




Christ as Priest, Mediator and sacrifice: An exegetical study of Hebrews 9:11-28

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to highlight the concepts of *priesthood*, *mediation*, and *sacrifice* within African Independent Churches, and to evaluate this understanding in light of Hebrews 9:11-28. This will help to identify whether there are points of divergence or convergence. African Independent Churches approach the Bible from an African worldview; hence, their Christology is greatly influenced by concepts within African Traditional Religion. This research further relies on the analysis of Christ's priestly, mediatorial, and sacrificial roles as depicted in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Following the introduction, this study undertakes a critical and analytical review of contextual Christological concepts – such as Christ the Ancestor and Christ the Healer – that have shaped Christological perspectives within African Independent Churches. It also reviews key element of African Traditional Religion, including its concepts of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice, to demonstrate how these have influenced the formation of Christology in many African churches. These insights are then evaluated in light of the research findings from the exegetical analysis of Hebrews 9:11-28.

The research findings indicate that African Independent Churches adopt a more contextual approach in their theology. While the importance of contextualising the gospel in Africa is undeniable, African Initiated Churches have not fully captured the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in their Christology. The influence of African Traditional Religion on their liturgy has contributed to syncretic tendencies, including the practice of sacrifices to ancestors and belief in ancestral or human mediators. In contrast, the book of Hebrews presents Christ as the one who has fulfilled all Old Testament sacrifices as the superior Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator. The African Initiated Churches' misinterpretation of this Christological truth obscures the pre-eminent and all-sufficient role of Christ as presented in Hebrews.

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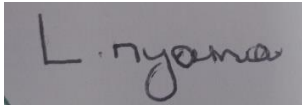
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, solemnly declare that this dissertation is my own original work produced without duplication, and that I have not submitted it previously to any institution for a degree.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Nyama".

Liberty Nyama

30-07-2025

KEYWORDS

African Christian theology

African Christology

African Independent/Initiated Churches

African theology

African Traditional Religion

Christology

Mediator

Priesthood

Sacrifice

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	African Independent Church
AOTO	Ecumenical association of African Theologians
ATR	African Traditional Religion
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
EH	Epistle of Hebrews
JMC	John Masowe Churches
NT	New Testament
NWU	North-West University
OAIC	Organisation of African initiated churches
OT	Old Testament
ZCC	Zion Christian Church

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Personal interest

What provoked my interest in this research is my family background with African Independent Churches (AICs). I observed that, while we attended church every Sunday, we still appeased the ancestors with sacrifices. During these ceremonies of honouring the ancestors, it was our pastor who initially officiated the ritual. Kealotswe (2014:228) observes that by the end of the 20th century, AICs were firmly established across Africa, having become one of the largest Christian communities on the continent. This exponential growth can be attributed to their incorporation of traditional African cultural elements into their Christian theology and practices, making the Christian faith more relatable to people within the African continent. With the significant influence and growth of AICs on the continent, it is crucial to develop a nuanced theological and Christological understanding that is anchored in Scripture. The main theological and pastoral concern of this research, therefore, is to critique AICs' perspectives of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice through an exegesis of Hebrews 9:11-28.

1.1.2 Background to the study

Kealotswe (2014:229) observes that by the mid-20th century, AICs had not only gained autonomy from Western influence but had also developed a distinct theological identity that authentically expressed Christianity from an African worldview. Levison (1992:94) states that AICs are African in leadership, constituency, liturgy, music, and spirit. Hastings (1976:9) agrees and further explains that the late 19th century saw the emergence of the AIC movement, as Africans sought to break away from white control and establish purely African churches. This began in Nigeria and South Africa and has since spread across Africa. This pursuit of African identity has had a significant positive impact on the development of AICs, which are now widespread across the continent. In many parts of Africa, such as countries in Southern Africa, the AIC movement arose as a response by African Christians affiliated with Western mission churches who sought to achieve independence in church governance, doctrine, and worship (Maboea, 2002:7).

Maganda (2002:148) posits that certain African Christians have not only reverted to the practices and beliefs of African Traditional Religion (ATR) but have also sought to equate the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ with that of their ancestors. This phenomenon raises significant concerns that necessitate biblical clarification in order to identify the divine intermediary between God and humanity, as well as to ascertain any points of agreement or contention between the New Testament (NT) and the Christological concepts inherent within AICs. Pauw (1975:156) notes that the Orthodox Church among Xhosa-speaking Christians in South Africa explicitly acknowledges God and preaches about him using a lexicon that demonstrates familiarity with biblical language and terminology, including references to Jesus as "the Son of God". However, a pressing concern remains that a majority of congregants continue to perceive ancestors as mediators. De Visser (2000:108) further observes that in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the title of "mediator" is applied to their leader; therefore, the mediator between Zionists and God is their leader.

Levison (1992:95) reflects that in Africa, mediators must be members of the human community and able to exercise spiritual influence on behalf of the community. Consequently, African theologians reference biblical texts that reinforce Jesus' membership in the human community, such as his circumcision and passages that highlight his influence in the ancestral sphere as the "Firstborn among the dead". This kind of interpretation is well accepted within AICs, as it embraces African identity and the perceived liberation from colonial influences. It is therefore critical that the role of Christ as priest, sacrifice, and mediator be examined to determine whether there is any legitimacy to this view and understanding as applied in the AICs.

Wepener (2021:9) highlights the valuable insights gained from a research project on AICs conducted in South Africa between 2008 and 2011. During the study, the researcher discovered the *Isitshisa*, an annual sacrificial ritual practised by one of the AICs in South Africa. During this ritual, a cow is slaughtered and placed on a shrine to become a burnt offering every Saturday night towards the end of October. Following the killing and burning of the cow, the priest collects the ashes, which can then be used in purification rituals to cleanse individuals and communities from sickness and death. This indicates that there are aspects of AICs' understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice which need to be critically examined in light of careful biblical exegesis.

Within the AIC framework, animal sacrifices, mediators, and African priests still play prominent roles. The EH highlights the purpose of the Old Testament (OT) sacrificial system and its relation to Christ. This will enable the research to critique the AICs' understanding of their Christological concepts and how these might be at variance with Scripture, through an exegetical focus on Hebrews 9:11-28. This passage sheds light on the unchanging and everlasting priesthood of Christ, the mediation of Christ, as well as his once-for-all sacrifice.

1.1.3 Why the Epistle to the Hebrews (EH)?

The broad understanding of Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator is clearly presented in the book of Hebrews, which is highly Christological in nature. Cockerill (2012:14) states that analysing the sermonic structure of Hebrews highlights the interconnectedness of biblical exposition and exhortation. This book demonstrates the authority and divine origin of the OT, while also establishing the finality of Christ as the fulfilment of all types and shadows in the OT. Furthermore, Hebrews serves as a biblical resource for Christology because of how it explicitly presents Jesus as the Priest in heaven, who is our mediator and sacrifice (Heb. 2:11, 17–18; 4:14–16; 5:7–10). Kvidahl and Lioy (2020:40) point out that the book of Hebrews is distinctive in that it offers a comprehensive examination of Christ's priestly ministry, situated within a detailed analysis and exposition of OT sacrifices and priestly functions. Bruce (1991:31) notes that priesthood and sacrifice are inseparable concepts within this text. The exegesis of Hebrews 9:11–28 is able to elucidate Christ's identity as High Priest, his sacrificial death on the cross, and his ongoing role as mediator.

The context of Hebrews is also applicable within the African community. Ellingworth (1993:25) observes that the recurring theme in Hebrews is that of true worship, contrasted with apostasy. Cockerill (2012:21) adds that the book of Hebrews contrasts Christ not with Judaism of its time, but with the ceremonial system of the OT and priestly functions as they are presented in the Pentateuch. The book of Hebrews shows the connection between the OT and NT by explaining how Christ stands in continuity with the OT and how he fulfils it. This aspect of the book enabled the researcher to examine institutions within AICs that resemble those of the old covenant, demonstrating how they are fulfilled in Christ.

Ellingworth (1993:70) adds that the author of Hebrews utilises sacrificial language as an effective means of connecting with his audience while also teaching central aspects of Christian doctrine. The author of Hebrews might have been alarmed by the influence of OT traditions on his audience, as evidenced by the alarming rate of African Christians being lured back to their traditional beliefs through AICs. Lane (1991:47) notes that the original audience of Hebrews was at risk of committing apostasy, which meant abandoning their faith in God by turning away from Christ. This is applicable to the African context, where Christians exhibit syncretic tendencies. Kealotswe (2014:238) agrees that AICs have shown themselves to be rooted in both traditional and biblical teachings, as they incorporate African beliefs and practices while also maintaining the traditions of the Jews in the OT. In this regard, Hebrews 9:11-28 serves as a platform to critique the Christology of AICs.

Kealotswe (2014:232) further observes that AICs derive their theological inspiration from the OT, where they find parallels when comparing the Jewish concept of God and the African concept of God, whose traditions emphasise the importance of rituals and offerings. The EH directly engages with the OT sacrificial system and way of worship. The author offers a distinctive and important exposition that demonstrates how Christ's priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice fulfil and supersede that of the OT.

The exposition in EH is also sufficient to critique the Christological concepts and models within AICs that might be connected to the OT sacrificial way of worship. The key question of this research does not explore the connection between the OT and NT; however, it becomes relevant when interpreting the book of Hebrews. In this instance, the focus of this research, being an exegetical work of Hebrews 9:11-28, requires a clear position on the relationship. While some argue for a discontinuous relationship, others admit a continuous relationship (Antwi, 2020:7-8; Astika, 2013:144-145). Bartholomew (2015:499) explains the relationship between the OT and the coming of Christ in the NT, emphasising both the continuity of God's plan of redemption and the discontinuity brought by Christ's fulfilment of OT promises. There are, however, some hermeneutical challenges in the usage of the OT in NT books, and Hebrews is no exception.

Doriana (1996:143) notes that one of the exegetical challenges in applying Scripture to modern life is building a connection between the ancient world of the Bible and contemporary cultures. This connection will enable proper application of the text in our

African context. Igba (2013:5) observes that the book of Hebrews is more Christological in its nature. The Christology of the audience was not adequate because they were subject to persecutions and pressure; hence, they were in a position of "turning away". This can be said of African Christians who are in a position of "turning away" from Christ to embrace other mediators.

The conception of Christ in Hebrews 9:11-28 as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator played a prominent role in formulating a biblical response to AICs' beliefs concerning sacrifices and ancestors. Nyende (2005:519) summarises it well:

Hebrews, by its example can be used to offer African theology an appropriate analogy for the reconceiving of Christ. This portrayal of Jesus as mediator and High Priest means that we have a biblically sanctioned category that is easily grasped by Africans, one through which they can then conceptualise and interpret Jesus. This is so because in Africa there are a constellation of beliefs and practices focusing on mediator figures.

Much of the content in Hebrews centres on the theme of priesthood, initially introduced in 1:4, further developed in 2:17 and 3:1, and forming the primary focus in 4:14–10:18 (Nyende, 2005:515). This highlights the necessity of situating the research within an expository framework of EH, in order to provide a biblically grounded analysis of the role and mission of Christ in reconciling humanity to God as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice.

1.2 Problem statement

The interpretation and application of Hebrews 9:11–28 within the AICs remains significantly underexplored, resulting in a gap in their understanding of how this passage can inform their Christology, particularly concerning Christ's role as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice. Most AICs readily accept the concept of priesthood in the OT, given its association with sacrifices, rituals, mediation, and intercessory responsibilities. However, the interpretation and theological grasp of Christ's fulfilment of these roles, as presented in Hebrews 9:11-28, continues to be a subject of debate.

Maganda (2002:147) aptly observes that African Christians and missionaries seeking to contextualise the biblical message in Africa are confronted with various theological challenges, such as the syncretism of traditional beliefs with biblical truth. Nyirongo (1997:5) notes a parallel between African beliefs and early Christian thought, explaining

that African theologians inclined towards syncretism have been influenced by early Christian perspectives. To support this argument, Nyirongo (1997:6) states:

Clement of Alexandria thought that God prepared the Greeks with their philosophy and the Jews with the OT for their faith in Christ. The Greek philosophy was a steppingstone to the OT because both were a revelation from the same God. Origen took the same stand and believed that heathen philosophy was not only a foundation but a route to deeper insight.

Similarly, Mbiti (1970:218) echoes:

African people have no creeds to recite; their creeds are within them, in their blood and in their hearts. They have a body of beliefs about God. Their beliefs are expressed through concepts of God, attitudes towards him and various acts of worship.

Nyirongo (1997:16) contends that there should be no objection to the view that God had already revealed himself to African peoples prior to the advent of Christianity, through natural revelation. The key issue lies in how this prior revelation is to be understood and integrated in relation to Christ. This remains a challenge for African Christians today, who are often encouraged to return to their foundational beliefs in ATR as a means of salvation. This tendency contributes to the limited understanding of the revelation of Christ in Scripture among AICs.

Shembe, for example, offered a distinctly Zulu cultural perspective on biblical interpretation, becoming not only a mediator but also a messiah figure for his followers (Sundkler, 1970:111). The principal motivation for joining the movement appears to be the belief that Shembe serves as a saviour of the African people from Western influences. Oleka (1998:111) argues that Africans ought to interpret the Bible according to their own understanding. He further explains that, as Scripture originates from a particular linguistic and cultural context, it must be interpreted and applied within the framework of one's own language and culture. Chukwuka (2022:9) concurs, adding that biblical principles can be contextualised to foster an authentic and biblically grounded relationship with God that resonates with African cultures and values.

Daneel (1970:11) observes that in South Africa and Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), the oppressive colonial climate sparked reactions and protests from African Christians who resisted injustice. Additionally, missionaries' ignorance of indigenous culture and strict rules against ancestral worship largely contributed to members breaking away from

mission churches to join AICs. Maboea (2012:1) further explains that traditional African worldviews are deeply intertwined with the spiritual realm, where communion with ancestors and supernatural powers provides meaning and purpose. Maboea (2012:2) also points out that in recent years, the AIC movement has witnessed remarkable expansion in South Africa, thriving among African communities and attracting devotees of ATR as well as former congregants of mission-oriented churches.

In light of this, the Christology of AICs is significantly shaped by their ATR background and the socio-historical climate of Africa. The limited understanding of how Hebrews 9:11–28 can influence AICs requires further investigation to uncover the theological implications and practical applications of this passage within the context of AICs.

1.3 Research questions

The main research question guiding this study is:

What is the impact of Hebrews 9:11-28 on the understanding and interpretation of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in AICs?

The subsidiary questions were:

- What is the understanding of Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator within AICs?
- What does Hebrews 9:11-28 teach concerning Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator?
- What is the implication of Hebrews 9:11-28 for the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs?

1.4 Aim and objectives

1.4.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how AICs understand the concepts of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice, and to evaluate these understandings in light of Hebrews 9:11-28 to determine whether there are points of divergence or convergence between AIC interpretations and the exegetical meaning of the text.

1.4.2 Objectives

The objectives were to:

- Analyse the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice among AICs.
- Examine the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews.
- Evaluate the implications of Hebrews 9:11-28 for the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs.

1.5 Central theoretical argument

The conception of Christ in Hebrews 9:11-28 is definitive in formulating a valid exegetical critique of the Christological perspectives within AICs concerning priests, sacrifices, and mediators, as well as the contemporary practices of animal sacrifice and ancestral mediation prevalent in AICs today.

1.6 Delimitation

This study does not attempt to address all Christological misconceptions within the AICs. While it does not provide a broad or exhaustive exploration of every Christological aspect, it offers focused insights into the AICs' understanding of Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator.

As indicated earlier, the researcher acknowledges the many hermeneutical challenges associated with the NT's use of OT passages. However, this study does not seek to engage fully with the broader debates on continuity, discontinuity, and related interpretive issues.

1.7 Research methodology

This study adopted an exegetical approach to engage with the Christological views of AICs using literary sources. Falling within the field of NT studies, an extensive exegesis was undertaken to establish the biblical meaning of the text as a basis for critiquing the highlighted views of AICs concerning priesthood, mediators, and sacrifices. Data were collected through a literary analysis of relevant written material on the subject.

1.7.1 Research approach

This study adopted a Reformed evangelical approach to exegetical research, focusing on Hebrews 9:11-28. The research is grounded in the belief that Scripture is the inspired and authoritative Word of God. Furthermore, it sought to interpret the text faithfully within its original context while considering its theological significance (Smith, 2008:170).

1.7.2 Primary method: Historical-grammatical

The study employed a historical-grammatical approach. This method seeks to elucidate the author's intended meaning by analysing the linguistic, grammatical, literary, and historical context of the passage. It entails a meticulous examination of the Greek text, including its syntax and structure, as well as the broader literary context within the EH. Furthermore, it ensures that the interpretation remains faithful to the original meaning of the text (Gorman, 2009:235; Kaiser & Silva, 1994:235). Consequently, this research undertook a comprehensive exegesis of Hebrews 9:11-28, taking into account its historical setting, cultural context, and linguistic features (Blomberg, 2012:27). The aim was to establish an objective biblical account of Christ's role as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator.

1.7.3 Supplementary method: Socio-historical

To complement the historical-grammatical method, a socio-historical approach is employed. This method offers insights into the cultural, religious, and social background of the original audience and helps contextualise the message of Hebrews 9:11-28. Igba & Hobyane (2021:117) quote Meeks (2003:2-7) who correctly views the socio-historical approach to the NT as a method of interpretation that contextualises early Christianity within its first century setting and examines the interplay between the text and contemporary cultural realities. This will enable the research to understand how the text might be received and applied within the context of AICs.

1.7.4 Sources and tools

The study utilised a range of scholarly resources, including critical commentaries, peer-reviewed journal articles, theological dictionaries, and lexicons. Primary sources included the Greek NT and reputable English translations. Secondary sources were selected based on academic credibility and relevance.

1.7.5 Hermeneutical considerations

Special attention was devoted to the theological unity of the OT and NT. This study examined the relationship between the sacrificial themes in Hebrews and the typology and covenant theology of the OT. The interpretation was informed by a Reformed hermeneutic that underscores the continuity of God's redemptive plan throughout both Testaments. The research was based on positions articulated by scholars such as Astika (2013:144-145), Antwi (2020:7-8), and Bartholomew (2015:499-500), who recognise that both Testaments constitute one organic unity.

1.8 Study context

This study focused solely on the Christological views of AICs. The analysis and evaluation of data were based on the literary sources mentioned above.

1.9 Ethical considerations

The researcher completed the ethical training modules prescribed by North-West University (NWU) and complied with all related requirements. As the study was based solely on literary research, the associated risk levels were minimal. All sources were properly cited, and academic integrity was maintained throughout the research process. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines established by NWU for postgraduate research.

1.10 Significance of the research

This research will help African Christians within AICs develop an exegetically valid Christology based on what Christ has done, as indicated in the EH. This may empower these Christians to align themselves with a correct application of Scripture. It could influence practices that resonate with the author's appeal in Hebrews to discontinue animal sacrifices through an understanding of what Christ has accomplished through his death.

1.11 Relationship between the study's research questions, methodology, and objectives

The following schematic table presents a succinct overview of the research design, emphasising the interrelationships among the research questions, methodology, and

objectives. This alignment facilitated coherence between the research questions and methods, while also offering a clearly delineated framework of the study's objectives.

Table 1.1: Schematic presentation of the relationship between the study's research questions, methodology, and objectives

Research Question	Aim and Objectives	Research Method
What is the understanding of priesthood, mediatorship, and sacrifice in AICs?	Analyse the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice among AICs.	Literary analysis to determine key proponents and evaluate the central arguments of AICs in relation to priesthood, mediation, and sacrifices, utilising the socio-historical method.
What does Hebrew 9:11-28 teach concerning Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator?	Examine the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews 9:11-28	Exegesis, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of Hebrews 9:11-28 using the historical-grammatical method. This process is supported by the use of resources such as biblical commentaries, academic journal articles, theological dictionaries, and Greek and Hebrew lexicons to ensure a contextually informed understanding of the text.
What is the implication of Hebrews 9:11-28 for the understanding of priesthood, mediation and sacrifice in AICs?	To examine the implications of Hebrews 9:11-28 for the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs.	The socio-historical method was complemented with the historical-grammatical approach by providing insight into the cultural, historical, and social context of Hebrews 9:11-28. This combined methodology enabled the researcher to both apply the text meaningfully and critically engage with the theological practices of AICs within their historical and social context.

1.12 Outline of chapters

This thesis comprised the following five chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the research problem and sets the context for the study.

Chapter 2: CHRIST AS PRIEST, MEDIATOR AND SACRIFICE IN THE CHRISTOLOGY OF AIC'S: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

This chapter provides a critical examination of how these concepts are understood within AICs.

Chapter 3: CHRIST AS PRIEST, SACRIFICE AND MEDIATOR: EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS 9:11-28

This chapter presents a biblical understanding of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice through an exegetical and analytical approach.

Chapter 4: IMPLICATIONS OF HEBREWS 9:11-28 FOR UNDERSTANDING PRIESTHOOD, MEDIATION AND SACRIFICE IN AICs

This chapter offers an analysis of key texts and explores the relevance of Hebrews 9:11-28 to the AIC context.

Chapter 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter summarises the findings and offers recommendations for a biblically and hermeneutically sound Christology within the AICs.

1.13 Chapter summary and conclusion

This introductory chapter presented the topic of the study and outlined the main elements of the research process. The following chapter critically examines the Christology within AICs, focusing on their distinctive understanding of the priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice of Christ.

CHAPTER 2 CHRIST AS PRIEST, MEDIATOR, AND SACRIFICE IN THE CHRISTOLOGY OF AICs: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to critically examine the Christology of AICs, focusing on their distinctive understanding of priesthood, mediation, and the sacrifice of Christ. To accomplish this task, the socio-historical approach, as a subset of the historical-grammatical method, is used. In doing so, the chapter provides a nuanced understanding of AICs within their socio-historical context. Literary evaluation and analysis is achieved through a critical examination of the contributions of some key voices within this field. The differences and similarities among these key voices are also analysed to provide a background of the key concepts and ideas in relation to the priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice of Christ.

Oden (2007:13) states that African Christianity has been shaped by the continent's cultural heritage and history. Proponents who have struggled for its establishment are born as Africans within communities with generations of indigenous African experience. Consequently, the approach moves from a broad overview to a specific analysis within the scope of African theology. This enables the study to find its place within the subdivision of African theology.

Gehman (2019:11) rightly observes that a person's current convictions can serve as a foundation for the expansion of knowledge; therefore, understanding one's audience is essential for effective communication within a given context. In light of this, the researcher examines African Christology within the broader theological discourse. This is followed by an analysis and review of the Christological frameworks of AICs, highlighting the distinctive African indigenous perspectives that have been assimilated into their theology.

2.2 African theology

2.2.1 Definition of African theology

Mashau and Fredriks (2008:113) observe that establishing a clear definition of 'African theology' is a complex task, as it implies the existence of a singular type of African theology. Perspectives on what constitutes or defines African theology vary across

different contexts, leading to the concept of 'African theologies'. Sakupapa (2018:408) notes that the written forms of academic African Christian theology have emerged as self-conscious contextual theologies. He further explains that African theology has typically been classified according to various approaches, such as theologies of AICs, inculturation, and reconstruction, which contributes to the complexity of defining African theology. Magezi and Igba (2018:1) agree that the multifaceted nature of African cultures within the continent complicates the definition. They add that the pursuit of a clear and distinct African theology has recently emerged as a priority in the field. Nonetheless, African theologies have remained distinct in their focus.

Mbiti (1969:15) defines *African theology* as “the theological reflection and expression by African Christians.” He further describes it as “theology that carries the distinctive marks and characteristics of the African context.” Mashau (2008:113) explains that this implies that theology must shed its alienation and become relevant through contextualisation, enabling it to engage meaningfully within the African continent. Magezi and Igba (2018:2) further observe that this definition takes into consideration that “there are non-Africans who have made notable contributions to the growth and shape of African theology, either directly or indirectly through motivating constructive thinking towards development of a contextual theology.”

As previously noted, constructing a comprehensive definition of African theology is a challenging task. Mashau and Fredriks (2008:114) propose that it is possible to discern major characteristics in African theology such as: “Firstly, it is developed in Africa, secondly to an extent, it comes out and is closely tied to self-conception of African people, thirdly, it is mainly based on African ideologies as well as historical situations and finally, issues of culture, African race and poverty are critical concerns in the development of theological discourse in Africa.”

A distinction must be made between African theology and African Christian theology. Igba and Stoker (2018:4) note that the concept of African theology encompasses a broader scope that extends beyond the confines of African Christian theology. This distinction is significant, as African theology, when considered in a general sense, can also encompass Muslim theology or ATR. In contrast, African Christian theology is characterised by its focus on the dialogue that examines the intersection of African culture, ATR, and Christianity (Igba & Stoker, 2018:4). This distinction makes the purpose of contextual

theology in Africa an important consideration when building the African church through participation in biblically sanctioned theological discussions. Taking this into account, the following chapter will examine how African Christian theology has contributed to the establishment of AICs. This will provide a basis for and shape the development of AICs' Christology.

2.2.2 African Christianity and the establishment of AICs

Molobi (2013:1) asserts that AICs have been significantly influenced by their historical interactions with Western forms of Christianity. This historical context has led to a religious approach that is shaped by Western values. During the colonial period, any religious practice that did not align with European values was deemed primitive and uncivilised.

Papu (2015:57) elucidates that the independence from colonialism in Africa is not the sole catalyst for the expansion of African Christianity. He contends that AICs, as a distinct expression of Christianity, did not emerge solely after independence but rather originated during the colonial era and have maintained their relevance in the post-colonial context.

Sundkler (1961:38) observes that the first "Ethiopian" type of church in South Africa was established at Witwatersrand in 1892. Prior to this, there were several attempts at Bantu emancipation from mission authority. Furthermore, Zionist-type churches can trace their origins back to as early as 1904.

The "ama-Nazaretha" Church, a Zionist-type Zulu church in South Africa known for its intentional use of indigenous approaches, was established in 1906 following the baptism of its founder, Isaiah Shembe (Sundkler, 1961:50).

The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), founded in 1976 in Tanzania, raised awareness about prioritising inter-religious discussions with other churches and the international community as vital for theological discourse (Adamo, 2011:6).

According to the Organisation of African Initiated Churches (OAIC), founded in 1975 in Nairobi, Kenya, "The church is a movement of God's people who are empowered by his spirit and committed to build a society where poverty, exploitation and disease are eradicated" (Masuku, 2019:198).

Adamo (2011:6) further points out that the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (AOTA) was established in Accra, Ghana, in 1977. By definition, it is an ecumenical association that facilitates dialogue and cooperation with various churches, both locally and abroad. Papu (2015:58) notes that the AICs critically examined both ATR and missionary Christianity, highlighting areas of tension and agreement in their experience and practice. The emergence of AICs pioneered a new approach that enabled indigenous Christians to reinterpret Christianity according to their own contextual beliefs.

Molobi (2011:2) observes that Sundkler's (1961) book, entitled *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, is regarded as a landmark study that provides a comprehensive account of AICs in South Africa.

2.2.3 What are AICs?

African Christianity diverged from traditional Western Christianity. Resane (2020:1) defines AICs as churches founded by Africans who either sought to reform existing Western Christianity or were commissioned through some spiritual revelation. Resane (2020:1) further states that they can also be viewed as independent African churches with complete autonomy and no affiliation with non-African churches.

Ngewa *et al.* (1998:286) suggest that AICs are established by Africans for contextual relevance, with both membership and leadership being African. This latter definition also identifies AICs as indigenous African Christian churches. Resane (2020:2) categorises AICs as Ethiopian, Messianic, Zionist, Apostolic, and charismatic.

2.2.4 Main types of AICs

Maboea (2012:9) notes that there are two main strands within AICs that support these definitions: independent and indigenous. "Independent refers to churches that broke away from western missions while indigenous refers to African founded churches that maintain their autonomy. Independent churches often preserve elements of western churches while indigenous ones incorporate ATR features into their practices" (Maboea, 2012:9).'

Masondo (2005:94) observes that a review of existing scholarship on AICs highlights the following historical developments:

Firstly, in early research portrayed them as potential danger to traditional Christianity and political status and viewed as a separatist movement. The next development was realising that AICs were not only religious a syncretic mix of Christianity and ATR. The third stage marked a shift, recognising them as genuine African movements. The final stage situates AICs within socio-historical and anthropological contexts in which they have come to be understood as being both African and Christian.

AICs have therefore evolved from being a threat to European domination religiously and culturally to become recognised as truly authentic churches for African Christians.

Masuku (1996:441) adds that AICs are acutely aware of their African worldview and belief system; consequently, their religious practices remain closely aligned with traditional African culture. This affinity with ATR attracts thousands of adherents. Daneel (1987:38) identifies three principal types of AIC churches, namely:

(i) Ethiopian Type Churches

These independent Bantu churches have separated from white mission churches on racial grounds. They represent a response to the colonial agenda of white missions. Their church structures and worship practices are usually modelled on those of the white missions from which they originate (Sundkler, 1961:54).

Daneel (1987:49) highlights that the Ethiopian ideology took root and began to spread and establish itself primarily in the regions of South and East Africa between 1890 and 1920. The title “Ethiopian” emerged in 1892. During this period, a Methodist minister on the Witwatersrand, Mangena Mokone, spoke out against racial segregation in the church. With the support of like-minded individuals, he established the Ethiopian Church. As the influence of Mokone and his followers grew, the term “Ethiopian” became increasingly prominent in the names of newly formed churches.

(ii) Zionist-Type Churches

The primary characteristic of these churches is their emphasis on spiritual manifestations of the Holy Spirit’s power, evident in practices such as speaking in tongues, prophetic activities, and faith healing. These are also referred to as Spirit-type churches. The word ‘Zion’ frequently appears in their church names. They have also indigenised the concept of a kingdom of God centred on a Holy City of Zion. This city is typically located on a mountain, either figuratively or literally, which is regarded as sacred and holds a very

important place in their worship (Daneel, 1987:39). The term 'Zion' is used because the leaders and followers of this movement call themselves "ama-zion" (Zionists).

These Zionist-type churches are known as Aladura in Nigeria and Harris Churches in the Ivory Coast, named after the prophet Harris, who led the evangelisation. Unlike Ethiopian-type churches, Zionist-type churches are a more recent development. In South Africa and Zimbabwe, Zionist churches gained prominence after 1920, while the Aladura churches in Nigeria emerged between 1910 and 1950 (Daneel, 1987:40).

iii) Messianic Churches

Messianic churches are sometimes placed in the same category as Zionist churches because both are largely focused on prophetic practices. Daneel (1987:41) correctly notes that, "Messianic churches are distinct in that their leaders are revered as messianic figures. In these churches, members are drawn in by the mystical powers, miracles and mediatorship of the leader between God and his followers."

Masuku (1996:443) summarises that Ethiopian churches assert autonomy whilst retaining pre-existing structures. Zionist groups incorporate African practices alongside activities of the Holy Spirit, such as ecstatic utterances, whereas Messianic churches are characterised by leaders who claim special powers and appear to assume a Christ-like status among their followers.

Donkor (2016:3) explains that African Christian theologians contend that Western theology fails to fully appreciate the African worldview and religious context when interpreting the Bible. Consequently, African theologians have developed contextualised theological frameworks that reflect African realities. The following section elucidates how AICs embody African Christianity.

2.2.5 AICs as reflections of African Christianity

Kealotswe (2014:229) observes that by the mid-20th century, the AICs had firmly established themselves beyond their origins as a Protestant movement against European colonialism and had begun to develop a theology rooted in African perspectives, resulting in an authentic African Christianity.

AICs display variations in their organisational forms, as previously noted; some may share similarities with Western Christian denominations, while others are distinct. It is crucial to

recognise that these churches are also characterised by significant differences. Areo and Areo (2023:2) explain that practices differ among these churches, with some incorporating spiritual rods, white attire, and incense, while others do not. Despite these variations, they share certain common characteristics, including prayer, spiritual activities, divine healing, and an African worldview. These practices express African culture and embody African Christianity.

Kealotswe (2014:229) states that, during the early 20th century, missionaries in Southern Africa adopted a more open-minded approach, engaging in systematic study of ATR beliefs. This shift was further advanced by the emergence of African scholars in theological studies, who were committed to elucidating the distinctions between ATRs and the Christian faith. Notable among these scholars is Mbiti (1975) and Setiloane (1976). Their contributions enabled Western missionaries to recognise the limitations of imposing Western Christianity on African cultures. Molobi (2009:7) asserts that AICs constitute an essential aspect of African cosmology; thus, their acknowledgement and preservation significantly contribute to the sustainable growth of Christianity on the continent.

Areo and Areo (2023:10) reveal that the 'Celestial Church of Christ' in Nigeria, like other AICs, seeks to contextualise Christianity and asserts that no individual can separate themselves from their culture.

2.2.6 Position of the Bible in AICs

The Bible plays a central role in the ministry of AICs. It is accepted as the Word of God, and their leaders are believed to be chosen by God, just as OT prophets like Moses were sent to set the chosen people of God free from oppression. Their belief in the special revelation of God has led the leaders to depend on the Bible as a form of guidance in their churches. However, Scripture is not usually the only means or source of revelation for all AICs (Maboea, 2012:75). A good example is the John Masowe Churches (JMC) in Zimbabwe, who believe that the Bible was a tool of imperialism used to suppress African cultures and impose Western dominance; therefore, its usage is completely prohibited. This church advocates for the progressive revelation of God through spiritual utterances inspired by the Holy Spirit (Musoni, 2022:5).

Mbiti (2009:221) observes that when Africans engage with the Scriptures in their indigenous languages, they identify with the experiences of the Jewish people in the OT. In this context, the Bible possesses greater authority than colonial rulers. Mbiti (2009:221) further explains that the God whom Africans have known and trusted through ATR is revealed in the Bible.

Some individuals depend on personal revelation, typically conveyed to the leader through dreams. Numerous Zionist and Apostolic churches derive their names from personal prophecies given by God to church leaders. Such revelations are often integrated into preaching alongside the message of the Bible (Maboea, 2012:75). As previously indicated, the JMC in southern Africa distinguishes itself from other AICs by emphasising spiritual revelations as the foundation of theological reflection and spirituality, rather than relying solely on the Bible.

Olowola (1998:290) contends that in many AICs, visions and revelations play a central role, citing William Wade Harris of Liberia, who claimed to have seen the Angel Gabriel in a vision and to have been commissioned by him. Similarly, the founder of the Celestial Church of Christ in Benin asserts that he was commissioned in a dream and provided with specific instructions, including the name of the church and its mode of operation. The Nazareth Church in South Africa traces its origins to the Zulu prophet Isaiah Shembe, who reportedly received divine revelations instructing him, among other things, to divorce his wives and leave his village (Olowola, 1998:291).

2.2.7 African biblical hermeneutical approach and its influence on AICs

The emergence of the African Biblical hermeneutical approach is a significant factor in the evolution of AICs and their Christology. Kealotswe (2014:232) observes that the Bible remains the primary theological resource for AICs in the 21st century. This observation illuminates the background of key Christological themes that have developed within AICs.

The interpretative method employed by African theologians in AICs predominantly utilises the African Biblical hermeneutic approach. Adamo (2015:31) aptly characterises this approach as effecting transformation in Africa through contextual biblical interpretation. He (2015:31) further asserts that, “Exploring African biblical hermeneutics can be essential for the development and transformation of African society.”

Adamo (2015:32) defines *African biblical hermeneutics* as:

The biblical interpretation that makes African social cultural context a subject of interpretation. It is the rereading of Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective. Specifically, it means that the analysis of the biblical text is done from the perspective of African worldview and culture.

This approach emerged as a response to the consequences of colonialism in Africa. Many Africans perceived that the Bible had been employed as an instrument of colonialism; consequently, it can also be reinterpreted within the African context and worldview. Adamo (2015:31) notes,

A casual look at biblical interpretation in Africa by Africans shows that our interpretation has been colonial. As far as I understand, colonialism is not limited to the partition of Africa and the eventual domination of the entire continent by the European nations; it includes the colonisation of our thought and the entirety of our way of life.

The prevailing argument is that African biblical interpretation has been colonised because the Bible is approached through a European worldview. The African mind has been so influenced that even indigenous culture is often regarded as unbiblical. Therefore, the interpretation of Scripture must begin from the African worldview; in other words, the Bible should be read through the lens of an African perspective.

2.2.8 ATR, OT, and the identity of AICs

The question to consider is the nature of the relationship between African Christians and their ATR heritage. Bediako maintains that the inability of early Christian missionaries to recognise continuity between ATR and the Christian faith threatened African Christian identity. He contends that if Africans are severed from their religious heritage, they will be deprived of a sense of identity (Gehman, 2019:339).

Gehman (2019:222) describes continuity as the concept that all religions contain divine truth and provide a means of salvation, even though Christianity may be acknowledged as ultimate and supreme. Consequently, the relationship between ATR and Christianity is one of preparation and fulfilment, with ATR serving as a preparation for the gospel.

Mbiti (2009:222) cites Rev Meya, a theological teacher from Cameroon, who advocates for ATR as a foundation of the gospel.

We recognise our history in the Pentateuch. We feel that we possibly stem from the history of the Hebrews because our customs and those of the Hebrews are so similar. This feeling is all over Africa, The AIC's feel as if they are custodians of this discovery since they have been freed from foreign domination in religious matters. Without the Jewish Bible, the AICs would not have such a close identification and affinity with scriptures. The people once regarded by colonial and missionary rulers as no people, have become the people of the Bible.

The implication of this understanding is that African culture shares similarities with Hebrew culture, revealing a sense of continuity. The OT therefore resonates strongly with African Christians because of practical parallels in culture and sacrificial practices. Part of this appeal is inspired by the salvation story of Exodus in the context of oppression. Many rules and regulations in the OT like the ATR emphasis on ritual – where sacrifices are an integral aspect of worship and prophets mediate divine revelations (Gehman, 2019:370) – further strengthen this connection.

Akrong (1998:63) asserts that, with the translation of the Bible, Africans were able to discover spiritual values applicable to their needs and concerns. The rediscovery of Christianity by independent African churches as a religion of salvation for Africans was key to unlocking the spiritual values of Christianity and began the process of reinterpreting Christianity through the lens of indigenous culture and spirituality.

Gehman (2019:368) quotes Emmanuel Twesigye, who believes that God's redemptive process was operative and effective in saving Africans even before the arrival of Christianity and colonialism in Africa. Similarly, this efficacious work of God was present in ancient Israel before the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

In conclusion, AICs believe that the concepts of human priests, human mediators, ancestors, and sacrifices still persist; therefore, the offering of sacrifices remains a vital aspect of African Christianity. The role of Jesus is not to fulfil all OT sacrifices but rather to open our eyes to the possibility that we, too, can have our own African messiahs who can deliver us from various challenges facing Africa, such as poverty, sickness, and drought.

2.2.9 Factors that influenced the Christology of AICs

Kealotswe (2014:240) maintains that AICs represent a significant dimension of Christianity in Africa, having become genuine and meaningful expressions of African

Christianity. It is therefore essential to analyse the development of their theology in order to gain a deeper understanding of the foundational African perspectives that have shaped it. This is crucial in recognising that the evolution of AICs' Christologies did not occur in isolation, but rather was influenced by a range of factors.

Ukpong (1999:313) notes that in the 1960s, the theology of inculturation emerged, followed by the development of liberation and black theology. Papu (2015:59) asserts that there are three theological currents, each with distinct voices and contextual concerns: "African theology served as the cultural expression; liberation theology was the voice of the poor while black theology was the voice of the marginalised." All these elements contributed to the emergence and growth of AICs.

The theological trends in Africa are fundamentally influenced by context as a common factor. Papu (2015:60) proclaims that "racism, poverty, and African culture all have to do with the African context." African Christianity has been shaped by contextual theology even prior to its formal academic definition.

Masuku (2019:199) elucidates the identity of AICs as indicated in their vision statement:

The vision of AIC's is well defined and laid out in the vision of the Organisation of African Independent Churches. These churches consider themselves as African Christians living out their faith through their cultural heritage, transformed by biblical truth to build a brighter future for their children.

2.2.10 The challenge of the foreignness of Christ in Africa

As previously noted, the persistent issue lies in the introduction of Christ to Africa by white missionaries, whose primary intent was colonisation. Banda (2021:46) asserts that Jesus was presented across much of Africa within the framework of a Western agenda to colonise and 'civilise' Africans, who were perceived as pagans. Christianity thus served as an instrument to fulfil this aim, resulting in the widespread conception of Christ as a white, Western figure. African theologians contend that African societies possessed their own histories and theologies requiring interpretation, yet these were disregarded, and Africans were dismissed as uneducated pagans.

Bimweyi (2003:98) contends that the arrival of the foreigner – Jesus – was perceived as a threat, as it demanded the abandonment of traditional forms of cultural expression. The introduction of a new religion and worldview was regarded as a danger to the existing

socio-religious order. Banda (2021:47) further explains that the central issue is the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the missionary gospel as one intent on eradicating Africanism and transforming Africans into Westerners. Rather than affirming the legitimacy of African identity, Christianity stigmatised, condemned, and undermined it. The religious and social context was profoundly disrupted, as following Christ necessitated the rejection of one's culture in favour of adopting a Western identity.

The traditional African way of life came to be regarded as inhuman and primitive. This perception created a religious vacuum, as many challenges Africans previously knew how to address – such as sickness and witchcraft – could not be resolved by the Jesus introduced by missionaries. Consequently, there was a rise in syncretic practices and the formation of AICs seeking freedom from Western influences. The perceived foreignness of Christ is a significant factor contributing to syncretism within AICs. This dynamic has also led to the development of various models, which will be examined to explore how Christ can be meaningfully incorporated into African Christianity.

2.2.11 ATR and its influence on AICs

The preceding discussion elucidates the mutual relationship between the teachings of AICs and African religions. Molobi (2009:3) notes that an interview with an AIC founder in South Africa revealed that the practice of ATR constitutes a significant aspect of African Christianity. It is therefore essential for this research to examine the extent to which ATR has influenced the development of AIC Christology.

Kealotswe (2014:235) contends that the typical point of departure in AIC theology is their conception of the nature of the universe. This cosmological perspective accords with the African worldview. Within this cosmology, God is approached through intermediaries, namely ancestors. A comprehensive understanding of AIC theology is unattainable without considering ATR and its impact on African Christians.

Gerhman (2019:8) notes that African cultures have undergone significant transformation. This is attributed to technological, educational, economic, cultural, political, and, to some extent, religious changes affecting traditional customs. Despite these social shifts, African Christians frequently revert to traditional practices during periods of crisis, such as bereavement. Although times have changed, the fundamental core beliefs of

communities endure. Daneel (1987:25) highlights the following regarding the growth of AICs:

The reason there is a rapid growth in the number of African independent churches is that these churches offer a unique opportunity for observing and expressing how the African deals with his own traditional religion once he is removed from the immediate influence of western oriented missionaries.

Gerhman (1989:21) reaffirms that numerous African nations have achieved independence from colonial rule in recent generations. These countries are now rediscovering their African identity, abandoning European customs, and seeking to reclaim their traditional practices and religions. The resulting social complexity has led to the emergence of AICs, which are deeply rooted in ATR. Papu (2015:20) poses the significant question of how African Christians should engage with and approach the study of ATR in relation to Christ.

A clearer understanding of the significance and purpose of sacrifices in ATRs may shed light on why many African Christians continue to practise and believe in ancestral mediation. Pali (2014:150) states that sacrifices serve as offerings to the ancestors, seeking their favour and maintaining communion with the spiritual realm. African sacrifices promote harmony and unity between the living and those who have passed on. This enables families to communicate with their deceased relatives. In almost every African family, there is a practice of animal sacrifice to appease the ancestors. Nyirongo (1997:39) maintains that sacrifices and offerings are a fundamental part of worship among African people. Sacrifices and offerings may be made to one or multiple entities, including God, spirits, and the living dead. The spirits of the deceased are regarded as intermediaries bridging the gap between the living and the dead. Blood sacrifices are usually offered to ancestors for good luck or before any major event, such as building a house, a marriage ceremony, seeking employment, or other significant life occasions like birth or marriage. The African worldview does not focus on the problem of sin, but rather addresses the problem of evil. This is why most sacrifices are performed to avoid bad luck and for protection against evil spirits (Mbiti, as cited by Nyirongo, 1997:39).

2.3 Christology models within AICs

This section examines the impact of ATR on AICs, focusing on the Christological models and concepts that have shaped and informed the understanding of Jesus within these churches.

2.3.1 Christ of the people

Verster (2015:1) underscores the visible challenges confronting the African continent, such as poverty. His principal concern is how the purpose of the African church may be modelled on the example of Christ, who suffered on the cross for the sake of the poor. Accordingly, he proposes a model of 'Christ of the people', who descended from heaven and died on the cross for those willing to become part of his community. Verster (2015:6) further asserts that Christ stands among others in that he was wounded so that all might be included in his community. Christ came from heaven and embraced poverty in order to identify with humanity. The church's mandate, therefore, is to comprehend how Christ suffered for the marginalised and to emulate this in efforts to eradicate poverty. The essential objective is to address poverty, as in Christ, the poor are received before God.

2.3.2 Messianic tendencies and continuous incarnation

Musoni (2021:4) explains that the term "messianic tendencies" refers to religious leaders who are worshipped as the Messiah or the saviour of the people. Adegoke (2009:3) further clarifies that the term "messianic" is often used to describe AIC groups led by exploitative and dominant church leaders, who are believed to possess special powers that place them on the same level as Christ.

Members of John Masowe Chishanu in Zimbabwe argue that it was not possible for God to send a white messiah to African communities. Musoni (2021:4) notes that the Christological understanding of this church is based on the belief that Jesus, as a white man, was sent by God to the Western nations. The spirit of Christ that was in Jesus was sent to Johane Masowe, their leader, to save black people. In this regard, Johane Masowe is regarded, and presents himself, as a saviour chosen for black people.

Musoni (2021:4) notes the following from an interview with a JMC member:

The JMC believe that an angel of God called Christo worked through Jesus. After Jesus was crucified and died, this angel (Christo) went back to God. This

same angel was then sent to Africa where it worked through different people assuming different images until eventually, it came to Johane Masowe.

This is what Musoni (2021:4) refers to as *continuous incarnation*. Resane (2020:10) explains that AICs such as African Zionists have worship centres that serve as points of encounter with the messianic figure. Meeting the leader is regarded as a special spiritual privilege, through whom blessings and material well-being are imparted to devotees.

Bishop Lekganyane of the ZCC church is often exalted by his followers as the Messiah and portrayed as a successor to Jesus Christ. There are instances where he is referred to as the Messiah or mediator (Visser, 2011:8). Visser adds that, to a certain extent, Bishop Lekganyane and Jesus have become intertwined, as scriptural passages proclaiming the work of Christ as Messiah are applied to the bishop as well.

Musoni (2019:39) notes that these church leaders are respected because it is believed they possess the spirit of Jesus. When African Christians face life-threatening problems, they turn to their leaders, whom they regard as mediums capable of connecting with the spiritual world.

2.3.3 Christ as suffering Servant

African theology carries the responsibility of revealing and identifying with the African identity. In this model, Jesus is seen as someone who identifies with the collective suffering of Africans. Adamo (2016:8) highlights that this model fosters self-awareness among African Christians as they recognise their connection to the suffering of Christ in Scripture. Scriptural interpretation should reveal to African Christians how they have been colonised by the European gospel.

Mugabe (1991:348-349) explains that not all suffering should be related to the redemptive suffering and death of Christ. He elaborates that "a distinction between oppressive suffering and redemptive suffering must be realized." The suffering of Christ had redemptive significance because he represented other people. This is the reason God was with Jesus throughout his redemptive journey, as his suffering symbolised the victims of colonialism, corruption, and injustice.

The implication is that the redemptive suffering of Jesus was not intended to provide a solution to the problem of sin; he suffered to liberate Africans who were under oppression and slavery by the white regime politically, socially, and religiously.

2.3.4 Christ as Healer

Moloney (1987:508) suggests that this model may have originated with a man named Kibongi, a writer from Congo. Kibongi described Christ as Nganga, an African term that can refer to a witch doctor, medicine man, or healer.

The healing miracles of Christ recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John appear to be interconnected and can be distinguished on various levels: physical, social, emotional, and religious. Western Christianity separated the concept of healing, focusing solely on the moral and spiritual aspects. African Christians question this separation of healing, which has led to the rise of healing ministries (Moloney, 1987:509).

Clarke (2005:147) observes that the African context is profoundly affected by high mortality rates, illness, and poverty. This compels African people to seek healing and wholeness. The deep need for healing and completeness is identified with Jesus Christ, who is regarded as the greatest healer. Salvation, therefore, is understood as freedom from sickness and all forms of affliction.

2.3.5 Christ as Saviour

Clarke (2005:142) notes that Mbiti's (1970) concept of "Christ as Saviour" holds significant resonance and meaning within the African context. Upon conversion to Christianity, individuals commit themselves to Jesus Christ, who is regarded as the saviour bringing salvation. This implies that Jesus possesses the requisite power to save. A critical question to consider is from what, precisely, African Christians require deliverance. Clarke (2005:142) explains that, within the Akan context, Christ is understood as one who offers protection from adversities such as sickness, witchcraft, barrenness, failure, and death at a personal level. Collectively, Jesus is seen as saving the wider community from war, oppression, slavery, and epidemics, among other threats.

The significance of Christ as Saviour within Akan AICs lies in reconceptualising the transformative power of Christ to address local circumstances in ways that are credible and acceptable to the community (Clarke, 2005:143). When Jesus is invoked as saviour, he engenders a sense of security and well-being among African communities that have experienced colonisation and enslavement. Adelokun (2011:29) contends that, while the Western notion of salvation has traditionally prioritised the soul and the afterlife, African

perspectives insist that Christ as saviour must address both the soul and the physical body, offering holistic healing.

Jesus proclaimed the good news of salvation to those suffering political oppression. In doing so, he not only reconciled humanity to God, but also provided physical healing, sustenance, and instruction in communal living (Adelakun, 2011:31). Thus, the concept of salvation, particularly in the African context, should encompass the entirety of human existence.

2.3.6 Jesus the Ancestor

Moloney (1987:509) notes that, although numerous themes have developed within African theology, the concept of the ancestor is distinctly more African. This is owing to the deep-rooted presence of ancestral beliefs within the African religious consciousness. Beyers and Mphahlele (2009:38) agree that faith and trust in ancestors are deeply rooted in traditional African thought and, as such, central to African Christian theology.

Moloney (1987:509) further acknowledges that Charles Nyamiti was one of the pioneers to systematically examine the subject. Ilo (2006:88) cites both Bujo and Nyamiti, who affirm the salvific value of certain ATR beliefs that draw people closer to God. As a result, they incorporate ancestral beliefs into their Christological reflections. This concept of Jesus as the Ancestor adds contextual relevance to Christ in African Christology. Papu (2015:26) argues that the faith of African Christians can only be properly appreciated if the role of Christ is clearly elucidated and expounded. Moloney (1987:509) correctly notes that when Christ is categorised as an ancestor, emphasis is placed not only on his work but also on his being.

The understanding of Christ as Ancestor appeals to the humanity of Christ. Moloney (1987:510) rightly explains that ancestors are simply human beings who now belong to another world. Christ does not cause the ancestors to lose their value but rather perfects the African conception of Christ (Papu, 2015:26).

Moloney (1987:510) draws attention to the shortcomings of this model because Christ's ancestral role centres on his humanity, while the divine aspect is overlooked. This model, therefore, does not do justice to the divine aspect of Christ. In addition, Africa, being a diverse continent, does not have a uniform view on ancestors.

2.3.7 Christ as the Proto-Ancestor

Ilo (2006:49), in his comparative study of Bujo's theology, observed that Bujo's understanding of the African ancestral tradition is grounded in African anthropology. Moloney (1987:511) adds that the concept of "Proto-Ancestor" means that Christ becomes a distinct source of life, separate from all ancestors. When Africans become Christians, they attain a salvation that surpasses that offered by ancestors. This model facilitates the recognition of Christ as the one who leads and is above the entire body of the church.

Bujo (2003:134) argues that attributing to Jesus the title of Proto-Ancestor signifies his position as the primordial ancestor. He is not an ancestor who can be equated with others; rather, he transcends all and conveys God's life and salvation to African Christians. His status as the first ancestor is not based on descent from Adam, but on his having dismantled all racial, ethnic, and tribal divisions.

Within ATR, ancestors hold profound significance for the well-being and worship of African communities. They are regarded as vital for existence, prosperity, and health. The central challenge Christianity faces is whether Jesus is sufficient to bridge the gap left by the renunciation of ancestral veneration. This model endeavours to address that ancestral gap by presenting Christ as the Great Ancestor.

In recent research conducted in the community of Mohlakeng in South Africa, where adherents of AICs were interviewed, Beyers and Mphahlele (2009:3) found that most church members regarded their understanding of Christ as Proto-Ancestor as central to both their religious beliefs and cultural context. As a result, they identified more strongly with the ancestral model.

Through his study of the Akan people of Ghana, Pobee (1979:94) identified the following:

In Akan society, the God the Supreme Being and ancestors are the ones who provide good life and protect against evil. Ancestors co-work with the Supreme Being to bring law and order. In this regard, Jesus is looked upon as the great ancestor. He has been delegated power and authority to execute judgement to the evil and to bring rewards to those who do well. As the great ancestor, Jesus is above all other ancestors by being closest to God. He has authority not only over the world of men but also of all spirit beings, namely the cosmic powers and the ancestors.

Despite the diversity of traditional beliefs and practices across the African continent, belief in ancestors emerges as a common thread. Within this model, Christ is regarded as an Ancestor – exalted above all others.

Bujo (2003:135) argues that Jesus identified himself so closely with humanity that, in him, all that was just and good in the actions and desires of the ancestors was fully realised. He is, on the one hand, the place where one encounters the God of salvation, and on the other, the unique and privileged means through which the ancestors can be fully understood. He is the only true ancestor and the true saviour, while the rest are merely images. Through his death and resurrection, the experiences and actions of the ancestors have become more effective, and a future of salvation has been opened.

Ilo (2006:77) further explains that this Christology model is supported by Scripture. The NT presents Christ as possessing both human and divine natures; thus, the understanding of Jesus as Proto-Ancestor is rooted in Scripture and bridges the gap between ascending and descending Christology.

Moloney (1987:512) notes that models portraying Christ as an ancestor demonstrate that the concept of ancestors, and the need to relate to them, remains a vital part of African spirituality, so much so that, for many religions, it is unimaginable without them.

2.3.8 Christ the Transformed Ancestor and the transformer of ancestors

Papu (2015:29) explains that this perspective describes Christ as the Great Ancestor par excellence. According to Papu (2015:29), the main proponent of this view is Collis Machoko, who agrees with Bujo and Nyamiti but develops his ancestral Christology further.

Machoko seeks to understand the role and significance of ancestors when Christ, the greatest ancestor, has come, and whether Africans should abandon their ancestors. He responds negatively, encouraging African Christians to continue venerating ancestors; however, he suggests they should ultimately realise that Christ is the destination or goal, not the ancestors (Papu, 2015:30).

In his assessment, Papu (2015:30) observes that Machoko does not see transformation as the complete eradication of ancestor veneration. Ancestors should therefore remain central in African worship. This understanding of Christ not only views him as the

transformer of ancestors, but also changes the biblical interpretation of ancestors by seeing them as divine beings who have been given status by Christ, and therefore should be included in worship.

2.4 Practical practices and concepts of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs

The African-contextualised models discussed above are groundbreaking in helping us understand that, in African Christianity, Christ can be interpreted using concepts that correspond with African cosmology. Musoni (2019:36) rightly points out that many scholars have contributed to the study of African Christology, such as the concept of Jesus as the Chief Ancestor (Nyamiti). However, at this stage, it is crucial to examine whether the Jesus of the Bible is evident in AICs' practices of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice.

2.4.1 Mediatorship in AICs

In ATR, the traditional healer serves primarily as the intermediary between the living and ancestral spirits. Gehman (2019:111) asserts that all Akamba people consult the traditional healer to discern the will of their ancestors. The traditional healer does not convey personal opinions to clients, but transmits the messages of the deceased to the living.

Musoni (2019:36) notes that every religious tradition recognises some form of mediatorship to understand ultimate reality. Mediatorship is a key element of the liturgy of AICs. He (2019:36) further argues that Africans are deeply concerned with health issues. It is in light of this that the miracle-working Jesus of the NT gained acceptance. Jesus has been embraced as a chief mediator because African Christians wish to live long and seek divine protection from their ancestors. The name Jesus is often added alongside the names of ancestors and church founders without genuine belief in his atoning work.

In churches such as the ZCC in southern Africa, the bishop is revered by followers – often to the extent of being attributed a messianic status. Bishop Lekganyane, for example, is often depicted as the successor of Jesus Christ (De Visser, 2011:8). JMC, an AIC in Zimbabwe, maintains, as stated earlier, that God could not have sent a Jewish messiah

to save African Christians (Musoni, 2017:143). Musoni (2021:7) captured this idea well in his interview with one of the members. The member explained the following:

At first God sent his Angel Christ through Jesus the son of Joseph (a white man) of the overseas. This Jesus was an ordinary son of Mary and Joseph. Jesus became the white community angel when the Angel Christ came upon him. Thus, his name changed to Christ. People of the overseas did not want to change their evil ways so they killed him. After his death, Jesus was buried but the Angel Christ went back to God. God the father was angry and swore that he will never again send his angel to the white communities. Thus, the same Angel who worked in Jesus came down to the black community but with a new name Johane. This Angel Johane came and found Shonhiwa Masedza. After Shonhiwa died, Angel Johane went back to God and came back with a new name to find another black person to use.

The understanding in this church is that Jesus was sent for white communities. The Spirit of Christ that was in Jesus is now in Johane Masowe, implying that Johane Masowe is the current mediator for black people. Similarly, De Visser (2011:198) gathered from his interview with a ZCC church member that Bishop Lekganyane is viewed as the mediator between his congregants and God. He is the way to God; no one can communicate with God except through him.

Ancestor veneration has significantly influenced the way African Christians perceive Christ. African ancestors are believed to assume physical form by possessing the living. Musoni (2019:38) notes that in AICs, resurrection plays a very important role because it is believed that the spirit of the crucified Christ returns and inhabits certain individuals. Jesus is therefore not only found in the Bible but also in the anointed church leaders. African church leaders are thus feared and respected because the Spirit of Christ is believed to live only in them.

The Celestial Church of Christ in Nigeria has utilised the African context to develop its modes and methods of worship. Aero and Aero (2023:6) reveal that, on the last Thursday of every month, a night vigil is held during which a special service focusing on the "Invocation of the Dead" is performed. Ancestors remain central to the worship practices of AICs in various capacities.

In the Corinthian Church of South Africa, prayers are offered in the name of the founder. It is believed that the congregation enters into fellowship with the Spirit of the founder and his angel. The adherents hold that their founder mystically connects them with God, Jesus

Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Mbaya & Chetty, 2012:574). The founder, even in death remains the mediator between God and his followers.

2.4.2 Concept of priesthood in AICs

This study observed that AICs are significantly influenced by ATR in their practices and beliefs. In ATR, a priest is a religious specialist who presides over ritual ceremonies within the society. He is chosen based on heredity or his family position. In West Africa, priests are common, serving at the shrines of various divinities. In East Africa, the priest may be the head of a homestead who officiates at sacrifices made to ancestral spirits. The priest is usually a male who is a specialist among medicine men.

These priests are often called to their vocation and receive training, learning their many prayers, rituals, and sacrifices from their tutors. After being called by the ancestral spirits for this position or inheriting it from someone else, a priest must observe various taboos, such as avoiding contact with others. The priest not only offers sacrifices but often serves as a medium (Gehman, 2019:97).

The priest, as a specialist among traditional medicine men, is highly respected and involved in all sacrifices relating to the well-being of the community. Gehman (2019:95) further explains that, because of his special relationship with the ancestral spirits, he is granted special honour. Among the Akamba people of Kenya, the priest leads when walking on the path. When he needs a new house, the whole community joins in to build it for him.

In this context, the priest in ATR can be referred to as a chief traditional healer who offers sacrifices to ancestors on behalf of the community.

The priestly attributes of spiritual sacrifice and self-sacrificing service are manifested in the lives of many AIC clergy, expressed through regular fasting, prayers, and mediation on behalf of the people (Daneel, 1987:146).

AICs rarely apply the title "priest" to those appointed as leaders in their congregations. Daneel (1987:146) correctly observes that this might indicate an acceptance of the ultimate priesthood of Christ. The *vaPostori* (AIC in Zimbabwe) refers to their founder Johane as high priest, but this is in reference to his good leadership rather than any specific priestly function.

The indigenous understanding of ancestral mediators often causes confusion in AICs, resulting in the priesthood of Christ not being fully recognised. This is particularly true for ZCCs. Prophetic leaders are usually viewed as closer to God than the members. The leader assumes the role of the ritual priest, representing the kin to the ancestors, or the cultic priest, who mediates on behalf of the people for rain.

Daneel (1987:146) reported that members of the ZCC, under the leadership of Mutendi in Zimbabwe, consult their leader at Zion City for guidance in resolving life's challenges. Solutions arise after gifts are offered to the leader so he can ask God for assistance as their representative. Daneel (1987:146) explains that one ZCC member told him they only bring simple matters directly to God in personal prayer, as important issues require Mutendi to present them to God. This role indicates a priestly and mediatory function that can only be performed by the leader.

Maboea (2012:58) correctly notes that in ATR, an elder family member is typically called upon to represent all family members when appeasing the ancestors. Following this pattern, the ZCC in Southern Africa calls upon their leader to intercede for the entire congregation. The priestly role of Christ is not recognised at all.

2.4.3 Concept of sacrifice in AICs

The concept of sacrifices in AICs can be fully grasped when we acknowledge their roots in ATR. It is important to note that in ATR, the dead who have become ancestors hold more power over the living soon after their death. Appeasing them through sacrifices is crucial for the well-being of those who are still alive. Goats and sheep are sacrificed to ancestors to avert misfortune, while traditional healers act as mediators who understand the type of sacrifice required by the ancestors (Maboea, 2012:79).

With this understanding, sacrificial offerings are an integral part of many AICs. Kgatla and Park (2015:4) quote Archbishop T. Pura of Namibia, who explains that his church performs animal sacrifices according to the guidelines in the book of Leviticus in the OT. The Bible is interpreted literally, and animal sacrifices are not considered fulfilled in Christ.

The Corinthians Church in South Africa affirms the continued relevance of animal sacrifices. Mbaya and Chetty (2012:578) describe the following ritual practised within this church:

Animal sacrifice is done for various reasons, notable amongst them is to enhance health and to ward off danger. A special mention should be made of the sacrifice of the red heifer, commonly known as isitshisa because of its parallels with the sacrificial cult of the OT in the book of Leviticus and the traditional African sacrifices. This ritual sacrifice is highly symbolic and dramatic. At about midnight, processed in by worshippers, the red heifer is sprinkled with holy water, incensed, a prayer said and then processed out. The heifer is slaughtered and offered as a burnt sacrifice. The blood of the heifer which is shed is 'life' which becomes symbolically available to people through the ashes. These ashes will be used in prayers for barrenness and employment and to cleanse the community.

Nwaka (2019:4) writes about the Sabbath Church in Nigeria. Dee Ekeke, the founder, preached against sin and practised animal sacrifices as part of his religious beliefs and rituals. The emphasis on animal sacrifice is prevalent among most members of this denomination. This sacrifice is the means through which the profaned can be cleansed, sanctified, and holiness restored. This practice is derived from the OT and ATR.

This is an understanding that is unanimous among most AICs in Africa. Kgatla and Park (2015:4) report that in Namibia, sacrificial offerings of cattle, sheep, and goats are a key aspect of AIC ministry. This helps to sustain the faith of the followers. Whenever these sacrifices are offered, sections of the Bible, such as Leviticus 1–5, are taken into consideration. These sacrifices are performed to thank God for delivering them through difficult situations and for bringing Christ for our salvation. The blood of Jesus as a sacrifice is not considered sufficient to address all life situations.

2.4.4 Evaluation

The literature reviewed indicates that the development of Christology within AICs has been significantly shaped by the socio-political and religious landscape of Africa. This context-driven approach gave rise to African theology and African biblical hermeneutics, enabling the interpretation of the Bible in a way that is meaningful for African Christians. The understanding of Christ as priest, sacrifice, and mediator is reflected in the wounds of Africa's colonial past and in the pursuit of self-identity through reconnection with African indigenous beliefs. Masuku (1996:450) observes that AICs have progressed further than most mainline churches, which remain under missionary control regarding the inculturation of Christianity. The models presented above can be seen in various forms throughout Africa. The central theme is the identity of Christ for African Christians and his

role as mediator. Igba (2013:50) rightly notes that mediation is the primary concept that creates a point of convergence with ancestor Christology.

The models of Christ that can be easily contextualised generally fall within flexible biblical categories. This is true for the models discussed above, which use terms such as 'Saviour' and 'Suffering Servant', drawing on traditional images and contexts to express their Christological significance in Africa (Clarke, 2005:163). Biblical terms are used within the framework of African cosmology and worldview. Consequently, this suggests that the Bible is not regarded as the sole authority in the development of Christology within AICs. While contextualisation offers relevance, there are important theological concerns arising from the Bible not being the only source of theology.

As indicated above, African scholars have sought to evaluate the ministry of Jesus Christ by comparing it to that of African traditional healers, ancestors, and self-proclaimed messiahs, in order to develop relevant African Christologies. This is because the interpretation of the life and mission of Jesus in the Scriptures is influenced by the different worldviews of the interpreters (Musoni, 2019:34).

Interpreting Christ either as an ancestor or by replacing his mediatory role with that of human or ancestral figures, by default, affects the AICs' understanding of soteriology. A theology of salvation that is not grounded in Scripture may risk an incomplete understanding of sin, salvation, and what Christ accomplished on the cross. This lack of understanding contributes to the practice of animal sacrifices. Nyirongo (1997:161) correctly observes that building doctrine on a few verses either in the OT or NT results in an incomplete understanding of the sin problem and how God has provided a solution in Jesus Christ. AICs in an effort to integrate their ATR world view, focus on OT passages which emphasise animal sacrifices. There is a need to understand the whole counsel of God in the bible in order develop a biblically grounded Christology.

Another notable consequence of contextual Christology in AICs is the rise of spiritual figures such as false prophets and black saviours, as discussed above. Magezi and Banda (2017:2) highlight that the recent 'prophetic Pentecostalism' promotes an unbiblical dependence on prophets by viewing them as channels of divine blessings for their followers. The elevated status of these leaders results in congregants feeling they cannot access God on their own. Christ's role as Mediator, as set out in Scripture, is overshadowed by that of the prophet. This shows that there are some Christological

models in AICs that completely reject anything connected to ATR yet replace Christ with their prophet.

Beyers and Mphahlele (2009:5) argue that when Jesus is equated with ancestors, the implication is that his divine nature is immediately denied, as an ancestor cannot possess two natures, both human and divine. The debate concerning continuity and discontinuity remains ongoing. Papu (2015:85) offers a balanced perspective by stressing the following:

[W]hile continuity proponents may be guilty of over emphasis of African religion, those for discontinuity also run the risk of undermining the place of culture when preaching the gospel in Africa.

The biblical conception of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice can contribute to this conversation because many AICs do not deny the authority of the Bible and use it as a foundation for their theology. There is a cultural agenda influencing African scholarship, with increased emphasis on ATR methods employed for inculturation (Papu, 2015:87). While Christ has been integrated into the African worldview through contextualisation, there remains a significant gap regarding his work as revealed in Scripture.

2.5 Chapter summary and conclusion

From the above review, it is evident that AICs are contextual, reflecting the expression of Christianity rooted in African soil. Donkor (2016:8) rightly asserts that the pursuit of contextualised Christologies aims to make the gospel message meaningful and relevant to Africans. The culturally contextual Christology models discussed have arisen as a result of African theologians seeking to develop and examine different kinds of Christologies that can be seamlessly integrated into African political, religious, and social contexts. This endeavour has been successful, as evidenced by the development of various Christology models that are accepted within AICs. It can also be noted that AICs agree with African Christian theologians that Western contextualised theology does not do justice to the interpretation of Scripture within the African context.

This development of theology from an anthropological perspective, though valuable and contextually relevant, may have obscured the proper revelation of Scripture regarding who Christ is and his role as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator. Kunhiyop (2012:80) maintains that a balanced Christology must be biblically based. The interpretation of

Christ must be understood as arising from Scripture while also addressing the deficiencies of the people through consideration of their context.

Bimweyi (2003:99) argues for the relevance of African culture in Christology. He states that, to prevent African theology from being reduced to an archaeological survey, it should be grounded in authentic values that have a real impact on daily life in contemporary Africa. While this is true, AICs should strive for a proper, biblical conception of Christology. This study has also shown that, under the guise of culture and the African worldview, some leaders have become messiahs and have supplanted the role of Christ as Mediator. It can also be deduced that the mediatorship of Christ is often understood only within the confines of ancestral Christological models. His unique work as the Sacrifice, the Priest, and Mediator has not yet been fully acknowledged within African Christianity.

In view of the above, while AICs offer contextually relevant Christologies, this cannot overshadow the need for critical scrutiny regarding the dilution of key Christian doctrines such as sin, its consequences, and salvation through Christ. The study has highlighted the gap in the biblical interpretation of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice among AICs, and that this can influence their Christology. Striking a balance between contextualisation and the doctrinal integrity of Scripture through rigorous exegesis remains an ongoing challenge. On this basis, the next chapter offers a detailed exegesis of Hebrews 9:11-28 to uncover the biblical portrayal of Christ. This analysis examines whether his priestly, sacrificial, and mediatory work is sufficient for the African Christian context. It also evaluates the extent to which the Jesus of Scripture is reflected in AIC Christologies through an assessment of these core aspects of his redemptive role.

CHAPTER 3 CHRIST AS PRIEST, SACRIFICE, AND MEDIATOR: EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS 9:11-28

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a detailed exegesis and theological exposition of Hebrews 9:11-28. The intention is to provide a theological foundation regarding the conception of Christ as Mediator, Priest, and Sacrifice in EH. Kvidahl and Lioy (2020:40) agree, stating that “the letter to the Hebrews stands out among its New Testament epistles because it offers an in-depth exposition of the high priestly work of Christ in comparison to a detailed discussion of Israel’s cultic theology in the Old Testament.”

Proper exegesis requires an understanding of the historical and theological context of a text. This process involves addressing questions related to historical context, including authorship, audience, and destination. This will enable the researcher to identify any similarities in the social setting of the original audience and the practices of AICs at a later stage.

3.2 Authorship

Authorship plays a significant role in establishing the historical context of any written text and is therefore crucial for credible interpretation. Igba (2013:55) rightly observes that determining authorship is necessary for interpreting Hebrews, even if it may not lead to definitive conclusions. Kvidahl and Lioy (2020:39), quoting DeSilva (2000:25), point out that although identifying the author with certainty is a difficult task, it is possible to construct a profile of the author based on internal evidence. Such a profile can provide valuable insight into the audience’s situation and the circumstances that gave rise to the letter.

Some of the earliest traditions attribute authorship to Paul. Pink (2005) agrees that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, supporting this claim with reference to 2 Peter 3:15. He argues that Peter was writing to saved Jews who were the same people Paul had previously addressed, according to 2 Peter 3:1. Pink notes that there are characteristics of Paul in Hebrews, including terms such as “sons of God” in Hebrews 2:10, a phrase used only by Paul. Pink also points out doctrinal parallels between Romans 8:16 and

Hebrews 10:15. Finally, he cites Hebrews 13:23 and concludes that Timothy, who is mentioned, was only a companion of Paul, suggesting that Paul is the author of Hebrews.

Hagner (2002:22) rejects Pauline authorship, arguing that Paul could not have written the book because internal evidence shows that the author was not among those who heard directly from the Lord. Hagner (2002:22) also notes that the Greek and style of writing differ from those found in other Pauline epistles. The most compelling argument, however, is the theological differences between the Pauline epistles and the book of Hebrews. Further analysis of Hebrews will show that, although there are differences with the Pauline epistles, there are also notable similarities.

Hagner's (2002:23) response to these similarities is that they do not prove that Paul wrote the book, but rather that it was written by someone from the Pauline circle who was influenced by Paul's thinking. He concludes that there are many speculations – including Luke, Barnabas, Silas, Clement of Rome, and Priscilla. For all these suggestions, there are reasons both for and against, and therefore the writer is certainly not Paul and remains anonymous. He further illustrates the point of anonymity by referring to the canonisation of Hebrews, noting that the earliest known reference to Hebrews is a quotation in a letter from the Roman Church to the Corinthian church in AD 96.

Hagner (2002:191) explains that Clement of Rome, believed to be the author of the letter to the Corinthians, did not identify the author of Hebrews. Although Hebrews was later included in the Pauline corpus, this was based on assumption rather than verified authorship (Hagner, 2002:191). This suggests that the canonisation of Hebrews was not based on authorship but rather on its perceived apostolic association. For these reasons, Hagner (2002:191) concludes that the author of Hebrews remains anonymous.

Bruce (1988:57), in his book *The Canon of Scripture*, offers insight into the authorship of Hebrews. He notes that the recipients of the letter were well acquainted with its author and, therefore, would not have regarded it as an anonymous communication. However, as the book does not bear the author's name, the identity of the writer was forgotten after a generation or two and has never been recovered. The conclusion, therefore, from the perspective of canonicity, is that the writer is anonymous.

John Calvin (2009:27) notes that although some have proposed Paul, Luke, or Barnabas as possible authors of Hebrews, others – such as Luke – have also been suggested. He

notes that among the Greeks, the letter was grouped with the Pauline epistles, while the Latins, despite their historical proximity to the apostles, disagreed with this classification. Calvin concludes that there is no compelling reason to consider Paul as the author. He further contends that the argument that Paul withheld his name due to sensitivity toward Jewish readers lacks credibility, given that Timothy is mentioned in the text. Calvin (2009:27) agrees with those who argue that the teaching and style of the letter indicate that it could not have been written by the Apostle Paul. His final conclusion is that the author remains unknown.

Igba (2013:57) correctly concludes the matter by saying:

The conclusive agreement by the Church is that the epistle is of inspired authorship is evidenced by its discernible doctrinal content as well as its consistency with the rest of scripture. This observation overshadows the question of the identity of the human author.

Philips (1977:41) adds that this book has been called “the orphan epistle” because it lacks the signature of a human author, instead of beginning with the name of Paul, or Peter or James, it begins with “God”. The human author might be unknown, but it remains an inspired piece of writing.

3.3 Date

When one considers that there is no clear evidence regarding the identity of the recipients or author, the date is also uncertain. The approximate date can be determined through an examination of internal and external evidence. Internal evidence is important because it can reveal how the author, and probably his readers, came to know the gospel, helping to establish an approximate date (Bruce, 1990:5).

Igba (2013:57) provides valuable insight when he explains that:

the key factors which have been considered to date the epistle include the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D 70, the people and events within the letter as well as its literary relationship with the early text of 1 Clement. Traditionally, the book is dated A.D.96 because of references to Hebrews in the Clement letter but no firm conclusions could be reached because the letter of Clement itself does not have a specific date.

Harris (2019:5) concludes that there is no scholarly agreement regarding the date. One important factor in determining the date is the destruction of Jerusalem. He (2019:5) adds

that, although the destruction is not explicitly mentioned in the book, the author's intention was also to show that the temple, as an earthly tabernacle, was no longer relevant. If the temple had already been destroyed, its destruction would have been a significant part of his argument; therefore, it is unlikely that the epistle was written after AD 70. Harris (2019:5) suggests that the letter could have been written during the lifetime of Timothy because of his presence in the epistle. This could mean a date in the late 50s or 60s.

Igba (2013:58) agrees, concluding that,

The internal evidence in the text of Heb 13:23 suggests that Timothy had been freed from incarceration. The language of an immediate danger of persecution rather than an occurrence that could involve loss of life (12:4) as well the argument regarding the destruction of the temple in AD 70 suggests that the composition of Hebrews was during the events leading to the AD 70 persecution. This places the epistle between A.D 60-65.

3.4 Recipients

Igba (2013:58) remarks that “the title of the Epistle suggests the recipients to be Jews, and they have been traditionally accepted as such.” This implies that the original audience consisted of Christians of Jewish origin who were being both urged and tempted to return to the sacrificial practices of Judaism. Bruce (1979:24) concurs with this perspective, mentioning that the book was addressed to Jewish Christians because its entire argument is set against a background of OT events and assumes a good knowledge of Levitical rituals. These Jewish Christians were experiencing persecution from their own community; hence the purpose of Hebrews must be understood in this context. Borden (2020:7) also agrees that the writer of Hebrews was addressing a community of Jewish Christians who were considering apostasy to Judaism due to both internal and external persecution, as well as confusion regarding the relationship between the new Christian faith and their Jewish heritage.

Cockerill (2012:20) argues that EH does not contain any ethnic distinctions. The author's intention is not to differentiate between Jews and Gentiles or between Greeks and barbarians; therefore, if the term “Jewish Christians” is understood in an ethnic sense, it may cause confusion. Cockerill (2012:20) further contends that the term “Jewish Christians” refers to followers of Christ who have adopted Jewish religious practices, regardless of their ethnicity. Jewish Christians are both Jews and Gentiles who devote

themselves to Christ while also recognising the importance of incorporating Jewish practices into their worship.

Igba (2013:59) concurs with Cockerill (2012:20), arguing that since Timothy had a mixed Greek and Jewish heritage (Acts 16:1-3), and Italian Christians are mentioned, the letter may have been addressed to a community of believers with both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.

3.5 Genre of Hebrews

Ellingworth (2000:59) notes that the primary importance of placing a specific writing within its correct literary genre is to understand its general character and distinctive features in comparison with other texts in the same group. This classification helps to assess the literary unity of a document. There are some complexities regarding the genre of Hebrews. O'Brien (2010:20) observes that the book begins like a formal discussion, shifts to the style of a sermon, and ends as a letter. Hagner (2002:29) suggests that Hebrews does not begin as an epistle. There is no identification of author or recipients, and the book lacks an opening greeting. An examination of the main body shows that a specific community is being addressed. The book concludes as a letter, with greetings, a doxology, and a benediction.

O'Brien (2010:21) argues that Hebrews is not simply a theological treatise, but that its purpose is hortatory, as seen in the exhortatory passages. He (2010:21) further points out three key features that reveal the oral character of this document:

Firstly, the distinctive usage of the first person (we, us, our) throughout the discussion enables the speaker to identify with the listeners. Secondly, the language of speaking and hearing instead of writing and reading and thirdly, the skillful oscillation between exposition and exhortation is a pattern that enables the author to clarify his points without losing the attention of his listeners.

Igba (2013:59) agrees that the EH combines literary genres, as exposition and exhortation are closely linked. The expository sections are interconnected and provide the foundational context for the warning passages. The structure of the book suggests it is not a traditional letter, as it lacks a standard letter introduction, greetings, and any indication of the author or recipients.

Ellingworth (2000:62) rightly observes that, while fully recognising the oral characteristics that have led some to regard Hebrews as a sermon, it can still be viewed in its current form as a letter, with the author demonstrating skill in both written and oral communication. O'Brien (2010:22) also notes there is no reason this "sermon" could not have been read aloud as a letter. Hebrews 13:22 implies that the document may have been communicated both orally and in writing.

3.6 Occasion

With regards to occasion, Hagner (2002:25) states:

For one to have a bearing and understanding of the purpose of Hebrews, it will largely depend on one's view concerning the identity of the original recipients. The major purpose, if not the only occasion, of the letter is to warn, and exhort. The book is full of warning passages.

Harris (2019:4) notes that Hebrews 13:22 describes EH as a message of exhortation. This aligns with the five warning passages found in 2:3-4, 3:12–4:11, 6:4-8, 10:26-32, and 12:25-29. Harris (2019:4) further observes that the author presents significant Christological teachings to support these warning passages. The main purpose can therefore be understood as encouraging the hearers to remain steadfast in their faith, even amid persecution.

3.7 Situation of original recipients addressed in the passage

The author of EH was writing to Christians who were on the verge of abandoning their faith in Christ due to both internal and external persecution, as well as a misunderstanding of the relationship between the new Christian faith and their Jewish heritage (Borden, 2020:7). Cockerill (2012:41) refers to the OT as the backbone of the argument, as the entire book of Hebrews is an expository sermon that emerged from a thorough examination of the OT in light of Christ's accomplishment on the cross.

The author's intention is to encourage them to remain faithful amid suffering so that they do not forfeit their salvation. Additionally, he wants them to understand how Christianity is superior to Judaism; hence, there is a strong emphasis from chapter 1 on God having spoken through his Son, who is superior and the fulfilment of all OT shadows. Cockerill (2012:19) affirms that "the God who 'spoke' in the OT through prophets has now 'spoken'

through Jesus his son. This ultimate message by the son is both continuous and the fulfilment of what God promised in scripture before [the] incarnation of the son.”

One of the most pressing questions for the original audience was whether they should continue to interpret the OT according to tradition or in light of how Christ fulfils the OT sacrificial system. This is why the author quotes the OT and interprets it as fulfilled in Christ.

African Christians ask these same questions today. Should they leave traditional religion and follow Christ, who is perceived as a foreigner? This is the reason AICs became independent: so that they could integrate their traditional religion within their Christianity. This integration appears to have been an attempt not to lose African identity and customs in the context of Christianity. Cockerill (2012:44) notes that all those who lived before and after Christ received the same promises and are on a journey to the same heavenly city, which can only be attained through faith in Christ.

3.8 Structure outline of Hebrews 9:11-28 (Adopted from Harris, 2019:7).

Hebrews chapter 9 can be divided into four key sections: 9:1-10, 9:11-14, 9:15-22, and 9:23-28 (Kvidahl & Liroy, 2020:74). This structure is relevant for this study because it logically flows with the argument and brings out the purpose of the text regarding the priestly-mediation role of Christ and his sacrifice.

The new sanctuary and sacrifice (9:1-10 – 10:18)

- The shortcoming of the old system (9:1-10)
- The blood of Jesus has secured an eternal redemption (9:11-14)
- Christ the mediator of the new covenant (9:15-22)
- The perfect and permanent sacrifice of Christ (9:23-28)
- Type and reality, sacrifice, and obedience (10:1-10)
- The finality of Christ's sacrifice and Priesthood (10:11-18).

3.9 Exegetical study of Hebrews 9:11-28

This section undertakes an exegetical analysis of Hebrews 9:11-28, focusing on how the passage presents Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice. Through this detailed examination, this exegetical analysis aimed to provide a precise interpretation of the biblical portrayal of Christ in relation to his person and work in these roles.

3.9.1 Greek English translation of the text

The use of the Greek-English interlinear translation, supplemented by the 2005 Greek Byzantine text (Bible Hub), facilitated an accurate examination of the Greek text, leading to a more precise interpretation. Engaging with the original language strengthened the reliability of the exegetical findings. These translation tools were invaluable in uncovering the original meaning of key terms and words, thereby enhancing the clarity and depth of the exegesis. This approach enabled the researcher to highlight key aspects of the priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice of Christ according to the text.

Table 3.1: Greek English translation of Hebrews 9:11-28

New Revised Standard Translation	Greek interlinear translation (Biblehub.com: RP Byzantine Majority Text)
<p>11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)</p>	<p>11 Χριστὸς δὲ παραγενόμενος ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειότερας σκηνῆς, οὐ χειροποιήτου, τοῦτ' ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως,</p>
<p>12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.</p>	<p>12 οὐδὲ δι' αἵματος τράγων καὶ μόσχων, διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος, εἰσήλθεν ἐφάπαξ εἰς τὰ ἅγια, αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὐράμενος.</p>
<p>13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified,</p>	<p>13 εἰ γὰρ τὸ αἷμα ταύρων καὶ ταυρῶν καὶ σποδὸς δαμάλεως ῥαντίζουσα τοὺς κεκοινωμένους ἀγιάζει πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα,</p>
<p>14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God?</p>	<p>14 πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς διὰ Πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ Θεῷ καθαρῆί τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν Θεῷ ζῶντι;</p>

New Revised Standard Translation	Greek interlinear translation (Biblehub.com: RP Byzantine Majority Text)
15 For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.	15 Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἐστίν, ὅπως, θανάτου γενομένου εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων, τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας.
16 Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.	16 ὅπου γὰρ διαθήκη, θάνατον ἀνάγκη φέρεσθαι τοῦ διαθεμένου·
17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.	17 διαθήκη γὰρ ἐπὶ νεκροῖς βεβαία, ἐπεὶ μήποτε ἰσχύει ὅτε ζῆ ὁ διαθέμενος.
18 Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.	18 Ὅθεν οὐδ' ἡ πρώτη χωρὶς αἵματος ἐγκεκαίνισται·
19 For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people,	19 λαληθείσης γὰρ πάσης ἐντολῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον ὑπὸ Μωϋσέως παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, λαβῶν τὸ αἷμα τῶν μόσχων (καὶ τῶν τράγων) μετὰ ὕδατος καὶ ἐρίου κοκκίνου καὶ ὑσσώπου, αὐτὸ τε τὸ βιβλίον καὶ πάντα τὸν λαὸν ἐράντισε,
20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you."	20 λέγων· τοῦτο τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης ἧς ἐνετείλατο πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὁ Θεός·
21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.	21 καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν δὲ καὶ πάντα τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας τῷ αἵματι ὁμοίως ἐράντισεν.
22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.	22 καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν αἵματι πάντα καθαρίζεται κατὰ τὸν νόμον, καὶ χωρὶς αἱματεκχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις.
23 Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.	23 Ἀνάγκη οὖν τὰ μὲν ὑποδείγματα τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς τούτοις καθαρίζεσθαι, αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ ἐπουράνια κρείττοσιν θυσίαις παρὰ ταύτας.
24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.	24 οὐ γὰρ εἰς χειροποίητα ἅγια εἰσῆλθεν ὁ Χριστός, ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν, ἀλλ' εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανόν, νῦν ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν·
25 Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own,	25 οὐδ' ἵνα πολλάκις προσφέρῃ ἑαυτὸν, ὡσπερ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὰ ἅγια κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν ἐν αἵματι ἀλλοτρίῳ·

New Revised Standard Translation	Greek interlinear translation (Biblehub.com: RP Byzantine Majority Text)
26 for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.	26 ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου· νῦν δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανέρωται.
27 And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment,	27 καὶ καθ' ὅσον ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις,
28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.	28 οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός, ἅπαξ προσενεχθεὶς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνενεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας, ἐκ δευτέρου χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας ὀφθήσεται τοῖς αὐτὸν ἀπεκδεχομένοις εἰς σωτηρίαν.

(Source: Douglas, Brown & Comfort, 1993:776-778)

3.9.2 Hebrews 9:11-14: The blood of Christ attains an everlasting redemption

Eberhart and Schweitzer (2019:5) correctly observe that, in order to use language that vividly describes the work of Christ, this chapter first provides listeners with a detailed explanation of the tabernacle of Moses (Heb. 9:1-5). Secondly, the chapter highlights the duties of the priests during the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 (vv. 6-10). With this context of the Day of Atonement, the author begins to argue in Hebrews 9: 11 and 12 that, “But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.” Harris (2019:221) notes the chiasmic structure in Hebrews 9: 11b-12a as follows:

A διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειότερας σκηνῆς

Through the greater and more perfect tabernacle

B οὐ χειροποιήτου, τοῦτ' ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως,

Not made with hands, that is not of this creation

B οὐδὲ δι' αἵματος τράγων καὶ μόσχων

Not through the blood of goats and calves

A διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος

But through his own blood

Clauses A/A positively state how Christ approached the heavenly sanctuary, while clauses B/B contrast this approach with the heavenly sanctuary (Harris, 2019:221). O'Brien (2010:317) maintains that Jesus' entry into the heavenly tabernacle to secure eternal redemption is the focus of this central section of Hebrews. The discussion of the effectiveness of his offering as Priest, and his ministry in the heavenly tabernacle, was introduced in Hebrews 8:1-4, 6. The word δὲ in verse 11 likely connects with μὲν in Hebrews 9:1, indicating a contrast between the earthly sanctuary (vv.1-10) and the heavenly one (vv.11-22). This underlines the sharp contrast between what the older could not achieve but Christ has accomplished, signalling the shift in focus to sacrifice (Harris, 2019:222). Hagner asserts that this decisive and definitive sacrifice could not be accomplished through animal offerings but only through the blood of Jesus. This shows that Christ is a different kind of high priest because he offered himself as the sacrifice (9:12). For this reason, the death of Christ was able to obtain eternal redemption, once and for all. Harris (2019:224) agrees that the subject of εἰσῆλθεν (he entered) is Christ, and the adverb ἑφάπαξ (once and for all) contrasts his significant entrance into the heavenly tabernacle with the Levitical priests' annual entrance into the inner sanctuary (holy of holies) on the Day of Atonement.

The author skilfully compares the earthly tabernacle of Moses with the heavenly tabernacle, while developing the argument that Christ is the high priest of a better covenant in chapter 8. The central point of this section is that Christ entered once for all, with his own blood, into the heavenly tabernacle to secure eternal redemption. This is far superior to the rituals of the earthly tabernacle and the blood of goats. In chapter one, the EH argues that God has now spoken through his Son. The blood of Christ secures eternal salvation because he is the Son of God.

In verse 12, αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν answers the question of what Christ offers: eternal redemption. Vincent (1903:1138) adds that αἰωνίαν (eternal) refers not only to duration but also to the quality of the redemption – one that endures beyond the limitations of time. Λύτρωσιν denotes redemption or release by means of a sacrifice (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:535). The quality of the blood of Jesus offered as a sacrifice secures an everlasting redemption. This implies that there is no need for any other sacrifice for sin whether it is the blood of goats or any other.

In verses 13 and 14, Hughes (2019:354) explains that the theme of Christ's superior high priestly sacrifice is further developed. A proof of this sacrificial death is presented through a fortiori argument ('How much more', μάλλον). Πόσω combined with μάλλον expresses an emphatic exclamation and serves as a strong example of a fortiori reasoning (Harris, 2019:225). This comparison is valid argument, as the blood of goats and bulls, along with their ashes, were used for external cleansing from defilement through sprinkling. The word 'sanctify' (ἀγιάζει) means to set apart or remove something from the common, enabling an individual to be restored to worship and fellowship (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:535). A ceremonially unclean person could be sanctified and restored to fellowship through an act of external cleansing.

Hughes (1990:354) agrees that the sprinkling with the ashes of a heifer was usually prescribed for someone who had touched a dead body (Num. 19). These ashes were not used on the Day of Atonement, but their association with animal sacrifice suggests they could only provide external cleansing.

The author Hebrews is deliberate in his choice of words to ensure that his audience understands: if the OT ritual system could externally sanctify and restore an individual to the worshipping community, then the blood of Jesus accomplishes far more, since Christ offered himself as the unblemished sacrifice. Harris agrees that προσήνεγκεν (he offered) and ἄμωμον (unblemished, blameless) allude to Numbers 6:14 and 19:2, which specify that sacrificial animals must be without blemish. Christ, the sinless Priest, was also the unblemished Sacrifice. O'Brien (2010:325) asserts that the term 'unblemished to God' is chosen to emphasise the perfection of Christ's sacrifice in a moral, rather than a physical, sense. His offering became the climax of a life of perfect obedience to the Father.

Harris (2019:226) affirms that the reference to πνεύματος αἰωνίου (eternal spirit) is debated. Firstly, it could refer to the spirit upon the servant as indicated in Isaiah, intended to link the work of the Spirit to eternal redemption and eternal inheritance. Secondly, it could refer to Christ's divine nature; and thirdly, the expression could indicate the part of his being that was an eternal and spiritual sacrifice. Vincent (1903:1139) is correct when he asserts that the most significant aspect of the sacrifice of Christ is that he offered his deepest self. The cross is an expression of love, truth, mercy, and selflessness. This sacrifice washes both internally and externally and cleanses our guilt of sin.

3.9.3 Hebrew 9:15-22: Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant

Having addressed how and why the blood of Jesus achieves eternal salvation in the previous section, he now reaches the climax of his argument to show that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. Harris (2019:230) notes that καὶ (15-22) connects this section with the preceding one (11-14). διὰ τοῦτο (therefore) refers to the earlier argument in 11-14 and signals a strong conclusion: “because Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary by means of his own blood, therefore, He is the mediator of the new covenant” (verse 15). The conjunction τοῦτο (because of this/therefore) refers to the previous verses regarding the effectiveness of Christ’s blood.

Wiid (1992:153) contends that:

The role of Christ as initiator and mediator of the new διαθήκη (covenant) is very connected to his death. It is the result of his death that the heirs (κεκλημένοι – those elected v 15) obtain salvation (τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας vv15). Verse 16 stipulates that for a testament to be affected there is need for the death of a testator (τοῦ διαθεμένου) must be proved (φέρεισθαι).

This observation is accurate because the text indicates that the effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice is closely linked to the establishment of a new covenant, which creates a new relationship between God and believers. The meaning of διαθήκη in verses 16 and 17 has been a subject of debate regarding interpretation. The main issue is whether this word should be rendered as ‘testament’ or ‘covenant’. Harris (2019:230) comments that these difficulties are resolved when the term is understood as ‘covenant’ throughout Hebrews 9:15-18. Guthrie (1983:194), on the other hand, clarifies the matter by suggesting that the use of ‘testament’ or ‘will’ is more comprehensible in Greek, as the same word encompasses both ideas. This is because a will or testament takes effect only after the death of the testator; similarly, the new covenant comes into effect after the death of Christ. The word ἐγκαίνισται in verse 18 emphasises the idea of introducing or initiating something new; thus, the concepts of ‘inauguration’ and ‘dedication’ are closely related (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:536).

The author of Hebrews wants his hearers to understand the significance of Christ’s work. The first covenant at Mt Sinai was introduced with the blood of animals, but the new covenant has now been established by the blood of Christ. Since Christ’s offering is greater than the OT sacrificial system, the New Covenant is also greater and more

effective than the old one. In light of this, Harris (2019:233) explains that the relationship between the Old and New Covenants should be understood as Jesus having to die because the covenant had been broken, not as a general principle for inaugurating covenants. Bruce (1979:214) asserts that Christ's death fulfilled all requirements for the forgiveness and renewal of God's promises for eternal redemption.

Ellingworth (1993:465) adds that, in Hebrews 9:18-22, the focus is on the blood of sprinkling, which was crucial for inaugurating the covenant at Sinai. Harris (2019:234) explains that ὅθεν (for which reason) in verse 18 draws an inference from verses 16-17 about the necessity of Christ's death. In addition, he (2019:234) notes that διαθήκη (covenant) should be understood elliptically from Hebrews 8 and is modified by πρώτη. ἡ χωρὶς αἵματος is an example of a double negative (litotes), indicating a strong emphasis on the blood offering. O'Brien (2010:235) explains that the verb ἐγκεκαίνισται (put into effect) is suitable for describing the inauguration of a solemn legal relationship binding the Lord and his people, and agrees that the phrase "not without blood" recalls the earlier use in verse 7, where sacrificial blood is the means to approach God.

Verses 19-20 summarise the exodus account; however, certain features not found in the OT narrative are included. There is no mention of the sacrifice of calves and goats, only the bull; nothing is said about the ceremonial use of water, scarlet wool, and hyssop. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that the author is addressing the general question of cleansing by blood in the OT (Hughes, 2019:374). Guthrie (1983:195) agrees that the main point is that the Old Covenant was confirmed by blood. The sprinkling of blood on the book and the people also demonstrated that the OT covenant involved the participation of the people, who needed to be sanctified from their sins.

Cockerill (2012:409) further observes that there are parallels between the words and actions of Moses at Sinai and those of Christ at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:27-28, Mk. 14:13-14). Harris (2019:236) agrees that in verse 20, the LXX text was altered as follows: τοῦτο (this) replaces behold, ἐνετείλατο (commanded) replaces ordained, and God replaces Lord. These variations support the authors carefully constructed argument to align the quotation with the Lord's words over the cup at the Last Supper. This shows a continuation from the OT to the NT. The Old Covenant pointed to Christ, who would fulfil and establish the New Covenant through his blood.

The focus is on bloodshed at the inauguration of the covenant. Cockerill (2012:409) suggests that the author used these similarities to draw a parallel between God establishing the Old Covenant through Moses and Christ establishing the new through his blood. The change from ratified to command avoids ambiguity: God initiated it by his authoritative word – that is, God commanded the former covenant, and Israel ratified it.

The inauguration of the first covenant, which had limitations in terms of effectiveness and duration, served as a type pointing to the true covenant to come through Christ. In verses 21-22, the author stresses the importance and purpose of blood even in the OT by highlighting that “almost everything” associated with that covenant is cleansed by blood according to the law (v.22a) (Cockerill, 2012:409). This indicates that cleansing from sin was not possible without blood. The blood of animals pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, which sanctifies from all sin.

Ellingworth (1993:470) notes that verse 22 provides a transition from the inauguration of the former to the new covenant, but there are some scholarly disputes concerning the exact steps, particularly regarding the relationship between verse 22a (κατὰ τὸν νόμον) and verse 22b. The concluding statement is the key to closing this argument: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” The effectiveness of the forgiveness of sins in the OT was not based on any other purification rituals apart from the death.

3.9.4 Hebrews 9:23-28: The perfect and permanent sacrifice of Christ

The author of Hebrews further demonstrates why the sacrifice of Christ is permanent and unique. He does this by comparing the place where Christ offered his blood with the place where the priests of the OT offered their sacrifices. The main point of this section is that Christ did not offer his blood in a holy place made by human hands (χειροποίητα). This was just a ἀντίτυπα, which enhances the idea of a copy or counterpart of reality (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:537). The victory of Christ was not only terrestrial through his death on the cross but also celestial because he appeared in the heavenly sanctuary and offered his blood.

The οὖν in verse 23 introduces a new section, providing an important connection between blood and cleansing. The μὲν ...δὲ construction highlights a contrast between the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly one, recalling Hebrews 8:1–5 (Harris, 2019:241). O’Brien (2010:336) comments that the principle of “without the shedding of blood there is no

forgiveness” appears to extend to the heavenly domain, of which the earthly cultus was a type. There is a range of interpretations regarding the purification of heavenly things, which fall into three main categories: a) the initiation of the heavenly sanctuary, b) the purification of heaven itself, and c) the cleansing of God’s people (O’Brien, 2010:336). Ellingworth (2000:478) explains that κρείττοσιν θυσίαις παρὰ ταύτας is elliptical language: “(But it is necessary for the heavenly things to be purified with better sacrifices than those of the earthly sanctuary).” Hughes (1990:379) further clarifies that the plural κρείττοσιν θυσίαις (better sacrifices) is generic rather than precise, corresponding to the plural “these sacrifices” in the first clause of the verse.

In verse 24, γὰρ provides support for verse 23 and introduces the first two contrasts drawn by the author between the old priestly order and Christ, specifically regarding entrance to the sanctuary (Harris, 2019:243). Cockerill (2012:417) discusses how Christ did not enter a tabernacle made by human hands (9:11), like the one constructed by Moses (8:3–5) and described in 9:1-10. The word ἀντίτυπα conveys the idea of a “representation” or something “corresponding to” another. It may be translated as model, copy, or representation. Alternatively, the word could indicate a type, pointer, or foreshadowing. The significance of the tabernacle built by Moses was that it served as a model or type of the original one in heaven (Harris, 2019:243). Guthrie (1983:198) highlights that the focus is on the sanctuary into which Christ has entered. This is an historically completed event, articulated in both negative and positive terms: negative in that it is distinct from the earthly sanctuary, and positive in that it is a final and greater sanctuary because it is in heaven itself. There is therefore no longer any need to go to an earthly sanctuary to offer sacrifices, as they were merely copies of the one in heaven. Christ has entered into the true and original sanctuary. All earthly sanctuaries and altars for sacrifices are now obsolete.

Harris (2019:244) correctly explains that οὐρανόν refers to God’s place of dwelling, which is the true sanctuary. The verb ἐμφανισθῆναι (to appear) denotes making something clear or, in legal contexts, appearing before a magistrate with a complaint. Harris (2019:244) agrees that ἐμφανισθῆναι indicates the purpose for which Christ has entered heaven; in this case, it refers to the divine acceptance and favour experienced by Jesus appearing before God. This single act of appearing before God holds the promise of future entry for believers and has present implications, as the text states that he “has now appeared for

us.” His presence as our representative assures us that his salvation is valid and will secure access to God for all who believe, with no restrictions (O’Brien, 2010:339).

The text continues to draw comparisons and parallels between the old ritual system of animal sacrifices and the superior sacrifice of Christ, which was offered in a better place. The one sacrifice of Christ abolishes all sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Christ not only entered but also appeared on our behalf. The Greek word ἐμφανισθῆναι conveys the sense of becoming visible, appearing to someone, and being present before someone (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:537). The text can be understood as Christ appearing before God, or in the presence of God, to offer his sacrifice on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. This was a legal act because, as stated earlier, without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. This forms the basis for justification, as through this single act of Christ, believers are justified.

In verses 25–26, a second contrast between the OT and what Christ has achieved is presented, with emphasis on sacrifices. Ellingworth (2000:481) notes that “οὐδ’ ἵνα is used because the main clause (οὐ γὰρ εἰς ...εἰσῆλθεν) is expressed negatively.” Christ’s sacrifice contrasts with sacrifices under the old order. Harris (2019:26) argues that the reason for Christ to enter the tabernacle in heaven was to avoid a repetition of sacrifices, as it was during the old order when priests repeatedly offered sacrifices many times.

The key word in verses 25-26 is προσφέρῃ which is presented in a negative present tense emphasising a continuous action meaning “to offer himself over and over again” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:537). Christ does not need to repeat his sacrifice. This contrasts with the sacrifices offered by Levitical priests, which had to be made repeatedly, year after year. Furthermore, the Levitical priests offered the blood of animals, whereas Christ offered his own blood. The sacrifice of Christ is therefore perpetually effective, so there is no need for any other sacrifices for sin or any form of cleansing.

In verse 27, καὶ connects the discussion of the nature of Christ’s death (25-26) to an analogy drawn from human experience (vv. 27-28). Just as ordinary human beings die once, so too Christ died once – but with vastly different consequences (Harris, 2019:247). Ellingworth (2000:486) notes that τοῖς ἀνθρώποις (for men) is general, indicating that Jesus shares in the human condition, including death. The adverb ἅπαξ (*once*) serves as the clearest point of comparison between verses 27 and 28. Harris (2019:248) explains that the construction καθ’ ὅσον (just as) in verse 27 and οὕτως in verse 28 signals a

comparison, linking the validity of Christ's work to the human problem of sin. In using the verb ἀπόκειται (appointed), the author not only argues for the unrepeatable nature of Christ's atonement but also reminds his audience that death is appointed for all people.

This is a valid argument by the author to demonstrate the eternal effects of Christ's offering. This was a one-time appointment that cannot be repeated or revoked. When Christ returns, his purpose will not be to offer another sacrifice, but to save those who wait for him in faith.

The wording of verse 28 alludes to Isaiah 53:12. The vicarious atonement of Christ is revealed in the salvation it brings, which is inseparably connected to Jesus leading his people to heaven, where he is already exalted (Harris, 2019:248). Verse 28b affirms that Jesus will return to earth in his second coming. Ellingworth (2000:487) notes that the construction at the end of verse 28b is uncertain, but most modern exegetes take εἰς σωτηρίαν (to save) with ὀφθήσεται (he will appear), meaning that the appearance of Christ will result in the final salvation of believers. Guthrie (1983:88) avers that the verb ἀπεκδεχομένοις, translated as "eagerly waiting" in this text, also appears in epistles such as 1 Cor 1:7, Phil 3:20, and Rom 8:19 in reference to the anticipated glories of Christ. Believers, therefore, patiently wait for the revelation of Christ's glory when he returns.

The wording of verse 28 is carefully crafted to indicate that judgement will come with the appearing of Christ. The same Christ who has achieved salvation for those who believe is the one who will return to judge. Believers are encouraged and warned not to abandon their faith in Christ. The word ἀπεκδεχομένοις therefore also conveys hope in the salvation Christ will bring when he comes, despite the persecutions and sufferings his hearers were experiencing. The hope of believers' rests in the glory that Christ will bring to those who have persevered in faith.

3.9.5 Analysis of findings

EH was written to an audience facing the challenge of abandoning Christianity and returning to Judaism due to persecution. The author's intention was to lead the audience back to the OT sacrificial system, with which they were familiar, and interpret it in light of Christ. The aim was to show how Christ fulfils the role of OT priests and sacrifices, and how he is the mediator of a new and better covenant.

Hebrews 9:11-14 discusses how Christ, as High Priest, offered an eternal sacrifice of his own blood, which is far greater than that of animals. This sacrifice was made in the true tabernacle in heaven. Therefore, there is no longer any need for animal sacrifices. Christ is the perfect high priest who has offered an effective and permanent sacrifice.

Kvidahl and Lioy (2020:2) highlight,

In Hebrews chapter 9, the author of Hebrews shows a perfect understanding of the sacrifice of Christ through his death, His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary and atonement for sin. The death of Christ is carefully explained within the context of Leviticus 16 (9:1-10, 11-14, 23-28) and a covenant inauguration (9:15-22).

Verses 15-22 are central because they explain the relationship between the old and new covenants, highlighting how Christ fulfilled the Old and established the New Covenant. The introduction of this covenant was based on the blood of Christ. Salvation is founded on the sacrifice of Christ. The audience needed to understand that Christ has paid the penalty for sin, and they now stand under a better covenant which offers forgiveness and pardon of sin. The author wants his audience to understand how Christ fulfills the sacrificial system of the OT. The implication is that any further form of sacrifice is no longer necessary.

Verses 23-28 continue the same line of argument, encouraging the hearers to be confident in their salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, which is eternal in nature. Believers are also reminded to eagerly await the return of Christ because judgement is certain. Pali (2014:156) agrees that,

in both the Old and the New Covenants, blood was the medium for entrance into the presence of God (Heb. 9:11-14). The author, through comparison of the OT priesthood and that of Christ, showed how Christ entered the holiest tabernacle in heaven to offer his own blood (9:11, 24). The reason is that Christ's Priesthood is perfect, unique and eternal.

Hebrews 9:11-28 certainly displays the High Priestly role of Christ, his redemptive sacrifice, and how only he is the mediator of the New Covenant. Through faith in what Christ has already accomplished in his role as Priest, Mediator and Sacrifice, believers are assured of redemption and forgiveness of sins. There is no need for any other forms of mediators and sacrifices because none of them can accomplish what Christ has done.

3.9.6 Chapter summary and conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews. The first section provided a historical and literary analysis of EH to help clarify its historical context, including a discussion of authorship. This discussion showed that the authorship of Hebrews has long been debated, with differing opinions, but the author remains unknown. The occasion and destination of the letter are not specifically stated; however, this does not diminish the theological significance of the letter or its place in the canon as an inspired work (Hughes, 1990:1). The message in the EH is as relevant to us today as it was to the original audience.

The exegetical section employed biblical tools such as original languages and critical commentaries for analysis, interpretation, and a focused exegesis of Hebrews 9:11–28. This demonstrated how Jesus, as the perfect High Priest – sinless and undefiled – does not need to offer sacrifices continuously, but accomplished the ultimate sacrifice by offering his own blood once for all. In addition, Jesus took his blood to the heavenly sanctuary, which was foreshadowed by the earthly tabernacle of Moses, to make his sacrifice permanently effective.

This section is rich in the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice. The uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice lies in its provision of complete atonement, unlike OT sacrifices. Jatau (2022:461) rightly concludes that Jesus Christ should be regarded as the perfect and sole Priest who offered the ultimate sacrifice of his blood on behalf of humanity. Christ ministers in the true tabernacle, which was not made by human hands, in contrast to that of the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 9:11). Pali (2014:156) asserts that Jesus, as the Superior High Priest, offered his own blood, which established and secured a New Covenant – of which he is the only mediator. As the Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ represents and intercedes for humanity. Hebrews 9:11–14 provides the biblical testimony that there is no longer any need for priests to offer animal sacrifices on behalf of humanity, because all was fulfilled in Christ.

The sacrifice of Christ, unlike any other, sanctifies those who believe morally and spiritually. It is once for all time and will never be repeated. As Pali (2014:158) opines, “the effect of Christ’s sacrifice extends to the past, present and future sins.”

CHAPTER 4 IMPLICATIONS OF HEBREWS 9:11-28 FOR UNDERSTANDING PRIESTHOOD, MEDIATION, AND SACRIFICE IN AICs

4.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the AICs' Christological understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice. Drawing on insights from Chapters 2 and 3 – particularly the Christological models outlined in Chapter 2 – it assesses how these concepts are interpreted and practised within AICs. The analysis aims to identify points of convergence or divergence with the biblical testimony of Hebrews 9:11-28.

Employing a socio-historical method as a subset of the historical-grammatical approach, the researcher was able to explore the cultural, religious, and social contexts of both the original audience of Hebrews and the AICs (Igba & Hobyane, 2021:117). This approach also enabled a critical assessment of how the themes of Christ's priesthood, sacrifice, and mediation, as portrayed in Hebrews 9:11-28, are understood and applied within AICs.

Some questions that guided the ensuing discussion included:

- How does the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator in the book of Hebrews influence the AICs' understanding of him, especially when compared to their existing models of priests, sacrifices, and mediators?
- Do the culture-specific Christological models discussed in Chapter accurately reflect the practical understanding of priesthood, sacrifice, and mediation within AICs?
- In what ways does the biblical depiction of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in Hebrews 9:11-28 inform a biblical response to the beliefs of AICs, which are significantly shaped by ATR?

4.2 Summary of key conclusions in Chapter 2

4.2.1 AICs' Christology as an avenue for interpreting Christ in Africa

Chapter 2 examined African theology and various Christological models that have influenced the development of AICs, with a focus on priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice.

The authors reviewed generally agree on the need for contextualised forms of Christology, shaped by specific cultures, to accommodate the African worldview. Among these, the most prominent and developing model is Jesus as Ancestor. The researcher traced the development of this model – from Jesus as Ancestor to Proto- Ancestor, and more recently, the concept of Christ as the Transformed Ancestor and transformer of ancestors.

Bujo (2003:133) argued that it is necessary to understand the mystery of Jesus in an African context, as the experience of Christian faith and salvation history is closely linked to culture and the African concept of ancestor. Kealotswe (2014:235) also observed that the worldview of AICs is similar to that of ATR. Since God has intermediaries called ancestors, one cannot truly understand the theology of AICs without understanding ATR and its influence. We also noted other models of Christ, such as Suffering Servant, Saviour, and Healer, which emerged in response to colonial oppression and the quest for salvation. This led to the rise of messianic leaders – black messiahs – commissioned to liberate black people. In this context, African scholars have compared the work of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice to that of African traditional healers, ancestors, and self-proclaimed ancestors, in order to develop relevant African Christologies.

4.2.2 The challenge of clarifying the role of Jesus in AIC perspectives on priests, mediators, and sacrifices

Chapter 2 explored various African contextual Christological models that reflect aspects of the African worldview. These models – such as Jesus as Ancestor, Jesus as Saviour, and Jesus as Healer – demonstrate how African Christianity seeks to express its understanding of Christ in ways that resonate with indigenous cultural and religious frameworks. While these models have been accepted within the African Christian Church and thought, it should be noted that AICs represent theological interpretations shaped by the African context and therefore may not do justice to the nuanced and comprehensive biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice. Musoni (2019:36) correctly observes that many scholars have contributed to the study of African Christology, such as Nyamiti (Jesus the Ancestor). The question, however, is whether the Jesus of the Bible is visible in AICs or not.

With this question in mind, further observations were made that, in practice, AICs regard their church founders as mediators and priests, whether dead or alive. It was also

discovered that animal sacrifices to appease ancestors still play a central role within AIC liturgy. A notable similarity among the models discussed is the role of ancestors in connecting God and people. This reflects the general understanding of intermediaries in Africa, where the common view is that ancestors can mediate.

This indicates that, although Christ is accepted within the different models discussed, his role as the Superior High Priest – who is the only mediator and sacrifice – is often misunderstood and not fully recognised. This leads to further exploration of the influence of ATR on African Christianity.

4.2.3 The problem of the relevance of ATR in AICs

As mentioned earlier, African Christians face the challenge of integrating Christianity with their traditional religious systems. The main contributing factors are the social and historical events brought about by colonialism. Africans seek to reassert their identity by observing their traditional religions. This has led to efforts to develop contextual Christologies that are not rooted in Scripture. In this regard, syncretism has two potential sources. Firstly, the misinterpretation of biblical truth, whether through deliberate distortion or unintentional misunderstanding of the text. Secondly, contextualisation, or attempts to harmonise biblical truth with cultural trends, norms, and practices (Anselmo, 2009:234).

According to O' Donovan (2009:254), the Israelites were guilty of syncretism for several reasons:

they blended their worship of God with elements of pagan cultures around them. They had Levitical priests for their sacrifices to God but also appointed different kind of people who were not chosen by God to officiate for them as priests at shrines in high places (2 Kings 17:32). 1st Kings 12:31 further illustrates this when Jeroboam erected high places and appointed his own priests to minister and offer sacrifices in those places. They mixed the worshipped God with that of the gods of the nations around them.

Donkor (2016:8) contends that the intersection of culture and religion, as well as issues of inclusion and exclusion, will remain topics of discussion and debate within the field of missiology. This is because, when the gospel is preached, it is usually understood and interpreted according to the context of reception and the reasons for its acceptance.

This same dilemma has affected the understanding and interpretation of Christ in African Christian churches. The AICs are therefore a reflection of African Christianity, which is why it is difficult for Jesus to be naturally assimilated into their theology. The Christological models presented in Chapter 2 are African traditional concepts that have been used to explicate Christ.

4.2.4 Misconceptions of sin and salvation as a hindrance to a proper understanding of Christ in AICs

As noted in Chapter 2, AICs embrace ATR; therefore, the main problems in life for African Christians are material and earthly issues such as barrenness, sickness, famine, and death. These problems are often attributed to perceived witchcraft or angry ancestral spirits, hence the need to appease them with blood offerings.

The place of Christ cannot be fully understood because there is no concept of sin. Gehman (2019:162) observes that the teaching of original sin as a result of the fall, and the essential biblical doctrine of salvation, are not yet understood in ATR. This has significantly influenced how AIC Christians view Christ. There is little emphasis in their teaching on the real nature of sin and human depravity. The focus is largely on material wealth, providing a fertile ground for prophetic churches that promise health, wealth, and abundance.

Misunderstanding the doctrine of sin has led to a lack of understanding of what Christ accomplished as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice. If ATR realities continue to influence the development of African Christologies, there is a risk that Christ will remain foreign in Africa. This calls for AICs to develop a biblically grounded Christology. The roles of Jesus as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice must be given due emphasis, with careful attention to the full scope of biblical authority and truth.

4.3 Summary of key conclusions in Chapter 3

4.3.1 Christ's once-for-all blood sacrifice

The exegetical study in Chapter 3 began with Hebrews 9:11-14. Emphasis was placed on key terms to derive the theological meaning of the text. This study establishes that the definitive atonement achieved by Jesus through his sacrifice could not be accomplished

through the blood of animals. The uniqueness of Jesus lies in the fact that he is a High Priest who entered the heavenly holy place with his own blood. His blood was offered once and for all. This contrasts with the Levitical system of animal sacrifices in the OT, which needed to be offered every year and could only cleanse externally. The blood of Jesus, offered once and for all, accomplishes what the blood of animals (goats and cows) in the OT could not: it removes sin and guilt and restores humanity to God in terms of relationship and fellowship. The author uses a comparison of the OT sacrifices to demonstrate how much more effective and permanent the sacrifice of Jesus is. Christ was the unblemished sacrifice and the Priest without sin who offered the perfect sacrifice.

4.3.2 Christ – the only Mediator between God and humankind

Hebrews 9:15-22 explains the extent of Christ's role in reconciling humanity to God. Christ's redemptive sacrifice, culminating in his death and his entry into the heavenly tabernacle to offer his own blood, established the New Covenant with Christ as Mediator. O'Brien (2010:237) elaborates that Jesus's death as a ransom has delivered humanity even from the transgressions committed under the first covenant and, as mediator, he guarantees that all God's promises are kept.

4.3.3 The perfect and permanent sacrifice of Christ

The author of Hebrews continues to examine the parallels between the OT and NT in Hebrews 9:23-28. The significance of Christ's sacrifice, as noted earlier, is that he did not enter an earthly tabernacle like the Levitical priests of the OT, but instead entered the true sanctuary in heaven to offer his blood. His purpose in entering the heavenly tabernacle was to offer his blood once and for all, making any further requirement for blood irrelevant.

4.3.4 Jesus is the perfect High Priest

The author of Hebrews, through argument and comparison, demonstrates that Jesus is the perfect High Priest. Hughes (1990:4) emphasises that Christ and his priestly work are compared with those of the Levitical priests to establish his superiority. He (1990:40) further notes that the declaration in the opening verse of EH – that the final word of God has been spoken through his Son – leaves no room for venerating the ancient prophets in any way that could undermine the supremacy of Christ. As Son, Christ is superior to

the OT prophets, angels, and the Levitical priesthood. Jesus 'has passed through the heavens' to present himself (Heb. 4:14). Having entered heaven (9:24), he is now seated at the right hand of God (8:1).

4.4 Jesus as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice: Versus the understanding of AICs

There is a strong relationship between the AICs and ATR, which indicates that the African worldview has a significant influence on the liturgy and Christology of African Christians. Nyirongo (1997:39) explains that sacrifices and offerings to ancestors are among the most common practices among African Christians. Bantu messiahs, such as Shembe and Lekganyane, are regarded as black messiahs by their followers. The implication is that Christ's role as Mediator is largely overlooked due to his Jewish origin. As discussed above, messianic leaders remain mediators even after their deaths. Shembe is described as a mediator who will exclude white people from the gates of heaven, admitting only black people who believe in him (Daneel, 1987:180).

Kim (1997:144) highlights the following beliefs held by the Shembe Church:

they allow polygamy, have a strong belief in ancestors and believe that Shembe was chosen by God to represent African people. They do not believe in Jesus because in their view, he was chosen to represent the Jews or White people.

Daneel (1987:181) further points out that the leadership of the Shembe Church is modelled on the leadership system of the Zulu kingdom:

The Zulu King traditionally acted as mediator between his people and God hence Shembe is also an African messiah who mediates for his people. The result is that such leaders as Shembe and Lekhanyane are exalted as 'Kings' in their colonies, mediators in their own Jerusalem while Christ as the head of the church fades into the background (Daneel, 1987:181).

De Visser (2000:108) agrees that another title frequently applied to Lekganyane is 'Mediator', because no Zionist can request anything from God, or communicate with God, except through him. He (2000:108) affirms that ZCC members pray in the names of the founding fathers of the church. The founders remain mediators even though they have passed away. This practice also demonstrates veneration of ancestors within the ZCC as mediators.

There are parallels between diviners and prophets in the AICs and ATR. The role of the traditional religious priest, such as a witchdoctor, is similar to that of a Christian priest. In the same way that African people consult witchdoctors when they encounter problems, African Christians consult their messianic leaders and prophets to resolve issues in their lives.

The same African worldview is adopted by AICs; as noted above, most of these churches continue to offer sacrifices to ancestors who are regarded as mediators. It can therefore be noted that, in some AICs like the ZCC, the messianic leader, as previously mentioned, is the priest and mediates to God on behalf of the congregation. In the Corinth Church of South Africa, the prophets are the priests who offer blood sacrifices to the gods and ancestors. This indicates that African Christians still feel there is a need for the blood sacrifices of animals, even after they have accepted Christ as their saviour.

Daneel (1987:238) explains that “Ethiopian type AIC’s have more tolerance on the mediatory powers of senior spirits of the deceased and no disciplinary measures is taken against anyone who performs sacrifice rites to the ancestors.”

The models presented do not correctly represent the primary Christological issues that affect Africa. The significance of Christ to AICs is not captured in relation to his mandate due to a lack of commitment to the proper interpretation of Scripture.

4.4.1 Jesus as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in Hebrews

Several major points emerged from the exegetical analysis of Hebrews, namely: First, the blood of Christ has accomplished a redemption that is permanent (Heb. 9:11-14). Jesus is the spotless sacrifice and the Son of God who fulfilled OT sacrifices when he presented his blood in heaven. Second, as the Priestly mediator, Jesus facilitates and connects us to a new relationship with God, effecting forgiveness for sins. The writer assures his audience that those who are called receive their eternal inheritance because Christ offered his sacrifice, which enables salvation for sins to all who believe (Heb. 9:15-22). It is therefore important to examine the implications of this conception of Christ in Hebrews for AICs.

4.4.2 The implications of Hebrews 9:11-28 for AICs' understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice

As previously noted, following independence from colonial rule, many Africans began to reject Christianity, regarding it as foreign and an instrument of oppression. Pali (2014:160) observes that African indigenous religion became integrated with Christianity, resulting in syncretism within AICs. Although Christ, as High Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice, has accomplished all that is necessary for salvation, many AICs continue to offer sacrifices to ancestors.

The theological foundation underpinning AICs is rooted in ATR. Their overarching worldview aligns with ATR's understanding of general revelation, wherein God is perceived to have intermediaries, namely ancestors, who convey the will of God to the people. The God worshipped in Africa is considered identical to the Hebrew God, insofar as He continues to require sacrifices (Kealotswe, 2014:234). This perspective underlies the AICs' emphasis on the OT.

As highlighted earlier, the whole of chapter 9 uses the OT method of priesthood and rituals to compare with the priesthood of Christ. O'Brien (2010:3) remarks:

The sacrifice of Christ is established on the following grounds: Firstly, the place of the blood offering was in heaven not on earth (Heb. 9:11, 23-25; 10:12-13), secondly, the blood of his sacrifice belonged to him, was not that of animals (Heb. 9: 12-28) and the offering of Jesus the heavenly high priest was eternal, it was made once and for all , and therefore no need for continuous sacrifices like the Levitical Priests.

Nyende (2005:517) adds,

[The] contrast between the Aaronic Priesthood and Christ's high priesthood was done after the validation of the high priesthood of Christ (Heb. 4:14: 14-5:10). Jesus meets the requirements of being a priest, performs the role of a priest and surpasses the Old Testament Priesthood system making it irrelevant. Christ is now the only final and absolute mediator. The Aaronic priesthood in its imperfect functions was a pointer to Christ who performed to completeness the functions the OT Priests repeatedly performed without permanent and effective results.

As stated earlier, AICs have their own messianic leaders who stand as priests on behalf of the congregation. They also have churches in which prophets who operate like

witchdoctors offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, as indicated above in the Corinth Church of South Africa.

Hagner (2002:103) insightfully explains Hebrews 9:11-28 in relation to the argument presented in 7:20–22 as follows:

The work of Christ as high priest, in contrast to that of the Levitical priests, brings us to a better reality. This hope involves a confidence that enables us to come directly into the presence of God. The sacrificial work of Christ is what brings about atonement and makes it possible to access God.

The priesthood, sacrifice, and mediation of Jesus are perfected forever and are thus perpetual. This chapter reveals that there is no need for the Levitical priesthood. The same also applies to priesthood as previously explained within AICs. It is not necessary to continue offering sacrifices because Christ has provided a permanent one; therefore, there is no need to venerate human beings as priests and mediators, since Christ is the ultimate Priest and the only Mediator between God and humanity.

Hagner (2002:103) rightly points out that, compared to the work of the high priests in the OT, who had to continually offer sacrifices – including for themselves – Jesus, because of his perfection, was not required to offer a sacrifice for himself. Rather, he accomplished an eternal and permanent sacrifice when he offered up himself. This sacrifice established the new covenant; therefore, there is no need for any OT sacrifices, as they pointed to and are fulfilled in Christ. This implies that every form of sacrifice is abolished.

Igba (2013:112) reiterates that the mediator-priest role of Jesus makes him a new and superior High Priest through his self-offering, fulfilling and surpassing the typological ministry of the Levitical priests, which pointed to him. He (2013:112) notes that the quality of this kind of sacrifice is far greater, as none could surpass the offering of one's own life. The value of other sacrifices therefore pales in comparison to what Christ accomplished when he became the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

Igba (2013:112) observes that, unlike ancestral priests who, like OT priests, die and are consequently removed from their mediatorial office, Christ's eternal priesthood ensures and guarantees the permanence of his mediation. This cannot be said of self-proclaimed Messiahs in AICs, who are similarly constrained by death; thus, their priesthood lacks both efficacy and permanence.

Whilst Hebrews 9:11–28 identifies Christ as the sole Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice, this superior work of Christ and its implications for African Christians are frequently overlooked in AICs. The primary reason for this, as previously noted, is that the Bible is interpreted within the framework of the African traditional worldview.

4.5 Chapter summary and conclusion

The introduction to this chapter indicated that the AICs' understanding of the concepts of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice would be examined in light of the findings presented in Chapter 2, as well as the exegesis undertaken in Chapter 3. The guiding questions for this evaluation were how the biblical conception of Christ as Priest, Sacrifice, and Mediator, as articulated in the book of Hebrews, influences the ways in which he is conceptualised within the AICs, particularly when compared to their own paradigms of priests, sacrifices, and mediators. Additionally, it set out to determine whether the culture-specific models discussed in Chapter 2 adequately reflect the practical understanding of priesthood, sacrifice, and mediation within the AICs. The key findings from this chapter were:

Firstly, while various African Christological models attempt to contextualise Jesus within the AICs, these frameworks do not fully encapsulate the lived reality of how Christ is conceptualised as priest, mediator, and sacrifice among AIC congregations.

Secondly, the Christology of the AICs has been significantly influenced by their ATR heritage. Consequently, the role of Christ is not comprehensively understood; he is frequently regarded as an ancestral figure rather than as the unique mediator depicted in the biblical text.

Thirdly, the AICs demonstrate a pronounced reliance on the OT, which has resulted in the continuation of sacrificial practices intended to appease God through the ancestors.

Fourthly, the portrayal of Christ in the book of Hebrews is crucial, as it demonstrates how Christ fulfils the sacrificial system of the OT. This perspective has the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of Christ, particularly given the AICs' reliance on the OT.

Fifthly, the concepts of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice have yet to be apprehended from a biblical perspective within the AICs; thus, the Christology presented in Hebrews is

frequently neglected or misunderstood. This is largely attributable to the perception of Christ as a foreign figure and the interpretation of the Bible through an African worldview.

In light of this, the AICs' conceptualisations of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice, which are more closely aligned with ATR, stand in contrast to the findings of Hebrews 9:11-28. The implication is that a new paradigm needs to be developed in which the reality of Christ as the sole Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice can guide the AICs.

The following chapter concludes the study.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

AICs are experiencing rapid growth. Amid this expansion, a biblically rooted understanding of Christ should remain the foundation of the Christian faith. While the contextualisation of the gospel offers valuable ways to express faith through the African worldview, it has significantly contributed to the emergence and development of African Christological perspectives that are not derived from the Bible.

One of the central issues within African theology has always been the identity of Christ in relation to the African context. While Christ needs to be understood in a way that connects with all Africans, the biblical conception of Christ is often overlooked in this endeavour. The identity of Jesus is directly related to his role as priest, mediator, and sacrifice. AICs, as a reflection of African Christianity, play a significant role in contextualising Christianity in Africa. This makes it important to understand how they view Christ, along with some practical beliefs concerning the roles of priests, mediators, and sacrifices.

The book of Hebrews, with its Christological focus, directly addresses the issues in the OT sacrificial system that are similar to those practised in AICs. The conception of Christ in terms of his role as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice makes this epistle central to this research. The challenge encountered is that the understanding of priests, mediators, and sacrifice in AICs could not be exegetically proven and was therefore largely assumed according to the African context. Nyirongo (1997:18) rightly explains that it is in the Bible that God reveals himself fully. This is the only way to avoid error. If we begin (as the AICs have done) with sympathy towards the African worldview and claims, and then turn to the Bible to validate those claims, we are bound to go astray.

African Christians give priority to the OT. This is because of similarities between African traditional practices and OT practices. These similarities have led to Christological models that are not biblical. Sacrifices and mediators still occupy a prominent place in the worship of African Christians across Africa. In terms of similarities between African and Jewish culture, Nyende (2005:520) offers the following insight.

If the phenomenon of similarities is granted, then there is a sense in which aspects of the religious-cultural heritage of Africans can be viewed as pointing to, and preparing Africans for the reception of the gospel, in which God speaks

with finality and fulfils their religious heritage the way he fulfils the Jewish religious heritage.

This highlights the issue of the contextualised understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice, which does not align with what Christ has accomplished.

In light of the above, the researcher sought to answer the following question: ‘What is the impact of Hebrews 9:11-28 on the understanding and interpretation of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in AICs?’ The researcher aimed to examine the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs, and to evaluate this understanding in view of Hebrews 9:11-28, in order to determine whether there are points of convergence or divergence between AICs and the exegetical meaning of the text.

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

- Analyse the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice among AICs.
- Examine the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews.
- Evaluate the implications of Hebrews 9:11-28 for the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs.

5.2 Summary

Objective 1, to analyse the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice among AICs, was addressed in Chapter 2 through a critical review of these concepts by examining key voices in the development of AICs’ Christologies, utilising the socio-historical method. The contributing factors underlying the emergence of AICs were identified. The inadequacies of existing models in sufficiently reflecting the practical expressions and comprehension of the work of Christ were observed. The actual practices of priesthood, sacrifice, and mediation according to AIC traditions were also examined. Furthermore, the absence of Jesus as portrayed in Heb. 9:11–28 was noted in their worship and conceptual framework.

Objective 2, to examine the biblical portrayal of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice utilising the historical-grammatical method in the text of Heb. 9:11–28, was achieved through exegetical analysis and theological interpretation. It was demonstrated that the

work of Jesus in his priestly, mediatory, and sacrificial roles is unique, as it concerns redemption and salvation. His singular sacrifice, 'once and for all', therefore surpasses and fulfils the OT sacrificial system.

Objective 3, to evaluate the implications of Heb. 9:11-28 for the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in AICs, was addressed in Chapter 4 through an analysis of how this passage speaks to the findings in Chapter 2 regarding AICs' perspectives on Christ, employing the socio-historical method. The evaluation concluded that the conceptualisations of priests, mediators, and sacrifices within AICs are not aligned with critical Christological doctrines and biblical teaching. This highlights the need for AICs to engage with Scripture more objectively in pursuit of transformation.

5.3 Recommendations for further research

The scope of this study was insufficient to construct a comprehensive Christological model applicable within AICs. Further research that expands upon Christ's roles as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews may facilitate the development of a Christological model that is both contextually relevant and biblically accurate.

In addition, future research could:

Engage in empirical studies (e.g., ethnographic or case study approaches) to assess how local AIC congregations understand and practice concepts of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice in worship and pastoral care.

Examine how Christological themes in other New Testament texts, such as Revelation, the Gospels, or Pauline epistles, complement or challenge Hebrews-based models of Christ in African contexts.

Consider interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from other disciplines such as missiology, anthropology, and liturgical theology, to enrich the construction of contextual Christologies that remain faithful to the biblical witness.

5.4 Final conclusion

The research affirms that the Christology presented in Hebrews 9:11-28 effectively serves to critically engage with and evaluate prevailing Christological perspectives within AICs. The study's findings align with its initial aim of examining how the identity and function of Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice can inform and challenge contextual Christological understandings within the AIC model. Exegetical analysis of Hebrews 9:11-28 revealed that the understanding of priesthood, mediation, and sacrifice within many AICs does not fully align with the biblical portrayal of these themes. This suggests a need for deeper biblical engagement with the scriptural text to enrich and correct theological perspectives in these areas.

This research has demonstrated that Jesus is the only Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice who fulfils all the requirements for salvation and redemption, yet this is not adequately reflected in AICs' concepts. Various models presented encourage concepts of mediation and sacrifice that are inconsistent with the biblical teaching in Hebrews. AICs still recognise the role of their church founders and ancestors as mediators and priests for the sake of material blessings. This has completely prevented them from recognising Christ as the only priest, mediator, and sacrifice who has accomplished redemption for all who believe in him through his blood.

There remains an ongoing need for a contextualised theology in Africa – a theology that acknowledges Christ as the Saviour of Africa and derives its foundation from the authority of Scripture, while also taking into consideration the cultural identity of Africans. Such a theology would enable a more biblically grounded conception of Christ within AICs.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: LANGUAGE EDITING

This letter serves to confirm that I have edited the thesis titled:

Christ as Priest, Mediator, and Sacrifice: An exegetical study of Hebrews 9:11-28

By

L. Nyama

[This certificate does not cover any alterations made subsequent to the editing process].

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lee-Anne Roux