical studies. He identifies two major strands found in current biblical scholarship in Africa. The first consists of one in which Western critical tools are employed without directly relating the biblical text to the African context; in the second, Western biblical tools are used, but the text is interpreted in relation to the African context. Within the second strand, Ukpong identifies the following categories: Comparative studies, evaluative studies, Africa-in-the-Bible studies, inculturation hermeneutics, liberation hermeneutics, black theology, and feminist hermeneutics. Following Ukpong's categorisation, this study falls within the evaluative studies category and will adopt the approach within the category which involves the study of the concept in the light of the biblical witness while using the historical-grammatical method in analysing the biblical text. The ancestor Christology concept will be studied through an analytical review of

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[10]For a detailed introduction to theological interpretation, see Treier, D. J. 2008.Introducing theological interpretation of Scripture: recovering a Christian practice. See also Webster (2009:69-94) 'who is the Son: theological reflections on the *Exordium* to the Epistle to the Hebrews' In Bauckham, R. (eds).

[11]Carson (2012, kindle location 1074) carefully explains the existing scholarly suspicion and the necessary relatedness between biblical exegesis and systematic theology. He shows the need for such interdependence as essential while presenting evidence to establish how the convergence of systematic theology and biblical exegesis can lead to a cohesiveness that will reflect biblical fidelity. Markus Bockmuehl (2008:7-13) had expressed similar views earlier and suggests that biblical and dogmatic theology must not be considered as mutually exclusive enterprise but rather as '*pas de deux*' or maintaining complementary partnership.

[12] See also Ukpong, J. S(2006:62-63), 'African Interpretation' in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. See also in Yarbrough, R W. 2011,*New Testament Studies in Africa*.

the works of its major proponents and will be evaluated in the light the biblical witness and a focused exegesis of Hebrews 1:1-4. Attention will be paid to the methodological principles proposed by Yusuf Turaki (1999)[13] in researching, analysing and evaluating theological concepts of African concern.

While particular attention is given to engagement with key African Scholars and theologians, the research engages a broader range of scholarship in exegesis, interpretation, analysis and evaluation to enable it fit into a wider spectrum of biblical scholarship. Bazylinski's 'Guide to biblical Research' (2009) and other relevant theological dictionaries, commentaries, articles, books and lexicons will be consulted for effective analysis, exegesis, interpretation and synthesis of key passages.

1.6 Provisional Chapter Division

1. General Introduction

2. African Ancestor Christology: a critical and analytical review

3. Jesus' identity in Hebrews: analysis, key texts and exegesis

4. A critical evaluation of the African ancestor Christology as measured against Hebrews.

5. Conclusion and preliminary suggestions

1.7 Possible value of research

The importance of this research lies in the fact that the church in Africa is experiencing tremendous growth and along with that, the need to contribute to the development of an African Christianity that is authentically African, truly biblical and Christ-centred. It is with this in mind that this research is poised to contribute in the following ways:

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[13]Prof. Yusuf Turaki is a highly respected Nigerian scholar and theologian. Turaki adjures African scholars on the need to maintain the centrality of the Bible and the Gospel of Christ in the African theological discourse. This according to him, will safeguard against serious theological questions and concerns that have trailed the over 3 decades of theological method and output of African theology.

To contribute a current engagement with Hebrews while offering much needed biblical clarity on the identity of Jesus especially from an African perspective,

To appreciate and bring to light current efforts towards contextual and biblical Christologising especially in Africa,

To contribute to the ongoing need for elaboration and evaluation of African contextual Christology,

To bring to light the implications of conceptualising Jesus in ancestral terms,

To serve as a springboard for further exploration at a PhD level into the Christology of Hebrews, such that will seek to answer to the crucial need for contextual relevance and biblical exegetical accuracy.

Chapter 2

African ancestor Christology: a critical and analytical review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

What this Chapter seeks to achieve is to study and analyse the Africa ancestor Christological concept. This aim will be achieved by an analytical review of the contribution of some key authors with regards to the concept. The driving concern and unique contributions of these key authors will be brought into perspective. Identical trends and differences in formulation among the proponents of the concept will be traced and analysed in order to understand the conceptual background of the paradigm.

The approach employed here is to move from the broad to the particular by situating the discussion within the wider African theology spectrum. Because the African ancestor Christological discourse falls within the broad African theology spectrum, it will be important first to identify the various strands that exist within the broad African theology spectrum with the intention of establishing the subset of African theology into which this research fits. This will then be followed by a focused examination of African Christology in contemporary theological dialogue. After this, a focused look at the African ancestor Christology model and its key proponents will then follow. This will necessitate an analytical review of key authors who have contributed to shaping the thoughts of Africans in relation to the ancestor Christology concept. How these key authors relate and differ from one another in their propositions will be discussed. The approach employed here will therefore be descriptive as well as analytical.

At the end of this Chapter, space will be given to highlight questions that arise from the analytical review. All of these will serve as a necessary basis for further reflection and evaluation

in keeping with the purpose of this research which is to evaluate the ancestor Christology concept against the backdrop of Jesus' identity in Hebrews.

2.2 African theology

2.2.1 Definition & Differentiation

Scholars have noted the difficulty and complexity of the task of describing, defining and accurately assessing African theology. (Mashau & Fredricks 2008:109; Tiénou, 1990:74). The fact that the quest for a definitive African theology is a fairly recent pursuit as well as the vastness and diversity of the continent is noted as contributory to the difficulty. The quest for a definitive African theology only became an academic concern arguably in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the foreword to Bujo's (1992:5) *African Theology in its Social Context,* Schreiter particularly posits that the publication of a volume in 1956 by a group of young African theologians in French titled *Les Pretres noirs s'interrogent* actually marked the beginning of modern African theology. Bujo (1992:2) expands further by pointing out that the first individual African theologian is Vincent Mulago who wrote in 1955 and published in 1956, followed by Alex Kagame (1956) and then a group of Africans referred to by Schreiter who published as a group in 1956. What remains obvious here is that published African theological reflections by Africans are a fairly recent effort[14].

The conceptual framework behind the reflections that led to the emergence of African theology as Nkansah-Obrempong (2007:140-141) argues is twofold, namely: African '*personality'* in Anglophone Africa and the '*Negritude'* movement of Francophone Africa[15]. These concepts according to him functioned as tools of regaining identity and:

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[14] For more on the origins and background of African theology, see also Tiénou,T, 1990, 'Indigenous African Christian theologies : the uphill road', International Bulletin Of Missionary Research.

[15] Nkansah-Obrempong (2007) defines *Negritude* as An anti-colonial literary and political movement from the 1930s, expressing pride in being African and black.

They also motivated theologians to begin to reinterpret the Christian faith in terms that reflect this identity, so [that] Africans can understand and relate to the Christian faith as their own. These cultural and socio-political movements laid the foundation for African theology of indigenization or inculturation that sees the African culture and religion as important sources for theological reflection on the Christian faith. At the same period in the southern Africa region, the black movement contributed to Black theology of liberation.

These proceedings according to Nkansah-Obrempong gave birth to the two major streams of African theologies of inculturation (or contextualisation[16]) and liberation.

The establishment in 1976 of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)[17] in Dares-Salaam is considered to be a significant marker in the African theological quest[18]. Before EATWOT, leading African theologians maintained that the existing theology of the African church at the time was 'prefabricated' (Idowu, 1965:22-23) and actually nonexistent (Mbiti, 1969:232). This assertion, as Bediako (2004:15) maintains, was unmindful of the already existing African theology at the grass roots (Bediako 2004:15). A further reflection by Mbiti (1986:229) decades later acknowledges and confirms the existence of not just written African theology, but oral theology ahead of definitive written theology in Africa. Mashau and Fredericks (2008:10) clarify this point further by maintaining that there is such a thing as *lived* theologies and academically developed theologies and it goes without question that the existence of *lived* theologies in Africa goes as far back as the advent of Christianity in the continent. While

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[16]Mashau and Fredericks (2008:119) define contextualization as the effort to take seriously the specific context of each human group and person on its own terms and in all its dimensions — cultural, religious, social, political, as well as economic and to discern what the gospel says to people in that context, so that the particular needs and hopes of people are addressed and met.

[17]Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, henceforth EATWOT, refers to an association formed to create a platform for theological reflections by people of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

[18] It is worth noting that the formation of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEM) in 1966 preceded the formation of EATWOT in 1976. Though EATWOT is a broader ecumenical body, AEM was the first organised body of the Evangelical movement in Africa; and as Nkansah-Obrempong (2010:294) notes, as of today, AEM considers itself as a custodian of evangelical theology or orthodoxy and upholding Christian values and ethos in Africa.

Mashau and Frederic's observation could be right, the implication however is that if there was any *lived* theology before the advent of Christianity, it remains questionable whether such a theology could be termed or equated with Christian theology in the sense of biblical Christianity.

Mbiti (1976:164) therefore simply defines African theology as the theological reflection by African Christians. Taking his thought further however, if theology is generally understood as reflection and discourse about God, African theology then is that theological endeavour which is embarked upon mostly by Africans as well as non-Africans who are familiar with the African milieu, and who are seeking to respond to such issues theologically[19].This definition recognises that that there are non-Africans who have made significant contributions to the growth and shape of African theology, either directly or indirectly through stimulating constructive thinking which fed into African theology[20]. Even though African theology is said to have emerged, what remains unclear as Mashau and Frederiks (2008:115) maintain is that it remains debatable whether the methodology can be said to be exclusively African. In other words, questions remain as to how totally African such a methodology for doing African theology is at this stage[21]. This is not to

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[19] Tite Tiénou 1991:74 agrees with the difficulty that exists in defining African theology and suggests an adoption of the definition in *Mission Studies* (1985:94) in which African theology is defined as theology that is "done in Africa, ... to a significant degree arises out of the identity of African people, draws on African categories of thought and speaks to the historical situation of African people".

[20] Mbogu (2012:32) addresses the 'insider/outsider' question with regard to African theology and maintains that the foreigner brings with him to the task of African theology his feelings, perceptions, experience and privilege which no matter how small, could distort theology in the other context. However, he admits that to ignore or deny the contributions of outsiders to the development of African theology could amount to academic dishonesty. See also Parratt (1995:19) who makes a strong case for the contribution of non-African contribution to the development of African theology.

[21]See Kwesi in Parratt (1995:20) who discusses the presence and possibility of a Western 'methodological straight jacket' that could hamper originality of thought in African theology. Tiénou (1991:76) had earlier expressed doubt as to whether there was yet a fully emerged African theology by stating that, 'genuine African Christian theology is still in the future tense'. He attributes that to the fact that the status of theological education in the continent may contribute, in no small way, to the foreignness of the theological enterprise. Even though Tiénou's position as expressed here was formulated not less than two decades ago, it does not seem to have totally lost validity.

infer that there have been no efforts towards a methodology that is African. Nyamiti's (2005)[22] recent two volume work on methods attests to this.

The concepts 'African theology' cannot be assumed to refer to African Christian theology exclusively. This can be stated in the light of other African theologies that are not essentially Christian. This raises the question as to what constitutes an African Christian theology. As Mugambi (1989:vi-x) demonstrates, without such a differentiation, 'African theology' could generally refer to such theological reflection and discourse as was carried out by Africans before the advent of both Christianity and Islam to the continent. In his view, 'African theology' without distinction could imply African Christian or Muslim theology or even a theology of the African religious tradition that is neither Christian nor Muslim. The differentiator therefore that distinguishes African Christian theology is that, it is such a reflection and discourse that seeks to relate the African cultural and religious heritage to Christianity. Nyende (2005:3) rightly clarifies further that, African Christian theology is "a theology derived from the interplay of Christian tradition, or any aspect of it, on the one hand, and African cosmology or any aspect of it on the other". Furthermore, Nyende contends that the Bible is central to a theology that seeks to be Christian and 'it is incumbent on those who wish to articulate an African theology to use the Bible in dialogue with African cosmologies and culture for it to be a *Christian* theology'. One can concur with this observation when one takes into consideration the goal and purpose of African Christian theology which can be summarised as 'the building and sustenance of African Christian communities in faith, ethos and *cultus' (*Nyende, 2005:3-4).

2.2.2 Context and task of African theology

In an incisive analysis of the context and development of African theological thought, Bediako (1997:426-443) points out that the context out of which African theology came forth is twofold. In his view, the struggle for the social and political transformation of the conditions of inequality

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[22]See Nyamiti, C. 2005. *Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: methodological and Trinitarian foundations*. Nairobi, CUEA Publications.

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and oppression in South Africa gave rise to 'Black theology' which in his view is a theology of liberation in the African setting. On the other hand, the theological explorations into the indigenous cultures of the African peoples gave rise to a different theological strand designated as 'African theology'. Though Bediako maintains that 'Black theology' and 'African theology' are not mutually exclusive[23], what he concedes is that they are not one and the same thing. Bediako's differentiation serves to clear the tendency that may exist to assume wrongly that the African theological endeavour is one and the same with the liberationist Black theology[24]. In a similar vein, Balcomb (2008: 7-10) further sheds light on the contextual and evangelical nature of African theology by maintaining that, The Southern African axis 'south of Limpopo' as he calls it, have had to deal with issues of democratisation and politics with getting rid of apartheid and transformation of the society as a chief goal, thereby leading to the 'theology of bread', while their counterparts in the Sub-Sahara Africa have had to deal with issues of culture and identity as a chief concern leading to their focusing on the 'theology of being'[25]. Balcomb (2008:7-10) contends further that, what characterises and serves as the distinguishing features of African evangelical theology[26] are the nature of its faith, its orthodoxy in relation to foundational doctrines of the Christian faith and its countenance of the powers. He describes faith here not in a soteriological sense or in terms of adherence to the rubrics of a particular church tradition, but rather as 'the propensity to believe' primarily in God and also belief in unseen spiritual realities. Such belief in unseen spiritual realities which, according to him, have been long lost in the west through 'secularisation' enables African evangelical theology to engage such issues theologically.

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[23]Bediako (1997:426) following Desmond Tutu describes how Black and African theologies relate as "a series of concentric circles of which Black theology is the inner and smaller circle".

[24]*Mashau and Frederiks*, (2008:119) identify people at the forefront of Black Theology to include Manas Buthelezi, Gabriel Setiloane, Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane etc., and note that 'African theology that emphasized liberation was typified as 'Black Theology', though in recent years also other forms of African liberation theologies have developed such as African women's theologies and theologies of reconstruction'.

[25]Balcomb in using this expression utilises West, G. (2000). In 'Mapping African biblical Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch', *in* M.W. Dube and G.O. West (eds.).

[26]For a historical background of Evangelical theology in Africa, see James Nkansah-Obrempong in *Evangelical Theology in Africa: Ways, Perspectives, and Dilemmas*. ERT (2010) 34:4, 293-299.

Balcomb's (2008:7-10) categorisation could have highlighted some exceptions and has succumbed to some generalisation as he also admits. In fact, one may choose to argue differently about what constitutes an evangelical African theology. Some even debate whether such further categorisation of African theology in terms of 'evangelical 'and 'non evangelical' is even necessary at all[27]. Balcomb's analysis in any case gives at least a fair view of what basically underlies the contextual basis of African theology. Furthermore, his pointing out the distinguishing mark of African evangelical theology as commitment to essential orthodoxy in relation to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith is important; this goes hand in hand with the need to maintain the requisite nature of the Bible for a distinctive and authentic African Christian theology, regardless of whether such a theological endeavour is labelled evangelical or not. This view is buttressed by Nyende (2005:5) who maintains that the place of the Bible as normative and serving as the criterion for what is authentically Christian compels all theologies that would wish to be considered Christian, African theology inclusive, inevitably to come under its scrutiny for validation as Christian theology. This view is not unaware that there are varying opinions and ongoing discussion on the place, the authority and the use of the Bible in African theology[28]. This present research maintains the position that the centrality of the Bible in the African Christian theological endeavour should be sacrosanct.

The task of African Christian theology has been described as understanding Christian theology within the African context and shaping Christian theology within the African world view (Balcomb, 2008:8). This however does not impinge on the vitality and usefulness of such theological reflection beyond the geographical space of such African theologians. This should be

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[27] While Parratt (1997:x) shows approval and welcomes the involvement of 'conservative evangelicals' in addressing issues that give shape to African theology and leading to the publication of the *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, he however deplores extending such categorisations to 'conservative' and 'liberal' which are terms commonly used for categorisation in the West. In his view, such categorisation is unhelpful to the church in Africa. Beyond the question of mere categorisation, my view is that the crucial need for commitment to the essentials of the Christian faith and biblical orthodoxy cannot be overemphasised in the African theological endeavour.

[28] See for example West, G. O., & Dube, M. W. (2000). *The Bible in Africa: transactions, trajectories, and trends*. Leiden, Brill.

the case especially where heed is paid to Bediako (1997:432) who maintained that African theology should bear in mind an overall goal of making specifically African contributions to the theology of the universal church. The significance of the task of African Christian theology becomes more heightened in the face of the spread of Christianity in Africa along with the attendant need to remain faithful to the essentials of the Christian faith. Hastings' (1976:16) observation many decades ago thus rings true today when he notes that, the challenge the African church faces is not that of decline (as obtains in the West); rather, the challenges of the African church

> arise instead from the sheer rapidity of growth, from an almost discordant vitality, from the need and often too the determination to reshape the pattern of Church life and thought learnt from European missionaries, directly or indirectly, to accord with the complex religious and secular needs of African society, while remaining faithful to the essentials of Christian tradition.

This observation being the case in present day Africa makes the task of African theology very pertinent as a vehicle for contributing to the needs of the African society and shaping church life through engaging issues from a theological and biblical perspective. African theology in its task must keep as an important goal the creation of possibilities for the gospel to answer questions raised in the interior of the African worldview while removing 'Western hegemonic structures' to enable a response to the gospel that is indigenous(Ogbu, 2008:11).

For the purpose of this research, the term 'African theology' will be used in reference to African Christian theology that holds to essential orthodoxy in relation to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, thus positioning the research within the evangelical subset of African theology.

2.3 African Christology

"...If Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking what would he look like...?" (Taylor, 1963:16)

2.3.1 African Christology: from the margin to the centre of African thought

Taylor (1963) who lived and worked in Uganda raised the question above which stimulated so much thought and Christological reflection among African theologians. His question has maintained relevance ever since. Without stating the obvious, what Taylor seems to be saying also is that African theologians too (at least at the time) are not sufficiently responding to such a crucial Christological question asked by their fellow Africans.

In the African theological space, the critical nature and importance of the need for clarity on the question of Jesus' identity have been variously expressed by scholars. Mbiti (1971:190) one of the pioneers of modern African theology rightly maintained that theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ in a given time, place or human situation, and therefore, Christian theology ought to be Christology. In a similar vein, Bediako (1983:110), also a prominent African theologian further comments: 'The heart of the encounter of the Good News with our context is Christology; the significance of our faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for our existence in the world'. Though the need had been grasped by African scholars, the concern as expressed by various African theologians was lack of proportionate scholarly response to the identified need(Appiah-Kubi, 1987; Obaje, 1992:47-48; Udoh, 1988:162).

Whereas an engagement with the subject matter of Christology was deemed to have failed to generate considerable interest among scholars between 1960 leading up the early 1980s[29], the concern as expressed by these scholars led to a vibrant engagement with the subject matter of Christology in African theological scholarship in modern times. Noticeable changes in the present scheme of affairs led Oborji (2008:16) to assert that Christology at present is perhaps the

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[29] De Jongh (1996:2) rightly observes that prior to 1970; a glance at available literature revealed that very little existed in the form of written Christology by African theologians.

one aspect of African theology that has received the greatest attention from African theologians. This assertion is similar to a position earlier averred to by Nyamiti, (1998:17) who maintained that, 'there is no doubt that Christology is the subject which has been most developed in today's African theology'. Perhaps, by 'developed', Nyamiti would be right if he is referring to the fact that there is a wide scale engagement with the theme by African scholars at present, causing it to have some shape, as opposed to its former shapeless and almost seeming nonexistent form, in which case African Christology can now be considered 'developed'. This is different from being 'developed' in the sense of completeness without the need for further development. What all of this goes to show as Akper (2007:225) notes is that Christology, which was once at the margins of the African theological discourse, now occupies a central position in contemporary African theology.

2.3.2 African Christology: method and approaches

2.3.2.1 Method of inculturation

Nyamiti (1998:17-39) indentifies African theology of inculturation and African liberation theologies as the two broad bases undergirding approaches adopted by theologians towards Christologising in Africa. In his view, while those from within the African theology of inculturation make an effort to incarnate the Gospel message in the African cultures on a theological level, those from within the liberation perspective make an effort to find Christ in the socio-political situation of the Africans. As he further points out, among inculturation theologians, there are those whose starting point is the biblical teaching about Christ, after which they proceed to find relevant Christological themes from within the African cultural situation; as well as those within the inculturation sub set who take the African cultural background as their point of departure for Christological elaboration. Wanamaker (1997:282) helpfully points out that the approach which employs 'African cultural background' as the point of departure for Christological elaboration in African theology is 'far more commonly employed' than the method that starts from the biblical teaching about Christ; this fact is evident in the ancestor Christology concept which Nyamiti proposes along with others. The concern to contextualise the Christ event in Africa is a shared one between African theology and African Christology, and so

is the methodology that utilises the culture as a point of departure. Wanamaker (1997:282) sees validity in such a method by drawing attention to the fact the early followers of Jesus 'those who shared his human existence and became witnesses to his resurrection, began the process of Christological elaboration by interpreting Jesus in terms of the worldview and themes derived from their own cultural experience'.

2.3.2.2. The Reverse Hermeneutics Method

Mashau and Frederiks (2008: 116) maintain that an identifiable characteristic in the method of doing theology in Africa and other situations of contextual theologies can be termed as 'reversed hermeneutics'. This involves the reversal of the hermeneutical cycle in which case the hermeneutical movement is from the cultural context to the biblical text instead of the other way around. This approach which focuses on the context is also known as contextualisation; and in their contention, this methodology that moves from the African contexts to the text has became the distinctive marker for African theology. Though 'reversed hermeneutics' as explained here cannot be said to be the only method African theologians have utilised in engaging the biblical text, its prevalence cannot be overstated. To assert that 'reverse hermeneutics' is prevalent and evident in African theology on the other hand confirms that Africans are taking their context seriously and are making efforts to respond theologically to Christological questions Africans are asking. However, the importance of biblical exegesis as foundational for methodology and approach in African theology cannot be overemphasised, as Nkansah-Obrempong (2007:143) rightly observes. According to him, for African theology to yield any lasting fruit for the community of faith, there is the need to 'make full use of biblical scholarship—sound biblical exegesis and sound cultural exegesis of the contemporary culture—in constructing a relevant theology and a theology that will not be sterile and bankrupt'. He adds that creative dialogue between African culture and biblical culture must be ongoing. Further appealing to the African proverb that says 'wisdom is not found in one person's head', Nkansah-Obrempong (2007:143) insists that African theology needs to take into account the teachings of the wider Christian

community and also to learn from the traditions of the Christian faith developed over many centuries of Christian history[30].

2.2.2.3. The conceptualisation of Jesus in Traditional African Imagery

Ancestor Christology as an effort at contextualising the Christ event in Africa serves as a bold effort towards answering Christological questions Africans are asking as well as an effort in taking the task of African Christology seriously. The concept exemplifies the 'reversed hermeneutics' method that involves moving from the cultural context to the biblical text as an identifying criterion evident in much of African theology. Though African Christology as the mother ship of ancestor Christology is closely related in origins and background to African theology and is actually a sub-set within African theology, ancestor Christology occupies a unique place within African theology and Christology as we shall see in the section that follows.

2.4 Ancestor Christology

2.4.1 Background and theoretical framework

Ancestor Christology has been identified as a widely accepted paradigm in present day efforts towards contextual Christologising in Africa (Vähäkangas, 1998; Ezigbo, 2008; Loba-Mkole; 2011). Ezigbo (2008:71) particularly asserts that the paradigm is the most influential in contemporary African Christian Christological discourse. In his view, the reason for the

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[30]Tiénou(1990:76) boldly assert that, the 'correctness of indigenous African theologies should be judged by the degree to which they are faithful to the Christian Scripture. According to him, that will make African theologies to have the same reference point as any other Christian theology. He posits: 'If we maintain the double concern of relating the totality of biblical revelation to the totality of the situation of African Christians, African theology will truly become a discipline at the service of the church. It will cease being either a footnote on Western theology or an instance of exotic Christian religious product for musicologists interested in Africa'.

popularity may well be connected with the claim that the cult of the ancestors proffers the best 'theological meeting point' for Christianity and African indigenous religions.[31]

As a concept, ancestor Christology has been necessitated largely by the same factors and concerns that led to the birth of African Christian theology and Christology, which is, the need to contextualise the Christ event among Africans.

Kalu Ogbu (2008:12), a notable African Church historian and theologian asserts that God was in Africa before the missionaries came, and that the missionaries brought the gospel at known points in time and therefore one of the tasks of African theology should be to examine the patterns of the traditioning or appropriation process better described by the term contextualization and incarnation. He however expressed concern that against the backdrop of African deities, ancestors and spirits, how could one understand God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and other Christian doctrines within the African sphere in biblically authentic ways? Ogbu's (2008:12) question though expressed in a fairly modern time reflects a concern which seems to have lingered on the minds of other theologians that are either Africans or non-Africans who were familiar with African cosmology. Taylor (1963:16), whose book, 'The Primal Vision' has been widely acclaimed by Africans and non Africans alike as a classic on the issue of African primal religions, raised a similar question earlier on and expressed similar concerns. For Taylor (1963),the question 'what will Jesus look like'?, or 'what semblance will he take if he is to appear' sums up the question Africans are asking about his identity and smacks of a challenge for African theologians to take more seriously the need to respond appropriately to questions that their fellow Africans are asking about Jesus' identity. Taking the challenge to respond to inadequate Christology in Africa and the need to present the Christ that would be an answer to

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[31] Ezigbo (2008:72) makes this assertion following Caritas McCarthy, "Christology from a Contemporary Perspective," in Pluralism and Oppression: Theology in World Perspective, vol. 34, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Langham: United Press of America, 1991), 34. And also R. Moloney, African Christology," Theological Studies 48, no. 3 (1987):509. Wanamaker (1997:281) also demonstrates that belief and practices related to ancestors are supposedly at the core of African traditional religions that predates Christianity in South Africa and the rest of Africa, and adds in concurrence with Pauw (1975:140-144) that "the vast majority of Xhosa Christians still accept that their ancestors can and do influence their lives". This explains why the ancestor concept has been very usable in Africa.

the questions being asked in Africa led to the construction of varying concepts and models of Christology, among which ancestor Christology occupies a central place. As earlier noted, various reasons account for placing the ancestor concept in a position of prominence in contemporary Christological discussion especially in Africa. Chief among those reasons is the fact that ancestral belief and practices in varying forms and degrees occupy a place in the socio-religious thought of many people in present day Africa. Secondly, ancestry and kinship which serve as the core framework upon which ancestor Christology is built are traditional ethical value-beliefs that resonate deeply across the African landscape. Discussion centred on ancestors would seem to have an easy familiarity to most Africans. In the African worldview[32], the existence of God as the supreme deity and the world of spirits/ancestors are hardly questioned; they are rather taken for granted. The prevalent cultural understanding of reality is a world in which there is God who is transcendent and far removed, followed by a world of the spirit ancestors who mediate between God and humans. The spirit/ancestors are themselves approached in most cases by means of some ritual or through other human intermediaries as the diagram below illustrate:

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[32]See Metuh, E. I. (1999). Comparative studies of African traditional religions. Nigeria, IMICO Books.

Fig. 1: an illustration of traditional African cosmological framework

A number of implications stem from the reasoning the above illustration exemplifies. A major implication is that, whereas there is an overlapping relatedness between human beings, human intermediaries and the spirit ancestors, there is no such overlapping relatedness with the transcendent God. Consequently, while a person in the lowest category of the illustration can ascend to be a human intermediary or spirit/ancestor, the possibility of ascending further and becoming the transcendent God does not exist. This compels the question as to how then can Jesus be conceptualised and categorised as ancestor and yet be transported adequately into the category of the transcendent God? Some theologians who advocate the ancestor Christology concept such as Bujo (1992) seem to have envisaged such a difficulty and have suggested placing Jesus in an ancestral category of his own as the 'proto-ancestor'. This however does not

adequately answer to the difficulty or successfully put the question to rest. We shall return to this important question at a later point. A more focused analysis of the views of major proponents of the concept will be necessary for our analysis to be informed and grounded, in order to enable us properly to engage with this and other related questions that may arise.

2.4.2 Key proponents of ancestor Christology and their emphases

Over four decades have come and gone since the African theologian Mbiti (1967) stated categorically that 'African Christological concepts do not exist,'[33] the tide has definitely changed as he also admitted shortly after and even advocated that theology ought to be Christology (Mbiti, 1971:190). Ancestor Christology as a concept appears to be a major contribution by African theologians to address the dearth of Christological reflection and conceptualisation in Africa. Before the proliferation of the concept, Christological reflection was not altogether nonexistent, but as pointed out earlier[34], it did not fall within key issues that African theologians were responding to in their theologising.

Though some variations in perceptions and praxis relating to ancestors and kinsmen are possible from place to place in Africa, the belief in and regards for ancestors is widely held in Africa. It is this shared belief that theologians have utilised in formulating the ancestor paradigm which is acclaimed to have gained popularity with African theologians today (Vähäkangas, 1998; Ezeigbo, 2008; Loba-Mkole, 2011). As illustrated above, the world view of Africans generally accommodates God, spirits and ancestors and it is therefore understandable that the point of departure in the formulation of the ancestor Christological paradigm is the general African traditional concept of kinship and ancestry as Banda (2005:11) also observes.

A number of African theologians have made major contributions to the trend of thought and the conceptualisation of Christ as ancestor. These include John S. Pobee (1979, Ghana, West Africa), Charles Nyamiti (1984, Tanzania, East Africa), Benezet Bujo (1992, Central Africa),

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[33] In one of Mbiti's earliest essays on African Christology, titled "Some African Concepts of Christology," and later published in *Christ and the Younger Churches,* ed. G. Vicedom (London: S.P.C.K., 1972) 51-62, at 51.

[34] See 2.3.1 above: "African Christology from the margin to the centre"

and Kwame Bediako (2004, Ghana, West Africa). Wanamaker (1997, South Africa) also makes a contribution to the discussion from a South African perspective. Peter Nyende (2005, 2007), a Kenyan New Testament scholar represents a unique and recent engagement with the concept; unique in the sense that he engages the concept from a biblical exegetical perspective of Hebrews. Similarly, Edison Kalengyo (2009), an Anglican New Testament professor at the Ugandan Christian University also makes an important contribution to an aspect of the concept that relates to ancestors through an interpretation of Hebrews 12:1. What now follows is an examination of these key authors and their particular contributions.

2.4.2.1 Pobee, (1979) (Great & greatest ancestor)

John S. Pobee's (1979) 'Toward an African Theology' with a focused Chapter on Christology is arguably the earliest published work on the concept; certainly the earliest most publicised. After an engaging comparison on the similarity between Jesus humanity and how it relates to familial lineage particularly in the thought forms of his Akan tribal understanding, Pobee (1979:94) consequently proposes speaking of Jesus as 'the great and greatest Ancestor' known in his Akan language as 'Nana'. Pobee (1979:94) was however quick to point out that, 'Even if Jesus is Nana like the other illustrious ancestors, he is a *nonpareil*[35] of a judge; he is superior to the other ancestors by virtue of being close to God and as God'. As Nana, Pobee further adjoin that, Jesus 'has authority not only over the world of men, but also of all spirit beings, namely the cosmic powers and the ancestors'. What Pobee envisages and seeks to address immediately after proposing the 'great and greatest ancestor' paradigm hinges on Jesus' divinity. Pobee seems aware that the ancestors are essentially humans who become spirit ancestors by reason of death. They are by no means mixed up with the transcendent supreme God. They rather mediate between the transcendent God and the people. The realisation of this difficulty moves Pobee to therefore attempts to place Jesus in a distinct divine category as God, even though an ancestor. What he succeeds in doing is to present a template that shows the difficulty involved in

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[35]Eminent beyond or above comparison

contextualising in cultural categories as well as the inherent tension and danger of 'humanising' Jesus at the expense of his divinity.

Pobee (1979:82) also emphasises the need to keep the Bible at the centre of the African theological endeavour and insists that the cross, the humanity and divinity of Christ are essential to Christologising and are not negotiable. However, what is noticeable is that in his approach, the starting point was not the Bible; Rather, as a deliberate step in moving away from what he terms the Greco-Roman culture that engenders 'the tendency to discuss Christology in metaphysical terms' Pobee (1979:82) takes the Akan traditional worldview, particularly Akan proverbs, as his starting point instead of the Bible. How much he succeeds in squaring his proposition with the need to maintain Jesus' divinity remains questionable. Admittedly, Pobee (1979: 97) concedes that 'every image is bound to be partial and half truth'. Of course this must not be seen as a call for stopping Christological conceptualising but rather a cautious expression of the continuing need for elaboration and critical evaluation of such concepts.

2.4.2.2 Bediako (1980, 2004) (ancestor & sole mediator)

Pobee's (1979) grounding of his proposition on the basis of Akan proverbs have been deemed insufficient and called into question by Bediako (1980:236), who is a fellow Ghanaian with Pobee. In Bediako's view, he doubts whether Akan 'wisdom literature' on its own, gives an adequate account of the Akan world-view and is enough to be the basis of the attempt to cast essential Christianity into its African categories and thought-forms. What Bediako questions essentially is not the validity or accuracy of the concept *perse*, but the basis of it.

Bediako (2004:24) charges that approaching the question through 'Akan' proverbs instead of Scripture 'does not deal sufficiently with the religious nature of the question and underestimates the potential for conflict'. As far as relating Jesus to the ancestors is concerned, Bediako (2004:22-24) agrees with Pobee by maintaining that, it is important to relate Jesus to the ancestors for a number of reasons: firstly, the powerful ways the ancestors are known to operate and the important role they are believed to play positively or negatively in relation to the wellbeing of individuals and the community is significant; and secondly, the fact that presenting

Jesus in ancestral terms answers to the question of familial relationship that Africans would naturally ask if the Jesus they are presented with does not have a link or belong to their clan, family, tribe and nation. As Olsen (1997:263) rightly noted, Bediako's concern is not so much with the usage and accuracy of the ancestor concept; rather, his concern remains that the undergirding foundation for the concept should be 'Biblical revelation and Christian experience'. In asserting this, Bediako opens the door for biblical necessity more widely than Pobee and reinforces the crucial place the Bible need to occupy in other to keep the Christological reflection rooted both in the Bible and also in the African culture proportionally. Essentially, Bediako (2004:23) points towards an African Christology that bases its reflection in the Bible while critically engaging the culture. This in his view needs to happen as a conscious move away from the Gospel that was presented in a way totally 'unrelated to traditional religious piety'. Bediako (2004: 23) persuasively shows what results where there is no appropriate engagement between Gospel and African culture:

As a result, many people are uncertain about how the Jesus preached by the church saves them from the terrors and the fears that they experience in their traditional world-view. This shows how important it is to relate Christian understanding to the realm of the ancestors. If this is not done, many African Christians will continue to be men and women 'living in two levels', half African and half European, but not belonging properly to either. We need to meet God in the Lord Jesus Christ speaking immediately to us in our particular circumstances, in a way that assures us that we can be authentic Africans and true Christians.

On the grounds of a theological reflection on a number of biblical passages such as Heb. 1:1, 3; 2:11, 14-15; 7:14, 16; 8:6, 4; 9:12, 24; 10:19-20, 27; 12:22-24, Bediako (2004:25-28) who fondly referred to Hebrews as 'our Epistle', goes ahead to propose speaking of Jesus as 'Ancestor and sole mediator'. Though Bediako did not approach those passages exegetically to buttress his assertion, he claims to have utilised the theological pattern used by the author of Hebrews who according to him, though the prevailing tradition would consider Jesus as an outsider to the priesthood, the author was able successfully and convincingly to present Christ as the high priest of the order of Melchizedek; thereby using familiar categories of revered status to explicate the

person of Jesus and the need and importance of paying heed to him. Following the author of Hebrews, Bediako (2004:28) then demonstrates that 'sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestral function' which are a traditional heritage of Africans create the necessary platform to appropriate the teaching and theological pattern of the author of Hebrews because 'in relation to each of these features of our religious heritage, Hebrews shows Jesus to be the answer to the spiritual longing and aspiration that our people sought to meet through our traditions'. It becomes clear that Bediako labours to ground his reflection in the Bible though maintaining the ancestor-mediator category.

In trying to understand Bediako, a number of questions arise. Even though he admits that 'ancestral function' is one aspect that Jesus rarely fits into in the African context and that ancestors are in fact 'the product of the myth-making imagination of the community' (Bediako, 2004:30), one however, fails to see why Bediako did not follow through with the author of Hebrews to find a conceptualisation for Jesus that would be more suitable to the African context since Jesus did not fit into the 'ancestral function' of the African context. In addition, would categorising Jesus as ancestor not inadvertently perpetuate the feeding of the so called 'myth making imagination of the community'?

Bediako (2004:29) highlights the fact of Jesus' divine origin as the marker for the surpassing worth of His priestly mediation, and calls for an end of any other form of priestly mediation, he also persuasively grounds his conceptualising of Jesus as the 'ancestor and sole mediator' in a theological reflection on the Bible, especially the Epistle to the Hebrews. However, he does not satisfactorily justify utilising the ancestor category, especially from an exegetical point of view of Hebrews. Neither did he address further the possible consequence of conceptualising Jesus in ancestor terms into a world-view that have already been very deep in the belief of the mediation of various priests and ancestors. Would his conceptualising of Jesus as 'God's son and sole mediator' as opposed to 'ancestor and sole mediator' be more reflective of the thinking of the author of Hebrews on the one hand and answering to the need for familiar terms in the African context on the other? One also wonders if other African theologians agree with Bediako in consigning the ancestors to the realm of myth. We must respond to these questions through

progressively studying other African theologians who have espoused the ancestor concept from different perspectives.

2.4.2.3 Nyamiti, (1984) (Brother Ancestor)

Nyamiti's contribution to African Christology and ancestor Christology in particular has been well recognized as extensive and far-reaching in its ramifications; for some, his treatment of the concept constitutes a unique contribution to African Christology (Olsen, 1997; Vähäkangas, 1998; Loba-Mkole, 2000). Even though he admits to not being the first person to conceptualise Christ in ancestor categories[36], none the less, the uniqueness of his contribution lies in the fact that his treatment of the subject has been sustained and varied.[37] Nyamiti's major effort in conceptualising Christ as an ancestor is in his 1984 book, *Christ as our ancestor.* Though he has continuously elaborated on the concept ever since, his 1984 title epitomises the crux of his conceptualisation of the paradigm. He based his conceptualization on the African traditional concept of the brother-ancestor. He defines the brother ancestor as 'a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of who he is a mediator to God, archetype of behaviour and with whom-thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death-he is entitled to have regular sacred communication' (1984:23).

Unlike Bediako (2004), Nyamiti does not consign the ancestors to the realm of myth; rather, he takes the cult of the ancestors seriously enough to build upon it not only his Christology, but his ecclesiology as well. He views the ancestors as not only having a continuing relationship with the existing relatives but also as having supernatural status acquired through death. He explains their supernatural status as including 'super-human powers and nearness to God' which enables the ancestor among other things to mediate between God and the earthly relatives (Nyamiti,

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[36] See Nyamiti, 1984:8-10 *Christ as our Ancestor.*

[37] Nearly three decades after his major publication on the subject, Nyamiti continues to elaborate on the ancestor concept as his most recent publications show: Nyamiti, C. (2005). *Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: methodological and Trinitarian foundations*; Nyamiti, C. (2006). *Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: an essay on African Christology.*

1984:15). Even though he explains that his brother-ancestorship concept is grounded on the social constitution of man, he nevertheless relates his understating of an ancestor to the African belief that '...the deceased individual perdures even after his death,...and supernatural communication between the living and their dead kin is the normal consequence of this sort of relationship' (1984:17).

He elaborates on his definition of the brother-ancestor definition by pointing out that, filial relationship through a common progenitor, as well as the capacity to mediate between God and the living descendants are important qualifications which an ancestor must poses, all of which are qualifications Christ possess. According to his elaboration, we share a common progenitor as a result of God being the parent-ancestor who begets Christ with whom we have a filial connection through grace and the incarnation. Also, by reason of death, Jesus has acquired that supernatural status which enables him as an ancestor to mediate between God and man. It is on such a basis that according to Nyamiti, Christ can be considered our brother-ancestor.

Nyamiti (1984:27) brings Jesus' ancestorship closer to the African race and beyond by asserting that Jesus descended from Adam in his humanity, and since we share the same origin in Adam, it enables Jesus' ancestorship to transcend all family, tribe, clan and racial limitations. Jesus' Adamic human origin has, according to Nyamiti, enabled Jesus' ancestorship to expand to all human races that originated from Adam. Essentially, Nyamiti builds the concept on the basis of 'the Christian belief in the common origin of all men in Adam' by which Christ assumed our humanity thus establishing Christ as Brother-Ancestor. This, he contends, is found in following the teaching of the Early Church Fathers that maintained that 'what Christ did not assume, He did not save'. Nyamiti (1984:31-32) posits further that, beyond just being a Brother-Ancestor due to common descent from Adam, if viewed from a Trinitarian perspective, Christ is God-man whose ancestorship is rooted in the Trinity. What this means in his proposition is that both

Christ's divine sonship in the Trinity and assumed humanity in Adam forms the comprehensive grounds for his ancestorship[38].

By rooting Jesus' divine ancestorship in the Trinity, Nyamiti seems to be pre-empting any possible charge that his articulation of the question is oblivious to the divinity of Jesus. The view of this researcher, however, is that by placing Jesus side by side with the ancestors, the argument detracts from the fullness of the deity of Jesus, rather than exalting it. Furthermore, what he does in bringing the discussion into the sphere of Trinitarian perspective actually counters what he had set out to do in the first place. Instead of explicating the identity of Jesus in concrete terms using identifiable metaphors in African thought categories, Nyamiti inadvertently moves the discussion into speculative categories. The point being made here is not to say that Nyamiti's intended African audience cannot grasp his permutations; but rather that, what he seeks to do take the subject back into the unfamiliar terrain from which he had hoped to free the interpretation of the person of Jesus from. While his conceptualisation is without a doubt, innovative and has served as a key contribution to African contextual Christological reflection, one fails to see a focused biblical or exegetical basis for his articulation. Even though the Roman Catholic theological framework from which Nyamiti writes may not necessarily see the relevance of some of these questions, the fact that the concept finds advocates in the wider non- Roman Catholic African theology circle[39] provides a validation for asking these question from an evangelical African theology framework.

Nyamiti's rooting of the ancestor Christology concept in Trinitarian thinking also presents a methodological standpoint on which Bujo (1992) disagrees with him, which again highlights the difficulty of conceptualising Jesus in ancestor categories.

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[38] Nyamiti has taken this Trinitarian ancestor Christology thought further in his most recent published work in two volumes: Nyamiti, C. 2005. *Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian foundations*. Nairobi, CUEA Publications. Vol. 1 and also, Nyamiti, C. 2006. *Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: an essay on African Christology*. Nairobi, CUEA Publications. Vol.2

[39] See for example among key proponents of the concept; Kwame Bediako, who is an ordained Presbyterian minister: http://www.dacb.org/stories/ghana/bediako_kwame.html and Samuel Pobee an Anglican priest: http://www.africanbookscollective.com/authors-editors/john-samuel-pobee. Accessed 05 August 2013.

2.4.2.4 Bujo, (1992) (Proto ancestor)

> In which way can Jesus Christ be an African among the Africans according to
> their own religious experience? (Bujo, 1992:12)

Bujo's question above reflects his driving concern. Though Nyamiti evidences interaction with Bujo's thoughts in the form of an article before Nyamiti's publication in 1984, Bujo's publication in English only appeared in1992. In Bujo's perspective, the fact that Christianity did not grow in a culture-free vacuum from its early days and has always been in a living dialogue with the surrounding culture makes it imperative for African theology to engage African culture in Christologising. He therefore retains African ancestral beliefs and practices as the point of departure for his Christology. This he does considering the central nature of ancestral beliefs in Africa.

Bujo (1992:18-20) emphasises that in the greater part of African knowledge and understanding, God is connected with life and life-giving and is indeed considered as the ultimate life-giver. He explains that in Africa's concept of life which is a participation in God as the life-giver, there exists a 'hierarchical ordering' in the invisible realms through which the transmission of life occurs. Essentially then, there exists in Bujo's view, a mediation at different levels of life transmission in the hierarchical order. This, according to him is where the ancestors fit in as an important link in the transmission of 'life force'. In his view the ancestors in the 'mystical society' posses the 'inalienable responsibility for protecting and prolonging the life of the community in all its aspects'. This view leads him to posit that 'communion with the ancestors has both an eschatological and a salvation dimension'. He therefore notes that good health, numerous progeny, healthy cattle and abundant crops are all signs of the presence and the blessing of the ancestors (Bujo, 1992:22-25).

Having established the important place the ancestors occupy, Bujo proceeds to name Jesus as the *Proto-ancestor.* He clarifies that the term 'ancestor' is only in an analogical sense and not to speak of Jesus as one of the founding ancestors. According to him, Jesus 'infinitely transcended that ideal (of the god-fearing ancestors) and brought it to a new completion' thus making him the

unique ancestor who is the source of life and the highest model of ancestorship. Bujo however maintains that 'the title of proto ancestor is not just a superficial whimsical conformity with the fashion of the day' neither is it a label corresponding to nothing in reality (1992:80-82).In other words, though Bujo speaks of Jesus as an ancestor in an analogical sense, the term itself represents a concrete reality in the life and experience of the Africans. Again, Bujo in concurrence with Nyamiti here differs with Bediako on his view of ancestors. Bujo's assertion that ancestors are a concrete reality, his attributing to them 'inalienable responsibility for protecting and prolonging the life of the community in all its aspects' and his ascribing to them the power to bestow existential blessings of health and wellbeing elevates the status of the ancestors beyond the level where Bujo actually envisages. The ancestors, by performing the functions Bujo assigns to them, are engaged in a God-like kind of activity and should be considered as God by their benefactors. This is because life and life-giving (resulting in wellbeing) constitute activities which fall within the divine prerogative of God. Though Bujo clearly ascribes the source of life to God as 'founder-ancestor' from whom the 'life-force' flows down, and may therefore insist that the ancestors in carrying out the aforementioned functions are only mediating, his failure to designate such crucial life-giving functions to the unique mediatorial work of Jesus still leaves room for the question of whom to look to or call upon where such a need exists in the community. Should the African call to God to meet those needs through the mediation of his son Jesus, or through the mediation of the ancestors? Put in another way, where such a need exists, should Africans call upon Jesus, or the ancestors, or both? We will have to look at these concerns more closely in a later Chapter that will specifically focus on evaluating the concept through engaging the questions and the concerns the concept raises. What emerges and needs to be noted at this point is that though Bujo speaks of a hierarchy between God and the ancestors, he speaks of and places them at the same level functionally thereby giving room for confusion of identity between Jesus and the ancestors.

Bujo (1992:83-85) argues persuasively that Jesus as proto-ancestor makes more sense and is more understandable to Africans than Jesus as *Logos* or *Kurie*. He maintains that, because such conceptions come from a culture far removed and not fully understandable to the Africans, 'African sensitivity is not in touch with them'. He however maintains that in Christologising

ancestrally, clear emphasis must be laid on the essence that 'the legitimate yearnings of the African ancestors are not only taken up in Jesus Christ, but are also transcended in Him' thus making Jesus the 'proto-Ancestor'.

Bujo accuses some of not making precise differentiation about their use of the ancestor terminology. He specifically charges Nyamiti with 'imprecision in terminology' which according to him could lead to 'terminological confusion'. Also Bujo disagrees with Nyamiti's methodology and insists that Nyamiti seems to fashion his African theology on the model of European speculative tradition. He therefore posits with regard to Nyamiti that, 'it is impossible to avoid the impression that Nyamiti simply wants to rebuild the scholastic or neo-scholastic, edifice, but using African rather than scholastic or neo-scholastic terminologies' (Bujo, 1992:67-68). Though Bujo and Nyamiti are both agreed in utilising the African ancestor concept for Christologising, they differ in methodology and their articulation of the extent of Jesus' uniqueness in their Christologies, and neither has given enough evidence of maintaining an unambiguous placement of Jesus alongside the ancestors in mediatory function. As Illo (2006:97) helpfully points out further, Bujo as well as Nyamiti also share a major limitation in the insufficiency of the biblical evidence in their Christological construction.

2.4.2.4 Nyende, (2005), (Jesus the greatest ancestor)

Peter Nyende (2005) approaches the question of ancestor Christology through a 'typology-based theological interpretation' of Hebrews. Nyende makes the point that mediatorial Christology is at the heart of Hebrews. According to him, the author presents the mediation of prophets and angels alongside Jesus and posits Jesus' mediation to be superior. He makes a strong case for the existence of typology[40] in the Epistle and then proceeds to show the existence of such typology between Jesus and angels, Jesus and Moses and the Aaronic high priests (Nyende, 2005:149-162).

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[40] Nyende (2005:149; 164) explains typology as the correspondence of an Old Testament personage on one hand with Christ on the other. Though not absolute, it can be an analogy, a contrast or an objectified prophecy. He also adds that there are some New Testament texts that are themselves typological interpretations of the Old Testament.

The point he arrives at is that, in Hebrews, 'Jesus is the mediator *per excellence* or a definitive mediator'. Nyende demonstrates the parallelism between the initial context of Hebrews and the contemporary African one and on that basis transfers the mediator *per excellence* idea in Hebrews into the African context. This gives rise to Nyende's proposition of Jesus as the greatest ancestor for Africans. He points out that, ontologically, Jesus' identity as God's Son who lives eternally, unlike the ancestors who are the sons of the community that live and die (whose memory is also forgotten eventually) makes him greater than they. Also, Jesus' greater closeness to God than that of the ancestors as well as the redemptive quality[41] of his mediation makes him the greatest (2007:211-217).

On the place and nature of ancestors in Africa, Nyende (2007:370) taking into cognizance Young, (1950:38) postulates that it is futile to understand the indigenous ideas about God in Africa without going through the path occupied by ancestors. He maintains that in trying to understand who the ancestors are in Africa, 'one encounter a plethora of beliefs in and rituals concerning them that converge in some ways but also diverge and are in tension in other ways'. This position is the same as that of Nyamiti (2005:65) who contends that though ancestral beliefs and practices cannot be said to be found necessarily in the same pattern in all traditional African societies, they are definitely found in many. Nyende (2007:371-374) therefore describes ancestors generally as those who were once humans but are now the spirits of the departed who are 'understood to have close relationship with the living; pervasively influencing their affairs by, depending on their conduct, helping or punishing'. Nyende's concluding point about the ancestors is that they along with other spiritual beings can be understood to function as mediators of the ultimate deity.

A major concession Nyende (2007:374) makes is that there still exist a vagueness among some African people about who the ancestors are and how they relate to the supreme deity since prayers are often addressed to the ancestors themselves. This acknowledgment is a key concern

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[41] Nyende (2007:217) mentions the quality of Jesus mediation citing redemption in passing only. Even though the redemptive nature of Jesus' mediatorial sacrifice is a key idea in Hebrews that arguably sets Jesus apart and beyond comparison, one wonders why Nyende's articulation did not capture such a key concept.

of this research as noted earlier. Insufficient attention to this concern has however remained a deficiency that is identical in the ancestor Christology constructions under review. Though Nyende mentions it, he does not consider it as a point so important as to affect his construction; neither does it warrant his extended treatment of the danger of divided allegiance that lurks in the idea. Rather, Nyende goes on to submit that based on the typology he had argued for in Hebrews, 'ancestors are a type of Christ and conversely, Jesus an antitype of ancestors'. On the basis of such a typology, Jesus can be termed the definitive mediator, or the greatest ancestor on the basis of some similarities with ancestor in mediation but greater than the ancestors based on some contrasts (Nyende, 2005:201-202). Though Nyende proceeds to show some ontological and functional difference between Jesus and the ancestors[42], he proceeds to make a strong case for maintaining the ancestors as part of 'African Christian consciousnesses' instead of demonising or being indifferent to them (Nyende, 2005: 229). However, he proceeds on the same count to make a call for the displacement of ancestors in African Christianity since Jesus as the type displaces the antitype; without rejecting them as evil but rather 'giving them subordinate value in African Christianity as part of an African Christian consciousness' (Nyende 2005:230-232).

Though Nyende's painstaking approach is commendable and shows a sustained engagement through a meticulous theological engagement with the text of Hebrews and its key theological ideas, Nyende's concluding thoughts exemplify the difficult and confusing nature of ancestor Christologising that exists among some African scholars as noted earlier. Nyende calls for the maintenance of the ancestors in African Christian consciousness today and calls also for their displacement with the arrival of Jesus as the fullness of what they only pointed to in their mediation. Even though Nyende is clear that consultation of the ancestors for their mediation must cease (Nyende, 2005:234), he falls short of demonstrating how holding to such a consciousness for an African Christian can be effectively divorced from the practice of seeking their mediation. This is more so when one considers the functions attributed to the ancestors and the detailed elaboration of such functions that seems to showcase their value. An equally detailed

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[42] Nyende in (2005:211-217) elaborates more on how Jesus differs from the ancestors.

elaboration (or more) of Jesus' identity and how he uniquely fulfils and transcends those functions attributed to the ancestors in Hebrews does not sufficiently emerge.

As noted in the earlier part of this research, a major contemporary situation among African Christians is the real danger of divided loyalty due to inadequate Christology. It is this danger that Hebrews has great potential of addressing. In Nyende's postulation however, he fails to give adequate attention to the danger of divided loyalty between Christ and the ancestor that could easily result from his postulation. Positive outlook on the African ancestor cult continues to be affirmed in contemporary African theological dialogue without paying adequate attention to these concerns. The consideration of a recent African interpretation of Hebrews 12 by Kalengyo (2009:51) will help to drive this point further.

2.4.2.6 Kalengyo (2009), (Cloud of witnesses)

In an interpretation of Hebrews 12 titled 'Cloud of witnesses', Kalengyo (2009:50-51) commenting from the perspective of the Ganda tribe of Uganda maintains that 'majority of Ganda Christians still hold strong beliefs in the ancestors and such must not be condemned as pagan'. According to him, this is so because Hebrews 12:1 parallels an acknowledgement of the active role of the ancestors in the life of the living. He links Hebrews 12:1 to Hebrews 11 and concludes that 'the cloud of witnesses' in 12:1 refers to the ancestral heroes of faith listed in Hebrews Chapter 11. Relying on Rienecker and Rogers (1980:713) as well as Lane (1991:407-411), he therefore postulated that 'the heroes of faith are like a crowd towering above the competitors. The picture of a cloud describing a crowded group of people is a common classical figure and expresses not only the great number of people, but also the unity of the crowd in their witness'. In his description of an ancestor especially among the Ganda, he states that ancestors are the spirit of the departed known as the 'muzimu' or 'the living dead' who are thought to be both benevolent and malevolent. Kalengyo (2009:9) maintains that in their daily life today, 'the Ganda are so inextricably linked with the ancestors that any attempt to deny them a relationship with the ancestors is tantamount to denying them life itself'. This is so according to him because 'the individual, family and clan cannot exist apart from the goodwill and continual support from the ancestors'. Kalengyo (2009:51) makes the point that the ancestors essentially play an

inspirational role in the life of the living and he interprets Hebrews 12:1 as indicating a towering and possibly cheering crowd of ancestors over the living as competitors. A close reading of Kalengyo however reveals that, beyond just inspiring the living, Kalengyo attributes mediation and existential sustenance as a function to the ancestors. In other words, the ancestors function as intermediaries between the living and the divine and are also necessary for the continual existence of life since according to him, 'the individual, family, and clan cannot exist apart from the goodwill and continual support from the ancestors'. This is not an entirely different argument from those examined previously. This position reflects the contemporary reasoning of African scholars who advocate a positive outlook on the ancestors without sufficient exegetical substantiation or due diligence in considering the consequences of such an assertion.

Kalengyo's interpretation raises a number of questions. Given that Hebrews 11 and 12 is a reference to some biblical ancestral figures, does the same Scripture also point to actions and practices of libations and sacrifices in communing with those biblical ancestors as advocated by Kalengyo? If indeed the ancestors in Hebrews 11 and 12 are to serve as models to inspire the living towards faith and perseverance, does the Scripture show them as serving beyond inspirational models to mediating between the living God and their descendants after their earthly sojourn? Furthermore, does the ordinary African who holds to the belief in ancestors normally know where to draw the line between respectful veneration and worshipful reverence and supplication to the ancestors which is often the case in practice? This is not forgetting the fact that in most of such African societies, the ancestors are feared for their malignity even more than the supreme deity. Moreover, Nürnberger (2007:88) particularly argues against interpreting Hebrews 12:1 in the way Kalengyo does. According to him, 'They are not witnesses in the sense that they are now hovering around us in some way, watching what we are doing'. Rather it is what they did by faith in the past that is to serve as a witness to us in our present afflictions. And concerning what the ancestors listed in Hebrews 11 did, 'We have access to this witness not through dreams, ecstasy, divination or special revelations, but through perusing the historical records of the Scriptures'. Nürnberger's view highlights important points that we will need to address in a later Chapter dedicated to evaluation.

2.5 African ancestor Christology (AAC): contribution to African contextual Christology

The critical analysis of the AAC concept is not to disparage the contribution of this Christological effort. The fact that theology does not happen in a vacuum has been well noted by Kärkkäinen (2003:289), who maintains that theologies are all conditioned by their social, psychological and intellectual environments. Therefore, contextual Christologies such as ancestor Christology indicate a significant contribution towards making Jesus at home among Africans. The efforts as Kärkkäinen (2003:289) notes, 'not only add to the mosaic of Christological traditions and so speak to varying needs and desires, but also have the potential to correct one-sided classical Western views. They have also helped classical theology to acknowledge its own dependence on context'. It is therefore appropriate to highlight some more specific areas the contribution that conceptualising Jesus in the ancestor category makes.

2.5.1 The concept takes the African culture seriously

The presentation of Jesus in ancestor categories attempts a theological conception that fills the vacuum that existed; and does this in a way that is culturally meaningful. This cultural awareness that the ancestor concept displays is what gives relevance to the proposition. Because, a relevant Christology for Africa as Mbogu (1991:224) notes, must take seriously Africa's cultural, socio-political and religious dimensions, which the AAC does. Those are the elements which give meaning and relevance to the concept. As Mugabe (1991:351) argues, contextualising Christ in Africa as the AAC does should be taken seriously because it shows that Africans are speaking for themselves in ways that express issues that are relevant and meaningful to them and their situations. Mugabe's observation shows an eagerness which reflects the post colonial atmosphere in which Africans expect to be taken seriously when they speak for themselves in the sphere of theology as well as in other areas.

Bujo (1992:83), for instance, maintains that designating Jesus as ancestor or proto-ancestor as he does, -if translated properly and understood in the African context- will have much more meaning and relevance to Africans than Christological titles such as *Logos* and *Kyrios.* As he

further points out, if Jesus is presented only in the *Logos* and *Kurie* categories, for instance, such a presentation has the possibility of being incapable of connecting with the cultural sensitivity of the Africans and may not be taken seriously. His contention, following Edward Schillebeeckx, is that even the Early Church Fathers called Jesus "the new Orpheus" as a way of meaningfully connecting with the cultural awareness of the people who were then living in a Greek cultural and religious milieu.

Bujo's insistence is not without merit because whereas the *Logos* (word) may fail to find a connecting relevance and *Kurie* (Lord) may even evoke notions of subjugation that track Africa's chequered colonial history negatively, *ancestor* on the other hand connects to a very relevant aspect of African thought and life and has a possibility of relevance. As we have noticed earlier, the author of Hebrews can also be said to have also utilised the approach of a culturally relevant Christology when he presented Jesus as a unique high priest mediator; this is in spite of the fact that Jesus was not from a natural descendant of the priesthood. The author of Hebrews likened Jesus to the High Priest Melchizedek who had neither father nor mother. The Melchizedek analogy was such that the recipients could grasp and accommodate it. The author of Hebrews also utilised esteemed ancestors within the religious and historical context of his recipients to elaborate Jesus' divine identity and uniqueness. We must add here however that, when the author of Hebrews recognises the cultural relevance of bringing in some esteemed ancestors of his recipients into the discussion of Jesus' identity; he makes sure that in the concluding part of the *exordium*, he points out that, even though those important ancestor figures were brought into the discussion including angels, Jesus was greater or so much better (τοσούτῳ κρείττων) than those ancestors and the angels.

Even though there are variations in the way ancestors are perceived in Africa, the fact is that ancestorship touches on community and consanguinity which are key touch stones in African life. What the ancestor concept does, therefore, is to utilise those critical aspects of the African cultural system and understanding to place Christianity within a space where it can be perceived positively. This concept therefore sets Christianity on a path to be understood and comprehended by Africans since it takes seriously those cultural beliefs which are important to them. This fact

takes on more significance when one considers the charge against earlier missionary efforts into Africa, which have been blamed for cultural insensitivity and presenting the Gospel in a manner unconnected to African 'traditional religious piety' (Bediako, 2004:23)[43].

In presenting Jesus as ancestor, Nwuzor (1997:39) sees a validity in utilising the concept to discuss Jesus' identity, especially where Jesus is presented as the one who 'possesses precisely those qualities and virtues which Africans like to attribute to their ancestors and which lead them to invoke the ancestors in their daily lives'. The concept in that sense creates an interfacing possibility whereby Africans can concretely engage with the person of Jesus with as much reverence as they have for the ancestors.

Though this research has indicated the danger of the ambiguity that exists in placing Jesus alongside the ancestors and will say more about that shortly, it does acknowledge the value that could be found and the possibilities that exist where Jesus is presented as ancestor, especially as possessing and excelling in the qualities and virtues for which ancestors are invoked. This could be a valid starting point of engagement and interface about Christ and his Gospel, for which the concept has a promising usefulness; however what could make a further difference is the direction the interface takes from that initial point onwards as far as maintaining the mentioned distinction is concerned[44].

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[43] See also Parratt's (1997:3-4) observations where he enumerated 'the shortcomings of Western Missionary Christianity' in the effort to bring the gospel to Africa. Among other charges, he points to the devaluation of African culture and the dismissal of traditional African religion as heathen.

[44] The following warning by Tiénou's (1991:75) is worth paying heed to: 'In the process of taking seriously the so-called African traditional culture, however, some of these authors appear at times to be more apologists for non-Christian theology and religion. One can respond, of course, that a degree of that is inevitable, since Westerners, in the past, tended to ascribe little value to African culture and religion. But one does not normally think that the Christian theologian's calling is to rehabilitate the "pagan" religious past'.

2.5.2 The concept as foundational for African ethics

Another avenue the ancestor Christology concept opens up has been noted by Nwuzor (1997:44-45) who explains that presenting Jesus as ancestor does not only portray him as a source of life but also as a model for his lineage. What this could lead to is that if the concept succeeds in portraying Jesus as a model for his lineage, it is then possible to set that as the foundation for African ethics and moral theology based on Christ as the model ancestor. In this new perspective, Nwuzor (1997:45) notes, Christ becomes the constitutive principle of African Christian ethics. Such an ethic could find validity and authenticity among Africans because it is acceptable for an ancestor to be a moral exemplar. It is possible that if the ancestor concept is not utilised, the very foundation of such ethic and morality centred on Jesus would be open to the charge of an imposition of foreign values on Africans.

When the author of Hebrews discusses the heroic acts of the ancestors in Hebrews 11, he portrays them as models of behaviour to be either emulated or avoided (Calvert-Koyzis, 1997:37-44). The ancestors, according to the author of Hebrews, undoubtedly occupy the place of inspiring exemplars. The author of Hebrews maintained the place of the ancestors as witnesses to us of the faithfulness of God, and they cannot do any more than inspire us in that regard, nor can they impart the ability for continuity and perseverance needed in the race of life; for such qualities, only Jesus can supply. It is with that in mind that the author of the Epistle therefore directs his readers to look away from those esteemed ancestors and any other thing to Jesus(Heb. 12:2) who alone remains the 'pioneer and finisher' of faith. By so doing, the author of Hebrews sets Jesus as foundational to the ethics of perseverance, faithfulness and continuity needed by the community. This could validate the effort to build African ethics with Jesus as the key touch stone upon which such moral ethics are being built.

Among African theologians, Bujo (1992) exemplifies an attempt at exploring this possibility, which he does after setting forth a foundation with Jesus as the model ancestor or 'proto-ancestor'. He explains that presenting Jesus as a 'model', must be understood in terms of the usage of model in narrative ethics whereby those who contemplate Jesus can find values and norms which can lead to responsible conduct (1992:87-88). He posits further:

Jesus corrects and completes the traditional morality of Africa. The moral perspective is no longer limited to my clan, my elders, my friends, but extends to the whole human race, in loving service to the father. The morality of the disciple who accepts Jesus as model and proto-Ancestor is a personal re-enactment of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Bujo (1990:37-42) specifically posits further that even the problem of corruption and abuse of power that has plagued Africa can be overcome if Jesus Christ is held up to the faithful as 'Proto-Ancestor'. This assertion that Jesus corrects and completes the traditional morality of Africans is a major claim that finds acceptance among Africans on the basis of their conceptualisation of Jesus' as a model ancestor. The ancestorship of Jesus could ensure the acceptance as authentic of such an African Christian ethic among many Africans.

2.5.3 The concept contributes to 'de-foreignisation' of Jesus in Africa

The post-independence call by some African political leaders and scholars to return to the traditional ways of Africa (otherwise known as African cultural revival) also labelled Christianity as a 'white man's religion' and the notion of the one high God was viewed as an imposition of the colonialist missionaries[45]. This conception has grown and has even been cited by Muslims seeking to convince Christians to move away from following Jesus and the 'white man's religion'. This insistence on the foreignness of Jesus and Christianity was made no less severe by the fact that the missionary movement which engaged Africa with the gospel was mostly of the white race. A fact that further complicates this wrong notion is that some of the missionary activities were *ipso facto* intertwined with colonialism (Tiénou, 1990: 73-74).

It is when viewed against this backdrop that the contribution of the ancestor Christology concept as an effort towards the 'de-foreignisation' of Jesus becomes important. The potential that the AAC holds is quite significant in that it responds to the alleged or perceived foreignness of Jesus and the gospel in Africa as a 'white man's religion' by utilising the apparent family relationship

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[45] See for example the post colonial African scholar, Okot P'bitek, (1971;50) *In* Religion of the Central Luo. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau. See also Jim Harris (2009) who is in support of P'bitek's view

and kinship that the model conveys. What this means is that the concept then carries the possibility of contributing to the acceptability and subsequent growth of Christianity in the continent, especially among those who are questioning the fact that Jesus does not belong to their family lineage as Africans.

As rightly noted by Bediako (2004:32), in presenting Jesus as ancestor, the basic question changes; instead of asking *why should we relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to our clan, family, tribe and Nation?* The question changes to *how may we understand more fully this Jesus who relates to us most meaningfully and most profoundly in our clan, family, tribe and nation?* What this implies is that the concept in so doing, presents a possible theological value for spurring towards spiritual growth rather than apathy as far as relationship with Jesus is concerned.

An established fact that has emerged in our study on the origins of the ancestor Christology concept above remains that the concept came about as the result of an effort whose major concern was to elucidate the identity of Jesus, and make Jesus at home with Africans who hitherto had wondered who this Jesus is and therefore considered him a foreigner. On the effort to make Jesus at home, the concept not only helps to 'de-foreignise' Jesus for Africans, but could also serve as a foundational basis upon which other contextually relevant Christologies could be further developed. The fact that the ancestor concept has been developed to a degree opens up the creative room for other culturally relevant categories upon which African Christology could be further built upon or explored. Therefore, another possible value that exists through contextualising Christ in ancestor terms is that it could create a situation in which the basics of the Gospel message, and indeed Christ, can be presented in familiar thought patterns which will cause the message to be immediately grasped since they are presented in familiar thought forms which the ethnic backgrounds must have in certain respects prepared the people to receive (Wendland, 1991:15-16).

2.5.4 Convergence, divergence and questions

As established above, the rallying points of departure for African ancestor Christology are the general traditional African concepts of kinship and ancestry. In Africa, those concepts are not strange and isolated, but wide spread. At the core of the African concept of kinship and ancestry is mediation, or the one who mediates and is the go-between. Mediation therefore serves as the underlying ideological convergent point for Ancestor Christologies. In essence, the chief similarity that exists between the various ancestor Christologies and makes them to cohere is the ancestor-mediator concept because of the understanding and the general acceptability of the concept of mediation in Africa. Mbiti (1969:58-73) goes to great pains to show the types and functions of intermediaries that exist in Africa generally and stresses their importance in the socio-political and religious life of Africans. He mentions the living-dead [ancestors] as occupying the ontological position between spirits and men and between God and men. For these reasons, it becomes plausible for Jesus to be presented as an ancestor-mediator.

In spite of these common grounds, there exist differences as well. Apart from the differences in emphasis in the various ancestor Christology models as discussed earlier, the fact that ancestors are perceived differently in various African settings could then mean that presenting Jesus as an ancestor could be perceived differently, depending on each people's views on ancestors and their roles even within Africa.

Wanamaker, (1997:284), commenting especially within the South African context, maintains that the conception of the ancestors including their nature and function has changed significantly over the course of time and continues to do so. This he attributes to a number of factors including Missionary Christianity and urbanization. Even though his original reference point is South Africa, it would be appropriate to apply that observation to most parts of Africa. This being so, it behoves us to ask questions as follows reflecting on what have been said above:

1. How should Jesus' identity and the quality and implication of his mediation as explicated in Hebrews impact on his being conceptualised as ancestor and placed side by side[46] with ancestors in the ancestor Christology paradigm?

2. Bearing in mind the acceptance by some African scholars (Nyamiti, Pobee, and Kalengyo) of the possibility of continuous communion and interaction with the ancestors, how could one view such possibility of communication with ancestors along with the rituals and practices that take place in the light of Hebrews as well as other biblical passages?

These questions must not be left unanswered; however, they will only be attended to in a Chapter dedicated to an assessment and evaluation of the concept. Since our basis for assessing the concept is the teaching of Hebrews on the identity of Jesus and the place and function of ancestors, it is important that we make that the focus of the next Chapter so that the assessment and evaluation that will follow after will be informed by our findings.

2.6 Chapter summary and conclusion

We have highlighted the importance of contextual Christology, particularly ancestor Christology and the importance of the concept as a worthwhile attempt to present Jesus in familiar thought patterns which can be immediately grasped by Africans. Furthermore, the possibility the model offers of establishing a sense of consanguinity between Jesus and Africans is beyond doubt. This is particularly important considering the fact that kinship, ancestry and community occupy an important place in African thought, life and experience. We have also studied the various key contributors to the ancestor Christology concept to examine and understand their theoretical basis. We have noted where they agree and disagree. Importantly, we have pointed out some critical assumptions and highlighted important questions that the ancestor Christology model

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[46]While some may argue that the proponents of the concept do not see themselves as placing the ancestors side by side with Jesus but rather below him, what emerged in the review above shows that the weight of elaboration of the place and function of the ancestors and what is attributed to their mediatory role places them as functioning in activities that are within the divine prerogative of God, thereby placing them side by side. This observation can be seen for instance in the elaboration of the place and function of the ancestors as transmitters of 'life force', in Bujo (1992:22-25) and as those whose goodwill is needed for continual existence in Kalengyo (2009:9).

raises which the key proponents have not sufficiently answered. These questions and observations will be properly attended to as an evaluation of the concept after considering the biblical teaching on Jesus and the ancestors in Hebrews which will serve as the evaluative basis. Among the examined authors, it remains clear that there is no definitive call for an end of the cult of the ancestors nor is there a well-defined effort that aims at correcting some non-biblical reasoning and practices in relating to the ancestors by African Christians. Neither is there a sufficient elaboration of Jesus' identity and function in a way that outweighs the almost romanticised elaboration of African ancestors and their functions. The next Chapter intends to focus on explicating the identity of Jesus and the place of the ancestors in Hebrews 1 and12 (along with other relevant biblical passages) through exegetical analysis and theological interpretation.

Chapter 3

Jesus' identity in Hebrews: analysis, key texts and exegesis

The reader is reminded *en passant* that this Chapter is made up of three main sections. The first section pays attention to historical and literary analysis in keeping with the practice of biblical studies in which it is important to discuss introductory matters surrounding a biblical text or corpus to be studied. The second section focuses on identifying the purpose of Hebrews and the key texts that explicate that purpose. In the final section, the texts which are so identified will be the focus of exegesis and interpretation. The structure of this Chapter will therefore be as indicated below:

    I.   Historical, literary & interpretive analysis of Hebrews

    II.   Purpose & key texts

    III.   Exegesis & interpretation

3.1 Literary& interpretive analysis of Hebrews

3.1.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is not an attempt to solve the 'historical riddles[47]' surrounding Hebrews. It is not an attempt, for instance, to answer the age old question of its authorship definitively.

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[47]This utilises Laansma (2012:3) who describes the historical background of Hebrews as a continuing riddle and notes that though most of the historical questions may not have definite answers, engaging them gives room for creativity and showcases rich suggested possibilities. Using Bio-analogy, Laansma insists that the reason for lack of

Rather, this section intends to bring into perspective current on-going effortsin the area of biblical research regarding the Epistle.

Using the theatrical picture of the Walt Disney movie 'Cinderella', Guthrie (2004:414) describes the Epistle to the Hebrews as 'The Cinderella of NT studies'. He further maintained that this is not unconnected with the fact that, just like the Cinderella of the Walt Disney movie, the Epistle has been 'somewhat out of place in her home of the NT canon' in the middle part of the 20th century.Guthrie (*ibid*) however notes that considering the rising interest and focus of research on the Epistle at the dawn of the twenty first century, it appears that 'this Cinderella seems to have come out of obscurity and to be on her way to the ball'. Clearly speaking, the value and place of the Epistle in Christian theology and doctrine is now coming into focus. This is evidenced by the increased interest of scholarship on the Epistle in recent times[48].

A rehash of the enduring issues such as the authorship becomes necessary to highlight where scholars are and as a springboard into issues of more contemporary significance such as current approaches adopted in engaging the book. Laansma (2012:6) also reminds us that, the question of the authorship of Hebrews has persisted because ultimately, it bears on the apostolicity, authority and canonicity of the Epistle.

Because this study engages with an African theological concept which arises from a reading of the Epistle from an African perspective, space will be given to discussing a few examples of how the Epistle has been approached in Africa. Ultimately, the particular approach this research utilises will be stated.

A number of specialist works on Hebrews will be utilized for this task. Laansma's (2012) *Christology, hermeneutics and Hebrews;* Mason's (2011) '*Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students*', Bauckham's(2009) multi-authored volume, Witherington's (2007) socio-

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abundance in the fruits of engagement with the epistle stems from an over preoccupation with its historical analysis alone, and rather calls for an integrative historical-theological analysis which according to him, could open the gates for richer harvest of the fruits of engagement with the epistle.

[48]For very recent Scholarly works on Hebrews, see Laansma 2012; commentary by Cockerill, 2012; Mason 2011; as well as Bauckham, 2009, among others.

rhetorical commentary, and Koester (2001) among others, will help bring the research up to speed with historical background as well as theoretical concepts in the current state of research on Hebrews. The importance of this lies in the fact that understanding the background is valuable and indispensible as a precursor to doing proper exegesis. This is well captured by Fee (1983:96) who notes that 'investigating the historical-cultural background of the text is important for the exegete'.

3.1.2 Authorship, date & recipients

i. Authorship

Accounting for the writer, the audience and the world of a biblical text is considered an important step towards credible interpretation (Nyende, 2007:60); it therefore becomes necessary to do that in interpreting Hebrews even if the effort does not yield conclusive answers but only succeeds in highlighting current scholarly efforts in attending to such questions. As Laansma (2012:6) notes, in spite of the so far inconclusive nature of the discussion on the authorship of Hebrews, it has remained a persistent feature in scholarly works on Hebrews because it serves not only the purpose of historical explanation but actually bears on the important question of the book's apostolicity, Scriptural authority and canonicity.

The general acceptance of a Pauline authorship dates from as early as the second century in the Eastern Church, though the basis of such assertion is largely hinges largely on inference rather than on received or reliable traditions about the author's identity (Koester, 2001:21). As Koester (*ibid*) notes, possible objections to Pauline authorship were countered by the Eastern Church Fathers in the following ways: first, the fact that Paul's name was never mentioned in the Epistle was interpreted as a virtue as well as a wise step to avoid causing displeasure from Jewish readers already suspicious of him. Second, the difference in style between the Epistle and other Pauline letters was explained by asserting that Paul wrote the letter in Hebrew while Luke translated it into Greek. Thirdly, the Epistle's allusion to non-biblical tradition such as the prophet Isaiah sawn into two (Hebrews 11:37) is defended as being consistent with Jesus (Matt

23:29-38), Paul (1 Thess. 2:14-15) as well as Stephen in Acts 7:52 who variously made mention of prophets who had been persecuted and or killed.

Among Early Church Fathers in the west, Pauline authorship was disputed but eventually accepted. While Tertullian named Barnabas, others disagreed, and some even questioned the Epistle's canonicity. However, Pauline authorship eventually became the standard view up to the sixteenth century. Jerome, an influential Early Church Father in the West is reported to have commented thus: 'We must admit that the Epistle written to the Hebrews is regarded as Paul's, not only by the churches in the east, but by all church writers who have from the beginning written in Greek'. He however expressed the Western church's reservation and disagreements on Pauline authorship. The Epistle was accepted as preserving apostolic teaching; but its positioning within the New Testament writings in the west remained at the end of the Pauline corpus (Koester, 2001:27).

The present state of biblical scholarship, however, seems to have rested the question of authorship with more arguments against Pauline authorship. Rayburn (Kindle 2012: location 40430) summarizes the following as key points against Pauline authorship in modern scholarship:

1.   The letter is anonymous, which is uncharacteristic of Paul

2.   The style of Greek is significantly different from that of Paul's letters

3.   The statement of Hebrews 2:3 seems impossible to reconcile with Galatians1:12[49]

4.   The indistinct [vague] testimony of the Early Church Fathers: Clement of Alexandria and Origen accepted Hebrews as Pauline but with major qualifications; Tertullian named Barnabas as the author and gave no hint of controversy on that point-difficult to explain if the author was none other than the great apostle to the Gentiles.

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[49] Heb 2:3: How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was *confirmed unto us by them that heard him* ;**cf**. Gal 1:12: For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it , but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (KJV).

Thus Rayburn (2012) labours to show that the view held by the Early Church Fathers in attributing authorship to Paul and widely acclaimed by some is not consistent with the evidence of current biblical scholarship. According to Griffith (2005:237), the last full-scale attempt to defend Pauline authorship was put forward in 1939 by William Leonard and since then, scholarly consensus has maintained that Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews

An important point to note regarding the authorship of Hebrews, which also informs the position of this research, is that within the mainstream reformed tradition, the consensus that the Epistle is of inspired authorship evidenced by its discernable doctrinal content as well as its consistency with the rest of Scripture overshadows the question of the identity of the human author (Koester 2001:38). Regardless of a lack of scholarly consensus on the human authorship therefore, the Epistle bears evidence of divine authorship and thus its canonicity, which is demonstrated by its doctrinal content and consistency with the rest of Scripture. Witherington (2007:17)likens the lack of scholarly consensus on the human author to the enigmatic Melchizedek figure introduced in Chapter 7 whose parentage and pedigree remain unknown and adds that the Epistle comes to us in a similar way, making it a 'unique and truly one-of-a-kind document in various respects'.

ii. Date

The death of Jesus in A.D. 30 is an event that was causative to the authoring of most of the New Testament writings. This coupled with the fact that there must have been a reasonable passage of time before the early church recognised the need for writing and distributing documents causes most New Testament scholars to regard A.D. 45-50 as the earliest reasonable date for any New Testament writing (Trotter,1997:33). External evidence like references to the book in other early literature could also serve to indicate that the book could not have been written after the date of the writing of the book in which it is mentioned. An alignment of the external with the internal evidence leads to a more probable date.

Key factors that have featured in the attempt to date the Epistle include the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, mention of persons and events within the Epistle(13:23)as well as its literary relationship with an early text, 1 Clement.

Traditionally dated at A.D. 96, 1 Clement contains references to Hebrews, which would indicate that the Epistle could not have been written post A.D. 96. However, firm conclusions about dating Hebrews cannot be reached on the basis of its literary relationship with 1 Clement since the dates for the composition of 1 Clement itself are wide ranging and not clearly agreed upon.

The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 is a key historical event of relevance to the biblical world, and as Koester (2001:54) notes, in modern scholarship, many are inclined to date the Epistle as a pre A.D. 70 composition, arguing that if an event of such significance had occurred before the composition, the author would have made a mention of it in some way. As plausible is this is, some scholars would still argue, as Koester also notes, that the non-mention of such an event could be because the author was dealing with fatigued 'second-generation Christians' or he would not want to aggravate those already dealing with 'a sense of loss over the destruction of Jerusalem'. Koester (2001:54) therefore concludes that 'A.D. 60 and 90 is plausible, but greater specificity is tenuous'.

In my view, considering the internal evidence of the mention of Timothy as having been released from prison, (Heb. 13:23), and the language of imminence rather than occurrence of a persecution that could involve loss of life, (12:4: 'Not yet resisted to the shedding of blood'), as well as the compelling argument from silence regarding the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, I will suggest the composition of Hebrews during events leading to the A.D. 70 persecution which had death dealing ramifications. This will place the Epistle between A.D.60 to 65. With this, Trotter (1997:36) agrees and states: 'there is a good reason to date this Epistle prior to the fall of Jerusalem, somewhere in the mid-60s'.

iii.   Recipients

The Title of the Epistle suggests the recipients to be Jews and they have been traditionally accepted as such. Such a line of reasoning describes the recipients as Jewish Christians tending to return to Judaism and its sacrificial practices. Earlier works proposing this view include Nairne, (1913), Moule, (1950) and in more recent scholarship, Thompson, (2008). As Koester (2001:46) however points out, 'it seems more likely that the title is a second century inference

based on the book's contents'. The inference, he posits, clearly results from the Epistle's many references to the Old Testament along with comments and comparisons to OT practices which the author expected the recipients to be familiar with. Koester (2001:48) maintains that, 'a simple distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians does not help the interpretation of Hebrews'.

Considering that Timothy who was named in 13:23 was of Greek-Jewish parentage (Acts 16:1-3) and taking into account reference made in the Epistle to Italian Christians (13:4) presents possible evidence that could suggest mixed Jewish-Gentile recipients. In the same vein, Trotter (1997:30) after presenting the case for both Jewish and Gentile recipients concluded that 'the weight of evidence tends towards a congregation of mixed background'. He arrives at this conclusion in concurrence with Ellingworth (1993:25).

3.1.3 Genre and approaches

i. Hebrews Genre

The value of taking into consideration the genre of a particular literature has been highlighted by McKnight (2005:257) who pointed out that the genre of a literature shapes its reading and interpretation. He cites for instance that, Gospels are read as gospels, letters as letters, apocalypses as apocalypses, theological treatises as theological treatises and sermons as sermons. On the genre of and how to read Hebrews specifically, McKnight (*ibid*) rightly suggests that first, because the Epistle is found within the biblical literature, it therefore suggests that the book should be 'read in light of its nature as covenant literature'. Second, 'it's placement in the New Testament suggests further that it be read in light of the new covenant established by Jesus Christ'. Furthermore, 'The content of the book confirms these judgments, as the book thematizes the relationship of Jesus Christ to the covenant with Abraham and the "new covenant" spoken of by Jeremiah'. More specifically however, McKnight (2005:266) cites Friedrich Buchsel and Rafael Gyllenberg as scholars who in recent years have proposed that one finds more that a singular genre in the Epistle; and the switch in genres is in fact the 'definitive mark of Hebrews'.

In Hebrews, there is interplay of genres. Exposition and exhortation run together. Though they each have unique functions, they are utilized by the author for the same purpose. The sections

that show identifiable marks of being expository are then linked and serve as the basis for the hortatory (exhortation) sections. While the expository units serve as a step-by-step building of the hearer's knowledge of the Son, the exhortation serves to encourage the hearers to right action. Therefore, where hortatory material follows exposition, the hortatory material draws from the material in the expository section (Guthrie, 1994:126-143). This is well illustrated by Guthrie (1994: 144) in the table below:

Introduction: God Has Spoken to Us in a Son

exposition

I. The Position of the Son in Relation to the Angles

1:5–14   A. The Son Superior to the Angels

2:1–4
2:5–9   ab. The Superior Son for a Time Became Positionally Lower than the Angels

2:10–18   B. The Son Lower than the Angels (i.e., among men) to Suffer for the sons

3:1–6
3:7–19

4:1–2
4:3–11
4:12–13

II. The Position of the Son, Our High Priest, in Relation to the Earthly Sacrificial System

4:14–16   Opening: Since We Have a High Priest . . .

   A. The Appointment of the Son As a Superior High Priest

5:1–10   1. Introduction: The Son taken from Among Men and Appointed According to the Order of Melchizedek

5:11–6:3
6:4–8

6:9–12

6:13–20

7:1–10   2. The Superiority of Melchizedek
7:11–28   3. The Superiority of Our Eternal, Melchizedekan High Priest

8:1–2   ab. We Have Such a High Priest Who is a Minister in Heaven

   B. The Superior Offering of the Appointed High Priest

8:3–6   1. Introduction: The More Excellent Ministry of the Heavenly High Priest
8:7–13   2. The Superiority of the New Covenant
9:1–10:18   3. The Superiority of the New Covenant Offering

10:19–25   Closing: Since We Have a Great Priest Who takes Us Into Heaven . . .

10:26–31

10:32–39

11:1–40

12:1–2

12:3–17
12:18–24
12:25–29

13:1–19

13:20–21
13:22–25

exhortation

WARNING: Do Not Reject the Word Spoken Through God's Son!

Jesus, the Supreme Example of a Faithful Son
The Negative Example of Those Who Fell through Faithlessness
[Intermediary Transition]
The Promise of Rest for Those Who Are Faithful
WARNING: Consider the Power of God's Word

[Overlap] Closing: Hold Fast and Draw Near

The Present Problem with the Hearers
WARNING: The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith
Mitigation: The Author's Confidence in and Desire for the Hearers

God's Promise Our Basis of Hope

[Overlap] Opening: Draw Near and Hold Fast

WARNING: The Danger of Rejecting God's Truth and God's Son
The Positive Example of the Hearers' Past and an Admonition to Endure to Receive the Promise
The Positive Example of the Old Testament Faithful
Reject Sin and Fix Your Eyes on Jesus, Supreme Example of Endurance
Endure Discipline as Sons
The Blessings of the New Covenant
WARNING: Do Not Reject God's Word!

Practical Exhortations

Benediction
Conclusion

β
γ

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Fig. 2 Guthrie's structural assessment of the book of Hebrews showing inter-relatedness of genres

The evidence of lack of the standard epistolary introduction along with greetings and indications of sender or recipients as well as the author's reference to the book in 13:2 as a 'word of exhortation' (του λόγου της παρακλήσεως)[50] serve to strengthen the case for considering Hebrews as a hortatory homily or sermon. This is in spite of its conclusion with a standard epistolary form (13:22-25) which makes it to be rightly referred to as 'a sermon with an epistolary twist' (Trotter, 1997:18).

Though the evidence substantiates the genre of Hebrews as a homily, this research will continue to refer to it as an 'Epistle' in keeping with traditional naming of the corpus; not as a position disputing with the aforementioned scholarly findings.

ii. Approaches and interpretive analysis

Koester (2001:19) refers to biblical interpretation as the art of asking questions of the text. He adds that, the way questions are posed reflects the assumption and concerns of the interpreter and shapes the answers that are given. In relation to the study of Hebrews, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to the emergence of three established theological traditions that have shaped the interpretation of the Epistle: the Roman Catholic tradition with emphasis on the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ as a basis for worship and ministry; the protestant from the Lutheran and Reformed traditions with emphasis on the need to hold fast to the Word of God that strengthens faith; and the Liberal tradition which emphasises Christ as an example of most perfect personal religion whose self-offering affects and satisfies the underlying religious need associated with sacrifice (Koester, 2001:41). It is necessary to point out however, that at present, scholarly engagement with the Epistle on the various emphases mentioned above is not restricted to scholars within the above named traditions. This can be seen more clearly in African biblical Scholarship where Kalengyo (2006, 2009) for instance write on sacrifice, Mvunabandi (2008) on blood sacrifice and Nyende (2005, 2007) on priesthood, even though none of them writes from the Roman Catholic tradition.

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[50] Heb 13:2

Koester (2001:20-41) highlights three major shifts which have occurred in the study and interpretation of the Epistle as follows;

1. In the fourth and fifth centuries, theological controversy on the status of Hebrews finally led to the acceptance of the Epistle as canonical.

2. In the sixteenth century, questions on the status of the Epistle were reopened, which led to difference in reading the Epistle between Catholic and Protestant readers, particularly touching on the issues of priesthood and sacrifice.

3. The late eighteenth century highlighted the emergence of historical critical reading of the Epistle, bringing again to the fore questions of authorship, context and recipients.

To Koester's summary above, it needs be added that the third era leading to the present also saw the rise of major works utilising socio-rhetoric methods in approaching and interpreting the Epistle as can be seen especially in the work of De Silva (2000) and Witherington (2007) among others.

iii. Some approaches to Hebrews in Africa

Nyende (2005:513), points out that Hebrews is noted as a book whose argument appeals more naturally to Africans than Europeans[51]. This observation according to Nyende was first made in 1942, and considering that African theology as an academic discipline came about much later than that shows that the importance of the Epistle for African church was noted quite long ago. However, as Nyende (2005:513) further posits, studies have shown that in comparison to other books of the New Testament, 'it appears that the Gospels and the Pauline books are the only ones [more widely] engaged' as far as New Testament studies in Africa is concerned. There is not much change regarding Nyende's findings concerning Hebrews in Africa today. The level of engagement with the Epistle from the view point of published works in biblical studies by

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[51] This was pointed out by Nyende (2005:513) whose observation draws from G. E Phillips (1942:7) *in* The Old Testament in the World Church.

Africans remains noticeably small compared to the Gospels and Pauline writings.[52]Indeed Nyende is correct to assert that Hebrews together with other non-synoptic writings is 'on the periphery of New Testament Studies in Africa.'

In African biblical interpretation, the general approach[53] to the Bible as identified by Nyende (2007:61-64) falls within the institutional (academic) and popular approaches. What these approaches hold in common is their preoccupation with the African context in engaging the Bible. However, those who utilise the popular approach have been noted to tend more towards highly personal and individual appropriation than those from the academic approach. This analysis also applies to how the Epistle has been approached in Africa.

Recent interpretive contribution to studies in the Epistle in African biblical scholarship with noticeable methodologies and approaches are seen especially in Peter Nyende (2005, 2007). Nyende makes a significant contribution in articulating ancestor Christology as we have noted earlier. He specifies his interpretive methodology as 'a typology-based theological interpretation'[54]. Through his typology based theological interpretation, he arrives at the view that in articulating Christology in Africa, the analogical and metaphorical use of Jewish mediatorial figures to explain the mediation of Christ in the Epistle gives grounds to speak of Christ as ancestor in Africa, but insists that such must be done "*mutatis mutandis*", that is, with the necessary changes made.

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[52] Some recent published biblical research on Hebrews by African scholars include Nyende's PhD thesis (2005) along with various articles; Kalengyo's PhD,(2009) and some articles as well as a Chapter in The Epistle to the Hebrews in Christian theology edited by Bauckham (2009). Mvunabandi (2008) also did a recent PhD on Sacrifice in Hebrews. Gert Steyn (2011) a white South African who is a well published Hebrews (NT) Scholar with sustained technical publications on Hebrews deserves a mention here. See for example Steyn, G 2011, *A Quest For The Assumed LXX Vorlage Of The Explicit Quotations In Hebrews, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht*.

[53] This must not be confused with particular methods of interpretation mostly used in African biblical interpretation which is highlighted in the discussion that follows after this.

[54]See Nyende, 2005. Jesus the greatest ancestor: a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa

Edison Kalengyo (2009), with whom we interacted with in the earlier Chapter, has made some interpretive contribution in engaging with the Epistle specifying his method as 'contextual interpretation'.[55] Kalengyo also contributed a Chapter in *The Epistle to the Hebrews in Christian theology* edited by Bauckham (2009).

While methods and approaches of engagement with the Epistle are continuing to emerge in Africa[56], particularly within African biblical scholarship what is obvious is a canonical reading of the Epistle followed by either a contextual or theological interpretation (or both) resulting from varying levels of analysis of the biblical text. For the purpose of this research, I will consider my method of reading this Epistle as canonical,[57] and my interpretation as theological[58] while employing exegetical analysis. This is congruent with Webster's (2009:69) explanation as follows:

> Theological interpretation reads the New Testament as apostolic Scripture. It approaches the texts as acts of communication whose primary author is God the Holy Spirit, acting in, with and through the apostles. These apostolic communications are addressed to the fellowship of the saints; they summon their hearers to faith and obedience; and they have as their end the up building and the sanctification of the apostolic community.

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[55] See also Kalengyo's PhD thesis: Sacrifice in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and Ganda sacrifice: a study in relation to the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist.

[56] See for example Punt, J (2007) who advocates for a postcolonial reading of Hebrews in A Postcolonial Commentary on The New Testament Writings.

[57] This follows McKnight (2005:257) who makes a case for the Epistle to be read as biblical text & covenant literature. For a definition of canonical method, see Seintz C, 2005. In The dictionary for theological interpretation 100-102.

[58] See Treier, D. J. 2008 for a detailed introduction to theological interpretation in Introducing theological interpretation of Scripture: recovering a Christian practice. See also LeMarquand, G (2005:31-34) In the Dictionary for theological interpretation of the Bible for particular discussion that identifies African biblical interpretation as mostly utilising canonical and theological methods.

3.2 Hebrews: Purpose and key texts

3.2.1 Introduction

The overriding intent of this Chapter is to study the identity of Jesus and the place and function of the ancestors in Hebrews. It is however important to first of all identify the central purpose of the Epistle along with such text or texts which explicate that purpose, which is the concern of this section. The reasoning here is that, such texts which explicate the purpose should presumably be key to the entire discussion in the Epistle and should thus be rightly identified as key. In keeping with the scope and focus of this research, the guiding question leading to the key texts would then be 'what is the central purpose of Hebrews and which texts explicate that purpose'? This is to enable this research to identify and justify the need exegetically to engage with particular passages as key to the discussion at hand. Due to the scope of this research, the focus here will not be exhaustively to highlight each and every passage that is considered important in relation to the central purpose of the Epistle. Rather, in conversation with key authors, this subsection will identify some passages of prime importance in seeking to understand the identity of Jesus in relation to his unparalleled nature alongside that of ancestors.

3.2.2 Covenant, Priesthood & Sacrifice:

Wuest (1947) Moule (1950), Ellingworth (1993)

Wuest (1947:14-17) argues that the Epistle was written to prove that a certain position is true. According to him, the author's recipients were Jews who had left the temple sacrifices and became identified with 'groups of people who were gathering around an unseen messiah' but were in danger of renouncing their new profession and returning to the abrogated sacrifices of the Levitical system. In his view, the author's purpose then is to prove to such people that Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant ratified in his blood and not the blood of animals; and as such, the author seeks to affirm that the new covenant is superior to and replaces the old covenant ratified in the blood of animals, with the attendant implication being 'the abrogation of

the Levitical system of sacrifices at the cross...and the supplanting of the same by the sacrifice of our Lord..'

In his view therefore, the superiority of the new covenant over the old, and the annulment of the Levitical sacrificial system discussed in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 is at the heart of the Epistle. It is highly probable that Wuest's view was the prevalent scholarly view at the time; or at least he must have reached his conclusion in concurrence with Kennedy (1916) who argued earlier than Wuest (1950), that an elaboration of the concept of covenant is the key purpose of the Epistle, maintaining that Chapters 8-10 as well as earlier Chapters on Moses and angels are central because they portrayed such figures as covenant mediators. It is however clear that the view has been expanded upon progressively in succeeding works

Moule (1950) in a similar vein though slightly nuanced maintains that the author was faced with Christian Jews tempted to revert to Judaism not only because of persecution, but also "the human yearning for the ordered stability of an ancient system, with objective, tangible symbols, that will drive men back from the bold pioneering demanded by the Christian faith to the well-worn paths of the older way". As such, the purpose of the Epistle can be captured in two resounding 'exormen': "we have a high priest, we have an altar: sanctuary and sacrifice are ours (8:1; 13:10)". Reverting will thus be tantamount to an exchange of the substance for the shadow. In Moule's view then, the passages which explicate the key purpose of the Epistle are Chapters 8-10 with a culmination in Chapter 13.

Ellingworth (1993:78-80) establishes that the recipients of the Epistle were experiencing 'weariness in pursuing the Christian goal', and faced the likelihood of turning to go in the opposite direction to the will of God; that they were also faced with 'a constant temptation to de-emphasize, conceal, neglect, abandon, and thus in a crises reject and deny the distinctively Christian dimension of their faith'. Ellingworth (1993) therefore maintains that to such a group of people, the author's purpose was to paint a picture of the negative consequences of such an action while on the other hand presenting Christ as the centre point and the summation of God's purpose and pursuit for his people. According to him, 'the writer's distinctive teaching about the high priesthood of Christ is the central focus of this positive appeal. Christ as high priest,

offering in perfect obedience to the Father the sacrifice of himself, accomplished once and for all what the old priesthood and its animal sacrifices foreshadowed but could not effect. Anyone who abandons him has no hope'

While Wuest (1947) narrows down the purpose of the Epistle to an emphasis on the new covenant and a doing away with the Levitical sacrificial system that validated the old covenant (Heb. 7, 8, 9, 10), Moule (1950) takes the thought further by pointing out that not only is the Levitical priesthood along with its sacrificial system abrogated, but the author purposefully points to the existence of a high priest, an altar, a sanctuary and sacrifice of a different and superior nature. If Moule took the thought further, Ellingworth (1993) then makes an encompassing and convincing case that proposes the author's purpose to be found in the presentation of Jesus as the centre point and the summation of God's purpose for and pursuit his people. This argument does not necessarily differ with Wuest or Moule in great detail, but Ellingworth's view rather encompasses and broadens theirs. Because, ratification of the new covenant and the doing away with the Levitical system that Wuest points to, as well as Moule's assertion of the predominance of the superior priest, altar, sacrifice and sanctuary are all based on what Jesus has accomplished. The meeting point for these scholars in my view would be that the purpose of the Epistle is to be found in the author's presentation of the person of Jesus, his work by what he accomplished as the unique high priest as well as the value and worth of such an accomplishment.

3.2.3 Finality, supremacy & uniqueness of Christ:

Witherington (2007), Mackie (2008), Bauckham (2009).

According to Witherington (2007)[59], the author's chief concern was the possibility of defection from the recipients' previously held 'high Christology' to which the author responded by purposefully presenting a 'vivid and visual, indeed a theophanic, portrait of Christ so that the audience could immediately see what they would be giving up if they defected'. Witherington therefore points to the *exordium* in Hebrews 1:1-4 and likens it to a rhetorical piece akin to what could be found in classical rhetoric, where an author sets up the introduction in such a way as to obtain the attention of the recipients or hearers, and create a sense of anticipation of what is to follow.[60] In this instance according to him, the author accomplishes that goal by 'both the exalted content and the elevated style and sound of Hebrews 1:1-4'. He maintains that the author uses the *exordium* (Hebrews 1:1-4) to 'remind the audience of the common ground on which they stand in this case, Christological common ground'. He therefore posits that the *exordium* as a 'Christological hymn fragment' is central to the author's purpose and very important to the subject of the Christology of the Epistle especially as portrayed in Hebrews 1:3.

Mackie (2008)[61] asserts that the distinctive dual Christology that portrays Jesus as God's exalted supreme son and high priest are central to the purpose of the Epistle. In his view, 'casting Jesus as both exalted Son and high priest appears in somewhat abridged form within the *exordium*'. For Mackie therefore, the purpose of the Epistle is to be found in the *exordium* in which the

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[59] Witherington focuses discussion on the place and importance of the *exordium* in relation to the purpose of the Epistle to the Hebrews in pages 96-122

[60] For more on the likeness between Hebrews and classical rhetoric, see Attridge, 1990:214-215 where he identifies classical rhetoric to consist of three general classes comprising forensic oratory used in the law courts, deliberative rhetoric used in legislative assemblies and epideictic rhetoric for occasions of solemn festivity or mourning. Following which he demonstrated that Hebrews relates to classical rhetoric owing to the fact that interplay of the features of these classes of classical rhetoric is noticeable within the Epistle, with epideictic rhetoric being more prominent.

[61] In making this assertion, Mackie follows Vanhoye (1969:1-117) and Ubelacker (1989:66-139)

author utilises the opening construct to show Jesus' divine representation and as familial[62] with God in a way that makes the *Exordium* 'paradigmatic for Hebrews' hortatory strategy'. In his view therefore, 'The three statements made in 1.3ab, in the heart of the author's grand program statement, ultimately locate this hortatory strategy in the very being of the Son and in the nature of his relatedness to both his father and the community' (2008:450). In other words, the author's opening statement in the *exordium* serves not only as a purpose statement, but also as a gateway into understanding and explicating the nature and identity of the Son as well as the nature of his relationship with the father. To this it can be added that, the author's opening statement in the *exordium* also gives a purview to the supreme worth of the mediation of the Son later elaborated upon in the text. Though Mackie's assertion is more narrowly focused on the *exordium*, his view which places importance on the *exordium* as key to the argument of the Epistle is not without merit. This is more so when the *exordium* is viewed along with and in the light of other passages in the Epistle which the author uses to elaborate what he earlier premised.

Bauckham (2009) contends that the Epistle to the Hebrews attributes to Jesus the three main categories of identity of 'Son', 'Lord' and 'High Priest'. Of key importance is the categorisation of Jesus as the Son of God which makes him to share an eternal uniqueness of identity with his father. Bauckham made this assertion after establishing that in the Jewish monotheistic theological framework, (which early Christianity consciously utilised); the key features of the unique identity of God are as follows:

> God is the sole creator of all things (all others are created by God)

> God is the sole sovereign ruler over all things (all others are subject to God's rule)

> God is known through his narrative identity (that is, who God is in the story of his dealings with his creation, all the nations and Israel)

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[62] Relating to having the characteristics of a family

God will achieve his eschatological rule (when all creatures acknowledge YHWH's sole deity);

The name YHWH names God in his unique identity;

God alone may and must be worshiped (since worship is acknowledgement of God's sole deity);

God alone is fully eternal (self-existent from past to future eternity)

(Bauckham, 2009:16).

It is these features according to Bauckham, that informed the author along with other early NT writings e.g. John1, Col1, as well as Heb 1 to include the "protological Christology"[63] in their prologues[64]. Following Bauckham therefore, it becomes reasonable to maintain here that the *exordium* needs to be considered as a key text and thus a valid starting point in seeking to understand the identity of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews[65]. As earlier mentioned, this cannot be done in isolation from other equally important texts within the Epistle. As Bauckham further argues, while the first part of the *exordium* (1:2b-4) sketches 'the Son's narrative identity in seven compact descriptions', it is followed by a *catena* of seven scriptural texts designed to establish and expound the Son's full deity (1:5-14)'.

What these scholars share in common is their focus on the *exordium* as showing and explicating (albeit in a condensed form), the purpose of the Epistle. Therefore, ignoring the *exordium* in studying the purpose of the Epistle and the identity of Jesus could lead to a limiting conclusion.

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[63]Bauckham, 2009:17

[64] Arguably, traces of this 'protological Christology' can also be seen in Luke 1 as well as the rest of the gospels

[65] See Webster (2009:73) as he explains the attempt to clear the *exordium* of reference to pre existence.

3.2.4 The Anonymous author of the text on the purpose of the Epistle

Laansma (2012:27) makes a strong case against 'dehumanising' the author which happens when there is an engagement with a text without any effort in speaking with or argue against or take seriously the questions the author is asking or answering. This caution necessitates an attempt to seek an understanding of what can be seen as the purpose of Hebrews in the authors' view. According to John Calvin (1948: xxviii), Jesus' priesthood and the meaning of his sacrifice is presented more clearly in Hebrews than in any other book of the Bible. In his view, the author did not set out to prove the messianic status of Christ as the promised redeemer. Rather, the author's concern was to prove the pre-eminence of Christ's office to an audience that was unclear about 'the end, the effect, and the advantages of his coming' (Calvin, 1948: xxviii). To this end, Calvin (1948: xxix), maintains that the author sets out the 'dignity of Christ' at the beginning of the Epistle by affirming the superiority and eminence of Christ above all men and angels, which in his view, happens in the first three chapters. 'By setting Christ in the *three first chapters* in a supreme state of power, he intimates that when he speaks, all ought to be silent and that nothing should prevent us from seriously attending to his doctrine'.

What needs to be added to Calvin's observation is that, what gives strength and potency to Christ's office and the effect of his sacrifice is the uniqueness of the nature of his identity. This comes into focus when the author's opening statements are taken into consideration; especially in 1:3 When the author states:

ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως, δι' αὐτοῦ καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς[66]

While καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος is agreed to refer to the work of Jesus' priestly mediation, ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, refers to his royal exaltation. In these, the priestly and royal works of Christ are placed together in the closest connection (Westcott,

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[66] Holmes, M. W. (2010). *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Heb 1:3). Logos Bible Software.

1909). The author bases the excelling nature of Jesus' high priestly mediation and royal enthronement on his unique nature as having the same ὑπόστασις with the father and being the ἀπαύγασμα of the father's glory, by which indication he is essentially eternal. This will need to be addressed in more detail later. The point being made here is that, following the author carefully in his opening statements within the *exordium* gives an indication of his understanding of Jesus' identity thus leveraging the *exordium* as the starting point in his thought progression in explicating Jesus' identity.

As earlier shown, in classical rhetoric -to which the relationship of the Epistle to the Hebrews has been indicated -, rhetoricians were known to set out a summary of their chief argument in the opening *exordium* which also serves as the programmatic statement for the rest of the discourse. This appears to be the case in this instance. The author in the *exordium* sets forth the identity of Jesus as a Son through whom God has spoken through as the final word, the agent of creation through whom God made the universe; the effulgence or the radiance of God's glory, the one who upholds the universe by the word of his power and who also made purification for sins. Examining and understanding the *exordium* therefore remains fundamental, especially to this research. This will be done along with some passages that further elaborate what the *exordium* has presented.

Bearing in mind that this research is focused on the identity of Jesus and the place of ancestors in relation to the African theological discourse on ancestor Christology, it is also essential to point out that the author introduces ancestors and angels as either recipients of God's promise, mediators of the covenant at different times and stages or as exemplars of faith. (Heb. 1:1; 3:9; 6:13-15; 8:8-13; 11; 12). This has also been noted by Calvert-Koyzis (1997:37-44) who further affirmed that ancestors play an important role especially in latter New Testament writings, and that ancestors are depicted as those to whom God was covenanted to fulfil promises to. As such they occupy an important role as covenant mediators and exemplars. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author focuses attention on the ancestors especially in Chapters 11&12 as exemplars of faith. It is therefore important to study some aspects of these Chapters in this discussion.

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3.2.5 Conclusion on Hebrew's purpose and key texts

This subsection has interacted with some key scholars on the purpose of the Epistle as well as key passages that explicate that purpose. What emerges is that the Epistle is a purposed Christological treatise. Though scholarly views differ on the question of which particular passages best explicate that purpose, the weight of scholarly evidence especially as seen in the arguments proffered by the three preceding scholars above point to the *exordium* (1:1-4) as a key passage that is programmatic for the entire argument of the Epistle, which view in my opinion, finds substantial support within the text. The Epistle, as McKnight (2005:260) succinctly notes, is a theological treatise that is driven by the need to make Christology clear through biblical exposition, with the author opening up in the *exordium* with statements about the divinity and superiority of the Son (Steyn, 2003:1119). Furthermore, perhaps a perceived threat that a belief in angelic or other pre-eminent figures could affect the belief in a surpassing exaltation of Christ, together with the possibility that there is also the danger of blurring the distinction between Christ and the angels constitute the driving concern of the author (Steyn 2003:1125).

Given that Christology is the author's major driving concern overall, the introduction of Jesus in the *exordium* (1:1-4) therefore remains an essential starting point for the entire treatise. This subsection has also highlighted Chapters 11 & 12 as important in understanding the role of the ancestors as exemplars of faith. What will follow therefore is an exegesis of these highlighted texts comprising the *exordium* 1:1-4 and Chapter 12:1.

3.3 Hebrews 1:1-4; 12: (Exegesis)

3.3.1 Introduction

In this subsection, the primary focus of exegesis will be Chapter 1:1-4 in connection with other relevant passages especially Chapter 12. This will require specialist tools like a Greek lexicon, dictionaries, commentaries and a consideration of the passage in the original languages. The primary question in the subsection is 'what is the author saying in relation to Jesus' identity?' This will be followed by seeking to understand how the author speaks of the ancestors in relation

to Jesus. This will be done by a close scrutiny of the passages using the relevant tools mentioned. Also, to be highlighted and tackled are possible questions that the passage raises; that is such questions that are considered essential towards an understanding the passage. Thereafter, the meaning that emerges will be presented.

The rhetorical and literary sophistication of Hebrews and of the *exordium* in particular has been recognised by scholars (Vanhoye, 1969; Black, 1987; Attridge, 1989; and Lane, 1991). Lane (1991a:5-6) particularly argues that the Epistle bears the mark of a rhetorical artistry that distinguishes it from any other document in the New Testament; an assertion which according to him is evident in the *exordium*. Particular literary features are present in Hebrews which the author uses as principal techniques in structuring the Epistle. Vanhoye (1989:20) lists the features as: Announcement of subject to be discussed; inclusions that indicate boundaries; variation of literary genre, [switching exposition and exhortation at some points]; words which characterize a development; transition by immediate repetition of a "hook word" and symmetric arrangements. Burge, *et al*; (2009:390-391) further point out that the author utilises unique literary features that include alliteration (words sharing initial sound), *homoeoptaton* (words sharing ending sound) and *anaphora* which involves repetition of a word, as can be seen especially in the use of the word 'faith' in Chapter 11. This understanding contributes immensely to a perception of the flow of structure in the text which in itself is important for proper exegesis.

The demarcation of the *exordium* is generally agreed to fall within 1:1-4. This view finds support from a majority of scholars (Attridge, 1989:36; Lane, 1991a:5-7; Guthrie, 1994:118-119; Mackie, 2008:1). However, Koester (2001:174; 2011:101)[67] differs and argues that the *exordium* extends to 2:4. Admittedly, the *exordium* does not stand in isolation. It is structurally and thematically interrelated with the rest of the Epistle and with Chapter 2 in particular. But as Cockerill (2012:87) rightly points out, Koester's argument that the *exordium* stretches beyond 1:1-4 to include 2:1-4 'gives inadequate consideration to both the unique character of 1:1-4 and the close association between 1:1-2:4 and 2:5-18'. Also, the evidence as demonstrated by Guthrie (1994:118-119) that the four opening verses in Hebrews 1 form a single multi-clause

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[67] See also Ellingworth (1993:90) who states that the prologue has links beyond Chapter 1.

sentence built on "periodic style" is convincing[68]. Lane (1991a:5-9) further demonstrates that the Author of Hebrews in a unique way, employs elements of literary style present specifically in 1:1-4, elements that commands the attention of the ear when read aloud especially in the original language as seen in the *exordium*. He identifies unique elements as follows:

Alliteration (five words beginning with the letter (π) in verse 1: **π**ολυμερῶς, **π**ολυτρόπως, **π**άλαι, **π**ατράσιν, **π**ροφήταις

Variation of word order (the insertion of material between the adjective and noun in v4: <u>κρείττων</u> γενόμενος τῶν <u>ἀγγέλων</u> ... διαφορώτερον παρά αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα);

Parallelism of sound (v 3): τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ... τῆς δυνάμεως,

Parallelism of sense (v1): πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις

Which corresponds to ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ[69]

These give good grounds to demarcate 1:1-4 as forming the *exordium*.

3.3.2 The text: Hebrews 1:1-4

The text is here presented in biblical Greek side by side with my own translation as guided by various tools for easy reference:

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[68] Guthrie (1994:118) explains a 'period' as 'a highly stylized configuration of clauses and phrases which concludes with an appropriate majestic ending and therefore explains a 'periodic style' as a literary device commonly used in oratory by which the substance of the discussion is built around similarity or contrast between sets of clauses as is the case in Hebrews 1:1-2. Guthrie's view here is supported by Witherington (2007:98-99) who goes further to show evidence that the periodic style in the *exordium* relates to early rhetorical conventions as described by Aristotle (Rhetoric 3.9) and Quintilian (Institutio Oratoria 9.4.125).

[69]See Lane (1991a:6)

GREEK	ENGLISH
1 Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις 2 ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας· 3 ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, 4 τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.[70]	1 God having spoken long ago on many occasions and in many forms to the ancestors by the prophets, 2 in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all, through whom also he made the ages, 3 Who is the radiance of His glory and exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by the word of his power. Having made purification for sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 Having become better than the angels, by as much as he has inherited a more excellent name than theirs.

Fig. 3. Hebrews 1 Greek NT: Westcott / Hort, UBS4 Variants

The location of this text at the beginning of the treatise establishes its programmatic nature. The text is a single sentence composed of three segments, which together operate as the programme statement for the entire Epistle as well as setting forth the principal themes of the Epistle (Attridge, 1989: 36; Mackie, 2008:438; Ubelacker 1989: 66-139; Vanhoye, 1969, 111-117). Ellingworth (1993:90) disagrees with this and opines that it would be misleading to view vv1-4 as programmatic and serving as a précis for the following argument. The thrust of his contention

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[70] Holmes, M. W. (2010). The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition (Heb 1:1−4). Logos Bible Software.

is that the author rather proceeds 'by an interweaving of themes, as in a musical composition'. However, as Attridge (1989:36) rightly maintains, 'the first four verses of the text consist of a single, elaborately constructed periodic sentence that encapsulates many of the key themes that will develop in the following Chapters'[71]. Importantly, the text brings to view principal characters such as God, ancestors, prophets, the Son and angels, but places focus on the nature and the uniqueness of the Son. As earlier mentioned, the text comprises of three segments with verses 1 and 2 forming the first segment, and verses 3 and 4 forming the second and third segments respectively. Therefore, the ensuing exegesis will be done in that order.

3.4 Hebrews 1:1-2

The Son as the mediator of God's eschatological word, the heir and agent of creation

3.4.1 Hebrews 1:1 Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸςλαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις

(God having spoken long ago on many occasions and in many forms to the ancestors by the prophets)

This segment begins with God as the subject: he has spoken. He spoke to the ancestors through the prophets who were clearly human mediators of divine revelation. The revelation was also incomplete in its form as well as in various ways (πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως). The author intentionally begins with a rhetorical alliteration meant to secure the attention of the listener so as to proceed with the import of the speech. Though the author begins with God as the subject, the fact of God as the speaking God is assumed by the author, and is not a subject of dispute. Divine speech to the ancestors through the prophets is an established fact to the listeners. That such speech was multifaceted as πολυμερῶς and πολυτρόπως indicate was also not in dispute. Lane (1991a:10) further elucidates that the author actually stated a known conviction in an

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[71]Attridge (1989:36) cites the following as supportive of this view: Vanhoye, *Situation,* 111-117; Erich Grasser, "Hebraer 1:1-4. Ein exegetischer Versuch," *EKKNTV* 3 (1971) 55-91 (reprinted in ibid, *Text und situation: Gesamelte Aufsatze zum Neuen Testament* [Gutersloh: Mohn, 1973] 182-230); and Loader, *Sohn, 68-80.*

emphatic way. Such a literary convention as seen in the author's use of the πολυ- compounds is however said to occur only here in the NT.

Lane (1991a:10) dismisses the assertion that attribute the origin of this literary convention to an influence of the writings of Philo by maintaining that although Philo does have a fondness for the πολυ compounds and for alliteration involving the πολυ words, this particular combination found in 1:1 never occurs in his writings. He insists that no evidence exists to confirm that the author's use of the πολυ alliteration was influenced by anything found in the writings of Philo; neither is there evidence according to him, in 'the Philonic corpus corresponding to this sonorous description of the OT revelation as manifold and varied'.

Distinctive elements have been identified in the first segment of the *exordium* (1:1-2). These are unique and are considered to have rhetorical and theological significance. Unlike the usual way in which some of the author's contemporary writers would start with a reference to what many (πολυ) of their predecessors had said on a given topic, and thereafter present their reflections (e.g. Sirach prologue; Luke 1:1), the author rather focuses on God as the one who spoke before, and now speaks again through his Son. This was rhetorically unconventional and yet theologically significant in the sense that the listeners are not confronted with the author's reflection about God, but actually with God's word. This focus on God as the speaker is maintained in 1:5-13 (Koester, 2011:104).

Another unique feature is the author's placement of value on what God said in the present compared to what he said in the past. Usually, the contemporaneous is considered inferior to the previous, but in this instance, the author emphasizes the superiority of the contemporaneous. By emphasizing the superiority of what God said "in these final days" (1:2) over what he said in former times, the author reverses a widespread perception of decline attached to human speech (Koester, 2011:104)[72] and sets a solid premise on the basis of which to make comparisons and to explicate the uniqueness and the superiority of the Son as God's present word.

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[72] As Koester's (2011:104) explains, the author shows that though human speech would have been thought to be degenerative, God is not captive to that trend.

It is important to note here that the author shows a progression in God's revelation and he builds up his argument towards a comparison. As the next segment shows, the author sets the stage to compare the mediation of the prophets with that of the Son in their respective communication of God's word. The suggestion the author makes however is not that the word of God mediated before the Son was bad. In fact, he affirms and upholds the integrity of the earlier revelation that came to the ancestors through the prophets. Rather, the author makes his comparison between what is good and what is better. The good was represented by that which came partially and piecemeal, and the better is represented by that which came fully and completely in the Son (Witherington:2007:100-101, Cockerill:2012:88-89). Both the prophets and the Son are portrayed in parallelism by the author. This is rightly pointed out by Vanhoye (2011:64) as follows:

> To interpret correctly the parallelism established in the sentence between the first mediators of the Word of God and the last-<<the prophets>>and <<the Son>>- we have to remember Jeremiah's expression[73]which gives the prophets the status of <<servants>>. The suggested parallelism is therefore between <<servants>>and a <<Son>>.

In Hebrews 1:1 the author makes the point about the uniqueness of Jesus' mediation in communicating God's word as we shall see in the section that follows.

3.4.2 Hebrews 1:2a: Ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ[74]

(He spoke to us by his Son)

The contrasting nature of the segment comes into clearer focus at this point (1:2). God who spoke in the past (πάλαι) in or through the prophets speaks now 'in these last days' (ἐπ'ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων). He spoke to our ancestors but now he speaks to us. Instead of speaking

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[73] 'From the day that your ancestors came out from the land of Egypt until this day I have sent you all my servants the prophets, day after day, sending again and again' (Jeremiah, 7:25). See also Jer. 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; and 44:4

[74] The possibility that the absence of a definite article before 'Son' could likely infer the plurality of sons from which God could have chosen as agents of revelation has been rightly dispelled. See Attridge 1989:39, and Westcott, 1903:7. The singular form in any event argues against plurality.

bythe prophets, he now has spoken definitively by his Son. This Son is contrasted to the earlier mediators of God's word on a number of counts. While God's word mediated by the prophets was in the past, God's word mediated by the Son is present as well as eschatological. The uniqueness of the agency of the Son in the communication of God's word is here affirmed by the author.

Of what significance is the author's presentation of Jesus as the Son? The ontological identification of the Son as well as his identification as the eschatological Son, the inheritor and agent of creation, places Him in a unique place in comparison to the prophets as mediators. His operations are also placed within the sphere of an eschatological framework. In as much as the author acknowledges the mediation of the prophets in the past, he maintains the superiority of the Son as well as the word He mediates. This is consistent with the author's assertion of the superiority of the Son's priesthood and sacrifice in Hebrews 7:23-24; 9:25-26; 10:11-12.

Most prominent of the Psalms that shapes the theological outlook of the New Testament and the Christology of Hebrews in particular are Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. The 'oracle of Nathan' (2Sam 7:4-17; 1Chr 17:3-15) in which David's son would also be Yahweh's Son is also alluded to in Hebrews (Vanhoye, 2011:64-65). The allusion becomes clearer in the fact that Psalm 2:7, which is also related to the oracle of Nathan, is quoted by the author of Hebrews in 1:5: 'For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son'?

Both Psalms2 and 110, usually regarded as 'Royal Psalms' 'were employed in the Christian community to reflect on the identity of Jesus, to affirm the relative status of Jesus as Davidic king, and to exalt Jesus as the very Son of God' (Wallace, 2003:42). The linkage of Psalm 2:7 which echo the Son of Hebrews 1:2a, and Psalm 110:1, which the author of Hebrews utilises in 1:3 ('at the right hand of the majesty on high') warrants the conclusion that the author had in mind the messianic Son portrayed in those Psalms. As Wallace (2003:46) shows, this position is further justified on the basis of

The similarity of language in describing a session at God's right hand, the citation and allusion to the Psalms elsewhere in Hebrews (1:13; 8:1; 10:12; and 12:2), and early Christian tradition in general, both Hebrews 1:2a with its association to Psalm 2:7 and Hebrews 1:3d with its association to Psalm 110:1 employ the language of exaltation, frequently in view in early Christian uses of these Psalmic references.[75]

The author establishes the eschatological nature of the passage by placing the Son as God's last word in 'these last days'. The author's assertion finds links with similar passages of an eschatological nature that were read messianically in the author's era. Such passages as: Gen 49:1, 10; Num 24:14, 17; Mic 4:1; Hos 3:5, Is 2:2; Dan 10:14. Witherington (2007: 101-103) identifies the author's assertion regarding the Son as a reflection of an interaction with a pre-existing Christological hymn fragment, though none of the hymn fragments contained in the NT address Jesus with the title of 'the Son': Jn 1; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16.

The phrase ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν is used four times in the LXX (Num 24:14; Jer 23:20; 25:19; Dan 10:14). This shows that the author's 'last days' expression is shaped by and contextually rooted in the OT. The view that this phrase has an eschatological sense enjoyed shared commonality by Jewish, and early Christian apocalyptists, as well as those of the Qumran community (Attridge 1989:39). The author's addition of τούτων indicates that he views the 'last days' as an eschatological reality. This becomes clearer when τούτων is taken with the whole phrase and read 'in these days which are the last days'. In other words, 'God has spoken in the present, and… this present is also the end-time' (Ellingworth, 1993:93). This is important because it places the Son as pivotal to the eschatological hopes of the author and his readers. As Attridge (1989:39) observes, the author also uses this eschatological framework as an important frame for interpreting much of the OT material in Hebrews.

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[75] See also (1991a:11-12) who is in agreement that Hebrews 2a alludes to the royal Son of Psalm 2 and Hebrews 1:3c echoes the royal priest of Psalm 110. He explains further that Hebrews 5-7 makes the reliance on psalm 110 more apparent.

It could be argued that the presentation of Jesus as the Son does not necessarily infer his divine identity; but rather his humanity. This is especially in consideration of the dominant Greco-Roman understanding that there were many gods and that human beings could be deified. What is clear however is that the Jewish tradition from which the author of Hebrews writes was based on faith in one God. And as Koester (2001:202) argues, the tradition within which the author writes also forbade identifying that one God with a thing or human being (Deut 6:4; Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8; 2 Macc 9:12; cf. John 5:18; 10:33). Hebrews 1:8a and 9b therefore become very instructive; because the author addresses the Son as God as follows (Emphasis mine):

> But concerning the Son, (He says), "Your throne, O **God**, is forever and ever, and the sceptre of righteous is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; because of this **God**, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy more than your companions.

In the above, the author of Hebrews utilises the words of Psalm 45:6 and 7 to ascribe deity to God's anointed king identified as the exalted Christ. Bauckham (2009: 18-19) makes an important observation that brings this into clearer focus. According to him, the implication for the categorization of Jesus as the Son in Hebrews is that the author places the Son as sharing the unique identity of his father the God of Israel and the God of all reality ontologically. Also, such a categorization characterizes Jesus' solidarity with humans in his incarnational mission to bring human sons and daughters of God to glory (2:10-12). 'Thus, sonship in Hebrews is both a divinely exclusive category (Jesus' unique relationship with the father) and a humanly inclusive category (a form of relationship with the father that Jesus shares with those he redeems)'. Comparatively speaking therefore, the Son maintains the place of uniqueness and superiority as God, because of His sharing in the unique ontological identity with God as His father while partaking of humanity as man.

3.4.3 Hebrews 1:2b&c: ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας (Whom He appointed heir of all, through whom He made the ages)

Apart from the Son being pivotal in the author's eschatological framework, this Son is also referred to as 'heir of everything' (κληρονόμον πάντων) as well as the creator. The logical and expected pattern of describing the Son first as creator and then inheritor was deliberately reversed by the author. He rather begins by presenting the Son as heir because it is rhetorically effective and also because it is determinative for the meaning of sonship in the sense that, it presumes an existing bond of relationship (a Father/Son relationship in this case) from which inheritance becomes the logical extension and the fruition of the relationship.

Presenting Jesus as heir does not immediately seem to signify divine identity. In fact, such a claim, as Koester (2001:185) points out, goes against the prevalent view that considered the emperor as heir of all things.[76] However, understanding the author in the light of Psalms 2 and 110 (which as noted earlier, informs the authors' Christological view), makes it plausible to assert that the Son in the contemplation of the author of Hebrews is the royal King-Priest Son anointed by God and promised 'the nations' for his inheritance and the 'ends of the earth' for his possession. As Attridge (1989:40) argues, the designation of the Son as heir is based on Psalm 2:8 and is a traceable motif in Isaiah 53:12; Dan 7:14; Ps. Sol. 17:23; 1 Mac. 2:57 and is also significant not only 'as a Christological predicate, but as an encapsulation of a soteriological theme'. In Hebrews 1:5, the author affirms that this Son is the unique begotten of God and so the rightful heir.

Though the primary content of God's promised inheritance in the OT is in reference to land (Deut 12:9; 19:10), this understanding developed and by the Hellenistic period, the reference to the promised inheritance became increasingly specified as 'a transcendent or heavenly reality'. This understanding informed the views of early Christians who 'affirmed that, Christ through his death and resurrection, was given a heavenly inheritance in which his followers share'. This

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[76] Koester (2001:185) explains that Julius Caesar adopted Augustus to be his son and heir and since Augustus had no children, he adopted Tiberius as his son and heir to the throne. Tiberius and his successors continued the practice so as to keep the Empire as the inheritance of a single family.

understanding of inheritance as heavenly and eschatological is apparent in Hebrews (Attridge, 1989:40). This is not to say the 'land' has no place in the promised inheritance as Attridge (1989:40) explains:

> The promised inheritance can still be 'the land' as at Matt 5:5, but other objects rapidly come into view, including the kingdom of God (Matt 25:34; 1Cor 6:9-10); eternal life (Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25;Matt 19:29; Tit 3:7); immortality (1Cor 15:50); Christ's glory (Rom 8:17); a heavenly salvation (1 Pet 1:4-5); or the heavenly city (Rev 21:2-7).

By the attribution of sovereignty to the Son as creator, the author further reinforces a familial link between the father as creator and the son whom the author also names as creator. God as the creator is not in dispute among the author's audience, and so the author by designating the son as creator 'shows clearly that the Son is included within the unique identity of God' (Cockerill 2012:91-93). It is God who created in the beginning by his word (Gen 1), who also created all things and for whom all things exist (Heb. 2:10; 3:4). The author identifies the Son as the creator and owner/inheritor of all creation thus placing the Son in the divine identity of God the creator.

Witherington (2007:102) points out a 'deliberate paradox' by stressing that, ordinarily, a son is to inherit only at the death of the Father but in this case, the son inherits when the son dies! To my mind, this further serves to strengthen the argument that the author here includes the Son in the divine identity of the father.

It is important to note that when the author describes Jesus as creator, he successfully places Him outside of the created sphere. What this implies is that, while all the other human mediators and ancestors as well as angels are placed within the creative activity of the Son, He is placed outside of creation as the creator and owner. Because creation is an undisputable activity of God, at least in the thought context of the author, the author therefore is here attributing divine identity to the Son by naming His as creator. Prophets, ancestors and all of creation are not on a par with the Son who has a unique divine identity as God the creator.

Therefore, in 1:1-2, the author labours to show the superiority of God's present word in the Son and bases that superiority on the Son's unique divine identity as pre-existent Son, inheritor and creator. What the author states as the claim of Jesus' divine identity functionally, he substantiates ontologically in verse 3 onwards by pointing out keystone relational aspects between the father and the Son, as well as an elaboration of activities that further demonstrate Jesus' divine identity.

3.5 Hebrews 1:3

The Son as revealer (of God's glory and essence), sustainer, priestly mediator and kingly ruler

The possibility that verse 3 originates from an early Christological hymn fragment has been variously explored and the view is widely held. However, this view has been challenged and modified as Mackie (2008:440) points out. Considering various aspects of available evidence, a plausible is position that the author possibly composed his own Christological hymn using existing hymnal themes.[77]

As continuation and a reinforcement of earlier stated declaration about the Son, the author further develops the predications introduced in verse 2. This means that verse 3 complements and serve as the centre of the author's predication about the Son. This is made clearer in a chiasmic structure[78] proposed by Elbert (1992:168). According to his proposal, the *exordium* follows the chiastic pattern ABCDC'B'A' which could be easily seen if presented in outline form as follows:

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[77]See Macleod 2005:218 for a detailed discussion on the differing views concerning the hymnal origins of this verse.

[78]In discussing the *exordium*, others (especially Mackie, 2008; Macleod, 2005) have also suggested a chiasmic structure in deference to Elbert, D.J (1992). Rhee (2012) also suggests the use of Chiasm in understanding the Christology in Hebrews 1:1-4 and proposes a more complex and far reaching chiasmic structure ranging from 1: 1-14.

A. the Son contrasted with prophets — vv. l-2a

    B. The Son as messianic heir — v. 2b

        C. the Son's creative work — v. 2c

            D. the Son's threefold mediatorial relationship to God — v. 3a-b

        C'. The Son's redemptive work — v. 3c

    B'. The Son as messianic king — v. 3d

A'. The Son contrasted with angels — v. 4

From the chiasm, it becomes obvious that the author contrasts the Son with prophets in the earlier part, and then contrasts the Son with angels in the later part of the *exordium*.[79]

3.5.1 1:3a: ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ

(Who is the radiance of His glory and exact representation of His being)

In proclaiming the Son as the ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, the author introduces some terms that are open to various interpretations. ἀπαύγασμα and χαρακτὴρ used here are counted among words identified in the NT as *hapax legomena*[80].The term ἀπαύγασμα is found only in Hebrews and the Wisdom of Solomon (7.26)[81] suggesting dependence on the Wisdom tradition (Witherington, 2007: 103; Attridge, 1989: 42; Mackie, 2008:441-442). Though Hebrews dependence on the wisdom tradition is generally assumed, Mackie (2008:442) points out that Larcher (1969:27-28) disagrees with the position and maintains that the similarities in Hebrews and the wisdom of Solomon particularly could be attributed to common dependence on the LXX, Jewish Alexandrian speculation and Greek

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[79] A further contrast with Moses and other key figures in the context of the author's hearers followed in Chapter 3 onwards.

[80] A Greek expression referring to a word that appears only once in a designated document or body of literature (ἅπαξ λεγόμενον, "something said once"). pl. hapax legomena. See DeMoss, M. S. (2001). *Pocket dictionary for the study of New Testament Greek* (65).

[81] "For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness" (KJV, Wisdom of Solomon, 7:26).

thought. Furthermore, O'Brien (2010:53-54) argues convincingly that though conceptual and linguistic similarities exist, the details in Hebrews indicate significant independence of thought as well as an advanced Christology beyond the wisdom speculation. I will argue that it is plausible to ascribe the similarities to common dependence on the LXX as Larcher (1969:27-28) earlier observed.

The major interpretive question ἀπαύγασμα raises is whether it should be seen as active or passive: Is the Son to be seen as reflecting a glory which belongs to God, or does the glory shine forth from him? The import is that if the Son is viewed in the passive voice as merely reflecting God's glory, it then raises questions or at least leaves room for thinking of the Son as lesser in some degree to the active source of the glory he either outshines or passively reflects. Similarly, viewing the predication of the Son as ἀπαύγασμα in the active voice presupposes the Son as an active source of the glory he radiates. The Wisdom of Solomon (the tradition from which ἀπαύγασμα is thought to originate) is not clear as to the passive or active nature of the word. Though a consideration of the placement of ἀπαύγασμα parallel to χαρακτὴρ (which is passive) in the immediate context may support a passive understanding, Attridge (1989:43) suggests that the parallelism may not be synonymous but antithetical, considering the fact that such an indication can be seen in the preceding clauses.

Απαύγασμα bears an active sense when viewed from the perspective of God's δόξης in Hebrews as connoting God as glorious and thus radiant. The Son then is the enactment and form of this divine radiance of God, and is 'the particular luminous reality in and as which the glory of God presents itself in its brightness'. This implies that 'the Son is not a body illuminated by a light outside of himself... his being and act are the actuality of the divine radiance not simply its mirror (Webster, 2009:85).

Being the χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως of the father reinforces the fact that the son is not a 'mirror' passively reflecting a light from outside of him. Rather the author combines the thoughts of 'imprint' and that of 'essence' 'to convey as emphatically as he could his conviction that, in Jesus Christ, there has been provided a perfect, visible expression of the reality of God' (Lane,

1991a:13). Essentially, the Son in relation to God is the exact representation of God, and in relationship to the world, the Son is the creator and the perfect character and revealer of God unlike the prophets who were partial and imperfect revealers of God (Vanhoye, 2011:62-63).

3.5.2 1:3b: φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως δι᾽ αὐτοῦ

(Sustaining all things by the word of his power)

The author slightly shifts the discussion from the essential nature and being of the Son to his activity. This does not mean that the author brings an entirely new aspect in recounting the identity of the Son. As Westcott (1903: 13) explains, what the author does here is to show that 'the providential action of the Son is a special manifestation of His nature' and what the Son does flows from what He is'. The Son who created in 1:2 is the one who provides ongoing upholding support by His word in 1:3b.

Despite the apparent shift between 1:3a and 1:3b, the fact is that 1:3b actually qualifies 1:3a when **τε** is viewed as a connecting word as suggested by Mackie (2008:447). What then follows in viewing 1:3a and 1:3b as sequential is that the Son's radiation/reflection of the father's glory and his exact representation of God's existence are in some way demonstrated by 'his powerful word' that 'upholds the whole universe'. The Son's sustaining 'word of power' becomes a manifestation and conveyance of the 'interplay of ontological representation and familial resemblance' in 1:3a (Mackie 2008:447).

Westcott (1903:13-14) warns though, that φέρων must not be understood in the sense of support of a burden as if the Son is an atlas supporting the κόσμος. Rather, the use of φέρων here signifies 'bearing' that connotes guiding, directing and moving towards an end; 'governing' to be precise. Such an interpretation of φέρων resonates with Jewish writers who attribute φέρων to God as bearing and guiding in the present and continuing to the end of all created things. The author here again identifies the Son not only as creator but as the Lord and sustainer overall creation.

3.5.3 1:3c&d: καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς

(Having made purification for sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high)

The term καθαρισμὸν refers to the priestly act of 'purification' or 'cleansing' from physical stains and dirt, as in the case of utensils, (Matt. 23:25 and figuratively in verse 26); or from disease, as of leprosy, Matt. 8:2; and in a moral sense, from the defilement of and guilt of sin, as well as to consecrate by such act of cleansing (Acts 15:9; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 9:14; Jas. 4:8; Eph. 5:26; 1 John 1:7; Heb. 9:22, 23; 10:2)[82]. To be purified and pronounced clean from sin calls to mind the duty of the priest, especially the priest's sacrificial work on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:30; cf. Exod. 30:10)[83]. As rightfully noted by Attridge (1989:45), even though the author does not explicitly refer to the high priesthood and the cross of Christ here, the particular usage of καθαρισμὸν in this passage and as further clarified within the Epistle (9: 14; 22, 23; 10:2) makes it valid to suggest that 'the essential feature of Christ's priestly work is adumbrated in this phrase' And as Attridge (1989:46) further posits, though the usage of the term as a designation of Christ's atoning sacrifice is rare in the NT (found only here and in 2Pet. 1:9), the basic notion that Christ's death provides cleansing of or expiation for sin is more common and forms an important part of early Christian proclamation. As Chapter 9 (especially vs. 14) makes clear along with Chapter 10 (especially verse 14), the use of καθαρισμὸν in the *exordium* is in reference to Jesus' death on the cross by which his blood was shed for cleansing from sin. This is consistent with the author's thought progression. Webster (2009:89) notes in the same vein that if the world is to reach its appointed consummation, conservation and governance by the Son is not enough; cleansing is also needed, thus necessitating the purification by the Son. Attridge (1989:45) further affirms: 'The son who from the beginning was the instrument of God's creative activity is also the instrument of his salvific will because it is he who has made 'purification for sins' (καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν).

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[82] Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). *Vol. 2*: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (104). Nashville, TN: T. Nelson.

[83] Macleod, D. J. 2005. The Finality of Christ: An Exposition of Hebrews 1:1-4. *The Bibliotheca Sacra.* 162, 210-230.

In asserting that Jesus 'made purification for sins', the author utilises Psalm 110 in referring to the priesthood of Jesus as in the order of Melchizedek and makes his point more clearly in Hebrews 5-7. Jesus as the priestly mediator is shown by the author to occupy a priestly office in the order of Melchizedek to whom the great ancestor Abraham submitted. It is a priesthood that supersedes that of Aaron the high priest. Unlike other priestly mediators, Jesus' mediation as a priestly king is unchanging and unending and entails propitiation for sin, cleansing and continuing intercession for the wellbeing of those who come to God through him (Heb 7-9). His salvific mediation signifies the uniquely perfect and complete mediation.

Lane rightly (1991a:11-12) suggests that the emphasis on Psalm 110 in Hebrews 1 is meant to prepare the reader for acceptance of Christ's eternal priesthood based on appeal to the psalm. The mediation of the Son is increasingly shown by the author as unique and beyond comparison with angels and prophets. Jesus' priestly mediation being likened to that of Melchizedek (the King priest) points to the eternal significance of his mediation which guarantees cleansing from sin and unceasing intercession for the continual well being of his subjects.

That the Son 'sat down' (ἐκάθισεν) at the right hand of the majesty on high is instructive and noted as climactic in the author's predication of the identity of the Son[84]. ἐκάθισεν (8:1; 10:12; 12:2) as Westcott (1903:15) notes, expresses the solemn taking of the seat of authority, and not merely the act of sitting. And because 'majesty on high' express the idea of God in his greatness, it further strengthens the fact that the author here depicts Christ's session at the right hand of God; a figure according to Westcott (1903:16) used of the incarnate Son in connection with his manifold activity as King elsewhere in the NT (Acts 2:33 ff.; Eph. 1:21 ff.; Col. 3:1; c. 10:12).

While angels are always represented as 'standing' (Is. 6:2; 1 K. 22:19) or falling on their faces and the priests as ministering, this author presents the Son not only as superior in being and

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[84]Though not explicitly stated in the text at this point, the direct citations that follow after the *exordium* shows that the allusion is to Psalm110:1 here, being the only biblical text that speaks of someone enthroned beside God. For more on this, see Lane, 1991a:16.

status in relation to angels, prophets, and priests, but as having completed his priestly work of redemption, thus taking his royal sitting position[85].

3.6 Hebrews 1:4

The Son as royal mediator and superior to human mediators (prophets) and angelic mediators, and thus worthy of worship

3.6.1 τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα

(Having become better than the angels, by as much as he has inherited a more excellent name than theirs)

The concluding part of the *exordium* reflects a connection with the earlier affirmations of the Son and serves as the framework for the next scriptural citations while also serving as the summary for the first two Chapters of the Epistle (Attridge 1989:47; Ellingworth 1993:103). The use here of γενόμενος (having become), κεκληρονόμηκεν (Inherited) and ὄνομα (name) raises questions as to whether Jesus actually became who he is and inherited what he did at a certain point in time, thus contradicting the earlier assertion of his eternal existence. Another question that could be asked is, 'what is that name that he inherited that is more excellent "διαφορώτερον" than that of the angels?

Cockerill (2012:98) disagrees with suggestions that view the passage as affirming a two stage sonship comprising eternal sonship and sonship by adoption at Christ's exaltation[86]. Cockerill's view is plausible taking into consideration the theology of the book and also if one places the emphasis here on κρείττων (better) rather than on γενόμενος (become). This is helpful in resolving the seeming contradiction. Κρείττων, as he shows, is predominantly used by the author to denote superiority in kind not in degree. He buttresses this position as follows:

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[85] O'Brien (2010:60) agrees and elaborates further on this.

[86] See an analysis of such views by Attridge (1989:54-55).

He became "better" than the angels because he had become the fully effective saviour by offering a "better" sacrifice (9:23) which established a "better" priesthood (7:18-19) and covenant (7:22; 8:6) through which the faithful enter a "better" (i.e. heavenly) homeland (11:6). In these references, "better" is a form of κρείττων, which within Hebrews denotes superiority in kind, not degree. The resolution, following Cockerill (2012:98) would therefore be that the exaltation brings to fulfilment what the Son has always been. This position is strengthened by Attridge (1989:47) who draws attention to the fact that, the usage of the terms 'become' and 'inherited' seems odd in the light of the earlier assertion of the Son's pre existence, it should be realized that the focus here, as is also the focus in the rest of the Epistle, 'is not on the inauguration of Christ's position, but on the fact of its superiority'.

This understanding does not warrant implying that Christ became a son only at a certain point. Consequently, the διαφορώτερον "more excellent" name he inherits is that of a Son as verse 5 shows. In reality, he inherits a name reflecting nothing essentially different from what he is from the beginning but only now made plain by his exaltation for the benefit of humanity. He inherits the name 'Son' which speaks of His ontological identity with God as the father. It is that name that establishes the fact of his being greater (κρείττων) than the angels.

Webster (2009:92) elucidates the point quite succinctly by stating that in the closing verse of the *exordium*, the author makes clear a 'logic and rhetoric of excess'. In other words, the effect and intent of κρείττων as the accumulated comparative, is quite categorically to say "incomparable". For the Son's superiority is not an incremental one, nor is he just of the highest dignity among the angels but he is rather the enthroned object of worship as 1:6 declares 'and let all the angels of God worship him'.

Steyn (2003:1108) maintains further that for the author of Hebrews, arguing that the status of Jesus was higher and different than that of the angels was his way of taking a strong stance against a possible skewed Christology that attributed certain angelomorphic elements to Him[87].

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[87] Steyn (2003:1108) presents evidence to support the fact that there existed angelomorphic views during and possibly after the composition of Hebrews as a possible evidence of an existing angelomorphic Christology that the

While 'becoming better' may seem to suggest the idea of a progressive incremental quality in the very process of 'becoming better', the evidence as discussed above suggests a contrary understanding. For as earlier noted, κρείττων as used by the author pertains to establishing the excelling status of the Son's superiority in comparison to angels and other key figures; and not to show an incremental, progressive and eventual attainment of a better status. This understanding maintains the eternal existence of the Son and answers to the question of whether the Son actually became who he is and inherited what he did at a certain point in time. This is strengthened by the author's injunction for all angels to 'worship him' (1:6). Because, while angels are depicted as created servants (1:7), the Son is deemed to deserve worship (1:6) because of his name as 'Son' which is obviously greater in status in comparison to servants, especially where the Son shares the same divine identity with God as in this case. The command to worship the Son (1:6) clearly discountenanced the worship of angelic beings as well as other important ancestor figures that are all depicted as mere servants. The author of Hebrews establishes the Son as the kingly divine mediator who is superior to human and angelic mediators (all depicted as servants), thereby pointing to him as the one who is worthy of worship.

3.7 Summary of findings

So far, we have identified Hebrews 1:1-4 as central to the message of the author of Hebrews and a key initial place where the author presents the identity of Jesus; and thus worthy of our task. The study proceeded to expound the teaching on the identity of Jesus in Hebrews 1:1-4. The summation of what emerges is that the author compares the Son and the prophets and recognises the Son's superiority as royal priest and mediator; also he explicitly compares the Son to the angels, and affirms the superiority of the Son. (Vanhoye, 2011:63).

The author of Hebrews therefore utilizes the *exordium* to predicate the identity of Jesus as divine. As Bauckham (2009:16) rightly notes, the author places Jesus within the unique identity of God and as the Son who shares a unique identity with the father. The author presents the identity of

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author of Hebrews had to deal with. Though the thrust of this research is not to argue for or against an existing angelomorphic Christology in Hebrews, Steyn's (2003:1108) view on the inadequacy of the existing Christology is agreeable with the emphasis of this research.

Jesus using predicates familiar within the frameworks of Jewish monotheistic theological framework attributed to God; Predicates such as eternal creator, owner (inheritor) and sustainer of the universe who is to be worshiped (1:1-6).

3.8 Rationale for a study on Hebrews 12:1

The chief object of this research as stated at the beginning is to study the identity of Jesus and the place of ancestors in the Epistle to the Hebrews so as to bring the result of the research into an evaluative conversation with the African ancestor Christology concept. In recent discussions regarding ancestors and ancestral function in African theological thinking, the νέφος μαρτύρων (Cloud of witnesses) in Heb. 12:1 has been cited as key in explicating the place and funtion of ancestors in the life of African Christians. It therefore behoves us at this point to examine Hebrews 12:1exegetically.

As we shall see shortly, even though the author introduces some important ancestor figures like Abraham, Moses, Aaron and others, he draws a more focused attention to their role in Chapter 11 and 12. What will follow here therefore will be a short study of Hebrews 12:1. The focus of this segment of the study unlike the section above is not to investigate the identity of Jesus in particular, but rather, to a short study to enable this research later to comment competently on the role of the ancestors in the life of African Christians while adding to our understanding of the identity of Jesus.

3.8.1 νέφος μαρτύρων

Hebrews introduces πατράσιν (ancestors, the fathers), as either recipients or anticipators of God's promise at different times and stages and as models of faithfulness. (Heb. 1:1; 3:9; 6:13-15; 8:8-13; 11; 12). They were depicted as those to whom God was covenanted to fulfil promises and as Calvert-Koyzis (1997:37-44) notes, they were also models of behaviour either to emulate or avoid. They occupy an important place as exemplars and play an important role especially in later New Testament writings. As earlier noted, the author in the Epistle to the Hebrews pays a specially focused attention to the ancestors especially in Chapters 11&12 as exemplars of faith.

Bearing in mind the focus of this subsection, the passage contributes to our understanding and interpretation of the function of 'the cloud of witnesses'.

The placement of Τοιγαροῦν (therefore) along with νέφος μαρτύρων (cloud of witnesses) at the beginning of the section (12:1) links the discussion to the previous Chapter and links the discussion with the list of names in Chapter 11. That νέφος μαρτύρων refers to 'the heroes of faith' listed in Chapter 11 is therefore not in doubt (Ellingworth, 1993:639).

Westcott (1903: 393-395) discuses a number of possible interpretations that have been suggested regarding the meaning of the cloud of witnesses after which he maintained that, there is no evidence that μάρτυς is ever used simply in the sense of a 'spectator.' At the same time, it is impossible to exclude the thought of the spectators in the amphitheatre.

The word μάρτυς as a noun stands for 'a witness'. The verb form μαρτυρέω generally refers to one who bears witness. Among early biblical scholars, Bartlett (1877:149-153) directly questions the then established view that considered the νέφος μαρτύρων as persons actively looking down from above at a spectacle. He queries whether this is really the conception which the writer intended to convey. He argues that if the author of Hebrews intended to convey the idea of being compassed by 'a cloud of unseen spectators who look with interest at our race' he would have rather used the word θεατης, used to refer specifically to an onlooker at a spectacle, a word commonly in use at the time. He presents evidence to support the argument that, even though θεατῶνvwas not used in the NT, it was in common use at the time as seen in the usage of the word by Early Church Fathers Chrysostom and Theodoret. Bartlett (1877:151) advances further evidence to establish that the way the author uses μαρτύρων within the passage rather supports the view that the νέφος μαρτύρων are not active onlookers looking at our race, but are rather summoned by the author 'as witnesses of the unseen power [of faith] which animated them, to testify to us that as they ran so we can run ; as they overcame so can we overcome...if we will run with patience, and look steadily away from the things around us to Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith in which they overcame, and in which we have to strive' (Bartlett, 1877:152). The assumption that the usage of νέφος (cloud) by the author necessarily infers that the μαρτύρων are above us as a cloud has also been challenged effectively by Bartlett

(1877:153), who maintained that the usage of the word as evidenced in the works of early Greek writers pointed to 'a picturesque expression for a multitude, without any further idea'. He points to Homer, who writes about 'a cloud of Trojans, of foot-soldiers'; Herodotus, about 'a cloud of men'; and Euripides, about 'a cloud of Greeks'. The fact that the word θεατης lacks in abundant usage in the NT as Bartlett admits remains strange and may seem to weaken his argument. However, the evidence of usage of the word by the Early Church Fathers gives strength to this view. Importantly, Bartlett's (1877:152-153) view in interpreting 12:1 as inspiring witnesses seems to enjoy much scholarly support as can be seen below[88].

For Brown (1988: 226), what 12:1 means is that we are surrounded by former contestants who are *witnesses* to us of the faithfulness of God. He maintains, following John White, that 'the writer's point is to bring witnesses before us who will testify that faith is worth it'. They have finished the race. Now it is our turn; we must run it. Yet, although they inspire us, they cannot strengthen us. For the necessary qualities of continuance and endurance needed can only be obtained as we look away to Jesus who not only offers a perfect example, but imparts necessary help for perseverance and continuity (2:18; 4:16).[89]

Believers, as Brown (1988:229) points out, are required to fix their attention on Jesus *the only perfecter*. He brings the faith of the former saints (11:40) and ours to triumphant completion. He alone makes it all perfect; and as Brown explains further, our moral integrity is essential, but that cannot bring our faith to completion. Our devoted service is valuable, but that cannot perfect our faith. Our spiritual experiences can be inspiring and illuminating, but Jesus is faith's only consummator. Believers rely completely on him, for he ran the greatest race right to its finish, and we come to fullness of life only in him.

What these observations bring out in relation to the function of the ancestors is that though various interpretations exist, it is plausible to maintain that the ancestors in Hebrews 12:1

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[88] See also Verbrugge (2000:357) who shows that the usage of μαρτυρέω in Hebrews especially Hebrews 11 and 12:1 is exclusively in the passive.
[89] Brown, R. (1988). *The message of Hebrews: Christ above all*. The Bible Speaks Today (226). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

function as inspiring exemplars who bore witness in their own times, even unto death for some. The author, however, presents Jesus as the only one who can both bring to completion and also to fulfilment all the longings of the faithful who have passed on and those yet alive. Importantly, those ancestors are witnesses to us of the faithfulness of God and they cannot do any more than inspire us, nor can they impart the necessary quality for continuity; for such, only Jesus could supply. That is why the author in 12:1 goes ahead to present Jesus and he directs his readers to 'look away to' him; as the 'pioneer and finisher' of faith.

Johnson (2006:317) makes an important observation that relates to this section by noting that, 'this climatic presentation of Jesus as the hearer's moral exemplar echoes at the very beginning of the composition'. Jesus as the chief model remains in the author's contemplation as noticed from the beginning of the Epistle (1:1-4) to this point and onwards. This position is made stronger by the Author's use of ἀρχηγὸν (initiator) along with τελειωτὴν (consummator) in describing Jesus, which could validate a reading of this section as an exhortation for the readers to keep looking beyond the prophets, priests, and the ancestors listed among the heroes of faith to Jesus as the chief/perfect model of faith and perseverance. Beyond being a human exemplar, the section identifies Jesus as the initiator (ἀρχηγὸν) as well as the consummator (τελειωτὴν) of faith, pointing again to his divine identity and his excelling in comparison to the exemplary human ancestors. This understanding goes against the interpretation of this passage in African theological thinking[90] as a depiction of departed ancestors who are actively watching and therefore involved in the affairs of their families which requires continuous communion in libations and sacrificial practices and rituals.

3.9 Chapter conclusion

This Chapter set out to study the identity of Jesus and the function of ancestors in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Chapter approached the study through three subsections. The first subsection covered the historical, literary and interpretive analysis of the Epistle for the purpose of familiarising the study with the context. In this first section, it was also important to study and

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[90] See 2.4.2 especially vi.

understand the genre since the genre shapes the reading and interpretation of a text. The last part of the first section discussed the interpretive approaches utilised in the study of Hebrews and identified the approach adopted for reading the Epistle in this research as canonical along with theological interpretation.

The second section in conversation with key scholars of the Epistle laboured to identify the purpose of the Epistle as well as the key texts that explicate that purpose. Though there were varying scholarly opinion, the scholarly evidence in the study led this research to Hebrews 1:1-4 (known as the *exordium*) to be identified as a key passage that is programmatic for the entire argument of the Epistle and as such worthy of our exegetical task. Chapter 11 and 12 as containing a teaching on the exemplary role of the ancestors in Hebrews was also identified and studied.

The final section utilised various biblical tools including the original languages for a focused exegesis, analysis and interpretation of the *exordium*. In the *exordium*, the author of Hebrews utilises it to predicate the identity of Jesus as divine by placing him within the identity of God as the Son who shares a unique identity with the father, using predicates for Jesus such as 'eternal creator', 'owner' (inheritor) and 'sustainer of the universe' who is worthy to be worshiped (1:6).This divine identity sets Him apart as the unique and perfect mediator whose nature of mediation is unique in the sense that it is salvific, redemptive and perfect. With regard to the νέφος μαρτύρων in Hebrews 12:1, what emerged is that the νέφος μαρτύρων are examplars of faith who only inspire us and are not involved in the life of the living in some other existential way.

Chapter 4

A critical evaluation of the African ancestor Christology as measured against Hebrews.

"......without a clear concept of who Jesus is to Africans, the church in Africa may be standing on a quick-sand." (Waruta, 1998:44)

4.1 Chapter introduction

As noted in the general introduction, the aim of this research is to investigate whether the African ancestor Christology concept correlates to and adequately conceptualises the identity of Jesus in Hebrews. So far, we have pursued this aim through a study of the African ancestor Christology (AAC) concept as shown in the works of some of its key proponents. Also, the identity of Jesus and the function of ancestors in Hebrews were studied through the exegesis of Hebrews 1:1-4 and 12:1.

The aim in this Chapter is to critically evaluate the ancestor Christology concept utilising an integration of the findings in both Chapters two and three. To strengthen this evaluation, other relevant biblical, Christological and theological insights will also be utilised for analysis and conclusion.

The questions that will guide our evaluation in this Chapter arose earlier in the critical and analytical review of the concept in Chapter 2 and are as follows:

1. How do Jesus' identity and the quality and implication of his mediation as explicated in Hebrews impact on his being conceptualised as an ancestor and placed side by side with ancestors in the ancestor Christology paradigm?

2. Bearing in mind the acceptance by some African scholars (Nyamiti, Kalengyo, Bujo) of the possibility of continuous communion and interaction with the ancestors, how should one view such a possibility of communication with ancestors along with the rituals and practices that take place, in the light of Hebrews as well as other biblical passages in general that forbid such activities?

Because the evaluation of Chapter 4 will utilise an integration of the key conclusions of the previous Chapters, it is important first to recapitulate such key conclusions.

4.2 Summary of key conclusions in Chapter2

4.2.1 Supposed mediation of the ancestors as a basis for Christ as ancestor-mediator

In Chapter 2, we looked at an overview of African theology and Christological discourse and its development in a general manner while focusing on the African ancestor Christology. We reviewed and critically analysed key works that significantly contribute to the development of the ancestor Christology paradigm. One common thread among the examined authors is that they all agreed on the use of the ancestor category for Jesus on the basis of the traditional African understanding of ancestors. The traditional concept of ancestors is built on kinship and consanguinity with mediation at the core. As we saw earlier[91], Mbiti (1969:58-73)an influential African theologian asserts that the living-dead [ancestors] occupy the ontological position between spirits and men and between God and men. He goes to great lengths to show the types and functions of intermediaries that exist in Africa and stresses their importance in the socio-political and religious life of Africans. Essentially, we discovered that the chief similarity that exists between the various ancestor Christologies and makes them cohere is the shared understanding and the general acceptability of the concept of mediation in Africa as well as the

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[91]See 2.5.4

common assumption that ancestors can and do mediate[92]. Generally, it is for reasons such as these that it seemed plausible for these scholars to present Jesus as ancestor-mediator.

Even though we have in Chapter 2, presented the specific contributions the concept could make towards contextual Christology in Africa, the following are a summary of the shortcomings we discovered in conceptualising Jesus in ancestor categories

4.2.2 The difficulty in clarifying Jesus' divine identity in African ancestor Christology (AAC) due to the utilisation of an existing cosmological framework

We noted the difficulty encountered by Pobee (1979:94) who was seemingly aware that the ancestors were humans who assumed their ancestral position by reason of death and are not to be confused with the supreme deity. He attempted to place Jesus in a distinct category separate from the other ancestors by insisting that, though Jesus is an ancestor, he is a *nonpareil* of an ancestor, that is, eminent beyond comparison. His attempt to maintain the divinity of Jesus and still present Him as an ancestor showed a major limitation and an ensuing difficulty that becomes apparent in the use of the concept by the other proponents examined. As earlier noted, the traditional African cosmological framework illustrated by figure 2[93] consists of a hierarchy in which there is God, then ancestors, followed by humans and then things. Within such a framework, it becomes difficult if not impossible, to place Jesus within the category of ancestors and then effectively transport Him back into the realm of the transcendent God. Once He is presented within the category of the ancestors, the cosmological framework assigns Him a subordinate place. This difficulty has not been successfully addressed by the proponents of the concept. Nyamiti's (1984:31-32) attempt in responding to this difficulty was to root the divinity

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[92]Possible exceptions to the common understanding that ancestors still perform the function of mediation are Bediako and Nyende. These scholars, even though they espousethe concept as valid for explaining Christ in Africa, have each sought to make the point that Christ now displaces the ancestors as the "ancestor and sole mediator" (Bediako, 2004:25-28) and as "the greatest ancestor" (Nyende, 2007:378). Calling for the displacement of ancestors in African Christianity, Nyende (2005:229) argues that Jesus as the type displaces ancestors as the antitype; but insists that the ancestors should not be rejected as evil but should rather be given 'subordinate value in African Christianity as part of an African Christian consciousness' (Nyende 2005:230-232).

[93]See 2.4.1

of Jesus in the Trinity. This was shown to be fraught with difficulties by Bujo. This difficulty in clarifying Jesus' divine identity as distinct from that of the ancestors has remained a major weakness of the concept.[94]

4.2.3 The problem of confused identity between Jesus and ancestors since they are both prayed to

Another major shortcoming of the concept that we find in our research is an observation highlighted by Nyende (2007:314). According to him, there still exists vagueness among some African people about who the ancestors are and how they relate to the supreme deity since prayers are often addressed to the ancestors themselves. This problem is a major difficulty that confronts the concept. Bujo for instance, asserts that the transmission of 'life-force', good health, numerous progeny, healthy cattle and abundant crops are all signs of the presence and the blessing of the ancestors (Bujo, 1992:22-25). In essence, the ancestors are considered to mediate such blessings. If prayers are to be made to the ancestors, it then means they are able to mediate between God and the people. The concept assumes the active involvement of the ancestors through their mediation for the good of the community. The major themes of identity and mediation summarise the weakness of the concept as our study in Chapter 2 shows.

4.3 Summary of key conclusions in Chapter 3

4.3.1 Jesus as the Son, heir and creator (divine identity)

In Chapter 3our study of Jesus' identity in the exordium along with a study on the exegetical and theological meaning of 'the cloud of witnesses' in Hebrews 12:1 displays the Christology of Hebrews and its view on ancestors to be different from that which the ancestor Christology concept portrays. The author of Hebrews is unambiguous on the identity of Jesus. From the opening statement in the Chapter 1:2, the author presents Jesus as the Son, the heir and the

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[94]When Jesus is presented as ancestor, the persistent identity of the ancestor in the mind of most Africans is linked to that of their departed ancestors; and they will not mind adding one more altar of worship or a shrine for this Jesus as one of the 'ancestors' they have neglected. The difficulty arises when they realise that this Jesus is not like the departed ancestors. He demands exclusive allegiance

Creator. Speaking of Jesus as Son, Heir and Creator effectively places Jesus within the divine identity of God. The uniqueness of Jesus as a Son becomes instructive when viewed from the perspective of Psalm 2 and 110 which, as we have shown in the study, define His identity as God. The predicates the author uses are familiar within the Jewish monotheistic theological framework as attributes that define the identity God; such predicates as eternal creator, owner (inheritor) and the sustainer of the universe who is to be worshiped.

4.3.2 Jesus as the revealer of God, cleanser from sin and intercessor for the well-being of His subjects (Mediator)

In Heb.1: 3, the author elaborates on the scope of the mediation of the Son to include revealing God's glory and essence, cleansing from Sin and sustaining all creation. As the 'χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως' the author combines the thoughts of 'imprint' and that of 'essence' 'to convey as emphatically as he could his conviction that, in Jesus Christ, there has been provided a perfect, visible expression of the reality of God' (Lane, 1991a:13).

4.3.3 Jesus as greater than prophets, angels, revered ancestors and he alone as worthy of worship

Another key conclusion we arrived at from the study of Hebrews is that the author presents Jesus as greater or superior (κρείττων) to angels, prophets, ancestors and he is to be worshiped by all, without exception (Heb. 1:6). Following Webster (2009:92), we concluded that the effect and intent of 'κρείττων' as the accumulated comparative, is to say "incomparable". What the author of Hebrews maintains is that the Son's superiority is not an incremental one, nor is he just of the highest dignity among the angels but he is rather the enthroned object of worship.

4.3.4 Deceased ancestors as exemplars and not in a position to do any more than inspire

In our study of Hebrews 12:1 on the place of the ancestors, the key conclusion reached was that the ancestors bear witness to the faithfulness of God, even unto death for some of them. They can only serve to inspire the living without any active involvement in the present life of the living. We did not find within the teaching of Hebrews, any admonition to seek the blessing of

the ancestors through prayers to them or to pour libations and sacrifices, as some proponents of ancestor Christology would suggest.

In the light of the above, we would now address in more detail the question of the extent to which the African ancestor Christology, which we have argued must at all times derive its basis from the Bible, is inconsistent with the teaching of Hebrews on the identity of Jesus and the place of ancestors.

4.4 Jesus' identity and mediation: versus ancestors

Though Bediako (2004:22-24) subscribes to the ancestor concept as a valid way of speaking about Jesus in Africa, his call for a need for Christological concepts in Africa to be founded on 'Biblical revelation and Christian experience' remain a key admonition that needs to be taken seriously. Even though Bediako (2004: 30) believes that the ancestors are 'the product of the myth-making imagination of the community' the majority of African scholars would rather take the ancestors seriously as a concrete reality[95]. It is the fact that ancestors are taken seriously that leads to their being juxtaposed with Jesus in analogy as mediators.

In our study of Hebrews, a major point that emerged in relation to the mediation of Christ is that Jesus as the Son mediates God's eschatological word. He is also the one 'through whom' all creation came into being (1:1-2). As the priestly mediator (1:3) the Son's mediation entails purification for sin, and continual intercession for the well-being of those on behalf of whom he mediates. As the royal mediator (1:3), Hebrews declares the Son to be superior to other human mediators (prophets) as well as angelic mediators; therefore, He is deemed to deserve worship (Hebrews 1:6). His priestly mediation likened to that of Melchizedek signifies an unending priestly mediation. These are crucial aspects of His mediation bound in His identity that the African ancestors are unable to match up to. It is these aspects that set the mediation of the Son above and beyond comparison with that of the African ancestors. These aspects will be elaborated on in the next subsection as conclusions that came from our study in Chapter 3. As

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[95] See Nyamiti, 1984:15-17, Also Bujo, 1992:22-25

indicated in the introduction to this Chapter, some aspects of this elaboration will utilise some related biblical, Christological and theological insights to further clarify and strengthen the evaluation.

4.4.1 Jesus and ancestors: Juxtaposed in analogy

When Jesus is placed side by side with the ancestors as the AAC concept does, major limitations that should inhibit the stance are ignored or not paid sufficient attention. Take Nyende (2007:211-217) for instance, he discusses the superiority of Jesus in comparison to the ancestors as we saw in Chapter 2[96], and clearly makes the point that ontologically, Jesus' identity as God's Son who lives eternally, unlike the ancestors who are the sons of the community that live and die (whose memory is also forgotten eventually) makes him greater they are. Importantly, he also mentions that Jesus' closeness to God unlike the ancestors as well as the redemptive quality of his mediation makes him the greatest. Surprisingly though, he mentions the fact of Jesus' redemptive mediation as a point of difference from the ancestors without emphasis, failing to highlight that the redemptive nature of Jesus' mediatorial sacrifice is a key idea in Hebrews that arguably sets Jesus apart and beyond comparison with the ancestors.

As noted earlier in our study,[97] the particular usage of καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in Hebrews 1:3and as further clarified within the Epistle (9: 14; 22, 23; 10:2) shows the mediation of Christ to entail an atoning sacrifice for sin. His atoning sacrifice that dealt with sin makes Him able to forgive and cleanse from sin. Redemption and cleansing from sin makes the quality of his mediation beyond comparison with that of the other mediators. The mediation of the ancestors, if at all, does not ensure cleansing from sin. This is clear when understood in the context of the High Priest analogy that the author uses. Even though the High Priest offers sacrifices for sin as a mediator, he lacks the power to do away with sin. This makes the High Priest to continually offer those sacrifices in the hope of obtaining forgiveness and cleansing. It is into this scenario that the author of Hebrews presents Jesus as the one whose High priestly mediation perfectly settles the

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[96] See 2.4.2

[97] See 3.5.3

problem of sin. By his sacrificial death, He has dealt with sin. The sacrifice of His body and shed blood replaces and completes all such sacrifices (Heb.9:23-28; 10:1-18). There is no need for continual mediation and sacrifices in the hope of forgiveness and cleansing because Jesus has offered that one sacrifice for sin, which implies that forgiveness and cleansing from sin are obtainable from Him alone (Heb. 1:3; 5:2-10; 7:11-28; 9:11-14;).

While angels are always presented as 'standing' (Is. 6:2; 1Kings. 22:19) or falling on their faces and the priests as ministering, the author of Hebrews shows the Son not only as superior in being and status in relation to angels, prophets, ancestors and priests, but as having completed the priestly work of redemption, having made 'purification for sins' (καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν) thus taking his royal sitting position as ἐκάθισεν denotes (O'Brien (2010:60).

To elaborate further on the inconsistency that exists when Jesus is placed side by side with the ancestors, Nürnberger, (2007:95-96) shows that the difference between Christ and the African ancestors that impinges on their being placed side by side does not lie only in ontologically conceived difference, but also in what they actually stand for and in what they do to us. Among a number of differences that Nürnberger (*ibid*) points out between Christ and the ancestors includes, interalia, the limitation of the sphere of ancestral authority, supervision and influence. The most important according to him, is the fact that Christ became 'sin for us' and died as such and rose into a new life, so that we become righteous by the reason of Jesus death and resurrection. He maintains that African traditions do not normally foresee such a transformation. Nürnberger's observation finds support in Gehman (1999:5-6) who asserts that the concept of resurrection as found in the Bible does not feature in African thought. Rather, as we saw in our study on how Africans view ancestors and how they have interpreted Hebrews 12:1, death is seen as a translation into the ancestral realm on the understanding that the dead known as 'the living dead' are able to continue to interact with, and influence the lives of the living, which is an understanding we have shown to be contradictory to the teaching of Hebrews. When Jesus is juxtaposed with, and presented in ancestral terms using the existing framework of the ancestors as those who transit from the earthly to the ancestral realm, the hope of resurrection as a consequence of faith in Jesus could be lost. Because the ancestors never resurrected but merely

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transited into ancestral realms, the danger of considering Jesus as not having resurrected makes it more difficult to fully comprehend Jesus' victory over death and His offer of the hope of resurrection. The fear of death could be more powerful than the hope of the resurrection for those who believe in a Jesus in the framework of ancestors since the ancestors do not typify resurrection.

The import of taking all of this into consideration is that because forgiveness from sin and salvation is available through the mediation of Christ as we saw in Hebrews, and redemption is also available in his death and resurrection and along with that, the guarantee of resurrection for the followers of Jesus, an unfathomable theological gulf between Christ and the ancestors exists which leaves little grounds if at all, for comparatively analogising Christ with the ancestors. Juxtaposing Jesus with the ancestors evidently detracts more than it exalts the fullness of Jesus' deity and His accomplishment. The concept continually fails to take into account the possibility of a critical soteriological deficiency in the identity of Jesus when he is presented and understood as ancestor. The identity of Jesus and the quality and scope of His mediation places Him beyond being juxtaposed with the ancestors.

4.4.2 Ancestors as mediators between spirits, men and God?

Mbiti, (1969:58-73) at an early stage in the development of African theology asserts that the ancestors, known as 'the living-dead' do occupy the ontological position between spirits, men and God. In Africa, ancestors are considered to be indispensible intermediaries. They are considered to be an integral part of the traditional African religious and social structure. In most African societies, ancestors are believed to be the ones who sanction the customs, values and ethics of the community. As such, they are believed to give moral guidelines as well as enforce ethics (Partain, 1986:1067). Stinton (2004:110) describes intermediaries or mediators in the traditional African perspective, as those beings who function in the roles of discernment and mediating reconciliation in situations of illness, or any actual or perceived disharmony. As Turaki (1999:257) further notes, 'salvation, immortality and human well-being' are all tied to the ancestors and ultimately to the community in traditional Africa. The ancestors are therefore considered as playing the crucial role of maintaining the well being of the community. Appiah-

Kubi (1997:67) concurs and maintains that the idea of a mediator or intermediary is common among most African societies and is an important part of the African heritage which influences Africans' interpretation of Jesus in relation to such mediatory conceptions.

As Nyende (2007:372) further points out, the religious cosmology of Africa is encompassed by spirit beings consisting of ancestors/ ancestor spirits, spirits and deities. He further clarifies that while some communities like the Shona of Zimbabwe may have a simple hierarchical ordered spirit world beginning with humans to ancestors and to the supreme deity, others like the Yoruba's in Nigeria have complex hierarchically ordered spirit world with humans, ancestors, a horde of deities and the supreme deity at the top. Therefore, he posits that ancestors and other spiritual beings can be understood to function as mediators of the ultimate deity in the African experience. He gives further examples of the widespread belief in ancestors as mediators in Africa by citing selected examples of the Ngonis in Malawi, the Mende of Sierra Leone and the Ibos of Nigeria.

What the forgone goes to demonstrate is that the ancestors are believed to occupy a mediatory role between men and God in traditional African thinking and they need to be constantly appeased for the benefit of the well-being of the community. It is this same framework that informs the ancestor Christology concept as we showed earlier. The outworking of this understanding also plays out in many traditional African settings where almost every ill or evil is interpreted to be a result of some disharmony with the gods or the 'living-dead' ancestors who must be appeased for the restoration of peace and harmony to the concerned individual or the community as a whole[98]. This is usually done through the offering of prayers, libations, sacrifices, and or rituals mediated by a priest or the necessary official. As Magesa (1997:195) shows, prayers, sacrifices and offerings are considered essential elements and feature

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[98]Within the period of this research, I got to know an individual who is a Christian and had a touching story of a running battle he has had with his immediate family members (some of them professing Christians) as well as the larger family clan who are insistent that the reason why he and his wife lost their baby followed by other ill fated events was because the ancestors have been neglected and needed to be appeased through offering some sacrifices and rituals. This was irrespective of the fact that he tried to make them realize that he and his wife both tested positive to the HIV virus and the fact that the hitherto unknown status and the resultant complications could have possibly resulted in the loss of their baby.

prominently in the practice of African religion. He further points that 'The fundamental meaning of sacrifices and offerings (in African traditional religions) lies in their efficacy to restore wholeness'. According to him, 'if wrongdoing causes a dangerous separation of the elements of the universe, sacrifices and offerings aim to re-establish unity and restore balance'. Therefore, offering prayers and sacrifices to the ancestors by Africans, opines Magesa (1997:203) 'are pragmatic ways by which the living acknowledge their limitations before the ancestors and God and their indebtedness and gratitude to the mystical powers'.

In chapter 3, it was shown that we disagree with the assertion that ancestors are mediators between men and the supreme deity. Our study in Hebrews showed that ancestors occupy an important place as recipients of God's word (Heb.1:1), and as Calvert-Koyzis(1997:37-44) affirms, they occupy an important place in new Testament writings where they are depicted as those to whom God has covenanted to fulfil promises. The author of Hebrews also shows in Chapter 11 and 12 that they are examples. The inconsistency comes into focus when the ancestors are considered as mediating between God and men. In Heb.1, the prophets were depicted as the mediators of God's word, but the author hastened to show that their mediation was imperfect and have been overtaken by the perfect mediation of Christ.

Nyirongo (1997:54)[99] rightly asks whether, despite the fact that some African theologians defend and insists that ancestors do serve as mediators, the ancestors are to be considered as God appointed mediators biblically speaking. Also, do the ancestors embody the underlying reasoning behind biblical mediation as foreshadowed in the mediation of the biblical priesthood? To add to Nyirongo's question, in the face of the need for mediation, should Africans call upon Jesus, or the ancestors, or both? Obviously, as I have maintained in Chapter 2[100], making room for Jesus' mediation alongside that of the ancestors' sets up a system of mediation outside of that contemplated by the author of Hebrews; it seeks to re-enact or contradict what the author of

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[99] See Nyirongo (1997:51-58) in a Chapter interestingly titled 'Who is the mediator: Christ, ancestors, priests, mediums or...?'. in which he discusses the similarities in African belief in mediators and the belief in the Roman Catholic tradition and draws a clear conclusion on the biblical meaning and role of the mediator. He also outlines the biblical basis for the uniqueness of Christ as mediator.

[100]See 2.4.2.4

Hebrews labours to show, namely that Christ has consummated, transcended and fulfilled. Since the fundamental assumption of the mediation of the ancestors between God and men is shown to be inconsistent with biblical teaching and the teaching of Hebrews in particular, what this portends for the ancestor Christology concept is that, the fundamental basis for the concept is faulty, and as long as the concept remains on such a faulty basis of assumption, it will continue to display such inadequacies. The need for Christology to be undergirded by very a solid biblically consistent basis cannot be overemphasised. Just as a faulty foundational basis remains a threat to the building, a faulty Christological basis remains a harbinger of heresies and errors.

The quality of Jesus' priesthood and the impact of his mediation leave no grounds or place for mediation by ancestors as the ancestor Christology concept accommodates. This is most especially so when 'life force' or salvific and existential blessing is linked to the mediation of the ancestors as Bujo (1992:22-25) attempts to do. It must be pointed out here that human mediation and the human mediator as an African cultural reality that plays out in for instance, mending broken relationships between individuals or communities, or negotiating traditional marital agreements and other communal issues are unique and enviable ways of expressing African communality. While it may be possible that some ancestors may have served as mediators at human levels while they lived, the problem arises when such mediation is believed to carry on after death. Death as it were, forces their 'mediation' to cease.

4.4.3 The quality, impact & implication of Jesus' mediation

Commenting on the writer of Hebrews' claim for the mediatorial title of High Priest for Jesus, Ellingworth (2001:700) states a position so succinct and key to the argument here that it warrants a complete recast:

> Jesus is for the writer both a new and better kind of high priest, and also the sacrifice which he himself offers to God (Heb. 9:11–14, 23–28). The writer sees in the mysterious figure of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1–17) a foreshadowing of priesthood higher than that of Aaron, and fulfilled in Jesus. His death supersedes the OT cultus, as reality supersedes a mere foreshadowing (10:1–4); it effects in the conscience of the believer the forgiveness and purification that the OT cultus

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could effect only in an external manner (10:5–18). In particular, Jesus carries out on a cosmic scale the functions repeatedly and ineffectually performed by the high priest of the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

What Ellingworth brings out in essence is that Jesus' role as the mediator-priest makes him a new and better high priest who offers himself as the sacrifice to fulfil and supersede what the former priesthood foreshadowed. In our study of Heb. 1: 3,where we demonstrated that the far reaching effect of Jesus' mediatorial priesthood is better understood when one takes into account the import of καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶνwhich goes to show that the Son's mediation does away with sin and ensures forgiveness, which the repeated functions of other priest-mediators could not achieve. The further attendant implication is that the quality of the sacrifice is superior and complete since there is no any other sacrifice better or likened to the sacrifice of his life that has been offered. Other sacrifices fade in significance when compared to the sacrifice of his life; such other sacrifices actually have no place or value. Furthermore, though other priests must cease their mediatorial function by reason of death, Christ does not, as the author of Hebrews says, 'Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood' (Hebrews 7:23-24). Unlike the ancestors, who we insist, die and cease to mediate and who may even fade out of memory due to the passage of time and changes in generations; it is the permanency of Jesus' priesthood that guarantees the permanency of his mediation.

In Africa, the widespread understanding of the concept of death is that it is a translation into the ancestral or spirit realm (Nürnberger (2007:25)[101]. This is based on a general hypothesis that the dead are able to continue to interact with and influence the lives of the living. On that basis, ancestors are believed to maintain a mediatory role that continues even after death. However, a biblically informed understating of death as the end of life here and now and an end of

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[101] Nürnberger (2007:25) further points out that this does not mean that people ordinarily look forward to death or becoming ancestors in Traditional Africa. He explained that the after-life is not generally a desirable goal except for those who are very old. At the most, people hope to continue to be respected after their demise and hope not to be excluded from the community, not to fall victim to faded memories, and not to become a homeless spirit because of neglected funeral rites.

interaction with the living would therefore mean that from a biblical point of view, belief in ancestors as the living-dead and as performing a continuing mediatorial function cannot be clearly supported. Gehman (1999:141-142) specifically posits that the death of Christians according to biblical understanding refers to being 'at home with the Lord' (2 Corinthians 5:1-10) and therefore precludes the possibility of such dead Christians communicating with the living not the least through mediums which the Lord in whose presence they are has forbidden. Biblically, mediators or priests cease to function by reason of death. Only Christ continues because he ever lives to mediate in intercessions (Hebrews 7:25). His priestly function of mediation is unending since he is noted to have no beginning nor ending of days, just like Melchizedek.

Torrance (2009:61-96) explains further about the quality, impact and implication of the mediation of Christ as follows: 'whether we look at the teaching of Paul or that of Hebrews, we find that the theology of atonement is grounded upon the person of Christ as mediator and intercessor, and it is that work of mediation and intercession that we must seek to understand'. He further posits that in the letter to the Hebrews, the unity of the priest and the sacrifice in one person once for all ends all legal enactment and temporal repetition of sacrifices. In other words, the far-reaching implication of Jesus' mediatorial role is that, he has achieved a reconciliation which is once and for all and by its very nature, cannot be repeated. All that is left is 'a counterpart in the worship and adoration and confession of the church in the form of Eucharistic prayer and praise echoing the heavenly intercession of Christ as we overhear it in John17' (Torrance, 2009:91). Furthermore, Torrance (2009:93-94) explains:

> In the Epistle to the Hebrews, as also in the Johnnie writings, Jesus is stated to be both the lamb and the priest, so that here the twofold act in the liturgy of the Old Testament revelation is now one act in the incarnate person of Christ. Once and for all Christ sacrificed himself and presented himself before God as our sacrifice thus entering into the presence of God as our advocate and mediator to be accepted by him. It is one indivisible act in one indivisible person. Now the fact that atonement in act is identical with Christ himself, and the fact that Christ is

God and man, means that once the act of atonement is made, it is made once for
all and it lives on forever in the person of the mediator.

The understanding above seems missing in the conceptualisation of Jesus in ancestor categories, but this understanding remains an important basis to constructing Christology. The quality, impact and implication of Jesus' mediation as missing components in the elaboration of Jesus' identity in the ancestor Christology concept, again, shows a Christological concept that fails to adequately and biblically explicate who Jesus is to Africans.

4.5 African ancestor Christology and its relationship to traditional ancestor belief and practices

4.5.1 Continuous communication with ancestors and related practices

In Chapter 2, this research has established a relationship between conceptualising Jesus in ancestor categories and belief in traditional ancestors and the practices that go along with it. When Jesus is conceptualised in ancestor categories and presented to Africans as such, what underlies the conceptualisation is the existing framework of the traditional ancestors which also happens to be the frame of reference for the recipients of such concepts. This existing frame of reference of the traditional ancestors goes along with some practices. What have been identified in Chapter 2 as one of the weaknesses of the African ancestor Christology concept is that the potency of the cult of the ancestors is in most cases elaborated in very positive sense only, without paying adequate attention to addressing the pre-existing practices that involve the ancestors. By so doing, most proponents of the concept inadvertently validate belief in the continuation of communication with the traditional ancestors along with the attendant practices in communing with them. As earlier indicated, we do not find support for this understanding in the teaching of Hebrews. That is the aspect that the next section intends to address in more detail. Some aspect of the evaluation in this subsection especially 4.5.3 and 4.6 addresses aspects that appear to be beyond the immediate scope of our exegetical findings, but is considered necessary here as matters of related consequence to the discussion at hand. Admittedly, some of the issues in the said subsections (4.5.3, 4.6) might require further study beyond our immediate scope.

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4.5.2'Communion of the saints' and the role of the African ancestors

We have noted in Chapter 2 that Taylor (1963:16) made a significant contribution towards stimulating the growth of African Christology. His question stimulated significant Christological reflection as we discussed earlier. Taylor (1963:166) again asks: 'Is it not time for the church to learn to give the Communion of Saints the centrality which the soul of Africa craves?'.His question makes allusion to a part of 'the apostle's creed' and by this very question, Taylor ushers in an angle of thought into the African theological space that other African theologians sought to develop. His observation compels us to ask the question 'what does the communion of saints mean to Africans?'And whether the understanding reflects consistency with the teaching of the Bible and Hebrews in particular? The phrase 'the communion of saints' which has been subjected to varying interpretations has a bearing on this research. As it relates to this research, it is important to note that this phrase has significantly informed how African theologians view the relationship between African Christians and their ancestors.

The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed and the Athanasian Creed are three of the most famous creeds established in the first five centuries of church history (Guretzkiand Nordling).[102] While serving as a summary of the Christian doctrine[103] the apostle's creed dated around A.D. 150 is particularly known to reflect the early form of New Testament Christology. The creed reads as follows with my emphasis in bold:

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[102] Grenz, S., Guretzki, D., & Nordling, C. F. 1999. *Pocket dictionary of theological terms*

[103]Evans, C. A. 1997. Apostle's creed In Dictionary of the later New Testament and its development. See also Cairns, A. (2002: 37) in Dictionary of Theological Terms.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.[104]

Early in the developmental stages of African theology, Edward Fashole-Luke (1974: 215), an Anglican pioneer African theologian, described the communion of the saints as 'a spiritual fellowship which is based upon union with God in Christ through baptism which cannot be terminated by physical death'. As Partain (1986:1068) rightly observes, this definition creates ambiguity, more so when viewed in the light of Fashole-Luke's (1974:216) assertion that 'we cannot simply say that the African ancestor can be embraced within the framework of the universal Church and included in the Communion of Saints'. But then he insists that no one living or dead is outside the scope of the merits of the death of Christ. Furthermore, Fashole-

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[104] Translated from the Latin by Christian Reformed Church, accessed online 20 September 2013:

http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed

Luke (1974:219) then posits that 'there is no prima facie reason why those who believe that their departed brethren are within reach of their words should not ask for the prayers of those who are with the Lord'.

This position correlates with Mbiti's (1971:148-149) who cautiously posited that we cannot suppose that dead saints have no interest in the Church on earth, and we cannot forbid communion between saints on both sides of life as long as it is done in Christ. This confirms Mbiti's notion of the ancestors as the 'living dead'. For Fashole-Luke (1974:219), 'The intercession of the departed, who are with Christ, is a legitimate consequence of the fellowship in prayer which unites the whole body of Christ'.

Gabriel Setiloane, a South African Methodist theologian (1978:407) also contributed to African theology in its early stages and his view on the ancestors and how they relate to the African Christian is best captured in a poem he wrote. The poem reads as follows:

Ah, yes it is true

They are very present with us

The dead are not dead; they are ever near us,

Approving and disapproving all our actions,

They chide us when we go wrong,

Bless us and sustain us for good deeds done,

For kindness shown, and strangers made to feel at home

They increase our store, and punish our pride[105].

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[105]Setiloane, G. M (1978:407) in 'How the Traditional World-View Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana'.

What becomes apparent from the above review is that fundamentally, key African theologians have set precedents for how others will understand and translate 'the communion of the saints' in relation to African ancestors. Also worth noting is that the African theologians that have contributed to viewing favourably towards communing with the African ancestors favourably, are, as seen above are not necessarily from the Roman Catholic tradition only. What this points to is that such a view of ancestors is not particularly limited to those African theologians within the Roman Catholic tradition whose official church teaching on saints when transposed into the African scene, could include African ancestors. Rather it is a sympathetic and accommodating view of the ancestors that is generally prevalent in Africa especially among those who subscribe to conceptualising Jesus as ancestor. A few examples of the more recent view of African theologians would further substantiate this.

Kalengyo, (2009) an Anglican and New Testament professor at the Ugandan Christian University has featured in Chapter 2 of this research where his specific contribution to the conversation was highlighted, especially as it relates to ancestors. In interpreting the cloud of witnesses of Hebrews 12:1, Kalengyo (2009:51) maintains that Hebrews 12:1 parallels an acknowledgement of the active role of the ancestors in the life of the living. In his view, the heroes of faith are presented in the form of a towering and possibly a cheering crowd of ancestors over the living. According to him, 'the picture of a cloud describing a crowded group of people is a common classical figure and expresses not only the great number of people, but also the unity of the crowd in their witness'. When Kalengyo (2009:60) describes the relationship between his Ganda people and their ancestors today, he insists that 'the Ganda are so inextricably linked with the ancestors that any attempt to deny them a relationship with the ancestors is tantamount to denying them life itself' because, 'the individual, family and clan cannot exist apart from the goodwill and continual support of the ancestors'. Kalengyo (2009:66) therefore concludes that Chapter 11 speaks of the departed faithful ancestors who are surrounding the living as the 'great cloud of witnesses' referred to in Hebrews 12:1. There exists in his view, a parallel to affirm that 'the departed faithful ancestors as it were are still in a way in fellowship with the living providing inspiration and encouragement'. Though he makes clear that they provide inspiration and encouragement, his earlier assertion as discussed above shows that

practically speaking, the Ganda look to the ancestors for good will and support without which they cannot exist.

Kalengyo's interpretation of the 'cloud of witnesses' confluences with the views of the earlier African theologians on the meaning of the creedal phrase 'communion of the saints'. Together, they endorse a continuing and active relationship between the departed ancestors and their living descendants since the ancestors are in his view, maintaining an active presence. A recent support for Kalengyo's view is seen in comment by Cromhout, M. (2012) of the University of Pretoria; which though in concurrence but slightly nuanced, also asserts that the ancestors maintain an active presence in the community[106].

Nürnberger (2007:88) points out that the picture in 12:1 of 'the great cloud of witnesses' surrounding us is popularly used in defining ancestors as the deceased who are included within the community of believers and that this definition is especially favoured by those who see Hebrews 12:1 as an important New Testament biblical warrant for a belief in active interaction between the living and the 'living-dead' ancestors.

However, our study in the previous Chapter differs with this view regarding the role of the ancestors in Hebrews 11 and 12:1. Admittedly, the ancestors are presented in an important position by the author of Hebrews and as Nürnberger (2007:88) rightly notes, the cloud of witnesses in 12:1 are not witnesses in the sense that they are presently hovering around us in some way, watching and getting involved in what we are doing. Rather, the cloud of witnesses showcases what was accomplished by faith in the past which is to serve as a witness to us in our present.

The linguistic as well as historical evidence proffered by Bartlett (1877:149-153)[107] supports the view that the νέφος μαρτύρων are not onlookers looking down actively at our race, but are rather

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106 It must be said however that Cromhout (2012) unlike Kalengyo, labours to show that the presence the ancestors maintain in the community is in providing honour and reputation and watching as an encouragement for the living to 'throw off and run'. This is a slightly nuanced assertion of the active role of the ancestors.

107 See 3.8.1

presented by the author as bearing witness to us that as they ran so we can run; as they overcame so can we overcome especially if we run with patience, and look steadily 'away from' the things around us to Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith. A vital linguistic evidence that also supports this view is the fact that, the usage of μαρτυρέω[108] specifically as used in Hebrews, is shown to be in the passive verb form especially in Chapters 11 and 12:1 (Verbrugge, 2000:357) which implies that unlike the usage of the verb in its active form elsewhere, the author does not envisage these witnesses as having an active role of witnessing by what they say or do to us, but perhaps by how they lived, persevered and even died.

Brown (1988: 226) echoes similar views by maintaining that, what the verse means is that we are surrounded by former contestants who are witnesses to us of the faithfulness of God. And further adds that the author's intention is to present witnesses to us who testify that faith is worth it, witnesses who have finished their race, and have now passed the baton for us to run ours.

The νέφος μαρτύρωνin Chapter 11 designated as 'the cloud of witnesses' in 12:1 is presented by the author to inspire us and nothing further. This view takes into account the preceding scholarly views as well as the theological force of the passage as reflected in the authors' contemplation, as discussed below.

The author of Hebrews' contemplation as our study of the *exordium* in the previous Chapter indicates is to present Jesus in his divine status as God and God's incomparable word and mediator. The author uses κρείττων (better/more excellent) in 1:4, in order to emphasise Jesus' superiority over the revered ancestors and angels. This contemplation runs through the author's presentation of Jesus in the Epistle. Cockerill (2012:98) demonstrates this fact of the author's contemplation by pointing out that, Jesus, according to the author became 'better'(κρείττων) than the angels because he had become the fully effective saviour by offering a 'better'(κρείττων) sacrifice (9:23) which established a 'better'(κρείττων) priesthood (7:18-19) and covenant (7:22; 8:6) through which the faithful enter a 'better'(κρείττων) (i.e. heavenly) homeland (11:6). This

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[108] Witness not only by word, but example or death. See Zerwick, M., & Grosvenor, M. (1974). In A grammatical analysis of the Greek New Testament. Rome, biblical Institute Press. pg 684

shows the author presenting Jesus as the focal point of both the author's argument and illustrations. The reference to the cloud of witnesses as 12:2 makes clear is to say that Jesus is the one that occupies the focal place of a better (κρείττων) example than the ancestors' especially because he is the ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν of our faith.

The foregone has implication against an interpretation of 12:1 that places emphasis on the ancestors as not only watching but even aiding (or actively involved) with the living in their own race. In 12:2 which is the climax of the unit[109], the author's use of ἀρχηγὸν(initiator) along with τελειωτὴν (consummator) in describing Jesus validates a reading of this section as an exhortation for the readers to keep looking beyond the prophets, priests, and the ancestors listed among the heroes of faith, to Jesus as the chief/perfect model of faith and perseverance. More than human exemplars, the section identifies Jesus as the initiator (ἀρχηγὸν) as well as the consummator (τελειωτὴν) of faith, pointing again to his divine identity and his excelling in comparison to the exemplary human ancestors. As Johnson (2006:317) notes, 'this climactic presentation of Jesus as the hearer's moral exemplar echoes at the very beginning of the composition'.

So then, instead of interpreting the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 as a reflection of the creedal phrase the 'the communion of the saints' and thus a warrant for communing with African ancestors, the evidence before us makes it more plausible to rather understand 12:1 as not referring to departed ancestors that are involved in the life of the living, but as a presentation of the ancestors as exemplars of faith; yet pointing the hearers to Jesus in 12:2 as the more excelling (κρείττων) exemplar. the creedal phrase 'the communion of the saints' must then be understood and interpreted in its simple sense as speaking about belief in the united fellowship of all believers, regardless of nationality, language or culture(Bray, 2000:143)[110]. This circumvents the interpretive practice that adduces 12:1 as a biblical basis for communing with African ancestors.

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[109] See Johnson 2006:317

[110]Bray(2000:153) examines the understanding of this creedal phrase in medieval, middle and present time and posits: At the present time, the doctrine of the communion of saints is generally interpreted according to the dimensions of both time and space. In time, it is taken to mean the fellowship of Christians in every age, past, present and future. In practical terms, this means that the church today has a duty to preserve the faith which it has

4.5.3 Other ancestor practices

At the beginning of this subsection, we established that there exists a relationship between conceptualising Jesus in ancestor categories and accommodating belief in the mediation of the ancestors, along with the attendant practices. What we have also identified as a shortcoming is that the practices that form part of the traditional ancestor framework has not been subjected to critical Biblical evaluation to either assert or refute their validity. Therefore, the evaluation of some of these practices here will be done in the light of the wider biblical understanding.

Yusuf Turaki's views (1999:254-263) are quite helpful as well as insightful on this. Turaki (1999:254) suggests that African scholars are generally agreed that African ancestors are revered and not worshipped as divinities, and it is also generally agreed that they play the role of mediators. The belief in the mediation of the ancestors is followed by various practices as Turaki shows, that include prayers or invocation to or through the ancestors; offering food, drinks, pouring libations and giving sacrifices and communication [through the ancestors] with the spirits of the dead. As Turaki (1999:254) however shows, these beliefs and practices associated with the ancestors clearly fall within the category of practices that are condemned in the Bible. Beliefs and practices such as prayers to the ancestors, offerings and sacrifices to them for help and protection, or speaking, consulting or calling them up all clearly fall within practices that are contra-biblical (Deut. 18:9-12, 14; 1 Sam. 28:3,9ff. Ex. 22:18).

Since it is established that African ancestral practices involve invocation, prayers, offering food, drink, sacrifices and pouring out libations to the ancestors, the critical and obvious implication is that, if the ancestors function as intermediaries or mediators in the sense that they receive such prayers, libation, invocation and sacrifices, then dealing with them becomes idolatry since they then take the place of Christ who according to 1Tim. 2:5 is the only one mediator between God and men (Turaki 1999:254). This is so much more when seen together with Jesus' self

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inherited from the past, and to transmit it unimpaired to future generations. Roman Catholic Christians also maintain that it has a direct bearing on the church triumphant in heaven, and use the doctrine as a justification for praying to the dead, especially to the officially canonized 'saints'. Protestants vigorously reject this interpretation, because prayer may properly be offered only to God, because Jesus Christ, not the saints, is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5) and because the church triumphant has entered into eternal rest. In space, it means that all true believers are united in fellowship, regardless of nationality, language or culture.

declaration in John 14:6 as holding an exclusive mediatory role thus declaring: 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me'.To this, Turaki agrees and concludes that, from a biblical perspective, only Jesus is found as a worthy mediator, capable of both mediating and reconciling between God and man (Dan.7:13,14; John 3:16, 36; Acts. 4: 8-12; Rom. 5:1,2; 3:21-26;8 Heb. 2:14-18; Phil. 2; Eph. 1; Rev. 1,4,5&11). This is critical when brought to bear on the idea that one can embrace Jesus in his true identity as well as holding to the ancestors as mediators along with the practices that follows.

Nyirongo (1997:87) boldly asserts that the supposed communication with the ancestors as practised by some Africans is idolatry; and because demons are usually behind idolatrous practices to encourage and enhance it, such seeming appearance of ancestors are actually demonic manifestations; which is to say, those who indulge in such practices in the thought that they are communicating with their departed ancestors are actually communing with demons.

In a similar vein, Gehman (1999:139-142) adduces evidence that at the heart of the African traditional practice and belief in the living-dead ancestors is that the ancestors continue to interact and even appear to the living to counsel, warn, help, punish or bless them, and he maintains that such activities are not biblical. He attributes such alleged appearances of the dead as the appearance of Satan and his demons and not the dead ancestors. He based this position on The Second Helvetic confession of 1566 as summarising the historic reformed position on the issue as follows:

> Now, that which is recorded of the spirits or souls of the dead sometimes
> appearing to them that are alive and craving [wanting] certain duties of them
> whereby they may be set free; we count those apparitions [appearances] among
> the delusions, crafts, and deceits of the Devil, who, as he can transform [change]
> himself into an angel of light, so he labours tooth and nail either to overthrow the
> faith, or else to call it into doubt.

A point that Nürnberger, (2007:89) makes on this that is worth noting is that, this is not say in a blanketed manner that our progenitor ancestors are all demons that are lost in eternity and 'could not be part of the *communion sanctorum* if they had been believers, it is only to say that they are dead and as such, have no contact or continual interaction with the living according to the biblical witness'.

In a fairly recent study on the practice of communicating with the departed ancestors among the Shona of Zimbabwe, Mazuwa (2010: 21) establishes that the practice of communication with the departed ancestors occurs through pouring libations, making offerings, sacrifices, praying to and fulfilling other requests made by the departed. This according to him is driven by fear of malignant spirits as well as the need for help in distress. He notes that in Shona culture, the perception is that necromancy can be harmonised with or justified from Scripture and 1 Samuel 1:28 has been a viewed as a likely justifying Scripture in the thinking of some Shona people. From the study of 1 Sam 1: 28 as well as other biblical passages, Mazuwa (2010:108) concludes that 1 Samuel 1:28 and other related passages cannot not be used to substantiate the practice of communication with departed ancestors since it is clear that the Bible condemns necromancy and all related practices. From Mazuwa's analysis, what is striking is the fact that those who are involved in the stated practice and hoping to find a biblical justification must at least subscribe to the Bible and are possibly Christians. That being the case, it is not farfetched to see that presenting Jesus to such a group of people in ancestor categories might only serve to further an existing practice by providing some sort of validation for an existing culturally relevant but non biblical practice.

4.6AAC: Continuing validity?

Stinton (2004:131) classified factors that challenge the continual relevance of the ancestor model as historical, missiological as well as theological. Elaborating on historical and modernisationas a factor, Stinton (*ibid*) documented the experience of Ghanaian Catholic Bishop Palmer-Buckle to prove that modernization and urbanization are factors that have alienated Africans from traditional culture and are capable of inhibiting the continual relevance of the AAC model. In concord with Stinton, the Bishop proffered:

Because I grew up in a Christian environment, the role of the ancestors was overshadowed already at a very early age by the saints in the catholic faith and by Jesus Christ. So I have never had a big, call it reverence of ancestors as such. But I grew up in Accra [the Ghanaian capital city]. Maybe that's another negative aspect of it that I grew up in the urban area, so something like pouring libation, calling on the ancestors, something like a stool, ancestral stools, never played much of role in my life.

Another factor that threatens the continual validity of the concept is the ethnocentric nature of the concept. As various respondents in Stinton (2004: 130-142) prove, the fact that Jesus is conceived of as an ancestor in a particular family of Africans automatically cuts off the other families from laying hold of his ancestorship because of lack of familial consanguinity to them. Even though we have highlighted earlier that Bujo exemplifies an effort in constructing an African ethics based on the ancestor model and Nyamiti ventures to build not only Christology but also ecclesiology on the basis of the ancestor model, the respondents' show how difficult this could be in reality, if not impossible. The views of Ghanaian catholic Bishop Sarpong (Stinton, 2004: 132) on the possibility of utilising the African family as a model for the global church with Jesus as the ancestor and the danger of such a venture is critically instructive and worth a complete recast here to place his view in full perspective:

It can be very good and it can be very dangerous, in the sense that the African family is characterised by love, sharing, sensitivity to one another, sharing problems, joint ownership of property and so on. These are all excellent things. But, at the same time, the African family excludes other families. It's very ethnocentric. And what's happening in the African world, in Rwanda, in Burundi, is all an enlargement of the African family. The person who is outside my family is not as important as those in my family. I can band together with my own family members against another person from another family. When somebody from my own family has done something no matter how obnoxious, I support him or her, you see? So whereas the concept of the family can be used beautifully as for the church, in some respects it can be very dangerous.

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It is difficult to disagree with Bishop Sarpong because Africans are known to be a people that are community based and community driven, yet it is this same African value of community that shows itself in its extreme negative form through ethnocentrism that has led to the exclusion of others or even considering them as inferior; in some cases, this can even lead to inter tribal conflicts. Obviously, this is a problem that may be caused by the concept of Jesus as ancestor.

Oborji (2011)[111] asks how long the model will continue to have relevance in Africa considering the momentum of the process of modernization, urbanization and universalism of education. He therefore suggests that the ancestor paradigm may have to be re-examined and re-evaluated by emerging African theologians. Wanamaker (1997: 284) also sees the following as challenging the continual relevance of the ancestral Christology model: 'the conception of the ancestors including their nature and function has changed significantly over the course of time and continues to do so' this he attributes to the same factors as Oborji and a further number of factors including missionary activity and the influence of Christianity.

While it may be an over assertion to infer that the belief in ancestors and the practices associated with it will vanish quickly in Africa due to the reasons considered above, it may however be reasonable to affirm that the place and value of explaining Jesus to Africans in ancestral terms will not only be limiting, but will also diminish in force of relevance considering not only the forces of urbanisation, modernity, the pervading force of postmodernism but also the growth and expansion of evangelical biblical witness in Africa.

4.7 Chapter summary and conclusion

It was indicated at the beginning of the chapter that the African ancestor Christology will be evaluated utilising the findings described in chapter 2 and of the exegesis in Chapter 3. Guiding questions that directed our evaluation were the impact of Jesus mediation on the ancestor

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[111] Accessed online:http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/oborji_5.htm. [Date of access: 23 Sept. 2012].

concept; the related problem of ancestor practices as well as the possibility or otherwise of the continual validity of the concept. The following is a summary of the findings in this chapter:

First, in the conceptualisation of Jesus as ancestor, there is an inadequate presentation of Jesus' identity that fails to capture the qualities and the quality, impact and scope of His mediation.

Secondly, basing the concept on the traditional African cosmology with its hierarchical ordering automatically places Jesus in a subordinate position.

Thirdly, because ancestors do not typify resurrection as Jesus do, basing the conception the traditional understanding of the ancestors threatens the understanding of resurrection and promotes fear of death in the absence of a clear understanding of the hope of resurrection.

Fourthly, prayers and communication with the ancestors along with related practices is not consistent with the teaching of the Bible and Hebrews in particular; and such portrayal of the ancestors in the ancestor Christology concept is inconsistent with the results of this study.

In this evaluation, the biblical and theological basis of linking the ancestors with Christ has been questioned and shown to be faulty. Any attempt to elevate ancestors to the place and position of mediation and existential sustenance and the requisite need to continually acknowledge such by libation and sacrifices to them of any sort is clearly outside the contemplation of the author of Hebrews in particular and the biblical teaching in general. This means that conceiving of Jesus as ancestor and giving room for the mediation of other ancestor could lead to setting up a system of mediation outside of that which Christ has consummated, transcended and fulfilled.

In the light of this, we would have to reject the African ancestor Christology as Christology rooted in an existing traditional framework of African ancestors that stands contrary to the teaching of Hebrews. This also means a rejection of the ancestors as mediators. Consequently, it is concluded that the conceptualisation of Jesus as ancestor needs to be reconsidered. Perhaps,

presenting Jesus as God's Son and sole mediator[112] could circumvent some of the weaknesses while being more reflective of the thoughts of the author of Hebrews.

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[112] Earlier on in this research (2.4.2.2), this suggestion was made. Perhaps this idea merits further exploration. The suggestion does not assume that there may not be any difficulty with presenting Jesus as God's Son and sole mediator.

Chapter 5

Summary, conclusion & suggestions

5.1 Introduction

It remains a fact that Jesus is the epicentre of the Christian faith. Knowing who Jesus is or seeking his identity has made the question 'Who is Jesus Christ?' relevant since the first century to the present time across various cultures. For Africans, the question becomes more personalised and pertinent as many seek to know who this Jesus Christ is and how he relates to them as Africans. It is a question of this nature that serves as the underlying motivation for African Christology. African ancestor Christology occupies a place of prominence among various other concepts as a contextually relevant concept that African theologians have developed in seeking to explicate the identity of Jesus to Africans.

The intense Christological nature of the Epistle to the Hebrews as well as its reflected similarity to the African situation of priests, mediators, sacrifices and ancestors combines to make ancestor Christology and the identity of Jesus in the epistle the main focus of this research. A major problem this research identified is that in developing the concept, its biblical basis (especially in Hebrews) is more inferred than exegetically demonstrated. This makes Bediako's (2004:22-24) question as to whether the conceptualisation is founded on 'Biblical revelation and Christian experience' very instructive.

Because ancestors are held in high esteem across Africa and there are various practices that go along with such beliefs, presenting Jesus as ancestor stands to serve as a validation of such various beliefs and practices even if such beliefs and practices are contra-biblical. This is more so considering the insistence by some of the examined African theologians (especially Nyamiti, Bujo and Kalengyo) on the possibility of continuous communion and interaction with the departed ancestors. This raises the related problem of the place and function of the departed

African ancestors and how to view the various practices that persist among African Christians in relating to those ancestors. These remain issues which the theologians that developed the African ancestor Christology concept have not given adequate attention to.

It is in view of the above that this research undertook to answer the question: 'How does the identity of Jesus in Hebrews impact on the conceptualisation of Jesus in ancestral terms in the African ancestor Christology concept'? The research aimed at the study of the identity of Jesus and the place of the ancestors in the AAC through the works of the major proponents of the concept, a study of the *exordium* in Hebrews 1:1-4 along with a study on the 'cloud of witnesses' in Hebrews 12:1 as a representative text that explains the place and function of ancestors.

 The main objectives that were set for the study were to:

1. Study and analyse the African ancestor Christology concept

2. Study the identity of Jesus and the place and function of ancestors in Hebrews, paying particular attention to the *exordium* in Hebrews 1 as well as Hebrews 12.

3. Evaluate the concept and highlight some implications based on the biblical evidence, including a biblical evaluation of some practices in relating to ancestors today

4. Present Preliminary suggestions based on the conclusion of the research

5.2 Résumé of conclusions

In order to meet the first objective which is to study and analyse the ancestor Christology concept, the research in Chapter 2carried out an analytical review of the concept through a study of the works of key proponents of the concept. The importance of the concept as a worthwhile attempt to present Jesus in familiar thought patterns was noted. Specific contribution that the concept makes towards contextual Christology in Africa were noted and outlined. However, the failure of the concept to take into account important aspects of Jesus' divine identity that sets him apart as the unique and the summation of mediation was noted. Also noted was the problem of parallel mediation of Jesus and the ancestors that the concept accommodates.

To meet the second objective, Chapter 3 studied the identity of Jesus with special emphasis on the *exordium*. This aim was achieved by exegetically examining the *exordium* and interpreting it theologically. The study in this Chapter established that, the epistle predicates the identity of Jesus as divine in very definite ways. This divine identity sets Him apart as the unique and perfect mediator whose nature of mediation is unique in the sense that it is salvific, redemptive and perfect. The Chapter also studied the νέφοςμαρτύρων (cloud of witnesses) in Hebrews 12:1. What emerged is that the νέφοςμαρτύρων are exemplars of faith who only inspire us and are not involved in the life of the living in some other existential way

Chapter4 evaluated the concept so as to meet the third objective. This was done through asking important questions about the concept. The questions were answered using the exegesis of Hebrews as well as the findings of Chapter two as the basis. After analysis and evaluation of the concept, the conclusion in the Chapter was that, a conceptualisation of Jesus in categories that are potent with critical theological and soteriological deficiency; and might also exasperate the existing problem of non-biblical practices such as relating and communing with the ancestors needs to be reconsidered

5.3 Final Conclusion

This research finds that the hypothesis surmised at the beginning of this thesis holds true. The hypothesis of this thesis was that the Christology of Hebrews shows that the conceptualisation of Jesus in ancestor categories is inadequate and fails to capture important aspects of His identity; such aspects that the author of Hebrews sets forth in the *exordium* by placing Jesus within the unique identity of God and as the Son who shares a unique identity with the father. The author of Hebrews sets forth Jesus' identity using predicates familiar within the frameworks of Jewish monotheistic theological framework attributed to God; Predicates such as eternal creator, owner and sustainer (Bauckham 2009:16). It is that divine identity that sets Him apart as a unique and incomparable mediator.

What this research has shown therefore, is that Jesus as the unique and divine mediator whose scope of mediation is salvific and redemptive is presented in an inadequate manner when

presented in ancestral categories. Presenting him as such also creates the problem of a validation of the ancestors as mediators between God and men which is not consistent with the teaching of Hebrews who presents Jesus as the summation and perfection of mediation.

An outflow of validating the departed ancestors as mediators today is that it encourages people to look to the ancestors to mediate on their behalf for God's blessings of peace, prosperity and security or for other existential needs instead of looking to Jesus who is God, the one and only perfect mediator.

5.4 Preliminary suggestion for further study

A noticeable limitation of this research is that the exegesis could not be as wide ranging as possible; though the limitation is self imposed for the sake of the scope of this study. A wider scope of exegesis of Hebrews would be needed to lead to a broader understanding of the identity of Jesus in response to the issues this research has raised. The nature and scope of this study also could not accommodate the construction of a comprehensive Christological model.

Therefore, a study that could widen the scope of this research on the Christology of Hebrews that will focus on the significance and implication of Jesus' identity in relation to his mediation as it relates to the perception of his salvific work especially in Africa is hereby suggested. Such a study could develop or serve as a basis for developing an Christological model from Hebrews that would seek to answer to the crucial need for African contextual relevance while paying attention to biblical exegetical accuracy.

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