

# An Adamic incarnational Christological framework as a theological approach for African contextual ministry

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## Abstract

Many African Christian thinkers and writers are responding to the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity by treating Christ under the traditional African ancestral category. However, it is our contention that the designation of the ancestral category to Christ has a tendency of diminishing the actuality of Christ as God incarnate and encouraging syncretism in African Christianity. Given this, this article proposes and formulates an Adamic incarnational Christological model as an alternative response to the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity. In employing the anhypostastic and enhypostastic principles, we demonstrate that Jesus Christ is not a foreigner to African Christians, since the human nature he assumed in the incarnation is a general human nature which embraces all humankind. In establishing the Adam-Christ relationship in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, we advance Adam as a biblical-theological category in enhancing the relevance of Christ to Africans. It is from this perspective that our Adamic incarnational Christological model proposes that in the incarnation, God in Christ fully identified with all mankind as the New Adam, acting from the ontological depth of his divine-human existence to save African Christians from sin and all its consequences, including death and opposing spiritual forces. Thus, our own model underscores the relevance of Christ to African Christians by emphasizing Christ's complete solidarity with all humanity as the New Adam.

**Key words** Adamic African Christology, African contextual ministry, African Christological model, African incarnational Christianity

## 1. Introduction

There is a problem of foreignness of Christ in African Christianity. This results in perceived 'inadequacy' of Christ in protecting African Christians from traditional religious spiritual threats such as witchcraft and angry ancestral spirits. In traditional African religion, protection from spiritual threats of this kind is obtained from charms, ancestors and traditional medical practitioners. At conversion, Afri-

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can Christians are taught to relinquish reliance on these traditional spiritual powers and to trust only in Jesus Christ for their protection. However, in times of crisis such as sickness, death or inexplicable life situations, some African Christians revert to their previously abandoned traditional forms of security, whilst continuing to believe in Christ as offering eternal salvation (Michael 2013; Magezi 2006)<sup>3</sup>. This form of syncretism is offensive to God, since it depends on other powers rather than God's saving power which is only revealed in Jesus Christ.

Many scholars such as Pobee 1979:81, Reed and Mtukwa 2010:158-161, Bediako 2004:23, and Oborji 2008:17 agree that this foreignness arises from the central traditional African ancestral world-view which requires a blood-related ancestor in order to address the needs of Africans). It is complemented by the newness of Christ in African religiosity, which has been further intensified by the missionary era of Christianity, which presented Christ from a predominantly Western perspective (Hood 1990:145; Taylor 1963:16; Banda 2005:4-5,27). This un-relatedness of Christ with Africans is a stumbling block for some African Christians because they see Christ as unable and insufficient to meet their various African contextual needs (Banda 2005:27). Thus, many African believers "are uncertain about how the Jesus of the church's preaching saves them from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional world-view" (Bediako 2004:23).

In an attempt to grapple with the problem of the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity, many African theologians have attempted to translate the gospel into various traditional African categories and concepts which are familiar to African Christians (Oborji 2008:15-17; Igba 2013:3). This method "reflects on the gospel, the Christian tradition, and the total Christian reality in an African manner and from the perspectives of the African world-view" (Oborji 2008:15). Some of the approaches which have been employed by African theologians in making Jesus Christ familiar and relevant to Africans include the treatment of "Jesus as the liberator, the ancestor, the healer, the African king and the African chief" (Oborji 2008:16). However, the treatment of Christ under the category of ancestor is the predominant approach which African theologians follow (Wacheche 2012:27; Oborji 2008:16). For example, Bediako (1994:93-121), Bujo (1992:79), Nyamiti (2006:24), Pobee (1979:94), Milingo (1984:85), Kwesi (1984:197-198), Kabasele (1991:123-124) and many others are approaching the subject of Christology from an ancestral perspective. This is

<sup>3</sup> This practice is called syncretism. However, syncretism is not a problem for African Christians alone. Western Christianity is rampant with syncretism in many different ways. Thus, we suggest that the difference lies in the forms of syncretism in both African and Western Christianity. It is maintained that continual reliance by some African Christians in traditional African powers to address their various contextual needs can cease by pointing them back '...to the mighty power of Jesus in His ability to protect the believer from the powers of witchcraft and evil spirits' (Michael 2013:98-99).

why Oborji (2008:15) argues that “in the writings of African Christian theologians, one sees the effort to link the African ancestors’ world-view with the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ.” Perhaps, this approach has gained popularity in the academic literature because for Christ to be accepted by Africans and fulfill the expected responsibilities in addressing their spiritual insecurity (which is believed by Africans to be the role of ancestors and other African traditional practitioners), the overarching concern however is about the familial relationship between Jesus Christ of Nazareth and African people, since the two do not belong to the same “clan, family, tribe and nation” (Pobee 1979:81; Reed and Mtukwa 2010:158-161 & Bediako 2004:23).

The treatment of Christ under the ancestral concept takes the traditional African ancestral worldview seriously. However, this approach has encountered serious critiques at both academic and grassroots<sup>4</sup> levels. Scholars who are against the treatment of Christ under the category of ancestor argue that this approach reveals a tendency of diminishing the actuality of Christ as God incarnate and encouraging syncretism in African Christianity (Reed & Mtukwa 2010: 144-163; Palmer 2008:65-76 & Mkole 2000:1138). Concerning the diminishing of Christ as God incarnate, these theologians are of the opinion that Christ, since he is God incarnate, transcends the African ancestor category which makes the concept unsuitable for a biblically based Christology. Concerning syncretism, they argue that it is unhelpful to force the preconceived African ancestral category on Christ since it encourages African Christians to continue to think of Christ in the categories of their natural ancestors. That is, the conceptualization of Christ in the ancestral concept encourages African Christians to perceive their natural ancestors as intermediaries between themselves and God (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:157). Given the above-mentioned challenges, if we want to ensure that Christ is viewed as relevant by African Christians (and therefore influence believers to live as the ambassadors of Christ in the world); we should establish a different biblical model which best describes Christ’s relevance to Africans rather than adopt the ancestral model.

Given this, the article proposes and formulates an *Adamic incarnational Christological framework* as a response to the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity. This framework will be established by initially demonstrating the relevance of Christ to African Christians through delineating that Jesus Christ in his vicarious humanity is the true representative of all humankind. This will be done by using the two Greek Patristic concepts, namely, the *anhypostatic* (affirms negatively that the human nature of Christ is without an independent personal centre) and *enhypostatic* (affirms positively that the human nature of Christ finds its centre and expression in the person

<sup>4</sup> Palmer (2008:65) similarly contends that many Protestant and Catholic theologians “have referred to Jesus as an ancestor. Yet at the grass-roots there is still significant resistance to such a concept.”

of the eternal Son of God) principles which are key in conceiving the person of Christ. Once this is established, the second section will use Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 in establishing Adam as a foundational biblical category which can be used for the purpose of enhancing Christ's relevance to African Christians. However, since Adam is not a category which arises from the traditional African world-view or culture, a brief justification for using the Adamic Christological category in ensuring the applicability of Christ in African Christianity will be given. The final section will then demonstrate how the *Adamic incarnational Christological* model should be understood by those in Christian ministry at reflection (academic level) and popular level (lay people – ordinary church people) to ensure Christ is viewed as relevant.

## **2. The vicarious humanity of Christ: the anhypostasis and enhypostasis concepts in conceiving the person of Christ**

African Christians should understand the relevance of Christ in meeting all their African contextual needs by perceiving Jesus Christ in his vicarious humanity as the true representative of all humankind (Torrance 2008:84, 230-232 & 2009: lxxii). Because of the ontological inclusivity of all humankind in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ, African Christians should cease to perceive Jesus Christ as a Western savior who is primarily interested in meeting the needs of a western worldview (cf. Taylor 1963:16). Instead, they should be encouraged to view Christ as someone who is blood-related to them as a brother (cf. Hebrews 2:11-18), therefore able to meet all their existential challenges.

Our understanding of Jesus Christ's vicarious humanity as the true representative of all humankind should be grounded in the theology of the Trinity which affirms that God is one incorporeal (John 4:24) being in three distinctive persons, namely, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Barth 1960:402-403 & Torrance 1995:3; 1996:169-202). It is rooted in the Trinitarian doctrine of God because "the very essence of the gospel and the Christian faith depend on the centrality and primacy of the relation in being and agency between Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Torrance 1995:3). Thus, God, *in and through* Jesus Christ in the incarnation, has once and for all moved into the bounds of space and time in order to identify with all humankind for the sake of our redemption (cf. John 1:1-14). That is, as was contended in the council of Nicaea (of 325 AD), Jesus Christ is very God himself (one in being with God the Father, cf. John 10:30 & John 14:10), who identifies with all humankind (in the incarnation) without ceasing to be truly God (Calvin 1960:143 & Torrance 1996:169-202). This is why Torrance (1996:18) contends that the incarnation "constitutes the one actual source and the one controlling center of the Christian doctrine of God, for he who became man in Jesus Christ in order to be our Savior is identical in Being and Act with God the Father".

However, in order for African Christians to understand that in the incarnation, there is a once and for all solidarity between “Christ and all mankind”, the vicarious humanity of Christ as the true representative of all humankind is determined by the two inseparable Greek Patristic theological concepts, namely *anhypostatic* and *enhypostatic* union (Torrance 2008:230 & 2009:lxix-lxxiii). These are the two qualifications that need to be made about the relation of the humanity of Christ to his divine person. On one hand, the *anhypostatic* concept asserts the negative; that the human nature of Jesus Christ has no independent grounding (Barth 1958:49; Torrance 2008:84, 229; cf. 2009: lxxiii; & Moltmann 1974:231). On the other hand, the concept of *enhypostatic* union affirms the positive; that in the incarnation, the human nature of Christ is grounded in the eternal person of the divine Logos, which implies that the human nature of Christ acquires real existence and stability in the existence of God (Torrance 2008:84 & 230, cf. Barth 1958:49).

Barth (1958:49) and Gunton (1992:47) perceived the potential objection which is associated with the *enhypostatic* concept, especially in its relationship to the doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ (hence, Christology). They stated that the concept of *enhypostatic* union seems to deny the actual humanity of Christ (docetism) if not understood properly. However, we affirm that *anhypostasis* “does not teach, as is sometimes alleged, the impersonality of Christ’s humanity, but the fact that his *hypostasis*, his person, does not have its basis in the way that ours do in the processes of the finite world alone” (Gunton 1992:47). That is, by employing the concept of *enhypostatic* union to the vicarious humanity of Christ, we do not mean that “in the incarnation there was no particular individual called Jesus existing as a particular human being, with a rational human mind and will and soul” (Torrance 2008:230). Instead, we believe that Jesus was a true human being, who possessed a full “human mind and human soul and human will” in his “*hypostatic* union with divine life” (cf. Luke 2:52) (Torrance 2008:230).

However, to bring the complete relevance of Christ to African Christians, the *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis* concepts should be interpreted cooperatively. That is, *anhypostasis* confronts all humankind with the actuality that the human nature of Jesus Christ does not have an independent center of existence because his human nature finds its center of existence *enhypostatically* in the one eternal person of the Divine Logos. Thus, the bearing of the meaning of these Greek Patristic theological concepts in the enterprise of ‘de-foreignising’ Christ in African Christianity is that the impersonal, common or general human nature of Jesus Christ does not have an alternative center for grounding and expression other than in its *enhypostatic* grounding in the eternal person of the Son of God<sup>5</sup>. African Christians can thus now

<sup>5</sup> Torrance (2008:230) encapsulates the couplet significance of the *anhypostatic* and *enhypostatic*

have confidence in their true human existence in the vicarious human existence of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Once this is established, we can conclude that Jesus is not a foreigner to African Christians, since the human nature which he assumed was not for a particular group of people. Instead, the human nature of Jesus Christ transcends all racial, genealogical, national and tribal categories (Bediako 1994:100). That is, “our true identity as men and women made in the image of God, is not to be understood primarily in terms of racial, cultural, national or lineage categories, but in terms of Jesus Christ himself” (Bediako 1994:100). Given this, Bavinck (2006:306) is right in his affirmation that the human nature of Jesus Christ:

[h]ad no personal existence in him alongside the Logos but was from the very beginning so prepared by the Holy Spirit for union with the Logos and for his work that in that Logos it could represent the entire human race and be the mediator of God for all humans of all the races and classes and age groups of all times and places.

Since many African Christians may struggle to grasp the close relationship between Jesus Christ and the ancient nation of Israel and how that relates to Africans, we substantiate: African believers appropriate the divine promises given to the patriarchs of Israel through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:11-12; cf. John 3:43-44) (Bediako 2004:24). This is because even though Jesus Christ is from the womb of Israel (cf. Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:32-33 & Romans 1:2-3, 9:5), we are aware that he did not fulfill the unique role of Israel (in bringing salvation to all the nations, cf. Genesis 12:3) as a mere *instrument* of God, instead, he fulfilled it as God: the God who emptied himself of his honour and glory (Philippians 2:5-11) in order to identify with all humanity so that he can suffer for the sake of our redemption (Torrance 2008:45 & 50-58, cf. 1992:3). With this in mind, African Christians ought to understand that it is in and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ that the whole world, including African Christians, is ingrafted into the biblical redemptive narrative of Israel and into fellowship with God particularly because:

[t]he Old Testament is stretched out in expectation, and the New Testament looks back in engulfment. This one movement throughout the Old Testament and New Testament

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concepts in relation to the doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ, as he argues that: “the anhypostasia stresses the general humanity of Jesus, the human nature assumed by the Son with its hypostasis in the Son, but enhypostasia stresses the particular humanity of the one man Jesus, whose person is no other than the person of the divine Son.” Importantly, the concepts of “anhypostasis and enhypostasis” are “a very careful way of stating that we cannot think of the hypostatic union statically, but must think of it on the one hand, in terms of the great divine act of grace in the incarnation and on the other hand, in terms of the dynamic personal union carried through the whole life of Jesus Christ” (Torrance 2008:84).

is the movement of God's grace in which he renews himself to man in such a way as to assume human nature and existence into oneness with himself (Torrance 2008:45).

Even though we argue for African believers' appropriation of the Abrahamic promises through faith in Jesus Christ, this does not mean that African Christians become Israelites. Instead, owing to their faith in Jesus Christ, African Christians are to understand that God has embraced them through the history of Israel. That is, since God's redemptive narrative, particularised in Israel, was also designed by God to extend to us (Genesis 12:3b), it embraces all nations/people not by way of colonization but as *brothers* in and of Jesus Christ through faith. Given this, Jesus Christ is not foreign to African Christians because through faith in him, they appropriate the divine promises given to the patriarchs of Israel and Israel as a nation.

### **3. A brief biblical-theological basis for the Adamic Christological construction**

Even though the previous section has established that Christ is the true representative of all humanity in the incarnation, there is a need for a biblical category which enhances the relevance of Christ to African Christians. This category is the *Adamic* Christological concept, which argues that the eternal Son of God, the eternal Logos of the Father has assumed our common Adamic human nature as the New Adam. Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 will be employed in the approaching subsection to establish Adam as a foundational biblical category which can be used for the purpose of enhancing African Christians' understanding of Christ's relevance to them. This arises from the fact that Scripture usually presents us with an Adamic Christology by drawing explicit comparisons between Adam and Christ (cf. Romans 5:12-21 & 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49). In the comparisons between Adam and Christ, there is an ontological inclusivity of all humankind in their vicarious humanity. Here, Adam stands as the head of the fallen humanity, whilst Christ stands as the head of the redeemed humanity. Also, Adam is a type of Christ; who is the real thing (the anti-type) which the type symbolizes (cf. Romans 5:14) (Barth 1956:9-10 & Hultgren 2011:226). That is, even though there are continuities between Adam and Christ on the basis of the corporate solidarity of humankind in their vicarious humanity; the God-man, Jesus Christ transcends Adam in all respects as the one who 'un-does' Adam's sin and death for all humankind who believe in his saving person and work.

#### **3.1 Adamic Christology in Romans 5:12-21 and I Corinthians 15:21-22**

In interpreting Romans 5:12-21, many commentators (Fitzmyer 1993:135-136; Schreiner 1998:274-277; Jewett 2007:281 & Moo 1996:326-328) are of the opinion that Paul in this section is defining the identity of humankind as either found in

Adam or in Christ. Schreiner (1998:275) argues that “the parallel between Adam and Christ suggests that people are constituted as sinners or righteous not by virtue of their own sin or righteousness but by the sin of Adam or by the righteousness of Christ, respectively.” Here, the reality is that in Adam’s disobedience all human beings have sinned (Romans 5:12). Even though Adam’s descendants may not have sinned in the way which Adam sinned, the truth is that all human beings are the inheritors of Adam’s sinful humanity, including Jews and Gentiles (Fitzmyer 1993:135-136 & Jewett 2007:376-377). This is because sin and death came into the world through Adam before the Mosaic Law (cf. Romans 5:12-14) (Fitzmyer 1993:135-136 & Jewett 2007:376-377). Given this, we agree with Moo (1996:329) in his assertion that “whether we explain this solidarity in terms of sinning *in and with* Adam or because of a corrupt nature inherited from him (Adam) does not matter at this point”<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, Jewett (2007:373) argues that the sin of Adam has “affected all” his descendants “without exception, placing all under the powers of sin and death.” Thus in Adam all humankind has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (cf. Romans 3:23). Hence, when Paul affirms the aforesaid universal sinfulness of *all* humankind, he has in mind that in Adam all humankind has died as the result of his sin (1 Corinthians 15:22a, cf. Romans 6:23).

We also agree with Wright’s (1991:36) interpretation of Romans 5:12-21 from a covenantal perspective. By virtue of their election by God into a covenant relationship with him, Wright (1991:36) perceives Israel as the true people of God, who were to serve as a means of salvation for all mankind. Israel was expected to fulfill her covenant role by fully submitting to God’s revealed law and “cultic” worship (Torrance 2009:7-8). However, because Israel was part of Adamic sin and death, she could not fulfill her mandate. Therefore, in the drama of redemption, we find Jesus Christ as the New Adam, who is both true God and true man in nature. He is the one who fulfills the covenant requirements (between God and Israel) from both the side of God and of man. “Jesus Christ stands in the place of Israel” as the one who fulfills the role of Israel in bringing salvation to all mankind (Wright

<sup>6</sup> Here, Berkouwer (1971:425-451) argues that many theologians and commentators hold to the doctrine of original sin. Augustine (Berkouwer, 1971:430-433), Calvin (1947:200-201), Luther (1954:93, cf. 93-98), Cranfield (1975:281), Bavinck (see Berkouwer, 1971:450-451) and Kruse (2012:241-244) are few adherents’ of the doctrine of original sin. In Berkouwer’s view, many theologians agree on the doctrine of original sin, however, they differ on how the sin of Adam was propagated to all humankind. The two dominant positions are the realism and federal positions. On one hand, the realism position argues that all humankind co-sinned with Adam in the garden of Eden, on the other hand, the federal position argues that “the sin of Adam is imputed to us because he merely represents us as our covenantal head” (Berkouwer, 1971:439). We agree that these aforementioned positions have their own strengths and weaknesses. For a detailed understanding of these positions, see Berkouwer’s (1971:425-451).

1991:35-40). That is, the New Adam, Jesus Christ stands in the place of Israel in both a renewing and recreating manner by fulfilling the covenant between man and God from both the side of man and God, especially, as he ultimately offered himself, even unto death on the cross, for the atonement of the sins of all mankind. This is why Torrance (2009:9) says:

The realization of the covenant will and faithfulness of God in Christ is atonement – atonement in its fullest sense embracing the whole incarnate life and work of Christ. It involves the self-giving of God to man and the assuming of man into union with God, thus restoring the broken communion between man and God. It involves the fulfillment of the divine judgment on the sin of humanity, but that barrier is removed precisely by the complete fulfillment of the covenant, in which God kept faith and truth with humanity in its sin by its complete judgment.

Thus, even though Wright (1991:40) interprets Romans 5:12-21 from his own particular covenantal perspective, in our view, he still pays attention to Paul's predominant argument (in 5:12-14) that sin and death came into the world *before* the Mosaic law, i.e. through Adam. Both Israelites and Gentiles have their corporate identity in Adam if they are not united with Jesus Christ (the New Adam) through faith in his death and resurrection. This is because Jesus Christ is the one "who had revealed what God's saving plan for the world had really been – what Israel's vocation had really been – by enacting it, becoming obedient to death, even death at the cross" (Wright 1991:40). However, once Adam's sin is established as the origin of death for all humankind, Pauline theology presents Christ as the one who reverses the Adamic sin and death (Romans 5:15-21). The eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, became the ideal man, who identifies with all humanity, so that through his obedience and righteousness, all humankind who believe<sup>7</sup> in him can be justified before God (Romans 5:18b) and inherit the greatest gift of eternal life (Romans 5:21).

<sup>7</sup> Even though Paul in Romans 5:12-21 does not mention faith as the means of appropriating the saving righteousness of Christ, it is important to highlight that in his previous discussion, the saving work of Christ is efficacious for everyone who believes in him (Romans 1:16). This should be emphasized because some commentators like Hultgren (2011:231-232 & 1987:54) and Barth (1968:182) seem to take Paul as implying universalism in Romans 5:18-19 by paralleling the universal application of Adam's disobedience to all humankind with Christ's righteousness. However, Paul makes it clear that the disobedience of Adam has a universal application, whilst Romans 5:17 provides us with a clue that the surpassing gift of Christ's righteousness is for both Jews and Gentiles who will receive it by faith (cf. Kruse, 2012:251; Schreiner, 1998:291 & Moo, 1996:336-337). That is, God's gift in and through Christ is not for all humanity "without exception" (Schreiner, 1998:291). Given this, Wright (2002:529) is correct in arguing that Paul's focus in Romans 5:18-19 is not on the question of numerical universal salvation; instead, his universalism focuses on Christ as the way of salvation for all those who will receive God's gift of righteousness in and through Christ by faith.

The *hypostatic* union between God and man *in and through* Jesus Christ in the incarnation is inseparable, immutable and indivisible since it stretches into eternity (Torrance 2008:119-120). Therefore, Torrance (2008:119-120, *my emphasis*) argues that the great *palingenesis* is:

the great conversion of humanity to God, which receives its ultimate and eternal answer in the divine satisfaction and good pleasure when God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and forever affirmed the reconciliation and restored fellowship effected in the obedient life and death of his Son, thus placing it eternally beyond all the assaults of evil and all possibility of undoing. *Thus the covenant will of God for fellowship with man was translated into eternal actuality.*

In other words, Adam identifies with all humanity as the head of the fallen humanity, whilst Christ identifies with all humanity as the head of the redeemed humanity (Dunn 1989:106 & Fitzmyer 1993:406). That is, “as through the one man Adam, sin and death came upon Adamic humanity, so through the one man Christ Jesus came eternal life upon Christic humanity” (Fitzmyer 1993:406). Paul is giving the discontinuity between Adam and Christ as a way of elaborating “the dominion of Christ over believers” (Jewett 2007:379). The dominion of Christ over believers is clearly shown in Romans 5:15, in which Paul affirms that the obedience of Christ counters the trespass of Adam, as he states that: “for if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many?” Here, Paul is depicting Christ as the one who replaces and supersedes the dominion of Adam’s sin and death to believers once and for all. Given this, Dunn (1989:101) argues that:

Adam is a key figure in Paul’s attempt to express his understanding both of Christ and of man. Since soteriology and Christology are closely connected in Paul’s theology it is necessary to trace the context of the Adam motif in Paul if we are to appreciate the force of his Adam Christology.

The parallelism between Adam and Christ (in Romans 5:12-21) does not connote an equivalence between these two historical figures, since Christ is depicted as the one who *supersedes* Adam by undoing Adamic sin and death once and for all. The only equivalence between Adam and Christ rests in the fact that all humankind has its corporate identity in either Adam’s or Christ’s human nature. This is why Schreiner argues that “Adam and Christ are the two most influential individuals in human history, and believers can take confidence because they belong to one who has overturned all that Adam introduced into the world” (Schreiner 1998:282). In line with Schreiner, Fee (2007:272) argues that Christ reverses the Adamic sin and

death because he possessed a true humanity (human nature), which “he shared fully with Adam and thus with us, but without sin”. Torrance (2008:92) concurs with Fee in his assertion that:

Christ is the second man, the Last Adam. Adam owed his origin to a creative act of God, and he was a type of Christ. Christ as the new man comes likewise from God. His likeness to Adam was not in sin, but in coming into existence and in representative capacity.

Even though there are some crucial differences between Adam and Christ, the “... thing that is common to both relationships is that in two different contexts true human nature is being revealed, and that in two different ways it is shown to be subject to the ordering of God its creator” (Barth 1956:9). Barth (1956:9 & 10) further expands that:

To discover the common factor that connects the two sides, we have to take into account the decisive difference between them. And this difference is that our relationship to Adam is merely the type, the likeness, the preliminary shadow of our relationship to Christ. The same human nature appears to both but the humanity of Adam is only real and genuine in so far as it reflects and corresponds to the humanity of Christ... Our relationship to Christ has an essential priority and superiority over our relationship to Adam. He is the victor and we in him are those who are awaiting the victory. Our human nature is preserved by sharing in Adam's nature because Adam's humanity is a provisional copy of the real humanity that is in Christ.

Paul's predominant argument in Romans 1-5:1-11 is that all humankind finds new life through faith in the redeeming death and resurrection of Christ (Fitzmyer, 1993:406). Now in bringing this predominant argument to bear on Adam's Christology, Fitzmyer (1993:406) understands that in Romans 5:12-21, Paul is summing up all that he has been saying prior to this point in his argument. That is, in defining the differences between Adam and Christ, Paul is establishing “once more the basis for Christian hope (Romans 5:5): as Adam's sin introduced baleful consequences for all historical humanity, so the justification brought by Christ Jesus has affected those consequences for good and for salvation” (Fitzmyer, 1993:406). In other words, Paul's aim in Romans 5:12-21 is to “show the all-encompassing and surpassing glorious effect of Christ on those who belong to him, and the Adamic comparison merely serves that end” (cf Romans 5:15) (Jewett 2007:380). That is to say:

The one person of Jesus Christ matches the one person of Adam by which the many died. By enhancing the parallelism and dissonance between Adam and Christ, Paul

renders more powerful his argument that the lesser is superseded by the greater (Jewett 2007:381).

In substantiation, Fee (2007:115) argues that Paul's analogy between Christ and Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 has couplet significance. Firstly, this analogy serves to explain that all humankind are the heirs of death due to Adam's sin (Fee 2007:115). Secondly, it is "an interpretation of the first-fruits metaphor" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which assures the future resurrection of Christians (Fee 2007:115). "The divine response to our death is the resurrection that all who are Christ's will equally share. Just as they shared equally in the death of Adam" (Fee 2007:115). In this way, Paul can confidently speak of Christ's resurrection as the guarantee for the future resurrection of all believers (1 Corinthians 15:20-58). To put it differently, Paul's prevailing emphasis in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 is "on Christ's real humanity. Whatever is true of Christ, in his incarnation he was a true human being, who died as Adam died" (Fee 2007:115). Therefore, Adam's Christology displays Jesus as the man who lived an obedient life in his entire earthly life, and then gives life to all humankind as he reverses Adam's sin and death through his saving death and resurrection from the dead (Wright 1991:26-40). That is, Jesus Christ is the Last Adam or New Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45-49), who identifies with all humanity and destroys the broken relationship between God and man (Fee 2007:272 & 115). He (Jesus Christ) vicariously lived a faithful life fulfilling the requirements of the law and died on our behalf, so that all those who believe in him might become the righteousness of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). That is to say:

within this human-inhuman existence of Adam, Jesus Christ comes as the Son of God, the Son of man as Jesus calls himself, to live out a truly obedient and filial, that is a truly human life, in perfect and unbroken union with God the Father... In all of that Jesus Christ is the last Adam, the one who...brings to an end the bondage of Adam's sin, breaks its power and opens up a new and living way to God (Torrance 2008:73).

### **3.2 Justification of the Adamic category in ensuring the relevance of Christ to African Christians.**

Given the above discussion, it is clear that there are good biblical-theological grounds for using Adamic Christology as a mediating category in helping African Christians to understand Christ's relevance to them. However, at the same time we are also aware of the possible objections we may encounter in using Adam as a mediating category in communicating the relevance of Christ in addressing the various

contextual needs of Africans. That is, one can argue against this view by saying that the Adamic category is a mediating concept which does not arise from the African traditional culture or world-view, therefore, how can it be legitimately employed to aid African Christians to understand Christ's complete identification with them? In responding to this challenge, we argue that we have not found an African traditional category which can be applied to Christ as a means of 'de-foreignising' him in African Christianity without undermining the supremacy of Christ as God incarnate. Also, we have not encountered a mediating category in traditional African culture or world-view, which can be used to best describe Christ's complete relevance to African believers without encouraging syncretism.

We contend that even though we do have to take the African traditional world-view seriously, it follows that we must not exalt our traditional world-views or cultures at the expense of the gospel. That is, all cultures must be "treated with dignity and respect in the theological process," however, owing to the universal pandemic of sin (Romans 3:23), all cultures are "fellow participants in the theological endeavor but not as an epistemological conclusion in which we assert the complete validity" of our hypothesis of contextualization (Cortez 2005:356). Hence, we are not going to force the traditional African concept of ancestor upon Christ since it cannot retain the *being* of Christ as very God himself. The presentation of Jesus Christ under the ancestral category "might only serve to further an existing practice by providing some sort of validation for an existing culturally relevant but non-biblical practice" (Igba 2013:124). Dualism and syncretism can only cease in African Christianity by the exaltation of Jesus Christ *over* the world of spiritual powers. Salala (1998:138) puts it this way:

Unless Christ is elevated in the person's cosmology as he is in heaven, dualism persists, syncretism is advanced, and Jesus is reduced to being simply an additional helpful source of power, perhaps equal in power with traditional spirits and personalities.

In regards to the above-mentioned reminder from Cortez, Igba and Salala, here we are proposing the use of an Adamic Christological category which seeks to deepen Christ's relevance to African Christians without diminishing the actuality of Christ as God incarnate, encouraging syncretism in African Christianity or reducing the validity of African contextual needs.

Many African theologians (such as Bediako 2004:25 & Nyamiti 2006:12) mention Adam in their biblical discussions without saying anything about major difficulties of African Christians in understanding their real solidarity with Adam. This silence in African scholarship can only imply that African Christians do not struggle to understand their corporate sinful solidarity with Adam, the forefather

of all mankind. That is, African Christians understand that “every member of the human race is descended from the biblical Adam”, which is a “standard doctrine in Islamic, Jewish and Christian thought” (Livingstone 2008:5). One can argue that African Christians do not see the importance of their complete identification with the biblical Adam because they are not preoccupied with sin as the root of their existential challenges – instead, they are much more concerned with the need for a saviour from a realm beyond (cf. Bediako 2004:25), who fully identifies with them and saves them from their insecurities. Further, since Africans have their own creation stories that may not necessarily resonate with the Christian doctrine of creation, one can ask if Adam is less foreign than Christ in African Christianity? However, this issue has never been explored and it’s the scope of outside our discussion.

Given this, it follows that if African Christians do not find significant difficulties in understanding Adam’s identification with them, then an *Adamic incarnational christological framework* which views Christ as our New Adam is the next and necessary step in enhancing Christ’s relevance to African Christians to the extent that they can solely rely on him for their spiritual security. That is, instead of African Christians’ continual reliance on their familial traditional African mediums, they can be empowered through knowledge to fully rely on Christ’s ability to address their existential challenges as their New Adam with whom they are united by faith. We assert, therefore, that Adam is a suitable category in deepening the relevance of Christ to African Christians. Now the ensuing section will now establish how the *Adamic incarnational Christological* model should be understood by those in Christian ministries at reflection (academic level) and popular level (laymen- ordinary Christians) to ensure that Christ is viewed as relevant by Africans. However, before we demonstrate how our own model should be understood by those in Christian ministries at reflection and popular level, it is imperative to consider what other African theologians have said about Christology in the African context. We will do so by briefly dialoguing with the ancestral Christology as the predominant approach in African Christology. The challenges associated with the treatment of Christ under the ancestral category will be considered.

#### **4. How the Adamic incarnational Christological framework should be understood by those at academic and popular level**

Gospel contextualisation is a key concept which denotes “the procedural patterns in which the character of contemporary Christian faith manifests itself in a given cultural context, in a given time and place” (Ngige 2011:406). The concept of contextualisation arises from the fact that the redemptive message of Jesus Christ is universal and for all humanity (Rodewald 2014:60). Christians are saved so that they

can be God's instruments in carrying the redemptive message of Christ to people of all tongues, tribes and nations (Matthew 28). That is, God "...has chosen us not only as receivers of this message, but also as its messengers" (Rodewald 2014:60).

In taking Christ's salvation to all people, one has to make the Word of God relevant to the audience. Thus "contextualisation seeks to encapsulate in a single word the process of proclaiming God's Word so that it may be heard in all its fullness by those within different cultural context" (Rodewald 2014:54). The basis of contextualisation as a theological enterprise is the incarnational mystery of Jesus Christ (Costas 1979:25-26). The incarnation is the reality that at the appointed time in history, Jesus Christ, the very God himself came into the space and time (foreign context) of humanity, and then assumed our human mode of existence so that he can relate fully to us for the sake of our salvation (Philippians 2:5-8). Even though Jesus Christ is of one being with God the Father (John 10:30 & John 14:10), in the incarnation, he forsook his rights and came into our human culture so that he could seek and save estranged humanity (Ngige 2011:427-428). That is, the eternal-transcendent God, who created all invisible and visible things (Colossians 1:16, cf. John 1:1-5) fully identifies with us in Christ so that we can understand (of course, this is a partial comprehension of God) him, as well as relate to him in human terms. *René Padilla in agreement* Costas (1979:26) captures the notion of the incarnation as the basis of gospel contextualisation in this way:

The incarnation makes clear God's approach to the revelation of himself and of his purposes: God does not shout his message from the heavens; God becomes present as a man among men (and women). The climax of God's revelation is Emmanuel. And Emmanuel is Jesus, a first-century Jew. The incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God's intention to make himself known from within the human situation. Because of the very nature of the Gospel, we know this gospel only as a message contextualised in culture (Costas 1979:26).

It is important to note that through the Holy Spirit, Christians are called to participate in God's on-going mission (cf. Matthew 28 about the Great Commission) of reconciling alienated humanity to himself (cf. Rodewald 2014:61; Ngige 2011:428). In this divine-human partnership between God and Christians, the work of God the Spirit supersedes our human work because he (the Holy Spirit) is the one who brings the miracle of new birth to humankind (John 6:63). This is why Rodewald (2014:61) argues that:

...God's action in the world through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit's calling and involving us in His purpose and using us as means to call others. It is God and His Word, involving both messenger and hearer, who, in faith given, preserve and express

that Word throughout the world's many peoples and cultures. We proclaim and hear the Gospel perfectly. Yet God calls us anyway and works in our hearts and minds, and so we witness to what He has done for us through His Son. As messengers, we understand ourselves as integral to the message, but also as its corruptors. Thus, we constantly seek, by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, to remove barriers and corruption and preserve that message so that the Word may have free course (Rodewald 2014:61).

In view of the above, African theologians emphasises 'a critical theological construction which will relate more fully to the widespread African confidence in the Christian faith to the actual and ongoing Christian responses to the life experience of Africans' (Bediako 1994:17). This is because they believe that "through reading, hearing, and interpreting the Scriptures in African mother tongues and therefore in dynamic relation to indigenous categories of thought and to the psychological and spiritual realities at work in them" (Balcomb 1998:12), African Christians will reflect a deeper understanding of the saving work of Christ. In other words, African theologians desire African Christians to possess "a viable heritage of Christian tradition in its indigenous language" through the translatability of the Gospel into various categories and experiences which arises from the traditional African cultures and world-views (Bediako 1995:61). This concern within African theologians arises from the understanding that the early Western missionaries in Africa confused their cultures with the integral part of the gospel (Wagenaar 1999:365; Teresa 2015:5). These missionaries allowed their "cultural superiority to inform "their approach, with a conflation between Christianity and European culture shaping their vision" (Chitando 2005:184; Stinton, 2004:27). In doing so, they painted Christ as a Westerner and the saviour with a Western world-view thereby making Christ irrelevant and foreign in addressing African contextual needs. Taylor (1963:16) concluded that "Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view". Indeed, this is why there is a "cry for a contextualization of the Christian's faith within the African society in African Christianity" (Ejenobo 2009:77-78).

The predominant approach in the contextualisation of the doctrine of Christology is the treatment of Christ under the ancestral category. This approach views Christ from a traditional African perspective. The argument is that Christ fully identifies with African Christians as their ancestor, and as such, he is able to address their African contextual needs. The treatment of Christ under the ancestral category is a dominant approach to the extent that some African theologians categorises Christology in African theology as ancestral and non-ancestral<sup>8</sup> (Gathogo 2015:4). Many

<sup>8</sup> We are also aware that some African theologians have argued that African Christologies have two-fold-classification namely, inculturation and liberation Christology (cf. Gathogo 2015:2-5; Mugambi

of these theologians base their arguments in the superiority of the ancestorship of Christ because Christ is very God himself, the creator and the sustainer of all things, who identifies with all humankind in the incarnation. Bujo (1992:79), Nyamiti (2006:24), Bediako (1994:99-118 & 2004:24-33) are the few examples of African theologians who designated the ancestral category to Christ. Bujo (1992:79) advances the idea of Christ as Proto-Ancestor par-excellence since he (Christ) is the creator and the sustainer of all creation. Hence, Christ possesses the highest rank which the natural African ancestors cannot acquire. Nyamiti (2006:24) views Christ as the par-excellent Brother-Ancestor of Africans by grounding Christ's ancestorship in the Trinitarian doctrine of God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Further, Bediako designated Christ as the Supreme ancestor of Africans by using the uncompounded divine-human nature of Christ. Since Christ identifies with all humankind in the incarnation, Bediako argues that the humanity which Christ assumed in the incarnation is universal, which means Christ is the ancestor of every Christian, including African Christians (Bediako 1994:99-118 & 2004:24-33). Here we must suggest that Bediako's (cf. Bujo & Nyamiti's) viewpoint raises a problem, since it is one thing to say Christ shares our humanity, and another thing to say that he is our ancestor. In other words, one can ask the following question: does Christ's sharing in our humanity make him our ancestor? We answer an emphatic no to the foregoing question because the Bible does not present Christ as an ancestor. Given this, we advise African theologians to allow their reasoning, traditions and world-views to bow before Scripture as the benchmark in their hypothesis of contextualisation (Teresa 2015:18).

Although Bujo, Nyamiti and Bediako's application of the ancestral category to Christ takes seriously the traditional African world-view of ancestral veneration, this endeavour seems to undermine the supremacy of Christ over the spiritual universe (Afeke & Verster 2004:59). It is reminiscent of the danger of encouraging African Christians to continue thinking of Christ in view of their former traditional understanding of ancestors, in spite of the fact that Christ is the incarnated God,

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1995:9 & Martey 2009:2). Mugambi (1995:9) and Martey (2009:2) argue that these categories are distinct but they complement each other. In Mugambi's (1995:9) view, usually theologians who concentrate on inculturation are also concerned with liberation Christology. However, Gathogo (2015:7) diverges from the aforesaid classification by introducing a new concept of Christology, namely: reconstructive Christology. This new concept views Christ as a reconstructionist, who "rebuilds the many walls that beg for attention, and this is seen through his ancestorhood, healing, reconciliation, elderhood and familyhood and is present as we wrestle with the vicissitudes of life" (Matthew 28:20) (Gathogo 2015:7). This approach is persuasive since the Bible demonstrates Christ as the very God himself, who truly identifies with humankind in order to renew, challenge, renovate and recreate our political, health, social, moral, economic and religious structures which were marred by sin. Thus, this approach sufficiently depicts Christ as a reconstructor in all aspects of life.

whose “Lordship, authority and Supremacy can meet all spiritual needs” (Afeke & Verster 2004:59). Perhaps this is why the Christological paradigm and metaphorical expression of Christ as an ancestor lacks practical value at the grassroots level (popular level) in African Christianity (Olsen 1997:251). Palmer (2008:65) similarly contends that many Protestant and Catholic theologians “have referred to Jesus as an ancestor. Yet at the grass-roots there is still significant resistance to such a concept (ancestral concept).” It is apparent that the conceptualization of Christ as an ancestor might encourage African Christians to continue to perceive their natural ancestors as mediators between Africans and God (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:157). African Christians might continue to look to both Christ and their natural ancestors for spiritual security, since they perceive no distinction between the two. Therefore, African Christians might continue to worship their former traditional ancestors by placing them “in a position that only God should hold by offering to them sacrifices and oblations” (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:157).

It is important to note that we are aware that in *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (Bosch (1991:375-376) is against the complete abandonment of old paradigms for the new ones in mission. Bosch (1991:375-376) maintains that there is always a continuity and change between the old and new paradigms. However, this is problematic when it comes to the un-theological meanings in old concepts attached to the new paradigms because it diminishes or compromises our various theological categories. That is, the old meanings of old models which are attached to the new models can influence people to view their new models in light of the former. Teresa (2015:18) sharply captures this concern in his assertion that:

[t]he danger in trying to create new meanings with such existing forms is that the old meanings are still attached, and it could result in the people having syncretized understanding and practice rather than one rooted in Scriptures. So the models are helpful in providing guidance for working through those kinds of issues (Teresa (2015:18).

The above-mentioned discussion indicates that we are not being unsympathetic to the traditional African world-view (hence culture) or ignorant of what other African theologians have written about Christology in an African context or else not contextualizing because we are driven by fear of being seen to be encouraging syncretism in African Christianity. As we have already argued, we have not found an African traditional category which can be applied to Christ as a means of ‘de-foreignising’ him in African Christianity without undermining the supremacy of Christ as God incarnate. Also, we have not encountered a mediating category in traditional Af-

rican culture or world-view, which can be used to best describe Christ's complete relevance to African believers without encouraging syncretism. Given this, we are not going to force Christ in African cultural trappings. Instead, we are advancing the *Adamic incarnational Christological model* as a mediating category between traditional African culture and Christianity, which should function at both reflection and popular level.

We suggest that those at academic and popular level should understand the *Adamic incarnational Christological model* as not only pertaining to African Christians but to Christian theology in general. It has an ecumenical application because Christ identifies with all Christians as their New Adam. Thus, Christian thinkers (at academic level) and laymen (popular level) can employ this proposed model as the benchmark or springboard for contextualising Christ in various discourses, which requires the establishment of Christ's relevance to people of all races, cultures, tribes and nations. In the academic and popular theological dialogues in which the relationship between Christ and culture/world-view is a subject of concern, this model can serve as means of mediating Christ to all cultures without exception. That is, the *Adamic incarnational Christological model* has an enormous missiological framework which assists both those at the academic and popular level to engage in the evangelistic mission (cf. Matthew 28) of the Church. This is done by using the ecumenical relevance of the Adamic Christological category, which arises out of the recognition of what Scripture itself teaches about the Adam-Christ relationship.

In other words, those at the academic and popular levels should understand the inclusivity of all humankind in the vicarious humanity of either Adam or Christ as important for the universal relevance of Christ. Because of the inclusivity of all people in Christ's human nature, African Christian thinkers and pastors should understand Christ as the representative of all humankind, regardless of their tribe, culture, language and nationality. In this way, they can use this proposed model to impart Christ to people of all cultures and influence them to be the true ambassadors of Christ. This means that the academic and layman's enterprises should serve the cause of the gospel by embodying this framework which brings the universal relevance of Christ to people of all cultures. This is a framework which represents the actuality of Adam as the head of the fallen humanity, whilst Christ is the head of the redeemed humanity. This is why Schreiner (1998:282) argues that "Adam and Christ are the two most influential individuals in human history, and believers can take confidence because they belong to one who has overturned all that Adam introduced into the world." Thus, those engaging in African contextual discourses where Christ is viewed as a foreigner at both academic and popular level should understand that even though there are continuities between Adam and Christ on the

basis of the corporate solidarity of humankind in their vicarious humanity; the God-man, Jesus Christ transcends Adam in all respects as the one who 'un-does' Adam's sin and all its consequences for all human kind who believe in his saving person and work. This *Adamic incarnational Christological* framework integrates the doctrines of God and Christology, enabling all African Christians to see the relevance of Christ without compromising the actuality of Christ as God incarnate, as well as encouraging syncretism in African Christianity.

## 5. Conclusion

In breaking away from the trend of treating Christ under the category of ancestor, we have advanced an *Adamic incarnational Christological framework* which responds to the problem of the foreignness of Christ in African Christianity. In using the *anhypostatic* and *enhyposstatic* principles, we found that Jesus Christ is not a foreigner to African Christians since his human nature is a common or general human nature which embraces all humankind. Importantly, after Adamic Christology was shown to be of foundational status in the biblical material from Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, our *Adamic incarnational Christological framework* advanced Adam as an alternative category in enhancing Christ's relevance to African Christians. The legitimacy of the Adamic Christological category was underscored mainly by examining the theological aspects of the Adam-Christ relationship (type and anti-type), which are inherent in the fact that the entire human race is summed up in these two historical figures in two different ways. On one hand, Adam is the head of the fallen humanity; on the other hand, Christ is the head of the redeemed humanity. In this continuity and discontinuity, Jesus Christ stands as the New Adam, who truly identifies with all humanity in his incarnation and reverses the Adamic sin together with its consequences (Romans 5:12-21 & 1 Corinthians 15: 20-23, 45-49) for all people who believe (Romans 1:16 & John 3:16) in his redemptive work.

Even though the Adamic Christological category does not originate with the African traditional world-view or culture, the credibility of using Adam as a mediating category in deepening African Christians' understanding of Christ's relevance in their existential challenges was further underscored by the fact that many African Christians seem not to experience significant difficulties in understanding Adam's identification with them. This is evident with African theologians who discuss Adam in their biblical discussions without saying anything about any major difficulties African Christians' have in understanding their real solidarity with Adam. This silence in African scholarship was taken to imply that African Christians do not struggle to understand their corporate sinful solidarity with Adam, the forefather of all mankind. Hence, an *Adamic incarnational christological framework* which views

Christ as our New Adam was advanced as essential in enhancing African Christians' understanding of Christ's relevance to them.

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