



The Lordship of Christ in Africa. Cultivating an African Biblical Soteriology

MJ Khotlele

 **orcid.org/0000-0002-1941-2369**

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It is my prayer that this small contribution will not only add to the broader scholarship on matters of faith and salvation, but that it can also have the necessary power to convict and transform lives and have people connect with Christ the Lord.

Amen!

ABSTRACT

The African cosmology still lacks an African Christology that adequately addresses the soteriological question. For an African, there is a plethora of literature on the salvation question from the perspective of the ancestor, liberation, or black theologies. This discourse elevates African Traditional Religion to the mainstream. The thesis argues for a distinctly African Christo-soteriology from the perspective of lordship salvation. It points out the lack of clarity regarding Christ's lordship and salvation in African theologies and emphasises the importance of developing a biblical African Christo-soteriology.

This study argues that African Christian theology (ACT) is rooted in African traditional theology (ATT), which currently continues in African Traditional Religion (ATR). While ACT seeks to align with the Bible, ATT and ATR are largely traditionally or culturally inclined. This makes it difficult for true Christianity to take hold in many African traditional religions and theologies. The study stresses the importance and the necessity of the lordship of Christ in Africa. Two theologies are evaluated as possible gateways for introducing the concept of the lordship of Christ in Africa. Lordship salvation theology is found to be a sound vehicle for introducing Christ's lordship in Africa, whereas free grace theology is found to agree with African traditional religions on key soteriological propositions, making it an unlikely solution.

The thesis further identifies key problems that hinder the concept of the lordship of Christ from taking root. This includes among other things the definition of sin, mistrust of the Bible, and interpreting Christ outside Scripture. The study concludes by proposing a gateway for the lordship of Christ in Africa through a triangle that consists of understanding the problem, which is sin, accepting the Bible as God's infallible Word, which is the key, and knowing Christ from Scripture, the provider of the solution. When this triangle is in place, a soteriology founded in sound biblical doctrine is possible.

Key Words: Lordship, African Traditional Religion, Lordship Salvation Theology, Free Grace Theology, African Christian Theology, African Traditional Theology, Christology, Salvation, Sin, Christ

OPSOMMING

Die Afrika kosmologie ontbreek steeds aan 'n Afrika Christologie wat die soteriologiese vraag genoegsaam aanspreek. Vir 'n Afrikaan is daar 'n oorgloed van literatuur oor saligmaking vanuit die perspektief van die voorvader-, bevrydings-, en swart teologieë. Hierdie diskoerse verhef egter die Afrika Tradisionele Geloof tot die hoofstroom. Hierdie tesis maak 'n betoog vir 'n uitdruklike Afrika Christo-soteriologie vanuit die perspektief van heerskappy saligmaking. Dit wys op die gebrek aan duidelikheid oor Christus se heerskappy en saligmaking in Afrika teologieë en beklemtoon die belangrikheid 'n Bybelse Afrika Christo-soteriologie.

Die studie voer aan dat Afrika Christelike teologie (ACT) gefundeer is in Afrika tradisionele teologie (ATT), wat voortbestaan in Afrika Tradisionele Geloof (ATG). Terwyl ACT poog om met die Bybel te bely, is ATT en ATG grootliks tradisioneel en kultureel georiënteerd. Dit maak dit moeilik vir ware Christenskap om 'n houvast te kry in baie Afrika tradisionele gelowe en teologieë. Hierdie studie beklemtoon hoe belangrik en nodig die heerskappy van Christus is in Afrika. Twee teologieë word geëvalueer as moontlike paaie waarlangs die konsep van die heerskappy van Christus in Afrika bekendgestel kan word. 'n Teologie van heerskappy saligmaking blyk 'n goeie weg te wees om Christus se heerskappy in Afrika te vestig, terwyl die vrye-genade teologie met Afrika tradisionele gelowe ooreenstem ten opsigte van sleutel soteriologiese proposisies, wat dit onwaarskynlike oplossing maak.

Die tesis identifiseer sleutelprobleme wat verhoed dat die konsep van die heerskappy van Christus wortel skiet. Dit sluit onder andere in die definisie van sonde, wantroue oor die Bybel, en die interpretasie van Christus buite die Skrif. Die studie sluit af met 'n voorstel wat die heerskappy van Christus in Afrika bekendstel deur middel van 'n driehoek wat bestaan uit 'n grondige verstaan van die probleem, naamlik sonde; aanvaarding van die Bybel as God se onfeilbare Woord, wat die sleutel bied; en kennis van Christus uit die Skrif as die gewer van die oplossing. Wanneer hierdie driehoek in plek is, word 'n soteriologie gegrond op 'n Bybelse leer moontlik.

Sleutelwoorde: Heerskappy, Afrika Tradisionele Geloof, Heerskappyverlossingsteologie, Vryegenadeteologie, Afrika Christelike Teologie, Christologie, Verlossing, Sonde Christus

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

The lordship salvation controversy in mainstream Christianity reached contemporary scholarship about eight decades ago. This controversy centres on two theologies, i.e., the lordship salvation theology (LST) and the free grace theology (FGT), both of which are in the main concerned with the relationship between faith and works in the attainment of salvation.

LST adopts a soteriological position that teaches that responding to the call of Christ is followed by a change in lifestyle. Therefore, if someone is in Christ, he or she becomes a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). This position finds support in authors like Arthur Pink (1886–1952), John MacArthur (1939–2025), and James Innel Packer (1926–2020).

Equally, FGT is a view of soteriology that recognises only faith as a condition for salvation. It teaches that responding to a call to believe gives one assurance of salvation, whereas responding to a call to follow Jesus designates one as a disciple. While FGT does not set the condition of having to practice the rigorous demands of an upright life, LST calls the follower to this. However, the believer is fully saved in both instances. Supporters of this theology are authors such as Charles Ryrie (1925–2016), Zane Hodges (1932–2008), and Charlie Bing.

The debate on these two theologies continues unabated, clearly visible from the recent literature written in defence of or against either of the theologies, i.e., Grudem (2016) and Bing (2015).

On free grace theology

Nyberg (2021:3) argues that FGT is not a concept that emerged in the 1960s. He credits scholars such as L.S. Chafer (1871–1952) and B.B. Warfield (1851–1921) as the first scholars who held a “traditional or normative view of free grace”. This view attaches to the teachings of Calvin and Luther, amongst others. However, he ridicules efforts by authors such as Zane Hodges, whom he deems as the “second wing of the modern free grace movement” and who, in his view, teaches aberrant views that are repudiated by many in the traditional free grace camp (Nyberg, 2021:3).

Be that as it may, at the heart of FGT are concepts such as faith alone; relationship and intimacy; justification and sanctification; eternal security; assurance of salvation; and rewards. Many of the proponents of FGT seem to disagree with LST on pertinent points. Authors such as Chafer (1948), Ryrie (1969), Bock (1989), Hodges (1992), and more recently Bing (2024a)

make their case against LST with strong polemics. In the main, they argue that LST elevates human effort and works at the expense of grace, which amounts to legalism.

The free grace movement encourages good works, however, they are not considered vital for salvation. They are recognised only as a test for rewards at the judgement seat, not a condition to expel those who did not live righteously because God will not expel his children on account of sinful behaviour (Bing, 2024a; Hodges, 1989; Radmacher, 1995). However, Nel (n.d.) holds that since we are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), our lives must reflect the changed life that aligns with that of Christ, contradicting the idea that obstinate sinful behaviour would not lead to a loss of salvation. He says, “We must embody it, we must become the gospel” (Nel, n.d.:2), arguing that the only way Christ followers can communicate the gospel is by “prototyping” it. This “prototyping” includes important aspects such as “appropriate response to an encounter with Christ; holding on to the Word of Christ; and taking the possibility of judgement seriously” (Nel, n.d.:13).

FGT proponents further hold that faith is the only condition for salvation. Baptism, perseverance in the faith, repentance (or turning from sin), are not considered as conditions for salvation, but as necessary for eternal rewards (Hodges, 1989). This implies that good works are not needed to merit, to maintain, or to prove one’s salvation (Bing, 2024b:1–2). According to Bing (2024c:2), repentance (which is not a condition for salvation) does not always involve faith, although “faith involves repentance.” Therefore, a person who has faith is saved and can be sure of eternal bliss with God since it is God who justifies through faith alone, thus providing eternal security (Anderson, 2018; Hodges, 2003:41; Moyer, 1997:57–59). Geisler and Nix (1986), however, argue that if a believer continues to live in sin without visible evidence of change, the authenticity of their faith is in doubt. Nel (2017) is also of the view that faith must be accompanied by repentance, signifying that this is the genuine, active faith that is characterised by trust and reliance on Christ.

FGT proponents say that relationship with God (the Father) begins with faith alone, arguing that this belief amounts to a new birth that cannot be undone even by continued sinning (Moyer, 1997; Hodges, 1989; Radmacher, 1995). Hodges reinforces the point: “A man who must wait for works to verify his faith cannot know until life’s end whether or not his faith was real” (Hodges, 1992:79). This establishes that works are not the determining factor when salvation is discussed, and works contrary to the will of God will not affect one’s salvation. This implies a distinction between salvation and discipleship¹ (Bing, 2024; Nyberg, 2021).

¹ FGT holds that only disciples have a higher calling: “deny oneself, take up your cross, follow Christ, abide in his Word, love Christ more than your family, etc.” (Bing, 2024). *Ordinary believers* do not have to uphold these requirements. This suggests that those who are compelled to follow the example of Jesus Christ are mainly disciples, beyond that saints can live their lives without being held to such high moral requirements.

Accordingly, a person is deemed righteous by faith in Christ, without necessarily having to *maintain* good works or burden themselves with the demands of discipleship (Bing, 2024a:1–2). They hold that good works are a by-product of God’s grace, and whether or not these good works are maintained is immaterial to salvation.

Contrarily, while Geisler concedes that works do not contribute to salvation, he counts them as essential evidence of true faith and central to a lifelong journey of discipleship. Geisler (1994) and Nel (2017) are stern in saying that a faith that does not produce good works may be indicative of non-saving faith. Needham (2000:271) also posits that the persevering quality of faith and faith-inspired obedience are the marks of election, suggesting that perseverance in doing good works is “the true mark of the faith of God’s elect”. Murray (2016:108), on the other hand, sees this faith as “a whole-souled movement of self-commitment to Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences”. Geisler (1999:321) also contends for what he calls “genuine faith”, which commits itself to Christ through repentance and a desire to follow him, leading to a transformed life. This results in a strong argument that links faith with repentance so that visible change in the life of the one claiming to be saved is inevitable.

The distinction that free grace proponents make between justification and sanctification are also apparent. They view justification as a free unconditional gift attainable by faith alone, while sanctification requires obedience to God. Radmacher (2007:143–186) for instance, says sanctification is not guaranteed, but final glorification to a sinless state is. Accordingly, he puts salvation at the point of acceptance of Christ by faith, and what ensues thereafter is no longer necessary to effect salvation. While Christ’s core message addresses repentance, FGT views repentance (*metanoia*), as “a change of mind” and not necessarily as turning from sin (Bing, 2024c:2). Bing (2024c:2) asserts “repentance is in no way a work that merits salvation”. He argues for proper context when the word is used, citing that in the Old Testament (OT), “the word repent is usually used in reference to God repenting, showing that it does not automatically refer to sorrow or turning from sin” (Bing, 2024c:1–2). This is on the understanding that God cannot repent, especially from sin, because He is sinless (Nyberg, 2021).

Free grace proponents effectively argue that repentance is possible without it resulting in salvation. Bing (2024c:1–2) thus argues that “a person can change his or her heart about something, even God or sin, but not be saved.” In a general sense this argument holds, but within the context of the gospel, a more nuanced approach is necessary. Those who repent within the context of the gospel message are persuaded to salvation. Some FGT proponents, including Hodges (2001) and Anderson (2018), later altered their thoughts on repentance, and now prefer to define repentance as turning from sin, although they still hold that repentance itself is not a requirement for eternal life.

FGT stance induces a view that everyone who accepts Christ will gain salvation (thus eternal security), without necessarily having to repent or persevere. While there may be an expectation of a changed life, failure to achieve or attempt that change (repentance) is immaterial – it neither effects nor confirms salvation. Any future sin, unbelief, or apostasy are not conditions for withdrawal of salvation, but may result in God's reprimand. Robert Thieme summarises it as follows: "Although the believer can never lose his eternal life, he can be in danger of destroying his spiritual life and losing all the blessings that God has prepared for those who love him" (cited in Lazar, 2017; Stanley, 1990:81, 116–118).

On lordship salvation theology

Arthur Pink's (2020:13) introduction of lordship salvation theology (LST) begins with a rebuke of FGT. He submits that FGT is about "brotherhood" to all without distinction of good and evil. It seeks "to make this world such a comfortable and congenial habitat that Christ's absence from it will not be felt and God will not be needed" (Pink, 2020:13). His criticism is that this gospel professes that "sin is merely ignorance or absence of good" (Pink, 2020:13).

In 1991, Packer (1991)² commented on FGT as a counter-salvation that is: "divinely guaranteed, that may have in it no repentance, no discipleship, no behavioural change, no practical acknowledgment of Christ as Lord of one's life, and no perseverance in faith." He argues elsewhere that grace does not accommodate moral laxity (Packer, 2005:55), and that "those who received grace should henceforth give themselves to good works" (Packer, 2005:155). Bonhoeffer (1979:47) deems it cheap grace.

On introducing the core beliefs of LST, MacArthur (2008 [1988]) argues that lordship salvation stands on faith and repentance; submission to Christ's authority; visible fruits of salvation; and repentance from works contrary to Christ's command. He argues that these are attainable by Christians if Christ is crystallised in the preaching, clearly defining his person and his works. Here, MacArthur advocates for nothing short of a total change in the way Christians live if Christ is to sit enthroned in the believer's life.

Repentance is therefore viewed as a turning from sin (Pink, 1977:47) which activates on account of divine grace that is separate from human effort or work (MacArthur, 2008:177–180 [1988]). They hold repentance as a change of heart, not just a mental assent to some truth about Christ (MacArthur, 2008:177 [1988]; Pink, 1977:55–56). Berkhof (1939:503–505) proposes not only an intellectual (*notitia*) and an emotional element (*assensus*) to faith, but also volitional element (*fiducia*), which involves personal trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

² This statement by Packer appeared in Tabletalk Magazine of May 1991.

Here, Tozer (1974:10–11) submits that “we are not saved by believing in an office nor in a work,” thus impressing the necessity and the importance of the object of belief (Christ).

Importantly, in countering the accusation of introducing legalism into the gospel, MacArthur (2008:185–193 [1988]) recognises faith as a gift from God, and since it is from God, no human can boast, and thus no human can claim to have worked for it. In turn, this faith prompts repentance and good works, leading to obedience to Christ, which is necessary for entry into the kingdom of God. MacArthur (2008:227 [1988]) evinces this in his submission that “obedience to divine authority is a prerequisite of entry into the kingdom.”

Equally, Vorster (2007:15) contends that good works are not a form of compliance in order to inherit heaven. He says, “This new life is characterised by good works – not good works to earn the love of God, but good works out of gratitude for God’s free grace in Christ”. Oden (2012:205) also sees the terms of salvation as repentance and belief, which are core to Christ’s teaching on salvation. It is conspicuous therefore that entrance to the kingdom of God, believers’ aspiration, equates to salvation flowing from the mouth of Jesus, and this salvation is not without repentance and obedience.

Linked to obedience to Christ, MacArthur (2008 [1988]) raises the important issue of perseverance. He acknowledges that believers are disposed to stumbling and falling. However, they do not stay this way. Part of what makes them believers in Christ is that when they stumble and fall, they do not forsake Christ for the expediency of what he terms “easy-believism.” This easy believism teaches that “disobedience and prolonged sin are no reason to doubt the reality of one’s faith” (MacArthur, 2008:205 [1988]). MacArthur’s arguments are in harmony with those of Pink (2007) who argues that Christ must be both Lord and Saviour, an idea Pink finds as *sine quo non* and thus the only plausible one.

It is clear that LST holds faith germane to receiving salvation, and that faith is not of human will but a gift from God. Importantly, faith is not alone; it eventually produces good works. Further, it recognises the centrality of repentance and the believer’s obedience in the affairs of salvation. This calls believers to be conscious of their lives which are lived in honour of Christ. Indeed, believers will stumble and fall. However, they rise again and strive to live exemplary lives. Good works are a consequence of a life placed in the hands of Christ. Vorster (2007:19) accordingly surmises that the new life that a believer receives from Christ is deeply dedicated to being obedient to God.

Introducing African Christology into the debate

The fact that these two theologies are patently different on critical points makes the introduction of African traditional religion into this debate even more challenging. While FGT

opts not to place emphasis on the importance of good works, LST advocates for this. African evangelicals and ATR adherents alike get the opportunity to claim connection to God and salvation from him while remaining rooted in their ancestral beliefs. They continue in practices that are contrary to the same God who demands full commitment from those who follow him.

African traditional religion (ATR) is premised largely on ancestral veneration and animal sacrifices as underpins (Bujo, 1992:42; M'Timkulu, 1977:19). It firmly holds to the performance of such sacrifices for salvation without distancing itself from connection to God. Baëta (1955:51–61) declares that “For, whatever others may do in their own countries, our people live with their dead”. Therefore, Africans who profess traditional religion do not regard the veneration of ancestors as a sin, but as a core of their religion, albeit contrary to the God whom they worship. The African concept of sin then, is ritual impurity, injury to relationships in communities, and separation from ancestors, among other things (Khotlele, 2023:24).

This injury to relationships in the African worldview is closely guarded by a shame and guilt culture, where the concern is more about what people will say rather than the impact of a person's actions against God. Adeyemo (1979:58) posits that the general refrain is “*Batho ba tla reng?*”, loosely translated, “What will people say?” Accordingly, some African Christians uphold the centrality of their ancestors and still hold to these beliefs, because not doing so can attract bad luck from ancestors who are regarded as guardians of family life (Turaki, 1999:178). This translates to a hybrid faith, introducing syncretism into African evangelical spaces.

African Christology from the perspective of Mbiti, Bediako and Setiloane

This then brings into view the need for what I term an African Christo-soteriology³ that is true to Scripture and yet respecting of African culture. It is known that traditional Africans have in many ways tried to adopt Christ as their own by either ancestorising⁴ him, or by morphing him into many different forms as the means to attain salvation. Taylor (1963:16) finds that names such as ancestor, chief, medicine man, guest, life, and master of initiation offer plausible explanations of the reality of Christ in the African worldview. Therefore, an African Christo-soteriology as a concept for development is no mean feat. This quest must tackle the twin problems of the object of salvation and the process of salvation (hence Christo-soteriology in Africa).

³ By African Christo-soteriology I mean a distinctly African theology that upholds the position of Christ in African Christology, placing Christ in a prominent position and making him suitable to the affairs of an African. Consequently, we map out a soteriology that an African can follow to attain lasting salvation. It encompasses the two – Christ and salvation.

⁴ *Ancestorising* implies an effort undertaken to depict Christ as ancestor. This thought has been developed by authors such as Mbiti, Nyamiti, and Pobee amongst others.

Still, Africa has spoken for herself on this problem over the decades. A number of African theologians, among them Mbiti (1931–2019), Setiloane (1925–2004) and Bediako (1945–2008), have expressed themselves in the Christo-soteriological space, the quest being the development of a sound Afrocentric theology, ATT, or ACT.

Mbiti (1969:229) for one holds that Africans are not strangers to God and have a long history of belief in him, as he happens to be the main influence of their religion. Many of the African traditional practices are thought to take after the OT (Lugira, 2009:19; Bongmba, 2016:25), testifying to a perpetual relationship with God since the earliest times.

In bringing Christ into the debate, Mbiti (1972:59) for instance argues that in traditional Africa, kings were seen as lords, and that through this, links could be drawn to develop the lordship of Christ in African thought. Much as he felt that the lordship of Christ fits well into African thoughtforms, Mbiti did not develop a Christology around Christ's lordship because of his comparative approach to the question of ATR and Christianity. This is further exacerbated by the fact that he sought to establish the equality of ATR and Christianity.

Notwithstanding Mbiti's model of an African Christology⁵ that he conjures through concepts such as the "living dead" (1969:58–73), the bestowal of honorific titles on Christ (1969:79), chieftainship (1969:81), and rites of passage and healing (1969:83), he acknowledges that the African world lacks a future perspective. Here, he argues that the redemption and resurrection of humanity are not provided for in ATR, and he sees Christ as closing this gap (Mbiti, 1969:99).

Authors such as Nyamiti (1993:18), however, feel that addressing traditional Africans by relying on the concept of Christ's kingship could be the right avenue as it may have everlasting permanence, and could be expressed through socio-cultural models to harness its relevance. Manus (1993) also views the kingship Christology as an answer to the African problem of Christ. However, like many others, Manus does not emphasise the king, but rather the kingship (Christ as exemplar and a model for emulation). This fails to address the question of salvation for the soul but rather deals with the conduct of people and how they address themselves in various existential situations.

Kabasele (1992:103–105) also proposes the chieftainship model because his compatriots in Congo had attributed the title of chief to Christ. He says that to the people, this chief defeats enemies; He is strong and a mighty hero (Kabasele, 1992:105). Sawyerr (1968) and Pobee (1979), however, stand opposed to this idea. Sawyerr (1968:72–73) for instance, points out that because of colonial rule and the resulting independence, the chieftainship has been

⁵ Background to the history of African Christology is outlined in Chapter 3

weakened and chiefs themselves, apart from being too distant from an ordinary person, do not have absolute power since they have to consult with the council of elders in decision making. Pobee (1979:97) feels that this chieftainship model concerns itself with *theologia gloriae* when the focus should be *theologia crucis*. This trajectory is rooted in inculturation and liberation christological models developed to emancipate Africans from oppression (Ogbonnaya (2015:31; Magezi & Igba, 2018:5; Martey, 1993:95)

Bediako's Christology, on the other hand, acknowledges that with the Christian message comes the "assurance that with our Christian conversion, we are not introduced to a new God unrelated to the traditions of our past, but to one who brings to fulfilment all the highest and religious needs and longings" (Bediako in Ford *et al.*, 2012:295). He holds the view that Jesus Christ is not a stranger to our heritage in his universality rather than particularity. Interestingly, this assertion not only places God, but Christ as well, as intervening parties in the affairs of the people and their cultures and religions from the earliest times. Thus, the rejection of Christ today in African traditional religions is a peculiar phenomenon that needs attention.

Bediako (2012:295) acknowledges that salvation in the traditional African world involves "a certain view of the realm of spirit-power and its effects upon the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence". He then contends that Christ must appear as the answer to those questions as posed by such a worldview. He draws comparisons between Christ and ancestors and contends that he has to be recognisable in the ancestral world for him to provide answers related to this worldview (Bediako, 2012:296). Bediako (2012:296) argues that the universal relevance of Christ makes the gospel our story – he has been the Word of God from the beginning. Thus, becoming the children of God does not stem from, nor is it limited by, the accidents of birth, race, culture, lineage or even religious tradition. It comes to us by grace through faith (Bediako, 2012:296).

Bediako places the cult of ancestors in the mythical space (respectfully so). He admits Christ's supremacy, conceding that he is above all and transcendent, thus towering above ancestors and becoming the solution to our problems. He finds that Jesus can answer this worldview by being an ancestor. In fact, he sees Jesus as the "only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind" (Bediako, 2012:297) given his incarnation, death, and continued existence beyond death.

However, this is a problematic approach because it follows the established position that invites Africans to continued relationships with their ancestors, elevating ancestor Christology while Christ becomes an add-on (Magezi, 2016:68). The deficit in this, however, relates to what traditional Africans must do with their ancestors – *umuntu akalahlwa* (a person cannot be discarded). The silence of many theological scholars on this matter results in a failure to draw

many Africans to salvation because it does not let people know what they ought to do with their ancestors. Throwing them away and forgetting about them is an unacceptable alternative given that in some African homesteads, the dead are buried in the yards and thus become an enduring reality to those living who interact with those graves daily. This engenders the assertion that “Africans live with their dead” (Baëta, 1960:289).

Elsewhere, we find Gabriel Setiloane, who is one of the ground-breakers with regard to the mapping of African Christology. He argues that the question of Christianity and African customs and practices is perennial, and accepting Christianity does not cause Africans to cease to be African (Setiloane, 1986:31). For him, Christianity is a *system* based on “the birth, life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus the man of Nazareth” (Setiloane, 1986:34). Setiloane avers that Jesus Christ also has a God in Modimo, like Africans do. He (Setiloane, 1986:32–33) says: “African theology sees the God of Jesus Christ and the missionaries as the same, the One and Only Source: MODIMO, Qamata, Lesa, Umvelinqangi of African Traditional Religion”. Jesus Christ is viewed as “a ‘fact’, ‘phenomenon’, or ‘event’” (Setiloane, 1986:31) that has occurred and is thus interpreted in a biased manner.

There is a clear struggle in Setiloane’s writing with acknowledging Christ as God, the Son of God or Lord and Saviour, given the silence in his writings. Instead, he only refers to Christ as a subject of Christianity, or a mentor, or the man of Nazareth (1986:33–34). In contrast to the writings of the New Testament (NT), which offers Christ the titles of Son of Man, Son of God, Saviour or Messiah, Setiloane does not go that way, nor does he confer on him the title of *Lord*, which will make him ruler over everything. He certainly accepts some truths about Jesus – that he is conceived of the Holy Spirit, that he is miraculously born of Mary, etc. (1986:34–35). While this is commendable, assent to some truths about Christ does not suffice to answer the perennial question of an African – that of salvation of the soul.

This shows that in African circles, the question of Christology as it relates to the object, is not settled. Clearly, the above three African theologians do not quite come out clearly in addressing the lordship of Christ as reflected in their Christologies. None display Christ as who he is – Lord and Saviour of humanity – except to confer on him titles contrary to the Bible. Bengt Sundkler’s (1958:3) observation remains important – that AICs, whose leaders were among others Lekganyane, Masowe, and Khambule, held that “...the Bantu prophet himself becomes the Messiah and Moses leading his people into the promised land”. This thought cannot be dismissed as old, for as recently as 2001, de Visser alluded to the fact that in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the bishop is regarded as the intermediary between God, ancestors, and the people, reflecting that this view is still popular. This means that the bishop “is more relevant than Jesus” (2001:199) in African circles because the type of salvation Jesus provides does not satisfy them.

Certainly, the lordship of Christ does not emerge clearly from decades of writing in African scholarship, and the negative attitude towards Christ's salvation remains. Different scholars have reacted from the perspectives of ancestor mediation, divinities and spirit beings, or of salvation that delivers from the current evils, and not necessarily the salvation of the soul (Mbiti, 1969; Maimela, 1985; Bediako, 2004; Pobee, 1979; Nyamiti, 2006). Others sought to explain Christ through ancestral cult (Bediako, 1996; 2004; Nyamiti, 1985; Pobee, 1976), while some debated black and/ or liberation theologies⁶ (Boesak, 1976, 1984; Maluleke, 1994, 2002) as salvation options for Africans. Only a handful have sought to put Christ as the saviour in the place of ancestors (Banda, 2005; Khotlele, 2023) by explaining the meaning of Christianity's fundamental sacraments and their application in salvation. Still, some attempted to understand how African churches interpret salvation in their religion in view of Christianity (de Visser, 2001; Buthelezi, 2011; Magezi, 2016).

Obviously, the above estimates that African Christologies, particularly liberation christologies seem to fashion themselves after the *theologia gloriae* model given the inherent need for deliverance from temporal maladies. This is especially on the backdrop that when Christ is celebrated as victor and a figure who can help traditional Africans in their need, his person is not necessarily the subject, but his work (De Visser, 2001:211). Therefore, not mentioning the death of Christ as salvation proposition reveals their understanding with regard to soteriology. Their understanding of Christology, therefore, is one that provides redemption from personal dilemmas, yet without conceding to his death (Kuster, 2001:76). The cross is not viewed as the sacrificial point from which salvation derives. This thought is well captured in de Visser (2001:232) who states that Dunger, a missionary theologian, felt that the "African believer has problems with the death of Christ for the salvation of humanity."

The similarities between free grace theology and an African Traditional Religion

In many African traditional religion's circles, Christ is viewed only as a saviour and victor in temporal matters. This view validates the most dominant problem in African traditional religion as it relates to its proposition on sin and salvation, which seems contrary to the biblical message. Some African Christologies' view of sin, as Khotlele (2023:24) elaborates, is "equivalent to deliverance from issues such as life's anxieties, fears of evil spirits, injustices towards ancestors, and loss of power." M'Timkulu (1977:15) describes it as that which breaks

⁶ The black liberation theologies hold different views on Christ. Boesak (1976), for example, leans towards the traditional reformed view (accepting Scripture but advocating for a broadened interpretation for a theology that emerges from the marketplace of life), equating apartheid to sin, and strongly advocating for the liberation of the oppressed blacks. Some scholars, however, conceive of Jesus as a human who set an example of prioritising the poor and oppressed, and who can be explained and equated to the human experiences of ancestors, chiefs, the medicine man, a guest, etc.

the coherence of society. A closer look at this implies that they are mere existential or mundane issues if one appreciates the reason why Christ lived, died, and rose. Just like FGT, here African traditional religions also seem to risk trivialising the impact of sin.

African ancestor and liberation christologies embrace a salvation view premised on themes of immediate well-being, fulfilment, overcoming of problems, and happiness, while it is eerily silent on the salvation of the soul (Maimela, 1985:72; Brand, 1999:196; Banda, 2005:3; Shabangu, 2005:186; Okorocha, 2005:2–30). This position is temporal as opposed to spiritual, leaving the question of the salvation of the soul uncertain. With this stance, Christ seems to be erased from the question of eternal salvation, and adherents of African traditional religions may directly converse with God through ancestors for temporal salvation. This is particularly evident in Parrinder's (1968:99) triangle of authority, where Christ is not a feature.

The above analysis reveals similarities between FGT and ATR. It appears that African traditional religion mimics FGT on a number of positions. First of those is the propensity of free grace to diminish the impact of sin and to dismiss it as trivial. Mbiti once confessed that he does not even preach about sin (cited in Meiring, 2005:70) because it does not apply to Africans, while Nyabongo (in Desai, 1962:38) claimed that Africans do not have in their vocabulary the word sin. Thus, by implication, free grace regards sin as trivial; African traditional religion erases it, only willing to acknowledge it when structural sin⁷ or sin against equals is in view.

Secondly, in not affording Christ's lordship greater significance, FGT plays to the gallery of African traditional religion in the sense that whether you imitate Christ or not is immaterial and has no ramifications for salvation. The third point relates to repentance, which is viewed as a non-requirement when accepting Christ as saviour. Here, FGT views repentance as unnecessary, not contributing to salvation, and only relevant to rewards at the end of life. In African traditional religion too, anyone can come to Christ yet continue with their past lifestyles, no matter how contrary they are to a Christian lifestyle as described in the NT. For as long as they overcome life's anxieties and contend with life's troubles, salvation is attained.

Perseverance is the fourth point that free grace deems not a factor in salvation – saints do not have to persevere in living out their salvation. Studies have been conducted that have revealed that African evangelicals revert to ATRs, thereby introducing a possibility of syncretism. If the free grace theological position has its way, could it be acceptable for evangelicals to revert to

⁷ Hamilton (2021:360–380) and Nolan (1988:43) say structural sin is something subjective (personal) as well as objective (social), something internal as well as external to humans. This is how African religion wants to interface with the concept of sin – something that cannot offend God but only equals.

African traditional religions and to practice syncretism when they find themselves unable to cope with life's skirmishes, while still claiming to be saved by Christ?

Clearly, the two theologies place salvation in Christ; however, consensus eludes as to how this further plays out. At the same time, FGT, in particular, appears to give African traditional religions latitude in interpreting the attainment of salvation—it fails to challenge this position in its theological proposition on issues such as sin, obedience, repentance, and allegiance to Christ, to name a few.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is apparent from the analysis above that a distinctly African Christology that aims to address the question of salvation from the lordship perspective is lacking – hence the Christosoteriology proposal. Without a distinctly African Christology, the dangers arise, as noted by Molobi (2019:319), that adherents of African traditional religions will tend to follow their founding leaders' conduct as "their source of indigeneity, history, cultures and opinions, apart from the general social conducts." This begs the question whether it will be a salvation that takes after humans who largely do not imitate Christ.

Also, LST and FGT have adopted opposing views regarding the person and the work of Christ in salvation, potentially obscuring salvation proper in the African milieu. African theologies and Christologies on the other hand, lack the lordship salvation ideology that is premised on the person of Christ, notwithstanding Nyamiti's (1991:3) avowal that "Christology is the most developed subject matter in African theology today." Still, the view of salvation through the temporal or existential lenses is problematic because it does not bring the person of Christ to the centre. It is only when spiritual salvation is viewed as fundamental that this perspective changes. This, however, does not mean the neglect of the temporal and existential needs of the people. I concur with Marshall (1988:611) who contends that: "...the New Testament sees the spiritual task, which is inseparable from the material concern, as fundamental".

The study must thus introduce the lordship of Christ to Africa that would be liberating to African traditionalists and evangelicals alike. ATRs and ATTs are predominantly extra-biblical in attempting this. Nyamiti (1992:15) avers that we cannot properly respond to this question "unless one knows first who Christ is in himself". The aim of this study is to do exactly that – to define Christ within biblical bounds for salvation to traditional and evangelical Africans.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The key research question for this study is: How can a soteriology premised on the lordship of Christ cultivate (support) a distinctly African soteriology?

The key question gives rise the following sub-questions:

- What has been the core gospel message presented in African evangelical churches to address the question of salvation for an African?
- What must be addressed in African Christologies in order to conjure an African Christology that respects Scripture?
- How does LST support biblical salvation for ATR adherents?
- How should we respond to FGT in light of its similarities with ATR?
- How can the lordship of Christ enter the African religious space to provide a biblical Christo-soteriology?

1.3.1. Central Aim

The aim of this study is to cultivate a distinctly African Christology from a biblical perspective to answer the question of salvation for an African.

1.3.2. Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To investigate the core gospel message presented in African evangelical churches to address the question of salvation for an African;
- To analyse what should be addressed in African Christologies to conjure an African Christology that respects Scripture;
- To determine how LST support a biblically sound soteriology for African traditional religion adherents;
- To formulate a response to FGT in light of its similarities with African traditional religion; and
- To promote the entrance of the lordship of Christ in the African religious space to provide a sound Christo-soteriology.

1.4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central argument of this study is that the introduction of the lordship of Jesus Christ into African Christologies can provide a lasting answer to the question of salvation for an African. It contends that African Christological theologies have largely been comparative in approach and limited with respect to how Christ can be adapted to the affairs of an African, giving him extra-biblical titles that fail to answer the question of salvation for an African. When Christ is not entangled in these extra-biblical descriptions and he is explained from the Bible, a sound Christo-soteriology can emerge for the benefit of an African. This study contends therefore that a proper lordship salvation model can be crafted for an African when the prevalent

external predilections of the person and work of Jesus are eliminated and Scripture speaks for itself.

1.5. CONFSSIONAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.5.1. Confessional Framework

African Traditional Religion (ATR) and culture is rich in spiritual heritage. It continues to define the lives of Africans, and remains the heartbeat of every native African. It is within this understanding that anything that disturbs the engagement of Africans with their culture constitute a serious offence. Amilcar Cabral has intimated that “African culture is the strength of African people” (cited in Martey, 1993:13). I thus acknowledge that even after the findings of this study, Africans will continue to identify with their African culture because it represents their identity and way of life – they will not cease to be African. I therefore do not write off African traditional religion and culture, however, I propose means by which Africans will continue to identify with their culture because this has been and continues to be their way of life. What I am proposing is to put all entities in place – God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and ancestors, in an effort to illuminate the salvation of the soul.

With this in mind, I neither claim neutrality, nor do I hold negative biases towards Africans and their religion – I am African too. Rather, the study is intentionally pursued from a confessional Christian standpoint within the Reformed tradition particularly to address the question of the salvation of the soul. In this way, the scope narrows to address ATR adherents who operate openly from their traditional religion, as well as those who continue to practice their African traditional religion within evangelical spaces. I thus propose a reconsideration of Christian soteriology within African traditional and evangelical spaces with a view of crafting a soteriological alternative. The resultant is that the salvific needs articulated in African traditional worldview are limited to the temporal or mundane issues, but every salvation need is best fulfilled in the person and the work of Jesus Christ – thus the need for the illumination of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in Africa.

1.5.2. Concept Clarification

The following terms are conceptually and operationally defined as follows:

African

To define what the term “African” means is not a matter that can be left to geographical positioning or the pigmentation of the skin colour alone. Diane Stinton (2001:23) appreciates this complexity, especially as it relates to the vastness of the continent and the diversity of its people. At the same time, while it could have been an easier task in earlier centuries to define an African, the effects of industrialisation and modernity presented us a gift that saw the world

become just a global village. Migration has brought complexity into this issue, where geography or skin colour lose their currency in defining an African.

Former President Thabo Mbeki narrating that he is an African, says: "I am an African. I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land" (SAHO, 2011). Although Mbeki acknowledges that he is "born of the people of the continent of Africa...", he seeks to elucidate that being African in essence, is more about our being – the values that we hold, and the fibre of our being. This therefore grounds my understanding of this word.

African Christian Theology

According to Adam and Boafo (2022:280), ACT is a concept which focuses on two domains, "the Christian message in the gospel and the culture of African Christians." This therefore makes ACT an all-encompassing phenomenon which seeks to accommodate Africans in their own identity and culture. Nyamiti (1971) Mbiti (1975), and Setiloane (1986) submitted that ACT is simply a theological reflection of a biblical message in African mindset and needs, speaking to the African soul, and expressed by Africans themselves. In this context, as ACT and Christianity come into dialogue, careful analysis and evaluation must be made to give each its voice and to ensure that a workable soteriology is framed.

African Christology

Stinton (2001:25) highlights the difficulty of explaining African Christology, indicating that because it is not yet developed (because it is fairly a new phenomenon), it can be described but not defined, as in western Christianity. This is of course grounded also on the fact that when we talk of Christology in Africa, we often talk in plural terms. Hence when Christology is discussed in Africa, the scope will include inculturation, ancestor, and liberation christologies. Christologies of African Indigenous and evangelical churches also come into view. These christologies are expanded in Chapter 3.

African Churches

There is a distinction made between African Evangelical Churches (AEC) and African Indigenous churches (AIC). The former is defined as those churches that developed out of historical western missionary efforts, whereas the latter are deemed to have emerged out of the breakaway from western missions. In this study, however, the use of the term (African churches/ AIC and AEC) describes those native churches who operate in Africa and are led by Africans, but have also separated from Western ties. The distinction is made in terms of how they receive and interpret the gospel message. These distinctions are made between

churches such as ZCC, ELCSA, AFM and AoG, particular their theology contained in De Visser (2001), Sundkler (1958) and Anderson (1992).

African Traditional Religion or African Religion

By African Traditional Religion (ATR) or African Religion we mean the religion that existed among the people of Africa before the influence of western missionary enterprise. This would include all the religions of Africa which existed in the continent and defined the lives of the people (Clarke, 2011:12). Shorter (1977:1) says that these religious systems defined various ethnic cultures of precolonial Africa, and flourished among the people, as they still do today. We align with Clarke and Shorter in the use of the term ATR. Shorter (1977:1) acknowledges that “although they were separate and self-contained systems, they interacted with one another and influenced one another to different degrees.” This then grounds our use of the term ATR, and African religions, to refer to all indigenous African traditional religions which were there pre-colonial era, and which still fight to be recognised in the mainstreams of religion today. John Taylor and Laurenti Magesa (cited in Clarke, 2011:12-13) have indicated that if not fundamentally the same, differences that may exist in African religions “must not lead one to conclude that there is no internal, essential unity” within them.

African Traditional Theology and African Theology

Ilesanmi, (2024) submits that ATT is “characterised by its deep roots in indigenous and cultural contexts and anthropological insights that inform religious understandings in Africa.” Martey (1993:72) argues that the Bible and ATR are considered a major source of African theology. Maluleke (1998:133) notes that African theology has never been pure Christian theology. The ancestors and African spirits of ATRs are always lurking and hovering on the horizon. Clearly, African Traditional Theology and African Theology bears resemblance – both draw links with ancestors and deep cultural contexts. In this study, they are taken to mean the same thing, referring to that theology that draws its existence from ATR and that is rooted in African traditional culture and ancestral links.

African Thought

The term is used to depict an African understanding of issues within this worldview. It represents how ideas are developed, understood, and used in the African cosmology. These ideas develop into frameworks that ultimately channel the thinking from an African perspective on social, philosophical and political issues.

1.6. METHODOLOGY

1.6.1. The study

This research relies on strong data collection from existing research or literature. It is supported by extensive literature reviews, logical deductions and theory building to respond to the need stated above. Christianity and ATR are the focus of the study and they are interfaced to develop a model of salvation that is helpful to African traditional adherents and African evangelicals who are in syncretic practices. The study operates within the discipline of theological studies by employing textual analysis, dogmatic construction, and hermeneutical evaluation, thereby ultimately building a credible Christology that answers the question of the salvation of the soul in the African milieu.

1.6.2. The approach

Being non-empirical research, this study adopts a theological systematic approach to answer the questions posed. Vanhoozer (in Davie *et al.*, 2016:885) sees systematic theology as concerned with presenting a “faithful and relevant articulation of the Christian faith in terms of a coherent set of interrelated doctrines.” Boaheng (2024:95) states that it is “a branch of theology that seeks to organise and interpret the teachings of a Christian tradition coherently and systematically,” dealing with topics about God, salvation, and eschatology, among others. Given that the study touches on the differing worldviews of Christianity and ATR, the theological systematic approach has to be supported by various hermeneutical methods in order to engage critically with the concepts at hand.

Within the discipline of systematic theology there is dogmatic theology. Asumang (2023:6) views it as a branch of theology that emphasises the importance of defining and defending specific theological doctrines and beliefs. In dogmatic theology, the research becomes premised on the Bible as God’s authoritative word (Majawa, 2020:1). As a “descending theology,” it engages and defines church dogmas, and teaches the Christian mysteries within the histories of revelation and salvation (Majawa, 2020:21). This view necessitates the examination of doctrinal systems and the construction of coherent theological conclusions.

Since two worldviews come into contact, I adopt both a biblical and African hermeneutics. By using these, I endeavour to understand biblical texts and African religious worldviews, thus enabling the two worldviews to communicate. The study engages ATR immanently with both the lordship salvation and free grace theological persuasions. Elizabeth Mburu (2019) has found a synthesis between these two contrasting worldviews that respects interpretation. Advocating for African-based Bible interpretation, Mburu (2019:65) presents a four-legged stool as a metaphor for her method of interpretation, namely parallels to the African context,

theological context, literary context, and historical and cultural context. These are important to my interpretation.

In view of Mburu's first interpretive leg, namely, parallels to the African context, worldview becomes important in relation to the theological, cultural, social, political, and geographical constructs (Boaheng, 2024:50). This study takes this focus because it seeks to establish the prevailing contextual situations that form part of the African worldview. Because we are starting from familiar stance of the African worldview (Kayumba, 2025), the importance of credible representation of the biblical worldview is underscored (Mburu, 2019:4).

Equally important is the second leg of the stool, which is the theological context. Boaheng (2024:50) emphasises that this aspect focuses on "the theological emphasis of the biblical text within its literary framework." It is argued here that the text is engaged in terms of its current meaning for the audience that engages with it. Accordingly, my engagement with this study compels me to this approach, where every African concept of salvation discussed is related back to the Bible and its response or validity is measured.

For the third leg, I indulge the literary context as espoused by Mburu (2019). Traditional Africans adopt many idioms and sayings, which speak to their specific understanding of salvation and how it is accepted as part of their worldview. Here, I adopt scriptural evidence that speaks directly to these idioms or statements, reflect the causes of separation of humanity with God, and the terms of reconciliation outlined in Scripture. This is in the main to engage ATRs within the context of their literature vis-à-vis the biblical literature.

Mburu (2019:6) sets the fourth leg as historical and cultural context. Manus (1993:29) aligns with this, and argues for an African-anthropologically-descriptive analysis that engages African anthropological and ethno-historical data, which he says must be engaged in service of NT exegesis. It is argued here that the Bible cannot be understood in isolation from its historical and cultural contexts (Boaheng, 2024:52). Therefore, traditional Africans have tended to interact with matters of faith within the context of their own situation, and largely leaning towards the OT over the NT. Here, a Christology that respects African history and culture while also offering a credible salvation gateway for traditional Africans, is developed.

In the main, the research seeks to employ these approaches precisely because they deal with traditional Africans and their religion, yet are also mindful of the centrality of the Bible. Accordingly, we must interface the practicality of African traditional religion with Christianity – from there the need for contextualisation,⁸ while being mindful of the associated danger of

⁸ Kato (1985:23) explains contextualisation as making concepts or ideas relevant to a given situation, whereas Makashinyi (2022:80) warns for a careful approach to contextualisation given the danger that it may obscure or even distort the truth. It is therefore imperative to ensure that cultural forms, combined with the message of the

syncretism attached to it (Mburu, 2019:4). To overcome this danger, the proposition is to let interpretation be led by the Bible as God's authoritative and final Word – meaning an African worldview must find interpretation and expression within the worldview of the Bible.

1.6.3. The interface

There is a need to have this study grounded in a system that supports the central argument, which concerns itself with cultivating a biblically sound soteriology in the African milieu. Therefore, this study sets dogmatic normativity as the primary lens of this interface. Here, central biblical tenets as they relate to soteriology are evaluated first. The import of this is to ensure that the study remains anchored in biblical revelation rather than traditional African theologies, which are largely influenced by ATRs.

Following here I interface African hermeneutic as the contextual lens and evaluate how ATR interacts with Christian beliefs (immanent parallels); how African evangelical theology, African Christologies and ATRs respond to biblical salvation; and how the theological persuasions of lordship salvation and free grace address the soteriological question in ATRs and the African worldview.

The outcome is combined, reflecting biblical dogmatics and the African worldview. Out of this interface emerges a sound theological assessment of salvation that is biblically faithful and contextually relevant, thereby presenting a plausible gateway for salvation in the African milieu.

1.6.4. The application to chapters

The study responds to the objectives in the following way:

- The first objective of the study prompts an investigation of the core gospel message presented in African evangelical churches. Here, I employ an analytical approach, which Asumang (2023:8) views as involving “careful dissection and evaluation of a theory or a concept by engaging its logical components.” Therefore, I engage analytically with key textual and doctrinal positions, the findings of De Visser (2001) in particular, together with others such as Sundkler (1958), and Mokhoathi (2021), to understand the gospel's content in African evangelical churches.
- The second objective is to take an analytic-synthetic approach as contemplated by Asumang (2023:8) for the development of an African Christology that respects

Bible, bring about a message that is true to the Bible and its worldview. It should allow proper onboarding of African religion and culture to this worldview, without upsetting Scripture, nor being antagonistic or disrespectful to the African culture.

Scripture. While the analytic approach “dissects and evaluates” theories or concepts, the synthetic approach on the other hand brings “unrelated concepts to form a new model” (Asumang, 2023:8). Thus, the analytical approach is used to draw from the established dictions, logical components, and beliefs by engaging scholars such as Mbiti, Setiloane, Bediako and others, and finally presenting a workable African Christology.

- The third objective seeks to resolve how LST can support a biblically sound salvation offer to African traditional religion. Here I employ an integrative approach. Lewis and Demarest (cited in Boaheng, 2024:98; Asumang, 2023) state that this methodology integrates historical, biblical, systematic, apologetic, and practical dimensions to provide a comprehensive framework for theological research. Therefore, different theories or opinions are integrated and harmonised into a logically coherent whole, understanding that not every African belief is demonic.
- The fourth objective, which is to formulate a response to FGT in light of its similarities with African traditional religion, will be met using the integrative approach as defined by Boaheng (2024:98). Here, then, FGT is interfaced with African traditional religion and the results are evaluated.
- Lastly, the fifth objective is to determine how Christ can enter the African religious space to provide a biblical Christo-soteriology by engaging in a synthetic assessment, largely leaning on constructive dogmatic theology (Asumang, 2023:8). This last chapter, having summarised all the views canvassed in this study, culminates by offering a model that proposes a gateway for the lordship of Christ in Africa by answering key ATR problems with Christian theology.

1.7. ETHICAL RISK STATEMENT

This research is social in approach and bears a low-risk rating owing to the use of methods such as “systematic reviews; reviews of literature, and analysis and development of theories” (de Lange *et al.*, 2016:16–21) which primarily constitute desktop analysis. This research did not engage any human subjects, neither through experiments nor interviews, and was primarily based on analysis of available literature, from which findings and conclusion are drawn.

1.8. SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION

Table 1: Schematic representation of the research method

Schematic Presentation		
Research question	Aims and objectives	Research method
What has been the core gospel message presented in African evangelical churches to address the question of salvation for an African?	To investigate the core gospel message presented in African evangelical churches to address the question of salvation for an African.	Textual and doctrinal analysis was conducted through literature review, in particular analysing De Visser (2001) and others such as Sundkler (1958), Mokhoathi (2021), Maluleke (1998 & 2002) in their respective studies of AICs.
What must be addressed in African Christologies to formulate an African Christology that respects Scripture?	To analyse what should be addressed in African Christologies to formulate an African Christology that respects Scripture and to synthesise an acceptable Christological approach in an African setting.	An analytic-synthetic approach (Asumang, 2023) was used to draw from the established dictions, logical components, and beliefs within African Christologies. It ends by presenting a plausible Christological approach in an African setting.
How does LST support a biblically sound salvation to African traditional religion adherents?	To determine how LST can support a biblically sound salvation offer to African traditional religion and integrate findings into a logically coherent whole.	An integrative approach as contemplated by Lewis and Demarest (cited in Boaheng, 2024:98) is adopted here. Key doctrinal statements are employed, integrating and harmonising different theories or opinions into a logically coherent whole.
How should we respond to FGT in light of its similarities with African traditional religion?	To formulate a response to FGT in light of its similarities with African traditional religion.	An integrative approach (Boaheng, 2024:98) is also employed here. Key doctrinal statements are analysed and FGT is interfaced with parts of African traditional religion. Its offer of salvation is examined.

How can the lordship of Christ enter the African religious space to provide a biblical Christo-soteriology?	To introduce the lordship of Christ to the African religious space in order to provide a biblical Christo-soteriology.	A synthetic assessment based on a constructive dogmatic approach is undertaken. It proposes the entry of Christ into the African religious space as the provider of salvation.
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CHAPTER TWO: THE GOSPEL IN AFRICAN CHURCHES

2.1. INTRODUCTION

For conversion to the Christian faith not to be superficial, “it must come to grips with traditional beliefs and practices” (Busia, 1955:1). It is then imperative to ask whether the leading concepts in traditional beliefs are compatible with Christian soteriology. When dealing with the salvation of the soul, we cannot accept that conversion is possible and that traditional beliefs and concepts are compatible with Christian faith without testing the concepts of sin, sacrifice, lordship, and others with respect to how they are understood in ATT as opposed to African Christian Theology (ACT).

This underscores the fact that even when our quest is to put ACT at the centre, we can only do so by drawing ATT and culture into the debate precisely because the shadow of ATR looms large in African Christian churches even today. Shorter (1977:1) submits that ACT will grow out of a dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religions. Maluleke (1998:133) comments as follows on the situation that prevails in Africa as it relates to religions and traditions:

African theology has therefore never been 'pure' Christian theology. The ancestors and African spirits of ATRs have always been lurking and hovering on the horizon – sometimes they have even invaded the secluded space of Christian theologising. There is therefore a sense in which African theology has always been a dialogical theology – at least a dialogue between Christianity and the ATRs.

At its core, ATT’s message is deeply embedded in both the theological foundations of Christianity and the diverse cultural, spiritual, and social contexts of the African continent. This comes as no surprise given that “African culture and African traditional religions have long been acknowledged as the womb out of which African Christian theology must be born” (Maluleke 2005:477). However, the “African gospel,” especially that of the AICs, differs greatly from the Bible on key concepts (Kame, 2022:34; Adam & Boafo, 2022:280). These concepts, I argue, include sin, salvation, lordship, sacrifice, the cross, relationship to the Bible, conversion, and culture, among other things. These should be explored and appropriated in the African milieu.

2.1.1. Methodology

Accordingly, we should explain how this task will be achieved with the method we propose to employ. To achieve the task set out, we will employ a dogmatic, analytical, comparative, and contextual theological methodology to survey the gospel within African Indigenous Churches and African evangelical churches. In this way, we examine the interconnectedness of ATR,

ATT, and ACT. Concepts such as sin, salvation, authority, saviourship, submission, power, and the death of Christ will be discussed. We will utilise leading scholars such as Mbiti, Maimela, Setiloane, Nyamiti, Bediako, Pobee, Maluleke and others, alongside recent contributions by scholars such as De Visser, Rakotsoane, Mokhoathi, and Awolalu in order to maintain theological relevance and ecclesial influence, while also understating where the debate is located currently. David Bebbington's (1989) quadrilateral model will be engaged as an evaluative framework to particularly estimate how ATR relates with Christian theology. Theological claims are assessed normatively through Scripture, evangelical dogmatics, and Christocentric theological judgement, while also considering contextual expressions of salvation in African evangelical practice.

2.2. THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE TERMS AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, AFRICAN TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

It is generally accepted that when they emerged, African Indigenous Churches (AICs) were the primary carriers of a gospel that was predominantly sympathetic towards Africa (Oduro *et al.*, 2008:18). Adam and Boafo (2022:281) submit that the pursuit (of ACT) gained great momentum in academia in the late 1950s and 1960s – with the AICs as the vehicles of such a theology.

Prominent churches of this tradition include the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa (ELCSA), the Assemblies of God (AoG), the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), and others. They attempted to infuse African ways into their belief system and practices. It is important to note that these AICs have degrees of variance in their theologies and belief systems. While some are Christo-centric in their beliefs (like AFM and AoG), others (like the ZCC, ELCSA) are ancestor-centric and Afro-ritualistic in their beliefs (Anderson, 1992; De Visser, 2001).⁹ Bae (2007:43) concurs, submitting that “[i]n some groups Christian beliefs are blended with ancestor reverence while others tend to follow more animistic rituals.”

Concerning African Christianity, Maluleke (2002:155) submits that: “It is particularly noted that African Christianity exists in the middle of (at least) two pulling forces—the ‘religious and cultural background of African people’ on the one hand and the Bible on the other.” This situation brings about two strands of theology, as it were, that pervade the African religious space. Adam and Boafo (2022:281) are of the opinion that these theologies are the result of

⁹ Anderson (1992) and De Visser (2001) have written extensively on the disposition and beliefs of various churches. The Zionist and the apostolic churches were compared by means of community surveys and studies, and it was found that in the main, churches that align with the Zionist tradition, like the ZCC, were culturally inclined and believed in the presence and worship of ancestors. The opposite, however, is true for predominately apostolic churches such as the AFM and the AoG, which were Christo-centric in their beliefs. The Lordship of Christ was more present in these churches, and the ancestor cult was less of an occurrence.

an encounter between Christianity and indigenous religion, which are two divergent dogmas, engaging in a process sympathetic to inculturation. Still, Mokhoathi (2021:2) sees these two religions, Christianity and ATR, as unique, and any attempt to juxtapose them would result in their dilution.

While the expectation would be that the theology that is formulated by traditional Africans would still be Christo-centric, there has been evidence to the contrary. Adam and Boafu (2022:280) found that “Africans embraced Christian theology while having already imbibed and appreciated African theology and identity.” These authors argue for the importance of Africans doing theology that relies on African anthropology or the African way of learning.

Ilesanmi (2024:37) notes in his analysis that ACT is not necessarily pure in its content. According to him, ACT “is a blend of Christian theology and African theology.” Charles Nyamiti (1971:1) realised this many decades ago, averring that ACT is largely an embedding of the biblical Christian doctrine in the African mindset and needs. In the same breath, Setiloane (1986:34) posits that “by African theology we mean a theology which is based on the biblical faith and speaks to the African soul... which arise out of the philosophy and worldview of Africans” (ellipses added). What this breeds is a new phenomenon called ATT.

ATT is “characterised by its deep roots in indigenous and cultural contexts and anthropological insights that inform religious understandings in Africa” (Ilesanmi, 2024), thus largely informing the discourse of a new theology. Ilesanmi (2024) submits that while Christian theology and African theology are distant entities, their blending together delivered what he terms ACT. ACT became a theological subset where the focus is on Christian traditions blended with African experiences to make Christian religion, as it were, intelligible to Africans.

ATT’s content is therefore largely similar to ATR on pertinent points. The implication of this is that ATT cannot have meaning nor can it operate independently from ATR – traces of ATR are manifest, making it the fulcrum around which ATT revolves. Therefore, in order for ATT to function, it must draw its form and shape from the ATR. Martey (1993:72) thus argues that the Bible and ATR are considered a major source of African theology. The implication of ATR being the dynamism of ATT is that when issues of inculturation are at play, especially in religion, the clarity of ACT becomes highly compromised because ATR influences ATT. ATT in turn becomes influential to ACT.

Clearly, the snare of working with a contaminated ACT looms large given that ATR forms the basis of ATT, which in turn grounds ACT. These snares seem familiar to those Idowu (1965) warned about when he implored the Nigerian church to indigenise. However, he realised that there is an antidote to such dangers, which is “the unflinching faithfulness of the Church to her

Lord in her conscious preservation of ‘the faith once delivered to the saints.’” (Idowu, 1965:11). It is therefore, important to understand the meeting points and explicate the differences. When this is clear, counter-arguments can be made to present an acceptable ACT.

2.3. CORE CONCEPTS OF SALVATION IN AFRICAN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

If salvation is to be understood and benchmarked across all cultures, the definitions and understanding of core concepts must be brought into dialogue with one another. The concepts that are of particular importance to this study are sin, salvation, and the image of Christ, all of which are not foreign to African cosmology. When people are confronted with their sinful nature and their depravity, the image of the redeemer who can save them would shine bright and would be acceptable as part of their worldview because all humanity desires salvation, irrespective of where it emanates from.

2.3.1. The sin doctrine in African Christianity and theology

2.3.1.1. The understanding of sin

It is a worrying observation that when sin is discussed in African thought, it moves in the domain of inter-human relationships (e.g., Mbiti, 1969; Sawyerr, 1968; Maimela, 1985; Kasomo, 2009). Often this does not delve into the origins of sin and its true impact on humanity. Since this is the stance, matters pertaining to the salvation of humanity become ill-expressed and fall short of providing true hope and salvation for many adherents to African theologies and religions.

When a deficient explanation of a concept such as sin is tabled, it results in deficient treatment of other concepts, such as salvation and the image of Christ. Here, Kame (2022:33) correctly finds that an attempt by some scholars to adapt ACT sees “...the African culture/experience and not the Bible as the starting point for African theology”. This makes the attempt to understand sin within the ambits of ACT problematic on two fronts. Firstly, there is not much literature to go around, and the little that is available still keeps to the old thoughts of bygone decades. Secondly, the starting point of ACT is often ATR, with its influences abounding because Africans generally default to ancestors. Therefore, while it may seem extreme, it makes sense to investigate the sin concept in African cosmology from the lens of ATR, which greatly influences the ACT, which in turn becomes the theological standpoint of many AICs.

2.3.1.2. The differences between the biblical and African view of sin

The definition of sin in African evangelical churches and the cultural cosmos differs from that of the Bible. In its conception of sin, the Bible describes it as an offence against God (Gn. 2; Rom. 3:23). It also states that the “wages” of sin is alienation from God and eternal death (Col.

1:21; Rom. 6:23). To lift this burden, and in view of the gravity of sin, God made Christ to be sin for humanity, the only remedy fitting to deal with sin and its associated consequences (2 Cor. 5:21). This then establishes a view that sin is something greater than human beings, high above human intuition and the ability of humans to deal with.

African churches and religions, however, opt instead to define sin as an offence amongst equals, thereby diminishing its impact and the remedy necessary to deal with it. In ATR circles, there seems to be “no problem” in the relationship between God and Africans (Mbiti, 1969:206; Maimela, 1985:69; Nyabongo in Desai, 1962:38). To ATR adherents, sin is disunity and disharmony between equals. God is too big to squabble with mere mortals; in any case, his will prevails over everything. Sawyerr (1968:30–32) puts it clearly: “God does not enter directly into discussion of sin among African peoples ... Sin is seen within the context of community life ... Any breach which punctures this communal relationship amounts to sin...”.

Maimela (1985:70–71) posits:

To traditional Africans, then, sin is the destruction of the stability of the community and, therefore, the refusal to love and have fellowship with one's fellows (both the living and the dead), the denial of that which makes for life here and now, the cause of anguish to a little child or a defenceless person.

Magesa (1997:161) takes it further by saying that what in Christianity is conceptualised and explained as sin or evil, is better expressed in African traditional religion by the concept of wrong-doing, badness, or destruction of life. There is an agreement that sin is wrongdoing. The Bible also recognises it as wrong-doing, but against God. However, the Bible emphasises the thought; for it indicates that even those who may appear righteous in the eyes of humanity, are helpless sinners in the eyes of God (Is. 64:6), further establishing that all humans are born sinners (Ps. 51:5). Therefore, sin is not just mere action, it is depravity, it is how we are born. It supersedes the thoughts held by some African authors¹⁰ who, contrary to the Bible, hold that “sin is ritual impurity, injury to relationships within communities, and separation from ancestors, amongst other things” (Khotlele, 2023:24).

These patent differences thus make for a deficient explanation of sin in African traditional religions. The result is that even salvation itself cannot be fully grasped and realised in African traditional and evangelical spaces. This aspect alone speaks to Kasomo's (2009:155) concern about the deficient explanation of sin.

¹⁰ Mbiti (1969), Maimela (1985) and Sawyerr (1968) all conform to the idea that sin is amongst equals and hold that humans cannot sin directly against God. In this way, they deem ancestors as intermediaries and qualified to speak to God on behalf of sinful humans for forgiveness.

2.3.1.3. The concept of sin from the African perspective

Some African scholars present the concept of sin from different backgrounds, often influenced by the geographical and communal spaces to which people are connected. For instance, some explain it as ritual impurity, others opt for injury to community relationships, whereas some would even dismiss it as non-existent in African circles. However, every view carries implications for how salvation ultimately derives.

2.3.1.3.1. Sin as non-existent

One of the greatest travesties is Mbiti's (cited in Meiring, 2005:70) assertion that "sin does not cross the lives of the people" and that he sees no need to address it in his congregation. Instead of acknowledging the sinfulness of humanity, Mbiti (1969), in direct conflict with the events that triggered the Edenic¹¹ separation, says that "separation came primarily because a time had come for God to separate from man, not because of any direct act on the part of primeval man." Some hold that sin is not part of the vocabulary of Africans (Nyabongo in Desai, 1962:38) and that Africans are only conscious of the rights and wrongs they commit based on their conscience. Further, De Visser (2001) also records that in traditional African worldview, a human being is believed to be morally good.

Mbiti (cited in Meiring, 2005:70) emphasises the point, averring that there is no need for African people to reconcile with God because their relationship with God is perpetual and cannot be undone even by the presence of sin. Perhaps the assertion of missionaries who held that "Africans had no sense of religion and no sense of sin" is partly to blame (Meiring, 2007:739). This is proven true when African theologies and religions favour definitions of sin that conflict with the Bible. These views in the African worldview that are dismissive of sin against God are in direct conflict with the Bible, which records that all of humanity is sinful (Rom. 3:23), that we are all born sinners (Ps. 51:5; Ps. 58:3; Rom. 5:12–14), that Christ died for sinners (1 Pt. 2:24; 1 Cor. 15:13; Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8), and that Christ's death saves sinners when they repent (Jn. 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:10). This deficient explanation of sin and its impact deals a major blow to any hope of true reconciliation with God.

2.3.1.3.2. Sin as injury to community relations

Traditional Africans are generally communal people, and because the community is where they live and thrive, anything that disturbs this setting is deemed problematic. It is out of this view that anything that presents a breach of fellowship with neighbours and a break in the relationship with ancestors is considered a malady that constitutes sin (Maimela, 1985:67–

¹¹ Edenic separation refers to Genesis 3, where man was deceived, acted against God's instruction, and fell out of favour with God.

70). Bediako (2004:25; 2000:26) and Maimela (1985:69) also allude to the fact that traditional Africans are community-oriented people and view sin as being committed between equals and societies, resulting in damage to a collective life of a group.

Arguing the point further is Sawyerr (1968:30–32), who asserts that sin is seen within the context of community life as opposed to individualism, and that any breach that punctures this relationship amounts to sin. Kasomo (2009:148) and Mbiti (1968:208) suggest that this arrangement makes sin a bottom-up occurrence. Still, Gutiérrez (2001:174) submits that liberation theology views sin as “a social, historical fact, the absence of fellowship and love in relationships among persons, ...” Here then, ATR aligns with a branch of theology that also chooses to apportion a contra-biblical interpretation of sin that opts not to consider God as the party offended by sin.

Obviously, this understating has ramifications, especially in view of salvation. Maimela (1985:68–69) then deems salvation possible when cordial relationships exist between the self and the neighbour, also seeing the manipulation of evil forces and respect of the ancestors as the basis for salvation. It therefore follows that the contrast between social and personal sin would require different treatments. Liberation theology and ATR address the issue of social sins (like oppression, racism, etc.), whereas spiritual salvation attends to personal sin. The downside, however, is Kasomo’s (2009:155) submission that “African Religion has not produced a doctrine or concept of *spiritual salvation*.” This position presupposes that traditional Africans in their religions seek salvation from the temporal rather than the spiritual, limiting the scope of salvation God can offer them.

2.3.1.3.3. Sin as ritual impurity

Since ATR is also rooted in rituals and claims to be taking after or to be validated by the OT (Bediako, 1995:69; Lugira, 2009:19; Bongmba, 2016:25), sin is classified as ritual impurity (Rieber, in Booth 1977:271) rather than including within its definition ethical unrighteousness. Adeyemo (1983:6) correctly finds that ATR thought is ritualistic, and that it views sacrifice as a means of communicating with God (1979:117–118). Maganda (2002:148) submits that because of this, some African Christians resort to these ritualistic practices and beliefs to the extent that they even equate the mediatorial work of Christ with that of ancestors in ATR. This is evident from the writings of scholars such as Mbiti (1969), Maimela (1991), Bediako (1992) and Pobee (1979), among others. In a religious context where rituals play a role in all aspects of life, it is difficult to expect a clean break from ritualistic type of behaviour (Balcomb, 2016:123).

However, regardless of the difficulty of the clean break, if Vorster’s (2010:73) sentiments can be accommodated, ATR should accede that humanity’s sin is not an accident; human beings

have a propensity to commit sin. This propensity is also not accidental; it is because humans are by nature sinful (Rom. 3:23). By this overture, it is important to note that people have an inherently sinful nature, more than just the blood of goats and bulls is required to cleanse them (Heb. 10:4). It is declared in the Bible that only the blood of Jesus Christ qualifies to cleanse us from sin (1 Jn. 1:7), and it is adequate to wash even the worst of sinners. To class sin as a mere ritual impurity is therefore an attempt to underplay its enormity, thereby restricting the effect of salvation to adherents of such religions.

2.3.1.3.4. Sin as separation from ancestors

In ATR, sin is understood as the break in the relationship with one's ancestors; constituting the greatest malady or injustice an African can suffer (Maimela, 1985:67–70). Rakotsoane (1996) is among those who highlight the importance of ancestors, especially for the Basotho nation. He says “‘Molimo’ was a Supreme Being, above ancestors in status, but who was staying together with ancestors. Ancestors were considered to be the closest circle” to him (Rakotsoane, 1996:41). Mahlangu (1999:39) on the other hand, maintains that the cult of ancestors is to the African what Jesus is to Christianity and what Mohammed is to Islam. Baëta (1955:51–61) also proclaims: “For, whatever others may do in their own countries, our people live with their dead”, whereas Bujo (1992:42) and M'Timkulu (1977:19) acknowledge ancestral veneration and animal sacrifices as underpins of ATR.

This reveals the salient role ancestors play for the Basotho nation and traditional Africans in general to the extent that all will be expended to protect these relations. It deposes Christ from his position and provides adherents with an alternative salvation route. Turaki (1999:178) also posits that some African Christians still uphold the centrality of their ancestors and hold to these beliefs because not doing so can attract bad luck from ancestors, who are regarded as guardians of family life. This position only entrenches the relationships with ancestors. Khotlele (2023:95–96) avers that relationships with ancestors are not necessarily wrong, but then only as far as remembering the departed as people who lived among us and taught us life lessons. The veneration and worship of ancestors is, however, completely discouraged. The evangelical churches ought to carry this message without fail if enduring salvation is to take root in Africa.

2.3.1.3.5. Sin as a non-issue for God

Sawyerr's (1968:30–32) statement that “God does not enter directly into discussion of sin among African peoples...” at best negates the impact of sin, and at worst positions God as a party not interested in the sin committed by people. All that this does is to take sinners further from accountability to the God who through Jesus Christ paid the debt humanity could not pay. The African worldview thus tells its people that because there is no sin, their relationship with

God is unbroken because the very thing that fractures relationships (sin) is absent, thereby resulting in a perpetual relationship with God.

Mbiti (1969:99) holds to this assertion that Africans' relationship with God is unbreakable and therefore perpetual. He suggests that separation between humans and God does not arise on account of sin, even the original sin. Rather, the separation is present only because a distinction had to be made between God and humans (Mbiti, 1968). What this understanding means is firstly, that people are not directly answerable to God for their sins. Secondly, it suggests that the relationship with God is always harmonious. This understanding therefore closes all possible avenues for people to seek forgiveness of their sins from God, thereby muting the possibility of salvation. The refrain that entrenches this view of sin is that "[s]in in African worldview is against the community and not against God" (Kato, 1975:42).

2.3.1.4. The role of personal and corporate sin

While sin is viewed within the dimensions described above, added to that is the issue of the apportionment of blame or a sense of guilt. Sin can also be viewed in terms of the personal and corporate dimensions. At the heart of these personal and corporate views is the central idea of community or communal responsibility. This dichotomy places the responsibility of sin at varying levels, and with varied consequences or penalties. These are explored below.

2.3.1.4.1. Personal sin

The concept of personal sin permeates African religious spaces, with individual human guilt being acknowledged in African worldviews and moral philosophy (see Mbiti, 1969; Sawyerr, 1964, 1972; Adegbola, 1969; Pobee, 1979). Accordingly, personal sin is present as a concept in the lives of traditional Africans and carries with it consequences. While personal sin is accepted in traditional African thought, it is, however, understood within the ambits of community (Bediako, 2000:26).

Often, a person who is found to have committed wrongs in the community, who has transgressed the taboos that make up the fabric of an individual community, is punished. This is because communities would do anything to deter and correct any wrong-doing because for them, the wrong acts members of the community commit have the propensity of attracting bad luck (Turaki, 1999:178).

The sacrosanct view of community is on the one hand exacerbated by what is termed "shame culture" (Kasomo, 2009:150; Van der Walt, 2004:12). This is prevalent in African culture and to a larger extent in personal sin spaces. For instance, those who commit personal sin would often prefer to remain hidden rather than face being paraded before the community. It is partly because of this that when an individual sins, external forces are blamed. Sometimes witchcraft

gets the blame (Conradie & Shakuba, 2006:61). It is a fact that biblically speaking, Adam could not blame Eve for his sin (Gn. 3:11), he was promptly held accountable for his role for the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

When the ATR approach is taken, it somewhat lessens the guilt. It allows the sinner to live with themselves in that while they have sinned, they share the responsibility with “other forces”. In fact, Conradie and Shakuba (2006:64) argue that “the emphasis of African religion and culture is on humans being the victims of evil forces.” Meiring (2005:101) concurs, saying that “African religion tends to locate the source of evil firmly in the human world, in the disruptive ambitions and jealousies of people.” Eventually, and in this way, they are unable to account for their sin without pacifying their culpability in it, thus making it bearable. However, an acceptable version would acknowledge that every human is a sinner before God (Rom. 3:23), and that every human must answer for their *own* sin (Lk. 15:18; 18:13).

2.3.1.4.2. Corporate sin

In terms of their acknowledgement of sin, traditional Africans feel most at home when corporate sin is in view because here, shared responsibility is at the forefront. This could stem from the fact that Africans are generally people with closely knit relationships who share in many things (Bae, 2007:51). No traditional African prefers to live in isolation, and the prospect of being jointly responsible makes sense even when people have to account for the sins they committed. Awolalu (1976a) argues that in Africa, no man lives alone; it is strictly a communal setting. So, whatever affects an individual can also affect the whole society. Mbiti (2005:1) avers that “For the same reason, the offender is not the only one held responsible for the injury and he or she will not be punished as if he or she acted alone.” The whole community takes accountability for the deed.

As a result, there are “many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observances and taboos, constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society” (Mbiti, 1969:205). Contravening these specific codes and community expectations amounts to wrong-doing. Awolalu (1976a:275–287) and Sawyerr (1968:30–32) likewise agree that to disregard the norms and taboos of the society is to commit sin, thereby giving rise to *sensus communis*. Kasomo (2009:148) also avers that “the essence of the sin lies in the violation of the solidarity of the community.” In this way, the whole community becomes affected by sin and become active agents in working against it.

Meiring (2007:740) explains that “sin does not exist in an absolute sense” or abstractly, “but always within the community and creation. Sin depends on the context and community, and not only otherworldly norms.” This concept relies on the fact that *sensus communis* is supreme in the African worldview. Sawyerr (1968:30–32) surmises that this solidarity is indispensable

for the maintenance of ethical conduct and a common standard of behaviour, closely guarded by the solidarity of the family, the clan, and the tribe, which becomes the fundamental factor of life.

It is, however, critical to understand that accountability for corporate sin was prevalent in the OT. This is not the case in the NT where individual sins account. The OT preferred to hold a community (Jo. 7; Ezr. 9–10; Neh. 1:4–11; and elsewhere) as well as individuals (Jr. 31:29–30; Ez. 18:20) accountable for sin (Jer. 31:29–30; Ez. 18:20; Dt. 24:16). However, in the NT where Christ is the remedy for sin, personal sin is at the forefront (Jn. 3:16; 14:6; 6:54 and elsewhere). Christ came to deal with this specific sin. While he appears to be removing the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29), he specifically stands at the heart of individuals, knocking, and forgiving anyone who opens the door for him (Rv. 3:20).

2.3.2. The doctrine of salvation in African evangelical churches

The quest for the salvation of the soul in Africa is not as defined or as clear as in Western Christianity. Western Christianity has written themes, topics, and doctrines that define what salvation is for them and how they interpret it. However, for African theologies and traditions one cannot claim the same. Often, thoughts on salvation are left unwritten (Muya, 2023:8), and in most cases they take on nuances that require one to carefully colour within the lines given their diversity and creativity. In Africa, religion is very fluid and diverse (Mothoagae, 2021:1–11), and aligns with many forms and norms, including the identities of other religions. Maluleke (1998:123) surmises:

ATRs are thriving in South Africa as indeed they are in the rest of the continent. They exist inside and outside Christianity, inside and outside Islam - and in the process, they are radically altering the faces of both Islam and Christianity.

Here then, we are dealing with the complication of dualism or pluralism – syncretism even. Thus, Maimela (1985:71) argues that in these circumstances – where Christianity and ATR are practiced at the same time – Africans feel that they have bought themselves double insurance for times of trouble and misfortune so that they can experience prosperity and happiness here and now. Authors such as De Visser (2001), Shabangu (2005), Munyai (2008), and others give us a glimpse into the position of AICs, and by extension, the theology of African Christians. Knowing that salvation is not an abstract concept in Africa, we must thus understand it within the African worldview. What do Africans see as salvation? What are the maladies they want to be saved from? How do they anticipate the receiving and working of that salvation? These questions, and others, are discussed next.

2.3.2.1. What is salvation?

It is important to note that Africans, at least in the traditional religious setting, cannot account for their salvation without the ancestors being central (Shabangu, 2005:174). This overture creates an interesting definition and understanding of their salvation in this milieu. Interestingly, salvation in the African context is not divided, it is a single occurrence between the physical and the spiritual dimensions (Shabangu, 2005:175). This presents a situation where physical well-being is central to salvation, and the presence of ancestors is centred around protecting and providing for people's prosperity while they are alive.

Ngong (2010:24) thus suggests that even though salvation in ATR terms concerns mostly the present, there is also an afterlife-element that finds expression through ancestors. At the same time, the afterlife is important and is viewed through the lens of ancestorship. "The goal of life is to become an ancestor after death" (Ezenweke 2004:3). In this way, it is set in the minds of ATR adherents that ancestorship presents an enduring reality of continued living, and at the same time, it occupies a special role of looking after those clan members left behind. This thought also finds expression in evangelical churches that are inclined to traditional practices, like the ZCC and the Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, among others (Anderson, 1992:97, 104, 108; De Visser, 2001).

Accordingly, the interpretation of salvation within the African worldview results in various understandings. It largely depends on the issues a person is grappling in life. Bujo (1992:27) explains that traditional Africans find wisdom and the future of life in their ancestors. To Asante, "getting answers for the problems of life and overcoming the agents of evil and the hard realities of life" (2001:361) amounts to salvation in the traditional African setting. For Bediako (2004:23), a traditional African would be saved when the terrors and fears they encounter in their traditional worldview are addressed.

Bediako (2004:23) further shares that deliverance and protection from evil spirits, assurance of the wellbeing of members of the specific clan, and deliverance from pressing social issues are what constitutes salvation, because these deal with terrors and fears. Importantly, Muya (2023:2) submits that the mark of salvation, especially amongst the Agĩkũyũ of Kenya, is moral values upheld in the community's daily life, which is the primary link between the individual and deity. To this end, Awolalu (1976a:278) postulates that because humans are created as moral agents, they are able to respond to the deity's command.

It appears then that the concept of salvation is broad in the African worldview and has many themes. It is centred on ancestors; while it does concern the present life, it has traces of an afterlife that is expressed by the desire to become an ancestor after death; it involves

protection from maladies that disturb the peace; it is wellbeing and deliverance and paralyses daily fears and terrors; and involves moral standing, which creates connection with the divine.

2.3.2.2. Key themes that shape the African understanding of salvation

2.3.2.2.1. Harmony and balance

Traditional Africans often view themselves as one with nature, and their life is connected and rooted in the environment in which they live. For them, nature is not only a space where they set their dwelling, but it is also a support system to their lives in its entirety – the individual, the community, and the cosmos. Accordingly, traditional Africans advocate for a maintenance of balance and harmony within the natural habitat they find themselves. Key to this issue is reconciliation, which Meiring (2005:86) deems to be “the heart of all religions.” He maintains that all religions concern themselves with healing and the restoration of a “perceived brokenness between humans and God, between humans and natural world, or between and among humans themselves” (Meiring 2005:86).

Concerning this balance, Magesa (1997:81) submits that it is attained when “the ancestors are happy, the vital force is strong, and there is harmony in the land and in creation.” This view resonates with one that puts the focus on salvation as “having good measure of life-force as experienced in harmonious relationships” (De Visser, 2011:11; Du Toit 2009:109). Clearly, for a traditional African, the manipulation of ‘forces’ – good or evil – is central in determining the quality of life they would live. It is therefore important that they have measures and systems in place to deal with such forces. Failure to manipulate these forces results in misery exerted by negative forces, and also misery resulting from a missed opportunity to manipulate good forces to their advantage. Therefore, forces cannot be left to themselves to play out; they must be manipulated to achieve a good life – hence harmony and balance (Ekeke & Ekpenyong, 2024:9). In this regard Kwenda (1999:8) exclaims, “this is salvation: entities in their proper places”.

2.3.2.2.2. The communal nature of salvation

In the African worldview, salvation is mainly recognisable through the eyes of the community. This statement advocates for the salvation of a community rather than an individual. Brand (1999:202) argues that African Christian theologians’ “social accounts of salvation seek to emphasise that the human good can only be conceived of accurately as a common good, which means that any salvation worth the name, will have to be a corporate salvation.” Idowu (1973) and Meiring (2007:736–737) underscore that salvation in African terms is a communal event where the well-being of an individual, spiritually and physically, is tied to the welfare of

the community. Idowu understands this to mean that this salvation is realised through strict practice and adherence to cultural norms and rituals.

In respect of this view of salvation, Magesa (1997:81) offers that within the family lineage and clan, the presence of prosperity as measured by a good birth rate and survival to adulthood, entrenches the belief that “there is a good rapport in the network of relationships.” Obviously, this strict adherence to cultural norms and rituals provide salvation. The network of relationships therefore underscores the attainment of meaningful salvation at the communal level, reinforced by the contentment of ancestors. In the end, the saying “I am because we are,” speaks to the fullness of salvation in the African cosmos. The Basotho would say, “*Matlo ho tjha mabapi*” (When the house burns, the neighbours are affected), speaking mainly of the importance of strong neighbourly relations, which contribute to the wellbeing of the entire community or neighbourhood.

2.3.2.2.3. Cosmic and social dimensions

The question of harmony and balance not only concerns itself with the relationships that connect people at the communal level, it also touches on the cosmic, which speaks to the whole of being. For many African cultures, salvation is not only about personal deliverance from sin or misfortune but also involves a restoration of social and cosmic order – therefore the manipulation of the cosmic to their advantage. Many African scholars understand the concern of African traditional religion as centering on harnessing the powers that operate in the cosmic spaces and manipulate them to their advantage (Mbiti, 1969, Magesa, 1997; Kwenda, 1998). Cosmic powers are some of the many “entities that must be in their place” if salvation is to take hold in the African worldview. Manipulating them properly leads to salvation because any condition that may upset the harmony or the success of the lives of the people has been overcome.

As we know, the cosmos – comprising the divine, the natural world, and humanity – is seen as a unified whole in African worldview (Du Toit, 2009:109). Steenkamp-Nel (2019:5) submits that “For an African to take note of this interconnectedness is to flourish”. What this suggests is that while it is the intention of humanity to attain salvation in the immediate world (earth) in which they live, it is also equally important to ensure attainment of salvation in the cosmic world, a role which is seen to be played by ancestors, thus marking their importance in the African world. This is because the sacred and secular worlds not only jointly influence each other, but are extensions of one another and are intricately intertwined (Mulago, 1991:119–120; Ngong 2010:1). This means that when a traditional African has manipulated all forces and has discovered the secret of the interconnectedness of the cosmoses, they can flourish in all areas of their lives – in other words, they have attained salvation.

2.3.2.2.4. Ancestors and divine forces

Bediako (1992) explores how African Christianity retains the ancestral spirit and how salvation can be understood as involving both the living and the dead. Mbiti (1969) would argue that Africans view their departed as “the living-dead” and accordingly assign them important status in their daily affairs by fulfilling obligations to them and maintaining their favour. To this effect, Ezenweke (2004:3), Mugambi (2005:536) and Mbiti (1969:149) point to the importance of burial ceremonies in African communities. They must comply with customary burial rites to ensure that the link between the living and the dead is maintained for salvation purposes. This is because many African worldviews consider death not as the end of existence or annihilation, but as a transition to another realm (Muya, 2023:2; Ekeke & Ekpenyong, 2024:9). This realm is a galaxy of competing forces where the strength of ancestors and evil is at play. The presence of ancestors and their subsequent victory is marked by their perceived cosmic power, which provides relief to their family or clan members.

According to Mbiti (1969:83), when one becomes an ancestor, they speak the language of God, thus connecting to the divine and harnessing these powers. This entrenches the ancestor’s power to manipulate evil forces, to reason with the divine forces, and to come out victorious. In this sense, salvation is deeply connected with the afterlife where the believer seeks to ensure a peaceful existence after death by maintaining strong relationships with ancestors during their lifetime. Ancestors have overcome life and can give assurance of salvation to the living. Apart from serving as guardians of family tradition and life, they also stand as intermediaries between humankind and God (Turaki, 1999:178; Bae, 2007:26); they provide for the welfare of the immediate family and guard against diseases, evils, and wars (Ezenweke, 2004:4–5); and they are “a source of benefit and givers and sustainers of life” (Wanamaker, 1997:294).

2.3.2.2.5. Healing and restoration

Salvation is often linked to healing, both spiritual and physical. In ATRs, healing is a crucial aspect of salvation, often sought through divination, sacrifices, and rituals. Turner (1967), Ubruhe (1996), Mvunamandi (2008), and Mensele (2011) speak in detail of various rituals and sacrifices performed in African traditions to gain health and restoration.

With respect to healing, Becken (1975:240) explains for example that securing employment or having a good relationship with the employer counts as healing, and thus salvation. This underscores the fact that not only good health but prosperity also is central when one speaks of salvation in the African milieu. Julius Muthengi’s (1998:254) take on one of the traditional African prayers speaks volumes about how salvation is tied to wellbeing and prosperity. He writes:

The contents of prayers in African traditional worship is largely for material and physical blessing. Some of the main concerns are: protection from sickness and death, a long life, material prosperity, victory over enemies, protection from evil spirits, etc.

One cannot ignore this fact given that Brandt (1999:201) also notes that in the African tradition, healing is intertwined with all other aspects of life and always has a religious dimension. For traditional Africans, a religion that does not offer healing cannot be regarded as a salvific religion. However, Muthengi (1998:254) accedes that the African prayers seem not to have any concern about the deity's will, with Elizabeth Isichei (2004:318) finding that these traditional religions are persistently *this-worldly*.

At first glance, the extract of this prayer, one can argue, has the same connotations as the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6, and elsewhere) to personal wellbeing. However, while the Lord's Prayer has the contents of the prayer alluded to above, one ought to note that it also takes it further. It puts God and his will at the forefront of all the requests being made (Mt. 6:33). This suggests that in spite of our needs, the relationship with God is priority, sacrosanct and paramount, in contrast to ATR.

2.3.2.2.6. Salvation as restoration of identity

In some African perspectives, salvation is closely tied to the restoration of cultural identity. This is especially prevalent in the context of post-colonial Africa where salvation may be seen as liberation from the psychological and cultural effects of colonialism. Essentially, the idea of salvation emerges in the political and cultural sense so that the salvation of the African individual and the community involves a return to cultural values, self-awareness, and collective empowerment. So strong is the view of African culture that Amilcar Cabral views it as the "strength of African people" (cited in Martey, 1993:13).

Brand (1999:208) also submits that human life and identity are intricately tied to "the cultural environments in which human communities live." This, he says, suggests that salvation is a cultural transformation. Pobee and Ositelu II (1998:260) attach to salvation an element of culture, arguing that culture has always been the solvent of Christianity. Maimela (1985:63–64) thus argues that even African culture is a suitable vehicle for salvation, strongly arguing against the imposition of Western culture as the sole vehicle of salvation.

The Western missionaries who came to Africa, as we know, demonised African culture and sought to obliterate it so that it could not be resurrected (Oduyoye, 1995:83; Meiring, 2007:739; Muya, 2023:2). Brand (1999:208) suggests that much later, there was a realisation (not necessarily from the side of missionaries) among Africans themselves that there are strengths in African traditional cultures, "and that no culture is inherently superior to another; and that all cultures can serve as vehicles for transformation and reception of Christian faith."

From this followed the process of *adaptation or indigenisation*¹² which meant that natives stand a chance for salvation through the message that is spoken to them in their own languages and symbols – their own culture. However, serious objections were raised concerning these terms, with African theologians preferring *inculturation*.¹³ The basis of this argument is that African culture too, like many others, serves as preparation for the gospel and that it is an indispensable resource “for the interpretation of the gospel message and the development of African Christianity” (Adam & Bofo, 2022: 281–2; West, 2002:69; Maluleke, 2002:162). This shifted the dial towards salvation because, having *lost* their identity through the missionaries’ allegiance to the flag, the gospel was finally spoken to them in their own cultural setting, and their identity was in the process of restoration. AICs were central to this disruption and did much to assert the identity of an African, coupled with what black theology advocated for in recent decades (Anderson, 1992; Martey, 1993; De Visser, 2001).

2.4. AFRICAN THEOLOGIES’ RESPONSE TO BEBBINGTON’S MODEL

Some of the important aspects that should be the measure of the relationship people have with Christ are described in Bebbington’s (1989) quadrilateral model. This four-legged model comprise Bible-centredness, personal conversion, evangelical activism, and the centrality of the cross. It is important to note that these concepts are not exclusive to Bebbington, but they speak in general to the message Christ wanted his disciples to carry into the world (Mt. 3:2; 3:8; 4:4, 4:17; 9:38; 10:38; 28:19; Lk. 9:23; Mk. 8:31; Jn. 8:31).¹⁴

Balcomb (2016:118) chastises these pillars as being a “propositional value or set of rules” one must follow to confirm one’s salvation. However, when they are interpreted not as a set of rules, but as a relationship proposition, I believe they could be central in helping us understand the positioning of *other* theologies with respect to Christian theology. Consequently, the

¹² These two terms effectively refer to the same enterprise (Catholic and Protestant variations) (Brand, 1999:208) of expressing of the gospel using the concepts and categories of Africa’s traditional cultures.

¹³ Pedro Arrupe (in Ela, 1984:88) says inculturation is “the incarnation [!] of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a “new creation.” Inculturation Christology is explained in Chapter 3

¹⁴ Jesus for instance says:

“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Mt. 4:4); “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;” (Jn. 8:31); which speak to the relationship with God’s word.

“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Mt. 3:2); which speaks to repentance or conversion and clinging to Christ.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt. 28:19); which concerns activism or evangelising others.

“Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” (Mt. 10:38), which speaks to the relationship we ought to have with the cross.

relationship of ATR, and by extension ATT and ACT with these four concepts is important because it is in understanding this relationship that one could gauge the proximity of these theologies and their relational aspects to God's salvation offer (Christ).

2.4.1. Bible-centredness

The negative use of the Bible by missionaries in their conquest of Africa can no longer be denied. In fact, this is one issue that sticks like a thorn in the hearts and minds of many Africans. This reality makes the relationship traditional Africans have with the Bible rather acrimonious, even to an extent that some proponents want to reform the Bible, if not totally reject it as a document against their existence and religion.

Punt (2023), Shingange (2023), and many others agree about this complicity with respect to the use of the Bible in the colonisation and denigration of Africans. West (in Dube *et. al.*, 2012:86-88), has also noted that Burchell had in 1912 used the bible as a symbol of power and authority in order to exercise control over the BaThlaping people. However, Punt (2023:82) also recognises that there have been fewer efforts to decolonise the Bible in Africa, with Shingange (2023:108) noting that these "missionary-colonial subjugation tendencies" constitute our everyday life. While the Bible was delivered with ulterior motives in the colonial era, Punt (2023:85) records that the African continent was the birthplace of parts of the Bible such as "the Septuagint and ancient versions such as the early Ethiopian dialects." The element of *coloniality* therefore, seems to be one of the greatest obstacles for traditional Africans to fully embrace the Bible as their book.

To this end, Khotlele (2023:13) having detailed how the Bible is truly an African resource, expresses disappointment about the fact that still today, "Africa fails to lay claim to the Bible and build on the great work done by the likes of Origen, Augustine, Tertullian, and many others". The greatest struggle is to legitimise African traditional religion and culture. Some of the African theologians find it right to fiddle with the idea of revising the biblical canon (Punt, 2023:91) on the grounds that it is a colonial tool that remains largely insensitive to African cultural issues and still functions largely as oppressive. This discourse derails the efforts to help traditional Africans to interpret the Bible in context, and pushes for expositions that are comparative and at best apologetic to the religion of Africans when the Bible itself should neither be *cultural* nor *geographical* in content.¹⁵

¹⁵ The problem with wanting to write the Bible in comparable terms and within geographical spaces is that it brings comparisons of Jesus Christ to an ancestor of note, a tribal king, healer, liberator, elder brother (Maluleke, 1994:57; Bediako, 2004; Mbiti, 1969; Pobee, 1998; Nyamiti, 2006; Maimela, 195), amongst others. The difficulty with this, as many other scholars have acceded, is that it fails to live up to the true potential of Jesus Christ. These comparisons and adaptations often fail to match the power and strength of Christ. In doing this, Africans continue to shape a frail and powerless Christ, this time all by themselves without the help of missionaries.

Banana (1993) is among those who calls for the altering and rewriting of the Bible. He advocates for the re-writing and addition of “what is not there,” averring that “re-writing is a necessary component to liberating the Bible” (1993:17). Punt (2001:304) notes that among the leading reasons to rewrite the Bible is an attempt to expose and eschew the imperialist discourse, because with the power it holds, attempts will always be made to subvert its texts for ulterior purposes. Gunda (n.d.:28) agrees to this, even calling for the ‘de-biblifying’ of the public sphere.

Banana, however, uses rather strong words and recommendations when suggesting the re-writing. It has the potential of challenging the grain and fibre of the biblical texts. The suggestion of re-writing seeks to totally dismantle the essence of the Bible. However, editing, or re-translation and correcting what is misinterpreted, as Idowu (1965:16–17) proposes, falls within an acceptable scope of corrections.¹⁶ Re-writing will culminate in a new document; “another Bible” one could say, marking the very distant relationship traditional Africans have with the Bible.

In this context, Bible-centredness is therefore not an arbitrary belief or literal interpretation of the Bible that locks out personal interpretation and adaptation of the biblical text to everyday life issues. On the contrary, it is the belief in the authority of and inspiration by God that attach to the scriptures themselves. Of course, others such as Sam Harris (2004), Christopher Hitchens (2007), and Richard Dawkins (2006), find it prudent to ridicule Bible-centredness on the basis that it lacks depth and revelation. They dismiss those who pursue it as shallow Christians who take no further or primary instruction from creeds, confessions, and commentaries. However, the Bible is not yesterday’s book, it has shaped societies and nations for centuries. It is imperative therefore that traditional Africans appreciate and develop “an unshakeable trust in God’s inerrant, infallible Bible, rightly interpreted” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:26).

Watson (2020:2) notes that Bible-centredness itself has been denigrated to such an extent that a biblical theologian is tagged as “someone who uses only the Bible for [their] authority and source of knowledge” and blindly holds to it to guide them in every situation they encounter. This view is disappointing given that many biblical theologians consult widely and in other religions as well to find a system that works for humanity at large. However, knowing that the Bible is God’s final word and authority, proposals by Gunda (n.d.:27–8) and Banana (1993) to have the Bible removed from the public sphere or rewritten, can only deprive

¹⁶ The above argument – of corrections to the Bible – holds true given Mbiti’s translation of the New Testament from Greek to Kikamba (Mbaya & Gezula, 2019:434-440). In this process, he noticed over a 1000 errors that had to be corrected. While we cannot detail all these errors here, it is important to note that what became of the translated Bible in 2007, was a book that kept in line with the grain and fibre of the Bible, yet with necessary corrections as permissible. The message was not lost, but amplified to resonate with the local people.

humanity of what God has intended for them as his image. Efforts by African scholars such as Mbiti (translation into Kikamba) and Samuel Gimnyige (translation into Nandi),¹⁷ who followed on the steps of Tertullian, Origen and others, to interpret and translate the Bible to make it available as a resource for Africans to engage with must therefore be commended. The interpretation of the Bible thus remains central if it is to play any meaningful role in the public sphere in the African landscape.

Therefore, by Bible-centredness we mean “a method of personal Bible study that rejects pre-conceived systematic theologies in order to *understand Scripture on its own terms*” (Howard, 2022, emphasis mine). The blueprint must hold within the context intended, otherwise this process or method is opened up to abuse by those who harbour nefarious intentions concerning the Bible – like Scientologists, atheists, Mormons, Muslims and others who are opposed to the Bible. Politicians and the powerful, as Gunda (n.d.) laments, have also used the Bible to legitimise their misrule and corruption at the expense of the poor. However, for an African, this is an opportunity to engage with the Bible in its “original state”, thereby speaking directly to the proposition of Edward Blyden: “The Bible will be our textbook, the Bible without note or comment” (Blyden, 1994:20–26).

Adamo (2015), Gatti (2017), Mbuvi (2017), Oduyoye (1995), and Mburu (2019) are among the advocates of a focus on hermeneutics and exegesis of the Bible, insisting on an “African hermeneutics” that reflects the African situation. The above enhances and embeds the position of Christ as Lord and saviour in African spaces, thereby illuminating his lordship. As long as African theology and ATR hold the Bible in suspicion, the concept of the lordship of Christ in Africa will never be entrenched for the benefit of Africans as intended by God himself.

2.4.2. Conversion

Conversion is one aspect that is greatly opposed in the African worldview. The common view is that Christianity is trying to uproot people from their religions when the two can co-exist. Maluleke (1998:12) shares that he was once asked: “Why do we continue to seek to convert to Christianity the devotees of African traditional religion?” Oduyoye (1995:83) also submits that “becoming Christian was presented as ceasing to be fully African”. Sadly, past conversion efforts were not only limited to matters of the soul or spirit, it went further to the way of life, systems, and processes that were central to the lives of traditional Africans before the arrival of the Western missionary enterprise.

Muya (2023:2–16) details the contact of the Agĩkũyũ of Kenya with the colonisers and missionaries in the pre-colonial period. Of importance, he finds that during this interaction, the

¹⁷ Gehman, (1987:27-28)

colonisers and missionaries sought to convert African ways of doing things, including leadership styles and systems and cultural values that colonisers devalued. They also sought to change the concept of God, as well as religious, education and health systems. This exchange by Muya paints a clear picture of how far the missionaries and the colonisers sought to obliterate everything African to impose the systems that they regarded to be the correct way of life.

The colonisers and missionaries gifted us two problems: a resistance to migration from African traditional religions; and the start of efforts aimed to assert African traditional religions on equal footing with Christianity. On the one hand, conversion from one to the other is resisted, while on the other, equality of *religions* is sought by those who feel that theirs is ill represented. With these positions entrenched, it is no wonder that some of the African scholars take umbrage with how Christianity not only ridiculed their religion, but also attempted to move them away from it. The first and most important argument by Africans in general, and ATR adherents in particular, is that their Africanism is their identity, and to ask them to adopt a foreign religion fashioned after a particular culture is to essentially ask them to cease to exist.

Many authors are vocal in expressing how they feel about these propositions from the Christian fold (Mbiti, 1969, Maimela, 1985; Bediako, 1995; Damuah, 1983; Brand, 1999). Still, a balanced voice comes from the All-Africa Churches Conference of 1962 (WCC, 1962:12), which stated the following:

An uncritical acceptance of the theology developed in the West, and an equally uncritical rejection of anything different from it, are both signs of theological immaturity and intellectual irresponsibility in Christian obedience – obedience to the Gospel within context of a given, concrete, social situation.

What the conference did was to caution the missionary enterprise and the colonial systems of the time about the fact that Africa has adopted a posture that would not receive everything without question. This means that anything put before it would be the subject of interrogation, and Africa will reject all that is found to be lacking in substance. Gallina (1969:14) interpreted this to mean “an African re-interpretation of the faith, and the attempt to find an African theology”.

Mbiti, Idowu, Pobee, and Setiloane were among the first groundbreakers of African theology whose advocacy sought to bring *indigenised* theology to the fore. They elucidated the shortcomings of the Westernised theology which had failed to satisfy Africans, not because Africans could not grasp matters pertaining to the spirit and God. But it was largely because their being (Africanism) was under attack and they were categorised as “inferior beings below the line of a human” (Grosfogel in Punt, 2023:83). This grants credence to Oduyoye (1995:88)

and Awolalu (1976b:2), who advance that Africans did not bow to wood and stone, but to the God of heaven, who is the essence of their ancient religious expression.

Mdingi (2023) is scathing of the views from the Western world, even suggesting that their behaviour exhibit that of a people who do not know God. Of the missionary enterprise of the past, he says that “it is a theological bias” and “a rejection of God” (Mdingi, 2023:71). He concludes that Western theology is not theology or the message of the gospel, but oppression with a quasi-theological twist (Mdingi, 2023:71).

Clearly, the list is long of African scholars, and Westerners alike, who rejected outright the practices of the colonialists and the missionaries on many fronts. It is understandable that traditional Africans would find it difficult to even think of converting to the same *religion* that essentially dimmed their light. Nonetheless, the concept of conversion is not the trademark of the West, nor is it exclusively biased toward the missionary enterprise. Conversion is an idea that emerges from the Bible and that is interlinked with the word *repent* (Lk., 24:47; Acts. 3:19, and elsewhere). It seeks to turn humanity away from sin towards God and his salvation offer. Mdingi (2023) thus opens a door for Africans, even those whose faith is rooted in traditional religion, to convert to Christianity by dismantling the notion that Western missionaries knew God more than Africans.

Conversion, it appears, is not a concept that only describes a change of allegiance in one's faith standing, it is used in various motifs to present the idea of a person moving from one thing to another (Morrison 1992). However, theologically, conversion refers to a profound change or turn in a person's life, especially their spiritual and moral life. This is measured through a process during which a person turns away from sin or previous beliefs and embraces faith in God. Conversion refers to the belief that lives should be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus and embracing his gospel (Mt. 28:19–20). Conversion thus speaks to the transformation of a person in terms of spiritual life, faith life, or salvation life.

On the other hand, in Africa, scholars have advanced materialist and instrumental explanations of Christian conversion. Engelke (2004:82–109) explains that Africans convert not out of conviction of the gospel but to achieve other ends, mainly temporal, such as wealth, power, health, and such benefits. This is partially because traditional Africans see their greatest need as the manipulation of the forces (Maimela, 1985:68–69) that bring them distress. Here, conversion to the Christian religion is not well received because Christ is seen as inadequate to deal with such issues (Banda, 2005:1).

When conversion that is premised on Christ fails to yield the desired results, it becomes difficult to keep even the converted in the Christian religion, let alone bringing new converts into the fold. For this reason, Okot p'Bitek responds that “many African Christians continue to practice their inherited religion alongside Christianity” (cited in Udoh, 1983:19) while Magezi (2016:4–14) submits that African Christians often revert to their traditional beliefs because of the perceived inadequacy of Christianity. It is patently clear that conversion will take hold in African theology and Christianity if people experience that Christ responds to their needs. However, given this context, the proposition of conversion to Christianity will always be met with resistance.

2.4.3. Evangelical activism

Evangelical activism in the context that we are dealing with here (Mt. 28:19; 2 Tm. 4:1–2, 6–8), makes for active participants in the spreading of the gospel message and the defence of the Bible. This view aligns with Bebbington’s understanding, which advocates for the centrality of biblical authority (Bebbington, 1989). He believes that the centrality of this authority (biblical) defines evangelical identity and serves as the foundation for evangelical activism (Bebbington, 1989). Elsewhere, he describes evangelical activism as the “tendency toward active expression and sharing of the gospel in diverse ways that include preaching and social action” (Bebbington, 1993:13). Biblical and evangelical activism is borne out of the great commission of the disciples who heard the message of Jesus when he said to them “you will be my disciples to the ends of the world.”

Flowing from the argument for evangelical activism above is the activism that seeks to align public life with biblical principles. Boaheng (2002:208) argues that “activism, from an evangelical perspective, must yield both spiritual and social ramifications”. He argues that evangelical activism rests in the desire of people to make converts for Christ after conversion (Boaheng, 2002:208). This is reflected much in advocacy for such laws that reflect biblical morality (e.g., promotion of Christianity in schools and opposition to laws that promote same-sex marriages and abortion). The belief that Scripture has authority and that it is inerrant gives much impetus to evangelical activism. This then becomes the motivation and the warrant for evangelical activism, which is deeply grounded in the idea that the Bible is the ultimate guide and touches on all human aspects, including moral, political, and social issues.

Harold (2018:21–37), looking into the regime that oppressed the masses of South Africa before democracy, finds that the church can be more active in protecting the image of God (that is, the people). He says, “...the Church must see itself as an alternative community to address through prophetic utterance and creative action and challenge issues that impinge upon the Imago Dei and dignity of being human in this present dispensation.” He intricately

ties activism to the action necessary to change the status quo. “It is not enough just to know what to do, but to do it” (Harold, 2018:23). Oduyoye (2023:140) accordingly notes the work that churches do, suggesting that “there are groups dedicated to praying, called ‘prayer warriors’ ... Others are constituted as visiting groups for various categories of sick, housebound, or incarcerated persons.” What is reflected by Oduyoye is complimented by Harold’s sentiments above.

The charge that Jesus gives to his disciples in Matthew 28 guides evangelical activism to align itself with this cause – spreading the message of personal salvation to all nations. Further, the call to do good to all (Gal. 6:10; Mt. 10:8), to care for the needy and the poor (Gal. 2:10; Mt. 19:21; Acts 20:35), to support the widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27; Is. 1:17), are but some of the calls that are at the heart of activism. Loving one’s neighbour is also a serious call founded in evangelical activism (Mk. 12:31, and elsewhere).

Love is about action that shows compassion for the distressed person – an act that Harold puts central to evangelical activism. He says that “for the church Christian practice is not seen as something we do, but rather who we are, a community of reconciliation, compassion, and love” (Harold, 2018:23). Therefore, evangelical activism is not just about social issues but also about ensuring that individuals are spiritually transformed, which is the backbone of evangelical activism. Out of love stems the belief in the need for personal conversion (Jn. 3:16), which shapes evangelical responses to societal issues by highlighting the importance of individual’s moral transformation. This is the goal of evangelical activism. It very much aligns itself with the Bible and seeks to live this out daily.

Oduyoye (2023:140) in the above quote alludes to the evangelical activism work that churches undertake and notes that this strategy or methodology is adopted from an African way of doing things. This is a positive outlook for African traditional religions, founded in the idea of Ubuntu. However, what is central to these religions is that their tradition is not open to strangers and to all, but closely revolves around the bloodline (Khotlele, 2023:96). Strangers cannot be partakers. This limitation reveals why it cannot take the shape of an evangelism, except to say that it seeks to defend its existence and ensure its survival (Damuah, 1971:8; 1983:1). Activism within ATRs takes the form of activists who defend the religion, speak for it, and overly protect it in terms of who they can let in into this religion. This is the complete opposite of Christian evangelical activism (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:805), which invites all to Christ based on the pillar of making converts.

2.4.4. The centrality of the cross

The enquiry in this segment aligns with the question asked by De Visser (2001:225): “If this message (of the cross) was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, what will it

be to Africans?” This especially in view of Dunger’s sentiment that the “African believer has problems with the death of Christ for the salvation of humanity” (in De Visser, 2001:232). It is a giveaway then that the centrality of the cross is about Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, which makes possible the redemption of humanity. It dwells on the significance of Jesus Christ's crucifixion as the central event of God's redemptive plan for humanity.

Although it is a painful episode that some may want to dismiss, it is important to note that this work on the cross was neither random nor fortuitous, it was specific and intentional. Sproul (2007:17) says, “The cross is not a tragedy or an accident; it is the essential work of God’s plan of redemption, revealing the holiness of God and the depth of His love for us.” Wright (2008:118; 2011:202) also emphasises that the work of the cross was not a tragic accident or a failure, but a necessary event in God’s salvation plan. While other religions may want to ridicule this event that has become the centre of the Bible, to Christianity it is a permanent feature that speaks of the nature and identity of believers.

It is thus a given that the work of redemption is not only about the centrality of the cross, but it is also about conformity to the cross (cruciform). Cruciformity has its focus on the cross as a symbol of sacrifice and redemption and “can be understood as embodying the likeness of Jesus, who was crucified as the Messiah” (Boaheng, 2024:478). While the centrality of the cross has to do with the type of message, added to this is the question of the conformity to the cross. It calls upon those who follow Christ to live by the way of the cross (Lk. 14:27) by ensuring that their lifestyles match that of the crucified Christ.

Bebbington’s (2003:15) summation is fundamental:

Give to the death of Christ its true place in your own experience and in your Christian work — as a witness to the real and profound evil of sin, as an overwhelming manifestation of Divine love, as the ground of acceptance with God, as a pattern of sacrifice to disturb us when life is too easy, to inspire and console us when life is hard, and as the only effectual appeal to the general heart of men, and, above all, as the Atonement for our sins.

In this way, the gospel as represented by the cross is not just news spoken without the intent of effecting change in the lives of those who hear it. It is meant to stir the hearts to accept Christ as Lord and Saviour.

It is necessary to consider De Visser’s (2001) question posed earlier: What does the cross mean to ACT? This question is relevant when noting Mugambi’s (2005:538) submission that “before the coming of Christianity the cross was not a religiously significant symbol among African communities.” While African theology is vague about its placement of the cross in its

affairs and in the salvation model and forgiveness of sins, it is apparent that traditional Africans cannot answer this question without attaching to it power, life force, or vitality. This is so because central to the African milieu is how one can manipulate the (evil) forces of life in order to live a good life. The manipulation of these forces, as alluded in the sections above, amount to salvation.

Therefore, when the cross is viewed within African circles and religion, it is only accepted as a basis of power where one weak power is replaced by a higher power. De Visser (2011:227) notes that an African's interest in Christ is aroused when they are told that this Christ "is the all-powerful King in Heaven". This interest is not abstract; it is rooted in the fears Africans have of evil forces that threaten their livelihood. It is for this reason that Banda (2005) found that Africans in general found Christ to be inadequate to deal with their problems, and when he is accepted, he becomes an addition to the numerous gods Africans have (Maluleke, 2002:162) in an effort to exercise control over the forces that trouble them. Mbiti (1975:30) coined this effect many decades ago, saying "many millions of Africans are followers of more than one religion, even if they may register or be counted as adherents of only one religion is correct". Their view to Christ, and by extension the cross, is that of power that must contribute to the pool of larger resources aimed at bettering their lives.

2.5. INTERPRETING THE CHRIST EVENT IN AFRICAN THEOLOGIES

The relationship between ACT and African traditional religions give rise to the question of the relationship that exists with Christ and his work in the African cosmology, especially in view of Bebbington's model above. The specific relationship of African traditional religions with the Bible, the cross, evangelicalism and conversion dictate how the relationship with Christ unfolds. It relates to how Christ is interpreted, and what place he is afforded in these religions. I therefore elaborate on how Christ's persona is received and interpreted.

2.5.1. Christ as Son of God

Do African evangelical theologies conform to the idea of Christ as the Son of God? This notion is most challenging given the purported long-standing relationship Africans have had with God. After much research and study, De Visser (2001:196) submits that in churches such as the ZCC and ELCSA¹⁸, the lordship of Christ is not much of a reality and is weak among the believers. It is in the Pentecostal churches¹⁹ where Christ's lordship took root and where believers express it as something real.

¹⁸ ZCC and ELCSA churches subscribe to traditional beliefs and are therefore not as committed to the idea of the lordship of Christ as the Pentecostals.

¹⁹ The Pentecostal churches today form an array of those who fully commit to the Bible, whereas there are those who subscribe to the traditional practices. This distinction must therefore be understood in terms of the

This issue, according to De Visser (2011:196), emerges because in the African traditional worldview, the idea of a “heavenly Master who rules his followers on earth...” through a relationship and a holy book, guiding them by a divine Spirit, fails to take root. The ZCC and ELCSA for example, would find this highly problematic because of their proximity to African traditional practices and the enduring reality of ancestors. Further, Desai (1962:25–26) explains that the idea of the Son being placed on equal footing with the Father is a hard-sell in ATRs, and sees ATRs relegate the son because of this sentiment.

Adamo (2011:4) finds that for Africans, “The next in rank to the Supreme Being, God, are the divinities,” and not the Son. In the triangle of authority as propagated by Parrinder (1968:99), Christ does not even appear (because he is the Son), making it clear that African traditional religions do not ascribe him power, ranking him even lower than the divinities. With respect to divinities, Idowu (1975:169–170) submits that they are considered derivatives from the deity and share in the theocratic government of the universe. The existence of these divinities and the derivation of their mandate from the deity is what marks the view of Christ in African cosmology. It causes the reluctance to accept him as God because he is just a son. Adamo (2011:4) and Rakotsoane (n.d.:9) argue that these divinities exist because of God (brought to life and created by God); are next in rank to God; are functionaries and intermediaries; they derive their power from God; and operate within the scope as permitted by God, attending to the issues of the orderly functioning of the universe.

It is clear that the view held above puts Christ outside the levers of power. It closes him out of the triangle of authority. Christ thus ranks lower than divinities and all other local gods or deities. For the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Orisa-nla is in view (Adamo, 2011:4); the Akan of Ghana reference Nyame and Asase Yaa (mother Earth) (Opokuwaa, 2005); it is Nkulunkulu for the Zulu’s and Tlatlamatjholo (Tlala-macholo) for the Sotho’s of Southern Africa (Mothoagae, 2014), among other examples. This is why Setiloane finds it comfortable to submit that Jesus Christ also has a God in Modimo, like Africans do.

Jesus Christ is therefore, viewed as “a ‘fact’, ‘phenomenon’, or ‘event’” (Setiloane, 1986:31) that has occurred, and he relies on God to attend to the affairs of the world just like ancestors do. He may be placed among the deities who also derives his existence from God, but he is not God. Christ therefore ranks lower than prominent local gods and deities. We must here qualify Awolalu’s (1976b:8) view that “African Traditional Religion is not essentially idolatrous, but it has a tendency to become so if the cult and the symbols of the divinities are so

Pentecostals who are born-again Christians. This would include churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, The Assemblies of God, and others like-minded.

emphasised as to exclude the Supreme Being”. He submits that the elevation of ancestors above Christ, or even putting him on the same par as ancestors, perpetuates idolatry.

It comes as no surprise therefore that traditional Africans are generally reluctant to accommodate Christ in their affairs since the space into which they place him is already occupied by divinities known to them. Martey (1993:78) proposes that indeed Africans “have difficulty integrating the person of Christ in their belief system” because he is foreign to African affairs (Banda, 2005), and a “Guest” in Africa (Martey, 1993). Of course, while the argument is that he does not fit into an African cosmology because he is an “intellectual or philosophical entity” as opposed to “a dynamic personal reality in all life situations” (Martey, 1993:78), it is nonetheless observed that while he is supposedly fitted into “all life situations” in Africa, he does not seem to be appropriated correctly when matters of salvation of the soul are discussed.

Mbiti (1969:99) admits that Christianity excels in this regard – providing enduring salvation – suggesting that African traditional religion and philosophy have supplied no solution. Even by admission of some of the participants surveyed by Mokhoathi (2021:8), “Jesus’s role is universal and entails the facilitation of reconciliation between God and the rest of humanity, whereas the ancestors look after the welfare of their clans or communities.” This then becomes the lament of Khotlele (2023), namely that the definition of salvation among traditional Africans does not satisfy Biblical muster. This must be viewed within the context of the death of Christ to save all humanity from their sin in order to make a home for them in the presence of God. That takes not a temporal but the transcendent view of salvation.

Since Christ is placed among or lower than the created beings and divinities answerable to God, it becomes convenient for African scholars to bestow titles such as ancestor, brother elder, liberator, etc. to Christ. I agree with De Visser (2001:229) that these attempts have been unconvincing. Although it helps ATR and ATT to drive home a narrative of their salvation, this view is highly deficient and falls short of God’s plan for humanity, which is only realised when the Christ event is analysed correctly and within biblical bounds. This view should suffice for ATT’s interpretation; whose fulcrum is ATR. However, it cannot and should not be extended to ACT, since its centre should be Christ and the Bible. ACT is a theology that is practiced in Africa and that takes its cue from the Bible and Christ.

Important to note thus is that those AICs such as the ZCC, ELCSA, AFM and AoG do acknowledge the existence of Christ. However, it is the relationship they choose to have with him that marks the difference. For those churches that are proximal to African traditional religion and practice it (e.g., ZCC, ELCSA), Christ is acknowledged but is not preferred as the

centre of their faith and worship. In some instances, their bishops and prophets are placed higher than Christ.

Sundkler (1958:3) and Njoroge (1992:136–137) have observed decades ago that AICs that are inclined to traditional practices place the church leaders as the messiah and the Moses who leads their people into the promised land. De Visser (2001:199) finds this view prevalent in the ZCC where the bishop is highly regarded as the “intermediary between God, ancestors and the people.” On the other hand, Pentecostal churches such as the AFM and AoG, amongst others, give Christ pre-eminence and he becomes central in worship, even influencing their way of life (Anderson, 1992; De Visser, 2001).

2.5.2. Christ as King

The idea of king is prevalent in ATR and thus finds expression with ease in ATT and ACT. Since traditional Africans easily relate to kings as royals that live in their spaces, they are able to appropriate the position of Jesus Christ as king who sides with them. De Visser (2001:223) submits that the kingship of Jesus Christ in African thoughtforms is tied to the concept of universality, where Christ rules over every situation and takes on the leadership role as liberator and protector in instances of danger. He duly notes that the presence of rulers like chiefs and kings who were seen as lords supports a possible link for the African cosmology to adopt Christ’s kingship (De Visser, 2001:230).

A number of views emerge when African scholars discuss the kingship model. For instance, Mbiti (1969:81; 1972:59) submits that in traditional Africa, kings are seen as lords, averring that links could be drawn to develop the thought of the lordship of Christ. Nyamiti (1992:18) follows suit, arguing that African chieftainship is similar to Christ’s kingship. It carries the idea of everlasting permanence. This may result in further expressions in theological spaces through the “chief model”. Manus (1993) also views the kingship Christology as relevant to addressing the African problem of Christ, and Kabasele (1992:103–105) proposes the chieftainship model because his compatriots in the Congo had attributed the title of chief to Christ.

Sawyerr (1968) and Pobee (1979), however, stand opposed to this idea because colonial rule and then independence had weakened the chieftainship, meaning that adaptation efforts may be flawed. They further found that unlike Christ, the tribal chiefs are too distant from an ordinary person and they do not have absolute power because of human limitations.

The challenge with wanting to translate Christ’s kingship into African thoughtforms in order for him to be adaptable to an African worldview certainly lies in adaptation itself. At best, what some scholars attempt to do is to explain Christ within the context of ATRs and their way of

life. However, Christ's appearance and scope of operation is entirely different from worldly kings, as we know. It is the divinity placed upon him as the anointed Son of God that secedes him from the rest. We can therefore not fully grasp his power and abilities if in our minds we seek to explain him through a worldly model that is highly deficient. It is deficient because its kingship is limited, its scope is different, and its goal is misaligned.

De Visser's (2001:237) view that "the Lordship of Christ can only prosper in the context of Biblical concept of God and a Biblical concept of salvation" is thus true and seeks to pin the Bible to itself and nothing else. It seeks to shield external influences that endeavour to make the Bible conform to their standard. This is evident in various propositions that seek to explain the Christ event specifically outside the parameters of what is allowed for in the Bible. It is for this reason that I concur with Sawyerr and Pobee that the chieftainship model as proposed by some scholars, fails to satisfy Scripture and thus should not be pursued in that context.

2.5.3. Christ as Saviour

The idea of Christ as saviour or messiah did not make the greatest of impression on the African worldview. This is because he is viewed as concerned with the transcendent salvation or deliverance as opposed to the temporal matters that affect people here and now. Various scholars have raised the apprehensions of Africans with regard to Christ, recorded especially by Pobee (1979), Bediako (2004), Banda (2005), Nyamiti (2006), amongst others. Here, apprehensions about security, evil forces, salvation, and protection, amongst other things, arise as a result of his perceived inadequacy. This gives rise to a situation where converts or Christians revert to their traditional religions, if not mixing the two together to give themselves a "double layer of security" (Okot p'Bitek, in Udoh 1983:19; Magezi 2016:14; Maluleke, 2002:162).

However, it is authors such as Blyden (1994), Banda (2005), and Magezi (2016) who vociferously contest the issue of inadequacy on the grounds that this stems from how missionaries opted to present the gospel to Africans. Blyden (1994) notes that this gospel had superstitions and idiosyncrasies that oppressed its purity. Thomas (1971:282) postulates that their gospel was engineered to deliver a weak Jesus for Africans and a strong, powerful, and dominant Christ for the white race. Mdingi (2017) even asserts that Western missiological enterprise delivered a dead and mummified God to an African. Mbiti (1969), Setiloane (1976), Pobee (1979), and Oduyoye (1995; 2024) all label the missionaries gospel in the early 20th century as suspect, denigrating, and eroding all of African culture and systems in favour of Western dominance.

The introduction of Christ in what is termed AICs thus proves a daunting task. This is visible in that some of these churches, instead of correcting the inaccuracies presented as part of the

compromised gospel, opted to completely relegate Christ to obscurity. This is more like throwing the baby out with the bath water, a practice highly discouraged by Khotlele (2023). This phenomenon resulted in churches like the ZCC elevating their bishop above the status of Christ. Sundkler (1958:3) observes this practice in some AICs, with De Visser (2001:199) noting that in the ZCC, the bishop is highly regarded as the intermediary between God, ancestors, and the people.

With regard to the titles of Saviour, Messiah, and Redeemer as used in the Bible, it is discernible that these are universal terms in their use and intent. For instance, Van der Walt (2007:78) notes that the “Messiah was to be for all the people, promised first of all to Israel, then to the nations” (Is. 42:1 & 6; Ps. 117). Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:805) surmise that in Psalm 117, what God was doing with Israel was essentially for the destiny of all people. This dominant biblical view is also asserted in passages such as John 3:16: “For God so loved *the world* that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever shall believe in him, shall have everlasting life.” Other notable biblical texts include Isaiah 9:6, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Corinthians 5:19, and Hebrews 9:12. The universality is rooted in the fact that all humanity is invited to Christ’s salvation offer. This view should compel all religions and traditions to the realisation that God is one and meets his people through Jesus Christ his Son.

2.5.4. The authority of Christ

People often respond to authority only when the one who exercises it over them is able to bring about positive changes in their lives. There is no doubt that the name that one attaches to Jesus Christ (the identity they give to him) would certainly be a measure of the level of authority he has in one’s life. When people assume one to be powerful and impactful in their lives, they often ascribe honorariums or titles that speak of the impact in their lives. Traditional Africans, in particular, are no strangers to naming things according to how they affect them.

Accordingly, Africans have opted to bestow upon Christ titles such as “Great Ancestor, powerful Leader or Chief and Healer” (Beyers & Mphahlele, 2009). Beyers and Mphahlele (2009:3) note:

It is not difficult to call him Great Ancestor, powerful Leader and Healer because their culture and belief help them to accept him in this way. This is how he has revealed himself to them. This is who he is to them.

De Visser (20001:197) makes an interesting observation that the differences noticeable between the ZCC, the ELCSA and the Pentecostal churches prove why it is impossible to simultaneously serve two masters. The inclination of the ZCC and ELCSA to observe traditional practices reveals a weaker reality of the lordship of Christ, whereas in the

Pentecostal churches, where there is an absence of worship or service of ancestors, the reality of the lordship of Christ is much stronger. Effectively, one can submit that in the churches where traditional practices are prevalent, Christ enjoys little to no authority, whereas where the Bible is viewed as supreme, he is more authoritative.

This reveals that the African traditional practices compromise the reality of Christ's authority and thereby compromise the role he can play as Lord and Saviour in their lives. Rakotsoane (n.d.:10) even finds that "...there is no urgent need to call upon God or the Supreme Being for traditional Africans as long as they have their ancestors or divinities around." The attempts to explain him in terms relatable to Africans follow, and they do little to elevate his authority. It only serves to make the thought of his presence amongst known powers (or ancestors) tolerable to traditional Africans and to create an illusion that he also sides with them in their existential fights (Mokhoathi, 2021:8–9).

While it can be good to explain him in this way to make him relatable, there is a lurking danger of going outside the Biblical bounds and infusing into Christianity what is not there. The problem with this approach is that in trying to prove that Christianity has no connections with the Western culture, concerted efforts are made to make Christianity African (Mokhoathi, 2021:1–11). In fact, what should be pressed for is understanding Christianity purely – away from Western and African connotations or influences. If this is done, there will be no need to call Christ many other names that are not mentioned in the Bible. His authority, therefore, would rest on the fact that He was, and still is, elected by God to be the ransom for the sins of humanity in order for reconciliation with God.

2.5.5. Conversion and submission to the lordship of Christ

Conversion and submission cannot be spoken of independently from what has been said above. The question of conversion rests on what and how the person or thing a person is converting to can help them. Further, the question of submission rests on the fact that whatever I am moving into, by virtue of its power, will compel me to submit in order for it to assume efficient control over my life.

However, conversion is frowned upon in African traditional religion. Maluleke (1998:12) was confronted with this issue when he was asked why it is the business of Christianity to seek to convert other religions into it. In essence, the rhetoric simply protests the conversion, seeking to keep Africans in their religion and culture, given that Christianity is viewed as a white man's religion and inadequate to attend to African affairs.

Yet, while this issue is uncomfortable, De Visser (2001:209) raises an important point by saying that the African worldview is inclined to a relationship with a "victor-type King" as

opposed to a “crucified King”. The *Christus victor* analogy is one that pushes Africans to look for a Christ who will solve their temporal or existential issues. When this (*Christus victor*) is the main motivation for seeking to relate to him, conversion is often not triggered because many powers operate in this space, all of which can offer these solutions. Rakotsoane (n.d.:10) points out that there is no urgency on the part of African traditional religion adherents to call on God. Since their problems do not exclusively rest on Christ for solution, his significance diminishes, and other powers/ divinities emerge. Conversion, therefore, especially in the African cosmology, becomes moot.

However, if the *Christus crucis* model should find expression in the African worldview, Christ would operate in this realm as the only authority and solution to the problem, not only of Africans, but of humanity in general. This is why there is the lament that salvation is deficiently interpreted in the African worldview as it does not consider all aspects of salvation. If Christ is viewed in this manner – as the only power that can provide lasting salvation – then traditional Africans in their religions and cultures would be agitated enough to embrace Christ as Lord and Saviour because in no other place can they find such salvation. A few concessions have been made already that “in African religion there is no solution for bridging the gap between humanity and God” (De Visser, 2001:205), and only Christ offers salvation of the soul (Mbiti, 1969).

In essence, *Christus victor*²⁰ and *Christus crucis*²¹ are equally important in matters of salvation. This is because the this-worldly (temporal) concept of salvation is somewhat in sync with the *Christus victor* model and answers the African worldview concerns as it provides salvation for the here and now. On the other hand, the other-worldly (transcendent) salvation concept generally takes after *Christus crucis*, which places salvation in the afterlife and speaks to the idea of salvation for Christianity. Yet it is important to acknowledge the need for a holistic and balanced view of salvation. This is notwithstanding the fact underscored by Marshall (cited in De Visser, 2001:208) and Meiring (2005:86) that people need to realise that the major need of humanity is reconciliation with God. Thus, without embarking on a lengthy discussion, we need to mention that it is the same God who promises good life and prosperity to those who put their trust in him (Jer. 29:11, Mt. 6:33).

This makes the question of submission in the African worldview rather obscure, especially in view of the African relationship with ancestors. One wonders whether the rituals that traditional Africans offer to ancestors is about submission, because in offering sacrifices and veneration,

²⁰ *Christus victor*, simply viewed, concerns itself with Christ's victory over evil, an aspect that resonates strongly with African religion given its intention to overcome or manipulate evil forces to their favour.

²¹ *Christus crucis*, on the other hand, is a concept that is more at home with Christ's work on the cross, and by extension, resonates with classical Christian concept of atonement.

the question of total obedience to ancestors hardly arises. This begs the question whether the concept of submission is understood in African theology, especially given the possibility that syncretism may be at play. This creates a space for artificial submission only when subjects require assistance – hence the easy acceptance of the *Christus victor* model. Still, ATR seems to express the relationship with ancestors based on transaction. The ancestor provides for the beneficiary, who offers submission at those specific points in their life when aid is required.

However, Christ is different, especially considering the *Christus crucis* model where submission to the cross is central. De Visser (2011:209) acknowledges that this model compels those who follow it to accept that Christ had to be crucified because of our sins. Ultimately, what he requires is not a relationship that is broken down in intervals or periods as the need arises. He requires deep devotion, total surrender and submission so that he takes over the life of the believer. This results in constant submission on the part of the beneficiary, and constant response of aid on the part of the benefactor.

It is for this reason that Christianity requires constant submission and reverence of the Lord Jesus Christ. “This is irrelevant as well as annoying to both traditional African religion and modern Western secularism” (De Visser, 2001:09). The *Christus crucis* concept is therefore superficial in the African worldview, and it is evident from the syncretic relationships that are at play as a result of the adoption of the *Christus victor* concept of salvation.

2.6. THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

Khotlele (2023:35) observes that adherents of ATR offer blood sacrifices for many reasons, but mainly revitalisation and vital force. It is claimed that these sacrifices deliver reconciliation. Importantly, adherents to the rituals performed by Africans surmise that their practice of sacrifices is in no way different to the OT practices (Bediako, 1995:69), which then gives credence to practicing ATT with traces of ATR.

Much as the OT contains similar rituals, it is important to acknowledge that this practice is not acceptable in today's Christian life. God stands opposed to any form of sacrifice intended for forgiveness of sins, except the one and final sacrifice (Heb. 10) he made through Christ. However, the challenge is how sacrifices are understood in Christian spaces and how this links up with the African worldview. I have made the point that African sacrifices are limited in terms of power (Khotlele, 2023), especially as they relate to salvation of the soul. However, it is important not to discount the views of some scholars, with proof, that these sacrifices provide healing to the sick, bestow power to sangomas, revitalise lives, provide propitiatory action, cleanses, and provide space for communion with ancestors (Theron, 1996; Ubruhe, 1996; Mvunamandi, 2008; Mensele, 2011).

The above forms the basis for how ATT and by extension ACT chooses to view Christ's sacrifice and the power derived from the cross as a result of that sacrifice. To an extent, it also presents a case for how that sacrifice affects African lives.

2.6.1. Christ's atoning death and its significance

It is common knowledge that Christ stands as the mediator of all times by virtue of the sinless sacrifice he offered on the cross for all humanity. The ideal, and what the Bible desires, is to see all of humanity saved. This is on the strength that the work that was done by Christ is final and complete (Olowola, 1993:59) and has the necessary power to save the entire human race should they ask God for his forgiveness. In spite of this wonderful news of the gospel, Amanze (2003:57; 1994:273) submits that many Africans, especially those found in AICs who profess to be Christians, still offer sacrifices to the ancestors. The practice is supported by the belief that ancestors stand as intermediaries between the God and the living (Rakotsoane, n.d.:9; Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:73–114; Mokhoathi, 2021:1–11). By extension, ancestors stand as those who possess answers to situations that overwhelm people in their lives.

But we cannot discount Olowola's (1993:57) view that individuals who perform these rituals have a shallow grasp of Christianity, failing dismally to comprehend the significance of Christ's sacrifice. The adoption of the position that ancestors and Christ can be put on the same footing with regard to sacrificial work fails to see the significance of Christ's sacrifice. To this end, the sacrifice of Christ comes down to nothing for traditional Africans, and this is merely by virtue of the perceived inadequacy in the world of distributed cosmic powers.

However, one must admit that the question of inadequacy is misguided given that what Africans generally wish to address with sacrifices is entirely different from what God sets out to achieve with the sacrifice of Christ. God's view still holds even when the OT is brought into view to pacify this point. For instance, while ATT and by extension ATR, would seek wealth and health, protection and power, manipulation of forces and overcoming evil, the sacrifice of Christ is intended to "save humanity from their sin". These differences suggest that when the sacrifice of Christ is in fact sufficient to provide salvation to all humanity, even his sacrifice appears to be deficient because of the understanding of Africans of what salvation is.

These are the effects of not fully grasping the salvation that is in Christ's sacrifice. Even when the sacrifices of the OT were made, they never carried a promise of blessings and good life. Bae and Van der Merwe (2008:167) make this point that "irrespective of what the Israelites may have thought of sacrifice, the prophets of the Old Testament consistently warned that Israel should not expect blessings because of their numerous sacrifices." They point out that sacrifice was meant to grow devotion, worship, and religion. Ironically, we have seen that ATR and ATT do not necessarily require or compel such elements as devotion and worship –

adherents are not held down to a set of principles to live by on a daily basis. Unlike in Christianity where conformance to the cross is central, adherents to ATT and ATR show those acts of piety and obedience only at the time when help is sought (Boaheng, 2024:478).

The uses and benefits of sacrifices in the OT are clear. VanGemerén (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:609–612) understands offerings and sacrifices to be “the heart of redemptive history” – therefore atonement.²² The use of offerings and sacrifices explains VanGemerén’s understanding of this important aspect. On the one hand, an offering is about the gift being brought, and on the other hand the sacrifice speaks to how the gift is brought. There were three categories of offerings that stood as sacrifices: the sin offering, the guilt offering, and the burnt offering (VanGemerén, 2017:609). These three offerings were important for atonement or salvific purposes.

Within the scope of propitiatory offerings, we find the sin offering and guilt offering (VanGemerén, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:610). These sacrifices were expiatory in nature and were meant to reset the relationship between God and the living, who would have become ritually unclean or would have sinned. The guilt offering would be observed in cases where a person had to pay damages or a fine, thus making restitution either to God or the person they sinned against. However, closely linked to propitiatory offerings were dedicatory offerings. VanGemerén states that these were intended to presuppose expiatory (propitiatory) offerings. Africans traditionalists still hold to this view about sacrifices²³ – it is reset of the relationship between God and fellow humans, ritual cleansing, and as means to pay damages (*ho hlaodisa*),²⁴ among other things.

VanGemerén (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:611) finds that both these offerings (sin and burnt offerings) were meant to assure worshippers that before they can “fully devote themselves to the Lord, (symbolised by the burnt offering), they must know that their sins have been atoned for (symbolised by the sin offering).” This understanding is well represented in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. Jewett (in Treier & Elwell, 774) and Moseley (in Davie *et al.*, 2016:798–9) submit that Christ’s death was indeed a sacrifice in every sense, and they stress that sacrifice is propitiatory in character and is meant to appease God’s wrath by removing guilt through substitutionary bearing of the penalty.

²² For details on the atonement and its extent, see Davie *et al.* (2016:7781), Treier and Elwell (2017:96–101), Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:159–160), and Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:422–423; 686; 778–779).

²³ In his 2011 dissertation, “A study of rituals performed in at two sacred sites in the Eastern Free State,” Mensele lists some of the key sacrifices performed by African traditionalists and their uses. These include healing, thanksgiving, invocation, protection/cleansing/purification, ancestral summon, and prayer rituals.

²⁴ The word “*ho hlaodisa*” is a Sotho word that means to pay. It is often used when one family has to pay a price to another, especially in instances where a boy has impregnated a girl. When this has been done, families can interact without animosity due to the boy’s actions with the girl. This practice is still in use today.

Without being expansive, Jewett correctly notes that the ceremonial ritual (of the OT sacrifices) is transferred in the NT to Christ's work. This has serious implications for African traditionalists who do not want to embrace the NT, because the weight with which God had deposited himself in the sacrifices of the OT has been transferred to the one true sacrifice – Jesus Christ. Clearly, this leaves them holding onto shadows when they could be looking unto Christ, who is the final sacrifice of God. One can therefore not discount the importance of the sacrifice of Christ, which is central to the atonement. The benefits that accrue from this sacrifice are obvious, but chief among them is reconciliation with God and salvation of the soul (Russel, in Davie *et al.*, 2016:79).

It is clear from the above that the practice of bringing sacrifices in African traditional religions, while taking after the OT (burnt offerings, animal slaughtering, libations, etc.), have run their course, because all the powers they represented, especially with regard to reconciliation to God, have been transferred to Christ. Jewett (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:774) argues that for this reason, Christ is correctly called the Lamb of God. Accordingly, Jewett submits (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:774) that satisfaction “embraces in its connotation all the major categories used in the scriptures to describe the meaning of Christ's atoning work as it relates to both God and the sinner”.

In spite of this evidence, however, it is clear that ATR and ATT do not prefer the above disposition in relation to Christ's sacrifice. Christ is in the main dismissed as powerless and thus unable to intervene in matters pressing to them. His death does not atone because it does not deliver from the temporal pressures. Here then, the view of African traditionalists and adherents alike must be transformed so that Christ is seen for who he is in order for the salvation of the soul to manifest.

2.6.2. The power of the cross against sin

We cannot speak of the power of the cross as separate from the power of the sacrifice of Christ. The preceding segment has demonstrated that the sacrifice of Christ, especially in the ATR and ATT, is rendered powerless and thus insignificant.

The teaching that the cross breaks the power of sin is not dominant in African cosmology. Mbiti's (1969:99, 206) thoughts on the absence of sin in Africans, the trivialisation of reconciliation, the interpretation of sin as breakdown of relationships between equals, does much more to trivialise the power of the cross. If the cross of Christ has to be powerful, especially within the African worldview, it should be able to have significance and power to address issues such as sin, reconciliation, and forgiveness. However, in the African worldview, this view is highly compromised.

Dierks (cited in De Visser, 2001:74), Bediako (2004:25; 2000:26) and Maimela (1985:69) argue that Africans solve sin among themselves based on the view of sin as something that is committed primarily against the community or equals. The solving of sin at this level plays a crucial role in diminishing Christ's message of forgiveness of sins, thereby having a direct impact on the view of His cross.

Equally important is the characterisation of Christ as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29; Rv. 12:11; Rv. 17:14) who dies at the cross for the forgiveness of sins. At the cross, the Messiah dies. This thought, however, fails to resonate in the African traditional religious space. The one who dies on the cross is not considered the saviour because for Africans, a saviour is synonymous with dominant and powerful characters, not the lamb, which is viewed as meek and powerless. It is of course known that while Jesus is in other instances depicted as the Lion and the Mighty One (Rv. 5:5, 1 Cor. 1:24–28; Eph. 6:10), when the theology of the cross is in view, he is the Lamb of God – an analogy which fails to resonate with African traditional spaces.

Since we have alluded to the fact that African theologies seem to align with *Christus victor* model earlier on, one would assume that it is a contradiction when we say that traditional Africans do not recognise Christ, yet they recognise him elsewhere as a victor. De Visser (2001) provides clarity. He explains that when Christ is celebrated as victor and a figure who can help traditional Africans in their need, his person is not necessarily the subject, but his work. This means that He himself is forgotten as King, and only the fruits of his work are enjoyed by those who attach themselves to his *Christus victor* status. Daneel (1987:258) prefers to term it “victory theology” instead of *Christus victor*. By implication, therefore, De Visser (2001:211) submits: “...it is like a king who has won a war, but when the war has been won, his subjects enjoy the victory and the king himself is forgotten.”

While the Bible gives a full account of the life and times of Christ even beyond the cross event, ATR and ATT do not press hard on the issue. To them, Christ is no more alive than their ancestors, and a “god” who comes to earth to live amongst the people is a powerless god. Christ's image, therefore, as presented biblically, seems to not speak to the power to which African traditionalists aspire. Thomas (1971:282) indeed finds fault with the gospel as it was presented by missionaries in that they presented a meek and mild Jesus to Africans, whereas to the Westerners he was dominant and strong in all respects. If these images and pictures are not corrected, the power of the cross will remain just a myth to African traditionalists.

2.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to examine the content of the message that pervades African churches and the AICs especially. As the study attempted this, the make-up of ACT came under scrutiny. The study found a link between ATR, ATT, and ACT. It was noted that ATR is

the fulcrum of ATT, which is the greatest influence on ACT. The result is a Christian theology that permeates AICs that differs from one church to another. Some AICs are ancestor-centric in their outlook, whereas others are Christo-centric. This presents varied gospel messages to the African milieu. This alone compels us to set aside these theologies on the definition and content of salvation, and warrants that the Bible be put at the centre.

On investigating the content of the message these churches offer, it became evident that this could not be done without looking into the ATR and what it does for ATT and ACT. In testing the congruence of the ATR message with Christianity, central concepts related to soteriology were interrogated, including sin, sacrifice, lordship, and the nature of salvation itself. The findings reveal that ATR and those churches that subscribe to ancestor-centric views are distant from the lordship of Christ and his salvation proposal. However, those AICs that subscribe to Christo-centric views, especially the Pentecostals, embrace the salvation that is rooted in Christ and appreciate his lordship.

In testing these religions and theologies against Bebbington's quadrilateral model, they were found lacking, implying that all that Christ canvassed for his church is thus lacking in ATR and ATT. What is found is that ATR and ATT do not prefer a relationship with the current Bible – at least the NT, often subjecting it to onslaught, suggesting that it be re-written, and at times rejecting it as a foreign book. This compromises evangelicalism, the centrality of the cross, and in what context conversion should unfold. This is a mark of the distance that exists between ATR, ATT and Christianity as preferred in African traditional and evangelical churches.

Ultimately, the gospel that is preached in a myriad of African evangelical churches presents a mix of ideologies which on the one hand supports the Bible, while on the other hand it rejects it – a situation which obscures the lordship of Christ in the African milieu. We thus have to conclude by agreeing with Idowu (1965:13): "This point about the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ and total, undivided allegiance to Him, cost what it may, needs to be emphasized." This is the intention of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: TOWARDS AN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY: RESPECTING SCRIPTURE WHILE ENGAGING AFRICAN CONTEXTS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Having observed the content of the gospel that is preached in African evangelical churches, and how closely it aligns with ATR and African theology in general, it is important to craft here a Christology for an African that is faithful to the Bible without disparaging the African culture. There have been frequent appeals to consider a Christology that is sympathetic to the African plight, and often Christology or the Bible finds itself having to trail African culture when the opposite should be the case if true Christology is to take root in Africa. In this chapter I engage with Christology according to the Bible to find ways to propose an African Christology that aligns with biblical Christology. This will provide a more credible answer to the question of the lordship of Christ in the African milieu.

3.1.1. Methodology

This chapter is important for three things – it provides the survey of the history of Christology in Africa; it engages the christological debate that is ongoing; it sets Christ at the centre of the debate from Christianity's perspective, thereby attempting to solve the problem; and concludes by charting what is termed a path of salvation.

To achieve this task, I employ a dogmatic-theological methodology grounded in an analytic–synthetic approach as contemplated by Asumang (2023:6). Analytically, existing African Christological models are examined and evaluated according to their fidelity to Scripture (Majawa, 2020:1), coherence with historic Christian doctrine, and their ability to address African existential realities without collapsing Christ into culturally derived categories of ancestor, healer, or liberator (as has been discussed in various publications by authors such as Nyamiti, Mbiti, Bediako, Pobee, Kato, and others). Moving away from this long held adaptations is deliberate because it has been evident that explaining him in this way obscures his identity and work (Khotlele, 2023:30). Sources (such as the above scholars) are selected on the basis of their prominence within African Christological discourse, theological influence, and relevance to soteriology. Synthetically, the study constructs a salvation path that remains biblically normative while meaningfully engaging African contexts and concerns.

3.2. BACKGROUND TO THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

The subject of Christology in Africa is complex. This is because when Christology is discussed in Africa, the focus is not only dominated by the person of Christ as in classical Christology, but by other entities which proliferate the African milieu. Atansi, Lewis and Stinton (2010) submit that when it is referred to as “Christology,” the focus is more on the study of Christ and

the experiences they had with him in the context of the bible. However, when the plural of “christologies” is used, which is the case for African cosmology, the focus is more on “the multiple expressions of Jesus’ identity and significance..., as believers reflect on Christ in the light of biblical revelation and their own particular situation, including culture, worldview, and experience.” Donkor (2016:7) concurs, averring that the gospel is proclaimed and received by people in varied contexts and situations, thereby leading to different interpretations and adaptations.

Christie (2005:17) submits that postmodernity was a challenge to classical Christology in that inculturated and contextual christologies challenged the core of the message of the bible as previously understood and accepted. African Christologies therefore emerged, offering reflections on Jesus Christ which are shaped by the historical, religious, cultural, and social realities of Africans (Atansi *et al.*, 2010; Christie, 2005:17). Stinton (2001:94) further submits that “African theology is commonly introduced according to two main trends which emerged from the late 1950s to the late 1980s: “African” or “inculturation” theology, and “Black” or “liberation” theology.”

Many scholars agree with this analysis (Magezi & Igba, 2018; Adam and Bofo, 2022; Donkor, 2016; Christie, 2005). In the main, two strands develop: contextualisation and inculturation. These christologies seek to secede themselves from Western, Eurocentric interpretation of the Christ event. In this way, they attempt to focus on the relevance of Jesus in light of the African worldview, social struggles, and spiritual needs of the people of the continent. Among the many African christologies known, the discussion is limited briefly to inculturation, liberation (Black and African women christologies), ancestor, and African indigenous churches christologies given their relevance to this study.

3.2.1. On contextual and inculturated christologies

Africa is a diverse continent, and will naturally have a variety of contexts from which African theologies can be pursued (Ogbonnaya, 2015:31). Contextual Christology therefore is theology that arises from, and is accountable to the diverse African people (Stinton, 2001:28). Ezigbo (2010:2) aligns with this, stating that African contextual Christologies are “weaved together into a complex political, cultural, economic, and religious webs.” Importantly, contextual christologies, according to Stinton (2001) and Ogbonnaya (2015:26), are informed not only by biblical revelation and Christian tradition, but also by the contextual realities in which they arise. From the above, we affirm that contextual Christology concerns itself with all aspects of life, including politics, society and culture. Often, contextual christologies shape themselves behind the context of liberation and the analysis of the situations that are prevailing, making them situationally relevant. The goal is to make faith relevant and active in

society. Contextual christologies will include those christologies such as African theology, black theology, African women theology, etc. with a focus on driving the message of relevance and liberation.

Inculturated christologies on the other hand are deemed to be a process of the incarnation of the Christian life and Christian message in a particular cultural context (Shorter, 1999: xi). Thus Arrupe (in Ela, 1984:88) argues that this experience finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, and becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture. Therefore, inculturation christologies mainly interact with the different cultures of African people. The concern is to illuminate and bring culture, symbols and a certain worldview to the centre.

The outlook of inculturated christologies thus become incarnational, presenting Jesus as the word made flesh (Magezi & Igba, 2018:5), and making him relevant to the cultures concerned. Shorter (1999: xi) thus submits that “faith must become culture, if it is to be fully received and lived.” He notes that religion as a human activity or phenomenon, must affect and be affected by culture. Although there are variations, these christological trajectories often overlap where reconstructive approach combines elements of inculturation, liberation and cultural analysis to address African life (Pobee, 1979, Bujo, 1992, and Nyamiti, 1998).

Nyamiti (in Magezi & Igba, 2018:5) and Adam and Boafo (2022) identify inculturation and liberation theologies as the two broad bases undergirding approaches by theologians in Christologising Africa. Martey (1993:121) opines that the “theological hermeneutic – inculturation and liberation – find themselves concerned with the cultural as well as the political aspects of the African theological reality.” It will therefore be reflected in our study how these two bases or trends impact the view of soteriology as envisaged in ATR and how it will be used to model the concept of Christo-soteriology as coined in this study.

3.2.2. An overview of key trajectories in African Christologies

Liberationist Trajectories

In summing up his views on liberative theologies, Ogbonnaya (2015:31) says inculturation, liberation, black/reconstruction, reconciliation, and theologies of women are also African liberative theologies. He submits in conclusion that “one cannot talk of African liberation theology while excluding any of them.” In this way, liberation is viewed in terms of culture, women issues, reconciliation projects, and race related issues.

Magezi and Igba (2018:5) view liberation christologies as concerned with finding and locating Christ in the socio-political situation of the Africans. Adam and Boafo (2022:282-284) submit that liberation christologies attempt to address cultural, theological, structural, and psycho-

spiritual liberation. They note that these christologies are still relevant and should occupy the centre as African Christians continue to dominate the space as questions to the political, economic and social struggles and inconveniences continue to confront the African continent.

Although liberation theology is largely influenced by the struggle of South Africa against apartheid (Martey, 1993:95), it has a worldwide reach if considered in light of the issues it seeks to address. Jesus or at least theology, is viewed through the lens of socio-economic and political realities, and focuses on injustice, poverty, and political oppression. Accordingly, Martey (1993:96) notes that the nexus of black/ liberation theology is concerned with emancipation of black people from white domination.

Ancestor Christologies

Although ancestor christologies are well represented in inculturation christologies, they are important to be mentioned separately because of their prevalence in African christologies. Magezi and Magezi (2016:153) state that “the treatment of Christ under the category of ancestor is the predominant approach which African theologians follow.” This is visible in the writings of authors such as Bediako (1994:93-121), Bujo (1992:79), Nyamiti (2006:24), Pobee (1979:94), Kabasele (1991:123-124) and others who approach African Christology from an ancestral perspective.

Ancestor Christologies are important for the reason that ancestors remain an enduring reality in the lives of Africans. The cult of ancestors also enjoys prominent mention in this study because Africans place not only their worship on God, but they also place salvation in the domain of ancestors. Here, Baëta (1955:51–61) intimates that Africans live with their dead, whereas Mosothoane (1973:86) submits that ancestors are a bridge of salvation for ATR adherents. Ancestor christologies therefore are visible in their attempt to advocate for salvation from God, relationship and identity with Christ, and deliverance from maladies by Christ. In context, these christologies place Jesus as the supreme ancestor who mediates life from God.

African Women Christologies

African Women Christologies (AWT) emerged in the 1980, and are largely considered part of liberation theologies (Atansi, *et al.* 2010; Gathogo, 2008:2). Mercy Oduyoye is credited with the title of ‘Mother of African women’s theology’ because of her relentless work in putting women issues on the agenda since the 1990s (Atansi, *et al.* 2010). Gathogo (2008:1) credits Oduyoye as the pioneer of AWT which he says was born in Accra in 1989. Credit is also given to other women theologians such as Betty Ekeya, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Musimbi Kanyoro, Rosemary Edet and Rachel Tetteh who advanced the plight of women with their writings (Gathogo, 2008). While many African scholars of the time concerned themselves with

liberation christologies which were largely silent on women issues, Oduyoye's work distinguished itself by critiquing "androcentric and patriarchal Christologies" (Atansi, *et al.* 2010).

In the main AWT aims to put women issues firmly at the centre. It stands as a voice to the oppressed and voiceless women who have been conditioned to live under the structures of patriarchy and misogyny. Oduyoye challenged this status quo. Noting that "traditional norms are enforced whenever they serve to silence women, reduce or eliminate their voices," she concludes that patriarchy "is defective and must be torn down" together with its associated pillars (Oduyoye, 1995:152-3). The focus on AWT as presented by Oduyoye thus puts emphasis on amplifying women's voices, healing, and nurturing holistic life with a sole purpose of seeing women being active participants in the affairs that affect them, and essentially become advocates of their own destiny.

Dube, one of the prominent women theologians also agrees. She says *Talitha Cum*, which is *African women's biblical hermeneutics of life*, refers to the art of living in the resurrection space: the art of continually rising against the powers of death, patriarchy, colonial oppression and exploitation, poverty, disease, and all forms of exclusion (in Dube *et al.* 2012:34). This puts women issues at the centre; and being a subset of liberation Christology, it ensures that women in particular, regain their voice, and become their own advocates against all odds.

African Indigenous Churches

Molobi (2019:319) states that "African Independent Churches are groups of churches emerging out of western mainline church experiences." The ignorance of the western scholarship concerning African worldviews and societal practices created two worlds opposed to each other – African culture and the bible. Here, AICs emerged as a protest against this ignorance, especially on those concepts such as initiation rites, polygamy and ritual practices (Molobi, 2019:320) which the western world opposed.

Without a written book to draw from, the influence of their theologies took after the church leader. The church leader's conduct functions as "their source of indigeneity, history, cultures and opinions..." (Molobi: 2019:319-321, Sundkler, 1958:3; De Visser, 2001:199). AIC Christologies therefore can also be considered within the spectrum of inculturated christologies for the mere fact that the aim is to develop the image of Christ that is recognisable in African milieu. What the leaders have been living and practicing becomes the conduct the church members must follow. This conduct largely aligns with African culture, and such lifestyle is associated with revelations from ancestors. Among the prominent AICs we find International Pentecost Holiness Church IPHC (of Frederick S. Modise), The Nazaretha

Baptist Church (of Isaiah Shembe), and the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) (of Engenas Lekganyane) (Molobi, 2019:321).

3.3. THE NEED FOR CONTEXTUALISATION OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

3.3.1. Understanding Christology

Having surveyed the above christologies, it is important to understand the need for our study, which is to formulate a biblical soteriology for an African. The understanding of a “Christology” thus becomes important, especially from a biblical perspective. Here, Berkhof begins his treatise on Christology by placing humanity at its centre. He acknowledges that the depravity of humanity and the chasm that exists between humanity and God, necessitates Christology. Due to the human situation, he postulates that Christology is in part the answer to that cry (of humanity), and that it “acquaints us with the objective work of God in Christ to bridge the chasm, and to remove the distance” (Berkhof, 1949:333).

The depravity of humanity and the chasm that exists between God and humanity, puts Christology firmly at the centre. Ehrman (2014:108) and Hastings *et al.* (2000:114) submit that Christology refers to the understanding of Christ, and that it concerns itself with the study of the nature (person) and work (soteriology) of Jesus Christ. Others such as Hillerbrand and Stefon (2022) say that “Christology is the part of theology that is concerned with the nature and work of Jesus, including such matters as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and his human and divine natures and their relationship.” O’Collins (1995:1) is of the opinion that it is “the field of study in Christian theology that is primarily concerned with the nature and person of Jesus Christ as recorded in the canonical gospels and the epistles of the NT”.

According to Mdingi (2021:300), Christology is the doctrine that is “fundamental in Christian theology for understanding God’s soteriological process in human existence.” Christie (2005:1) on the other hand views Christology as “the branch of Christian theology which studies the person and work of Jesus Christ, investigating who he was (or is) and what he did (or does).” Torrance (2008:1) argues that Christ has availed himself to be known through the study of Christology and has given “himself to be known as the object of our experience and knowledge, within our history and within our human existence.” Importantly, he argues that when we know him there, we know him in terms of himself.

Torrance’s point is critical as he talks about the terms on which we must know Jesus. He argues that while we experience and know him “within our history and within our human existence...” we must be mindful that he “gives himself to us by his own power and agency, by his Holy Spirit” (2008:1–2). Therefore, while the revelation of Christ in our lives is not coded, meaning it does not follow a defined process, it is not abstract either; it must emanate from

God himself, revealing himself to us, and trusting us to understand him through the confines of his revealed nature.

From a biblical point of view, there is consensus that Christology studies Jesus Christ's humanity and divinity and the relationship between these two aspects, as well as the role he plays in salvation. Most importantly, these above accounts do not differentiate across cultures, nations, or spiritual orientation. This indicates that a true reflection of who Jesus is becomes clear within biblical bounds. It is thus the responsibility of all interpreters of the Christ event to engage with it within these bounds.

3.3.2. Manifestations of a personalised Christology

While the purpose of Christology is revealed above, one of the challenges that face the world today, especially on the African continent, is a personalised Christology. By this I mean that in spite of who Christ says he is, humanity has decided to define Jesus based on the circumstances they face. This often makes for a Christ who is rather transactional in his interaction with people's situations. This gives rise to many Christologies that are formulated in answer to people's struggles and not Christ's power and purpose. For instance, Christologies centred on liberation have emerged in the form of black theology and feminist theology – clasped as inculturation christologies. These christologies differ in how they interpret Christ. In one instance He will be the liberator of black people from oppression, and in another a liberator of women from misogyny.

This emerges because the question is: "If Christ was to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?" (Taylor, 1963:16). Donkor (2016:4) suggests that this question "is to a greater extent what African Christian theologians are trying to answer in their Christologies." However, while this question remains crucial for an African setting, it does not embrace the entire human situation, for Christ is universal and must answer the salvation question across all cultures and nations.

It would then be prudent to look into that question and to rephrase it: Does Christ have the capacity to deal with the existential questions specific to an African? When phrased in this way, then Christ can appear as he truly is because in answering this question, our reference would be Christ's power and ability as contemplated in the Bible. Asking what Christ would look like in the African context assumes that he will take a particular form for Africans, and another for Europeans or Asians, leaving him without a unique universal identity that is central to the issues of soteriology. This leaves room for the inculturation and liberation theologies that define African Christology (Mburu, 2021:60). Concepts emerge that in the main take from Christ his true identity and fit him into situations that are otherwise secondary or even non-

aligned to his mission. This diminishes the reality of Christ as God incarnate and encourages syncretism in African Christianity (Potgieter & Magezi, 2016:6–7).

Essentially, if we are to craft a Christology for an African setting, Christ must be the starting point – Christ as conceptualised in the Bible. This resonates with Hastings *et al.* (2000:114) and Christie (2005:1) in particular, who argues that there should be no separation between the work and the person of Christ, insisting that “it is not possible to speak meaningfully of a person's identity apart from that person's activity.” Torrance (2008:1) then clearly defines our task in Christology. He submits that it is to “yield the obedience of our mind to what is given, which is God’s self-revelation in its objective reality, Jesus Christ.” Importantly, he asserts that “when we encounter God in Jesus Christ, the truth comes to us in its *own authority and self-sufficiency*” (own emphasis). Therefore, this chapter looks at how the Bible explains the Christ event and his strength and suitability to deal with the problems that exist in the African setting.

3.4. THE LOCUS OF AN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

The surveyed African christologies at the beginning of this chapter point clearly that when they emerged, they sought to adapt Christ to the African affairs through the process of inculturation or contextualisation. Accordingly, in the 1950s African scholars started making an effort to understand Christ for themselves, especially in view of their culture. This exercise was also influenced by pushback against what is termed westernised Christianity. When one looks at the history of Christology from the patristic periods to the contemporary times, African writings on Christology begin largely in the nineteenth century during the post-Reformation era. During this period, Berkhof (1949:338) records that an anthropocentric view of the historical Jesus at the time meant that “the supernatural Christ made way for a human Jesus, and the doctrine of the two natures, for the doctrine of a divine man.” However, it is with the post-modern era that African Christology has largely aligned itself. This is underpinned by “inculturation or contextual Christologies” that took African scholarship captive. This is reflected below in a short survey of this period.

3.4.1. Brief overview of postmodernity and its link to African Christology

Postmodernity developed during the 1980s and brought a shift in the interpretation of who Christ is and what he came to do or can do. This era found expression in at least three branches of Christology: radical, evangelical postmodern, and the postmodernism of the liberationists. Of these branches, Johnsen Jr. (2009:10–11) says that radical Christology values the idea of deconstruction and scepticism, and devalues historical research. It is therefore hyper-postmodern. It detaches from Christ his identity as the only way to the Father, and opts instead for many ways to God. Other branches, such as the evangelical postmodernist Christology, relies on Scripture but from the perspective of a specific context

(i.e., either the African setting, or the ancestorship setting). The liberation Christology or theology is concerned with participation in community, social sources, and political life.

Christie (2005:11) records that postmodernism introduced “inculturated or contextual Christologies”, essentially presenting categories in which Jesus can be viewed and expressed, so that “Jesus is becoming African, Asian, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Sri Lankan, and so on.” Mburu (2021:60) records this as the basis for African Christologies. In view of this, the emphasis was what Christ can become and can do for people of other ethnicities as an attempt to secede from the “theology of the west.” A new school of thought developed, and Christ became a Liberator (as in liberation theology), African (as in African Christology), and many other adaptations that defined the phenomenon that is Jesus (Resane, 2020:59).

Hodgson (cited in Christie, 2005:11) has suggested that postmodernism brought the traditional models for interpreting Jesus as the Christ under severe attack: “This is because the traditional models are perceived as ethnocentric, patriarchal, misogynist, anti-Judaic, exclusivist and triumphalist”. This became evident a few decades ago when confessing Christians such as John Hick started presenting a rather difficult concept to stomach, challenging the orthodoxy of old. He argues that the incarnation of the Word was “one of the many symbolic-mythic models the early followers of Jesus used to try to express what he meant for them” (Knitter, 2005:150).

Hick (1977) argues that positioning “Jesus as a man approved by God for a special role within the divine and as God incarnate” and “the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us”. This is an essential Christian belief that Hick seeks to depose because it is formed against the backdrop of the title of the son of God. According to him, such a title is conferrable to any extraordinary religious person. Christ to him was an extraordinary figure who became endowed with titles that he did not appropriate to himself.

The summation of Hick’s Christological proposal is troublesome. Knitter (2005:152) summarises it as follows:

By understanding the incarnation as a myth, Christians can declare that God is truly to be encountered in Jesus, but not only in Jesus. Furthermore, they can announce that Jesus is the centre and norm for their lives, without having to insist that he be so for all other human beings.

Hick’s sentiments are indeed continued in submissions by Mbiti and Bediako, but more especially Setiloane. Setiloane (1986:31) views Christ as the man of Nazareth who has the same God as the missionaries, and who is just a fact, phenomenon, or event that had

occurred. In this way, Jesus is just a mentor (Setiloane, 1981:31), and by extension he exists in the same plane as the bishops of culturally inclined AICs (Sundkler, 1958:3; De Visser, 2001:199), and shares powers with ancestors (Parrinder, 1968:99; Adamo, 2011:4).

It is evident from the short summary above that African scholarship has never really engaged the Christ event by looking at what one would term core biblical images as was the case at the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. The African scholarship on Christology emerged by diversifying and radicalising itself to contemporary interpretations founded in historical, philosophical, and cultural transformations. While central affirmations about Christ's divinity and humanity remain, their meaning and application continue to be reinterpreted and challenged in light of contemporary concerns. The evolution of the person and the work of Christ has really come full circle, beginning with him as the only begotten Son of God and the only way to salvation. In the contemporary debate with which African scholarship has aligned, this Jesus is regarded as a mere man and a moral exemplar who is but one of many ways to the Father.

3.5. CHRISTOLOGY UNFOLDING IN AN AFRICAN SETTING

African Theology, and by extension, African Christology is a fairly recent academic pursuit which is traced around the 1950s to 1960s (Magezi & Igba, 2018:2). This therefore grounds the importance of earnest scholarship necessitated by the need of an honest Christology if the doctrine of soteriology and the lordship of Christ is to have any meaning and take root in the African milieu. Obviously, African theology has also made strides in crafting its inculturated and contextual christologies as we have outlined above, that is, christologies that respond to the unique needs of its worldview. This position is surveyed briefly below.

3.5.1. The current state of the debate

Almost sixty years ago, Mbiti argued in 1967 that there is no African Christology in existence (cited in Moloney, 1987:505). Over the last three decades, an improvement has been noticeable. Nyamiti (1998:17) submits that “there is no doubt that Christology is the subject which has been most developed in today’s African theology.” Oborji (2008:16) comments that “Christology is perhaps the one aspect of African theology that has received the most attention from African theologians,” which shows its earnest development in recent times if one looks at its historical survey above. Resane (2020:67–69) however, raises the concern that out of the disillusionment and the suffering and struggles Africans had been facing and in the absence of sound theological or Christian education in schools, Africans asked “Where is God?” Resane (2020:5) thus finds that:

Christ, the centre of Christianity, and or Christology, in general, is caught at the crossroads. The bone of contention in African Christianity is the identity, the person, the place, and the role of Christ versus African ancestral veneration.

This is a serious indictment of the Christian scholarship and the clergy who proclaim the message of Christianity. They have serious work before them to paint an image of God that people would be able to see clearly. I submit that this image may not necessarily align with people's expectations, culture, or liberation ambitions; it must be the exact representation of God and of Christ. Whereas Christ is viewed as foreign in Africa (Banda, 2005), debates about him have been ongoing in Africa for decades, as discussed below.

3.5.1.1. The image of Christ

The lens through which the image of Christ becomes visible in Africa is largely that of power. The "Where is God?" question arises in the context of his presence when people are suffering or disillusioned. If we therefore want to understand African Christology, we have to engage with the levers of power. African Christology has been nothing but power struggle (Bediako, 1995); and even Jesus Christ is explained within the parameters of power. Resane (2020:84) proposes that "Christ and the witchdoctor compete for the same clientele: power, protection and prosperity." This is also true for Christ and ancestors, essentially making Jesus a foreign actor in a highly contested religious space where local gods and divinities enjoy more prominence and he is closed out of the triangle of authority.

African Christology thus finds itself explaining Jesus in the light of power. Resane (2020:52–54), however, explains that Africans rightly expected that there would be a synergy between the lifestyles of missionaries and the gospel they presented. The fact that missionaries did not live what they preached led traditional Africans to conclude that the god of the whites is dead (Mdingi, 2021). Equally then, Africa and Africans must also preach the God of the Bible and live according to what they preach. If not, it is expected that the western world and the entire universe will frown on them. Consequently, the life that is lived in honour of Christ determines how humanity views and interprets him in their own situations. It is a true measure of what their expectations of Christ are.

It is no secret that there remains a great struggle for Christ to take root in Africa. Resane (2020:73) even postulates that some Africans completely reject Christ because he is not African. Using a war analogy, he says this situation jeopardises Christology in Africa given that "Africa is a stage on which the battle of the gods is taking place." Bediako (1995:99), on the other hand, sees Jesus playing in the world of distributed power. While some arguments about Christ's foreignness relate to the question of his work from the perspective of the African worldview, (Banda, 2005; Clarke, 2005:163), others completely challenge his ethnicity and

totally write him off on that note. How then do adherents of African traditional religions and African evangelical churches alike view *Christ*, and what does he look like?

3.5.1.2. Christ in context in Africa

As part of his 2003 doctoral study, Clarke conducted a survey among the ordinary populace of Ghana, involving some 2500 participants. The question was “Who is Jesus to you?”. The responses were recorded as follows – Saviour (74,6%), Messiah (62%), Lord (57%); Chief, Brother and Ancestor (7,8%).

It is intriguing that almost seventy-five percent of the responses recorded revealed that participants viewed Jesus as saviour. He is further regarded as the Messiah and as the Lord. However, of particular interest is the fact that the titles above are awarded to Christ in relation to his ability to deliver them from their temporal issues and not necessarily as titles relating to who he is (his person), and to his chief mission (reconciliation with God). Mbiti’s notion must thus here stand that according to the African worldview, Jesus is our “Saviour” because he is almighty and not because of his redemptive atonement and resurrection as Christ (cited in Clarke, 2005:142). While it is worrisome that He is viewed and appreciated in terms of what he can do, and not for what he is, African Christology can be developed in the context of the Bible from such descriptions of Christ.

Resane (2020:73) argues that in spite of the apprehensions traditional Africans have about Christ, there is still a positive view of him in Africa. He finds that Christ is viewed as “an authentic ancestor who is like a sympathetic big brother” (Heb. 2:11–12). This view develops an interesting image of Christ – as the champion of the poor and marginalised and as the sympathiser for socially ill-treated. This view, he says, introduced “theologies of liberation such as African, black, feminist, and eco-theologies” (Resane, 2020:73).

Further, images of Christ in Africa as ancestor, as king, and as priest (Bediako, 2004:24) are replete. Others, such as Charles Nyamiti and Benzenet Bujo, even ascribe to him the image of brother-ancestor or proto-ancestor amongst Africans (Mburu, 2021:60). The goal is one – to have a powerful figure that occupies the African space and can manipulate any cosmic forces that are at play. Any god or redeemer entering the African space seems to be accommodated only from the point of view that they have what it takes not only to wrestle with the powers at play, but also to come out victorious. This victory is often adjudicated based on temporal results, becoming a value judgement premised on what an entity can do to aid those in need of help. However, we tend to agree with Van Rooy (n.d.:8) who contends that if the gospel truth is revealed, “that our greatest need is not physical healing or protection against black magic, but to be reconciled to God, then the message about Jesus Christ and his sacrifice will become meaningful.”

3.5.1.3. Christ and power

In the African worldview, which has been shaped in a space of distributed power as alluded to earlier, the power struggle will always exist. Resane (2020:84–86) notes that within this sphere of power, Christ must always contend with witchdoctors who claim to help traditional Africans maintain power, protect life, or ensure prosperity. These PPPs (power, protection, prosperity) have opened the doors in African Christian churches to consult externally, thus introducing syncretism. Nyirongo (2018:344) opines that African traditionalists do not bother to consult God as they face suffering on a daily basis because he is viewed as distant. Due to his distance from people, ancestors are instead consulted to relieve people of their suffering because they are perceived to be near the people.

The question, however, is: did Jesus not do anything to people's circumstances? Did he leave the biblical characters languishing in poverty, oppressed by demons and evil spirits? Did he not supply enough power for people to overcome their daily skirmishes with life? The answer is found in the gospels, which are replete with instances where Jesus not only concerned himself with spiritual salvation, but also temporal issues like healing (Mt. 8), casting out of spirits (Mt. 8:28–34, and elsewhere), and provision for people's needs (Mt. 6:11; Lk. 8:43–48) to name but a few.

If Christ's power could be seen in terms of his work of reconciliation, as Van Rooy (n.d.:8) suggests, African traditionalists would start to fight for the salvation of the soul. This view could perhaps be interpreted as parochial and bordering on fundamentalism as Resane (2020:82; 272) deems to be the case with those who press for spiritual freedom by demoting humanity's temporal needs. However, this submission does not imply that the scope of salvation should be limited to the spiritual. It categorically advocates for structural reforms that will see the lives of the marginalised and the downtrodden improve as they appropriate the message of the gospel physically and spiritually. For this to be achieved, the African traditionalists' view on salvation must be altered and the need for reconciliation with God must rise to the top of their needs. In this way, Christ's power will be correctly appropriated and applied.

3.5.1.4. Christ and culture

Many African traditionalists believe that they find all of their life's needs in culture and that they should therefore remain rooted in it. Those who turn away from culture are not only frowned upon but are pitied as people who are lost and who are destined to encounter great misery in life, even destruction. Christ, on the other hand, appears as that figure that draws people away from their cultures, walking them into untold danger according to adherents of African culture. In an effort to minimise the effects, African evangelicals prefer connections to both Christ and the ancestors.

Many Africans therefore frown on the idea of deserting their culture for a new culture, especially that which they term “western culture.” A large part, if not the only part of African theology, is to advocate for the centrality of their culture in doing Christology. Scholars such as Oduyoye (1997:203) remark that Pentecostal churches have advanced the gospel at the expense of African culture, arguing that for one to become Christian, there has to be cessation from African culture (Oduyoye, 1995:83). Others also, view inculturation of Africans into western cultures as a ploy to lead them to cease the practices of their cultures and to adopt foreign customs (Ukpong, 2002:10; Shabangu, 2005:38). Idowu (1962)²⁵ has vociferously opposed this inculturation and gives a lucid argument as to why western culture should not be considered the holy grail of the church. He sets out why and how African culture should occupy its rightful place in the church.

As much as Oduyoye notices the tendency of Pentecostal churches to push people away from their culture, she also records that “[a]ll human cultures have elements that are incompatible with the religion of Jesus and the way of life he exemplified...” (Oduyoye, 1995:87). Pobee and Ositelu II (1998:9) protest about the missionaries’ *tabula rasa* approach that essentially excoriated everything African. If we accept the fact that all world cultures contain elements that are discordant with Christianity, not only African cultures, it means that an attempt should be made to adopt those elements that acquiesce to the Christian religion, and abandon everything that contradicts it.

This should be understood by Africans who view their culture as hounded, that all cultures find expression in Christianity (Magesa, 2004:142; Maimela, 1985:65). Shorter has long intimated that “faith must become culture if it is to be fully received and lived. For African cultures to comply with the commands of the God who elected to save through Christ, they must cease every practice that is contrary to Christianity (the Bible), and embrace those elements that correspond with what Christ proclaimed as salvation. However, there are those who prefer African Christologies of inculturation and who advocate that Christ must fit into their culture and not the other way around (Nyamiti, cited in Makashinyi, 2022:75).

There seems to be no relenting in African cultures regarding the placing of their culture in religious issues. Culture defines how Africans relate to Christ. Adhering to culture amounts to salvation (Pobee, 1998:260). Africans thus view culture as the solvent of Christianity (Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998:260) and locate their salvation within it. Their position challenges that of Oduyoye. Where she suggests that some cultural elements are incompatible with Christianity,

²⁵ Bolaji Idowu (1962:23) laments the failure of the Nigerian church to formulate a theology that is distinctly African in its thinking and meditation. Khotlele (2023:94) argues that we should understand this not as an alternative to salvation but as means through which people are able to conduct themselves in a manner close to their cultural backgrounds, “touching on those liturgical elements such as worship, language, dress code, preaching styles, set-up of worship places, and so on,” without substituting the object of worship (Christ) with ancestors and adopting into the church cultural elements opposed to the gospel.

they prefer to claim that Christianity is what it is because of the cultures of the world. Since salvation is assured when they actively adhere to their culture, cultural practices are then performed in order to attain salvation. Such practices include amongst others circumcision²⁶ (Mbiti, 1961:121; Khotlele, 2023:29); veneration/ worship of ancestors²⁷ (Turaki, 1999:178); sacrifices²⁸ (Ubruhe, 1996:20) and libations²⁹ (Mensele, 2011; Mvunamandi, 2008).

This problem can be solved by looking to Reinhold Niebuhr. Within the context of Niebuhr's³⁰ typology of Christ and culture we find radicals (against culture), liberals (for culture), synthesists (above culture), dualists (paradox), and conversionists (transforming culture) (Carter, 2006:36, Kraft, 1979:103–115). What Niebuhr attempted to do was to show how Christians can consider relating to the cultural cosmos that is before them. While he points out typologies that are diametrically opposed to Christianity and indicates that the two cannot coexist, there are typologies that propose a balanced view.

For instance, when we accept that all cultures of the world “have elements that are incompatible with the religion of Jesus” (Oduyoye, 1995:87), it allows us to propose that those should be discarded in order to make room for God's salvation offer. This position aligns with what Niebuhr calls “Christ above culture,” which suggests that Christ and culture are not inherently opposed (Kraft, 1979:108–112), and that culture can be redeemed and transformed by the Christian religion. This is possible with respect to the African culture, especially for cultural elements such as language, dress code, songs, and other liturgical elements that are not necessarily opposed to Scripture. These elements amount to an inherent identity that cannot be detached from people. Bolaji Idowu has extensively argued this point in his 1962 book *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*, showing insistently that African worship ought not to be western in its implementation, effectively arguing for worship in African garb.

²⁶ Mbiti notes many symbolic and religious meanings contained in initiation/ circumcision. Withdrawal from society and absence from home to receive instruction during the circumcision rite period is symbolic of the process of “dying, living in the spirit world and being reborn (resurrected)” (Mbiti, 1969:121). Khotlele (2023:25–46) interprets this and many other rites performed to mean salvation to an ATR adherent.

²⁷ Turaki (1999:178) finds that ATR adherents believe that ancestors are guardians of family tradition and life; that they correct the errors committed by the living who fail to follow customs; that they stand as intermediaries between humankind and God and, by implication, receive requests from the living and relay answers from God, to name a few. Mosothoane (1973:86) claims that as Christ is the bridge of salvation for Christians, ancestors are the bridge of salvation to ATR adherents.

²⁸ It is Ubruhe's view that these sacrifices provide salvation. Importantly, they establish reconnection with God for those who practice them. They can be intended as [proprietary] acts, gifts, cleansing ceremonies, a way to establish communion with the ancestors and/ or God, or a reconstruction of community.

²⁹ In his master's thesis, Khotlele (2023:44–45) finds that adherents to ATR perform animal sacrifices with a view of finding relief when life is hard, and also when they require luck, guidance or deliverance in general. He finds that it is difficult to refute that these sacrifices work given there are people who have received help in their circumstances.

³⁰ For a detailed summary of Niebuhr's cultural typology proposition, see Charles H. Kraft (1979:103–115).

At the same time, another position exists within this proposition which advances that all cultural elements opposed to the Christian religion must be discarded. This includes such elements as ancestor veneration, animal sacrifices, consulting the dead and witchdoctors, mediums, and spirits that are contrary to God. These cannot form part of Christian worship (Khotlele, 2023:112–117). In Niebuhr's typology this proposition aligns with what he calls "Christ against culture." Kraft (1979:104) records that here, "the choice for commitment to God is by definition a decision to oppose culture." This advances that there is a major conflict between Christian faith and culture so that the two cannot co-exist. Indeed, such elements as veneration and worship of ancestors stand diametrically opposed to the Christian religion (Ex. 20).

However, the unfortunate position that adherents to Christianity and ATRs take is that of "Christ and culture in paradox." Here, adherents of both religions protect their own without considering that anything good can come from the other. Also, Kraft (1979:110) explains that in this setting, "a Christian is accountable to follow the requirements of both Christ and culture but each in its own place." This view breeds syncretism in churches or culminates in a total rejection of anything either African or Christian as each side prefers to wipe the slate clean (*tabula rasa*). This creates an impasse which for the Christian faith, makes evangelisation difficult and delays the prospect of salvation for adherents of ATR who must obtain God's great salvation. Both sides see themselves as *conversionists*, attempting to transform one another, if not totally annihilate and relegate the other to the dustbins of history. While conversion as pursued as part of the Christian religion is good and central to the faith, it should be undertaken mindful of the fact that there are those inherent cultural elements that even Christianity cannot remove from people (like language, dress code, and worship style).

3.6. APPROPRIATING CHRIST IN AFRICA – A BIBLICAL CHRISTOLOGY

Emerging from the above are key themes such as identity, capability, authority, power, culture, and Christ's value, which shape the opinions that Africans in ATRs embrace. In this section, we use these concepts to define an African Christology that can resonate with Africans and thus accommodate people inclined to ATRs.

3.6.1. The identity of Christ

Tsiane (2013:33–35) contends that the implications of Jesus' ministry are apparent. He cites Jesus as saviour, sanctifier, healer, and baptiser of the spirit. Further, he extends to Jesus titles of Prophet, Son of Man, High Priest, Teacher, God, and suffering Servant (Tsiane, 2013:36–46). These functions and titles are not unique to Tsiane. Antecedent scholars such as Mbiti, Setiloane, Nyamiti, Bediako, Maimela, Bujo, Pobee, and many others, have attributed similar titles to Christ. While Tsiane's views are mostly Bible-centric, others have argued strongly from the perspective of the African worldview and traditional religion, and as much as

they have tried to find a balance, some of their positions are outright radical because they hardly qualify “as being biblically and historically orthodox” (Makashinyi, 2022:74). However, their efforts are appreciated for attempting to map a Christology for Africans.

The titles of King, Prophet, Healer, Priest, have been discussed in detail by antecedent scholars who have the inculturation and liberation-theological disposition, and most recently by the likes of KT Resane, Christopher Magezi, Collum Banda, and others. Our focus narrows to the titles discussed below to expand on the question of Christology because they align with who Christ is in terms of Scripture.

3.6.1.1. Saviour of the world

Tsiane (2013:33) points out that the book Luke refers to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world who is concerned with the lives of the marginalised people. He regards the title of Christ as the Saviour³¹ of the world as the most important in the African cosmos primarily because Africans have for the longest time been the people on the margins. If anything, the marginalisation of Africans has been the lengthiest and hardest struggle they have had to contend with.

The content of the Bible, according to Plantinga, is largely about salvation (in Tsiane, 2013:33). White (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:775) holds that in the OT, “saviour” represents a participle of *yāša*, which means deliverance or setting free, and which is synonymous with God. This title further appears in LXX and NT as *sōtēr* (*deliverer or preserver*). It was attributed to pagan deities, semi-deities of the mysteries, honoured men, and deified rulers (White, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:775). Of importance, however, is a concession that this title applies to Christ as constituting, not merely exhibiting, salvation. This means that Christ not only establishes or initiates salvation, he also displays, reveals, and demonstrates it.

Africans must thus not simply view Christ as saviour, he must also be understood within the context of being the founder and displayer of salvation. Importantly, notice must be taken that God’s salvation (which now rests in Christ), does not befall only the nation of Israel (as in the OT), but it broke boundaries and reached even the marginalised (Gentiles). Acts 13:46–48 and Matthew 28:19–20 attest to the fact that Christ brings universal salvation. It refers to salvation from any danger, distress, enemies, bondage, exile, adversaries, defeat, or oppression. The scope of Christ’s salvation also extends to categories of social decay, moral and personal welfare, and political, national, and religious contexts (White, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:769).

³¹ Luke 2:11, John 4:42, Acts 5:31, 13:23, Ephesians 5:23, Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 John 4:14 are some scriptural references to Jesus’s *saviourship*.

It is thus visible that this salvation does not only relate to redemption from sins, but also to deliverance from the hardships of this life. The feeling of being marginalised indeed finds expression in Christ's mission as saviour, and this mission is for all nations of the world. Ephesians 2:13 teaches us: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ". This means that even Africans who feel marginalised, displaced and oppressed, have by direct invitation audience with God, who first promises them salvation from their sins through the blood of Christ, and then salvation from oppression and maladies of this world.

3.6.1.2. Sanctifier

One of the African concerns with respect to salvation is ritual purity or cleanliness (Desai, 1962:38,50; Rieber, 1977:271). Many rituals are performed specifically to do away with *senyama* or *sesila* (bad luck or ritual uncleanness) (Mensele, 2011:78–80).³² If impurity persists, people attract bad luck, and salvation is impossible. African adherents to ATR therefore make an effort to engage in practices that are aimed at purifying themselves as instructed by ancestors and priests, who are seen as oracles of God.

Tsiane (2013:34) gives a concise view of Christ as sanctifier. It focuses on him dying for all humanity and his blood washing away their sins. White (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:770) correctly remarks that sanctification means "to make holy" or "to set apart" from common and to reserve, as it were, for some divine power. Further, he states that consistent with God's intrinsic purity, "persons and things devoted to God's use must be *ritually clean*, not merely set apart..." Davie *et al.* (2016:805) subscribe to the notion of sanctification being soteriological in nature. They say that, "sanctification was both a soteriological and ethical concept, used to define the calling and the conduct of a Christian."

Yet it is important to note that sanctification comes because of Christ. White surmises that our sanctification is possible "not by moral transformation but by the sacrifice of Christ" (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:771). The Bible limits the power and the efficacy of blood to Christ's sacrifice only, thereby rendering all other sacrifices powerless (Heb. 10:4–18). Accordingly, the status of sanctification is thus by conferment only – through Christ. The implications of this for ritualistic practices intended for the removal of impurities in the African milieu are clear. It is logical to infer that sacrifices performed for ritual impurity lack power, and that only the sacrifice

³² Mensele (2011) gives a practical account of how people deal with issues of ritual impurity in ATR. He cites that there are sacrifices where blood is shed, and others where bloodless sacrifices are made to deal with ritual impurity, bad luck, and other maladies that are troubling to Africans. There is general consensus that those who practice such rituals return home ritually clean. However, nothing is impressed on their conscience about living upright lives, for this is not a call that is made to them as they enter and come out of the ritual purification process.

of Christ has the necessary might to deal with issues of salvation that impress not only Africans but humanity at large.

Not only does Christ sanctify, but he also regenerates (Acodezin, 2018:92). White (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:771) submits that sanctification “broadens into the total personal ethics for which *conversion* is the entrance, issuing in conformity to Jesus Christ.” The work of Christ, therefore, is not only to make us clean or to keep us unstained, which is the goal of African religious rituals, but to change our ethics so that humanity becomes more like him – a concept Davie *et al.* (2016:805) terms virtue. Christ cleanses, removes our rebellious attitude, and regenerates our morals. Since the goal of African traditional religion and the populace in general is good ethics and morals, Christ comes fitting this bill, declaring that if we turn to him, he will make us more like him.

3.6.1.3. Baptiser

In the African cultural space there is a view that circumcision is akin to baptism (Letšosa & De Klerk, 2019). Khotlele (2023:29) submits that the view of ATR and African cultures is that “through circumcision, alienation from clan or community is removed, and that all ritual impurities are cleansed.” In the same breath, African tradition subscribes to cleansing through water in rivers and streams. Mensele (2011:79) explains that when cleansing is performed at these sacred sites, a person can be immersed in water to wash themselves in the belief that bad luck flows down the river runs as a person is washed, leaving them clean. He surmises that ritual cleansing, amongst others, can be achieved by putting people “in the sacred river by way of baptism” (Mensele, 2011:79).

Concerning baptism, Bromiley (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:107) submits that it “denotes washing or plunging in water, which from the earliest days (Acts 2:41) has been the rite of Christian initiation.” Bromiley is of the view that it is a practice that was observed in OT for purification and was also a parallel practice in pagan rituals. Importantly, he indicates that Christ authorises its observance both by precedent (Mt. 3:13) and by precept (Mt. 28:19), and it is more common than fire and holy spirit baptism among Christian believers (Treier & Elwell, 2017:107).

Christ authorises this act because in the Christian faith, baptism is viewed as a symbol of death and resurrection in conjunction with the events of the flood (1 Pt. 3:19–21) and the red sea (1 Cor. 10:1–2). It also has the covenantal aspect in relation to circumcision (Col. 2:11–12) (Bromiley, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:107). Themes that are inferred from these actions include washing (as with the blood of Christ), and initiation (adoption as sons of God). Importantly, these are linked to the work of Christ as the one who enables believers to attain them.

The centrality of cleansing rituals in the African cosmos must thus find proper representation with respect to what the baptism of Christ actually does for those who put their trust in him. While it is the view of ATRs that the acts they perform during water immersion offer cleansing/purification and thus expel bad luck, Christ's baptismal action brings much more – it destroys the person of the past and raises a new one (2 Cor. 5:17), and it completes the process of adoption, making anyone who comes to Christ a son, an heir and a resident of the heavens (Jn. 3:5). Bromiley (in Treier & Elwell 2017:108) concludes succinctly that the common thought on the theme of baptism lies in “the destructive, yet also life-giving, power of water, as drowning and emergence to new life – that is death and resurrection”.

3.6.1.4. Son of man

There seems to have been little attempt in ATR scholarship to map a Christology that speaks of Christ as the son of man. Perhaps this is so because Africans do not regard sons as having power because the son is always deemed of lesser authority or significance than the father. Therefore, while many adaptations and typologies have been crafted in relation to Christ's role as king, priest, and prophet, the theme of Christ as son of man has never been developed, except for the concept of brother-ancestor that Nyamiti (1984) explored.

However, the title of Son of Man is viewed as a *Christological* title (Davie *et al.*, 2016:855; Gruenler, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:826), making it one of the most important to explore in the African religious space. Gruenler (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:826) submits that this is the title Jesus used, which clearly attests to his messianic self-consciousness. The implication of this awareness of Jesus is that this title is authoritative and effectively places him in authority of all situations and circumstances of the earth. Therefore, in the synoptics, the title indicates his servanthood, his fellowship with outcasts, and his power to bind Satan.

It is also important to submit that Christ is not an ordinary son, he is one who recognises who he is (Who do you say that I, the Son of Man is? – Mt. 16:13). He is equal to the Father, and he is God incarnate. He is not a son of any ordinary man, he is the Son of the Most-High God. It is because he is God that he has everlasting dominion (Gruenler, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:827) and is therefore above all rulers, powers, and principalities in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18; Eph. 1:21–23).

This title answers some of the troubling questions in the African world. The messianic title above testifies of power, which becomes relevant to African affairs. The title of Son of Man makes it easy to answer questions that the liberation christologies pose in that it places the Son of Man as a conduit of power. In this way, it directly intervenes in the fears and terrors Africans face. It shines a light on Christ as a servant who can serve them in earnest in spite of the fact that Africans have been treated as sub-humans whose only role is to serve their

masters. It further speaks of fellowship with outcasts, presenting Jesus through this title as a friend of slaves and sub-humans. Here, Africans who had been on the margins are brought into the mainstream. As it were, the Son of Man has elected and indeed managed to bring the Gentiles closer to himself by his blood (Eph. 2:13).

The advantage of adopting this title in the African religious space is that it enables Africans to deal with the fears and terrors that affect them. It is important that he be understood not as the Son who is second in authority, but one who is equal with the Father in all things, including power (Jn. 10:30; 5:17–18). If Christ is viewed in this light, as Son of Man who is above all humans, yet sympathising with every oppressed human being (Heb. 4:15), Africans would find solace and comfort with respect to their daily struggles. Importantly, they would know that the double layer of security (syncretism) (Udoh 1983:19; Magezi, 2016:14), is not necessary because in the Son of Man, they enjoy a concentration of power (Mt. 28:18; Heb. 1:3; Col. 2:9; Eph. 1:20–23) that permeates all aspects of their lives.

3.6.1.5. Teacher

Africans take pride in their ability to pass oral information from generation to generation. This story telling shows one important thing – that Africans are people who regard teaching as sacred. Many papers have noted that African history and religion are not written down, but has been skilfully and carefully passed on through generations (Awolalu, 1976b:2; Mbiti, 1969:5; Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979: 29).

Old men and women are often entrusted with these important discussions, making them revered members of society. However, one ought to note that even their teaching comes to an end, and it mostly focuses on past history and very rarely has a revelatory aspect. Boaheng (2021:224), for one, argues for relevance in doing theology that adapts itself to the current times and renders solutions to the needs of the people. Oladipo (2004:361) argues that because some of these religions are “not revealed,” divine truths and commands could be lacking, including revelation. This limits the scope of the teaching itself in that issues that are often of concern to humanity, especially those of eschatology, may not be fully expressed and addressed, an admission that Mbiti (1969:99) has already made.

Great African scholars such as Mbiti and Idowu have argued that religion permeates the life of Africans, meaning that everything that an African does, amounts to religion (Oladipo, 2004:353–354). Religion and life can therefore not be separated but must be seen as a unified whole (du Toit, 2009:109). By their own admission, African traditionalists have said that the OT validates their religion (Bediako, 1995:69; Lugira, 2009:19), and that many biblical aspects in fact align with their traditional religion. By inference then, the Bible is very much present in

African traditional religions as a document that guides them. Mojola (2014:1–7) even records that the OT could be read as an African book without much difficulty.

However, of surprise then is the many practices that African traditionalists prefer that are in direct conflict with the Bible. The teachers of African tradition in our communities fail to pass this hurdle, and continue to present teachings that are archaic and that fail to address present-day circumstances. African traditionalists have failed to move past the hurdle of the OT and into the NT where Christ is clearly revealed and the message of salvation is laid bare. A “Christ above culture” approach is essential in addressing this African issue of preferring to continue with practices that the Bible rejects outright. Boaheng (2021:221–4) is correct that the scope of compromises in practicing contaminated Christianity is closed. He asserts that any formulation of African Christology must be biblical, *glocal*,³³ oral, symbolic, written³⁴, and relevant.

It is important that the Bible refers to Jesus as Rabbi or a teacher. The above problem can be addressed if he is considered to be teacher of all Africans who seek his salvation. Part of what makes Jesus a good teacher is the fact that his teachings come from God (Jn. 7:16–18) and they are relevant in all seasons. What he taught many years ago still finds relevance today and it can offer answers to the pressing issues people face today. Moreover, it has a revelatory aspect that addresses the future, including issues of eschatology. His teachings, therefore, do not only lead humanity with respect to temporal existential matters, but also safely navigate people through issues of resurrection and the afterlife.

3.6.2. Suffering servant

The image of suffering is regarded as synonymous with being black (Resane, 2020:125). It is perhaps one that Africans would like to quickly forget given their own misfortunes at the hands of their oppressors. Africans have produced much literature with a view to liberate themselves from the suffering that was meted out to them and to place themselves on the path to recovery where a good life and prosperity abounds. However, the image of the suffering servant is important for Africans, especially for cases of identity and solidarity. Key elements that emerge from the image of the suffering servant include “the one called by God,” and “the deliverer of judgement,” (Is. 42:1). Importantly, in Isaiah 49:5, the work of this servant is to bring Israel

³³ The term *glocal*, refers to the combination of global and local setting unto which the gospel must be adapted.

³⁴ Rahner argues that “A theology is not technically theology when the experience about God had not been systematically, critically and scholarly interpreted or articulated.” Rahner’s assertion that theology must be “systematically, critically and scholarly interpreted or articulated” reflects theology done in societies with a high level of literacy. As a matter of fact, the academic approach to theology makes it globally accessible (Boaheng, 2021:223). We can state that African theology has in fact reached this level where it not only produced well-argued research papers and articles, but it has also developed to the level of producing African Bibles that seek to contextualise how Africans interact with God.

back to God. This servant is not only anticipated as the coming saviour (Is. 53:2), He is also to become Immanuel (Is. 7:14).

The question of suffering is connected to the concept of theodicy, with Davie *et al.* (2016:876) proposing that this is a problem for theism. When it comes to suffering, God is put on trial as an accomplice that watches when humanity suffers (Davie *et al.*, 2016:877). The verdict becomes that He is incapable or unwilling to intervene. Worse, He is labelled as evil himself and therefore not worthy of humanity's time or courtesy (Russell, 2008).

However, can this view still be held given that God created humanity "upright"? (Eccl. 7:29). Upright in this verse is used to represent the state of the heart that is disposed to faithfulness or obedience. It could then be argued that God placed humanity upright on this earth, but they disposed themselves to evil. How God chooses to end evil can now not be determined by humanity, and it should not serve as a temptation to label him as evil or uncaring. It is God's prerogative how evil ends, and how salvation can be attained.

It is on this basis that Africans also ask where God was when they endured misery at the hands of their oppressors (Mdingi, 2023:71; Harold 2018:21–37), much like the Israelites in Egypt and *en route* to Canaan. Yet the greatest suffering took place at Calvary when the suffering servant uttered "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Davie *et al.*, 2016:878). This cry is not indifferent to the suffering of humanity, who seeks the presence of Immanuel – God with us. The goodness of God is therefore present in the midst of suffering. In the ministry of Jesus, by contrast, we may discern a profound sympathy for those who suffer and a consistent effort to alleviate that suffering. Importantly, according to Davie *et al.* (2016:878) and Payne (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:803), Jesus is not a spectator to the suffering of humanity, he enters into it with humanity and suffers vicariously on their behalf.

Africans must come to see God not as inactive in their suffering, but as an active participant through Jesus Christ. Here, African traditionalists must cross the hurdle of OT into the NT where Christ's light shines, as mentioned above. It is in the NT that they will find their Suffering Servant who, amongst other things, sides with the weak and downtrodden, and will surely deliver the oppressed (Resane, 2020:73).

3.6.3. The authority of Christ

We observe in ATR the importance of authority. Not only is this so in the religion itself, it is the case in the African traditional worldview as well. Parrinder (1968:99), in describing the hierarchy in what he calls polytheistic ATRs, submits that "at the apex is supreme God, creator and ruler; on one side of the triangle are the nature gods, and on the other the ancestors,

about equal in power and in respect shown to them...” The same triangle is followed by Metuah (1981:54:55), whereas Mbiti (1976:75–85) presents a quadrantic model with four levels.

It is important to observe from Parrinder and others’ submissions that Christ finds no space in the triangle of authority. Ancestors appear immediately below God and occupy a special position by his side. Christ is therefore not the only one who is seated on the right hand of the father in line with Scripture. This proves one thing – that although ATR has made an effort to speak about Christ, they have found him to be just among the many divinities appointed by God in the governance of the world.

Analysing this triangle of authority, it emerges that it is crafted based on the responsibilities the entity has, especially towards the human race. For instance, of God, Parrinder (1968:99) notes that he is at the apex of the triangle because he is the father of other gods, gives moral law, and is the judge of people after death, although he is also viewed as distant and as having retired from the world he created (Bae, 2007:32). This sentiment is repeated by Pobee (1976:6,18), who avers that God is the *Opanvin* and a king par excellence and thus remains the supreme king.

Ancestors on the other hand, are seen as “benefactors of welfare to obedient and harmonious societies, or wrath to those who create disharmony and imbalances” (Bae, 2007:26; Amanze, 2003:45). There is an important link between them and the Supreme Being, putting them in a position to “play a role as intermediaries or mediators between God and their descendants” (Bae, 2007:26). This leads to them being ascribed the title of the living dead (Mbiti, 1969:58–73), essentially stamping their authority as ones next to God, as Jesus is. Bae (2007:26–31) details the scope of work of the ancestors, finding that it includes “the living dead as members of the family and community,” and “a role as intermediaries and mediators,” representatives of law, and as senior elders, underscoring their importance and authority.

At least in terms of ATR and their question of authority, Christ is viewed as chief, king and prophet (Pobee, 1979:60–61). They have further canvassed him as a proto-ancestor who is better than any other ancestor (Bediako, 1996:39). In this way, he finds his place in the triangle of authority and is placed among gods and deities that populate the African religious cultural space (Resane, 2020:79). His authority, from an African religious worldview, is that he is just another force or power who still ranks lower than God and who lives within the pantheon of gods and divinities.

Much as ancestors are canvassed as custodians of life and continuity (Bae, 2007:31), it is important to underscore that ancestors remain interred in their graves (Khotlele, 2023:33) and their life in the physical sense has been ended by death (Turaki, 1999:176). Also, their scope

of operation is limited to their clan relatives, and as time passes they cease to be ancestors because they become forgotten or a distant memory (Mbiti, 1969:83). Therefore, from time to time a new crop of ancestors must arise to continue the relationship and carry on with the familial functions assigned to them.

Bae (2007:32) is thus correct to state that the relationship between African cultures and God is somewhat ambivalent, and this perpetuates the gulf that exists between ATR adherents and God. Bediako (2004:197) concedes that it is Christ alone who bridges this gulf between God and ATR through his atoning death. Mbiti (1969:99) has also conceded that Christianity provides enduring salvation and outclasses ATR on the terrains of redemption and resurrection. Mosothoane (1973:86) has indeed attempted to make ancestors bridges over this chasm through sacrifices and the Eucharist as a validation of their presence and power. However, this fails because ancestors remain dead. Instead, Berkhof (1949:333) argues that this chasm that exists between humanity and God necessitates a Christology.

This Christology must therefore speak of Christ and his authority. This authority as we know it from the Bible, is not by accident. It was purposed and it was ordained. Viewing it from the narrow lens of Christ's work on earth eclipses the scope of his authority – his role extends to creation and redemption also. Treier (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:443) reveals that the gospel of John identifies Jesus as *Yahweh*, and this is premised on the 'I Am' sayings of Jesus Christ (Khotlele, 2023:84–89). Importantly, these predicates describe Jesus as the Logos (the divine Word) in which the universe has its beginning and structure. The Bible also ascribes to him the title of God (Rom. 9:5), and he is further defined as the express image and the exact representation of the Father (Heb. 1:3). Emerging from this a pattern is noticeable that Christ is God. The implication of his incarnation is that he also becomes fully human, fulfilling the roles of God and human at the same time.

This signifies that salvation and the process of salvation belong to God, and there is no role that humanity can play in attaining it. The repealing of the animal sacrifices of the OT and the enacting of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ establishes this very fact. Therefore, if Christ is both God and human (Treier, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:444–445), and if the Spirit in Christ dwells in believers also (Rom. 8:9), and it is a source of newly created life (Rom. 8:11), it means that in the triangle of authority with regard to salvation, there can only be three – God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This locks out any entity that may want to be players in the role of salvation and presents God as the only one capable of providing salvation for his creation. The polytheistic concept as postulated by Parrinder and Metuah is thus defeated as proposed in this triangle, because God is one (Dt. 6:4) (Sanders, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:898). He retains the power and retains the right to save his creation the way he sees fit.

3.6.4. The capability of Christ through the Holy Spirit

What is Christ capable of? For Africans, this is the question that would determine whether they come to his salvation offer or not. Before we discuss what Christ can do, it is important to talk about the question of his power. As discussed earlier, the context in which the image of Christ becomes visible in Africa is largely through the lens of power. Resane (2020:93) concurs that “[t]he African worldview of the Spirit is synonymous with power.”

However, Christ is obscured in the image of power to the extent that he is viewed as an absent, powerless, and un-relatable god (Bae, 2007:32). He fails to provide answers because he has neglected his responsibility of directing the affairs of the earth. To some extent, He is viewed as a retired God. This is partly the reason why the concept of him becoming an ancestor presents a problem. That analogy places him in another abode (of the dead) and strips him of his divinity (Banda, 2022:99), the implication being that he is distant still to those who may want to call on him. Worse, it declares him dead, and very much oblivious to the affairs of the living. Also, to become an ancestor, he now has to subsume a lower position in the African hierarchy of spiritual beings, and Banda (2022:99) points out that this conflicts with his divinity.

It is common cause therefore that Christ's power must be traced in terms of where it currently resides or is located. When Christ left, he sent the Holy Spirit. This means that the power that he had now rests with the Holy Spirit to aid believers on earth. Resane (2020:93) argues that “In African Christianity, power is associated with the liberation by the Holy Spirit from the shackles of darkness in personal and social experiences.”

Resane (2020:93) further submits statements that prove important in stamping the power that is vested in the Holy Spirit, including that “the Spirit is not just a Giver of Power, but he is power himself.” Nyirongo (2018:78) points out that the Holy Spirit gives us the power to do God's work, gives guidance, offers comfort during trials, and assurance of salvation and hope of eternal inheritance. Further, Packer (1993:159) submits that the Holy Spirit is a helper, adviser, strengthener, encourager, ally, and advocate. Here, it is apparent that the Holy Spirit is what Africans need because he carries answers not only to temporal problems, but to eschatological problems also. It is correct then to submit that questions of liberation find answers in the work that the Holy Spirit does on earth for anyone who chooses him.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit is not just power over the temporal, it is also power over sin (Resane, 2020:96), and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). Africans do not only need liberation from social injustices of this world, but they should also find freedom over the stronghold of sin. Only through the Holy Spirit can this be attained. Other divinities in the

triangle of authority may be construed to free people from poverty, witchcraft, and other related maladies, but none stake a claim that even freedom from the power of sin is realisable through them. Effectively, without the Holy Spirit, no one is free. It is here that Resane (2020:96) states that “the Holy Spirit became the power over sin, liberal thoughts, and above all, over human miseries”.

Without being laborious, Nyirongo (2018:74) shows the similarities between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from Scripture, and is happy to report that all are eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, truthful, and benevolent. This says to us that Christ is one with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17–18), and the power of the Holy Spirit is still at work today (Jn. 16:7). In the end, the Holy Spirit’s power is Christ’s power because the Father, the Son and the Spirit are one (1 Jn. 5:7). Cole (in Treier and Elwell, 2017:396) succinctly surmises: “The Spirit that is now in the believer is the Spirit not only of God but of Christ as well.” This Spirit is therefore one that is not only close to humanity, but dwells in the hearts of those who choose to accept Christ (Rom. 8:9), effectively endowing them with the power necessary to navigate issues of life.

3.6.5. The work of Christ

Cur Deus homo is still relevant as a question, especially for the African worldview. The reason why Christ became human is why we need to understand the work that revolves around his humanity. When humanity was lost, Christ had to become man in order to map a way back to the Father which humanity can follow. What is it therefore that Christ can do for traditional Africans? Apparently not much, given the question of his foreignness (Banda, 2005). If Christ is to perform any work for an African in their traditional religion, he must assume the image of an ancestor, effectively being stripped of his image as the Son of God.

Banda (2005) and Khotlele (2023) are opposed to this view, citing that in this way, his divinity is conflicted and his power is stripped. African traditionalists elected to reject God’s self-revelation (Nyirongo, 1997:3) and to turn to idols. To them, Jesus is standing before them as an idol who looks much like an ancestor. And if he stands before them in this way, he is able to offer help in their ominous situations, albeit temporal.

Notwithstanding the exploits of his hard-won salvation through his atoning sacrifice, what Christ does now is to deposit his Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers (Cole, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:396), essentially granting them the necessary power to live for him in this fallen world. In order to emphasise the connection between Father, Son and Spirit, Cole (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:369) submits that “there are no pneumatological moments without reference to the Father and the Son.” Even the Day of the Pentecost is about a particular focus on the risen

Christ, who pours out the Spirit of eschatological hope as promised in Joel 2:28 and delivered in Acts 2:14–21.

We may here allude in detail to the necessary work that Christ accomplished. However, given that he is positioned as an ancestor within the African traditional religions, that exercise may not be needed. It is, however, necessary to emphasise the point that in his absence, the Holy Spirit is at work for every believer. That same spirit stands ready to work for everyone who will believe and continues to intercede for believers with great groanings (Rom. 8:26). Christ also is not oblivious to the affairs of humans, for he is at the right hand of God and interceding (Rom. 8:34). Packer (2020:145) points out that his present role in heaven is referred to as heavenly session, with the word session (Latin *sessio*, meaning sitting) effectively meaning that he is sitting, interceding for believers.

To this also is added the mediatorial work of Christ as a result of his sacrifice. Davie *et al.* (2016:558) correctly posit that Christ is “the supreme interposition between God and [humans]” and that “he is the one mediator between God and [humanity].” Even Africans are not left out of this scope of Christ’s operation, and they can attain true salvation only when they surrender to him. Effectively, everyone who seeks God must go through Christ. Here, Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:779) state the ultimate truth for the entire world: “Forgiveness through Christ’s atoning sacrifice is not limited to one particular group only; it has worldwide application. It must, however, be received by faith.”

3.6.6. The value of Christ

Against what then should the value of Christ be measured? Again, it is not misguided to allude to the question of power. Clarke (2014:60) remarks that Christ must have the “power to save,” arguing that in the early African Pentecostalism view,³⁵ he is unmasked as *Osagyefo*, meaning that he is “one who saves the battle.” These honorifics are replete in African worldview, including the *Opanvin*, *Lesa*, *Qamata*, *Umvelingangi* (Pobee, 1979:61; Setiloane, 1986:33). Viewed in this way, Clarke (2014:60) maintains that Christ is able to save from the enemies of life, which include sickness, witchcraft, sorcery, magic, danger, misfortune, calamity, death, drought, war, oppression, foreign domination, slavery, and so on. However, while this is true of Christ who saves to the uttermost, this view continues to be largely temporal or this-worldly in its outlook, albeit resonating with the African traditional worldview and liberation christologies in particular.

³⁵ According to Clarke, this view emanates from William Waddy Harris and other African prophets, such as Garrick Braide, Simon Kimbangu, and Isaiah Shembe. This could also be extended to those AIC pioneers such as Bhengu and Barnabas Lekganyane for example. However, what is evident here is that the AoG and ZCC differ in the presentation of Christ with the passing of time, where the former became more Christo-centric while the latter became more ancestor-centric.

This view is sustained even in the writings of famous authors such as Mbiti, Bediako, Setiloane, and Pobee as they attempt to make Christ relevant to the African situation. He must speak to the existential threats that ordinary Africans face, otherwise he becomes irrelevant, foreign, and a guest. Theologies were therefore forged to meet this requirement – leading to feminism, black theology, and liberation theologies among others (Resane, 2020:73; Treier & Elwell, 2017) – attempting to answer all the existential threats pervading the African cosmology.

African cosmology thus ascribes Christ importance in relation to the existential needs that he answers. Ancestor, liberation and inculturation christologies have thus been developed in particular to deal with these issues of existence of African people. These are largely premised on the *theologia gloriae* model (Pobee, 1979:97; Kuster, 2001:76) according to which Christ's value is judged against his ability to deliver humanity from temporal issues. However, in the classical Christian worldview, he is more than that. His value is not judged merely on the basis of him answering the daily threats that humanity face, but it is intricately linked with the work of the cross, which was intended to reconcile God with humanity.

Humanity can devise means to rid itself of the temporal maladies that confront people in their daily existence by consulting mediums, spiritists, witchdoctors, prophets, and even Jesus himself. However, when the question of the salvation of the soul is on the agenda, only Christ can answer, thus speaking directly to the value that he holds. Value judgements can be made about many things, but Christ stands out when value propositions regarding salvation of the soul are made. ATRs have already accepted that Christ is the only remedy on the question of the salvation of the soul, and in order for them to remedy this situation, they must come to Christ – the supreme interposition between God and humanity.

3.7. SOLVING THE CHRISTOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN AFRICA

Ann Christie in her doctoral study engaged participants who had to reflect on their view of Christ and salvation. The findings and the conclusion that she advances, are telling. She (Christie, 2005:151) says:

The traditional ways of theologising the death of Jesus, using ideas of forgiveness, salvation, sacrifice, penalty, remission of sins, substitution, justification – to name just a few – do not seem to connect with many in my sample.

Quite telling indeed, because when the death of Jesus Christ is not understood and it is not ascribed its appropriate significance, Christian theologising will not reach its intended purpose as it will appear out of touch with the reality of the people. Her findings are similar in African worldview given that Christ is often not explained along this continuum. With this in view, the

focus must shift to the barriers that impede the path of African traditionalists and evangelicals to lasting salvation.

3.7.1. Causes of the Christological problem in Africa

Christie (2005:150–176) lists several “puzzlements” with the soteriological language in use to advance the cause of salvation. These include amongst others the *evidence of Christ's existence, why Jesus had to die, the view of God as sadistic, how Jesus saves, and whether salvation is available through Jesus alone*. She terms her investigation *Ordinary Christology*, where she picks the minds of ordinary people to answer challenging Bible questions.

Africa too, has her problems, which puts Christianity and African Christology into crosshairs. Flowing from the above, the causes of the Christological problem in Africa can be summarised as three main problems: the problem of the Bible, the question of culture, and the question of his foreignness. If Christ can be appropriated correctly in Africa, then the question of his power and the question of the Bible as a book of oppression, can be negated.

3.7.1.1. The problem of the Bible

It is not a secret that Africa's reception of the Bible is beset with suspicion and objections. This suspicion persists despite Gehman's (1987:27) observation that “in every instance the Bible translations into the various African vernaculars were made *with the assistance of African Christians*.” While West agrees with this observation (in Dube *et. al.*, 2012:85-86), he further notes that these interpretations had traces of miscommunication which were at times deliberate in order to shift relations of power. This power shift placed Africans in vulnerable positions. In many writings therefore, the leading statement is that “When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we (blacks) had the land. The white man said to us, ‘Let us pray’. After the prayer, the white man had the land, and we had the Bible” Resane (2020:134). This view continues to set the tone with respect to how the Bible is received in Africa.

While Gehman recognises the involvement of Africans in Bible translation, he also notes difficulties of “‘confusion of gospel and culture,’ and ‘rejection of African culture’” as matters that exacerbate the suspicious reception of the bible (Gehman, 1987-27-38). Scholars such as Banana (1993:17) felt for this very reason that Africans had to do more than just revise the Bible – they had to rewrite it given that those who brought it used it to subjugate them. If they could do this, Africans would have a Bible that speaks to their issues and needs and is divorced from the oppressor's predilections, so to speak. However, while *translation* has been accepted to have included the participation of Africans, compromised *interpretation* is largely accepted as the work of the western missionaries.

Why the Bible continues to be a problem in Africa therefore largely remains a question of interpretation and traces of translation mistakes prevalent in the bible. To Thomas (1971:282) then, Westerner missionaries preferred for themselves the powerful Jesus while they preferred him to be meek and mild for Africans. In this way, power shifted to the missionaries and the western enterprise (West, in Dube *et. al.*, 2012:85). The Westerners thus did not prefer an interpretation that was aligned with Scripture. Instead, they sought to elevate themselves as better human beings at the expense of the black Africans who were relegated to subhumans and subjected to slavery. Effectively, West (in Dube *et. al.*, 2012:86-88) says that western missionaries became the “vanguard of empire and colonialism,” and the bible became one of the power items they came along with. He notes that the visit to the Tlhaping people of South Africa by an explorer named William Burchell in 1912 reflected the use of the bible as a symbol of power and authority. This man, he says, used the bible to establish his own authority among these people.

In arguing for the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible, Holter (2023:231) argues that “Western interpreters have *very often* read typically Western prejudices against Africa and Africans into the text...” (own italics). Burchell used it to establish his authority. Africans must therefore see this problem exactly for what it is and they should accept the challenge of embarking on a proper interpretation – theology proper.

Blyden (1994:22–34) offers the view that what the missionaries brought to Africa was impure, superstitious, nominal, and superficial, and it failed to take root and flourish. This is because it was lined with their predilections and a hidden agenda that goes against the plan of God for his created image. This analysis caused Blyden (1994:20–26) to prefer the Bible without note or comment as a book Africans must relate to and embrace. Africans should thus not divorce themselves from the Bible when it is apparent that those who brought it compromised it (Punt, 2023:91; Shingange, 2023:108).

What should Africans do then? The solution is not to reject the Bible, because Africans are a part of it. This is not by coincidence, but through the welcoming of Christ in Egypt (Mt. 2:13–15) (Shabangu, 2005:4–5), through the carrying of the cross of Jesus (Lk. 23:26), and through great Bible scholars such as Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine (Boaheng, 2021:216–217; Mbiti, 1969:229), that Africans are active and rightful participants in the story of the Bible. Drane (cited in Barton & Bowden, 2004:27) is of the opinion that “there is something here (Bible) for everyone’s taste...” – much more so for Africans. It is therefore for Africans to give an interpretation to the Bible that is supported by Scripture and liberates Africans from oppression and slavery at the hands of other cultures. As a rule, Africans, unlike the missionary enterprise, ought to divide and project the word of God in the right way and plead fidelity to the Bible and to God. Importantly, the embracing of the gospel and Jesus

Christ must be engaged with a comforting understanding that he has “no hidden proselytising agenda” in him (Tshehla, in Dube *et. al.*, 2012:99).

3.7.1.2. The question of culture

Culture has continued to be an obstacle to doing theology proper in Africa (Gehman, 1987-27-38; Bota, 2020:158). The ridicule of African culture did little to advance the gospel, except to have efforts of evangelisation met with untold resistance that still permeates the African worldview today. Often in these discussions, Africans view culture as the basis of justice and inclusivity. The apprehension of Africans is that their culture has been trampled and counted for nothing (Oduyoye, 1995:83; Muya, 2023:2), when at the same time they are being forced to do theology based on the standards of the oppressor, something they view as great injustice.

Resane (2020:139) argues that seeking biblical justice would “condemn discrimination based on race, tribe, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status of any sort.” The search for biblical justice is thus important in the sense that in its pursuit of salvation, this search will be culture neutral, and the approach will not be based on race, gender, ethnicity and all, but it will rest itself on the image of God. In view of Ephesians 2:11–21 and Galatians 3:28, it is explicitly stated that Christ came to erect a new humanity that transcends class, race, and gender. In this way, every person as the image of God will be able to connect with the God of the Bible from their worldview and make sense of the salvation that is wrought in the Lordship of Christ.

But where does Africa look for biblical justice? I contend that it is through the sound interpretation of Scripture. We have stated above that Africans cannot let the interpretation of the missionary enterprise define their destiny, especially knowing that they advanced their cause using the Bible at the expense of Africans. Inclusion thus becomes important. Resane (2020:140) views inclusion as a buzzword in socio-cultural narratives, essentially meaning that Africans must draft interpretation models that puts them at the centre of the story of the Bible (Holter, 2023). They should not come to interpret the Bible as guests invited by Western missionaries as if they have no stake in it.

Without being expansive, a few concluding lines are necessary given that the story of African culture and Western missionaries is well known. How then do we bring African culture to the centre of the Bible story? Bota (2020:174–184), much like Idowu (1962), provides a solution. He argues strongly that culture in all its elements is dynamic and never static. He finds that cultures go through a process of diffusion where one may evolve into another or even reach a middle ground; a process that may happen through intermarriage, war conquests, or even proselytising by persuasion (2020:180–181). Even European cultures evolved in phases of

Western, Christendom and now secular culture, proving that Western culture is not synonymous with Christian culture and can therefore not serve as a benchmark of Christianity.

His conclusion is that even Africans can be cultural Africans without necessarily staying under the umbrella of ATR. ATR is a religion, but culture is identity. He says, “the sweeping answer to the question whether or not one can authentically be African and Zambian culturally without espousing ATR is in the affirmative...” (Bota, 2020:182). Therefore, Christian culture derives its values from Christ himself, and all cultures must come to identify with him and learn from his way of living. Tshehla has stated that Christ does not aim to proselytise Africans, citing the example of Nathanael (in Dube *et. al.* 2012:99). Idowu has already argued and concluded that Africans do not have to practice Christianity from the basis of Western culture. However, Africans must remain authentic in their “language, liturgy, conduct of worship services, dress codes, and so on; one culture cannot claim perfection” (Idowu, 1962:9–40; Khotlele, 2023:52).

In essence, this cultural diffusion may well speak to Niebuhr’s (Carter, 2006:36) “Christ above culture” approach where elements from the African culture that are not opposed to the Bible are assimilated into Christian culture. Culture is relative, dynamic, and never static, but the word of God is final, and Africans must advocate for an interpretation that relies on fidelity with the Bible. In this way, all cultures must tilt towards the Bible.

3.7.1.3. The foreignness of Christ

The problem of the foreignness of Christ is one that never fades. However, as we have seen above, Christ is very much at home in Africa, just like the Bible is (Holter, 2023). Many African authors have thus dealt with his foreignness by arguing that he is culturally different, geographically misplaced, and powerless to intervene in their affairs. Quite a compromised analysis given that his power is acknowledged only if he can be ancestorised, for ancestors are viewed as entities of power. It is therefore common cause to suggest that Christ’s power rests with him – and this power is fully realised when he is interpreted correctly. Therefore, when He is fully home in Africa, his power could be unleashed in measures never seen before. The question is: Does Christ belong in Africa?

The knowledge of God among Africans predates the knowledge of the Christian Christ. Africans have known God and have on many occasions alluded to their relationship with him (Banda, 2005:4; West, in Dube *et. al.*, 2012:85). Their religion, they avow, is even premised on the content of the OT, which they say validates their religion (Bediako, 1995:69; Lugira, 2009:19). It is posited that the OT could be read as an African book without much difficulty (Mojola, 2014). This indeed marks the proximity of Africans to the Bible, albeit mainly the OT.

When it comes to Christ, however, he is completely a new idea (Banda, 2005:3–4). He does not come with much validation in matters of security and provision. However, this feeling or apprehension among those who prescribe to ATR is somewhat incorrect. Christ delivers us just as he did those whom he aided in the Bible. At the same time, Christianity does not promise a life without difficulties or challenges (Jn. 16:33; Rom. 8:18; Jas. 5:10–11).

The nation of Israel, God's chosen people, endured suffering for over forty years in the wilderness (Jo. 5); even Jesus himself could not escape death by the cross despite his petitions to God for reprieve (Lk. 22:42). It is however, disappointing that in Africa, suffering and misery are viewed as the cause of “the distance, a gulf between God and his people,” as argued by Resane (2020:135; 124), and not as a test of faith (Jas. 1:2–4). We should appreciate that suffering is not limited to Africans, every human in this world goes through suffering.

The fact that Africans have become a definition and symbol of suffering (Resane, 2020:126), does not mean that Christ is foreign or indifferent to their plight. Of importance is to note that Jesus' first contact with Africa and Africans did not begin with the arrival of the missionaries or a written Bible (Holter, 2023:230). His arrival in Africa predates that of Christianity as a religion itself (Mt. 2). Africans have been central to the biblical story as discussed earlier.

We learn that his life was threatened after his birth, and he had to take refuge in Egypt (Mt. 2:13–15). This stands parallel to Israel's story in Egypt. Just as Israel as an infant nation went down into Egypt, so did the child Jesus (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:14). Here, the saviour who was to deliver nations from oppression and maladies and offer them eternal salvation, enjoyed the protection Africa had to offer in his trying times. Also, when Jesus faced what one could term his darkest hour, we learn that it was a man named Simon of Cyrene who came to his aid to carry his cross (Mt. 27:32). Cyrene, according to its geographical location, is an important city in Libya in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:80; 148).

Hays (cited in Holter, 2023:230) notes that “Black (African) people are not a modern-era addition to the story of salvation history. They were there from the beginning”. African participation in the events of the Bible also goes beyond the period of missionaries in Africa. They were present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), being among the first recipients of the Holy Spirit, and therefore were being prepared for the mission of the gospel. It is the Ethiopian eunuch, an African, who receives salvation and baptism (in Acts 8:27–40), with Holter (2023:232) acknowledging him “as the first non-Israelite to be baptised into the church.”

Why are these illustrations necessary? This is to demonstrate that the same Jesus who is accused of being foreign to African affairs is actually not. He was physically present; he was physically assisted by an African to complete God's mission; he was given protection by Africa; and he was sympathetic to the miseries of Africans as he demonstrated power in their circumstances. The difference between those biblical characters and the Africans of today is their attitude towards Jesus. While the Christians of the Bible called him Lord and afforded him pre-eminence, the current crop of Africans in their traditional religions prefer to put him alongside ancestors in the triangle of authority, as we have earlier seen.

If Adamo (cited in Holter, 2023) is heeded, he would be of much help in this ominous situation of traditional Africans of not accepting Christ as theirs. He says "God's special relationship is bounded by justice and righteousness. He is, therefore, not exclusively bound to one nation, but master of all and has a special relationship with all". Importantly, it must also be noted that from the earliest times the church confessed itself to be a catholic community, meaning it transcends the boundaries of race and nation. Christianity always was a universalist religion, because the God it worships is regarded as the creator of all things. In this analysis, Africans are firmly included.

3.8. MARCHING ON THE PATH OF SALVATION

The path of salvation has been created for all (Jn. 3:16). Africans too must enter this pilgrimage and march on it faithfully with an understanding that they are not marching on it as an afterthought, but it is God's predetermined idea for all humanity. In this segment therefore, Africans must march while understanding the purpose of this pilgrimage, which is largely defined as a way of salvation.

3.8.1. The path of salvation

We explore this path of salvation by asking two questions: Saved from what? and Saved by whom? When correctly answered, Africans will march the path to salvation with purpose and confidence.

3.8.1.1. Saved from what?

At the centre of salvation for Africans is the question of oppression and liberation. Resane (2020:80) is of the view that one of the struggles central to Africans is having to contend with "salvation without liberation or freedom from structural ills," while their white counterparts flourish physically and economically. This view stifles the discussion about salvation from sin, which can only be mastered by Jesus Christ.

The pursuit of salvation from sin has effectively taken a back seat and opened the door for varied views on sin. Two critical ones include Mbiti (in Meiring, 2005) who admits that he does not preach sin as it does not cross the minds of the people, and Nyabongo (in Desai, 1962) who argue that Africans do not have the word “sin” in their vocabulary. The dominant view in the African worldview with regard to sin is that it refers to “ritual impurity, injury to relationships in communities, and separation from ancestors,” amongst other things (Nyirongo, 2018:156; Khotlele, 2023). This view negates the importance of redemption and resurrection, and lacks future perspective (Mbiti, 1969:99). In this way salvation is viewed as temporal or mundane. Nyirongo (2018:156) submits that this view of sin obscures the understanding of Africans on issues such as judgement, salvation and immortality.

Almost a decade after the dawn of democracy in South Africa, legislation and policies that were intended to address the imbalances of the past were introduced, chief among them being Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (Vorster, 2007:22), later on Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) (Kruger, 2018:362). With these policies, a few black Africans became super rich, a sizeable number fell into the middle-class category, affording decent lifestyles both in townships and suburbs. Still, the inequality gap is on the rise (Vorster, 2007:23; Khunou, n.d. 2). The majority, however, are still left in abject poverty with no hope. But one cannot ignore the fact that there have been glimpses of material improvement. The delays in the emancipation of the majority of South Africans (and Africa at large) from poverty rests in the conduct of governments that are riddled with corruption and malfeasance (Resane, 2020:252).

Frank Chikane (cited in Resane, 2020:253) is of the view that “Corruption is devastating. It can compromise leaders to such an extent that they abandon their mission to serve the people...”. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of the Anglican Church shares in the despondence (cited in Kruger, 2018:362). Tellingly, Resane (2020:254) says corruption depletes whatever wealth the country could have gained. Therefore, the abandoning of the mission to serve the people, and the depletion of the wealth of the country through corruption, have nothing to do with God.

Notwithstanding the despondence, it is noted that the economic gap between the blacks and the whites has been narrowed, or at least some material improvement has been seen on the side of the blacks (Khunou, n.d.:2–14). This shows that God is not indifferent about the needs of his people. The constrained unfolding of these fortunes rests with the government, not God. It is also important to note that corruption is not synonymous with government only, but it is also prevalent in churches. Churches are empowered to be active participants in their communities and to provide social assistance and relief. Because of the corruption that is present in churches, this function also fails, further subjecting people to deeper misery.

Therefore, while emancipation from poverty and slavery rests with humans (officials) in government and with churches to solve, the question of the salvation of the soul still rests with God alone. Salvation thus has to address the question of sin and soul. Africans must be alerted that that which comes first is salvation from sin, the very reason Christ died (Jn. 3:16; Mt. 6:33). Nyirongo (2018:169) concurs that “throughout His ministry the Lord’s emphasis was on deliverance from sin – rather than physical, economic or political oppression (Rom. 5:9–10).”

The need for the political and social freedoms that we so dearly seek are not misplaced, in fact every human being deserves them by virtue of the image of God they bear. Africans must be resolute in seeking this. However, in the pursuit of these freedoms, the greater good for humanity must not be neglected, which is the salvation from sin. To this Nyirongo (2018:169) postulates:

All Christ’s miracles of healing were intended to reveal him as the deliverer from sin – the root cause of all suffering; for not until the problem of sin is dealt with, man has no real hope even if he is politically free or has material abundance here on earth (Lk. 12:15).

We therefore agree with Murray (2016:108) that Christian faith “is a whole-souled movement of self-commitment to Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences”, until such time that God has ended all suffering according to his promise (Nyirongo, 2018:170). Africans can claim all types of salvation they deem fit for their well-being, but salvation from sin, which they can only attain as result of the finished work of Jesus, must not be neglected.

3.8.1.2. Saved by whom?

Understanding the malady from which we are being saved (sin) must not result in confusion with regard to the deliverer of this salvation. Africans within their traditional religions advance various objects as guarantors or mediators of their salvation. Chief amongst these are the ancestors who continue to be an enduring reality in their lives and continue to occupy special place in their hearts and minds (Bujo, 1992; Turaki, 1999).

Mosothoane (1973:86) argues that “ancestors are the bridge of salvation for ATR adherents” just as Christ is for Christians. He views ancestors as “bridge over chasm of death.” In this way, ancestors are seen as vehicles for salvation and their adherents can thus look to them in hope. There are many statements in support of Mosothoane. For instance, Wannamaker (1997:294) submits that in ATR, ancestors are a “source of benefit and a giver and sustainer of life,” whereas Ezenweke (2008:4–5) ascribes to them protection of the family from diseases, evils, and wars; mediatorship between the people and divinity; and instillers of discipline. For

salvation that seeks harmonious relationships in communities and with ancestors emerges that in African worldview, salvation rests with the ancestors.

The Bible upholds a different view: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Salvation belongs to the Lord (Jo. 2:9). “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). What these verses seek to do is to put salvation out of reach of any human effort or invention and to place it in the hands of Christ. Importantly, humanity must not think that they stood any chance of saving themselves at any point in their lives. The Bible is clear that we are all dead in our trespasses. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13). In essence, we could not help ourselves in our dead state, making Christ’s coming necessary in order to give us life and save us from our trespasses.

Nyirongo (2018:170) points out that having assessed all NT and OT examples, it is plausible to conclude that “salvation is an act of God.” Seeing that these earthly deliverances are wholly God’s work and not instances of people saving themselves with God’s help, so it is with salvation, sin and death (Packer, 2020:162). Acts 4:12 concludes the matter, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Barton *et al.* (1996:1976) stress that “If God designated Jesus to be the Saviour of the world, no one else can be his equal.”

3.8.2. The promise of everlasting salvation

For any salvation to have meaning, it must provide security to those who attach themselves to it. If the call to African traditionalists is for them to come to the salvation of Jesus Christ, it will be natural to ask questions about the validity and endurance of that salvation offer.

Noting that authors such as Mbiti have already made concessions regarding the lack of endurance in the salvation found in ATR systems and ancestors – that it fails to address the afterlife with respect to redemption and resurrection – Christ salvation, on the other hand, is everlasting. It is recorded that as time passes, ancestors (predecessors) cease to exist and successors must emerge in their place in order to fill this gap (Mbiti, 1969:83). Nyirongo (1997:72) argues that as they become forgotten, they cease to exist. This thought aligns with how sacrifices unfolded in the OT – that regular sacrifices had to be offered on the altar for the sins of the people (Heb. 7:27), essentially reflecting the lack of endurance of dealing with sin in that system. Eventually, God ended this system that lacked endurance.

Salvation through Christ then became God's choice. He opted to place it solely on Christ because he knew that it would stand the test of time. The OT sacrificial system, including the sacrifices of animals, prefigured Jesus' ultimate sacrifice (Heb. 10:11–18). His sacrifice is final. Hebrews 9:26–28 highlights this, stating that Christ appeared once to do away with sin by offering himself as the sacrifice. His sacrifice established a new covenant that stands perpetually before God (Heb. 9:15), speaking of the endurance of this arrangement of salvation. This covenant carries with it the promise of forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God and eternal life through Christ (Packer, 2020:150–1). This is therefore the assurance even for Africans: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (Jn. 10:28–29). In Christ therefore, there is permanence of salvation.

3.8.3. On maintaining biblical fidelity in Africa

Biblical fidelity for any Christian is important because it represents God's infallible word and his message of redemption to his created image. The importance of biblical fidelity cannot be understated to Africans either. It is a given that Africans read the Bible through the spectacles of culture. Kayumba (2025) points out that within every human being there is an operating system. For Africans, he says this system is defaulted to African culture and an African worldview. Kraft (1979:104) posits that culture is an inescapable part of human existence. This means that in engaging with the Bible or God's word, Africans launch from the worldview of their culture, which at times makes biblical fidelity a daunting task, resulting in syncretic Christians.

Given this challenge, Chileshe (2023:79) asks the question: “How does the presence of ATR in the African Church undermine the authority of the Bible?” Of the three elements listed as problematic, two are important for our discussion, namely, suppressing truth through syncretistic practices, and placing authority in elderly men rather than Scripture.

The above two practices are largely dictated by culture, arising because Africans are defaulting to their cultural world and worldview. Chileshe (2023:88–89) argues that the dominant syncretistic practices in African churches arise as a result of a lack of appetite to deal with sin, and a desire to grow church membership often with lukewarm Christians. This has been evident from the way in which ATR conceptualises sin. It results in preaching that pacifies the effect of sin; that opts to look away when sin is committed, and that makes people feel comfortable with their debased lives. Already this view denies the power of the cross and everything that Christ has accomplished to reunite humanity with God.

Equally, authority that rightfully belongs to God in Christian churches is placed on mortals rather than God himself. It is clear from many AICs such as the ZCC and ELCSA that

reverence is placed on leaders of the churches themselves (De Visser, 2001). During the early rise of the AICs, Sundkler (1958:3) noted that the prophets become the Messiahs and Moses' leading their people into the promised land. The trend has long been evident that leaders such as Lekganyane, Masowe, and Khambule were and remain dominant above Christ in their congregations. Even the Pentecostal movement and the prosperity gospels have also been taken over by cultic figures such as the so called "prophets, papa,³⁶ and man of god" to name a few of these titles. The authority of Christ is removed, and mere mortals are at the helm.

The answer to dealing with these problems is biblical fidelity. However, fidelity to the Bible must arise as a result of how Africans engage with the Bible and how they intend to deal with their cultural worldview. Niebuhr and Bebbington become our references for two particular issues. Firstly, Niebuhr's typology of Christ and culture (see Section 3.4.1.4) which proposes models of cultural engagement in churches and by extension, towards Africans. Secondly, Bebbington's quadrilateral model (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4) which attempts to map a relationship with the gospel.

For the sake of brevity, the proposal in relation to cultural infiltration into the church polity and system calls for a consideration of Niebuhr's typology of Christ above culture. The Christ above culture approach, particularly leaning to the synthetic position rather than the dualist extremity, sees the "church as the instrument of God to bring about true culture" (Kraft, 1979:111). The error of assuming Western culture as "true culture" must be candidly opposed, and elements that are incompatible with faith in Jesus (Oduyoye, 1995:87) must be discarded. In this way, problematic cultural elements within the African worldview can be discarded, and those elements that harmonise with the Bible can form part of African Christian churches. A *tabula rasa* approach has brought untold misery and total resistance for Africans when evangelisation had to happen because even "good cultural elements" were thrown out on the basis that western missionaries could not identify with them.

Regarding Bebbington's proposals, Bible-centredness must become central to the African worldview. We have earlier noted the resistance that Africans have to the acceptance of the Bible and extreme proposals calling for its rewriting. The relationship of Africans with the Bible is therefore not decent, albeit with the exception that the OT is "their book". I restate that Africans must come to the realisation that they are not an afterthought in the Bible – it is their story (Holter, 2023:230). The project to deconstruct the myth concerning Africans and the Bible and the effort to decolonise it could not be more urgent.

³⁶ Papa is commonly known to refer to father. In many prophetic charismatic churches, the word has come to be understood as an endearment to the Pastor. In these circumstances, papa is given highest authority and church members fall completely under his authority. Church members therefore depend on him, and go to God and Christ through him.

Punt (2023:82), however, recognises that there are few and limited efforts aimed at decolonising the Bible in Africa, and this position really does little to deconstruct the inherent interpretation myths that are perpetuated by those with ill intent. Still, Africans must understand that they are central to the Bible story, and if it were not for Africa providing refuge to Christ, perhaps even the Christian faith could have been a mere legend. Africans must therefore own the Bible as their book and interpret it rightly.

3.9. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the interface between the postmodern era of Christology and African christologies as understood from various scholars. Inculturation and contextual theologies emerged and have become the basis upon which African christologies were developed, particularly ancestor and liberation christologies which concern themselves with culture and freedom. Because of this, these christologies have failed somewhat to produce elements compatible with the Bible for biblical soteriology to take root. The image or identity of Christ has failed to come out lucidly, thereby presenting an obscure image prone to misinterpretation. This obscure image presents a Christ that is powerless, absent, and detached from the problems Africans face.

By abandoning the traditional African christological interpretation of Christ within the African worldview, new propositions were brought forward. Instead of investigating Christ as ancestor, king, or priest, this chapter sought a new understanding. Christ was investigated as saviour of the world, sanctifier, baptiser, Son of Man, teacher, and suffering servant. This discourse presents a Christ who addresses the African existential issues and who is concerned about the plight of the people of Africa and humanity at large.

The study further encourages African traditionalists to do a sound review of the Bible, to revise their view on culture, and to accommodate Christ as their own. The Christological problem can only be addressed if all prejudices are removed and a re-interpretation of the scriptures rooted in the word of God is undertaken. Deconstruction of inherent myths about Africans and decolonisation efforts are urgent in the current atmosphere. Most important is for Africans to know that they are central to the story of the Bible as God's creation.

In the end, the gospel that is preached in African churches must be anchored in the truth of Scripture and stand for an interpretation supported by the Bible – a condition that will illuminate the lordship of Christ in the African milieu.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN EVALUATION OF THE LORDSHIP SALVATION THEOLOGY AGAINST AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the tenets of LST³⁷ by evaluating concepts such as sin, repentance, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. This will show that LST confronts ATR at critical points on salvation, and proposes a salvation method that is at variance with ATR. The path to salvation that this theology proposes is outlined, and propositions are made about how it can be of help to the predicament of salvation many in African traditional religions face. This evaluation is done in spite of the claim that ATR is in itself salvific,³⁸ for it has been acknowledged that it is only Christianity that offers eschatological hope for redemption and resurrection,³⁹ and therefore enduring salvation.

4.1.1. Methodology

In this section, two different worldviews are contrasted with the aim of understanding firstly, the position of each worldview in relation to its core beliefs, and secondly, bringing these two worldviews into dialogue in order to gauge their understanding of salvation and the relationship they prefer with Jesus among other things. Therefore, through a dogmatic theological methodology, evaluation of LST and ATR will be undertaken within a soteriological framework by integrating historical, biblical, synthetic, apologetic, and practical dimensions.

The study begins with a historical and theological survey of LST by bringing scholars such as MacArthur, Pink, Packer, Tozer, and Grudem, who defend the LST position. Equally, scholars such as Hodges, Ryrie, Bing, and Sensinig among others are employed in presenting the criticism against LST. These scholars, both for and against LST, are carefully selected across the scholarship over the past eight decades or so in order to get an overview of the issues that are in contention. The argument then moves to examining ATR conceptions of salvation by engaging authors such as Mbiti, Maimela, Maluleke De Visser, Boaheng, Magezi, Resane, and others, carefully ensuring that historical and current authors are well represented for a coherent argument. Theological claims are judged on the basis of biblical fidelity, logical coherence, and doctrinal consistency. Convergences with ATR are identified, and tensions

³⁷ Lordship salvation theology is abbreviated as LST. At times it is also referred to as lordship salvation.

³⁸ Simon Maimela (1985:66–69). In spite of this view of Maimela, the salvation that he propagates is more temporal than eschatological, and takes after the general view of salvation as understood in African religion, which is peace and harmony within communities.

³⁹ John Mbiti (1969:99).

and theological implications are resolved. The chapter concludes by constructing a model of salvation that presents a way of salvation for ATR adherents to follow.

4.2. THE BACKGROUND TO LORDSHIP SALVATION

4.2.1. The emergence of lordship salvation theology

LST emerged from a late twentieth century controversy between John MacArthur and Zane Hodges. Among the first advocates of this theological position are John Stott (1921–2011) and J.I. Packer (1926–2020), whose writings are dated before 1962. Arthur Pink (1886–1952) also wrote on the subject in the earlier years. The rebuttal of LST by Charles Ryrie (1925–2016) in the late sixties seemed to draw attention to this topic, unleashing scholars such as A.W. Tozer (1897–1963) and Kenneth Gentry, who wrote in defence of LST.

In the eighties, prominent LST scholars included the likes of R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) and John MacArthur (1939–2025), whose writings ignited another round of fierce polemic from Ryrie, Hodges, and others. The scholarship continued with the likes of MacArthur, John Piper (1946–), and John Miller (1928–1996), and the rebuttal also continues just as fiercely from the free grace camp (FGT)⁴⁰ through Charles Bing and others.

In the main, LST position largely stands as a response to the no-lordship doctrine which is defended by Ryrie, Hodges, and Bing amongst others. MacArthur (2008:152–153) notes that the lordship salvation doctrine stood “as a critique to a popular system of theology that argues that every reference to the lordship of Christ should be omitted from the gospel message,” which rose to popularity as a dominant system of theology in American evangelicalism for several decades. The underpinning of this theology is that anyone who confesses Jesus as saviour must submit to his lordship and lead a life that shows the fruits of repentance (Pink, 1977; 2013; MacArthur, 2008 [1988].; Piper 2007).

4.2.2. What is lordship salvation?

The definition of the concept *lordship salvation* is important in order to appreciate what follows in this chapter. The 1959 document of the World Council of Churches titled “The Lordship of Christ over the World and the Church” underscores the importance of discussing issues related to the lordship of Christ. It states (WCC, 1959) as follows:

The ecumenical movement cannot grow and deepen unless intensive biblical and theological work is undertaken at each major point in the common life of the churches.

⁴⁰ FGT movement, sometimes referred to as no-lordship salvation, and is discussed in detail in Chapter 5

This common life of the churches continues to confront us today with regard to the question of the lordship salvation. Thus, LST is regarded as a soteriological position that teaches that responding to the call of Christ is followed by a change in lifestyle (Pink, 1977; MacArthur, 2008 [1988].; Packer, 2020). Therefore, if a person is in Christ, they become a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). This position finds support in authors like Arthur Pink, John MacArthur, J. Packer, and others.

The WCC (1959) argues that the life of the church (meaning individuals who make up the church) must imitate the kind of life lived by Christ. They argue that if the church lives in this way, the love of God would drive out what is humanity's death and destruction (sin).

Wayne Grudem (2015) acknowledges the confusion that he says the lordship salvation term brings into the debate of salvation, saying that the term is a misleading and unfortunate summary of the central issues involved. To him, repentance and good works are central to the arguments of lordship salvation. He says when we engage these terms, we will see that the lordship salvation as a term is merely the "ordinary, mainstream, evangelical Protestant view since the Reformation" (Grudem, 2015:24). While I will keep to the term lordship salvation for the purpose of keeping to the thought being argued, I also appreciate that what Grudem is raising as the key issues involved in this controversy are warranted and are thus discussed in this study.

MacArthur (2008 [1988].) also has his view on the scope of lordship salvation. He contends that it stands on faith, discipleship, lordship (submission to Christ's authority); visible fruits of salvation; and repentance of works contrary to Christ's command. These concepts of regeneration, repentance, sanctification, and lordship are also lucidly argued by Arthur Pink (1977) in his book *The doctrine of salvation*, and are important in shaping this study. Next, I explain the position of lordship salvation using these concepts.

4.2.3. The tenets of lordship salvation

The proponents of LST present their argument using themes such as faith, repentance, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. In line with these concepts, we evaluate the position of LST to answer the criticism that is directed at this theology. The focus in this section is on establishing the position of LST, and not to necessarily establish the historical orthodoxy of these terms.

4.2.3.1. Faith

Packer (2020:173–174) submits that "faith is an object-oriented response, shaped by that which is trusted (God), God's promises, and Jesus Christ, all as set forth in the scriptures." He says it is "a whole-souled response, involving mind, heart, will, and affections." It is whole-

souled movement in line with old Reformed theology because it held to the analysis of faith as *notitia* (knowledge – of the gospel), plus *assensus* (agreement – accepting the gospel as true), plus *fiducia* (trust and reliance, personal dependence on God). He holds that faith is God's gift and is a fruit of applicatory illumination by the Holy Spirit, which holds with it conscious assurance through the Spirit (Rom. 8:15–17). God then grants humanity the necessary grace so that people can move towards him through the exercise of faith worked by his Spirit.

On the other hand, Pink (2018:10) submits that “all-saving faith in Christ does not save.”⁴¹ This statement marks the concern about the *attitude* of faith dispensed to Christ by those who seek his salvation. Pink (2018:10) then finds it necessary that “each of us make the most diligent and thorough inquiry concerning the nature of saving faith.” He uses the example of one Simon Magus who according to Acts 8:13 showed belief, but was later (Acts 8:21, 23) labelled by Peter as having no part in their work because his heart was not right with God. This then signifies that the attitude of belief towards Christ is essential and must flow from a contrite heart, which also appreciates the issues set before it (the gospel), thus a whole-souled movement idea.

The crux of Pink's (2018:11) argument on faith, a saving one, is that it is born neither from education nor self-effort (Acts 26:27), but from “spiritual light and Divine power moving the mind to assent”. He recognises that saving grace is a “spiritual grace communicated from on high” (Pink, 2013:18). He (Pink, 2018:17–18) says: “Thus an essential element or ingredient in saving faith is a yielding to the authority of God, a submitting of myself to His rule”, and eventually the abandoning of every false object of confidence.

Grudem (1999:307) also acknowledges that there is faith that saves, and he calls this true faith. He says true saving faith includes knowledge, approval, and personal trust. It is that kind of faith that trusts in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. The emphasis is that this faith is not just a belief of facts about Jesus but personal trust in him to save us (Grudem, 1999:308). Grudem's (1999:309) position is in tandem with that of Pink (2013) and Packer (1999), that this faith consists of knowledge of the facts, agreement to the facts, and surrender and conviction arising from these facts in order to obtain salvation.

Michael Ovey (1958–2017) examines what he terms two orders of salvation, where the one argues repentance and faith as mutually exclusive, whereas the other argues for mutual connection. Of the latter he says that the mutual connection between faith and repentance may be that one produces the other or they are sides of the same coin. The net effect of this

⁴¹ In this type of faith in John 2:23–24, Christ is the object, yet some are not saved. Barton *et al.* (1996:1904) explain this in line with Jeremiah 17:9, suggesting that Christ knows the hearts and saw the faith of those who pretended to believe because of miracles to be superficial. Other examples of non-saving faith are mentioned in Hebrews 6:4, Matthew 13:20, 21 and Matthew 25:7.

proposition, he argues, is that “a faithless repentance, or a repentance-less faith, may not be the kind of faith and repentance that lead to justification and forgiveness” (Ovey, 2019:104–105). Pink (2018:10) has given a plausible lecture on this faith, offering scriptural evidence that “not all faith saves.” It is thus conceivable to summarise the position on this saving faith as that which leads to true repentance.

4.2.3.2. Repentance

Pink (1977:45) laments the move away from teaching repentance, which he says some preachers have deemed unnecessary for salvation. He labels such preachers as deceivers of souls and accuses them of deluding the masses with their sugar-coated lies. He regards repentance as absolutely necessary for salvation (Lk. 13:3). He argues that repentance is taught in the Word of God, saying that “God requires a sincere and deep repentance *before* He pardons any sinner” (original italics) (Pink, 1977:46). Pink says that repentance is not a *meritorious* work on the part of the sinner to comply with this righteous demand from God. Rather, it is a truth of God that must be “pressed on those who have transgressed against Him” (Pink, 1977:46). He comments on repentance and faith (meritorious graces of self-emptying) by saying that repentance is the hand that releases those sins we had so tenaciously clung to, while “faith is extending an empty hand to God to receive the gift of his grace” (Pink, 1977:117), referring indeed to the grace of God’s salvation.

Pink (1977:47) further argues that repentance is occasioned by sin, consists in a change of mind, is accompanied by real sorrow for sin, and its fruit rests in the determination to change course or to desert the ways of old (also see Grudem, 1999:309–310). Of this repentance he says that it is not a once-off exercise that can be ticked off and forgotten about, it is a perpetual abhorrence of evil. It testifies of a heart that constantly acknowledges its sinfulness before God (1 Jn. 1:7–9), that accepts its depravity and that salvation is not by merit. This heart aims to rise to the level that God wants it to be, yet acknowledges that, by the grace of God, a life pleasing to God can be lived if war is waged daily against the devil.

MacArthur (2008:175 [1988].), on the other hand, begins by stating that repentance is a recurring motif in Jesus’ public sermons as contemplated in Scripture (Lk. 5:31, 13:3, 5; Mt. 4:17, and elsewhere). Noting that repentance is a critical element of conversion (MacArthur, 2008:177 [1988]), he says that repentance contains three elements, namely “a turning to God, a turning from evil, and the intent to serve God” (MacArthur, 2007:178 [1998]). He is of the same conviction as Pink, arguing that repentance is not a human work, thus avowing that no credit can accrue to a sinner as a result of their repentance. As sinners turn therefore, they do not merely exercise their minds, but their “intellect, emotions, and will” (MacArthur, 2008:179 [1998]) are also activated. The *intellectual* aspect of repentance consists in the recognition of

sin, whereas *emotionally* it activates an overwhelming sense of sorrow, and *volitionally*, compels a sinner to change direction (MacArthur, 2008:179–80 [1998]; Berkhoff, 1949). In tandem with Pink, MacArthur (2008:18) surmises also that repentance is progressive, and is a lifelong process of confession.

We also find other authors who subscribe to this view of repentance. Packer (2020:176–177) and Piper (2007:88–90) submit that repentance summarises Jesus’ gospel that was to be preached to the whole world (Lk. 24:47). Packer (2020:177) further submits that true repentance is that of contrition (concerned with sinning no more, Ps. 51) as opposed to attrition (arising as a result of fear of punishment). Calvin termed these views “evangelical repentance” and “legal repentance,” appreciating the importance of the former, which is occasioned by true conversion that leads to the mortification of our flesh and which is a consequence of faith in Christ (Calvin, cited by Davie, *et al.* 2016:765). Packer (2020:176) thus says: “Repentance means starting to live a new life”. Treier and Elwell (2017) likewise submit that preaching must involve repentance and remission of sins, which Piper (2007:88) says must also be joined with the proclamation of the cross and the resurrection (Lk. 24:44–49) for the Good News to take effect.

There is no denying that the positions of all these scholars on repentance are in harmony. On key points such as merit, fruit, and perpetuity of repentance, there is no ambiguity. The message that is being pressed on repentance can be summarised under the three statements, (1) that repentance is necessary and has its fruits in the new lifestyle that reflects on the sinner; (2) that this repentance is not for the account of the sinner, it arises as a gift from God, who enables sinners to convert; and (3) that this repentance is progressive and never final.

4.2.3.3. Regeneration

Packer (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:734) remarks that “regeneration, or new birth, is an inner recreating of fallen human nature by the Holy Spirit’s gracious sovereign action.” Importantly, regeneration in Christ “changes a person’s disposition from a lawless, godless, self-serving disposition,” to a demeanour that readily complies with God’s law and instruction (Packer, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:734). The fact that regeneration is considered a new birth shows that the old self has died and a new person is now alive (2 Cor. 5:17). The term regeneration appears twice in Scripture, and in both instances it speaks of renewal (of the cosmic in Mt. 19:28 and of the person in Acts 3:21). In the OT, the motif of God softening the hearts of Israel is attributed to regeneration, whereas in the NT, especially in view of the Nicodemus story (Jn. 3:1–5), a thought is maintained that there are no spiritual activities without regeneration (Packer, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:734–5).

Elsewhere, Packer (2020:171–2) assents that this term grew, it seems, from the interaction of Jesus with Nicodemus, averring that the concept is of God renovating the heart. This renovation entails the “implanting of a new principle of desire, purpose, and action” with respect to the gospel of Christ. Barton *et al.* (1999:1904) point out that entrance into the kingdom consist in repentance and new birth. It seems then that there is no exercise of faith towards Christ as Saviour without regeneration or new birth. This exercise of faith results in a positive and dynamic disposition towards the things of God, including the visible fruits of the spirit that accrue to a regenerate person.

Pink (1977:9) also sees regeneration as new birth. He (Pink, 1977:11) says regeneration is “a supernatural operation of God upon [hu]man’s spirit, a transcendent wonder... It is a marvel of divine grace, divine wisdom, divine power, and divine beauty”. This then makes regeneration a process, and we cannot expect to begin to understand how we become God’s children. As expected, Pink (1977:12–21) emphasises the necessity of regeneration due to our natural degeneration, humanity’s total depravity, and our unsuitedness to God. Pink (1977:24–28) contends that the nature of this regeneration reverses what happened at the fall, but more so, it is not just the restoration of the life that Adam lost, but the receiving of “the life which the Son of God has in himself, even eternal life”. However, even in the presence of this new life, the old character is still present in humans, creating the need for continual cleansing as in 1 John 1:9.

When it has taken its course, Pink (1977:29–36) avers that regeneration leads to the illumination of understanding, the elevation of the heart, and the rectification of conduct. He concludes by submitting that regeneration is of the born again, citing that it is seen clearly in impartation, renovation, and subjugation. God communicates his will to Christians, he renews the faculty of the soul and spirit, and supresses the power of the sin indwelling the one born again (Pink, 1977:37–38). Since regeneration is not able to preserve the soul from sin, there is continued supply of grace for believers to wage a continuous fight against sin. Here, Packer (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:735) postulates that it does not mean the regenerate are free of sin. However, *habitual* law-keeping is born within them.

MacArthur (2008 [1988]) opines that regeneration always adhered to the principles of “a new start, a rebirth, a turning from sin to God.” It is not a reward for human works, it always stood, even in the OT, as a gift of grace for repentant sinners. He explains this through Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, noting that the rebirth that Jesus was alluding to (of water and spirit) did not mean literal re-entry into the womb. However, being born of water was symbolic of regeneration, whereas being born of the Sprit symbolised renewal by the Holy Spirit (MacArthur, 2008:55 [1988]). What is obvious, according to MacArthur, is that Nicodemus understood the difficulty of saving himself (because he could not return to his mother’s womb),

and also, of the futility of his religion because that could not earn him salvation either (MacArthur, 2008:53–54 [1988]). MacArthur (2008:58 [1988]) comments as follows on the necessity of regeneration. He says it:

... is no option, but rather an absolute necessity. No one – not even the most religious Pharisee – is exempt from the divine call to a new birth. And thus we have the starting point of Jesus' gospel: that salvation is impossible apart from divinely wrought regeneration.

These scholars' views on regeneration are patently clear. In the scheme of salvation, regeneration is also the work of God. Believers cannot attain it by themselves; it changes a believer's disposition towards God and his instruction, with its chief end being to make believers more like Christ.

4.2.3.4. Justification

MacArthur (2008:196 [1988]) posits that the salvation Jesus promises "is not merely a one-time legal transaction." However, justification is "a one-time legal transaction" that forms the turning point that moves sinners into a relationship with God. Consequently, he sees justification as "an act of God through which he imputes to believing sinners the full righteousness of Christ, forgiving sins, declaring them perfectly righteous in his sight and delivering them from all condemnation" (MacArthur, 2008:196 [1988]). Importantly, justification is not the work of the sinner, it is more of a judicial process executed by God on the sinner on account of the propitiation accomplished by Christ. Therefore, a sinner stands righteous not because of their works (because their righteousness will always fall short, no matter how good), but because of the work that Christ accomplished on behalf of all humanity. Barton *et al.* (1996:2069) surmise that in justifying us, God "declared us not guilty and has offered us freedom from sin and power to do his will."

Pink (1977:109, 116) also posits that justification is by faith. He deems justification a judicial process through which God saves sinners not from sin, but from its penalty. Justification is to him an instantaneous process that takes place at the very moment when God declares a sinner saved (Lk. 7:50; Eph. 2:8; 1 Thes. 1:10). It is a forensic term that attaches to the law courts where "the accused is found to be guiltless," having been found to have met all the demands of the law (Pink, 1977:118). In the believer's case, sins are found to be imputed to Christ, who met all the demands of the law, thereby declaring sinners guiltless.

Pink (1977) contemplates justification from two separate viewpoints – the divine and the human. The divine aspect consists in the mediatorial work of Christ who, "standing as the sponsor and surety of his people, met the requirements of the law on their behalf" (Is. 53:5; 1

Pt. 2:24). On the human side, justification results from repentance and faith (Pink, 1977:116). He is explicit in averring that these two neither possess merit nor purchase the sinner's pardon, however, they are essential in the order appointed by God because salvation will not become ours experimentally until they are exercised (Pink, 1977:117).

Packer (2020:178–179) provides a succinct definition of justification. He says it is:

...a judicial act of God pardoning sinners (wicked and ungodly persons, Rom. 3:0–24; 4:5), accepting them as just, and so putting permanently right their previously estranged relationship with himself. This justifying sentence is God's gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:15– 7), his bestowal of a status of acceptance for Jesus's sake.

Packers (2020:179) avers that God may be judged unjustly because he declares sinners to be righteous, an act that goes against his righteousness and holiness. However, this righteousness is not on account of the sinner (Packer, 2020:179), but that of Jesus Christ, whom Pink (1977:117) says is the sponsor and surety of his people. On account of the work accomplished by Christ, and him presenting himself as the guarantor of our salvation, God accepts him, thereby accepting us, expressing clearly the mediatorial aspect of Christ. MacArthur (2008:198 [1988]) concurs, saying: "His perfect righteousness thus becomes the ground on which we stand before God."

Piper (2007:41–43) also provides clarity on how LST views the process of coming to salvation. In his view, justification is not something that *happens immediately after the call*, but rather something that happens *along with the call* – meaning that at that very moment, a sinner is declared righteous by God. It is instantaneous; not a process of coming to the faith, but a process of faith. He says in this way a believer now has a new relationship with God.

4.2.3.5. Sanctification

Ordinarily, sanctification is granted those who have now begun a new life with Christ. Pink (1977:122) avers that sanctification has to do with salvation from the power of sin: "sanctification signifies 'separation' – separation from sin". Even with sanctification, it has divine and human elements. On the human side, it is necessary for the believer to realise that they can reach sanctification by feeding their spiritual nature, by constant prayer and constant exercise as they walk with Christ (Pink, 1977:120–121). He attaches to this the element of working out our salvation in fear and trembling; a task that rests on every believer who has hope of seeing God.

On the divine side, Pink advances that it is God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12–13). The continued presence of believers in this sin-infested world requires God to constantly deliver them from the imperial power of sin. Through his grace,

God uses a number of means to achieve this deliverance, including granting believers “a clearer view of their inward depravity, by sore chastening, by bitter disappointments, and by granting believers the gift of the Spirit and His work in them” (Pink, 1977:121–127). Clearly, no believer will survive the harsh treatment of this world, and only God can walk side-by-side with the believer until they leave this earth having surrendered their will and their lives to Him. This effectively attaches grace to the process of sanctification –as the believer stumbles and falls, God cleanses them by his grace on account of the finished work of Christ.

MacArthur (2008:211 [1988]) emphasises the need for sanctification by saying it is “a *characteristic* of all who are redeemed, not a condition for their receiving salvation.” As we are being saved there is nothing good in us we can show God to merit our salvation. Even then with sanctification it becomes not our actions, but an imputed characteristic that God bestows on believers. Sanctification therefore becomes an inevitable part of our conversion (MacArthur, 2008:210 [1988]) because in it subsists the holiness that God requires from those who profess his name and have been granted his salvation (Heb. 12:14).

Packer (2020:183) regards sanctification as “a work of God’s free grace,” renewing the whole human after the image of God, and causing humans to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness. He speaks of relational sanctification, which is a state of being permanently set apart for God, and it is attained as a result of the cross. On the other hand, there is moral renovation, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, where believers are changed daily from their old self to become more Christlike (Packer, 2020:184; Barton *et al* 1996:2268). Both these aspects of sanctification are God’s work, imputed to humanity through grace. However, it does not mean that believers are passive in sanctification. Packer (Packer, 2020:184) clearly demonstrates that in the process of sanctification, believers become God-dependant in their actions (2 Cor. 7:1, Phil. 3:10–14; Heb. 12:14), “knowing that without Christ’s enabling we can do nothing”.

4.2.3.6. Glorification

Pink (1977:128–130) regards glorification as “salvation from the presence of sin.” This salvation comes because believers now change their abode – they no longer live on this earth, but in heaven; they no longer occupy their mortal bodies, but are given spiritual bodies; they no longer face the corruption and the weaknesses that characterised their bodies, but have now transformed into incorruptible and powerful status as a result of the work of Christ. Pink (1977:129 & 132) submits that this status (glorification) will be accomplished at Christ’s second appearance. At this point, believers who have persevered are now called unto God in his heavenly place and enter the full enjoyment of the possession Christ has purchased for them.

Importantly, MacArthur sees glorification also as the work of God and a facet in the work of salvation. It also includes repentance, faith, sanctification, and obedience. God is not dependent on humanity to produce those elements. However, any element that is missing cannot be accounted as the saving work of God (Rom. 8:29–30) (MacArthur, 2008: 48,197 [1988]). Grudem (1999:356, 358) concurs that glorification is God’s work. It is the final step of God’s salvific work, which is completed at the dawn of the “new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

Packer (2020:261) argues that Christ’s second coming, which brings the salvation of believers from sin, occurs to “impart to God’s children their final glory.” This event sees the elected in glory, purified and perfected, forever honouring the Lamb that has accomplished their redemption. What subsists in glorification is “the servant-Lord relationship between God and the *godly* (own italics) that follows the era of the mediatorial kingdom” (Packer, 2020:261).

It is apparent that perseverance will lead believers to glorification. Therefore, even after glorification, when sin is no longer present, the godly must and will always continue in a servant-Lord relationship. It will not be a new thing that suddenly comes upon them as they transform into a state of glorification, but it will be just a transition from their obedience to this relationship and to God whilst they were still on earth confronted by the harsh realities of the present sin. The new position (of glorification) sets them perpetually before God where Christ remains Lord and they, who have known him as Lord on this earth, continue to know him as Lord in the Heavens in their glorified state.

4.2.4. The way to salvation

The exposition above hints at the view of salvation in LST. There is an argument that LST position does not have a correct view of salvation because at the point of conversion, it demands works, thus introducing legalism. However, the discussion above demonstrates that lordship salvation takes after a pattern of the Bible, and like Grudem (2015:24) argues, it is not a new teaching but an old protestant teaching that underpins the lordship salvation message.

Accordingly, in answering a question on the way to salvation, we answer three questions that reveal how LST contemplates the unfolding of salvation. These include what we must do to be saved, the role of our faith in salvation, and how God saves us.

4.2.4.1. What must we do to be saved in the way of salvation?

When one reads the contributions by Pink, there is a deep-seated sense that the answer to this question lies in repentance. There will not be adequate reply to this question if repentance is not at its centre. At the outset, lordship salvation demands repentance in response to what

the sinner needs to do. While it is implied that the sinner needs to do something for salvation, we have already seen that “doing” has a negative connotation as it involves the sinner to merely let go of their sins (Pink, 1977:117). Pink (2013:17) argues that for salvation to accrue it does not depend only on the sinner believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, because this position is overly simplistic and “leaves out of account God’s demand for repentance (with all that it involves and includes), and Christ’s clearly defined terms of discipleship in Luke 14”. Thus, sinners letting go of their sins must also be coupled with the repentance which God demands.

Pink (1977:80–83) argues firmly that humanity must realise the havoc sin has caused in their lives – spiritual death, depriving them of necessary faculties to even recognise the God that stands before them. He therefore attaches humanity’s corrupt nature to their completely darkened understanding and their corrupt affections. Humanity is thus corrupted by sin, which in turn dims God’s light that is supposed to be shining in them. This light redeems their affections and aligns them with God’s will (Pink, 1977:80–83). Pink thus argues that mere belief on the Lord Jesus Christ does not represent the full scope of the salvation process, and this may well leave many unsaved.

Other scholars such as Miller (2009), Packer (2020), and MacArthur (2008 [1988]) concur with Pink that the belief in Christ that is needed for salvation, includes repentance. Here, Kromminga (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:740–741) indicates that repentance involves the whole process of change, and when faith is present and placed in Jesus Christ, repentance will lead to salvation. At the point of salvation therefore, issues of faith and repentance emerge, meaning the renouncing of the old self and assenting to the lordship of Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Pink (2013:17–18) then uses Romans 10:13 to make his point: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,” and Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”. It is clear that this simple belief does not mean lip service – assenting by mouth without triggering the heart to some changed action. Thus the only “calling upon His name” that God will hear is that which “issues from a broken, penitent, sin-hating heart, which thirsts after holiness” (Pink, 2013:18).

Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ must accordingly be crowned by his lordship over the believer, thus activating and regenerating the necessary faculties in fallen humans so that while they grapple with sin, their hearts resent it, and their desires resolve to please God. This entrenches the need for a complete turning to God and surrender to his power. And since humanity cannot come to God owing to its corrupt nature and its depravity, the act of coming to him purely depends on his act of pulling humanity towards him by his grace (Pink, 1977:85–102). Believers are then turned from their old selves and are made new everyday by God’s mercies in order for them to walk repentantly in the way of salvation. Gause (2009:21) thus argues that

“every aspect of repentance is a provision of the grace of God,” and humanity must yield itself to this repentance.

4.2.4.2. What is the role of grace and saving faith in the way of salvation?

With humanity being so depraved that it cannot bring itself into harmony with God, and a heart so depraved that it is in no position to see how it could be saved, only a miracle of faith, saving faith, can account for this great salvation. Pink (2013:18) talks of this difficulty, saying that saving faith itself “is not a native product of the human heart”. Humanity’s will is at odds with that of God. So great is this variance that the will of humans is at every junction in opposition even to the goodness that God wishes to extend to it. Pink (2013:19) rightly notes that “nothing short of a miracle of grace can ever qualify any sinner to believe unto the saving of his soul.”

Pink’s emphasis is on the power that becomes necessary to move an unbeliever to become a believer, noting that this power is far greater than the powers necessary to grant sight to the blind, to have the lame walking, and to turn water into wine. “Between sin and grace there is a greater distance than between nothing and the highest angel in heaven” (Pink, 2013:19). Pink’s argument thus implies that the obstacles that prevent humanity from coming to Christ are far greater than any difficulty humanity can ever face. The natural human is therefore unable to come to Christ because humanity actually harbours a corrupt nature – creating a great distance with God. He submits that the darkness of humanity’s understanding, the corruption of humanity’s affections, and the total perversity of humanity’s will, are some of the obstacles in the way of coming to Christ (Pink, 1977:80–83).

In all respects then, humanity cannot move itself to salvation – grace and power must intervene in this way of salvation. Gause (2019:21) even submits that there is no “spark of the divine” in the sinner to enable him/her to respond to the call of God. The necessary grace to be merciful to a hardened sinner, and necessary power to move such a sinner from corruption to regeneration, must come from God. This results in a transformation of an “unlovely, resisting object into the gracious design of God” (Pink, 2013:19). God thus grants humanity the necessary faith, which is a supernatural divine gift (Packer, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:304), and grace in order for humanity to come to repentance unto life (salvation).

4.2.4.3. What is the role of the power of God in the way of salvation?

The picture that Pink paints in this aspect is that of warfare, taking after Ephesians 6:10–18. It testifies of the difficulty sinners have in coming willingly to salvation in God, forcing God to engage in warfare to overcome humanity’s “sinful opposition and transform [them] into a loving and loyal subject” (Pink, 2013:20). This transformation happens when God draws sinners unto him through his mighty power. Just as God sets Christ at his own right hand in the heavens,

he also draws the hearts of his people to the things above, enabling them to overcome the opposition of the flesh by his grace. It bears testimony to the miracle that is involved in God drawing mere mortals unto himself. It is purely a grace effort for those who believe (Pink, 2013:20). God's power in salvation is thus present for those who believe for them to overcome their opposition and rebelliousness towards him and be drawn to the things above (regenerated).

Equally important is the fact that God raises sinners from the dead, just as he did Christ. God, through the Holy Spirit, quickens sinners into new life – thereby allowing them to fix their hearts on Christ (Pink, 2013:21). The power of God thus becomes necessary in this way of salvation to ensure that sinners who have been made alive in Christ are regenerated and can now comprehend the true light of God – Christ. As Pink (2013:21) says – “the washing of a child follows its birth.” We therefore appreciate that for salvation, God must through his power raise dead sinners by drawing them unto himself and regenerating them through his Spirit in order for them to conform to his will (Gause, 2009:21, 74) – an aspect that is out of reach of humanity except by the grace of God.

Pink (2013:27) gives three examples that clearly show how Christ won us salvation and what humanity's response should be. *First*, Christ has removed every legal obstacle, thereby paving the way to heaven for his people... *Second*, He has left us an example in that we should follow *his* steps... *Third*, Christ is willing and ready to bestow grace and strength to walk therein. It is necessary then that those who want Christ's salvation must walk the way back to the door and through it. Those who seek Christ's salvation must therefore take him as Saviour and also allow him to be Lord unto them; they must accept his justification, but also his sanctification. They must have him officiate as Priest but also have him legislate over them as King (Pink, 2018). This then demonstrates that God's power will work salvation in sinners when they are totally yielded unto him.

4.3. ATTENDING TO THE CRITICISM AGAINST LORDSHIP SALVATION THEOLOGY

LST has faced serious criticism from those in FGT camp. The criticism concludes that the teaching is heretical and compromises salvation by grace through faith; introduces legalism; and erodes the assurance of salvation (Hodges, Ryrie, Sawyer, Sensinig, Bing, etc.).

Sawyer (2004:1–16), for one, appears to seek a balance, gently chiding both FGT and LST in the beginning, and professing his alignment and sympathy with LST, albeit stating that there are minor differences here and there. However, it is his conclusion that completely decimates LST while turning eerily silent on FGT. Nonetheless, in his informative summary on points of

divergence between these two theologies, he raises some important points that I consider in the discussion.

Pastor Kelly Sensinig also criticises both LST and FGT, and therefore positions himself as objective. Charles Bing harnesses the thoughts of many FGT scholars to present a polemic against LST. His objections are also noted here. These three authors, Sawyer, Sensinig, and Bing, offer important submissions, and the criticism against LST is drawn from them. The criticism is four-pronged and is detailed in what follows.

4.3.1. The context of the criticism

Criticism 1: Repentance before salvation

Sensinig (n.d.:9) argues that LST's understanding that there should be repentance before salvation is incorrect. In his view, for LST, repentance means to "to turn away from sin." This would imply that we must give up our sins, follow Christ, obey his commands, uphold Christ's discipleship requirements, and meet Christ's conditions for eternal life in order to be saved. (Sensinig, n.d.: 9;14). Sensinig (n.d.:14) argues that the root of repentance is conflated with the fruit of repentance, and because LST joins the two together, they create confusion regarding the sinner's response to God at the time of conversion.

Sawyer also seems to side with Sensinig, especially aligning himself with Calvin's view. He espouses Calvin's argument that "repentance was a sanctification process, and not a precondition for it," thereby arguing that we truly come to repentance if we know God and have taken hold of his grace (Sawyer, 2004:14). This puts repentance somewhere after the call of salvation has been answered. Others such as Chafer (cited in Kober, n.d.:6) argue that in addition to believing, LST demands the unsaved to dedicate themselves to the will of God.

Bing (1991:76) also chides LST proponents for arguing for a narrower definition of repentance as that which is always related to sin. He charges that LST equates repentance with the actual work of forsaking sins or changing conduct. His opposition is that "fruits worthy of repentance can only speak of the results of the inner attitude of repentance and not define repentance itself" (Bing, 1991:90–1). Bing also appears to be saying that a call to salvation can be answered without a person repenting of their sins. He cites David as one who was saved from his sin by grace without any mention of David's sorrow about the sin he had committed (Bing, 2024:1–2).

These three authors seem to argue for no visible works of repentance at the point of salvation, yet there is no denying that at that point of salvation, the loathing of sin proceeds from the mouth of the sinner, thereby speaking to a link between repentance and sin.

Criticism 2: Salvation by works, legalism

Critics imply that LST teaches salvation by works. Sensenig (n.d.:4) for one, submits that “[i]n the lordship teaching duty and demands are placed alongside of the death of Christ, grace is no longer free, and the gift of eternal life must in some sense be earned.” Sawyer also sees this aspect as problematic as it relates to justification. He remarks that in stressing works as the evidence of a regenerate life, LST adherents have “de facto slipped back into a concept of justification as infused righteousness which finds assurance of salvation in one’s works” (Sawyer, 2004:8).

Here, Bing submits that Paul argues for the mutual exclusivity of faith and works because works by themselves nullify the free gift. Instead, he argues that Christ obeyed (obedience that he equates to works), and that “sinners gain the saving benefit of Christ’s obedience by exercising faith,” not by their works of obedience (Bing, 1991:24). To make his point, he says that people such as Abraham, David, and even the disciples, were eternally saved because they believed in God and Jesus alike, and that faith earned them salvation (Bing, 2024f:1–2). His argument is that faith does not require obedience in order to be faith, and works should not be associated with it either.

Criticism 3: Salvation and discipleship

In seeking to clearly distinguish between a call to salvation and a call to discipleship, a distinction between coming and following, Sensinig (n.d.:4–5) says:

Lordship Salvation goes beyond trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. It includes the teaching that a person must cooperate with Christ’s program of discipleship, or make a contract with God, which involves obeying the commands of Jesus and making a commitment to Christ’s lordship, as a necessary condition of eternal life... Christ’s call to salvation consists of coming (Mt. 11:28) whereas His call to discipleship consists of following (Mt. 16:24). This following comes after salvation. If discipleship is a required option for salvation, then several important questions must be answered. Must a person take up a cross ‘daily’ (Lk. 9:23) in order to be saved? Is this the message we must share with the lost so they can be saved?

Here, Ryrie (cited in Kober, n.d.:7) sees a confusion that he says is presented by LST, which is the teaching that Christ must be Lord of Life in order to be Saviour, ultimately confusing certain aspects of discipleship. Sawyer finds it prudent to also criticise LST here, saying that “Lordship teachers appear to be forcing all teaching on salvation through one grid, discipleship” (Sawyer, 2004:15). To him, it is not always possible to reach this standard because many who come to Christ have been bruised and battered by sin and may have deep-seated psychological problems that may take a while to overcome. He says that LST

can overcome much of its distortion if it distinguished correctly between justification and sanctification.

Bing (1991:153) argues that in an attempt to solve the problem of Christians who profess to be Christians yet show no interest in the things of Christ, LST introduces a demand that “sinners pay the price for their salvation, the price of submission and obedience”. He argues in view of the penitent sinner that “simple faith in who Jesus is and what he can deliver, brings salvation” (Bing, 2024d:2), thereby indicating that works do not bring salvation.

Criticism 4: Works accounting for assurance of salvation

Sensinig (n.d.:29), focusing on faith and works, says:

MacArthur simply asserts this identification of saving faith with works without demonstrating it biblically or semantically. Lordship teachers are forced to misread and misrepresent various words (repentance, faith) and passages of Scripture (Rom. 10:9–10; Jas. 2:14–26) to fit their theological grid... However, MacArthur is teaching that a commitment to follow Christ is a necessary ingredient of saving faith. He is teaching that faith in Christ is not enough.

Sawyer (2004:9) posits that the demand for works means that the believer has no assurance of salvation. In this way, LST denies a believer direct access to the Saviour for certainty, claiming instead that he must look for it within. This means that believers are left to look to their own works for assurance when they should instead be looking to Christ. He concludes that “the ultimate result of such teaching is uncertainty.”

Bing also brings to this debate the question of works, saying that LST advocates for *measurable*⁴² works as evidence of obedience. In his view, LST’s demand makes salvation uncertain, for there will always be variance in terms of the amount and the visibility of that fruit (Bing, 1991:30). Here, the assertion is that believers will not always be fruitful, that fruit will not always be visible, and that fruit can also lie in character traits.⁴³ He further infers that the difficulty with LST lies in the fact that it evaluates the quality and not the object of faith, thus rendering assurance of salvation impossible. He contends that LST fails to commit the believer’s eternal destiny to Christ for salvation (Bing, 1991:55). In this way, he says that LST’s

⁴² The word *measurable* is an insertion by Charles Bing, which he also acknowledges. The LST proponents referenced in his study do not use this word, only that the life of a believer must have fruit regardless of quantity. These works must flow from a heart inclined to please Christ, not to seek salvation, but out of obedience arising out of the love bestowed on them by Christ.

⁴³ Charles Ryrie, *Salvation*, 45–50, quoted in Bing (1991:30).

view of repentance cannot offer absolute assurance of salvation because all sins might not have been forsaken (Bing, 1991:105).

The key themes that emerge from this criticism are LST's views on repentance, the role of works, justification, sanctification, and faith assurance. These are the basis of the response to this criticism.

4.3.2. A response to the criticism

MacArthur, being a prominent scholar and the modern face of LST, is at the receiving end of this criticism. However, we understand him in view of Darell Bock, who says that "there is often a difference between what MacArthur says and what he apparently means" (Bock, cited in Kober, n.d.: 14–15). Therefore, as we formulate a response, it may be worthwhile not to rehash every argument MacArthur has put forward in light of the criticism he faces, but to let others come to the defence of LST. Authors such as Arthur Pink, Wayne Grudem, James Packer, John Miller and others, are worth employing here in formulating a response to this criticism.

Response to Criticism 1: Repentance before salvation

Is it LST's view that repentance comes before salvation as Sensinig alleges? Pink answers this question affirmatively. He says (Pink, 1977:45), "God requires a sincere and deep repentance *before* he pardons any sinner (*Italics original*)."

Miller (2009:46) also views repentance as preparation for Christ to enter a sinner's heart, because as long as the heart is rebellious to God, there cannot be repentance, nor salvation. Importantly, he says that conversion does not come as a climax to a long process of self-struggle, but it is "our coming undone in respect to all human righteousness, followed by going outside ourselves in faith to Christ alone for salvation" (Miller, 2009:53–54). Thus, when we despair and throw our hands in the air in total repentance and surrender and we confess Christ as saviour and lord of our lives, salvation comes instantly. Miller (2009), Pink (1977) and Gause (2009:8) view repentance as a gift from God and as the work of God, with the sinner being a mere recipient.

Highlighting how God's "repentance" unfolds in Genesis 6:6, Pink (1977:45) finds four things: (1) the realisation of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, (2) a change of mind, (3) real sorrow for sin, and (4) willingness to undo that which brings the sorrow. Pink's position therefore suggests that before any salvation could happen, there should be a trigger, for salvation is not abstract. It is therefore necessary that the gospel must be preached to sinners. And the totality of the gospel message preached by Jesus, John, Paul and others, calls sinners to repentance.

He submits that there has never been a sinner who was pardoned while impenitent, and penitence comes on account of the realisation of the ugliness of sin (Pink, 1977:50). This is buttressed by the call to repentance in various scriptures (Mt. 3:2; 12:41; Mk. 1:15; Lk. 15:7;

17:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30). In particular, LST relies on Luke 17:3 for this assertion. It reads that if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. Therefore, rebuke (hearing) triggers repentance (desire to turn), which if achieved, births forgiveness (salvation). This must not be construed to mean that repentance replaces salvation by grace through faith. Grudem (1999:310) submits here that repentance and faith are “different aspects of the *one act* of coming to Christ for salvation.” He says these two come at the same time. As soon as the gospel is heard, a person forsakes themselves and hopes for salvation in someone else. Christ remains the object and the giver of salvation. It is, however, clearly visible that salvation is offered to those who repent (Gause, 2009:17). Repentance does not entail work (Pink, 1977:46) as others would argue; it is realising our sinfulness and our desire to not dwell in that state.

Scripture teaches that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Likewise, no one will turn to God without first hearing about God – for how will we believe about whom we have never heard? (Rom. 10:14). Although some may hear, they may not believe, and cannot be saved. Ovey (2019:126) sees this as the implications of separating faith from repentance. However, those who hear and believe are saved because they are not just observers of the facts but choose to “put their trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God” (Grudem, 1999:307–308).

Therefore, the *hearing* that stirs the sinner’s heart results in repentance that is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ. Ovey (2019:127) posits that justifying faith is accompanied by conviction of sin and evangelical repentance; and this sequence, he says, is not a promotion of meritorious works. Tozer (2007:9) and Gause (2009:8) hold that repentance changes our relationship with God from a bad to a good one, resulting of course in good works.

Others make the argument (Sensinig; Kober)⁴⁴ that some verses (Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9, and elsewhere) only mention faith (belief) as a requirement for salvation. However, Pink (2013:17) acknowledges the entirety of the Bible as a guide for how one must be saved and claims that those who limit their idea of salvation to only one word – “believe” – are easily misled. Is belief in Christ independent from anything else, and does a belief that he is the Son of God settle the sinner’s case? Demons also believe, and they tremble before God (Jas. 2:19). Do they receive salvation? Certainly not. This is because they believe the facts to be true, which proves here that that is not enough for salvation.

⁴⁴ Pastor Kelly Sensinig (n.d.) argues his point in the article titled “Errors of Lordship Salvation”. Dr. Manfred E. Kober (n.d.) has put together the article titled “LORDSHIP SALVATION: A forgotten truth or a false doctrine?” In it he puts together arguments by LST adherents against those of FGT, and his view is that the argument of lordship salvation cannot be sustained because it works against Scripture.

Quoting Acts 16:31, Pink (2013:133–134) makes clear the condition and the attitude of the Philippian jailor who had to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. He notes that the jailor witnessed a great miracle, was stirred to the point of despair, acceded to help outside himself, and took his place before God by prostrating himself before the apostles. Pink highlights that the jailor did not show a flimsy repentance, it bore clear evidence that God's work had begun in his heart. We further submit that this jailor must have heard hymns and words spoken by Paul and Silas during their night worship – words that could have triggered faith (for it comes by hearing). Therefore, his repentance was not superficial (mere intellectual assent).

Belief involves forsaking our ways and putting our trust in Christ for salvation. Barton *et al.* (1996:2277) point out that James is speaking against those with mere intellectual assent without true faith, averring that while demons also know Jesus, they do not obey him. In asking what must they do for salvation, Peter spoke to the Israelites, saying that they should repent and be baptised and turn again (Acts 2:37–38; 3:19). Barton *et al.* (1996:1975) solidify the point: “if you want to follow Christ, you must repent ... to repent means to turn from sin, changing the direction of your life from selfishness and rebellion against God's laws.” Gause (2009:8) puts it well when he says that repentance is “a change of masters: from bondage to the devil to willing servitude to God.”

Therefore, genuine saving faith must be accompanied by genuine repentance in order to gain salvation (Grudem, 1999:312), which involves “turning to Christ while depending on him for forgiveness, mercy, guidance and purpose” (Barton *et al.*, 1996:1975). Pink (1977:56) says this repentance is not just a will to turn a new leaf and live well, but it is genuinely about acknowledging our sinfulness, depravity; and being without strength, welcoming Christ – “not as a Helper, but as a Saviour”. Importantly, it is not inherent in us, thus not a native product of our hearts (Pink, 2013:18).

The emphasis on “*come as you are*” must thus not be construed to mean that one must come with a rebellious heart, but rather, to come with our sins, yet with a heart seeking change, thus repentance. A heart that does not seek change will not come. To come repentantly therefore does not mean to come without sins, for it is only Christ who can grant forgiveness and remove sins. I agree with Miller (2009) that repentance prepares the heart, and with Pink (1977) that repentance does not imply work, and also with Grudem (1999) that repentance and faith are both present during salvation – for there can never be a heart that accepts Christ without being willing to forsake sin and being repentant.

Response to Criticism 2: Salvation by works, legalism

Is it true that LST teaches salvation by works? Pink opposes this charge, instead showing that the presence of works – which are fruits in the believer – flows from repentance and the

sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. He argues that fruits that demonstrate godly repentance include real hatred of sin; deep sorrow for sin, confessing of sin, and actual turning from sin (Pink, 1977:71–73). Should this turning not be labelled as legalism? Miller (2009:52) and Packer (2020:174) beg to differ, citing that “repentance and the lordship of Christ cannot put us on the road to salvation by self-effort.” Miller (2009:52) further says that this problem did not trouble the apostles, who insisted on repentance and belief on the Lord Jesus Christ (Mk. 1:15, Acts 16:31; 26:20, Rom. 10:9, and elsewhere).

With respect to turning from sin, *metanoeo*, *metanolomai*, and *metanoia* are deemed necessary (Pink, 1977). He sees *metanoia* as an amending of ways, where a sinner pleads with God to create in him a clean heart (Ps. 51:10), which will cause the believer to desire to be right with God. This being our cry, he says we will “forsake vain company, abandon everything that tends to keep us secure in sin” and eventually turn to seek the will of God in Scripture (Pink, 1977:73–74). He views this as sanctification, which he says means separation from sin (Pink, 1977:122). Our desire is to become more like Christ, and the motivation for all this (repentance) is “*the lordship of the crucified Savior*” (Miller, 2009:31). Tozer (2007:3) posits that no salvation obtains apart from obedience, essentially referring to works of obedience and not works of salvation. The essence of sin is rebellion against God, therefore, being obedient to God illustrates the end of rebellion.

Coming to Christ means being subject to his discretion and guidance, learning from him and being obedient to him (Grudem, 1999:311; Barton *et al.*, 1996:1975). All these speak of a changed lifestyle – good works that follow from having repented from the old ways. Grudem (1999:327) posits that a person who is born again cannot continue to sin habitually or to live a life modelled after sin because the power of Christ now keeps them from yielding to a life of sin. The power and love of sin is dead (Rom. 6:11), and the desire to emulate Christ is born (2. Cor. 3:18). Barton *et al.* (1996:2125) and Grudem (1999:334) point out that the more closely we follow Christ, the more we will grow in him, and the more we will be like him. It is therefore an outcome of closely following Christ that results in the change of life that produces good works, which others may construe as salvation by works. These works are not demanded by the lordship position as if “it is up to *us* to get ready for salvation” (Miller, 2009:54); they follow as visible fruits because of Christ’s presence in one’s life.

The fact that those who have repented and are saved show the fruits of their salvation (Gal. 5:22–23), does not mean that their salvation is occasioned by works. Here, MacArthur’s (2008:211 [1988]) view is that “sanctification is a *characteristic* of all who are redeemed, not a condition for their receiving salvation.” Good works are therefore a consequence, an unavoidable outcome of having Jesus in their lives. Grudem (1999:331) concurs that sanctification is the work of God (1 Thes. 5:23) and indicates that it is also our work (Rom.

6:13) in line with Paul's call: "Yield yourselves to God." Thus, our role in sanctification is dependent on God, and at the same time, it is about us striving to conform ourselves to his will as we put to death the deeds of the flesh. Barton *et al.* (1996:1939) argue in line with John 14:21 that it is through obedience and commitment that Jesus' true followers show their love for him. The good works, we must reiterate, are not works for salvation, but works of obedience to Christ's lordship.

Response to Criticism 3: Salvation and discipleship

Is it true that LST conflates salvation and discipleship? To answer this question, Pink gives a definition of a disciple. Pink (2013:119) sees the true position of believers as disciples – learners seated at the feet of Christ. He avers that God's thoughts are higher than ours, and the walk of salvation requires believers to, like disciples, sit at the feet of Jesus to be taught his secrets and unsearchable truths. Rayburn and de Koster (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:178, 185) submit also that a disciple is "one voluntarily under a master's discipline", a person who learns to obey all that Jesus commands – a call that stems from Matthew 28:19–20.

Jesus says of those who follow him: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31). The view that every believer must be a disciple is not implausible, as Rayburn and de Koster (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:185) point out that every "believe is formed by obedient response to God's word." Every saved believer has a duty to be a learner at the feet of Jesus in order to lead a life pleasing to God. We are not passive Christians, we are called to be active participants in our Christian walk and mission. Pink (2013:129) says that "God has not called His people to be drones, nor to maintain an attitude of passiveness. No, He bids them work, toil, labour." Pink's (2013:16) view is that God's authoritative and unchanging demand for repentance and Christ's own terms of discipleship (i.e., how to become a Christian: Act 11:26) in Luke 14:26–27 and 33 are central to the message of salvation, else people will remain unconverted and comfortable in their own sin and rebelliousness against God.

It is here that FGT disagrees with the view that believers ought to be disciples, proposing that being saved and being a disciple are two different aspects. The one can certainly be attained (sainthood), the other, being optional, *may* be pursued (discipleship). "It costs absolutely nothing to be a Christian. It costs everything to be a disciple" (Kober, n.d.:12). This is a misunderstanding of salvation because no human can be saved to be passive – it is not a decision to be made whether we want to be disciples or not. We are disciples by virtue of being saved. The work of the Lord must be done. "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few" (Mt. 9:37, Lk. 10:2). This shows the urgency that the saints should do the work of God. Take

for instance the entire seventy (elsewhere seventy-two) disciples⁴⁵ that Jesus commissioned to prepare for his arrival at various places (Lk. 10) – no-one was excused or deemed unworthy of doing Christ’s work.

Bing (1991:157) has no problem concluding that the seventy were also disciples, citing that this indicated that “all true believers were considered disciples in that they had learned of Christ and continued to do so”. However, he still finds means to say that the commitment of learners to Christ varies, citing that many of these disciples believed, but at the first indication of hardship, they deserted Jesus (Jn. 6:60–66) (Bing, 1991:155). It is given that some will stay the course with Jesus while others will turn away in the face of hardships. However, when we become saved, we become disciples – Paul was almost immediately a disciple (Pink, 1977:90). The same can be said of the Samaritan woman at the well. However, Rayburn and de Koster (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:178) seem not to discriminate between who is and who is not a disciple, for to them “the cost of discipleship must have full weight in the *Christian* life”. Therefore, every Christian must feel this weight of serving the Lord.

Therefore, if all Christians are disciples as per Bing, it follows that they have work to do, albeit varying in scope. This is a clear example that the mission of preparing the way for Jesus was not limited to the apostles, but to the disciples as well, who were specifically sent out to do the Lord’s work. “In Christian service, there is no unemployment. God has work enough for everyone. Don’t just sit back and watch others work – look for ways to help with the harvest” (Barton *et al.*, 1996:1849).

Packer simplifies this conundrum by giving a definition of a disciple. Much in agreement with Pink, he says that a disciple means a pupil or learner (Packer, 2020:210). At the same time, Christ’s utterances on discipleship cannot be ignored for they militate against every believer who just wants to be a “saint” living on their own terms. He talked of forsaking oneself and following him at all costs (Mt. 16:24–27), with Barton *et al.* (1996:1714) pressing on the issue that “following Jesus meant true commitment, the risk of death and no turning back.” Pink (2013:254) reinforces this issue, averring that “we are to witness before the world unto the holiness of his life, the heavenliness of his doctrine, the preciousness of his death—by a daily walk which shows forth *his* praises.”

Jesus’ encounter with many of those to whom he spoke about salvation was intertwined with discipleship through witnessing. The Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:1–42) immediately

⁴⁵ There is fluidity in the use of the word *disciple* in Luke 10. Others interpret it to mean apostle because they were the ones sent out by Christ. However, the definition of a disciple is plausible as well because they were also students of Christ. Christ himself commissioned them for his work while they were learners (Mk. 6:7–13, Mt. 10:5–42, Lk. 9:1–6). In some instances, the twelve were sent out while they were students of Christ. John himself was referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” – John 20:2.

went into the city and testified of Jesus. Although it is not explicitly said that she converted, inferences can be drawn from verses 19 and 25 where the woman acknowledges him to be the prophet and the Messiah who must come. In verse 26, Jesus makes it explicit to the woman that he is the Messiah, and from that moment, the woman begins to testify. Zacchaeus (Lk. 19) is one who also receives Jesus's salvation and immediately shows signs of repentance in verse 8, detailing how he gives alms to the poor and makes reparations. Many want to say Zacchaeus was doing this before he met the Lord in any event, but this is deeper than it appears.

Even Zacchaeus had already showed signs of wanting to do right by active action even before Jesus could say salvation had come to his house. This is evident from his desire to see Jesus at all cost, climbing a tree just to catch a glimpse, reflecting that his heart desired Jesus, and he was willing even to make amends for the wrongs he may have committed. Therefore, his salvation was not passive, it involved acts of reparations and alms giving. Barton *et al.* (1996:1873) interpret it as the work of Jesus that had already taken place, suggesting that Zacchaeus saw that his life needed straightening out, thus demonstrating inward change by outward actions, thereby testifying to the group that had gathered there.

The views of Sensinig and Sawyer can therefore not be sustained. What Sensinig (n.d.:4–5) alludes to as a call to come (Mt. 11:28) and a call to discipleship (16:24), can therefore not be separated. Regarding the call to come in Matthew 11:28, Barton *et al.* (1996:1700) argue that believers are relieved of their burden as Jesus frees people. They note that “God changes meaningless, wearisome toil into spiritual purpose and productivity.” Once again, we are not saved to be passive, a call to salvation is not only a call to enter heaven, but to take our cross and follow in his footsteps.

The assertion by Sensinig (n.d.: 24) that Scripture (Ti. 3:5; 2 Tm. 1:9) simply calls people to Christ and that that is enough, for to demand more is legalism, is misplaced. This is because he opts to separate repentance from faith. At the point of salvation, repentance speaks of a heart that is willing from that moment forward to do good works. These verses he refers to are clear on the fact that indeed we are saved freely by grace, not on account of works. Yet it does not suggest that works are not part of our walk with Christ. To follow Christ, we must let go of our sinful ways, which opens the door to adopting good works from that very moment – for our walk with him demands that we imitate him (Eph. 5:1).

Also, the justification advanced by Sawyer (2004:15) that people are weary, bruised and battered by sin, therefore they can only be saints, is misplaced, for Christ takes away these burdens, and gives rest through his purposeful work designed for believers. After Jesus had removed the load of sin from the man at the pool (Jn. 5:14) and the woman at the well (Jn.

8:11), he instructed them: “Go and sin no more.” These two went on to testify about Christ, making them disciples. The foundation for believers as disciples who obey Christ finds expression in Matthew 28:19–20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Therefore, the intent of the gospel is *to make disciples*, and those who become disciples *obey* Christ. This is the charge that Jesus himself gave his disciples.

Response to Criticism 4: Works as assurance of salvation

Is it true that LST teaches that saving faith needs commitment in order to complete the salvation process, thereby providing assurance based on works? In this regard, the error of those who oppose LST would be to think that it presupposes that works grant assurance. For until they understand that the argument of LST is that even good works themselves are not by the effort of the believer, but by God’s work in the believer (Pink, 1977:46, 51), they will keep misunderstanding the necessity and the importance of works in a believer’s life. We submitted that good works are not works for *salvation* but works of *obedience* to Christ’s Lordship.

Pink (1977:112; 2013:187) ponders: “How, then, is the presence of faith to be ascertained?” He charges that it is not by the ceasing of unbelief, but by faith discovering its own fruits and works, even when that fruit is amongst the thorns. The burden of sin and its bitterness are the true measures of the good works that would flow out of believers who are saved. On the other hand, the love of sin and the indulgence in it, militates against the call of Christ to holiness. And when you know that you are militantly opposed to Christ, you can have no assurance. According to Treier and Elwell (2017:92), assurance is evidenced by “godly transformation and encouraging perseverance in faith” throughout the believer’s pilgrimage on earth.

Sawyer’s (2004:9) suggestion that the demand for works by LST denies a believer direct access to Christ for assurance can thus not be sustained. The one who gives assurance (Christ) is the one who detailed the conditions of us becoming his (Jn. 8:31). Works that are contrary to Christ leave us conflicted with the question of assurance. False assurance, Chung (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:92) proposes, results in complacency while God’s grace is abused in the face of defiant presumptions. Yet if our hearts are against sin and there is no intentional sinning, then we know that our sins do not deny us assurance. For if we have this hope of seeing him, we purify ourselves daily, and we make every attempt to live holy (1 Jn. 2:28; 3:1–11).

Therefore, there is no passiveness in salvation; we labour for Christ, just as we know that labouring for the companies that have given us work will result in wages in the end. We do not labour to earn employment, for we already have that, we labour because this assures us of

the rewards. Those who blatantly ignore the conduct of the firm are expelled, some are disciplined while they remain, and the rest are praised for their outstanding work. Therefore, Sawyer's (2004:9) concern that the ultimate result of teaching good works brings uncertainty, has nothing to do with Christ, but it confronts the one who chooses to dwell and revel in sin.

Sensing should also realise that the Scriptures (Rom. 10:9–10; Jas. 2:14–26) he alleges MacArthur is misrepresenting should not be read in isolation. Pink (2013:17) argues that no verse in Scripture will yield its meaning in total isolation of the others. Pink therefore acknowledges that the requirement is belief as Scripture (Rom. 10:13) says. However, he also submits that there are many who call him "Lord," to whom he will say "Depart from me" (Mt. 7:22–23). Therefore, while Scripture calls for belief and confession, the same Scripture warns of rejection of those who call him lord and do not obey him. This rejection has its basis – the love of sin. "To love sin is far worse than to commit it, for a person may suddenly trip and commit sin in a moment of weakness" (Pink, 2013:185). Accordingly, the conditions that Christ sets for believers (Lk. 14, and elsewhere), are not to be dismissed with a view to give ourselves a licence to continue in our love and indulgence of sin.

Grudem (1999:336–339) details how believers can have certainty. Of importance though is the fact that in Scripture (Jn. 8:31–32, Mt. 10:22, Col. 1:22–23, Heb. 3:14), it is made explicit that assurance comes if we continue in the faith. Falling along the way and remaining in that state erodes assurance. He says that "those who continue to trust in Christ gain assurance that God is working in them and guarding them" (1 Pt. 1:5). He indicates that this guarding is occasioned by the believer's faith, which God *works* for assurance. The presence of continued faith provides security even when we fall or sin, because it signifies that we are truly born again as we continue in the Christian life (Grudem, 1999:336).

Highlighting that unbelievers may also show signs of conversion, Grudem (1999:344-6) asks how we are to know what will give a believer genuine assurance. He mentions present trust in Christ for salvation; evidence of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit; and long-term commitment to Christian life, also referred to as "godly transformation and encouraging perseverance in the faith" (Chung, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:92). These three are inseparable. Those who downplay the effect of continued living in sin and who dismiss the fruits of the spirit as signs of repentance, are diminishing the assurance that comes because of trust, commitment and perseverance in Christ.

Being sure of the work he has done and the life lived in honour of Christ, the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 7–8 submits:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous

Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who crave His appearing.

This is the essence of assurance – knowing that you have offered yourself to God, that you have fought for and kept the faith, and that every moment of your life you crave Christ and not sin.

4.4. THE POSITION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN VIEW OF LORDSHIP SALVATION THEOLOGY

African traditional religions make several claims about salvation. In particular, there are established views on the concepts of sin, reconciliation, and salvation. Of particular importance is how these concepts govern the daily lives of people as they interact – whether in dealing with pressing daily issues, or general communal relations in pursuit of salvation. Alike, LST has a set of principles and concepts that govern the daily lives of professed Christians. Here then we map how LST communicates with African traditional religions about the attainment of salvation. Without rehashing what has been said in the previous chapters about ATR, ACT and ATT, we here deal in summary with a general view of salvation and how ATR adherents believe they attain salvation.

4.4.1. The belief of African Traditional Religion in relation to Christian biblical beliefs

The below observations summarise the general view of this study in relation to ATR:

Firstly, the view and understanding of sin in African traditional religions is precarious. It is held that sin does not apply to Africans and that the word *sin* does not form part of the vocabulary of Africans (Mbiti, cited in Meiring, 2005:70; Nyabongo, in Desai, 1962:38). As a result, Mbiti (1969:99) trivialises the question of the separation of humanity from God, saying that this separation came because it was time for God to separate from humanity. He records that this separation was not because of any act or contribution from humanity itself. This entrenches a view that separation was warranted, and that humanity cannot be blamed for this act of separation. This means that humanity may have no need to reconcile with God.

The implication therefore is that African traditional religion erases sin, only willing to acknowledge it when structural sin or sin against equals is in view. In ATR, sin is therefore viewed as injury to community relationships (Kato, 1975:42), ritual impurity (Rieber, in Booth 1977:271), and separation from ancestors (Maimela, 1985:67–70). God is seen as apathetic to the sin committed by Africans (Sawyerr, 1968:30–32). Africans are seen as morally good (De Visser, 2001). There is no need for them to repent, and even if there was a need, God is not interested in their sins. The idea of reconciliation with God is judged as the apostle Paul's idea, and has nothing to do with Africans (Mbiti, 1969:206).

Secondly, ATR sees no need to emulate Christ, let alone make him Lord of their lives, because they see no salvation in him. De Visser (2001:196) observes that in some prominent AICs (ZCC, ELCA amongst others), the lordship of Christ is weak, and the reality of Christ is overshadowed by the presence of church leaders and bishops (Sundkler, 1958:3; Njoroge, 1992:136–137). These leaders triumph because they are closer to the people, and traditional Africans have not warmed up to the idea of a distant “heavenly Master who rules his followers on earth” (De Visser, 2011:196).

Further, African traditional religions, especially ancestor Christology, do not accede to the equality of the Father and Son, because traditionally, the Father would always be superior (Desai, 1962:25–6). In this sense, Christ is relegated to the bottom of the scales, placed among divinities, even below the ancestors (Adamo, 2011:4; Setiloane, 1986:31). Further, Christ does not even appear in the triangle of authority according to which African traditional religions ascribe power, he is even lower than the divinities (Parrinder, 1968:99). It is therefore difficult to integrate Christ into the African belief system because he is a guest (Martey, 1999:78), he is foreign (Banda, 2005) and he does not rank among the divinities. Therefore, when life has to be patterned after a figure, Christ does not enjoy prominence in this regard in ATR, contributing further to the syncretism in some African evangelical churches.

Thirdly, in ATR, anyone can come to Christ yet continue with their past lifestyles no matter how contrary they are to a Christian lifestyle as described in the NT. In ATR, Christ enjoys limited authority. It is limited mainly to what he can do for them (Banda, 2022:93). Here, the *Christus victor* view is preferred over *Christus crucis* (De Visser, 2001:209). He is therefore bestowed with honorary titles that describe his work for them, with titles such as “Great Ancestor, powerful Leader or Chief and Healer” (Beyers & Mphahlele, 2009). Beyers and Mphahlele (2009) argue that these titles are fitting because this is how Christ has revealed himself to Africans.

What this does for adherents of ATR and those evangelicals in AICs that value culture above all, is to work against the total conversion they can make towards Christ. For them, it still remains a question why Christianity seeks to convert other religions to itself (Maluleke, 1998:12) when God’s salvation is not limited to Jesus Christ only (Hick, cited in Knitter, 2005:152), marking the protest for conversion. Hick (cited in Knitter, 2005:152) asserts that Christians can announce Jesus as the centre of their lives without insisting that he should be the centre of all humanity. In this way, African traditional religions would confer titles on Christ that have him address their temporal issues, while ancestors remain the first call for help in times of trouble.

Lastly, perseverance is the fourth point that plays a role in salvation. African evangelicals often revert to ATR, introducing syncretism (Potgieter & Magezi, 2016:6–7). One main cause is a personalised Christology, which is a Christology that attaches personal circumstances to Jesus's capabilities. Ancestor and liberation christologies are leading in this regard, where the focus is largely on temporal rather than immanent issues of salvation. This makes Christ transactional and limits the scope of his power. In this way, syncretism has crept into African Christianity, where even converted African evangelicals prefer to also subscribe to ATR (Boaheng, 2021:7) to gain a double layer of security.

When pressed hard by life's circumstances, some African Christians and evangelicals would gravitate towards ATR. In some churches, like the ZCC and ELCSA, the reality and power of ancestors is not even in dispute, for it is part and parcel of the practice of their faith. These churches are ancestor-centric and cultural in their beliefs (De Visser, 2001). There is therefore no need to live purely according to the Christian religion, and the element of perseverance is extinguished because firstly, Christ is inadequate, and secondly, there are other options available in the event that Christ fails.

The above is indeed a snippet of how adherents of ATR and some African evangelicals view concepts such as sin, salvation, perseverance, and the lordship of Christ, amongst others. The next section tests the position of LST in these matters to determine whether LST condemns or is accommodating of the position of ATR.

4.5. IMMANENT PARALLELS BETWEEN LORDSHIP SALVATION THEOLOGY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Although the two beliefs are seen to be desiring the same thing (salvation), their departure from two different worldviews presents a challenge. The implications are clear from the outset that these two cannot agree on pertinent points. This emerges because as we have seen earlier, ATR sees the OT as its book, and hardly considers the NT. This breeds a challenge for ATT and ACT as they attempt to map a Christian theology for Africans. Africans are heavily influenced by ATR ideologies. The study has revealed how those AICs who adhere to ATR fail to advance the lordship of Christ, clearly indicating that although the two traditions may read from the same Bible, their interpretations differ greatly.

However, I show cause here that although there is a difference in worldviews, these beliefs can be argued immanently since both traditions seek salvation. What is reflected below is the position of LST on issues of sin, repentance, commitment to, and the authority of Christ of Christ, amongst other things. When viewed against ATR, it is clear that LST fails to support the position of ATR in its quest for salvation. Although this is the issue, LST presents a

plausible alternative for ATR, where the question of the salvation of the soul is answered on their behalf from a biblical standpoint. The above arguments give us an opportunity to present in summary the position of these two ideologies.

4.5.1. The implications of the lordship salvation belief

The assertion was made at the beginning that LST may be employed to help African traditional religion to formulate a biblically sound theology. The assessment made above is true to this assertion, and below I demonstrate how LST opposes the central beliefs of African traditional religion with regard to salvation. I further propose sound doctrinal amendments that can be adopted by African traditional religions in their quest for true salvation.

4.5.1.1. On sin and repentance

On the question of sin, LST, contrary to how African traditional religions opt to understand sin, limits itself to the bounds of the Bible (Pink, 1977:45). This is to be expected, for LST subscribes to the Bible. The difference with ATR centres on the severity and the implications of sin. Unlike ATR, LST prefers to condemn sin at the outset, and submits that it is not acceptable to God. The belief is that when salvation is in view, the one who seeks it ought to repent (Pink, 1977:46). Further, MacArthur (2008:178 [1988]) postulates that believers ought not to live with sin, and that repentance, being critical to conversion, must involve a turn to God, a turn away from evil, and the intent to serve God. LST submits that repentance is the start to a new life (Packer, 2020:176) occasioned by the gospel message that has been heard and heeded (Rom. 10:17).

Given that ATR trivialises sin, completely erasing it at times, it is difficult not to assume that God's salvation may not be possible for its adherents. The Bible puts sin as a fact of the separation between humanity and God (Is. 59:2), and if this grave malady is not acknowledged properly, salvation becomes doubtful. LST therefore makes plain the effects and the consequences of sin, and holds that where there is deliberate sin, salvation cannot materialise (Pink, 1977:47; MacArthur, 2008 [1988]; Tozer, 2007).

Therefore, if LST's standard and core belief on sin are upheld, salvation is in doubt for ATR adherents, for the reason that in ATR, sin is not properly defined and contextualised. Consequently, the trajectory that ATR has taken when explaining and understanding sin by claiming that God is not the offended party, suggests that salvation of the soul will be difficult to realise. To ATR and AICs who still adhere to traditional ancestral practices, LST can here present evidence for the need to repent and turn away from sin to be sure of salvation – sin against humans, and sin against God.

4.5.1.2. Relationship with Christ

The relationship of ATR with Jesus Christ is questionable (Resane, 2020:73). As indicated, Christ has no place in the triangle of authority (Parrinder, 1968:99). In AICs, he is even replaced by bishops and leaders (Sundkler, 1958; De Visser, 2001). Christ is a mere guest, and at times labelled a foreigner. This obviously signifies the power dynamics at play in ATR, and it has been settled that Christ does not satisfy those power dynamics. Resane (2020:84) postulates that Christ competes with witchdoctors for power. Within LST's understanding, Christ is in fact the power that humanity needs (Pink, 2013:20). Of importance, LST makes Christ central not only in the affairs of salvation, but also in the daily living of the believers. LST underscores that Christians should imitate Christ in line with the example that he left believers on earth (Eph. 5:1). This is only possible if believers have a relationship with him.

For ATR, particularly ancestor christologies, this relationship is difficult to conceptualise because Christ is not an influential factor in their lives – he is powerless and therefore of no help to them. He can therefore not be imitated, he cannot be called upon for help, and he certainly cannot be relied upon. For salvation to attain, there should be a relationship with Christ the Saviour, and the ATR position on Christ does not allow him the latitude to operate in their lives and offer them the salvation that matters most – the salvation of the soul. Therefore, LST can aid ATR in this regard by reiterating the importance of Christ being the Saviour and Lord of their lives. It is when he is acknowledged as Saviour and Lord that his salvation will materialise and obedience to him will take effect.

4.5.1.3. A commitment-free life

Another aspect that limits the attainment of salvation in ATR is their leaning towards the *Christus victor* concept (De Visser, 2001:209). Liberation christologies are employed solely to overcome the temporal maladies adherents may be facing in their lives. In this way, ATR opts to be transactional in how they deal not only with Christ, but with every deity or god they associate with. Here, the world of distributed power is fully visible in that the gods that are allowed to operate within this space are considered in terms of their power to deal with the earthly maladies and existential issues that people face. The proximity of ancestors to ATR adherents also see them advancing ancestor christologies with the aim of entrenching the work they perceive ancestors to be doing for them. The relationship with Christ thus becomes almost impossible because of the tag he has already been ascribed – powerless. Ancestors are then deemed to be filling this gap.

This view of ATR suggests that Christ will not play any role as saviour of the soul, because this aspect of salvation is not in consideration. If at all, Christ will be called upon to deal with those issues that are deemed above the powers of the ancestors or other divinities. When the

victory is won, Christ ends up like a king who has won a war, but when the war has been won, his subjects enjoy the victory and the king himself is forgotten (De Visser, 2001:211). Conversion or commitment to Christ is therefore not followed or encouraged (Maluleke, 1998:12). Syncretism arises as result of this, as people feel that they can have protection from both Christ and ancestors.

Contrarily, LST views Christ in light of his lordship. Here the understanding is nurtured that he is both Lord who must be submitted to and obeyed, and he is Saviour who saves humanity from its sins. This view acknowledges Christ for the exact purpose for which he came into the world (to set the captives free and to save humanity from its sin). The transactional relationships ATR opts to have with Christ do not advance salvation, and LST can aid ATR in this regard in order to illuminate the importance of his lordship. For in order for him to be Lord over anything, he must be Lord over everything.

4.5.1.4. On perseverance

For ATR, the question of perseverance fades away the moment syncretism takes over. As shown, ATRs are syncretic, mixing God with gods, ancestors and divinities. This has found its way into African evangelical groups too, especially the AICs that practice ancestor worship. They do not see the need to persevere with God in all circumstances. Just like the Greeks who had many gods for different circumstances (Acts, 17:16), ATR also subscribes to such practices. The disposition that ATR has towards Christianity and the many negative labels they have ascribed to Christ, already mark their terms of engagement with Christ himself.

To ATR adherents, there is little that Christianity can offer that their ancestral beliefs, which are the core of their religion, cannot deliver. The question of perseverance is not dominant in their own religion because the ancestors are also engaged on transactional basis. The adherents perform certain rituals and ceremonies to overcome adverse circumstances in their lives. Once they have succeeded, ancestors are pushed back until there is a need to engage them again. As indicated, ATRs are largely concerned with finding relief from temporal matters, no matter how the search for this help up-ends whatever relationship they may have.

LST in turn teaches more than a transaction. It teaches relationships that are underpinned by believers' submission to their Lord Jesus Christ. This position calls for perseverance even in the presence of hardship so that Christ is not deserted upon first signs of hardship (Rom. 8:38–39). It appreciates that believers are tested to cultivate patience, which ultimately leads believers to persevere. Accordingly, because this relationship is governed by the Christ who is now Lord over the believer's life, there is no tilting towards syncretism in order to find relief. LST can therefore aid ATR in this regard by demonstrating firstly that problems are a part and parcel of life, and that secondly, even if we may not find relief from those problems (Dn. 3:17–

18), Christ must remain Lord over our lives. The motivation is singular – it is Christ alone who saves to the uttermost.

4.6. AFRICANS WALKING THE WAY OF SALVATION

Pink (2013) presents just three things he regards as essential for humanity to walk with God. These are central for African traditionalists if the walk of salvation back to God is to start.

Firstly, by removing every legal obstacle, Christ opened a way to heaven for his people. For African traditionalists, this speaks to the heart of the rituals they perform for salvation. Here, we know that Christ became the perfect sacrifice (Heb. 9:26; 10:10) to which ATR adherents can look for all of life's needs. Further, Christ has removed the need to bow to foreign gods, divinities, and ancestors by becoming everything that humanity needs – God's exact image (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

Secondly, Christ has left an example that humanity should follow. They should follow in *his* steps so that there is no confusion about how our walk with him should be (Jn. 8:12; 10:27; Mt. 16:24, Mk. 8:34, Lk. 9:23). Christ is not only an example to Christians, he is also an example for all humanity, carrying the moral compass and reflecting the only way of life acceptable in the eyes of God – the way of Holiness.

Lastly, Christ is willing and ready to bestow grace and strength to walk in his footsteps, essentially helping believers in their walk with him (2 Cor. 12:9–10; 1 Pt. 4:11; Eph. 3:16). The point has been made by now that it is not by our works that we gain salvation. African traditionalists often focus on performance rather than God's enabling grace. The rigorous demands of their religions will have no hold on them if they surrender themselves to the grace of God as He will enable them by bestowing on them grace and strength to live for him.

4.7. CONCLUSION

The arguments above show at great length that LST subscribes to the Bible. Its core concepts propose a sound salvation framework for everyone who seeks salvation. Importantly, lordship salvation does not agree with the ATR understanding of the attainment of salvation. There is conflict on key aspects such as sin, repentance, commitment to Christ, and perseverance. LST also differs with ATR with respect to the object of salvation. ATR prefers ancestors as opposed to Christ; and this difference determines the scope of salvation – the ancestors offer temporal salvation as opposed to Christ's eschatological salvation.

However, from that opposition emerges a way of salvation that adherents to ATR can follow if they seek the salvation of the soul. There should be a commitment to Christ and his salvation

offer, underpinned by repentance and belief in him. Above all, Christ must be Lord over everything. It is all or nothing in the Christian walk with him.

CHAPTER FIVE: EVALUATION OF FREE GRACE THEOLOGY IN VIEW OF ITS SIMILARITIES WITH AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter evaluates the tenets of FGT in light of ATR. The position of FGT is clarified in relation to concepts such as sin, repentance, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and perseverance. The novel interpretation of these concepts is evaluated against the position of ATRs in relation to their understanding of sin, ancestorship, false assurance, and their relationship with Christ. The chapter argues that FGT, rather than being a redemptive bridge, becomes a theological mirror that fails to confront the core spiritual positions of ATR. This undertaking may well be opening the door for ATR to claim salvation because it aligns with FGT to some extent. The evaluation in the end finds that FGT, due to its trivialising view on sin, repentance, and Christ's lordship, reinforces ATRs and makes salvation possible even in the presence of continued sin and the absence of repentance.

5.1.1. The methodology

In going about this evaluation, it is important to note that two different worldviews are brought into dialogue, and the process of guarding how this dialogue unfolds becomes important. Essentially, I state here that ATR and FGT are not identical in doctrine, and can as such not claim theological equivalence, however, they do pose analogous resemblance. This means that although the two are patently different, in them we still find some parallel and corresponding relationship. I will limit this comparison to certain parallels as presented in both worldviews, especially in relation to how they treat salvation and ethical obligations among other things.

Therefore, because in this study we evaluate and compare concepts from distinct, backgrounds and worldviews, an integrative theological (as contemplated by Asumang, 2023:8; Boaheng, 2024:98) approach is necessary. Accordingly, a multi-layered integrative approach will be used, aligning with Mburu's (2019:65) Biblical-African hermeneutics which advocates for parallels to the African, theological, literary, and historical and cultural context.

I will therefore employ biblical exegesis, systematic theology, and contextual comparative analysis, and examine key biblical texts on salvation parallel to the ATRs proposals on salvation. I will then move on to the critical theological evaluation of their practical and soteriological implications for both worldviews and conclude by presenting what both these worldviews need to alter in order for biblical soteriology to take root in African space.

5.2. BACKGROUND TO FREE GRACE THEOLOGY

5.2.1. The emergence of free grace theology

The concept of grace has been discussed in the church since time immemorial. Authors such as Augustine of Hippo, John Chrysostom, Origen, and Ignatius of Antioch appear as earlier writers on grace after the advent of the written Bible. This implies that there has been versions of FGT ever since. Thus the free grace movement, although termed differently, has been in existence since the 4th century. Also, the Apostle Paul in his epistles wrote about grace, which has largely formed the basis from which the said authors have engaged with the concept.

Nyberg (2021:3) argues that FGT was championed as early as the eighteenth century by scholars like L.S. Chafer (1871–1952) and B.B. Warfield (1851–1921). He views this as the authentic form of FGT because it holds to the traditional or normative view of free grace that attaches to the teachings of John Calvin, Martin Luther, and the early fathers (bar Augustine),⁴⁶ amongst others. He views the modern free grace teachings taught by authors such as Zane Hodges (1932–2008), Robert Wilkin, and the Grace Evangelical Society (GES) as opposing the long held traditional view on grace. According to Nyberg (2021:3), these modern teachings, which he calls the minority view, teach “some aberrant views that are strongly repudiated by many in the traditional free grace camp”. Stegall (2016:29) also posits that what is offered by Hodges, Wilkin, and GES, amongst others, is a tragic “crossless gospel” that does not align with the traditional view of FGT.

In this way, Nyberg divides the free grace movement into two, and it seems this distinction emerged because of the exchange between Charles Caldwell Ryrie (1925–2016) and John MacArthur (1939–2025) during the 1980s. Obviously, Nyberg’s (2021) admonition is directed at Wayne Grudem (1948–), who suggests that FGT is recent. However, Grudem’s (2015) book⁴⁷ details historical facts since the early centuries by mapping his understanding of the concept of grace and how it attaches to the modern free grace movement, which emerged from the exchanges between Ryrie and MacArthur.

The response in this study is thus aimed at the modern free grace movement.⁴⁸ Since the 1980s, authors such as Zane Hodges, Charles Ryrie, David R. Anderson, Charlie Bing, and

⁴⁶ Nyberg (2021) holds the view that Augustine muddled the waters in relation to a clear teaching of free grace when he denied Paul’s understanding of justification as *forensic* by arguing that God makes the sinner righteous rather than declaring the sinner righteous. However, McGrath (2005:127–145) states that “while Augustine did not articulate justification in the forensic terms later emphasized by the Reformers, he clearly maintained that righteousness was a gift imparted by God, not a human achievement.”

⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem’s 2015 book, *“Free Grace” Theology – 5 ways it diminishes the Gospel*.

⁴⁸ The distinction between what Nyberg terms the traditional and the modern view on free grace is not discussed in detail. Suffice it to say that the modern view is discussed in this paper. However, some of the differences to note between the two movements are their opposing views on sin and repentance, where the former holds that mortal humans lack righteous standing before God, and the latter holds that humans lack eternal life. The

others, have written extensively in defence of FGT. Many schools or alliances even, have surfaced, asserting the position of FGT. The free grace movement's prominent present-day exponents according to Dennis Wright (2021:6), are "the Grace School of Theology, the Grace Evangelical Society, the Free Grace Alliance, and some local churches." In the main, points of discussion centre on faith, repentance, justification, assurance of salvation, eternal security, and works of salvation. These, and other points, are used below to map out the theological soteriological position of the modern free grace movement.

5.2.2. What is free grace theology?

Nyberg (2021:1), having vociferously fought against what he terms the modern view of FGT, offers the following definition of free grace:

Traditional free grace theology is the view that God saves sinners by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice alone. No works before, during, or after the moment a person places their faith in Christ contribute anything to the free gift of salvation. God justifies the sinner on the singular condition of faith in Christ. The lost sinner does not need to forsake sin or promise to live a virtuous life in exchange for God's free gift of salvation.

Wright (2021:1), having perused various authors of FGT, concludes that it suffices to define this theology as holding faith as the only condition for salvation, apart from good works and perseverance, and also holding strongly to eternal security. He posits that this theology holds that good works are not necessary "to merit, to maintain, or to prove salvation," but rather are part of discipleship and the basis for receiving eternal rewards.

According to the Free Grace Alliance (2025), the modern view on grace holds that "[t]he sole means of receiving the free gift of eternal life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose substitutionary death on the cross fully satisfied the requirement for our justification, and was raised bodily from the dead."⁴⁹

The Grace Evangelical Society (Yates *et al.*, 2014:2), submits the following on free grace as their statement of faith:

traditional view holds that repentance is necessary for salvation whereas the latter oppose this view, stating that belief in Christ suffices for salvation. The former view sees repentance as contained in the Gospel of John, where the word *believe* is seen as the same with repentance in use, but the latter claims that John preaches that repentance is not necessary for salvation as it does not arise in his writings. Lastly, regarding the content of faith, the former argues that a sinner must believe in Christ's substitutionary death in order to be saved, whereas the latter holds that mortal human must believe that Christ is the guarantor of eternal life, essentially being reward-driven.

⁴⁹ Free Grace Alliance, "Mission and Beliefs," <https://freegracealliance.com/mission-and-beliefs>, (accessed, 25/08/2025).

Jesus Christ, God incarnate, paid the full penalty for [humanity's] sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as his or her only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost.

Yates *et al.* (2014:3) further state that what is perceived as the novelty of FGT stems from its position concerning issues such as the receiving and losing of rewards by believers at the judgement seat of Christ; that assurance is the essence of saving faith; and that true believers can commit and continue in sin. Yates *et al.* (2014:3) say these are accusations levelled by the lordship camp in its opposition to this theology.

Bobby Grow (2022) gives a perfect summary of the position of FGT, and highlights that in contrast with five-point Calvinism, FGT:

... argues that salvation doesn't require 'repentance' as a condition of salvation; it argues that a person is eternally secure (without so-called 'good works'); it makes the distinction between salvation and disciple (so a hard distinction between justification and sanctification), which entails the notion that there are such things as 'carnal Christians'; it argues that the warning passages in the New Testament pointed towards Christians aren't referring to loss of salvation (which both Calvinists and Armenians take them as), but to loss of reward (which also includes loss of ruling and reigning with Christ during the millennium).

Authors who rally behind the above position include Zane Hodges, Charles Ryrie, Robert Wilken, Charles Bing, to name but a few. These authors have given us a solid foundation on which we can evaluate their views on key theological tenets as understood in FGT.

5.2.3. The tenets of modern free grace theology

The tenets of modern FGT are derived from Scripture. However, their novel interpretation is re-stated here in order for their position to be understood.

5.2.3.1. On faith

Regarding saving faith, modern FGT adherents submit that simple belief in Christ is sufficient to guarantee salvation. Hodges (2000:7; 1981:68), for one, submits that their goal is to have "people to believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny". In contesting the implied repentance and faith in the Gospel of John, he argues that "it would have been even more essential for John to state that the content of faith had changed," alluding to the fact that the disciples themselves could not have known about all the promises that Christ would make later in his ministry, causing them to repent. He argues that while the cross should be

preached, and by extension the totality of the gospel, simple belief in Christ and nothing else (even repentance), guarantees salvation.

Hodges further posits that while we strive to preach the full gospel message when evangelising, at times “trust in Christ can occur without a knowledge of the cross, but more often than not it doesn’t” (Hodges, 2000:7). He argues that all the cross does is to clarify God’s way to salvation. Wilkin (2005:28) aligns with this crossless⁵⁰ view, stating that “biblical faith in Jesus is not faith that he existed, nor faith in his deity, nor even faith that he died for our sins and rose again.” He says that to believe in Jesus is to be *convinced* that he died and rose again and that he guarantees eternal life. Hodges (2000:10) states that like in the Gospel of John, “Jesus is the object of faith that brings eternal life”. Although commendable, this is a narrow view that focuses on Jesus as a person, and not necessarily his entire finished work. David Anderson (1999:25) also posits that “saving faith begins as an assessment of certain facts about Jesus Christ.” However, for him “it consummates when a person believes that Christ has died for [their] sins on the cross and has given [them] the gift of eternal life.”

While these scholars state that faith must rest in Christ, this faith is rewards-oriented, and it mainly concerns itself with eternal life. Therefore, whether people are conscious of the work of Christ or not, or whether they are conscious of their sin or not, their salvation does not result because of that awareness, but by faith only. It is for this reason that Hodges (2003:41) finds that salvation can come before repentance, meaning that there is salvation if we believe, regardless of our consciousness of our sins or repentance from them.

Ryrie (1972:134–138) submits that more than 200 verses in the NT indicate that salvation is conditioned solely on faith, which has as its object the Lord Jesus Christ. Anderson (1999:25) evinces more, saying that “saving faith is only that faith tethered to the person and work of Jesus Christ alone for eternal life.” Like Hodges, Wilkin, and Anderson, Ryrie (Ryrie, 1972:134–138) affirms simple belief in Jesus Christ as a condition for salvation, averring that nothing else is required, for to imply that it is, is to preach worthless and false gospel. He says that in Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman, he “did not tell her to straighten out the entangled affairs of her sinful life in order to be saved” (Ryrie, 1972:134–8). He concludes that

⁵⁰ Stegall (2016:58) lucidly states the position of this gospel that he accuses the free grace gospel of. He admits to the offence this name brings. Nonetheless, he advocates for its relevance in view of it holding that the content of saving faith is not merely about whether people preach the cross but whether God requires belief in Christ’s work for eternal life. In this respect, it can be thoroughly documented that a segment of the free grace evangelicals associated with the Grace Evangelical Society has indeed been teaching in recent years that the “gospel” is God’s saving message and that this saving message doesn’t require belief in Christ’s person and work. The result is a gospel that is “crossless.” The use of the phrase “crossless gospel” is consistent with the manner in which Scripture itself speaks of false doctrine and its damaging effects, and it is in keeping with the way free grace people themselves have historically used the phrase “lordship salvation.”

salvation is a free gift, and never should we pretend that we give God something, for God gives all that which we receive by faith.

The views of above authors are espoused in the Journal for the Grace Evangelical Society, which also includes authors such as Ken Yates, Shawn Lazar, Robert Wilkin, Philippe Sterling, Steven Lemke, and Timothy Kaufman. The Journal's goal is to promote the clear proclamation of God's free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, and to distinguish this message from issues related to discipleship. Its statement of faith points to this direction, stating that "...Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as his or her only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost" (Yates *et.al.*, 2014). Anderson (1999:24–25) ends by pointing out that the NT does not support different categories of faith, nor does it subscribe quantities of faith necessary for salvation. He says that: "faith is faith, real faith, genuine faith, through and through." By this, he simply avers that any faith that believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life, will save that person.

In essence, FGT says that simple faith in Christ suffices to attain salvation. The content of the message that should bring salvation does not have to mention the cross or other aspects of the gospel, and that simple belief does not translate into or compel one to change or transform one's life. There are sinners who are saved without any form of repentance.

5.2.3.2. On repentance

Hodges (2002a), in his marathon series on repentance, appears to put little significance to its necessity. This is premised on at least two arguments that he advances in his article "Repentance reconsidered" (Hodges, 2002a). Here he argues that Paul and Silas never asked the Philippian jailer to repent, they only asked him to believe (Acts, 16:31). Elsewhere, both Hodges (2002a:2–3) and Wilken (2007) claim that the Gospel of John does not mention the word repentance, nor does it make it a condition for eternal life. They argue that the focus of John's gospel is that one must *believe* (Jn. 20:30–31).

The distance that Hodges places between himself and repentance is visible when he calls those who hold to this view the supporters of the "repent and believe" doctrine, accusing them of bringing into Scripture what is not there (Hodges, 2002a:3). He posits that whatever may be said about repentance, it "is not a condition for eternal life...; the gospel of John does not imply it; the epistles of John are silent about it; and John did not regard it as a condition for eternal salvation" (Hodges, 2022a:4–8). Elsewhere he asserts that salvation is possible before repentance (Hodges, 2023:41).

However, Hodges (2022a:9–11; 1999:63; 1989:26-27) elsewhere acknowledges that John does mention repentance in Revelations, and that John is ranked second behind Luke for the

number of times the word appears in his writings. However, the twist is that this repentance in Revelations is addressed to the saved, and not to the unsaved, and it did not amount to loss of salvation, but refers to discipline (Hodges, 2022a:9–11). He mentions four instances where John directs words on repentance in Revelation at the unsaved, averring that this repentance makes reference to long-held sinful attitudes and not repentance from unbelief. He (Hodges, 2022a:12) is clear: “In no case is there a reference to repentance from unbelief”.

Hodges (2002a:13–21) further cites the three parables in Luke 15 as examples that repentance does not imply turning from unbelief to faith in Christ, but that it is rather a requirement to believe that Christ is God. His view on repentance is finally stated as addressing “the need that sinners have (whether saved or unsaved) to repair their relationship to God in order to prevent, or to terminate, His temporal judgment on their sins” (Hodges, 2002b:34). This repentance, he says, is “a useful step in a sinner’s life that can prepare a sinner for eternal salvation” (Hodges, 2002b:37).

In concluding, Hodges (2023:41; 1989:145) states that the work of repentance is to bring glory to God when it is properly understood. It serves as “the means by which we can reach harmony with our Maker no matter how far we have strayed from him,” and that even the “unsaved can come to Christ *before repentance*” (*italics original*). He argues (Hodges, 2002b:45):

...if harmony is to be restored between the wayward sinner and his Maker, the straying sinner is called upon to repent and to seek forgiveness. When forgiveness is received, God and [hu]man can have fellowship with each other. The forgiven [hu]man is not only saved from eternal hell. He is in personal harmony with his God.

This begs the question whether salvation is attainable in absence of forgiveness and repentance, and whether the harmony that is spoken about does not amount to salvation since the relationship between God and humanity becomes restored. Wilkin (2007), however, aligns with this position, stating that Jesus did not ask people to be sorry or turn from their sins or commit themselves to him to be born again, rather stating that “all who merely believe in Him have everlasting life.” It appears then that while repentance does not breed salvation, it instead breeds harmony, which restores the relationship between humanity and God.

Speaking against the need for repentance for salvation, Ryrie (1972:123–139) argues that since Christ’s propitiation extends to the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2) and its basis is his shed blood (Rom. 3:25), we should not ask anyone to try to do anything to satisfy God, because owing to Christ’s death, God is satisfied. The message that must be heard by humanity today should be that they should be satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ, which completely satisfied the wrath of God (Ryrie, 1972:123). Ryrie (1972:139) therefore clearly says that repentance, when understood as changing your mind about your sin and being sorry for it, will not bring salvation.

To qualify this, he says that many criminals are repentant of their criminal lives, the wrongs they have committed. However, they do not give up their criminal lifestyles. He therefore makes the distinction that some people can be sorry about their sins without wanting the forgiveness of a saviour. Wilkin (2007) submits here that “[b]ecause of Calvary no one will ever be condemned due to their sins. The basis of condemnation is unbelief, not sinfulness” (see Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2; Rv. 20:11–15).

Therefore, for Ryrie, repentance hinges on that which culminates in a change of mind about not believing in Jesus Christ. Further, he says that there is repentance in Christian life which results when a believer changes their mind about the sins committed, and confession of those sins will lead to a believer experiencing forgiveness. This leaves many questions unanswered – does Ryrie see repentance as necessary for salvation or is it just necessary for forgiveness? Even so, does this forgiveness appear separate from salvation, or is it two sides of the same coin? Clearly, some clarity is needed about how forgiveness is used in this statement.⁵¹

5.2.3.3. On regeneration

The concept of regeneration relates to a new life, thus a change of lifestyle for those professing to be saved by Christ. Naturally, Hodges tackles this point in light of FGT. At least the importance of regeneration is noted in his statement that “eternal life itself is the result of new birth,” alluding that this eternal life result because of the knowledge of God (Hodges, 2005:47). He relates this statement to John 17:1–3, where Jesus affirms that eternal life is to know God – “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Hodges (2005:48), thus states:

It is the inner [hu]man that is transformed at new birth, not the outward [hu]man. That outward change can happen gradually as we walk with God, and the process will be completed when we meet the Lord in the air and receive our glorified bodies.

Hodges says that the regenerate self (the inward person) does not produce sin. Sin is the work of the sinful flesh as it wrestles within the yet-to-be transformed physical body. He asserts that the cross of Christ does not automatically regenerate humans, averring that they still need to attain the new life that comes only through faith in Christ (Hodges, 2002b:45). This suggests

⁵¹ Stegall (2016:54-55) summarises the view of FGT on forgiveness, citing a discussion held between John Niemelä and Hank Hildebrandt. The crux of the debate is that forgiveness is a fellowship issue in order for a person to have free communication with God. The removal of one’s sins upon salvation births forgiveness, which in turn guarantees a back and forth communication between God and humanity. Justification (which is viewed merely as an exercise that allows a person standing before God), is separate from forgiveness (which guarantees communication between God and a saved person). Obviously, the question still remains whether the unforgiven cannot communicate with God, especially in view of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16:19-31). Still, does it mean that sinners only have one opportunity to interact with God, which is at the point of believing Christ for salvation? Did God not speak to many kings in the OT whose hearts were opposed to him, like Pharaoh and Ahab? Or is it in the context of the conversation that the distinction is being made?

that humanity must surrender to receive eternal life. He (Hodges, 2002b:45) argues that the cross makes regeneration possible by repairing the relationship between humanity and God. There is regeneration at the moment when a person starts to believe in Christ for eternal life. There is also a cleansing from sin, sanctification (made holy and fit for the presence of God), justification, and reception of the Holy Spirit (Hodges, 2006:84–85).

Ryrie (1972:124), speaking on the sin nature (Rom. 6:1–10), argues that union with Christ “not only breaks the power of the old capacity within us, but it also associates us with the risen Christ, thus giving us the power to live according to the dictates of the new capacity.” He says the historical facts of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection become part of our personal history only when we believe in Christ. He concurs that we have been crucified with Christ and the power of sin has therefore been broken and made inoperable in the believer’s life; a fact he says is unalterable. However, he distinguishes himself from other authors by saying that to put “this (power) into practice *does depend on yielding ourselves to His control*” (Ryrie, 1972:124, emphasis mine). A Christian is now free to live a life pleasing to God. At times Christians may find themselves “listening to and following the promptings of sin,” but it will never be possible for sin to regain the control it had before conversion (Ryrie, 1972:124–125). It appears that Ryrie sees a need for a changed life, for a life that deliberately militates against God cannot be said to have attained to the salvation of God.

In addressing the question of regeneration, Bing (2025e:1–2) acknowledges that it is a spiritual new birth that is supported by a number of biblical passages (Jn. 3:3–7; 1:3; 1 Pt. 1:3,23; Jas. 1:18, and elsewhere). He notes that this new birth that one attains “through faith in Jesus Christ is the implantation of divine life in a sin-dead soul.” Bing asks the question whether regeneration will inevitably produce a changed life, and whether this change proves regeneration and provides assurance. He answers affirmatively, although guarded, because he says “[t]here is no statement in biblical texts on regeneration guaranteeing a changed life” (Bing, 2025e:1). In his view, even 2 Corinthians 5:17 does not speak of a regenerate life, because the “old things” cited in that passage could not be construed to mean sin or conduct.

Bing is of the opinion that Christians will always sin, and therefore sin will always be present in their lives, and their conduct will follow them to the end of their lives. The change spoken of here is viewed as “a change in the believer’s standing before God and the resulting change of perspective toward the world and others” (Bing, 2025e:1). Therefore, Bing argues that regeneration is only viewed in terms of legal standing before God and as what God *intended* for believers to be (Eph. 2:10). However, it does not produce a changed life (for Scripture does not support this). Neither does it prove regeneration (for it could also be induced by things other than faith in Christ), nor does it give assurance of salvation (for God’s grace is sufficient guarantee).

5.2.3.4. Justification

Hodges' (2006) treatment of the concept of justification not only clarifies his view on forgiveness, but also on sin and judgement. He starts by delineating the difference between forgiveness and justification, and argues that these two are not the same. Forgiveness, he says, "is an interpersonal issue" (Hodges, 2006:81) that deals with a person's relationship with God (also see Wilken, 2007). The process of forgiveness thus removes a barrier – sin. This removal enables believers to enter the Holiest of all, which is the very presence of God, as they are completely clean in the sight of God as result of being forgiven. Forgiveness then becomes a necessary deduction from the New Covenant promise about not remembering sin (Hodges, 2006:84). "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

Hodges (2000:9; 1981:102) argues that Paul views justification as a judicial issue, which in this instance unfolds in the hands of God – it is God who justifies. Justification is a "term related to the courtroom, and the act of justifying someone is the function of a Judge (that is, of God) and expresses a divine pronouncement, or judgment, about the believer in Jesus Christ" (Hodges, 2006:82). Here then, a sinner is pronounced righteous, and no charge can be brought against a believer. With this declaration, Hodges (2006:83) proposes that no justified believer will stand before God for judgement (Jn. 5:24; Jn. 3:17–18). In his own words: "Final judgement pertains only to the unregenerate" (Hodges, 2006:83).

Essentially, justification removes judgement against believers; they will not even appear before the throne of God for judgement. He differentiates between the words *krisis* and *bema*, saying *krisis* is more a terrifying event than *bema* would be, and believers will only appear before the *bema* (Hodges, 2006:83). This *bema*, likened to a judicial bench, is a place where believers will ascend to be addressed by God as they appear for their final accounting. This is because approaching the bench does not equate to judgement where the gavel falls as the judge passes a sentence. The notion that emerges here is that only the justified have the privilege of approaching the bench (*bema*) and of being *addressed* (not judged) by God.

Hodges (2006) suggests that it is important to note God's inability to (or choice not to) remember our sins, for Scripture does not say "their sins I will forgive." This act of not remembering is the result of justification (Hodges, 2006:84). Only justified sinners qualify for God to not remember their sins, for they are washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor. 6:11). He concludes that through the proclamation of justification as a result of grace, "God sees us as perfectly clean from sin, as holy people belonging to Him, and as completely free of any and every charge of sin" (Hodges, 2006:85). Justification and new birth are indefectible gifts (Hodges: 1989:107).

Ryrie (1972:125) underscores the importance of the death of Christ, pointing out that it brought justification. The law could not justify, yet “the death of Christ opened the way for justification of faith in Him alone” (Ryrie, 1972:125). This is important because justification comes not on account of what a sinner has done, but as a result of Christ’s sacrifice. Ryrie (1972) finds it prudent to explain justification as declaring someone righteous. “It is a judicial term indicating that a verdict of acquittal has been announced, and so excluding all possibility of condemnation” (Ryrie, 1972:128–9). The righteousness of Christ thus secures justification for humanity because in him, all of God’s demands are met – demands that humanity cannot satisfy. Because humanity cannot do anything to earn its justification, the means by which humanity is justified is therefore faith. He indicates that faith is not the ground but the means or channel through which God imputes justification to believers (Ryrie, 1972:129). When we believe all that Christ is, God in turn puts that to our account and acquits us of all our wrongs.

5.2.3.5. Assurance and eternal security

Assurance is central to FGT writings. Leading the debate is Hodges, who penned an article in 2009 titled “We believe in: Assurance of salvation.” Indeed, Hodges (2009:14) starts well by penning three foundations for assurance: (1) it is based on the promises of God’s word; (2) it must not be based on works; and (3) it is an inseparable part of saving faith. Hodges (2009:14) draws on 1 John 5:13 to advance his statements on assurance and views scriptural verses such as 1 John 2:6; 24 and 1 John 2:3, 7–10 negatively in relation to assurance. In his view these are wrongly interpreted to assume that keeping the commandments and persevering in obedience are the ingredients of assurance (Hodges, 2009:14).

Hodges (2009:15) makes it clear that the author of 1 John did not believe that eternal life could be lost. He uses the Gospel of John (4:13–14; 6:35–40, 50–51; 10:27–30; 11:25–26) to substantiate this claim, arguing that those who advocate for the keeping of the law directly oppose this basic theology. Of course, the rationale that Hodges (2006) advances is that if one stops living right and therefore does not persevere, the Arminian position states that such a person will not have assurance and may not be saved. Clearly, this position seeks to advance salvation without perseverance, and those who advocate for it are accused of preaching salvation by works. Hodges (2009:16) thus states that “all efforts to find assurance somewhere else than in the testimony of God are doomed ahead of time to dismal failure”.

To separate works from assurance, Hodges argues that assurance cannot be found in our works (Rom. 4:5). In his view, nowhere does the Gospel of John say that assurance of eternal life would be denied if there are no good works in the believer’s life (Hodges, 2009:18). He argues that it is ridiculous to suggest that God would say “my justification is for the person who does not work, but assurance of my justification is only for someone who does!” (Hodges,

2009:18). Here then, he finds it reasonably easy to accuse Arminian and lordship persuasions of assurance by works. This is a request that he says is not possible, for not all Christians will do good works. Hodges (2009:21) ultimately finds a “claim that a salvation which is apart from works, is not recognizable except by works,” to be logically and theologically absurd.

Arguing for assurance that is inseparable from saving faith, Hodges (2009:22) submits that assurance of our salvation “is part and parcel of believing the gospel message.” Again, he relies on John 5:24 and 6:47 as some of the verses that guarantee assurance, insisting that the one who believes these verses has eternal life. Hodges does not allow our imaginations to run wild about the content of this belief. He (Hodges, 2009:23–24) interprets “believe in Me” to mean to “believe that Jesus is the Christ,” and to believe in Christ is to accept his guarantee of eternal salvation. Hodges (2009:29) ends with a firm word to those who are opposed to this message, charging that “Evangelicals must resist the seductive temptation to attach riders and provisos to our message about faith alone in Christ alone”. Wilkin (2005:33) supports this view, opining that biblical faith in Jesus as the Christ “is the conviction that anyone who simply believes in Him is eternally secure.” Hodges concurs, claiming that “It is precisely the ability of Jesus to guarantee eternal life that makes him the Christ in the Johannine sense of that term.”

Ryrie (1972:131–132) on the other hand, starts off by claiming that the question of eternal security must be considered only in relation to a true believer. This is indeed a very important distinction, but there are questions about what a true believer is. When discussing the concept of assurance, Ryrie (1972:131, 179) introduces the idea of carnal Christians, whom he says will also be found in heaven but they may not receive the rewards when their actions are tested. Ryrie (1972:132) vehemently opposes the notion that a believer can lose their salvation. In his view, the doctrine of security depends on what God has done, and for a person to lose their salvation, some things that God had done would have to be undone. If this is touted as a possibility, believers will have to be removed from the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13); they will have to be unsealed (Eph. 1:13; 4:30); God will have to stop keeping believers in spite of everything; and there will have to be a reversal of the predestined and the pre-known, and the re-calling of the called (Rom. 8:29–39). If these things were to be possible, Ryrie (1972:132) states that God would be a liar.

Ryrie (1972:133) goes on to clarify that those verses (Heb. 6:4–6; Jn. 15:6; 1 Cor. 3:15; Jas. 2:14–26, amongst others) that are thought to be teaching that there is no security, were actually meant to address practical problems in churches. Interestingly, he argues that a call to move to maturity (Heb. 6:4–6) was only intended to mean that believers can *either stand still or move forward* (Ryrie, 1972:133), without mention of the possibility of regression. Ryrie’s (1972:133) position is that everyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ is assured of salvation, regardless of their position on the demands of that confession. Further arguing for

substitution and redemption from sin, Ryrie (1972:121) submits that “Christ’s death not only paid the price for sin but also removed us from the marketplace of sin in order to give us full assurance that we will never be returned to the bondage and penalties of sin.” He argues, in line with Galatians 4:5, that believers can never lose the adoption as sons and be returned to bondage. Therefore, those who have confessed Christ, are saved and will remain saved.

5.2.3.6. Sanctification

Sanctification refers to the cleansing of a believer so that they are more Christ-like. This is a period during which a believer despises and renounces sin, purifies themselves, and obeys the commands of God. Understanding the importance of sanctification, Hodges (2006) likens it to justification. He explains that the writer of Hebrews (in Heb. 10:10, 14) never uses the word “justified” but instead uses “sanctified” as its close approximation. This allows him to conclude that “all believers are completely sanctified” (Hodges, 2006:83). While the OT sacrifices could offer external purification only, under the New Covenant believers are totally clean, they have been sanctified and made holy in the sight of God. This sanctification has the benefit of making believers “able to enter boldly into the Holiest of all, that is, into the very presence of God” (Hodges, 2006:84).

The sanctification that Hodges advocates for results in God not remembering believer’s sins and lawless deeds, making them completely clean and holy in God’s sight – completely forgiven. This forgiveness occurs because of a “judicial pronouncement of justification” (Hodges, 2006:84). Hodges argues that this is the only way in which God will not and could not remember the sins of believers because they stand justified. The impact of sin then arises from this argument, with Hodges (2002b:49) and Wilkin (2007; 2019) averring that sin itself is not an issue in the life of a believer because Jesus’s death on the cross completely satisfied every judicial demand that God had in connection with humanity’s sin. Hodges (2002b:50) further argues that “God will not forgive the sins of those who are still unsaved. God cannot have true harmony with the unsaved.” Hodges considers sanctification as a New Covenant blessing that God had promised in Genesis 15:6, Psalm 32:2, Habakkuk 2:4, and Jeremiah 31:34: “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

On sanctification, Ryrie (1972:125) appears cryptic in his analysis. He asks: “Is the Christian under the Mosaic law in relation to sanctification or not?” He argues that because Christ’s death brought an end to the law, specifically the Mosaic law, sanctification is now possible. There is a sense that Ryrie (1972) advocates that since believers could not meet the demands of the law, a repeal was necessary in order for sanctification to take force – thus the ending of the Mosaic law or code. He posits that “...portions (not all) of the Mosaic law are repeated in the New Testament in relation to the believer’s sanctification” (Ryrie, 1972:125). However, the

governing law in the life of the believer is the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), or the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) (Ryrie, 1972:125). Clarity would have been welcome with regard to this “law of Christ” that works the sanctification of believers and on how they attain and relate to it. Ryrie (1972:126), however, maintains his point that “Christ’s death did do away with the Mosaic law as a means of sanctification”.

It is perhaps helpful to look at Ryrie’s (1972:82–84) understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit to gauge how believers come to sanctification. He argues that those who are infilled by the Holy Spirit can be known in at least in three ways, namely: (1) dedication of the self to God and his use and control; (2) not grieving the Spirit; and (3) dependence on God. The summary of this is: “To be Spirit-filled is to be Spirit-controlled, and this means dedication of life, putting away sin, and constant dependence on His power” (Ryrie, 1972:84). It is obvious from this statement that if these are present in the believer’s life, holiness (sanctification) is an unavoidable outcome.

Also, it is apparent that a believer must reach this point by constantly beating and subjecting themselves to the will of God. White (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:770–1) makes this clear on the basis of Leviticus 19:2. Because God is holy, He demands that Israel also must be holy. White (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:771) says “Israel is inherently holy, separated by God from ‘the peoples’ to be his own. Yet Israel must become holy, by obedience, fit for the privilege allotted them”. The argument is that holiness just does not fall onto a believer’s lap. It is a life of purpose lived in honour of the God who chose to sanctify them for himself through Christ.

5.3. ON THE GRAVITY OF SIN

One of the important aspects of FGT is its understanding of sin and its consequences, which to an extent seems to be peculiar. Authors who adhere to FGT have provided some clarity on their position, and below we map their views on exactly what sin is, how it affects the life of a believer, and its final consequences at judgement.

5.3.1. The free grace theology’s definition of sin

Hodges’s (2002a:12–13) view of sin concerns not the sinful acts that people commit, like murder, sorcery or sexual immorality, nor is it sinful acts such as the worship of demons, idols and gold as acts that hinder the attainment of eternal life. His argument is that people go to hell not because of sins, but because they do not have life (Hodges, 2002b:46). This gives us his definition. To him, sin means *unbelief in Christ*, because those who do not believe in him do not have life (Jn. 20:31; 5:24). He thus estimates that the possession of eternal life is the end goal and God seeks to bestow it on humans (Hodges, 2002b:46). As God forgives sins (humanity’s desire), the fractured relationship is fixed and harmony with God is restored.

Wilkin (2019:15) also contends that commitment, obedience, or turning from sins does not deliver salvation, but faith in Christ, essentially asserting that sin is unbelief in Christ. However, Ryrie's conceptualisation of sin differs from that of Hodges and Wilkin. He says sin would be anything that does not conform to the glory of God, in this case citing *lawlessness* as in 1 John 3:4 (Ryrie, 1972:110). It is therefore easy to deduct from the above that sin is unbelief in God, and that it also includes being opposed to the commands of God.

5.3.2. The effects of sin on humanity

Hodges (2002b:49) and Wilkin (2019:27) argue here that the pursuit of a sinful path by born-again people only serves to estrange them from God, as was the case with the prodigal son. This is because they view sin as inconsequential since Jesus's death on the cross completely satisfied every judicial demand that God had in connection with humanity's sin. Hodges (2002b:45) for instance contends: "So marvellously complete and full is the sacrificial death of Christ for our sins that it satisfied fully God's justice and no man is condemned to hell on the grounds of his sins," a view Wilkin (2019) agrees with.

With regard to Christians who live a sinful life, Wilkin (2019:35) says "[s]ome believers will be praised and some will be rebuked (see Lk. 19:16–26; 1 Jn. 2:28). *Those believers who have confessed Christ in word and deed will be praised* (see Mt. 10:32–33; 2 Tim. 2:12)" (own italics). This means that there exists an alternative option of confessing Christ in word and not in deed, as per Wilkin. The result of this is that heaven will not be lost, only some rewards. Ryrie (1972:114) seems to be of the same view as Hodges and Wilkin, arguing that "sin does not expel one from the family, but it does hinder full enjoyment of the family life." In fact, he advances the point that God takes sinners to heaven (1 Cor. 11:30). He (Ryrie, 1972:113) says that "on occasion the Lord may take a believer to heaven through physical death because of [their] *habitual* sinning" (own italics).

Further, Hodges (2022b:36) admits to the fact that the unsaved can be judged because sin actually puts them in temporal judgement of God, citing the example of Nineveh. However, the prodigal son on the other hand, although he was "dead and lost", he is now "alive and found," and on this basis, he still remains saved because he *remained* a son even when he was dead and lost (Hodges, 2022b:33). Ryrie's view is that people belong eternally to families. However, sin can in essence interrupt that fellowship, which will then require the necessary steps (confession) to restore (Ryrie, 1972:114, 122). Hodges therefore argues (in view of the prodigal son) that proper appreciation of the gospel of grace will have us understand that even the backsliding Christian cannot have grounds to doubt their salvation even when they are in the far country of sin. It is of no consequence how militantly opposed to God believers are, their salvation is not conditioned on their sins or lifestyles. Like the prodigal son himself, "he

will still know that he is a son of the Father whose fellowship he has left” (Hodges, 2002a:21; Ryrie, 1972:113–4). Lazar (in Wilken, 2013:15) also, being confronted by the accusation that he advocates for the salvation of homosexuals even in their unchanging lifestyles, says:

If a gay person believes in Christ’s promise of everlasting life (Jn. 3:16), they will receive the gift of everlasting life just as any other sinner can, whatever their sin may be. God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) ... There’s a difference between receiving eternal life as a free gift, and living a life that is pleasing to God.

It is Wilken’s (2007) view then that making our sins the issue of evangelism is to insult the work of Christ on the cross, because the issue has been settled at Calvary. Referring to the Nicodemus discourse, he claims that Jesus often did not even bring up the issue of sin in his evangelical ministry. Once we believe, we are adopted as children of God for life because that relationship can never be undone (Wilkin, 2013:15).

Hodges (2002a), Wilken (2013) and Ryrie (1972) see a continuity of salvation for believers (regardless of their persistence in sin), and no salvation for non-believers who do not believe in Christ for eternal salvation. These scholars make it clear that once you confess your belief in Christ for eternal life, you are saved, and nothing will reverse that salvation. This is the statement of assurance Hodges (2002a:21) advances to one young believer who struggled with assurance. Sin is therefore seen as powerless and ineffectual, and although a believer may indulge, salvation remains because the adage is: “there was nothing I could do to earn it, and nothing I could do to lose it” (Hodges, 2002a:21).

Elsewhere, in discussing 1 John 3:9, Hodges (2005:48) argues that the text simply means that the regenerate person cannot sin – God’s law is written in their heart, and their regenerate self never produces sin, thus conveying that sin has no effect on the attainment of salvation and eternal life. He expresses his displeasure with those who present the gospel in this way (of amplifying sin rather than faith in Christ in their preaching), although he admits that “this kind of presentation has been used by God to the actual salvation of souls” (Hodges, 2001:10). Almost as soon as he says that this kind of presentation cannot be found in the Bible (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 16:31), he finds reason to chide the so-called *repent and believe crusade* (Hodges, 2002a:1, 6), averring that “*repent of your sins and believe*” should not be the content of the message. Wilkin (2007) upholds this position, citing that Christ’s emphasis was on himself and not on the sinner’s sins, to the extent that he never even required the woman at the well to repent. Here then, leading people to Christ has nothing to do with their sin – all that is necessary is faith without the rebuke of sin or the requirement of repentance.

5.3.3. The consequences of sin at the final judgement

Hodges (2002b:45) suggests that sin is not a critical issue in people's lives. However, Ryrie (1972:114) records it as a *serious matter* that affects God and humanity, especially with respect to rewards at judgement. Yet Hodges (2002b:45) opts to view it as non-critical because as he argues, Jesus is the Lamb of God who not only takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29), but is also a propitiation of the sins of the world (1 Jn. 2:2). He finds it plausible to claim that "the issue at the final judgment is not [humanity's] sin, since Christ has atoned for that in its entirety" (Hodges, 2002b:46).

Effectively, Hodges (2022b:47) proposes that from God's standpoint, and as the judge of all humanity, "all humanity's sin was paid for by Christ and none of it remains as an issue in [humanity's] final judgment". What this means is that much as people go to hell unforgiven, they do not go there *because* they are unforgiven. *Christ has forgiven all*, and his reconciliation affects the entire world (Hodges, 2002b:47; Ryrie, 1972:122; Wilken, 2007). They go to hell because of their refusal to believe in Christ. At final judgement then, Hodges (2002b:47) and Wilkin (2019) assert that neither sin nor forgiveness become issues.

What then has bearing at the final judgement? Hodges (2002a:21) answers that the contention at final judgement is rewards or lost opportunities. Ryrie (1972:113) and Wilkin (2019:27) hold the same, arguing that sin brings "loss of fellowship between the believer and his heavenly Father." The prodigal son, for instance, having squandered all that his father had given him, was "still fully aware that he is his father's son" (Hodges, 2002a:19). However, much as he is still the son, he does not get back all that he has squandered. He may have been restored as son, but the loss of time, potential, and opportunity cannot be recovered. Hodges (2002a:21) thus argues that "the portion of any Christian's life that is spent away from God, as well as the rewards that might have been earned during that time, are permanently lost".

At the final judgement then, Ryrie (1972:178–179) argues that there is no doubt of assurance of salvation, only "whether heaven will be entered with or without rewards." The question whether it is sinful works or good works that are tested, does not arise, and no elaboration is given either. But those whose works do not pass the test will nevertheless enter the gates of heaven marching because "forgiveness concerns justification, the review concerns rewards" (Ryrie, 1972:179). In this way, Ryrie states that various crowns will be bestowed on believers – of rejoicing, of righteousness, of loving his appearing, of life, amongst others (Ryrie, 1972:179).

5.4. FREE GRACE THEOLOGY'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAY TO SALVATION

With the above said, the question begs how FGT perceives salvation to unfold for those who seek it. What FGT presents as the way of salvation lacks depth and presents the bare minimum requirements for salvation (Rutherford, 2006:6–7). It negates the rigorous demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is evident from what Ryrie (1972:134) provides in this regard. He presents to us what he calls “the terms of salvation”, which maps the response of the sinner to the gospel, and the actions that should (might) follow.

It is, however, unfortunate that the approach Ryrie takes does not necessarily map the way of salvation for FGT, nor does it give clear terms for how it unfolds, it only speaks against certain demands that are proposed as terms of salvation – surrender and repentance. These terms however, inform us about what FGT does not suggest as a way of salvation. In spite of this, I discuss Ryrie's and other proponents' understanding on this issue.

5.4.1. Belief and surrender as a way of salvation

Ryrie's (1972) overarching view in this section questions the need for one to believe *and* surrender their life to Jesus Christ in order to obtain salvation. He contends that salvation does not work in this way. He avers that “salvation is said to be conditioned solely on the basis of faith – faith that has as its object the Lord Jesus who died as our substitute for sin” (Ryrie, 1972:134). Together with Wilkin (2019:4), he completely rejects the notion that Christ must be made Lord and that all believers should be disciples as conditions for salvation. Ryrie (1972:135–137) accepts that belief as the sole condition of salvation will result in a number of shallow or carnal Christians among the believers, arguing that Lot did not surrender his life to God, yet he was called righteous (1 Pt. 2:7), and that Peter denied the lordship of Christ (Acts 10:14) (although he correctly finds this to be temporary denial), yet he remained a disciple.

Ryrie reasons that the grace of God is *uncomplicated*, and he urges people not to be tempted to complicate it in terms of its offer of salvation. He contends here that an uncomplicated salvation message is one that points people to the object of faith and what people should believe about this object of faith. He says this object of faith, which is Jesus Christ, “offers eternal life and forgiveness of sins to all who believe” (Ryrie, 1972:137). This Jesus is not concerned with the condition of the lives of the people for he did not tell the woman at the well to “straighten out the entangled affairs of her sinful life in order to be saved” (Ryrie, 1972:138). Wilkin (2019:8–9) also subscribes to this view, suggesting that it is wrong to believe in confession and turning from sin, commitment to Christ, and baptism as enablers of salvation, whereas the only thing needed is belief in Christ.

5.4.2. Repent and believing as a way of salvation

Viewing repentance as a change of mind, Ryrie (1972:139) argues that it is not any kind of repentance that will save. He contends that repentance that leads to salvation is one that results from a change of “mind about a particular sin of rejecting Christ”. Therefore, repentance about rejecting Christ is akin to faith in Christ. Changing your mind about any other sin, except this one specific sin (unbelief), does not lead to salvation. Ryrie’s proposition, although not explicitly stated, seeks to divide sins into two – the sin of unbelief, and the sin of unholy living. Here then, the most important sin a person ought to repent, is the sin of unbelief. Once that has been done, salvation is secured, and God cannot reject anyone who has confessed him as Lord. Lazar (in Wilkin, 2013:15) also suggests that “repentance is not a condition for receiving eternal life, but it is a condition for receiving God’s approval.”

Ryrie (1972:139) further argues that “people can be sorry for their sins without wanting to accept the forgiveness of a Saviour”. Even hardened criminals can be sorry for the crimes they committed without giving up the life of crime. However, one wonder whether belief in Christ would not lead to repentance from unholy living. Ryrie, as with Lazar (in Wilkin, 2013), would argue here that repentance may be part of the *Christian life* (after salvation), but it is not compulsory or necessary. Ryrie says a Christian does need to repent by changing their mind about particular sins committed. However, this repentance is not mandatory, for he says, “If he [she] does repent, then he [she] will confess those sins and experience forgiveness” (Ryrie, 1972:139). Ryrie’s abrupt ending of this segment leaves us pondering whether there could be Christians who militate against God who remain saved, and whether God is disposed to welcoming (in his presence) unrepentant sinners whom he did not forgive their sins.

5.4.3. The function of the power of God in the way of salvation

God’s work is to make salvation available through the atoning death of Jesus Christ (Ryrie, 1972:118–126). Since this salvation is available and attainable, God waits for those who believe that his son Jesus Christ is Lord and offers them salvation (Ryrie, 1972:134). Beyond this point, God does not overly concern himself with the type of life lived by those who believe in Jesus Christ as lord, no matter how militantly opposed they are to his commands (Ryrie, 1972:139). Once that confession is made, God is amenable to accepting them for eternity without them losing their salvation – for the death of Christ, which makes forgiveness of sins possible, underwrites this assurance (Ryrie, 1972:131).

While God provides salvation through his power, the position of FGT says that this power is relevant to make salvation available. However, the same power cannot guide sinners to live righteous life. God is resigned to the fact that his children will live anyhow, and he will be forced to accept them regardless. This however, contradicts the position that through God’s power,

hearts are changed (Ez. 36:27; Dt. 30:6; 2 Cor. 5:17), lives are renewed (Rm. 12:2), and believers receive grace to live righteously (Ti. 2:11-12).

5.5. ADDRESSING THE CRITICISM LEVELLED AGAINST FREE GRACE THEOLOGY

It is important to understand the criticism levelled against FGT camp in relation to their theology. Nyberg (2021:13), himself a free grace scholar, has expressed the view that the positions espoused by Hodges and Wilkin in particular contain aberrant views that do not reflect the traditional FGT held by Chafer and Warfield. Here then, I outline critical points against FGT.

5.5.1. The context of the criticism

Criticism 1: Misinterpreting justification by faith alone

Grudem states bluntly that FGT does not teach justification by faith alone as held by the Reformation. The difference, he says, is on the use of the word “alone,” which reveals a novel interpretation on the part of FGT camp. The position of the Protestant Reformation is that “We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone” (Grudem, 2015:27; Packer, 2020:174). Grudem suggests that FGT mistook this understanding to mean that nothing other than faith is necessary for salvation.

FGT took from that that the grace of God is uncomplicated and that even the gospel message must not be complicated by preachers (Ryrie, 1972:137). According to Grudem (2015:38–39), essential elements of the gospel are bound to collapse if we misunderstand this concept of faith alone. Here, concepts such as repentance, assurance, perseverance, and others, are already in jeopardy because faith is viewed as alone, separate from essential elements of repentance as taught by the Reformation and the NT.

Packer (2020:192–194) discusses the position of those who want to live free from the rigorous demands of the call of salvation. Calling it Christ-centred antinomianism, he says its position “argues that God sees no sin in believers, because they are in Christ, who kept the law for them.” FGT’s argument is here laid bare, arguing that what people do in their lives makes no difference to God because they have *at some point in time* in their lives confessed Christ and have secured for themselves eternal assurance.

Sawyer (2004:1–2) agrees, arguing that Zane Hodges, and others, went to the extremes of grace to the extent that “any talk of works even in a post-conversion regenerate state smacks of a mixing of faith and works...” He says that the mere fact that FGT managed to separate justification and sanctification, established a theological basis for antinomianism.

Criticism 2: No repentance gospel

Grudem (2015:49) accuses FGT of weakening the gospel message by avoiding any call to unbelievers to repent of their sins. This they do by arguing that there is no connection between repentance and eternal life (Grudem, 2015:49). He argues elsewhere that the lack of emphasis on the need of repentance means that one is preaching one half of the gospel (Grudem, 1999:312), which fails to transform lives in line with the gospel of Christ. He argues that FGT bases their rejection of repentance on the Gospel of John only, arguing that this gospel does not mention repentance (Grudem, 2015:49), resulting in Christians who do not show conversion at all (Grudem, 1999:312). He chides FGT camp for basing their doctrine of saving faith on only one book of the Bible.

Pink (2013:27) argues that failure to insist on repentance is to militate against God, thus failing to tell the hearers that “nothing but a broken heart which hates sin can truly believe in Christ.” Packer (2020:177) also views the possibility of faith without repentance and embracing Christ as Saviour but not as Lord, as destructive delusion. Sawyer (2004:2) here points out that Hodges in particular, “does not focus upon the supernatural character of regeneration, nor on the reality of regeneration by the Holy Spirit which Scripture emphatically asserts takes place at salvation.” Sawyer says that this position espoused by FGT fails to account for the witness of the Spirit in the life of the believer, a position that Gause (2009:75–77) clearly underscores with reference to its importance for living a regenerate life. Therefore, omitting repentance in preaching is a significant departure from the NT pattern, which, according to Grudem (2015:76), carries untold consequences.

Criticism 3: No surrender to Christ

There is also the question of surrender. Some writers find that FGT does not subscribe to a complete surrender. This stems from the fact that FGT writers appear happy to have Jesus as Saviour but not as Lord (Hodges, Wilkin, Bing, etc.). Pink (2013:5) in particular, argues that “there are many people who would like to be saved from hell, but who do not want to be saved from self-will, from having their own way, from a life of (some form of) worldliness.” Packer (2020:177) says that people seek justification through an impenitent faith, which in essence is false. Here, Pink (2013) argues that God will indeed not save such persons, for it is not on their own terms that God will save them, but on his terms.

Grudem (1999:312) posits here that without surrender, there emerges Christians who accept Christ over and over again without seeing change in their lives. These are Christians who seek salvation without ever wanting to deal with the rigorous demands of the Saviour. Grudem cites that Christ is never received as Saviour in his majesty – the absolute Lord of our lives. On this issue of surrender, Pink (2013:136) questions here the possibility of a convert who fails to

surrender but is guaranteed heaven, saying: “No one can receive Christ as his Savior while he rejects Him as Lord”.

Criticism 4: False assurance

FGT believes that those who confess Christ are guaranteed their place in heaven. They will not lose heaven, although they may enter it without rewards (Hodges, 2002a:21; Ryrie, 1972:178–9). Grudem (2015:77) sees this as “false assurance of eternal life to many people who profess faith in Christ but then show no evidence in their pattern of life.” The false assurance rises because of what Grudem calls a weakened gospel message that convinces many unsaved people that they are saved even though they reject repentance.

Elsewhere, Grudem (2015:82) submits that FGT’s position advocates that “people can become complete unbelievers and still be saved”. This stems from Wilkin’s and Hodges’s view that once people believe in Jesus for everlasting life, they are eternally secure, even if they later stop believing. Sawyer (2004:1) deems FGT’s position on assurance to be a theological basis for antinomianism, which of course makes for carnal and unbelieving Christians. They do this to ensure certainty of the individual’s salvation. In FGT therefore, justification and sanctification remain bifurcated, with the result being a false assurance of salvation.

Criticism 5: Underemphasis on trust in the person of Christ

One of the serious claims made against FGT is their underemphasis on trusting the person of Jesus Christ, the very object of salvation. Grudem (2015:99) asserts that FGT “overemphasises agreement with facts and underemphasises heartfelt trust in the person of Christ”. This is a serious allegation because FGT assumes the position that belief in Christ, and only Christ, is what is needed for salvation to occur. Grudem, however, clarifies his position by stating that while there are two views on saving faith in FGT (*intellectual assent* and *trust that is placed in the person of Jesus*), both these groups still overemphasise the belief that one is a sinner and that Christ died for those sins. Yet he argues that the content of their saving faith does not appear to emphasise the element of trust in the *person* of Jesus (Grudem, 2015:99), especially in the work of Zane Hodges.⁵²

Grudem (2015) accuses FGT of believing the promises of Jesus, not the maker of those promises. Sawyer (2004:3) finds this in Hodges’s writings as well, positing that when he speaks on faith, he aligns more with *assensus* and possibly *notitia* but not *fiducia*, an assent to facts rather than a trust in a person. Grudem (2015:103) indicates that elsewhere, Hodges argues that Martha believed the facts about Jesus Christ, suggesting that “by believing the

⁵² *Absolutely free*, 1989, set the tone on the doctrine of FGT. It can be read side-by-side with MacArthur’s *The gospel according to Jesus*, 1988.

amazing facts about the person of Christ, Martha was trusting him”. Wilkin (2019:7–8) repeats the same about Martha. Dave Anderson is also quoted as saying that saving faith is not consummated until one trusts the promises of God. He regards it as important for “one to appropriate those promises for [themselves] and be fully persuaded and confident in those promises as [their] only hope for eternal life” (cited in Grudem, 2015:103). Clearly, it is about rewards, and not so much about the giver of those rewards.

5.5.2. The relevance of the criticism

The relevance of Criticism 1: Misinterpreting the justification by faith alone

Is FGT misunderstood when it is criticised for misinterpreting the important aspect of justification by faith alone? It is important to clarify here that FGT has always sought to separate repentance, obedience, sanctification, and justification. Also, it is their view that (*absolutely*) *nothing else saves* except faith in Christ. Bing (1991:23) states that Paul (in Rm. 3:21—5:21) argues for faith as the only requirement for justification without ever mentioning obedience to qualify faith. He argues that to ask sinners to obey is asking them for something outside their remit, essentially nullifying the essence of grace, which is a free gift. He is firm that this position (of asking for obedience) confuses the issue of salvation with the issue of Christian life. Basically, there must be a clear distinction between the pre-conversion decision and post-conversion commitments (Bing, 1991:24). Ryrie (1972:125) thus asserts that “the death of Christ opened the way for justification of faith in him alone.” It takes only simple faith for this justification to occur in the life of the believer, separate from anything else.

The argument of FGT in view of the word “alone” must then be understood in the context of two views of justification. In the first instance, we need to understand that justification occurs when “God’s wrath is satisfied and sin’s guilt is removed” (Jewett, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:774, Gause, 2009:46–47). Davie *et al.* (2016:480) correctly submit that justification pertains to the reconciliation that has been effected between God and humanity. This reconciliation, they say, is a present reality for those in the church (those who have believed in Christ) and a possibility for those outside the church (the yet to confess sinners).

Dealing with the forensic aspect of justification (legal declaration), Gause (2009:48) submits that here, a believer is freed from accusations before God’s tribunal but not freed from guilt. What this means is that in the first instance, sin stood as a problem between God and humanity, and in his righteousness, God resolved to deal with it so that harmony can exist between him and all humanity. While the sin of Adam lingered, there was no possibility of reconciliation because God could not justify before being satisfied. Accordingly, Paul (in Rom. 3:21–26) demonstrates how “the gospel reveals a way in which sinners can be justified without

affront to the divine justice, which in line with Scripture” (Rom. 1:18–3:20), condemns all sin (Packer & Allen, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:457).

Here, Guy Waters (2010:14–18) brings the doctrine of imputation into focus. He argues that Christ, as the second Adam, had to endure death on the cross so that firstly, he can satisfy the demand of God and the penalty for sin, and secondly, so that redemption can become possible. Waters (2010:15) argues that this work of Christ has secured the possibility for sinners to be pardoned by God. This pardon is not *automatic*. He says that “pardon removes a person from the negative column and places [them] at zero. Pardon, however, does not thereby render a person acceptable. It does not transfer him into a positive column.” Obviously, this speaks to the pardon that is available to all humanity if they come to God by seeking forgiveness of their sins.

This is important because if Christ did not satisfy the demands of God, not one single human, even a believing one, would be able to come to God, regardless of their faith in him. This is because no human could satisfy the demands of God. Therefore, Christ died in the place of humanity so that “the curse is removed and the penalty is paid” (Waters, 2010:14). Packer and Allen (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:456) deepen this thought, submitting that regarding the two sides of justification, “the one side means the pardon, remission, and non-imputation of all sins, reconciliation with God, *and the end of his enmity and wrath.*” Therefore, at this point, God has made salvation *possible* to all through the death of Christ (Jn. 3:16; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:13, and elsewhere). Anyone who calls on the name of Jesus shall be saved (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13) because Christ has removed the barrier of sin between God and humanity.

The second part deals with justification located in the life of an individual believer. Waters (2010:15) has already alluded to the fact that sinners have been removed from the negative column to zero. They now need to advance from zero to the positive column. Here, Packer and Allen (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:456) talk of justification that is individually located at the point in time at which a person believes, which becomes important for the second part of our justification. This part of justification means the bestowal of a righteous status and a title to all the blessings promised to the just. Here, believers are viewed as God’s adopted children and heirs (Rom. 8:14–39; Gal. 4:4–7). Packer and Allen here introduce the question of “faith as the instrumental means whereby Christ and his righteousness are *appropriated*” (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:457). Righteousness is therefore imputed to everyone who believes in Christ for salvation. It is vital to mark that while salvation is available to all (through Christ’s finished work), it should still be appropriated; and the only means of this appropriation is faith.

Waters (2010:18–19) further submits that the believer’s righteousness is imputed in the sense that as Christ takes our sins, he imputes righteousness because believers are now in Christ.

He says union with Christ is the foundation for imputation, or appropriation. This union comes through faith in Christ. According to Scripture (esp. Rom. 5:16, 28–19), just as God condemned those in Adam because the sin of Adam was transferred or imputed to them, God justifies those in Christ because his work is transferred or imputed to them. Waters (2010:19) then asks: “How do we come to lay hold of the righteousness of Jesus Christ?”

This question brings us to the “alone” as contemplated in FGT camp. FGT argues that justification has nothing to do with repentance, it is also a gift from God. The act of justifying rests with God (Hodges, 2000:9; Ryrie, 1972:129), and he does this independent of repentance or obedience. When the Reformers argued that *the faith that justifies is never alone*, the intent was to survey the content of saving faith, which entailed repentance on the part of the one who believes. Gause (2009:49) has thus argued that “the experience of justification occurs in the believer along with a complex of other experiences in initial salvation: saving faith, repentance, regeneration, adoption, and the witness of the Holy Spirit that we are the children of God.” The argument is that you can never attain God’s justification if the disposition of your faith does not surrender itself to God and your heart still militates against him. God will not justify rebels by granting them salvation even in their continued rebellion. Rebels will remain in the zero column until such time that they confess Christ, thereby moving to the positive column. In order for justification to occur by faith alone, those who stand in line to receive it must have repentant hearts, something that FGT says makes justification by faith alone impossible. According to them, this adds works to the salvation process.

While FGT may deny other aspects that make up our salvation (Grudem, 2015:38:9), Burge (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:606) submits that the whole of biblical theology centres on divine revelation and receptive human response. He says: “God speaks his word; we hear and must obey.” Murray also rejects any idea of disobedience to God with respect to the act of justification. He says, “God cannot be indifferent to or complacent towards that which is the contradiction of himself” (Murray, 1979:119). Effectively, we cannot argue that we hear God without responding to him in some way, although this response is deemed implicit (Packer & Allen, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:456; Murray, 1979:132–133; Waters, 2010:62).

The necessary response, if we are seeking His salvation, is not mere hearing, but obeying what we have heard. Burge clarifies further, saying that in the OT the verb *šāma`* conveys both to hear and to obey (Gn. 22:18). Disobedience is any hearing that is not attentive to God’s instruction (Burge, in Treier & Elwell, 2017:606). The word even flows into the NT Greek, recorded as *akouein*, expressing still the relationship between hearing and response. Burge says that Paul uses these emphatic forms in his writings – *hypakouein* (meaning to hear beneath) and *hypakoē* (denoting obey/obedience). Therefore, in many instances Jesus, being obedient himself (Rom. 5:9; Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 5:8), called people to hear, not just as a lip

service, but as a deeper call to obedience (Mt. 11:15; 13:9; Mk. 4:9, 23; Lk. 14:35, and elsewhere).

It is therefore difficult to sustain the argument that justification can stand alone (separate from other complex experiences involved in initial salvation), for a human must cross some rubicon to be justified. It is improbable to think that a heart still proud, still militating against the might of God, and unwilling to surrender, can cross from condemnation to acceptance.

Packer and Allen (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:457) thus liken faith to an “outstretched empty hand that receives righteousness by receiving Christ.” This is not the ground but the method of securing justification. Faith thus becomes the instrumental and not a material cause of justification (Treier & Elwell, 2017:607). Murray (1979:132), says that to possess Christ is not a function of faith only. The argument is that faith is not the only response in the heart of the one who entrusts themselves to Christ for salvation. There is also an element of remorse, which signals willingness to repent. Therefore, “faith alone justifies but a justified person with faith alone would be a monstrosity which never exists in the kingdom of grace. Faith works itself through love” (Murray, 1979:133).

The relevance of Criticism 2: No repentance gospel

Does FGT teach that repentance is not necessary in the life of believers? This seems to be the established position of FGT. Hodges (2002a:2–3) in fact, uses Acts 16:31 to argue that Paul and Silas did not ask for repentance from the Philippian jailer. He also argues that the Gospel of John, believed to be written that people might believe, does not mention the word repentance. He says “[a]ll forms of the gospel that require greater content to faith in Christ than the Gospel of John requires, are flawed” (Hodges, 2001:8). This gives him confidence to state elsewhere that salvation is possible before repentance (Hodges, 2023:41). Hodges (2002a:9–11) views the repentance mentioned in Revelations as addressed to believers and not the unsaved, and does not amount to loss of salvation but rather discipline. Hodges (2002a:12) counts various instances of repentance in Revelations as speaking to sinful attitudes and not unbelief. For him, repentance is a way to repair the broken relationship between God and humanity. Ryrie (1972:139) shares the same sentiment, averring that while repentance refers to the need for believers to change their mind about sin in sorrow, it will not bring salvation.

Grudem (2015) opposes this position, submitting that repentance is very much part and parcel of the NT and a condition under which some of the people were called unto salvation. He cites Scripture (Heb. 6:1; Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 26:19–20; and elsewhere) to indicate that a call to repentance is in fact infused in the NT preaching, calling unbelievers to belief (Grudem, 2015:41ff). FGT makes an exerted effort to dismiss the repentance in Scripture as

anything other than repentance from sin. Bing (1991:82) in particular continues to argue that Jesus was not explicit about what people should repentant from, even in Luke 24:47. He (Bing, 1991:82) says:

It is clear that Jesus intended the message of repentance to go beyond the Jews to the Gentiles, but it is not stated explicitly *what is to be the focus of their repentance*. It can be safely said that He wanted all people everywhere to come to a change of mind, attitude, and disposition towards themselves and His gospel message, especially in view of His death and resurrection. This seems a general way of expressing His desire that all men be restored to God's favor. The change of attitude would include the more specific faith in Christ. (emphasis mine)

Bing (1991:85) continues with this trajectory in view of verses such as Luke 16:30 (Lazarus and the rich man), and elsewhere, citing that:

the idea of repentance here is chiefly that of holding a particular attitude, for he says that the brothers will not be "persuaded" (i.e., believe in Jesus, about whom Moses and the prophets wrote) even by one risen from the dead (v. 31). Repentance, then, is a persuasion of the soul, a change of the mind and heart akin to faith. It may refer here to both a change of mind about their unbelief as well as a change of mind about Christ. There is no mention of turning from all sins.

This position is not accidental, for it forms the basis of Bing's argument throughout his thesis. Elsewhere, he argues that "a person can change his or her heart about something, even God or sin, but not be saved...., Faith involves repentance, but repentance does not always involve faith" (Bing, 2024b:2). Therefore, according to Bing's assertion, many things can lead people to repentance, and not all these instances result in salvation. This might as well mean that no salvation can be possible in FGT because contrary to Bing, it holds that there is no need for repentance for salvation, and if repentance is not necessary, then there is no faith. This may very well result in a person saying at surface level (change of mind and attitude) "I believe Jesus", without being willing to take that belief a step further in terms of living according to that belief.

Gause (2009:9) thus reject Bing's assertions in totality. Citing Romans 3:23, he avers that "repentance under all circumstances has to do with sin". All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Therefore, belief in Jesus cannot be lip service, it must be followed with commensurate action (repentance unto life). That is the reason for the argument of James that even demons believe and tremble before Jesus (Jas. 2:19), but they are not saved because they *cannot repent*. This is the hallmark of non-repentance in pursuit of salvation – the flaw of FGT. This is, however, not the belief in view. The belief that changes a person is the one that commits itself to Christ; that forsakes all for Christ. Therefore, FGT cannot argue

that repentance is just a change of mind or facts about Jesus. It is deeper than that, and it must exceed what the demons in James believed. Its scope is not confined only to the Gospel of John.

Packer (2020:176) finds it plausible then to submit that repentance is “changing one’s mind so that one’s views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one’s whole life is lived differently.” He asserts that repenting means starting a new life. This is why the demons in James could not be saved, for there was never an intent on their part to start a new life. Equally, FGT’s view that repentance amounts to change of one’s mind and attitude about Jesus must be questioned. For in true repentance, which is necessary for salvation, a new life must begin (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:17). Opposed to Bing, Packer (2020:177) thus sees repentance and faith as inseparable, where repentance is the negative aspect and faith the positive aspect of turning to Christ.

Gause (2009:8) states clearly that repentance is a “reversal of a sinner’s attitude and behaviour in which he/she turns from disobedience to obedience...,” involving “the entire nature of human personality: mind, emotions and will.” He is clear that this experience is essential for salvation (initial repentance)⁵³ and is to be practiced throughout one’s life in Christ (continuous repentance). Locating repentance right at the beginning of salvation, Gause (2009:25–26) submits that people must know that they are sinners before they will seek to forsake the way of sin, and that the act and practice of repentance are essential to salvation.

Ovey (2019:1–2) caps this argument by asking a question central to FGT: “Should a presentation of the gospel include a call to repent?” Two distinct positions emanate, one held by John Calvin and the other by NT Wright. Ovey records these responses, citing that Calvin held that “with good reason, the sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins,” whereas NT Wright held that “the gospel is the proclamation that Jesus is Lord.” This position (of NT Wright) talks to the bare minimum advanced by FGT camp, preaching a Jesus who died because of sin, yet not amplifying the gravity of sin and the need of repentance in preaching.

To conclude, we quote from the words of Arch Rutherford, the self-confessed “Free Gracer” who wrote an open letter to his peers. He says (Rutherford, 2006:6–7):

In the case of the lost islanders,⁵⁴ it is true that if I could only select one verse to place in a capsule that I intended to throw in the ocean, it would be John 3:16 or John 6:47.

⁵³ Initial repentance is understood to be that repentance at the point of first contact with the salvation of Christ. Initial repentance is located at the point where a sinner takes Christ as Lord and Saviour and continues in repentance from that point forward until death.

⁵⁴ The “Lost Islanders” is a scenario propagated by Hodges (2000:3-4), talking about an “unsaved person marooned on a tiny, uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He/ she has never heard about

But, if the truth be known, I would rather put a whole Bible in a chest and push it out into the ocean—Majority Text, of course!

Further, he states:

We need to set the “bare minimum” in the context of the “bare maximum”! Telling people that “they need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God and who died for their sins and rose again from the dead, for eternal life” is still the gospel!

Lastly, he says:

Those in leadership need to respect the fact that there is a “bare maximum” that almost all of us believe and practice, and conclusions about the “bare minimum” that unsettle some. I would suggest a two-tiered doctrinal statement: a “bare maximum” statement of faith all Free Grace people are willing to sign and a “bare minimum” statement of doctrinal distinctives that are held by those in an organization’s leadership and that all who speak, write, or communicate through the ministry of that organization are expected to respect and not attack.

The above brings home the argument of FGT camp, and this is enough to reflect what other authors have held all along: In order for the message of the gospel to have grip, the totality of it must be preached and lived. The difficulty with FGT is that it chooses to eliminate other essentials in the preaching of the gospel and in the daily lives of believers, deeming them unnecessary, like repentance and obedience. In this way, the gospel message is diluted to present sinners who are saved not from sin, but from not believing that Christ is Lord (Jas. 2:19), but still with hearts that militate against the very Christ in whom they claim to believe.

The relevance of Criticism 3: No surrender to Christ’s lordship through discipleship

The question of saviour and lord comes into focus here. Is it a position of FGT that Christ should not necessarily reign in the believer’s life, and that the believer does not have to be his/ her disciple? This is where there is blurring of lines between the concepts of saint and disciple. FGT makes a distinction, saying that those who place themselves under the lordship of Christ are called to be disciples. Any man is called unto salvation, but for discipleship, God chooses (Hodges, 2000:7; 2001:13; Ryrie, 1972:134). Hodges feels that terms such as “commit yourself to Christ,” “trust in Christ,” “ask Jesus into your heart,” are not even biblical

Christianity in his/ her life. One day a wave washes a fragment of paper up onto the beach. It is wet but still partly readable. On that paper are the words of John 6:43-47. But the only readable portions are: ‘Jesus therefore answered and said to them’ (v 43) and ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life’ (v 47). Now suppose that our unsaved [person] somehow becomes convinced that this person called Jesus can guarantee his/ her eternal future, since He promises everlasting life. In other words, he/ she believes Jesus’ words in John 6:47. Is he/ she saved?” He/ she answers positively that the person is saved because he/ she has believed. For him/ her, the bare minimum is required for salvation, and this message must not be complicated by the repent and believe crusade.

and should not be used in leading people to Christ because they are liable to misrepresentation and misunderstanding (Hodges, 2001:13).

Bing (1991:153) sees this (the demand for surrender and lordship) as “the price of submission and obedience” which should not at all burden the believer. Sensinig (n.d. 4–5) argues that there should be a separation between coming to Christ (salvation call) and following Christ (discipleship call). The conclusion by FGT on this matter is loud: “It costs absolutely nothing to be a Christian. It costs everything to be a disciple” (Kober, n.d.:12). Obviously, there should be some grounding on this issue, especially against the backdrop of Rutherford’s insistence that there should also be a visibility of the “bare maximum” in FGT camp.

The challenge with what FGT is presenting here is to try and separate a believer from a disciple, because as we have been told, a believer does not have to comply with the rigorous demands of the gospel (Bing, 1991:153, Sensinig, n.d.:4). Wilkin (2013:6) even, propagates this position, citing that “in order to be a disciple of Jesus one must abide in his teachings...” as if there is room to call him Lord and not abide by what he says. This separation also comes in the words of Blauvelt who argues that to require of an unsaved person “a dedication to [Christ’s] lordship for their salvation is to make imperative what is only voluntary for believers” (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pt. 3:15) (cited in Erickson, 2009:112).

We argue that, although discipleship relates to people who are saved, discipleship is not necessarily separated from the call to salvation. In view of Scripture (Mt. 28:19–20), the command that Jesus leaves with his disciples is clear – that they should go and *make disciples of all nations*. We cannot dismiss the fact that when Jesus gives this charge, he has in mind that salvation must be preached. No one is saved to idle in the kingdom because the goal is to make disciples. When they believe, then they are disciples.

Where FGT seems to be mistaking this command is in the scope of what it means to be a disciple and what work a disciple must do. While the scope of disciple might be broad, understanding a disciple to mean a learner (Treier & Elwell, 2017:178; Pink, 2013:119) should be enough to decipher the myth that a believer is not a disciple. Without labouring this issue, which has been argued already in Chapter 4,⁵⁵ it is enough to conclude here that disciples are learners, and they cannot be believers without being learners. Christ’s charge in Matthew 28:19–20 is evidence that going out to make disciples is going out to preach salvation. Those who are saved because of that preaching, are disciples. There is no separate call to ask them to become disciples because they are now saved. This will only be if the gospel that is

⁵⁵ Section 4.3.2

preached is the bare minimum – one that tells you to believe in Christ and be saved today, and tomorrow it tells you that you must be a disciple in order to do the work of God.

The relevance of Criticism 4: False assurance

Does FGT advocate false assurance to believers? This position can only be understood in light of FGT's statements that heaven will be populated by unbelievers and sinners who, regardless of their militancy against God during their days on earth, will walk right into the presence of the heavenly Father who demanded nothing short of holiness (Hodges, 2002b; Ryrie, 1972:113). A person who believes in Christ cannot be condemned to hell because of his or her sins. In fact, their sins do not remove them from the family of God as adopted children (Hodges, 2002b:45; Wilkin, 2019:27, 35). The summary is that everyone who confesses Christ today is adopted into the family of God and has become a child who can never ever be expelled from that family regardless of their wayward behaviour.

Does this position find support in Scripture? FGT uses a number of scriptural references (such as 1 Jn. 5:13a). They submit that assurance of salvation is based on the testimony of God (Hodges, 2009:13–15), and that eternal life, once attained, can never be lost (Jn. 4:13–14, 6:35–40, 50–51; 10:27–30; 11:25–26). On the other hand, they do not view other scriptures (like 1 Jn. 2:6, 24; 1 Jn. 2:3, 7–10) as determinants of (assurance of) salvation (Hodges, 2009:14). Hodges (2009:15) says that keeping his commandments is not a commensurate test of assurance – for how long will we have to keep them in order to be assured of salvation? He objects to the idea that as long as we keep his commandments, we have eternal life, thus advocating for a view that as long as we *believe*, we have eternal life. Talking to the imaginary Ralph, Hodges (2001:16) states that he is “always pleased to hear this question (of assurance), because it signals to me that the person is getting the idea that this is a gift and that it is not withdrawn if we behave badly.”

Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:779) present an opposing view that is quite plausible. In relation to 1 John 2:6, they indicate that “abideth” (Greek, *menō*) means to remain, and implies a steady, consistent way of life (not occasional). This life is one that fashions itself after Christ, for the life intended for believers to live is one that is Christlike. They further find this correlation in the earlier verses (v. 3), submitting that keeping his commandments refers to those whose lives are generally characterised by obedience.

The problem of FGT therefore arises out of separating belief in Christ from obedience. Keeping his commandments is the instruction of Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 2:3) on account that we know him, not on account that we seek assurance, for it is him who gives such assurance. The antinomian view will thus push for separation of salvation and obedience on account that it sees obedience as a call to do works. If obedience is viewed as an act arising out of love for

Christ and as a need to be more like him, then the antinomian view must not even begin to arise.

Thus FGT, riding on the ticket of adoption, would argue for assurance. This position in the main creates an idea of wayward children who are at home living against the commands of their parents because they can never be expelled. Hodges (2001:16) puts it this way: “My *usual way* of responding to the question is that being born again is like being born into a family. After that, we are always members of that family, even if we are scoundrels.” (italics mine – this is the nature of the gospel of Hodges and modern FGT). However, the question is whether this is all there is to assurance – living any way you want because you are assured? Chung (in Treier & Elwell, 2017:92) gives a broader definition of assurance:

The security and confidence Christians as the ‘adopted children of God’ have of their salvation, evidenced by godly transformation and encouraging perseverance in faith throughout their personal and communal pilgrimage on earth.

It is important to realise that assurance is still explained within the parameters of the confidence that believers have, but it is there because they are adopted children who are transformed by their father to live like him. It is children who reflect godly transformation and perseverance. This adoption as the foundation of assurance consists not of name only (1 Jn. 3:1a), but also of actions (1 Jn. 3:24), for those who enter this family must not only change their name (to sons/ heirs), but must also change their actions (to godly transformation).

Gause (2009:87) helps to clarify a few points about adoption as seen by FGT. In arguing the evidence of adoption, he asks how we can know that we are the children of God. He submits that the Holy Spirit becomes the basis when we are led by him (Rom. 8:14). The Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15), is concerned with leading the child of God to purity (Gause, 2009:88). Here then, John explicitly says: “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 Jn. 3:6). Thus, concerning the Holy Spirit, Gause (2009:89) submits that it “leads to obedience, to repentance when there has been disobedience, to the cry ‘Abba, Father’ when there have been estrangement and chastisement, and to holiness of life.” The sure persuasion that we are children of God rests in the leading of the Holy Spirit who will not pacify the depravity of our fruitless life “by convincing us that we are acceptable with God despite our carnality” (Gause, 2009:87–88).

Packer (2020:208) sees this as the manifestation of the kingdom life that Christians should make visible to the fallen world. It is the responsibility of the church to bring to light the invisible kingdom through faithful Christian living and witness bearing. Therefore, assurance consist in the Holy Spirit who causes us to bear visible fruits of our assurance. Anything suggesting implicit fruits as the basis of assurance, as Hodges (2009) suggests, thus causing Christians

to live waywardly since visible fruits are unnecessary, is false assurance. Accordingly, it is by our fruits that we will be known (Mt. 7:16), and we are a light to the world and a city on the hill (Mt. 5:14), active representatives of Christ on earth whom we must imitate (2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Cor. 11:1) – that is true assurance.

The relevance of Criticism 5: Underemphasis on trust in the person of Christ

Does FGT underemphasise trust in the person of Christ? This question is best answered by quoting Hodges. He is of the view that Martha trusted Jesus simply because she believed the amazing facts about the person of Christ (cited in Grudem, 2015:103). Hodges (2001:11) further stated as follows:

... the facts surrounding the gospel message – such as the death and resurrection of Christ – are important facts for what they tell us about the reasons for trusting Christ. But believing these facts doesn't save anyone. People are only saved when they *believe that Jesus gives them eternal life* the moment they believe in Him for that (italics mine).

This submission entrenches the fact that trust must follow because Jesus guarantees eternal life. This is emphasised with the use of a desert island metaphor. Hodges (2001:12) declares that if he had to save a person trapped on an island, he would send them a capsule containing John 6:47 in order for the person to come to salvation. Leading people to Christ then, according to Hodges, should not be a two-step process of asking people to believe facts as a pre-condition, and then asking them to trust as a second step. This approach, he says, “ignores the instrumental value of the facts of the gospel in bringing men to faith in Christ” (Hodges, 2001:12). He emphasises this in his talk with ‘Ralph’, saying that “you can believe Jesus’s promises about eternal life and that when you do, you are saved” (Hodges, 2001:18). This is modern FGT’s classic gospel without the demands or responsibilities that children of God are called unto.

What leads to this underemphasis of the person of Jesus? We locate the cause in Nyberg’s arguments. He argues that there is misdiagnosis of the problem. While the problem should be sinful humans lacking righteousness, Hodges and GES place lack of eternal life as the leading issue (Nyberg, n.d.). The misdiagnosing of the problem results in a domino effect where repentance is unnecessary, Christ is believed only for eternal life, and sin is deemed not an issue for humankind. This is why two things are apparent in Hodges’ discussion with Ralph – that he must only believe in Christ *for* eternal life, and that the content of the message says nothing about Ralph repenting from sin.

There are serious problems with this proposition by Hodges and FGT camp. It fails to put Christ as the centre or the object of salvation. This is because one can believe in him for

eternal life without having to believe that he is God. Gause implores us to see beyond this point. He says “by seeing the atonement as a Person – Jesus Christ – we join together the Sacrifice and the Priest” (Gause, 2009:53). It is needless to indicate here the importance of the sacrifice, for it is in offering sacrifices in the OT that the benefactor *had to identify* with the sacrifice for the transference of guilt and the effecting of atonement. Even in this instance, there is still need for that transference; and it does not consist in believing the gift of eternal life, but the giver of eternal life. If we believe only the facts about Jesus (bare minimum), and not the totality of the gospel (bare maximum), we are bound to ignore the mission unto which we are called and we will continually diminish his person in favour of his benefits.

5.6. THE POSITION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN VIEW OF FREE GRACE THEOLOGY

Having evaluated how FGT treats some of the important aspects of salvation, like sin, repentance, the lordship of Christ, justification, assurance, and discipleship, it is imperative to evaluate these views in light of ATR beliefs. Since some of the pertinent points of ATR have already been discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 2), we will not dwell in depth here. However, the position of ATR must be understood and evaluated within the context of its internal concepts in order to present an immanent evaluation of its relationship with FGT.

FGT holds a scant view of repentance, perseverance, sin, and the lordship of Christ, and in this way it is found wanting in relation to the *transforming* demands of Christ’s salvation. A false assurance emanates, which may very well be accommodating to ATR adherents and some African evangelicals in view of salvation. The point of departure should be to understand the key points of intersection between FGT and ATR. In this instance, we must answer whether there is a coherent dialogue between the two in relation to the concept of salvation, and how this conversation unfolds. In essence, we investigate whether FGT becomes a bridge or a mirror when these salvific concepts are canvassed. But first we give a summary of ATR in relation to these biblical concepts.

5.6.1. The belief of African Traditional Religion in relation to Christian biblical concepts

When it comes to sin, scholars such as Mbiti (cited in Meiring, 2005:70) and Nyabongo (in Desai, 1962:38) hold that sin does not apply to Africans, nor does the word form part of their vocabulary. Essentially, there is no chasm between Africans and God and therefore no need for reconciliation. When it is acknowledged, sin is viewed as injury to community relationships, ritual impurity and separation from ancestors (Kato, 1975:42; Rieber, in Booth, 1977:271; Maimela, 1985:67–70). God, the Most Holy One, is not troubled by the sins of Africans and is apathetic to them (Sawyer, 1968:30–32).

With respect to the person of Christ, ATR sees no need to make him lord for there is no salvation in him (de Visser, 2001:196). His presence is dwarfed by other entities, especially in AICs that are more traditionally inclined like ZCC and ELCSA, and Christ thus does not appear as saviour or helper (de Visser, 2001:196). Even some African evangelicals have adopted the Papa/ Man of God syndrome, where pastors are elevated above Christ. He also ranks lower than ancestors in prominence (Adamo, 2011:4; Setiloane, 1986:31; Parrinder, 1968:99) and he remains a guest in Africa (Martey, 1993:78). He seems to be acknowledged only in respect to *Christus victor* title and not the *Christus crucis* (de Visser, 2001:209), aligning often with liberation christologies.

Further, on the question of repentance or a changed lifestyle arising as a result of a relationship with Christ, Africans are not affected. Africans are morally good people (de Visser, 2001) who need not reconcile with God (Mbiti, 1969:2006), and therefore there is no need for them to repent or change their lifestyles.

Concluding with perseverance, it is generally held in ATR, especially within AICs, that having ancestors and Christ in one frame provides a double layer of security (Nyirongo, 2018:344). Africans Christians in particular prefer to subscribe to Christianity and ATR (Boaheng, 2021:7), and they thus have no problem with syncretism. Perseverance only lasts for as long as Christ is able to deliver them. Upon failure, they tap into another form of security in ATR or ancestors.

5.6.2. The implications of this belief

Chapter 1 presented an analysis of FGT's view on some of the pertinent points of salvation, and a worrisome picture emerged where it seems as if FGT gives impetus to some of the views held in ATR. Earlier in this chapter, some of the views held by FGT were clarified. We therefore elaborate more on ATR and FGT in the sections that follow.

5.6.2.1. On sin

The concept of sin is important in the Bible and it remains the cause of the gulf that exists between humanity and God (Gn. 3:24; Is. 59:2; 2 Thes. 1:8–9). This is precisely why Christ had to die for sinful humanity for reconciliation to be possible. Hodges' (2002b:46) view is that the greatest human need is eternal life. Nyberg has detected this, stating that Hodges' salvation focus is eternal life (Nyberg, n.d.). With this view, Hodges, Bing, Wilkin, and others in FGT camp have resorted to viewing the sin that hinders salvation in one dimension – as unbelief in Jesus Christ. This view does not consider sinful acts such as murder, idol worship, etc., as hindrances to salvation (Hodges, 2002a:12; 2002b:49; Bing, 1991:85). This view has led them to conclude that the only effect of these sins is to estrange people from God, without affecting their salvation.

This view has caused untold harm in the African religious landscape where a protest has been that Christianity only seeks to convert people to itself (Maluleke, 1998:12). For ATR adherents, sin is not a problem with God, only with fellow humans (Mbiti, 1969:99). This view goes as far as proposing that this God does not take any interest in the sins African people commit (Sawyerr, 1968:30–32). The practice of idol worship (which results in syncretism) will be entrenched because of this view.

When theologies that are supposed to align themselves with the Bible trivialise the impact of sin, as FGT does, untold consequences follow. For one, adherents of ATR will not see any need to hold the correct view of sin and to live pleasing lives to God. FGT holds that sin is inconsequential for salvation as long as one has confessed Christ as saviour (Hodges, 2002b:46; Ryrie, 1972). This position means that adherents to ATR can also subscribe to that one-time confession of sin, claim their belief in Christ, continue to live in syncretism, and claim to be saved. By virtue of that confession, God has no means to expel them from his family because he has adopted them. Adages such as “we are all children of God” and that “God cannot condemn us to hell because he loves us” accordingly find traction.

Hodges (2002b:45) states that no man is condemned to hell because of sins, but rather because of unbelief. Ryrie (1972:113) even insists that God takes sinners to heaven. If theology proper is to take deep effect in Africa, then sin must be understood in its context as an offence against God (Rom. 3:23), who will condemn anyone who sins to eternal damnation (Mt. 25:46; Mk. 3:29, and elsewhere). Nyirongo’s (2018:169) view is important in this situation, stating that Christ’s ministry did not neglect the impact of sin, in fact sin was its emphasis. No deliverance is worth anything if it does not accommodate deliverance from sin. Here, FGT and African traditional religions alike must alter their position to align with the biblical view for true salvation to occur.

5.6.2.2. On repentance

The view that repentance is a mere intellectual assent or changing of one’s mind about Christ becomes the cause for debased lifestyles that would not only persist in African Christianity, but in other religions as well. Holding this view, Hodges (2002a2–3) has suggested that repentance from sin is not the primary requirement when salvation is in view. He maintains that repentance was not required of the Philippian jailer, and that the Gospel of John does not speak of repentance for salvation. Hodges and Ryrie feel that repentance and belief is not a gospel message that should be preached for salvation because it would lead to legalism or salvation by works.

This position plays into the gallery of the African religious landscape where people can be saved along with their baggage. It is here that Hodges (2023:41) even implies that people can

be saved without repentance. In ATR, Africans see themselves as without sin (Mbiti, 1969:99), thus making repentance unnecessary because there is nothing to repent from.

According to this view, all that ATR adherents should do is to change their mind about the person of Christ. It offers a possibility that people, while adhering to ATR prescripts, can confess Christ without the need to desert any of their prior ancestral beliefs. Referencing the believers in Greece who held to their ancestors or idols, Ryrie (1972) says that for them too, salvation had materialised in spite of their idols. He makes a serious point that becomes highly charged in the African religious space whose backbone is idol or ancestor worship. We have elsewhere alluded to the fact that while Africans can have memories and learn from their departed loved ones, it remains improper for them to worship such figures (Khotlele, 2023:121).

It is unfortunate that Bible scholars would regard idol worshipers as people who are saved because a one-time confession has given them assurance of salvation beyond any sin they can commit – even the sin of idol worship. It flies in the face of God who says “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). Nonetheless, this becomes the basis for salvation to ATR and African evangelicals who align with ancestor worship – making relevant ancestor christology. Bible scholars must come out very clearly on this issue and put God as the only one who must be worshipped and served.

5.6.2.3. Relationship with Christ

The argument that the lordship of Christ must take root in Africa and in the life of every believer rests on the view that humanity must concede to the rule of Christ in their lives. This concession, if made by all of humanity, will see Christ’s authority on earth take root, and the moral compass improve for the better. It is no secret that FGT opposes this position, for they view it as introducing something that Christ did not demand of believers, which amounts to legalism. Bing (1991:153) suggests that the demand to surrender to the lordship of Christ amounts to “the price of submission and obedience”. Hodges (2000:7; 2001:13) has in fact argued that instructions such as “commit yourself to Christ,” or “trust in Christ,” are terms to be avoided for they complicate the gospel message.

Many reasons are advanced for why a relationship with Christ is not the apex need in African traditional religions. Being so close to ancestors, Africans in traditional religions feel that Christ has nothing to offer them – he is weak and foreign (Banda, 2005; Martey, 1993:78; Adamo, 2011:4). This leaves Christ without effect in their lives as Africans in traditional religions continue to rank him lower than ancestors. FGT, on the other hand, make a distinction along the lines of the concepts of saint and disciple (Bing, 1991:153, Sensinig, n.d.:4), where the former maintains care-free living (free from Christ’s demands) and the latter demands

obedience. Such distinctions make it onerous for ATRs to grasp the proper relationship that must exist between humanity and God.

FGT does not advance the demands of this Holy God who proclaims that we must be holy, for he is holy (Lv. 29:2; 1 Pt. 1:15–16). Righteous living and imitating Christ are not only for those who become disciples. It is in fact a clarion call to everyone who chooses Christ to be their God and saviour. This trajectory relieves ATR and its adherents of any need to live holy lives before this God. Their (ATR adherents, and by extension, syncretic Christians) continuation of their traditional practices and their past lifestyles takes nothing away from their relationship with this God, an idea they have long held and that FGT now seems to prop. Views such as “It costs absolutely nothing to be a Christian. It costs everything to be a disciple” (Kober, n.d.:12), should therefore be revised so that all Christians are told that they are the light of the world, a city on the hill that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14–16), created to continuously do the good works of God (Eph. 2:10; Gal. 6:9–10). In this way saints will seek to live lives that align with their highest calling, including Africans who confess Christ as Lord and Saviour.

5.6.2.4. On perseverance

It is not difficult to see that with the above, the issue of perseverance will not even begin to take root in African religious spaces. First, syncretism is at the core of their religious practices. Secondly, the view held by many in African traditional religions that Christ is foreign and powerless, points to the possibility that adherents do not plan to walk the journey with him. The preference of Christ’s power (to overcome maladies) over his cross (obedience to the call of salvation) indicate the distance which exists between perseverance and holy living in African religious spaces. The existence of what is held to be a double layer of security (Nyirongo, 2018:344) means that Africans only persevere with Christ up to the point where they feel that he is not responding to their needs, and then they desert him.

The position of FGT is terrifying on this point, for it suggests that even Christians do not have to persevere to attain eternal life (Wright, 2021:1; Hodges, 2009:14). It is held that once one has confessed Christ, one has eternal life and this is assured regardless of whether there is perseverance (Ryrie, 1972:133). It is without dispute that this position will at best produce Christians who will not place themselves under the demands of the God they are confessing. If we take Packer’s (2020:251) definition of perseverance, namely that it is “persistence under discouragement and contrary pressure,” we cannot ignore the fact that this belongs to those who enter the walk of salvation. Otherwise, how will destiny be reached if people do not walk until the end? (Jas. 1:12; Rom. 5:3–4; Heb. 12:1). Packer (2020:252) thus finds it prudent to submit that not everyone who professes conversion will be saved (Mt. 7:21–23), only those who pursue heart holiness and show true penitence.

5.7. IMMANENT PARALLELS BETWEEN FREE GRACE THEOLOGY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

By way of summary, it is important to reflect here on those immanent parallels that exist between the two positions. From the above discussion, the following summation can be made:

On sin: FGT's position is one that seems to create room for continued sin as sin only affects believers in relation to rewards, not the salvation that follows belief in Christ. On the other hand, ATR advocates for rituals that act as cover for repeated moral failure. While ATR goes a certain distance to advocate for correction or punishment for those who offend the spirits or ancestors (because they disturb the peace of community), FGT on the other hand holds that those who cause offence to God can still go to heaven unchanged. Both fail to condemn or at least grant some leeway to those who propagate moral degeneration and sin against God. They instead take the position that those who commit such sinful acts need not to worry, especially FGT, which argues that believers are eternally guaranteed salvation in Christ.

On repentance: FGT holds that repentance is not necessary for the sake of salvation, whereas ATR considers it part of ritual practices to ensure restoration of relations, favour and cosmic balance. The problem with the two positions is that they both propagate salvation that permits moral disconnection, meaning that moral uprightness is immaterial to the cause of salvation to which lives ought to be dedicated. Repentance does not have bearing on the final salvation, and adherents of the two persuasions can live their lives without breaking ties with past lifestyles or gods.

On allegiance: FGT holds that even those who practise idol worship are saved believers. Theirs is not a lost cause in salvation because Paul recognised them to be believers at Corinth. Whether or not one denounces false gods is immaterial because salvation is granted even in their presence. ATR does not oppose syncretism and it is rooted in religious pluralism so that spirits and ancestors are served openly. In fact, it is recorded that this provides a double layer of security in times of trouble, especially since they denounce Christ in relation to the cross but accept him for victories he can grant them in temporal or existential matters. The two positions are amenable to dual loyalty, although in FGT this might be viewed to be implicit. FGT does recognise that even those who serve idols, like believers at Corinth, are saved.

On faith: According to FGT, faith is a mere intellectual assent and *notitia* without including in their scope the aspect of *fiducia*. This then responds to the promise of salvation and not the need to repent sin. The exercise of faith then becomes reward based, and concerns itself with eternal life. In ATR faith is defined and placed on objects that can provide power, largely supported by inculturation christologies. Their belief is in anything that promises power and can deliver from life's pressing issues. Here, faith in Christ reduces or fades because he is

deemed powerless, and faith in ancestors increases and is entrenched because ancestors are viewed as symbols of power. The two then appear to reduce faith to a transaction which relates to what adherents of the two persuasions can get from their system of belief – power for ATR adherents, and rewards for FGT adherents.

On authority: FGT considers Christ to be the Saviour, but not Lord over their lives. In this way, they do not have to prescribe to the demands of discipleship and are thus able to live according to their heart's desire because no one lords over them. On the same note, ATR prefers syncretic relationship, especially leaning towards the ancestors and the OT of the Bible. Rituals are offered to ancestors, and the same ancestors act as preferred medium between the living and God and gods. Both effectively encourage a docile relationship to deity, with FGT preferring the no lordship stance and ATR being openly syncretic. Whereas ATR understands the power that goes with authority, which they place on ancestors, FGT opts for a Christ who is a life giver but not supreme or authoritative in believers' lives.

On assurance: According to FGT, eternal security is guaranteed regardless of a life fraught with sin. Belief in Christ is the only thing needed to grant assurance in the immediate and future. Those who are adopted in the family of God remain children regardless of their errant lives. Further, even as believers stop believing, they remain God's adopted children and are guaranteed salvation. ATR also gives in to this false assurance, especially in view of the fact that rituals are central in correcting any anomalies between humans and God. In this way, ATR is able to offer false peace without propagating moral reforms. The long-standing belief that Africans are without sin and are also morally good, contributes to this position of moral laxity and lack of reforms. Both persuasions create illusions of peace with God without calling people to reformed lifestyles. FGT propagates certainty in the next world, whereas ATR wants to know the condition of their peace in the now – thus providing assurance for both persuasions.

This summary shows that viewed from the perspective of ATR, FGT offers a comforting position in relation to salvation. This in the main emerges because one thing in particular is not argued vociferously – the supremacy of Christ over everyone. In the triangle of authority as propagated in ATR, Christ is not accommodated, he even ranks lower than ancestors and he carries little importance. Of course reasons are advanced for that situation. However, with a theological movement (FGT) that fails to entrench the position of Christ's authority and supremacy in its statements, religions such as the ATR will have no need to exalt Christ, and he will forever be viewed in a negative light.

5.8. THE MAKEUP OF A SAVING FREE GRACE GOSPEL

The aim of believers should be to proclaim a gospel message that is not in conflict with the Bible. There is no denying that grace is a central theme throughout Scripture and it must be delivered to depraved humanity correctly. Africans too, must be invited to this truth and life-transforming message. Accordingly, the salvation that humanity enjoys is on account of grace (Eph. 2:8–9). Carl Trueman in his book, *Grace Alone*, speaks directly of the content of the saving free grace gospel that must take root in churches. These imperatives are important even for the adherents of ATRs and African churches because from them flows the core of the saving message of God. We discuss these four points below.

5.8.1. A grace-centred belief must take sin seriously

Why must sin be taken seriously if it has no bearing on the achievement of salvation (as in FGT)⁵⁶ and when African traditionalists view themselves as without sin (as in ATR)? Trueman's (2017:235) view of sin is instructive because he sees grace as God's proper response to sin. He argues that a proper understanding of grace depends on prior proper understanding of sin. This is important, for we have noticed that in FGT there is misdiagnosis of the problem (sin). When the problem should be that sinful humans lack righteousness and relationship with God, Hodges and GES place lack of eternal life as the biggest issue (Nyberg, n.d.). The consequences that unfold as a result of this are untold – non-repentance, false assurance, reward-centred salvation, etc.

Trueman sees nothing else as a human predicament (our daily sufferings and struggles) except sin, indicating that in Adam, all humanity has sinned. This, he says, is the problem that confronts all of humanity. However, God through his grace has prescribed a solution. When this issue is at the centre in the minds of believers (that we stand guilty before God), Trueman, (2017:236) says that the church's "ministers will preach the holiness of God and call people to repentance weekly". It cannot be stressed enough that anyone who preaches the gospel must let humanity know of its sinfulness before God and proclaim to them the solution that God has delivered for that problem through his grace (Lk. 24:47–49).

5.8.2. A grace-centred belief must take Christ seriously

There is no denying that Christ must rise above the rewards that he promises those who will be saved. This is because he came to solve the biggest problem on earth – sin. Trueman (2017:236), putting sin as the central problem, proclaims that the presence of grace "is not simply God's benevolent decision to ignore it and pretend that the fall has never happened".

⁵⁶ It is stated that the definition of sin is viewed mainly as unbelief in Christ. Every other sin has no bearing whether people are saved and make it to heaven. Section 5.3.1 has discussed the understanding of sin in FGT in greater length.

He is clear that grace is God's decision to deal with sin. This therefore positions Christ as God's deliberate act to deal with the problem of sin.

It thus becomes imperative that those in FGT camp should not exalt grace over the person of Christ. Of course, they will dispute this by alleging that they also preach Christ. However, positions like believing in Christ for rewards (eternal life) and not delivery from sin, as well as not recognising him as lord over them, underscore their message (Ryrie, 1982: 113,179; Wright, 2021:1; 2002a:21).

The fact that FGT has a scant view of sin (Bing, 2025e:1; Hodges, 2005:48) diminishes the very reason why Christ came, and this position does not reflect the scheme of salvation to the fullest. It is here that the "bare minimum" theology pulls FGT down. Most importantly, it creates spaces for religions like the ATR to claim to be saved in their religions because the essential problem that separates humanity from God is undermined.

Maimela (1985:63–64) has said it already that all religions are founded in God and are thus able to save their adherents, and FGT strengthens this position by proclaiming that believing Christ for rewards and not salvation through the forgiveness of sins *is* salvation. It is important that African traditional religions embrace both *Christus victor* and *Christus crucis* in order for complete salvation to materialise. Viewing him in one dimension speaks directly to the problem of the "bare minimum" as espoused in FGT camp, and confuses the doctrine of salvation from sin at important points.

5.8.3. A grace-centred belief must take the totality of the gospel seriously

Trueman (2017:238) calls for the centrality of the Bible in the church's actions and preaching. He asserts that the Bible is God's revelation of his purpose for his people. He proposes that ample public reading of Scripture, as well as preaching that brings people to Scripture time and again, must be the core pillars of free grace churches. Ample reading of Scripture ensures the full gospel message in churches, and rejects the "bare minimum" propagated in FGT. Others in FGT camp too feel that the majority text must be brought back into the churches that declare themselves as free grace churches (Rutherford, 2006:6).

We have discussed elsewhere that Africans (in ATR) have a problem with the Bible (Resane, 2020:134). Banana (1993:17) even calls for it to be rewritten. If anything, ATR would want to subscribe to the OT of the Bible for it appeals to their sacrificial outlook (Mojola, 2014:1). ATR and FGT then, with their minimalist approaches to the Bible, fall into the trap of not appreciating the full picture of the salvation wrought in the person of Jesus Christ.

Conversely, Trueman (2017:239) submits that the preaching that emerges when the Bible is centralised, will result in people being confronted with the sin problem, and they will either be “hardened or brought to their knees in repentance” of their sins. The gospel does not make people feel good about themselves even in their sinful lives. When they know that they militate against God, the true gospel will confront and cause them discomfort in their positions.

5.8.4. A grace-centred belief must take assurance seriously

Trueman (2017:237) sees the problem that exists with the narrative of assurance presented by those in FGT camp as something that must change. He recognises sin as one issue that steals the assurance of believers. However, he does not argue that it should be pacified to support assurance at all costs. He advocates that people should realise that they will fall into sin as the problems of this fallen world close in on them. Free grace churches should preach sin. People should not be pacified by being told that Christ has paid for sin and complied with the rigorous demands of God such that those who follow him can live care-free and still be assured salvation. Here, prominent authors in FGT camp will argue that God takes sinners to heaven (Ryrie, 1972:113) and that people can come to salvation without repentance (Hodges, 2023:41).

In this way, assurance emerges even for those in ATR because the requirement is merely a one-time confession of Christ, who then guarantees salvation for life. Ancestor worship can continue, and the idea that God has no problem with the sins of Africans can be espoused because at the end of it all, God will also welcome them into his holy heaven. This position goes against the spirit of Christ’s salvation where sin must be despised and repented and people must lead holy lives, without which no human will see God (Heb. 12:14; 1 Jn. 3:3).

5.9. CONCLUSION

This chapter has revealed the deep-seated problems of FGT with respect to its interpretation of some of the key concepts pertaining to salvation. The novel interpretation of these key concepts in salvation has proven that the salvation proposition of FGT fails to conform to the Bible. In the main, FGT is found rather in support of care-free living that is not subjected to the demands of the gospel. This interpretation props up the position of ATR and other non-Christian religions where Christ does not enjoy supremacy, and people can claim salvation even if their lives are opposed to him. FGT is found to accept the concept of sin only when viewed as unbelief in Christ and not other sinful acts that emanate from debased lifestyles. Salvation essentially becomes a simple exercise of belief in Christ without the demands of repentance and perseverance on those who believe.

African traditional religions would find this theology acceptable to their position because it gives latitude for syncretism. If FGT becomes the standard, it is possible for African traditionalists to continue in their ancestral beliefs and still claim the salvation of Christ because of one-time act of confessing Christ. There is no burden of having to change their lifestyles, no need to abort syncretism, and certainly no requirement to have Christ not only above the ancestors and spirits they worship, but as their only Lord and Saviour.

Finally, while FGT seeks to present itself as a contextualised biblical theology, when viewed in the context of African religious beliefs, it is apparent that it carries with it distortions that only serve to strengthen ATRs position. This aggravates the problems that already exists in ATR, which considers itself to be underpinned by the OT. What is taught by FGT only serves to soothe religious anxiety, but it does not begin to incline towards Christ the hearts of those in ATRs in search of true salvation. It positions itself not as a bridge through which a biblical theology can be built for Africans in ATR, but rather as a theological mirror that reflects almost the same image as ATR.

It is therefore necessary to state in our conclusion that true salvation seeks to restore moral order among individuals and communities. It takes Christ as supreme authority in the lives of people, and it places him as the only mediator between humanity and God. Owing to his authority in the lives of people, Christ leads those who believe in him to transform in true repentance and to seek moral transformation in the lives they live for him.

CHAPTER SIX: CHRIST ENTERING THE AFRICAN COSMOLOGY TO PROVIDE ENDURING SALVATION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this concluding chapter is to open a gateway for the lordship of Christ in Africa. In doing this, it is important to give an overview of the chapters that have shaped this study. The discussion starts with an overview of four chapters, setting the tone for a roadmap to the lasting reality of Christ in African cosmology.

6.1.1. Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 explored the relationship between ACT, ATT, and ATR, focusing on how these frameworks interpret sin, salvation, and the Christ event in Africa. While these frameworks operate in the same religious landscape, they differ significantly in their theological grounding and authority. ACT in the main arose as a response to a need in the African cosmology to have a theology that is truly African yet sensitive to African realities. ATT and ATR are frameworks that were shaped outside of Christianity and that often prefer to relate to the OT at the exclusion of the NT. This illuminated the reality that ACT cannot be examined independent from the influence of traditional religion and culture.

The study of sin revealed that ATT and ATR treat it not primarily as a transgression against God, but as a disturbance in the social and cosmic harmony, ritual impurity, or separation from the ancestors. To remedy these problems, restoration that often takes the form of ritual cleansing or community reconciliation rather than repentance, is preferred. ACT, however, maintains its biblical definition of sin as separation from God and insists that reconciliation comes only through Christ.

What is apparent though is that ACT does not easily serve as a bridge between ATR and ATT. In fact, it is clear that what ACT does is to try to separate itself from both ATR and the Western idea of Christianity. The observations of scholars such as de Visser, Sundkler and Idowu attest to this. De Visser observes that where ancestor veneration dominates church life, the lordship of Christ is weak, while Bible-centric churches uphold Christ's supremacy. While Bolaji presses for doing Christianity the African way while keeping the Bible central, Sundkler finds that in ancestor-centric churches, the bishops enjoy more prominence than Christ. This is a phenomenon we find even in the recent encounters with charismatic Pentecostal churches where pastors known as men of god and *Papas* have been elevated while Christ has been relegated to the bottom. This shows that ACT, while emerging from the African experience, remains largely biblical, although there is a fight to rid itself of negative elements that have

infiltrated the space. However, ATT and ATR continue to represent hybrid or syncretic belief systems.

Salvation in ATR and ATT is largely this-worldly (*Christus victor*), shaped behind liberation and ancestor christologies, and concerns itself with deliverance from the maladies that disturb people's lives. The idea of a crucified Christ who delivers humanity from sin does not begin to rise in these frameworks. However, even with these opposing views, ACT finds itself having to engage African cosmology because ancestral beliefs still shape African Christian practice. Maluleke captures this reality, noting that African theology has never been a pure Christian theology. This dialectical tension sketches African theology: it seeks to centre Christ without denying the *cultural realities* of African spirituality.

Because ATR continues to serve as the fulcrum of African theology which becomes the significant influence on ACT, diverse expressions emerged in AICs. This is largely because the Bible continues to struggle to be at home in Africa. Some AICs are ancestor-centric while others are Christo-centric, producing varied gospel messages across African contexts. When these theologies are tested against Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral model, it becomes clear that ATR and ATT fail to uphold the core elements of evangelical faith – biblical authority, centrality of the cross, conversion, and evangelism.

Many in African traditional religions and theologies resist the current Bible, proposing revisions or rejecting it as foreign, thereby compromising the core doctrines of salvation and discipleship. Consequently, African Christianity often reflects a mixture of ideologies that simultaneously affirm and undermine Scripture, obscuring the lordship of Christ in the African milieu. In agreement with Idowu (1965:13), the chapter concludes that "the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ and total, undivided allegiance to Him, cost what it may, needs to be emphasized." This emphasis must remain the foundation and the measure of ACT. This will emerge when the Bible is placed at the centre of doing African Christian theologies and is engaged theologically based on the truths of Scripture as revealed.

6.1.2. Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter, a concerted effort was made to envision what an African Christology would look like in the eyes of Africans. In Africa, discussions on Christology began in earnest around the 1950s. Because of this, African Christology leans somewhat towards post-reformation and to a great extent to postmodernity, which emerged during the 1980s. This is important because this is the era during which inculturated or contextual Christologies emerged. African theologies found it proper to formulate their Christologies or theologies in the context of their prevailing situations, thereby painting an image of their preferred saviour. These among others, included ancestor and liberation christologies which are deemed to be among the

prominent. Here, Jesus became African, Asian, Indian, Japanese, and anything people desired him to be. However, this chapter notes that these adaptations escaped the confines of the Bible, and desired interpretations that are extra-biblical.

Further, Africans prefer to understand Christ through the lens of power. However, his power is conflated with ancestors and spirit beings. He comes last in this realm because of the perception that he is foreign and powerless. Also, Africans feel that with respect to culture, Christ is not preferred because he robs them of their personhood, especially when they are told that everything about their culture is demonic. Notwithstanding, this study accepts that this kind of outlook on Christ has been discussed many times without yielding any meaningful functioning salvation. The chapter concedes to the difficulty of salvation to materialise as long as Christ is viewed in this way – outside biblical definitions.

Christ should therefore be viewed within the confines of the Bible. Biblical definitions of Christ (apart from ancestor, brother, chief, elder, etc.) are proposed as new alternatives for African Christians and traditionalists. Important points include his new identity in the eyes of African traditionalists – as Saviour of the world, as Sanctifier, as Baptiser, as Son of Man, as Teacher, and as suffering Servant. Here, it is important that Africans in their traditional religions appreciate that Christ is equal to none, and his saving work is unique to him only.

Understanding the importance of authority in the African cosmology, Christ is then reflected as the ultimate authority by virtue of him being God himself. However, African liberation and ancestor christologies prefer to place him on par with other divinities where there is much contestation of power. Because he is foreign and powerless, he is not their preferred contact for help. However, Christ possessed real authority. Viewing him through the lens of temporal problems eclipses the scope of his operation – his is eternal and impacts his salvation work, which no human can replicate. God offered him as the ultimate sacrifice, which answers all existential needs of humanity.

This chapter further revealed that a Christological problem endures in African cosmology because of the problem of the Bible, the question of culture, and the perceived foreignness of Christ in Africa. These continue to be points of deep division and apprehension when theology proper should be appropriated in Africa. The chapter proposes that African traditional religion adherents and some AIC churches must appreciate the fact that those who interpreted the Bible during the missionary enterprise did not do justice to the God they purported to serve. With this understanding, Africans are invited to read the Bible for themselves, and interpreting it as led by the Holy Spirit. Importantly, African traditionalists are reminded that they are not an afterthought to the story of the Bible, they are in fact central to the authorship of this

unmatched history and should take it as their own and appropriate it for themselves, for salvation.

While culture remains a serious stumbling block, ATR adherents are invited to the knowledge that Christianity is not cultural, and whatever missionaries presented as Christianity was laced with Western cultural connotations that have nothing to do with the Bible. ATR adherents are thus implored to find those cultural practices that are not opposed to the Bible in doing their theology. Not everything about African culture is demonic or filthy, and Africans too have a right to speak to God in their own language, decorated in their own cultural apparel, and dance for him with their own cultural dances and songs. However, everything that opposes the Bible must be discarded, reflecting Niebuhr's Christ and culture propositions.

In closing, the chapter prefers a way of salvation along which African traditionalists can march and be led safely to the salvation of God. Biblical fidelity is central to this salvation materialising. Importantly, two questions had to be answered – saved from what and saved by whom? Because African theologies and traditions often misinterpret sin and salvation, these questions find superficial answers that do not address the core problem of humanity – salvation of the soul. Therefore, the chapter emphasises that the problem is sin, which leads to eternal damnation, and finds its perfect answer in Christ only.

The relationship of Africans with the Bible and their fidelity to it is answered in view of one of Bebbington's quadrilateral model propositions – Bible-centredness. Within African traditional religions, there is a tendency to suppress biblical truth through syncretic practices that give rise to the prevailing lack of appetite to deal with sin within these settings. Putting the Bible at the centre is a good start to dealing directly with sin, for the Bible will confront it. ATR adherents must see themselves as central to the Bible story, and they must see the God of the OT as the God of the NT who has now chosen to deal with sin through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. With this knowledge, his lordship will be illuminated in the African milieu.

6.1.3. Chapter 4 Summary

Whereas the centre of the study was ATR viewed through the lenses of LST and FGT, this chapter's focus was mainly on evaluating this relationship from LST point of view. Obvious themes such as faith, repentance, regeneration, justification, sanctification, as well as sin and salvation, are discussed. LST holds sin and salvation in serious light, thereby making it suited to be harnessed as a guiding ideology for how African traditional religions can come to the way of true salvation. In order to enhance the above understanding, LST was discussed in depth, seeking to understand its position in relation to key concepts in biblical salvation.

LST subscribes to the understanding that the response to the call of Christ must be followed by a change of lifestyle. It distinguishes between the faith that saves and the one that does not. This distinction is made to root out superficial faith that does not recognise Christ for salvation but for his benefit. The idea of *Christus victor* and *Christus gloriae* is differentiated in that regard, where repentance-less faith that does not lead to salvation emerges.

The question of repentance was discussed in light of this view, and it is understood to be real sorrow for sin that is sincere and deep, and is central to God pardoning penitent sinners. This repentance is not a meritorious work, but rather a gift from God. Regeneration also follows this trajectory, with proponents agreeing that it is a new birth enabled by the Holy Spirit. In regeneration, the old self dies, and a new person is born, resulting in a new life fashioned after Christ. As regards justification, proponents agree that it is a one-time event that results in the pivoting of a sinner as they move into a relationship with God. Sinners are therefore declared not guilty and are not only justified, but also sanctified by God. Sanctification is a characteristic of all who are redeemed, and not a condition of receiving salvation.

There is some criticism from those who oppose these views. In the main, LST is accused of claiming repentance before salvation. This is a position on which the proponents of LST agree, citing that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. A person must first hear the message to have the necessary response to the spoken message. If there is a whole-souled turning after hearing, which indicates a heart that stops militating against God, then the sinner receives salvation. Equally, LST stands accused of salvation by works, thereby legalism. However, proponents argue that no-one is saved by works. Works that follow after salvation are fruits that show godly repentance, which consists of a hatred of sin, deep sorrow about sin, and actual turning from sin. In the presence of these, it is inevitable that good works will follow.

Since lives are changed in this way, people inevitably become disciples of Christ – another accusation levelled against LST that it mixes salvation with discipleship. However, it becomes clear that every believer is a disciple of Christ, a charge he gives in Matthew 28:19–20 when he commands that the gospel should be preached to all nations with the single purpose of making disciples. Therefore, hearers of the gospel who abide by it, are Christ's disciples. On the question of assurance also, LST is labelled as advocating for certainty on the basis of works when Christ should be the one providing it. However, the argument by proponents of LST is that works are the evidence, not the cause of assurance. Assurance lies in Christ and what he has accomplished. Therefore, assurance is evident for those who continue in the faith and who persevere to the end as attested by Paul in 2 Tm. 7–8 – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished his race, I await the reward from God”.

ATR was then considered in terms of the key biblical themes of sin, the lordship of Christ, conversion to Christ, and perseverance. The definition of sin as held by ATR is contrary to the Bible, as its impact is placed amongst equals or humans, and God is viewed not as the offended party. ATR does not place much emphasis on the person of Christ or his lordship precisely because they find him powerless and indifferent to their plight because of his perceived foreignness. If he provides victories, he is allowed to intervene, if not, other powers are preferred. In this way, conversion is not necessary, syncretic practices take over, and perseverance also becomes mute in ATRs because there are many providers of help when the situation demands.

In this way, it becomes impossible to align these beliefs immanently because they are opposed at important points of salvation according to the Bible. For instance, LST holds sin and repentance in serious light, making them central to the story of salvation. Sin disrupts the attainment of salvation, and repentance becomes necessary for salvation. However, ATR pacifies sin, even going as far as to say that God is not bothered by the sins of Africans, thus making repentance unnecessary. This continues with regard to the relationship with Christ, where LST places him central to the concept of salvation and as the one who personally delivers it. Yet ATR sees him as powerless and foreign to their affairs. It therefore becomes clear that the two beliefs are distant, and that LST cannot support ATR in its current set of beliefs. However, it is sufficient to propose Bible based ways for ATR to follow if its adherents are to obtain the salvation of Christ.

6.1.4. Chapter 5 Summary

Almost in the same tone as LST, FGT was discussed in view of ATR to test the preliminary findings in Chapter 1, which stated that in its arguments, FGT may support the position of ATR when matters of salvation are discussed. This stems from a scant view of sin, repentance, Christ's lordship, and perseverance on the part of FGT. This scant view of sin supports the position of ATR on its view of salvation and the relationship they prefer to have with the Bible and with Christ.

The evaluation of the modern free grace teaching thus touches on important points relevant to the doctrine of soteriology. These include faith, repentance, regeneration, justification, assurance or eternal security, and sanctification. Further, this discussion expanded to understand the view of FGT on sin and its impact on the lives of believers, including its consequences at final judgement.

FGT advocates for simple belief in Christ to attain salvation. The point that was made here is that there is no need to preach the full gospel in order to stir people to salvation because people may very well come to belief/ faith without knowing other aspects of the gospel. What

appears at this point is that the faith being advocated is rewards-oriented (eternal life) and does not require people to be conscious of their sin for salvation. People can be saved without knowing their sin, but by merely placing their faith in Christ, even when their hearts militate against him.

This trajectory continues to repentance, where proponents argue that repentance is not necessary for salvation because Paul and Silas did not ask the jailer to repent, nor did John's gospel teach repentance. The central message in John, according to FGT, is belief, which is necessary for salvation. Repentance is thus viewed as a work. If believers do repent, they are viewed as trying to satisfy God in his demands, something they can never achieve. In this way, repentance is a simple change of mind about not believing Christ.

Since repentance is not necessary for salvation, regeneration is viewed as unnecessary. For FGT, regeneration consists in the inner person being transformed, whereas the outward person can remain the same or experience gradual change, if any. Some argue that there is no biblical reference that regeneration guarantees a changed life. Justification is then premised on this point of change in standing before God, a legal transaction that God initiates on behalf of the sinner. In justification therefore, sinners are acquitted, announced righteous, adopted as sons, and their sins are never ever imputed to them again.

A foundation was then laid for assurance or eternal security, where proponents argue that assurance is given by virtue of believing the gospel message. There are no works that must be performed for assurance because what guarantees this is the finished work of Christ. Assurance is founded on the profession of faith in Christ, regardless of their disposition on the demands of that confession. Even when sanctification is in view, proponents view believers as resting under constant sanctification by God, flowing from the finished work of Christ. Under the New Covenant, it is then argued that believers are totally clean, sanctified, and made holy in the sight of God.

FGT acknowledges that sins committed are against God. However, the distinction was that, regardless of how much people sin or continue to live in sin, their salvation is not affected. Only their rewards will be affected when they reach heaven. In their definition, sin is unbelief towards Christ, and this is the only sin that would condemn people to hell. At times, a description of sin as lawlessness against God is a preferred definition, but it is weak. These sins however, (excluding the sin of non-belief), are regarded to affect only the rewards that are due to believers on judgement day. Even as believers appear before God on that day, they do not appear to be judged for their sins, but to be addressed by God on how they lived their lives. Sin is thus so inconsequential that even God takes sinners to heaven, and living in sin results in temporary estrangement from God – just as it was with the prodigal son.

In view of salvation, FGT inadvertently provides support for the position of ATR given its scant view of key salvation concepts. The insignificance of the impact of sin supports ATRs view that Africans do not have sin, and that God is unbothered by the sins committed by Africans. In this way, repentance appears to not be an issue for Africans. Due to the absence of sin, there is nothing to repent from, a view similar to the one held by FGT that repentance is unnecessary for salvation. Further, allegiance to Christ is downplayed by FGT as it relates to believers imitating his lifestyle.

In the same breath, Africans regard him as foreign, and not their moral compass. FGT also views perseverance as unnecessary by virtue of the impact of adoption, which results in salvation that can never be lost. In this way ATR finds support for their syncretic practices and see no value in persevering, somewhat aligning with *Christus victor* at the expense of *Christus crucis*. For as long Christ is able to deliver them from their troubles, he is God. If he does not, ancestors and other divinities stand ready to come to their aid.

This chapter culminated in the view that a content for a grace-centred belief, which will aid ATR in terms of its relationship with the Bible and Christ, be put forward. This belief should have as its content: a view of the seriousness of sin and its implications for all humanity; serious acknowledgement of Christ as Lord and Saviour of all humanity; acknowledgement of the totality of the gospel as important to lead all humanity to Christ; and the understanding that assurance is not abstract, responsibilities are attached to it.

6.2. ROADMAP TO LASTING REALITY OF CHRIST IN AFRICAN COSMOLOGY

Flowing from the summary above, it is important here to conclude the study with a roadmap for enduring salvation within the African cosmology, founded on the reality of Christ in Africa. A number of observations must be made here to put forward a coherent proposal that details how Africans, especially those in ATRs and AICs that are culturally inclined, should deal with the issue of the presentation of the gospel.

We agree with de Visser (2001:237) that the lordship of Christ in Africa can only be proposed in the context of a biblical concept of God and a biblical concept of salvation. The study has indeed showed how ATRs and those AICs that are culturally inclined have distanced themselves from the core biblical foundation of Scripture interpretation, including how they should relate to Christ.

De Visser (2001:238–240) proposes a few key points that can lead Africans in this direction. It includes people realising that they live their lives before the Lord, in the presence of God. People should know that they are answerable to the all-knowing and all-present God in whose sight nothing is hidden. He further argues that Jesus must be proclaimed as *vere homo*, as

vere Deus, as *Dominus*, and as the *Rex crucifixus*. I agree with de Visser on these points and in his proposition that churches like ELCA and ZCC should change how they present their gospel in order to illuminate the lordship of Christ and diminish the towering images of bishops and the likes. This is equally true for the Pentecostals who rely on the visible power of the spirit (like demon casting and tongue speaking) at the expense of the subtler power which transforms lives, guides in truth and convicts of guilt, and renewing minds of believers in Christ, which should be guiding people to live their lives imitating Christ.

However, we have discovered more serious issues embedded in the way ATR adherents prefer to do and practice their religion while also claiming a relationship with God. These problems, which we list and discuss below, lies in their misunderstanding of *what exactly humanity's problem is*, *their relationship with the Bible*, and *defining or explaining Christ outside the scriptural bounds*.

6.2.1. The problem

Firstly, with regard to the problem of humanity, African traditional religions, scholars and adherents are on record as saying that their relationship with God is perpetual (Mbiti, 1969:99), and that God has no interest in the sins committed by Africans (Sawyer, 1968:30–32). Equally important is the assertion by Kame (2022:33) that the African culture/experience and not the Bible is preferred as the starting point for African theology. Effectively then, ATR kindles ATT, which in turn sets the tone for ACT. This double-layered problem cannot be dismissed, for it tends to skew the presentation of the gospel among fellow Africans.

In this context, there is a misdiagnosis of the human predicament as ATR concerns itself with the *this-worldly* more than the *other-worldly* as the inherent problem they face. By this we mean that the concern becomes temporal and not transcendent. Van Rooy (n.d.:8) contends that “our greatest need is not physical healing or protection against black magic, but to be reconciled to God.” On the other hand, Resane (2020:82, 272) claims that it borders on fundamentalism to emphasise the spiritual over the physical. I contend that there should be a balance of the two. However, the greatest need that must trump *all needs*, come what may, is the need for the salvation of the soul.

To deal with this problem, ATR and their adherents must therefore know that the greatest human need is the forgiveness of God. Secondly, the problem that separates humans from God is sin, and that sin should be understood as an offence against God alone. Also, they should accept that God would not have sent Christ to die if he did not have a serious problem with the sin of the entire human race, including Africans. Therefore, the sooner it is realised that the purported perpetual relationship God has with Africans is fractured and cannot stand,

and that God is directly offended by the sin of Africans also, ATR adherents will come to God *through* Christ to mend this relationship.

6.2.2. The relationship with the Bible

The greatest cause of the problems with Christ and Christianity is the Bible, which is held in suspicion by Africans who adhere to ATR. The misinterpretation of Scripture by those whom Africans held in trust to deliver God's true message is a problem that is not subsiding. If this could be understood within the context that Africans, and the entire human race, are participants in the story of the Bible, the discourse could change for the better. Africans in particular should be proud of the fact that they shaped the story of the Bible in key NT events – protecting Christ from Pharaoh, and helping Christ carry his cross to Golgotha. Great Bible scholars such as Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine of Hippo are titans who shaped the biblical narrative and discourse. Africans should be proud of the work of these great men.

These are extraordinary feats performed by the people of this continent. With this view, the African perception of the Bible must change. The issue of biased interpretation by the missionary enterprise cannot be ignored. However, at the same time, Africans cannot seek to revise the Bible as a result of the compromised biblical interpretation. Here, Africans should know that the problem is not the content, but the context – which largely relates to the skewed interpretation by the missionary enterprise.

Therefore, Africans, including those in their traditional religions, must not find it comfortable to identify with the OT only, but also with the NT. It is when the Bible is not viewed as suspect and is accepted entirely that the reality of Christ will start to sink in in ATRs. The infiltration of Christ into ATR will greatly improve the relationship Africans have with him – he will become their Saviour, their Sanctifier, their suffering Servant, their Son of Man, and their God.

6.2.3. Explaining the Christ event within scriptural bounds

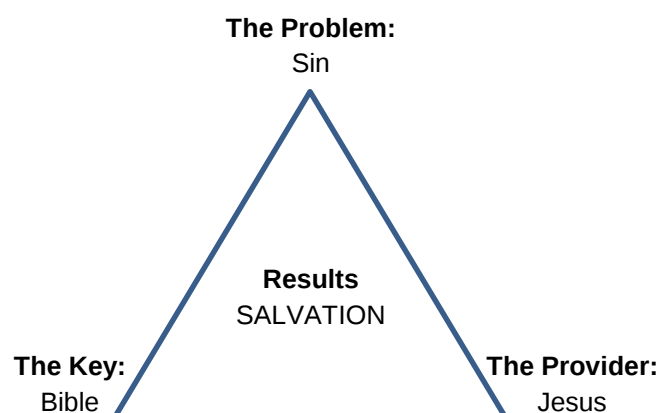
Makashinyi (2022:80) explains that the gospel message is intended to be in context for a particular culture or group of people for the sake of their understating. However, he warns that when pursued in the wrong way, contextualisation “may obscure or even distort the truth.” This is most visible from the way in which African traditional religions and scholars have attempted to describe the Christ event within the African worldview. Exacerbated by the misdiagnosis of the problem, Christ has been conferred titles that are extra-scriptural – ancestor, brother, warrior, etc. When viewed in context, these titles concern themselves with the this-worldly concept of salvation, obscuring the need for the salvation of the soul.

Christ will not take root in Africa unless he is appreciated for the central mission he came to deliver (Jn. 3:16; Jn. 10:10; Acts 5:31; 1 Tm. 2:5) – to save humanity from their sins. This study has shown that in order for Christ to take root in Africa, Bible-based interpretations of him should be undertaken. This includes Christ who is the author of salvation and the Saviour of the world whose scope of salvation, unlike the ancestors, covers the entire human race. He must also be preferred as the sanctifier and baptiser. Given the deep practice of sacrifices intended for cleansing through animals and river washing, Christ stands for all of the human race as the one who is able to wash clean through his blood. African traditionalists must thus accept that the blood of animals (Heb. 10:4–10) and river cleansing has lost power to deal with sin, and true cleansing is found only in Christ (Eph. 1:7; 1 Jn. 1:7).

Further, Christ must be seen for his role as the suffering servant who is not indifferent to the plight of the people. Africans do identify with struggle and often feel that their concerns find no expression even in God. However, if Christ is placed central to their affairs they will have someone they identify with in terms of their struggles, and they also gain someone who on a daily basis intercedes for them, unlike ancestors who are consulted occasionally when adherents want to present issues. Christ is available for them at all times to intercede for them, and to sympathise with them in their struggles. But Christ is also the Son of Man, chosen by God to be his representative on earth. Africans are thus not left destitute, for the Son of Man is imbued with necessary power and authority to attend to their needs.

6.3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we submit that the Lordship of Christ must be central in doing theology in Africa. In order for this to happen, a triangle of salvation in Africa must be drawn, reflecting all the elements that make it.



Essentially, the *problem* of humanity must be correctly diagnosed and understood as sin against God. Only when African traditional religions interpret the real human problem as sin

can we begin to make headway to address it. God is offended by the sins of all humanity and does not look away because it is Africans who are sinning. Christ died for the sins of all. Yet this death, which provides universal forgiveness, is accessed by faith in Christ.

The Bible must also remain central as the *key* to understanding the dealings of God with humanity in order for them to receive salvation. Holding the Bible in suspicion only breeds misunderstanding and attracts incompatible keys that may never bring humanity to understand its true plight before God. When the Bible is used as the right key to understand God and human relations, then issues at stake could be better understood and will attract appropriate reaction on the side of ATR adherents. Also, Christ must be interpreted within the bounds of the Bible and understood as the *provider* of salvation for all humanity. There is no salvation in anyone other than Jesus (Acts 4:12).

Eventually, when the problem is known (sin), and the Bible (key) provides answers to the sin problem, and the proper interpretation of Jesus (the provider) takes effect, then salvation (results) will be possible for Africans. In this way, an African Christo-soteriology emerges, and Christ enters the African cosmology to do what God has sent him to do – to save people from their sins. He must increase, and we must decrease (Jn. 3:30). In the end, correction is necessary: ACT now has a responsibility to communicate back to ATT, which in turn will communicate with ATR, the true content of salvation.

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