

8. A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Biblical perspective on aspects which have been discussed in the previous chapter is in order. As we have seen, the Lordship of Christ is interrelated to other Biblical concepts, especially the concept of God and of salvation. This chapter will deal with these related concepts first, and subsequently consider Christological aspects including the Lordship of Christ.

8.1 THE CONCEPT OF GOD

8.1.1 God as a personal Being

In the Bible God reveals himself as a personal Being who enters into a covenant relationship with His chosen people (Gen. 17). This background is indispensable for a Biblical view of the Lordship of Christ. It is also a prerequisite for the Christian to enter into a personal relationship with a heavenly lord and master.

In traditional Africa the concept of God was vague (see par. 7.2.2). He could be viewed in both a personal and impersonal manner. The influence of the Biblical message has resulted in God, especially God the Father, acquiring a greater personal identity in present day African Christianity. The concept of God the Holy Spirit is more obscure. Some observers reckon the Holy Spirit is seen as an impersonal force while others deny this and claim He is seen as a personal force (Daneel 1987:262).

It is important that theologians, church leaders, Bible translators, etc., use personal terms when referring to the Triune God.

To illustrate: It is important that in Sotho/Tswana languages personal concords be used to refer to *Modimo* (God) and *Moya* (Spirit).

The word *moya* is not in the *mo-/ba-* noun class (the class used for persons) but in the *mo-/me-* noun class (the class used for impersonal things). We should be prepared to break

the rules of grammar for the sake of clarity about the Person of the Holy Spirit. It would, for example, be better to speak of *MoyaMokgethwa le maatla a gagwe* (the Holy Spirit and His power) than *MoyaMokgethwa le maatla a wona* (the Holy Spirit and its power). ‘Maatla a wona’ is grammatically correct, but conveys the impression of the Spirit not as a person but a something. ‘Maatla a gagwe’ is grammatically incorrect, but it conveys the right message: the Spirit is a person.

There are interesting differences between translations in this respect. Romans 8:16 (“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit...”) is rendered in the ‘old’ Southern Sotho translation as follows: “*Le oona Moea o emelana le moea oa rona...*” (*oona* is impersonal: ‘the Spirit itself’). The Northern Sotho translation reads: “*Moyamokgethwa yena mong ke hlatse ya go kwana le moya wa rena...*” (*yena* is personal: ‘the Spirit himself’).

The same principle applies to the word *Modimo* (God). Romans 8:32 (“He who did not spare his own Son...”) may serve as an example. The old Southern Sotho translation says: “*Oona o sa kang oa qenehela Mora oa oona...*” (*oona* is impersonal: ‘its Son’), but the new translation reads: “*Ha e le moo a sa ka a qenehela Mora oa hae ka sebele...*” (*a* and *oa hae* are personal: ‘His Son’).

8.1.2 God’s self-revelation

It is impossible to establish a relationship with a ‘lord’ without communication. To this end the Lordship of Christ should function against the Biblical background, God’s self-revelation. The Belgic Confession, in the second article, maintains that God makes himself known to us by two means: First by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, second by His holy and divine Word (Book of Praise:442). Theologians usually differentiate between God’s general revelation and His special revelation, the latter consisting of revelation in deed and in word (Pinnock 1988).

Whether the Word is indeed a means of revelation, has been questioned by many. J.I. Packer judges that today “most theologians will only speak of Scripture as a human record, exposition, and celebration of God in history” (1988c:628). He considers this to be an incomplete statement, because the Bible presents itself as a work of grace whereby God “brings sinners into a relational saving knowledge of himself” (1988c:628). That the revelation in the Bible leads to a broad salvific knowledge, is stated by the apostle Paul in

his second letter to Timothy: “(The holy Scriptures) are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” (2 Tim. 3:15-16).

In paragraph 7.2.2 we have demonstrated that in traditional African religion God is a silent God (also Van Rooy 1995:75, Turaki 1999:163). Mbiti maintains that African religion “is written in the history, the hearts and experiences of the people” and that this results in a “very pragmatic” type of religion (1975:15). On the concept of authority in African religion he says: “The followers of African Religion are not bound by any authority which goes back in history. They just follow it as it has been handed down to them by former generations, changing whatever is necessary in order to suit their circumstances of life.” (:15) Indeed, in this context God is silent.

In Western society a different process has led to comparable results. D.A. Carson has described recent religious and philosophical developments in Western society in his book titled ‘The Gagging of God’ (Carson 1996). He argues that philosophical pluralism and religious pluralism (the conviction that it is wrong to believe that one religion is superior to another) have led to an outlook which is often labelled postmodernism (:19). He also describes some societal trends that are partly causes and partly effects of this pluralism. One of these trends is secularization (:37). Another is rising Biblical illiteracy (:42). A third is pragmatism (:45). When these trends dominate a society, God is reduced to silence.

It has been noted that African people living in a township environment undergo influences of both the traditional African worldview and Western secularism (par. 7.1). Those church members who are still to a certain extent under the influence of the traditional African outlook may find it difficult to get used to the idea of a God who reveals himself and a Lord who guides the lives of his followers. Our research results indicate that African Christians are inclined to expect authoritative guidance from human intermediaries, especially the church leaders. The position of bishop Lekganyane in the ZCC and the position of charismatic leaders in Pentecostal churches are illustrative in this respect.

To those who have been ‘westernized’ to a certain degree, the dominant Western religious pluralism with its accompanying secularism and pragmatism will not be helpful. Neither will it facilitate acceptance of an authoritatively speaking and self-revealing God.

For a healthy functioning of the Lordship of Christ in African churches, it is necessary that the concept of God’s revelation is understood and accepted, especially his revelation by means of Scripture. In Western society secularism goes hand in hand with Biblical illiteracy (Carson 1996:42-44). To use Carson’s terminology: the more the Bible becomes a closed book, the more God is ‘gagged’. In African society there still seems to be an openness toward and longing for the study of the Word of God. This may, hopefully, lead to the ‘ungagging’ of God in Africa.

8.1.3 A covenant relationship

In traditional African religion God was seen as a remote God (see par. 7.2.2). He was not expected to be involved in the doings and predicaments of man (Van Rooy 1995:29). African myths describe how the separation of God and man occurred. The blame is usually not placed on man who rebelled against God but on God who deserted man (Van Rooy 1995:102). As a result “it is man, not God, whose voice calls through the desolate garden, Where art thou?” (Taylor 1963:76). In African religion there is no solution for bridging the gap between man and God. Man has accepted the separation between him and God and this, according to Mbiti’s evaluation, is “the most serious cul-de-sac” in African religion (Mbiti 1969:98-99).

Our research has shown that, in the experience of many Christians in the Soshanguve township, God has come nearer. Still, what is lacking is the intimacy of the relationship which God establishes between Himself and his people. Daneel’s general evaluation is confirmed by the results of our research: Fellowship with God is an implicit fact rather than a prominent feature of worship (1987:255).

The Biblical concept of the covenant of God is important here. God, in His mercy, has chosen to enter into an intimate covenant relationship with His people. The main covenant promise of God, which embraces all other promises, is contained in the oft-

repeated words of Genesis 17:7, "I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you". L. Berkhof has described the nature of the covenant relationship as follows: "In general the relation between the covenant God and the single believer or believers collectively is represented as the close relationship between man and wife, bridegroom and bride, a father and his children. This implies that the response of those who share the covenant blessings will be one of true, faithful, trustful, consecrated, and devoted love." (1958:277)

Of special significance in this respect is the name 'Yahweh'. This name stresses the covenant faithfulness of God (Berkhof 1958:49). God is the self-existent, self-determining faithful God of the covenant (Reymond 1998:158). The name points to the immutability of God's relation to His people. In all that He does for them, God exhibits an inherent determination to persist with His chosen ones.

The name also points to the lordship of God. Yahweh is acknowledged as Lord in his direction, which is all encompassing, they embrace the whole of life. "Firmly grasped both in emotion and will, man receives unconditionally binding direction which gives meaning, measure and purpose to his life..." (Quell 1965:1079). The covenant relationship between God and his people is, in a sense, totalitarian. It demands total self-surrender. No part of human life or ones emotions is excluded from it. At the same time it is the only relationship which makes a person totally free for life, as it was meant to be.

The concept of the covenant is the answer to the needs of both Western and African people. Bosch, in describing a postmodern paradigm, maintains that Western people are not in need of objective truths anymore, but that they rather need a so-called 'fiduciary framework' (1991:358-360). Haak maintains that African Christians also need this fiduciary framework and believes that the covenant is the Biblical answer. The covenant relationship between God and his people is reflected especially well in the book of Psalms. Haak feels that in missionary preaching more use should be made of the atmosphere and sensitivity of the Psalms (2000:49).

There has been some debate about the usefulness of the covenant concept in the African context. Vonkeman (2000:59) feels that the term is prone to be misunderstood in a legalistic sense. He therefore prefers to use the Father-child metaphor instead.

Wielenga, however, in his dissertation on covenant and mission (1998), considers the covenant concept to be indispensable. He develops a missiological theory showing how the covenant perspective may be applied in missionary praxis. One of the aspects he deals with is the continuing relevance of the law of God (1998:216). Wielenga grants that there are many pitfalls, especially where the law is preached to people who previously were used to a legalistic type of traditional religion. But fear of legalism should not lead the church to refrain from teaching the law of God, nor from using the covenant concept.

The Biblical concept of the covenant is a powerful antidote against legalism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, legalism is strong in churches such as the Lutheran and Zion Christian Church because members see the laws and the rules of the church as precisely that: the laws and the rules of the church itself. When, however, the covenant is experienced as an intimate, personal relationship with God, impersonal legalism is replaced by an attitude of God-centered responsibility (Van Rooy 1995:170).

8.2 SALVATION

The previous chapter (par. 7.4.2) highlighted some differences between churches regarding the view of salvation. In the Lutheran church salvation is primarily understood in terms of receiving life-force, prosperity and healing, protection against misfortunes and, to a lesser extent, receiving forgiveness of sins. In the Zion Christian Church salvation is primarily understood in terms of receiving life-force, prosperity and healing, and protection against misfortunes and witchcraft. Forgiveness of sins is mentioned in passing only. In the older Pentecostal churches salvation is understood in terms of having received forgiveness of sins and experiencing a powerful Spirit-filled life (which is believed to imply victory over sin, sickness and demonic forces). In the younger Pentecostal churches the situation is similar, but there is less emphasis on forgiveness of sins and more emphasis on a prosperous life.

Generally it is true that a large section of African township Christianity tends to look for salvation here and now, and that the nature of salvation is of this world (which does not mean that it is absolutely materialistic and secularized). There is an inclination to see salvation in creational terms. This affects the position of Christ in the faith of believers, in that there is basically no need for a separate Christ. The type of salvation expected from Jesus Christ is the same as that expected from the Father and vice versa. This is detrimental to the functioning of the Lordship of Christ.

In order to deal with this important issue, it behoves us to set forth the scope of salvation. During the history of the church there has been much dispute about this. The Old Testament usage of the term to express God's action in saving his people from their enemies has sometimes been taken as normative, and salvation has been understood as freeing people from hunger and poverty so that they may live a fulfilling life in this world. The thought of spiritual salvation has retreated into the background (Marshall 1988:610-611). A clear example of this was the treatment the subject of salvation received at the well-known Bangkok CWME conference in 1973: Salvation was defined exclusively in present-world terms (Bosch 1991:396). Salvation was understood as a struggle for economic justice, against oppression, for solidarity, etcetera.

Bosch maintains that it is impossible to return to the classical interpretation of salvation, which he defines as "only escape from the wrath of God and the redemption of the individual soul in the hereafter" (:398). Bosch says the meaning of the cross is that it serves as "a model to be emulated" (:514). He feels that Christians should engage in a mission of self-emptying and humble service in the world.

We differ with Bosch here. Without embarking on a discussion of the doctrine of salvation, we refer to study results of the Biblical theology which shows that the apostle Paul understands salvation as salvation from approaching wrath (Foerster 1971:993). People need to realize that the major need of humanity is for reconciliation with God (Marshall 1988:611) This does not imply that the wrath of God is the only thing from which people need to be saved. J.I. Packer describes the scope of salvation as being saved from a former position under the wrath of God, the dominion of sin, and the power of death; from the natural condition of being mastered by the world, the flesh, and the devil;

from the fears that a sinful life engenders, and from the many vicious habits that were part of it. (1993:146-147) Salvation is not solely negative (salvation *from*). Packer again: "Our salvation involves, first, Christ dying for us and, second, Christ living in us and we living in Christ, united with him in his death and risen life." (:147) We agree with Marshall when he considers the spiritual side of salvation to be fundamental: "Spiritual salvation is not simply a small and dispensable part of a broader 'salvation' but is the basis of a new attitude between people. Granted that the task of the church is to care for the spiritual and the physical needs of people, the NT sees the spiritual task, which is inseparable from material concern, as fundamental." (Marshall 1988:611)

It is clear that there is a close relationship between the view of salvation and the role of Jesus Christ in the faith of believers. Like all other people on earth, Africans would naturally want a saviour who delivers them from the problems they experience. A victor-type of King who defeats dangerous spirits, who defeats oppressive political enemies, who leads his people into a valley of green pastures with plenty of food, yes, he is welcome. But a crucified King is a different matter. One cannot follow Him without acknowledging that He had to be crucified because of our sins. This is irrelevant as well as annoying to both traditional African religion and modern Western secularism. A confession of the need for Jesus' crucifixion can only stem from the work of the Holy Spirit in man's heart. In church history reformation and revival usually start when people are convinced of the severity of their sins and guilt before a holy and just God. This, according to the gospel of John, is a work of the Holy Spirit: "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin" (John 16:8). There can be no true faith unless it rests on the foundation of conviction of sin and reconciliation through the atoning death of Christ.

Packer (1988b) describes the Biblical pattern of revival as follows: "In revival God is said to arise and come to his people, in the sense of making his holy presence felt among them (Ps. 80; Is. 64; Zc. 2:10; cf. Heb. 3; 1 Cor. 14:24-25), so that his reality becomes inescapable, and the infinite ugliness, guilt, ill-desert and pollution of sin are clearly seen (Acts 2:37, cf. 5:1-11). The gospel of redeeming love and free forgiveness through the cross is valued as the best news ever, and the exercises and gestures of repentance

whereby believers distance themselves from their sins (confession to God and others, restitution, public renunciation of vices) become vigorous and violent (Mt. 3:5-10, 11:12; Acts 19:18-19; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; Jas. 5:16).” (:588.)

It cannot be that African Christianity should have less need of this reviving act of God than other parts of Christianity, today or in the past. African Christianity needs a more balanced and a more Biblical view of salvation. Only when this is achieved, will the Lordship of Christ become a reality in the life and faith of individual believers.

8.3 THE PERSON OF JESUS

8.3.1 Jesus’ resurrection and ascension

The proclamation that God had resurrected Jesus from the dead was a very strange teaching to the Jewish ear. It was even offensive to the majority of them because Jesus had been executed as a blasphemer on a Roman cross (Reymond 1998:565). The disciples of Jesus believed, however, that there were compelling reasons for such a proclamation. Two strands of evidence convinced them beyond all doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead: the empty tomb and the fact of His postcrucifixion appearances (Reymond 1998:565-566). One of these appearances, the encounter on the Damascus Road, convinced Saul of Tarsus that Jesus had risen from the grave (Witherington 1993:102). He came to the immediate conclusion that the Christian claims of Jesus’ resurrection must have been true. Afterwards he would write: “Have I not seen the risen Lord?” (1 Cor. 15:8). At the same time this encounter with Jesus convinced the apostle that Jesus had ascended into heaven and that He therefore was God’s anointed one. John had a similar experience on the island of Patmos. When Jesus appeared to him, He said: “I am the living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever.” (Rev 1:18)

Closely connected to the ascension of Jesus into heaven is the session of Jesus at the right hand of God. The doctrine of Christ’s heavenly session is important because it

emphasizes Christ's entry into His kingly office. G.L. Bray observes: "Christ's present reign is a reminder that his work on our behalf continues in the present. His victorious triumph assures us of the efficacy of his work of mediation, and is particularly important for our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. When the doctrine of the heavenly session is eclipsed, the work of the Spirit can be detached from that of Christ, either by too high a doctrine of the visible church, or by a spirituality which virtually ignores the work of Christ altogether." (Bray 1998b:47)

The resurrection, ascension and session of Jesus are important doctrines with respect to a Biblical view of the Lordship of Christ. In their faith many African Christians have given Jesus the place of a historical figure ("He has died for our sins"). Although it is believed that He is 'there', ideas of His present activities are vague. As a result He has faded away, even as a person. This is detrimental to the functioning of the Lordship of Christ.

Of course this is not a typically African problem. In many modern Christologies in Europe and America Jesus is a marginalized figure. Whether He is alive at all, is questioned or denied. A large part of modern theology is based on the premise that Jesus is not alive and that the resurrected Jesus is a product of the faith of his followers. Many theologians have relegated Christ's resurrection and ascension to the realms of legend (Reymond 1998:571,576).

Likewise, in some African Christologies there is a tendency to focus more on the so-called 'Christ event' than the living Christ himself. J.S. Pobee, for example, maintains that the starting point of Christian theology should be the "Christ event" and that theology should reflect on the implications of that event (Pobee 1979:28). Pobee makes a case for a "Christocentric world view" (:28), but this does not mean that the person of the living Christ is central in his theology. Instead, Pobee sets out to formulate implications of the work of the historical Christ (:28-32).

It may seem strange that on the one hand ideas of Christ's present work are vague, while on the other hand African churches show a proclivity towards a Christus Victor Christology (e.g. Daneel 1987:258, Staples 1981:365). The explanation, however, is not difficult: The person of Jesus is not important in this Christology. By analogy, 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. The victory is more important than the victor. Seen from this perspective, the so-called Christus Victor Christology could aptly be called a 'Victory Christology', as indeed it has been called a *theologia gloriae* (e.g., Daneel 1987:258). It appears that especially Pentecostal African churches, though they accept the doctrine of Christ's resurrection and ascension wholeheartedly, are in danger of stressing the victory at the expense of the victor (see par. 7.4.7). In the process the work of the Holy Spirit is in danger of being detached from Christ.

One of the relevant doctrines in this respect, is the doctrine of Christ's session at the right hand of God. In Revelation chapter 5 Christ is revealed as the One who breaks the seals and opens the scroll containing God's plan of judgment and redemption. This means that Christ has received authority to execute this divine plan and that He is indeed the one executing it (Beale 1999:340). Other relevant doctrines should be used as well to proclaim the present activity of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (e.g. Christ's Headship of the church).

8.3.2 Jesus' humanity

Another problem in much of African Christianity is that the humanity of Jesus is overlooked (Daneel 1987:258). Jesus is absorbed in the term God, and to what extent He is still human, is not clear.

Parratt observes that the humanity of Jesus has received a good deal of attention from African theologians (1995:82). This, however, only concerns the humanity of Jesus during His life on earth. The unity of experience between Jesus and His people is emphasized: that He was born as man, grew into manhood, suffered, and died as all humans do. However, the *present* humanity of Jesus stays out of the picture.

The doctrine of resurrection is significant in this respect. It implies that in His present state Jesus possesses full humanity (Bray 1988c:583). He is still man: and the manhood he now possesses is physical as well as spiritual. This has important implications for the present work of Christ. Firstly, as a priest His intercession continues and is grounded in

the fact that he lives in eternity (Hebr. 7:25). Secondly, as a prophet He is the source of the apostolic message. Paul makes this plain in 1 Cor. 11:23, "I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you" (Bray 1988c:584). Thirdly, as a king He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. As a sovereign ruler, however, He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has been tempted in every way, just as we are (Hebr 4:14-16). Being a man, the memories of Nazareth and Cana, of poverty and pain, of temptation and suffering, are imprinted indelibly on the Lord's memory (Bray 1998c:584). He knows our humanness from the inside.

The fact that the Bible clearly proclaims Jesus' present humanity, is one reason why it is theologically problematic to give Jesus a place in the realm of the ancestors. Many African theologians, among them Pobee, Bujo and Nyamiti, have tried to develop an African Christology by using the ancestor concept (Schreiter 1992:6-12). They speak about Jesus as 'the great ancestor', the 'proto-ancestor' or the 'brother-ancestor'. Bediako also speaks favourably of 'Ancestor-Christology', but one in which Christ "features as Lord among the ancestors" (Bediako 1995:228). In doing so Bediako clearly wishes to avoid universalism, but the fact remains that Jesus has been placed in the wrong category. Jesus is not in the category of spirits that do not have bodies. After His death Jesus did not enter into the realm of ancestral spirits, but He was raised from the grave with a new body that could be touched (John 20:27) and fed (John 21:12). He is fully God and fully human, body and soul.

8.3.3 Jesus' divinity and the Trinity

H. Bavinck has stated that Christianity stands or falls with the confession of the deity of Christ and of the Trinity (Bavinck 1928:251). He was of the opinion that every error results from, or upon deeper reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of the doctrine of the Trinity (:255). We believe that this is as much true for theology in Africa as for theology in Bavinck's part of the world.

Jesus is the beloved Son of God (Mt 3:17), fully God together with the Father and the Spirit. One may have doubts about the translatability of the term 'Trinity' within the

African context, but the doctrine of the Trinity – though it will remain a mystery that we will not be able to understand fully – can be translated into any African language and be proclaimed in any African context.

Nyamiti has drawn attention to one of the main weaknesses of modern African theology in that theologians try to draft so-called African Christologies while ignoring the doctrine of the Trinity. He maintains: “Those who pretend to have interest in Christ but not in the Trinity are in fact interested in a false Christ, a Jesus who is not of the Bible” (1992:15). And again: “All truly profound theology must be ultimately rooted in the Trinity – so much so that without this grounding it is bound to be radically superficial” (:16). The validity of Nyamiti’s observation is illustrated by a quote from Parratt’s book ‘Reinventing Christianity’: “One of the most promising approaches to christology that has been advocated by African theologians has been a “functional,” or existential approach, which focuses on the deeds of Jesus in relation to the individual believer.” (1995:81) Contra Parratt, we agree with Nyamiti when he says: “Obviously, an African christologist must ask the question: Who is Christ for the African? But his question cannot be properly answered unless one knows first who Christ is *in himself*” (1992:15, italics by Nyamiti). W.D. Jonker has shown that it is impossible to deal with the work of Christ without dealing with the ontological question ‘who is Christ’ (Jonker 1977:172-174).

The weakness spotted by Nyamiti is not found in academic circles only. Our research has shown that many African Christians have difficulty in ‘locating’ Jesus after His ascension. H.W. Turner observed that Jesus’ divinity is taken for granted (quoted by Daneel 1988:258). At the same time, Jesus’ position in the Trinity is vague. It appears that Jesus has somehow merged into a divine conglomerate. The result is, according to Schreiter’s judgment, that “Christ is still a largely distant figure for many Africans” (1992:ix).

For the Lordship of Christ to be a reality in the faith of African Christians, clarity on both the divinity of Jesus Christ and the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Father and the Spirit is required. Within the scope of this thesis it is impossible to offer expositions of Biblical support for these two doctrines. A few references may suffice.

Regarding the divinity of Jesus Christ, R.L. Reymond has published an impressive summary of the biblical evidence as well as the critical arguments in his 'Jesus, Divine Messiah' (1990). Much of the material has been used again in his systematic theology (1998). There is no doubt that in the New Testament "Christ is associated with God in astonishing ways" (Hurtado 1997:178). He is accorded divine titles, He functions in divine roles and is formally revered in specific ways otherwise reserved for God (:178).

Regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, it may be that the theological climate today is not favourable towards the use of this concept. But whether the term 'trinity' is used or not, there are three Biblical propositions underlying this doctrine, which any theologian in any context in the world will have to deal with: 1. There is one God, 2. God is three persons, 3. Each person is fully God (Reymond 1998:205-206; Grudem 1994:226-241).

There have been calls for a 'new theological idiom' in Africa (Bediako 1995:91-108) and there is an urge to seek African metaphors to replace those of the Western tradition (Parratt 1995:197). The word 'trinity' and expressions like 'sameness in substance' and 'distinctness in subsistence' which have been used by the church from the third century (Reymond 1998:206), are thus in danger to be rejected as typical products of the Western proclivity "to understand the Christian Gospel as a system of ideas" (Bediako 1995:106). On the other hand, to formulate new metaphors is a tall order. Parratt observes "that even the most innovative of African theologians have hesitated to jettison the parameters of Chalcedonian language." (1995:197)

The doctrine of the Trinity is indeed, as Bavinck has said, the central doctrine of Christian religion. Christology and, consequently, the Lordship of Christ are based on it. The rejection or neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity jeopardizes the position of Jesus Christ. In order to strengthen faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in African churches, it will be necessary to teach the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

8.4 THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

8.4.1 A Master/servant relationship

Interpreters agree that the Lordship of Jesus points to His authority and power to exercise the Father's sovereignty, with the aim of making everything subject to God (e.g. Foerster 1965:1090). They also agree that, while the Lordship of Jesus is cosmic in scope, its centre is Lordship over men (:1090). This relationship, between Christians and Jesus, resembles the relationship of a *doulos*, a slave, to a *kyrios*, a master (e.g. Witherington 1997:668). L. W. Hurtado maintains: "The term (*kyrios*, AJdV) expresses the relationship of Christians to Jesus as subjects to their master, as in the phrase "our Lord Jesus Christ" (1993:569; also Sevenster 1948:155)

In the Bible this Master/servant relationship is especially clear in so-called paraenetic contexts, passages which deal with matters of Christian behaviour. This is illustrated in Romans 14:1-12 where Paul urges believers differing over scruples of food and calendar matters, not to judge one another harshly. One man may eat, another may refrain from eating, one man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. The common motivation, however, is that they act "to the Lord" (Rom 14:6). Christian existence is even characterized as living and dying "to the Lord" to whom we belong (Rom 14:8). In chapter 16 the apostle Paul characterizes people who cause divisions, as "not serving our Lord Christ" (Rom 16:17-18). In other words, real Christianity can be characterized as 'serving the Lord Christ'. Another passage where Paul speaks about Christian behaviour is 1 Thess 4:1-12. He reminds them of the instructions he gave them "by the authority of the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess 4:2). To the Corinthians Paul gave commands from the Lord Jesus Christ: "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord)..." (1 Cor 7:10).

Hurtado summarizes these and other examples "as showing that Paul tended to refer to Jesus as 'Lord' in contexts where Paul instructs the churches in Christian obedience, and, more generally, in referring to Christian life and relationships, and the service involved in

spreading the gospel message. As their *kyrios*, Jesus claimed the obedience of his followers and defined the sphere of their endeavour” (1993:567).

Our research has shown that this notion is poorly developed in various denominations in the Soshanguve township. Although many Christians believe that Jesus Christ has died for their sins on the cross, the idea of Christ’s Lordship was either absent (especially amongst Lutheran and ZCC-respondents) or understood lop-sidedly in terms of a *Christus Victor* Christology (Pentecostals). The result of this has been a breach between Christ the Lord and the believers on earth. It has been indicated (par. 7.4.4-7) that this gap has been filled in various ways: the laws of the church, the leadership of the church, ceremonies performed by the church, a distorted view on the work of the Holy Spirit, etcetera.

In order to rectify this situation Christ will have to be preached as the *Christus Dominus*, Christ the Lord and Master of all aspects of life.

This *Christus Dominus* Christology, if developed along Biblical lines, will have enormous implications for many aspects of Christian life.

Three examples:

One: When considering the ethics of sexuality the Bible emphasizes that this area of life is also subject to the Lordship of Christ. “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord,” Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6:13). He warns against uniting oneself with a prostitute and he reminds his readers that their bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. “You are not your own”, Paul says, “you were bought at a price” (6:19-20). This is a far cry from the legalistic manner in which sins against the seventh commandment are dealt with in many African churches. As our research has shown, pastors complain that trespassers of this commandment do not feel guilty about it. Instead, they even tend to negotiate with the church leadership about the length of the ‘punishment’. These are signs that Christ is not seen as the Lord of Christian life. To address this weakness Christians need to view Christ as the Lord, who has bought them at a high price and who is the Owner of their bodies.

Two: In the field of work ethics and labour relations the Bible emphasizes that even in this area of life Jesus Christ should be served as Lord. Speaking within the social context of his time, Paul asks slaves to obey and to respect their earthly masters, with sincerity of heart, “just as you would obey Christ” (Eph 6:5). He continues to say: “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Eph 6:7). Masters are asked to treat their slaves well, knowing “that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven” (Eph 6:9). Jesus is the Master of both masters and slaves. Anyone who works, should do so as if working for the Lord.

This approach will go a long way towards combatting evils such as corruption, nepotism and laziness. Of course, these are not specifically African problems. But if Africa wants to see the end of poverty and a measure of prosperity for everyone, there is only one solution: Africa should be inhabited by people who do their daily work ‘as if for the Lord’, not for personal gain or for ‘kinship gain’.

The Nigerian theologian Y. Turaki maintains that the ‘law of kinship’ is “the queen of African moral laws” (1999:131). This law governs the ethical thinking of Africans, and the results are far-reaching. Turaki: “The question of right or wrong within the context of the outside world becomes relative. Practices such as cheating, embezzlement and mismanagement are usually not viewed as wrongs as long as they are committed within the “outside world”, outside of the kinship community boundaries and also, as long as they bring material benefits to the kinsfolk.” (1999:139) Turaki points out that Christianity has to address the traditional basis of responsibility and accountability. “They are not limited to one’s own kinship community, but pertain to everyone” (:140). In this context, a Biblical understanding of the Lordship of Christ over the life of the individual believer is of the utmost importance. The primary allegiance should be toward Jesus Christ, not toward the kinship group.

Three: The same pertains to family relationships. Wives should submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22). Husbands should love their wives “as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). Children should obey their parents “in the Lord” (Eph 6:1). Parents should bring their children up “in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Jesus Christ is the Lord of both husbands and wives, parents and children. Each one of us

is ultimately responsible towards the heavenly Master, Jesus Christ, for our conduct in the relationships in which we have been placed.

This approach will go a long way in saving marriages, bringing happiness to homes, and forging intimate bonds between parents and children.

8.4.2 Christ the only Lord

One of the implications of the Lordship of Yahweh was that He was, and wanted to be, the only Lord of his people (Foerster 1965:1078). The Lordship of Yahweh found its practical culmination in the commandment 'you shall have no other gods before me' (:1079). Why was this so important? Because to have other gods "implies not the theoretical acceptance of their existence but practical, willing appropriation of their powers, i.e. service in the widest sense" (:1079). Therefore the prophets chastised the people of Israel for trying to serve two masters. Elijah told the people at Mount Carmel: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). It is clear that the lordship of God excluded authoritative relations of the same or a similar kind.

The same principle applies to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He himself declared: "No one can serve two masters" (Mat 6:24). Jesus is the only Lord and the only Saviour: "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul is very clear on the subject in 1 Cor. 8 where he says that there are many so-called gods and many so-called lords, "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:5,6).

This aspect of the Lordship of Jesus Christ has important implications for the church's attitude towards the traditional African ancestor religion. Ancestor religion is more than just the theoretical acceptance of the existence of ancestral spirits. It is an acknowledgement of the power of ancestors to affect people's lives (Hammond-Tooke 1981b:31). This, in turn, leads to people serving the ancestors and being lorded over by

them. "The ancestors control religion, social, political and economic life and morality and ethics." (Turaki 1999:179)

Thus it is by no means strange that our research results suggest that the strength of traditional beliefs is inversely proportional to the strength of beliefs in Christ as Saviour and Lord. Those who venerate ancestors have a much weaker conviction of the Lordship of Christ than those who reject these practices. The reason is that the ancestor cult is a form of lordship. It dominates and governs by so-called messages, which are believed to originate from the ancestral spirits.

An illustration, taken from the TV-program 'Love Stories' which was broadcast by SABC 3 on the 4th July 2000: During this program a black man related how his life fell apart during the early 1990's. He went to the pastor of his church (Zionist type). They referred him to a diviner. The diviner made the divination bones 'speak' and he was told that there was a problem with his grandmother. She had been buried long ago, but apparently her spirit could not find rest. The man then visited elderly relatives in the rural area of Natal in order to discover the cause of her restlessness. Family secrets were disclosed. Grandmother had been living with grandfather, but they had never been properly married. Grandfather had many girlfriends which had driven grandmother crazy. She had tried to bewitch grandfather, but in the end she became mentally ill and killed some of her own children. Now, after all these years, it appeared that grandmother still wished to be married to grandfather. Only then would her spirit find rest. As a result the two families organized a 'wedding ceremony' in which a young virgin girl, representing grandmother, was vicariously married to a boy of grandfather's family. It was all done as if it was the real thing. Lobola (dowry) was paid by grandfather's family and the marriage between grandfather and grandmother was pronounced to be official.

After this the man's life returned to normal. He went back to his church and related the story to the congregation. God was praised for his help in solving this problem.

Significantly, the name of Jesus Christ was never mentioned.

This story illustrates that ancestor religion is not simply a form of filial piety but that people's lives are governed by the ancestor spirits (or the powers that are behind them). Ancestor veneration is more than just giving honour. It implies being lorded over by spirit forces. Turaki is right – and courageous – in placing the ancestor cult in the

category of idolatry (1999:179). Only a radical break with ancestor religion will free people from this domination and place them under the reign of Christ.

This is not the place to embark upon a discussion of possible theological responses towards ancestor religion. It is clear, however, that the person and work of Jesus Christ are of central importance in any theological approach towards ancestors. J.V. Taylor and R.L. Staples have stressed the importance of the Second Adam concept (Romans 5) in this respect (Taylor 1963:109-126; Staples 1981:412-425). Other Christological concepts which are of importance are the victory of Christ over death and evil forces, and the three offices of Christ, prophet, priest and king (Staples 1981:400-442).

Whether there is any theological answer which will allow African Christians to live with their dead in some significant sense, whilst at the same time being fully responsible to the gospel remains a difficult question. Staples feels that the mystical union of the church with Christ may provide some way for African Christians to somehow 'live' with their dead, but that only applies to those who have died in Christ (:450).

8.4.3 An intimate relationship

In line with what has been said about the intimate covenant relationship between God and His people (par. 8.1.3), it is necessary to draw attention to the intimacy of the relationship between Jesus and his followers. NT scholars point out that the apostle Paul sometimes speaks in very personal terms of the relationship between Jesus and Christians. An example is Phil. 3:8 where the apostle Paul speaks about "Christ Jesus my Lord" (Hurtado 1993:569, Sevenster 1948:156). It is a relationship which is characterized by love. The apostle Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians by saying: "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." (Eph. 6:24) Both John and Paul speak about the fellowship believers have with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3; 1 Cor 1:9). This bond of fellowship will reach its potential when Jesus Christ is revealed, yet even in the present era it is a reality.

Calvin has written a beautiful paragraph about 'Christ's oneness with us' (Institutes III,2,24). A quote:

“We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him. Rather we ought to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us. So the apostle teaches us: “Now your body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit of Christ which dwells in you is life because of righteousness”() Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.”

By saying this, Calvin reflects the apostle Paul, whose message is so intense in Galatians: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). And again: “Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?” (2 Cor 13:5). Although he does not rule out the possibility of a negative answer (“unless, of course, you fail the test”), the expected answer is a positive one.

Jesus Christ maintains a close relationship with all who belong to Him through the Holy Spirit. To belong to Christ, is to have the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). To have faith in Jesus, is to have received the Holy Spirit. A life in the freedom of Christ is a life lived by the Spirit (Eph 5:1,16) Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature and live by the Spirit (Eph 5:24-25). Although Jesus ascended into heaven, He remained with the believers through the Holy Spirit.

The relevance of this to African Christianity is clear. Our research has led to the conclusion that for many Christians in Soshanguve Jesus Christ still seems to be a remote Christ (par. 7.5). The Biblical notion of ‘Christ in us’ and ‘we in Christ’, effectuated through the work of the Holy Spirit, will strengthen the relationship between believers and the Lord Jesus.

The importance of this matter can be seen in views church members hold on the effect of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Many young African churches struggle with the meaning of the Lord’s Supper because this close relationship between Christ and the believers through the Holy Spirit is not understood well. Möller found that members of African independent churches tend to have magical views of the Lord’s Supper and that members of mainline churches do not expect much from taking part in it (1974:153). Daneel believes that individuals who attach magical significance to the Lord’s Supper are found

in both independent and mainline churches (1987:254). Our research has shown that in the Lutheran church there is a tendency to expect creational type of blessings from taking part in the Lord's Supper (par. 4.8). The danger of 'ex opere operato' beliefs is real where people have a magico-ritualistic background.

There is a need to understand the Lord's Supper as a celebration of the unity between the Head of the church and the congregation, through the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Supper is, after all, a rite which exhibits communion with Christ (Packer 1993:217). In this respect the 'sursum corda' of the Reformation liturgy is particularly important. We quote from the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper as used in Reformed Churches:

"Brothers and sisters, in order that we may now be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, we must not cling with our hearts to the outward symbols of bread and wine, but lift our hearts on high in heaven, where Christ, our advocate, is, at the right hand of His heavenly Father. Let us not doubt that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls with His body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of Him" (Book of Praise 1987:600).

In order to develop a Biblical understanding of the intimate relationship between Christ and His followers, it will be necessary to deal with the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Although there may be different interpretations of minor aspects of the Paraclete-texts in the book of John, it is agreed that these texts show that the Spirit's task is to mediate knowledge of, and union and communion with, the ascended and glorified Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Packer 1988:317). Important aspects of the Spirit's ministry are the following: The Spirit reveals Jesus' reality and the truth about Him. The Spirit unites believers to Christ so that they share in His kingdom and become members in the body of which He is Head. The Spirit mediates fellowship with the Father and the Son. The Spirit transforms believers into Christ's moral and spiritual likeness. As 1 Cor. 12:3 illustrates, the Spirit is known by the fact that He will promote the confession of Jesus as Lord (Packer 1988:317, Paige 1993:407).

This Christocentric focus of the Spirit's ministry, which is consistently sustained in the NT, should also be sustained in the teaching of the church in Africa. The results of our research have shown that there is a danger in African Christianity for church leaders to monopolize the work of the Holy Spirit and pretend to be Spirit-led apart from Scripture

(e.g. the role the church ‘prophets’ in the ZCC and the role of charismatic leaders in some Pentecostal churches). In the light of these aberrations clarity on the intimate association of the Spirit with the risen Lord Jesus, as well as the relationship between the Spirit and the word of God, is a necessity. It is self-evident that the word of God should also be included here, as the aim of both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit is to testify of Jesus (John 5:39, 15:26).

That the Holy Spirit and Scripture are inseparably conjoined, is a central tenet of the Reformation. It is not possible to discuss the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture here. A few Biblical illustrations may suffice. A beautiful illustration is the apostle Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. Full of the Holy Spirit the apostle addressed the crowd. The major part of his sermon was devoted to showing from the Scriptures (Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110) how the promises of God have been fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The Holy Spirit even inspired Peter to say that He, the Spirit, had been poured out by Jesus Christ (Acts 2:33). The same happened time and again. When the believers were all filled with the Holy Spirit after their prayer (Acts 4:31) they “spoke the Word of God boldly.” Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5) showed the Sanhedrin, from the history of Israel and from the Word of God, that they had resisted God by killing Jesus of Nazareth. And then the Spirit made him to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God (6:55). Philip, the evangelist, was told by the Holy Spirit to approach a man from Ethiopia. They ended up studying the words of the prophet Isaiah, with Philip telling the man the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:29-35). In paraenetic contexts the apostle Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, used to refer his readers to the Word of God and then reason with them on the basis of the Word. This does not imply that the Holy Spirit may not use supernatural and mysterious means to work in the church. But it shows that the Holy Spirit definitely uses inspired Scripture to build the church.

The implications for churches in Africa are important. In the traditional worldview moral consciousness was governed by the community. Turaki maintains: “Religious, moral and ethical codes, duties and obligations, authority and legitimacy and principles are communitarian in nature, even when derived from the gods, spirit beings or the ancestors” (1999:137). This means that every individual receives moral and ethical guidance from the community, in fact, from the leaders of the community: the chief, the diviner, the elders,

etcetera. God, the gods, and even the ancestors, were not thought to be involved in the day to day moral guidance of the people. The African community was to a large extent autonomous.

This is the background of the problem which has been indicated above: In the experience of many Christians in Africa a breach exists between themselves and the Lord Jesus. They do not expect moral guidance from Him. This gap has been filled by the church, its leaders and its laws. Church members are inclined to look to the church leadership for moral guidance. This is a generalization, of course. There are many Christians who pray for daily guidance from the Lord by his Word and Spirit. This will have drastic effects: Morality and ethics are no longer defined by the community, but by the Lord Jesus Christ, by His Word and Spirit. Individual believers, though not leaving the community behind, now receive their moral guidance from an authority that is higher than the community.

8.4.4 A universal kingship

Scholars agree that the 'Kyrios' title also points to Jesus' Lordship over the world, i.e. His universal kingship which implies his triumph over the kingdom of darkness (e.g. Weber 1983:78-79; Cullmann 1963:222-223; Wentsel 1991:542-543, Reymond 1998:660). The rulers of this age have come to nothing (1 Cor. 2:6,8). Having disarmed the powers and authorities, Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Col. 2:15). Christ is the head over every power and authority (Col. 2:10). These aspects need to be seen in conjunction with the 'kyrios' title, as is shown in Phil. 2:9-11. When the apostle says that Jesus has been given the name that is above every name (2:9), he is clearly referring to the name 'kyrios' (2:11). Every knee should bow at the name of Jesus, not only those on earth, but also those in heaven and under the earth. This is echoed in the praise and honour given to the Lamb (Christ) in heaven, according to the book of Revelation: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (5:13) Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15, Rev. 19:16).

This power and authority of Jesus Christ is used “for” the church. The apostle Paul describes how Christ has been seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body...” (Eph 1:21-23). Jesus is both Lord of the world and Head of the church. This is a comforting message for Christians. It implies that Jesus has the power and authority to protect and to preserve the church. This message is conveyed in many ways in the New Testament. In John 10 He describes himself as the shepherd who has laid down his life for the sheep (10:11). As He has paid such a high price He will not allow them to perish: “No one will snatch them out of my hand” (10:28).

This aspect of Jesus being the head of everything *for* the church is missing in much of contemporary African theology. Universalism (the belief that all human beings will attain salvation) is a dominant trend. Christ is seen as the liberator of ‘the blacks’ or He is seen as a source of hope for ‘the African people’. Even Bediako, who is seen as a representative of Evangelical conservatism (Fon 1995:15), has – by implication – advocated the view that all African people will understand Christ in the same fashion, given that he shall reign over all for ever and ever. Fon has criticized this in the following way: “That Christ shall reign over all for ever and ever is a true Biblical position. But that on the basis of that reign Africans can all claim the Gospel as their ethnic story is far from the truth. Not all are under the reign of Christ now. There are those who are disobedient, filled with unbelief. They can never claim the Gospel as their story” (:338).

Jesus’ supreme power and authority should be seen in an eschatological perspective. The Bible portrays Jesus Christ as the one who sets world history in motion. The course of history is in his hands. He is the only one worthy to break the seals and open the scroll of world history (Rev 5:2-7). This will eventually lead to the coming of the Lord on the day of judgment. On that day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

This eschatological perspective is also missing in much of African theology and in the faith of African Christians. Some African theologians speak about it disdainfully. Waruta says: "Africans are not interested in suffering through their problems now while waiting for the bliss of heaven" (1991:62) According to Waruta Africans want a Saviour who shows them the way to liberation "now" (:62). Daneel argues that there is a tendency towards a one-sided eschatology among the African Independent Churches (1987:264), but he does not believe that the future perspective has been totally eclipsed (:267).

Jesus, as the supreme Lord, leads world history to its final destination: the consummation of the Kingdom of God. African Christianity needs this message, not as a panacea, but as an encouraging and comforting message. Having Christ as Lord means being in safe hands.

An important aspect of the universal kingship of Jesus Christ is His triumph over Satan and demonic forces. Although not all scholars would judge this to be important for the present day church, I concur with those who do (e.g. Wentzel 1991:550-553). The war against and the victory over Satan and his demons is an important work of Jesus Christ the Lord (Wentzel 1991:552). Scholars do not agree on the question whether the present day church has been given authority to rebuke demons and command them to leave. Grudem answers affirmatively (1994:427-430), Wentzel is hesitant, though he stresses the necessity of the war against demons and using the appropriate means to triumph over them (1991:559-560). Among these means he reckons the gifts of the Holy Spirit, proclamation of the gospel, prayer, praise hymns, and a sanctified lifestyle (:560). Leaving the question of the church's authority aside, it is clear that the destruction of the power and work of Satan is an important aspect of the work of Christ.

The results of our research have shown that there is a deep seated fear of evil spirits in African churches, especially Pentecostal churches. The Lordship of Christ is particularly meaningful in this context. The figure of the triumphant Jesus, who has disarmed the powers and authorities (Col. 2), does indeed meet the need of African Christians. R.L. Staples, who identified certain dangers and biases in the way the Christus Victor Christology is applied in African churches, nevertheless feels that this concept should "be

utilized constructively rather than opposed” (1981:373). Staples points out that this message of the powerful Christ, who is Lord over all, will do much to remove fear from people’s hearts. At the same time, the Christus Victor Christology may help to render the ancestors redundant (Staples 1981:377, 382).

A word of caution is necessary. During our research we found that evangelists and pastors, especially among Pentecostals, have a special liking for rebuking evil spirits and commanding them to leave, even when it is not clear that the afflicted person is really suffering from demonic possession. The disadvantage of rebuking demons is that the afflicted person is not confronted with a possible sinful lifestyle which may have contributed to the demonic influence. Furthermore, the person is not led to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ either. W. Grudem had pointed out that ‘demon possession’ is an unfortunate term (1994:423) and that in many cases it is more appropriate to find out whether specific sins have supplied a foothold for some kind of demonic influence (:422). If there is indeed demonic influence, the solution would not be rebuking the demon but leading the afflicted person to repentance, and use of the given means to triumph over evil spirits, such as prayer, Scripture reading, etcetera.

From my pastoral experience in Soshanguve I recall the story of a lady who was clearly under some kind of demonic influence. During discussions it appeared that this demonic influence had quite a few possible causes: she had been living in sin for many years (adultery, theft), and she had recently completed a traditional healer’s training which had led to an aggravation of the demonic symptoms. Although it was quite a serious case, by God’s grace she was freed from the demonic influence by a combination of Scripture reading, prayer, repentance from sins, leading her to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and culminating in her personal decision to destroy her traditional healer’s attributes. There was no need to rebuke a demon, and in the end the advantage was that she herself had made a personal choice against these evil forces.

J.H. Bavinck has described the joy of people who have converted from African traditional religion and comparable religions, quoting them as saying: “Jesus Christ has delivered me from fear of the spirits. He has freed me from the spell of demons. Jesus has told me that He is Lord over all evil powers and that nobody is able to oppose Him. I know that I am in his hands. One day death will knock on my door, but even then I know

that Jesus Christ is the Victor and that I need not to fear anything.” (1950:36) This is the comfort of Jesus’ universal kingship.

8.4.5 A crucified King

When the Bible portrays Jesus as the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, attention is often drawn to what He did before He was raised to his present exalted position. In Phil. 2:6-11, the passage which speaks about the Lordship of Jesus Christ, it is emphasized that He first humbled himself, taking the nature of a servant and becoming obedient to death on the cross. In Revelation 5:1-7, the passage which speaks about Jesus’ authority to open the seals of the scroll, He is portrayed both as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” and “a Lamb looking as if it had been slain”. Whenever we think of Jesus as a mighty conqueror, we have to remember His sacrifice on the cross.

This message of the crucified Christ has proved to be a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). The question may be asked: if this message was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, what will it be to Africans?

Kurpershoek has rephrased the words of Paul as follows: “Jews demand miraculous signs, Greeks look for wisdom and African people want power, life-force and health, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles and irrelevant to Africans, but to those whom God has called, Jews, Greeks and Africans, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1996:255, translated from Afrikaans.)

Our research has shown that there is a ‘love of power’, even an obsession with power, in African Christianity, especially in churches such as the ZCC and Pentecostal churches. With regard to the Pentecostal churches we have suggested that this love of power reflects a twofold background of Pentecostal theology and African traditional religion (par. 7.4.2).

Missionaries and scholars have rightly pointed out that the traditional African concept of power, called dynamism or power-consciousness (Turaki 1999:100), exerts a strong

influence on present-day African Christianity. Steyne is quoted as stating that a powerless religion is considered to be valueless (Turaki 1999:101).

Vonkeman asserts that the African church emphasizes the power of Jesus. "You often hear people witness to the *amandla kaNkulunkulu* (the power of God). This is to be explained against the background of Africa's quest for power" (2000:65, translated from Dutch). Vonkeman points out that it would be wrong to ignore the African power-question, but it has to be supplemented with the guilt-question and the reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ (:65).

It is interesting to compare the African concept of power with the Greek-Hellenistic concept of power. Grundmann (1964) describes this power concept as follows: The world was seen as a manifestation of the forces in and by and on it. Man had to participate in the forces of the cosmos. In order to do so he had to know them and then control them by using magical means and ritual action. The similarities with the African power concept are striking.

The idea of power in the Old Testament is totally different from the Greek-Hellenistic concept: "When we turn from the Greek and Hellenistic world to that of the OT, we enter a different atmosphere. In place of a neutral idea of God we have the personal God. In place of the neutral forces of nature we have the power and might of the personal God, which do not operate in terms of immanent law but which rather carry out the will of God according to His direction." (:290.) Man's focus shifts away from impersonal power/forces to the personal God. Consequently magical means and ritual action are left behind and replaced by prayer and sacrifice to God (:294).

Haak (2000:44-46) asserts that African people should be confronted in their quest for power. They should be confronted with their human pride in trying to manipulate power. In the gospel the power of God is revealed indeed (Rom 1:16), but it is power given by God, not manipulated or controlled by man. This power comes by way of righteousness from God, a righteousness that is by faith (Rom 1:17). God's plan of salvation is carried out by way of justification.

This gospel will initially not be relevant to African people seeking power. He becomes interested only when told that Christ is the all-powerful King in heaven. But the Bible

always reminds us that Jesus was a different type of leader. Not a violent chief and warrior, but a shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, who surrendered to the enemy and made sure that his disciples were left unhurt (John 18). Following Jesus does not demand the power and bravery of strong men who follow a warlord, but it demands confession of guilt, acknowledgement of unworthiness and repentance from sins.

Should this be misunderstood Simon the Sorcerer's misunderstanding will be repeated time and again (Acts 8:9-24). Simon, the powerful sorcerer who was known as the 'Great Power' in Samaria, was astonished when he witnessed the great signs and miracles being performed by Philip the evangelist. Simon believed and he was baptized, the Bible says, but his thinking had not changed. He interpreted Christianity in terms of power manipulation. He accepted Christ as the stronger one. He had accepted a new god but his religion had remained unchanged. As a result Satan was able to use Simon in an attempt to regain control over the people of Samaria: a dangerous coup d'état from within the young church.

Satan has performed this coup d'état many times in the history of the church. Haak points out that the battle against the 'supreme gods' often results in a sham victory (2000:40). The supreme gods are replaced with Jesus Christ and the missionaries proclaim victory. But the context of magico-ritualistic thinking and power manipulation remains unchanged. As a result Christ is misplaced and misunderstood. A second phase of mission work is necessary in which the basic world view and concepts of evil and salvation have to be changed.

Mission history teaches that this problem is not typically African. Noort (1993:102-108) relates the story of how, many centuries ago, the Norwegian people accepted Jesus Christ as their new god. They accepted him because he seemed to be more powerful than Thor, their traditional god. Noort points out that the name of the god changed, but that the religious system remained the same. Christ was seen as the most powerful god. He was portrayed as a hero, a king, riding a horse (not a donkey!). Christ's suffering on the cross was meaningless to them. The notion of a suffering Servant did not fit into the Norwegian concept of a world of divinities in which power was the highest priority. Noort shows that the mission was unable to break the religious worldview of the Norwegians and other

peoples in Northwest Europe. Haak observes that this was accomplished only during the time of the Reformation (Haak 2000:38).

L.E. von Padberg devotes a lengthy paragraph to the perseverance of the pagan world view in England and Western Europe during the 7th and 8th centuries (1995:299-315). He describes the lengthy transition period during which many people who had been baptized, still clung to their pagan faith (:302). As an illustration he quotes from a letter of Pope Gregory III in which he urges church members in Hessen and Thuringen to do away with fortune-tellers, sacrifices for the dead, omens, amulets, charms, witches and “blasphemous customs” (:303). This illustrates that the battle against the household gods is much more difficult than the battle against the high gods, because it is easier for people to accept new gods than to change their religious world view.

It is clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not an easy message to convey. Christ, indeed, has to be proclaimed as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He has received full authority and all power in heaven and on earth. But this may easily become a distorted message when power is understood, in pagan terms, as the ability to influence and to control forces in the cosmos.

The NT concept of power is given its characteristic quality by the person of Jesus Christ. He is equipped with power. He is the Bearer of power. With “authority and power” He gave orders to evil spirits and they were exorcised (Luke 4:36). He was able to perform miracles by using only his powerful Word. There was no place for magic. Faith was needed. Grundmann says: “It is not the knowledge of magic media and formulae, but the personal relationship between God and Jesus on the one side and Jesus and men on the other which works the miracle with no magical compulsion.” (1964:302.)

In the present era, the era of Christ being seated at the right hand of God, this power of Jesus Christ is both visible and concealed. It is visible where demonic powers are commanded to come out of people (Acts 16:18). It is visible where unbelievers repent and turn to Christ. Then they receive power to ‘know the love of Christ’ (Eph. 3:18). The apostle Paul prays that God may strengthen the believers “with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16-17). Hence, the result of receiving this power is a true and intimate relationship with Christ.

The power of Christ is also concealed. Christ has gained the triumph over demonic forces, but the devil is still prowling around like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8). The new life in Christ is experienced but there is no complete victory over sin yet. The victory over death has been gained by Jesus Christ, but the final expression of this victory is still ahead of us. The servants of Christ proclaim a powerful message which can change lives through the power of the Holy Spirit, but they themselves are weak vessels (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

This is a far cry from the traditional African power concept in which man tries to manipulate and to control power – a power to be seen and experienced here and now in the form of life-force, health, and prosperity. The traditional concept no doubt still influences the power concept in much of African Christianity. The eschatological perspective is often missing. Preachers tell people: “Be strong, have faith, and God will lift you up *now!*” The apostle Peter says: “*Humble* yourselves under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up *in due time*” (1 Pet 5:6). African preachers tell people: “Cast all your anxiety on him because He has got the power”. The apostle Peter tells us: “Cast all your anxiety on him because *He cares for you*” (1 Pet 5:7). Vonkeman, referring to this text, comments that Africa needs to understand and accept the not-so-easy message of sharing in a victory while at the same time experiencing defeat (2000:65-66). This is the real Christian faith: trusting God like a child trusts its father in the midst of many dangers and uncertainties.

In this context the Biblical message of Jesus as the crucified King is important. In the book of Revelation Jesus Christ is portrayed as a slain but victorious Lamb, standing in the centre of the heavenly throne, with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6). This image symbolizes both the crucifixion and the victory of Jesus Christ. This Lamb has taken the scroll (5:7) which contains the events that must take place during the era between Christ’s ascension and his return (4:1). As many commentators agree, this scroll is best understood as containing God’s plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ’s death and resurrection but has yet to be completed (Beale 1999:340). The fact that this scroll is in the hands of the victorious Lamb, is a comforting thought for Christians living in the present era. At the same time it gives faith to persevere.

8.5 AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES

In previous paragraph we have on several occasions referred to publications by African theologians. It seems worthwhile to give a short impression of Christologies which have been designed on the African continent. In the context of this study our main interest lies with the question of whether these Christologies give room for the Biblical notion of the Lordship of Christ.

Quite a few overviews of African Christologies have been published in recent years. Two books may be mentioned here: R.J. Schreiter edited the book *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (1992) which has been hailed as an “excellent symposium from a Catholic viewpoint” (Parratt 1995:78). It contains a chapter ‘African Christologies Today’, written by Charles Nyamiti.

W.F.W. Fon has written a dissertation (1995) on Christologies in Sub-Saharan Africa in which he describes the Christologies of Protestant, Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologians.

Although evaluations of the present state of African Christologies differ, there is a general feeling that there is “something in the nature of a christological crisis that urgently needs to be attended to” (Schoffeleers 1994:73). There have been quite a few attempts to draft an African paradigm for Christ (Victor, Chief, Ancestor, Healer) but apparently none of these has been convincing.

African Christologies may be classified into two broad categories. The first category has been dubbed ‘synthesis Christologies’ or ‘inculturation’ Christologies (Fon 1995:152). These Christologies aim to establish some sort of synthesis between the Biblical message and the African tradition. Some of them start with Biblical material that resembles African beliefs and apply this to the African situation. A representative of this sub-category is Mbiti with his *Christus Victor* Christology. The majority of African theologians work the other way round: taking the African context as their starting point, they work back to the Bible. Christological formulations are directly influenced by the African traditional faith. Representatives of this sub-category are Bujo and Nyamiti with their Ancestor Christologies.

The second category of African Christologies has been dubbed 'critical Christologies' (Fon 1995:152) or antithesis Christologies. As the term denotes, these Christologies advocate a critical adaptation to the African context. The Bible is authoritative and takes precedence over the African context. A representative of this category is Kato. According to Fon, Bediako also belongs to this category but this is questionable. Fon himself points out that in some respects Bediako advocates a synthesis Christology (:337).

We will now focus on the notion of the Lordship of Christ in African Christologies, dealing with the two mentioned categories respectively.

Synthesis Christologies

The Lordship of Christ has been advocated by some African theologians as a notion that has particular interest for the African people. John Mbiti feels that the Lordship of Jesus fits well into African thoughtforms (1972:59). The traditional rulers, like chiefs and kings, were seen as 'lords', so there is a possible link here. After all, Mbiti observes, the Septuagint *Kyrios*-idea had its political undertones. Mbiti did not develop a Christology around the Lordship-notion.

Other African theologians are less enthusiastic about the Lordship of Christ as a concept to be used in Africa. Bujo, a Roman Catholic theologian, feels that the term *Kyrios* is not very meaningful to the African. "The modern African can only tread in the footsteps of Jesus Christ when he does not see him as a tyrannical *kyrios*, but rather as proto-ancestor", he says (quoted by Parratt 1995:132).

All in all it appears that the Biblical title of *Kyrios*, as applied to Jesus Christ, has not received much attention in African Christologies.

A Biblical concept which is closely related to the Lordship of Christ is the Kingship of Christ. This concept has attracted more attention. Nyamiti writes: "Christ's Kingship, to which African chiefship is analogous, has everlasting permanence and will always require socio-cultural models for its theological expression" (1992:18). Nyamiti believes that the 'chief model' has a future in Christology.

Some theologians have proposed the theme of kingship or chieftainship as a relevant theme in Christology. U.C. Manus has written a book 'Christ, the African King' (1993), in which he describes several African peoples' kingship traditions (Yoruba, Baganda, Shilluk and Zulu) and relates these to the New Testament witness about the kingship of Christ. According to Manus, the outstanding quality of Jesus' kingship is his meekness and humility. "The evangelists depict a king who is at the same time a Servant of God. This is the distinctive aspect of *King-Christology*." (1993:234.) Manus believes that this King-Christology is relevant for Africa in three respects. First, the Servant-Kingship of Christ should inspire the church to have participative and co-responsible patterns of leadership (:241). Second, liturgical services should become ritually indigenized along the patterns of African kingship rituals (:244). Third, Jesus' Servant-type of Kingship should be a model and inspiration for contemporary political leaders (:249). In general it can be concluded that Manus sees the kingship of Christ as a model to be emulated (:238). He does not emphasize the *King* (as a living and ruling person) but rather stresses the *style of Kingship* of Christ (as a model and inspiration).

Another theologian who has worked out the theme of kingship in Christology is D.W. Waruta. Waruta advocates a Christology which revolves around the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King (or Potentate). This, he believes, is not only Biblical, but it will be comprehensible to African Christians too (1992:56). With regard to the kingship, Waruta states that in African society leadership always carried with it a religious aspect in which the leader of the people exerted ritual and religious authority as well (:60). Therefore Africans have no difficulty in seeing Jesus Christ as the King "who leads his people to victory over the overwhelming threats of life" (:62).

Kabasélé takes up the theme of chieftainship. In his home church in the Congo believers actually have attributed to Jesus the title of 'Chief' in their prayers (1992a:103-104). Kabasélé believes that Christians in Africa have no difficulty in placing Christ in the category of chief because the prerogatives of a Bantu chief are seen to have been fully realized by Jesus Christ. He has fulfilled everything that people expect from their chiefs, "because he is a mighty hero who defeats the enemy, because he is the chief's son and the

chief's emissary, because he is "strong", because he is generous, wise and a reconciler of human beings" (1992a:105).

Not everybody is happy with the theme of chieftainship. John Pobee warns that the chief analogy is dangerous "because it is a *theologia gloriae*, lacking a *theologia crucis*" (1979:97). Pobee feels that the royal aspect should be combined with the priestly aspect. He believes that "a royal priestly Christology" is a useful approach.

Harry Sawyerr is also quite negative about the chief analogy. He feels that the traditional authority of the chiefs has been weakened too much by colonial rule and subsequent independence. Even in traditional Africa chiefs did not have supreme power: they had to give account to the council of elders. Furthermore, chiefs were usually remote figures, not easily accessible to the ordinary man. For these reasons Sawyerr suggests that chieftainship is not suited to the person of Christ (Sawyerr 1968: 72-73).

An aspect of the Lordship of Jesus that has attracted much attention, is his role as a liberator from evil and oppressive powers. Several African theologians have seen the real significance of Jesus as a 'Victor' over physical dangers (disease, death, poverty), evil forces (witchcraft, evil spirits) and enemies (political oppression). The image of Jesus as the one healing the sick, exorcising the possessed and delivering the captives is a powerful and attractive image for people in Africa. John Mbiti has stated that "the chief preoccupation of African Christians is 'redemption' from physical dilemmas" (quoted by Parratt 1995:87) and therefore he has proposed a 'Christus Victor' Christology. This approach has been criticised for "its apparent failure to come to grips adequately with the problem of human sin and guilt" (Parratt 1995:88). The same criticism is applicable to the liberation theology and/or black theology.

Antithesis Christologies

To date evangelical theologians in Africa have not done much to develop a Christology in African thoughtforms. Some of them have made suggestions for a point of departure. Dungen (a missionary/theologian) claims that the African believer has problems with the

death of Christ for the salvation of humanity. Therefore, he feels, salvation in Africa must take its starting point in the resurrection of Christ. "Thus, the majestic Christ at the right hand of the father, the head of the Church, must form the bedrock of Christological thought in Africa." (Fon 1995:142-143.)

Another evangelical theologian, Byang Kato, has spoken out against the position of people like Mbiti, Bujo and Nyamiti who placed Christ in the order of African ancestors of mediators. "Kato disagreed with these positions and stated unequivocally that Jesus stands on a different plane." (Fon 1995:314-315.) Unfortunately, Kato did not live long and he was not able to develop a Christology.

Van Rheezen, in his book *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (1991), suggests that Christ should be proclaimed as "the triumphant one, who defeats the principalities and powers" (:141). He believes that this is "the metaphor which does stir the heart of the animist" (:141). In addition to this, "the Christian minister is to point the animist to the cross – the symbol of God's great sacrifice of his Son to cleanse us of sin and to deliver us from Satan" (:303). To the animist this signifies liberation from demonic forces and freedom from sin. The cross also symbolizes suffering. "The animist views his religion as a way to escape from suffering – to overcome evil in the world. However, the Christian realizes that although he is in Christ, suffering continues and frequently increases because of Satan's attempts to turn him from Christ" (:304).

Evaluation

With regard to the 'synthesis Christologies' we conclude that the rich content of the Lordship of Christ notion has not been incorporated. Although some African theologians have taken up the kingship theme, Jesus is seen primarily as a historical figure, a model and an inspiration. Whether He is alive or not, is not really relevant. His divinity is not denied but not emphasized either. The idea of Christ being the present Master over the believers' lives, is totally absent. The notion of Christ being the Victor over evil forces, is there. But again Christ is seen more as an inspirational figure than involved in leading, guiding and protecting the faithful. In each of these Christologies the problem of human sin and human guilt before God is not really dealt with. Within the context of these

Christologies Christ will have to remain a distant Christ and a *Christus otiosus*. African theologians will have to reformulate their Christologies much more Biblically, otherwise, Christ – as the living Lord – will remain irrelevant to the African people.

With regard to the ‘antithesis Christologies’ there is still a great dearth of material. It is difficult to make a well-balanced judgment on the basis of a few publications. Van Rheenen’s book, though not concentrating specifically on the Lordship of Christ, presents a Biblical approach in which a theology of the Lordship of Christ can prosper.