

**Law, gospel and African  
theology**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Because Africa was viewed as a dark continent which lacked religion, Western missionaries presented a Gospel that was filled with their predilections to civilize Africans. Africans regarded this Gospel as one that did not respond to their pertinent questions of life. This study assesses salvation according to the Bible and critiques the "Gospel" which Africans received from missionaries.

It contrasts biblical views of salvation with those held by African traditional religion (ATR) adherents, examining the ways in which Africans bring their religious practices to conform to biblical models. Rituals such as ancestral foods, worship, and animal sacrifices are evaluated against sacraments such as the Eucharist and baptism. It also discusses the tenets of salvation, namely grace, faith, and Law, which must form the core of ATR. In the end, a model of salvation is presented that would embrace the African personality whilst ensuring that in migrating to Christianity, their insecurities fade.

Key Words: Law, grace, African traditional religion, Gospel, faith, salvation

## **OPSOMMING**

*Omdat Afrika beskou is as 'n donker kontinent sonder godsdiens, het Westerse sendelinge 'n evangelie aangebied wat wat hul voorliefdes gedien het met die oog daarop om Afrikane “beskaafd” te maak. Afrikane het gevoel dat hierdie evangelie nie op hul lewensvrae reageer nie. Hierdie evalueer verlossing volgens die Bybel en kritiseer die “evangelie” wat Afrikane van sendelinge ontvang het.*

*Die studie kontrasteer Bybelse sienings van verlossing met dié wat onderhou word deur aanhangers van tradisionele Afrika-godsdiens. Dit bevestig dat Afrikane hul godsdienstige praktyke by Bybelse modelle kan aanpas. Rituele soos gebruik van voorvaderlike voedsel, aanbidding en diere-offers word geëvalueer ten opsigte van sakramente soos nagmaal en doop. Ons bespreek ook die beginsels van verlossing, naamlik genade, geloof en die wet, en toon dat dit die kern van tradisionele Afrika-godsdiens moet vorm. Uiteindelik wou 'n verlossingsmodel daargestel wat die Afrika-persoonlikheid sal pas en wat betoog dat hul onsekerheid verdwyn wanneer hulle na die Christendom migreer.*

*Sleutelwoorde: Wet, genade, tradisionele Afrika-godsdiens, evangelie, geloof, verlossing*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND

From the earliest days of Christianity, the relationship of Law and Gospel had been debated. Not only did the theme surface repeatedly in the New Testament epistles, but it also led to the first assembly of churches' meeting held in Jerusalem (Kaiser, 2008:250). In recent times, the emergence of a number of neo-Pentecostal Christian movements, including the prosperity Gospel in the early 1970s, exacerbated divisions on the topic. African scholars, notably Mbiti, Maimela, and Bediako, have reflected on this question from an African perspective by asking what salvation means for an African (Bediako, 2004; Booth, 1977; Maimela, 1985; Mbiti, 1969).

In the second century after Christ, a controversy erupted around the views of Marcion of Sinope (ca. 110-160 C.E); he posited that there were two gods, one of the Old Testament (OT) and one of the New Testament (NT). This view was challenged by Tertullian, who said that "God is not, if He is not one" (Andrade, 2000:18-19; Roberts & Donaldson, 1868:5). Arguing for a supplantation relationship between the Law and the Gospel, Marcion accepted that the Mosaic Law has been abrogated by the arrival of the NT. Marcion described the OT as a Law that has passed and argued that the new "god" was represented in the new era of the new Gospel (Roberts & Donaldson, 1868:374). In the fourth century after Christ, the debate received new traction when Pelagius (c. AD 354 – 418) argued that Law and grace represented two plans of God. He opposed the notion of original sin and total depravity and subscribed to the inherent goodness of humanity and their ability to earn salvation through good works (Needham, 2000:86). He believed that humanity had powerful capacity to achieve anything, including its own salvation (Hawley, 2021).

Augustine (c. 354-430) opposed Pelagius by stating the intention of the Law as that of a teacher making sin known to humanity so that it would seek God's grace as a remedy. The intention of the Law is to see humankind flee for refuge to God who forgives their transgressions and live a holy life through his enabling grace (Augustine, 415). In contrast to Augustine, the Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480 –1528) rejected the notion of salvation through faith alone, arguing instead for good works as a contributory to living a saved life (Casni, 2018; Klassen, 1991:111-112). The Anabaptists accordingly rejected the notion of predestination, believing instead that every person enjoyed free will to accept or

reject God's grace. They emphasized the importance of a faith followed with good works, especially those acts contained in the Sermon on the Mount (Fuller, 2007:338).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) maintained that the Law reveals to humanity its sin, errors, and depravity. He said the Law needs the Gospel to be fulfilled, thus birthing a mutually inclusive relationship in which it reinforces the Gospel and suspends death and the hell associated with it (Hesselink, 2012:66-67). According to Luther, the purpose of the Law is to enable saints to know what obedience to God entails. He holds that Law and Gospel must be clearly distinguished in order to not obscure the glory of the redeeming grace (Kaiser, 2008:249-260; Thielicke, 1966:133-134).

On the other hand, John Calvin (1509-1564) recognized a threefold distinction of the relationship of the Law and Gospel, which are "the unity of the substance of the doctrine; distinction in the form or mode of instruction (*forma docendi*); and an antithesis of the letter and Spirit" (Hesselink, 2012:69). He developed the view that, if the Law is considered in its "peculiar office" which is power and end, then the letter (Law) becomes bare without the spirit (Gospel) (Calvin, 1541:109-119; Hesselink, 2012:69). He concluded that the Law is a form of the Gospel and that it remains a teacher to point to and reveal the need for a redeemer, irrespective of our inability to keep it (Calvin, 1541:179; Warfield, 1909:330).

James Arminius (1560-1609) stated that God's word consists of two integral parts – the Law and the Gospel - averring that the Law must first be known to humankind to bring them to realize their sin and seek God (Arminius, nd:95). Arminius (nd:95) held that the moral Law demonstrates the gracious promise of God and the ceremonial Law his displeasure with sin. He submitted that the OT is abrogated and that the NT church no longer needs a tutor or governor, because Christ has liberated it from the bondage of Law (Arminius, nd:97-98). For John Colquhoun (1748-1827), the Law and the Gospel are two integral and inseparable parts of the Word. To understand and appreciate the word of God, both must be held to be equally important in their mutual subservience (in Kistler, 2009:xxv).

In short, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Colquhoun accepted the central role that the Law plays in the life of a Christian. They ascribed to the Law the role of being a tutor that leads humanity to Christ by making them realize the extent of their depravity. They recognized a subservient relationship where the Gospel, through its consoling grace, fulfils the Law, whilst grace enables humans to obey the Law. God's Word is both Law and Gospel and is profitable for believers to attain their purposeful life. On the other hand, Marcion and Arminius argued that the OT is abrogated and plays no part in the covenant of grace as

found in the NT, whilst Pelagius posited that, through free will, human beings are able to earn salvation. Hubmaier opined that good works according to the Law of God speak to the salvation of humankind and recognizes it to be not only a tutor, but also a standard for godly living.

## **1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Evangelical churches today still struggle with the question of how the Law must be married to the Gospel, where debates are drawn along the lines of salvation and the human will. Much disagreement exists on the point of salvation being attained by grace through faith in Christ alone. The situation is even more complex in African Evangelical Theology as African theologians struggle not only with providing a definition but also describing the relationship between these concepts as viewed from an African perspective.

Interestingly, African scholarship still grapples with the question of what salvation actually means for an African. For instance, Maimela (1985:65-66) avers that in an African context, salvation is viewed as attainable through traditional means which, he says, obliterates the long-held view of God's salvation through the work of Christ. Bediako (2004:23), Pobee (1979:81) and Nyamiti (2006:3-9) submit that Africans feel vulnerable in the face of Christianity as the only means to salvation offered is a Westernized Christ. Banda (2005:1-4) asserts that "Christological insecurity" stems from a view that Christ is inadequate to meet their existential needs, thus compelling African Christians to combine Christianity and African traditional religions as means of salvation. He points to the desperation of African Christians for a Christ who is "sufficient to address the paranoia that permeates every aspect of African life" (Banda, 2005:4). To this, Okot p'Bitek responded that many African Christians continue to practice their inherited religion alongside Christianity (in Udoh, 1983:19). Magezi (2016:4-14) submits that African Christians often revert to their traditional beliefs because of the inadequacy of Christianity when it comes to addressing their entire needs basket.

Mbiti, addressing salvation for an African says the African traditional worldview holds that Africans did not see themselves as sinners before God until the arrival of missionaries who told them differently (Meiring, 2005:70), bringing into question the theory of original sin and the knowledge that every human is born depraved (Rom. 3:23). His position is complicated by his introduction of the concept of "the living dead" where the spirits of the departed are intermediaries between the living and God (Mbiti, 1969:58-73). This view usurps the role of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation (Jn. 14:6). Bediako (2004:23) finds that African Christians remain "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," where

witchcraft and strong ancestral beliefs still hold. Thomas (1971:282) posits that Africans are challenged by the fact that “Western Christianity identified the meek and mild Jesus as saviour of Black souls for Africans, and as source of power and domination for the white man in his mission for civilization,”<sup>1</sup> further eroding the faith and trust Africans should have in the Christ who died for all humankind.

Clearly, some Africans feel that salvation by Christ alone is inadequate. This opens a door for supplements, often found in the form of “other gods” and ancestor related rituals for total salvation of an African. Also, some Africans deem themselves to be without sin and claim to have had relations with God prior to Christ’s incarnation. They accordingly challenge not only the notion of original sin, but also the sufficiency of Christ’s work on the cross. Further, the inability of this foreign Christ to save them completely, and their willingness to remain in their traditional practices for salvation purposes, brings into dispute the question of free salvation or salvation by grace alone. These issues promote a performance-based salvation through rituals and intermediaries, the core of African culture. These views obviously have profound implications for the way in which the relation between Law and grace is understood and articulated. The notion of divine grace as a free gift through Christ alone is rejected, while the Law as additional performance-based means to salvation is supplemented with traditional rituals.

### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION**

This thesis therefore asks: How can a biblical concept of the relation between Law and Gospel assist Africans in developing a doctrine of salvation that is on the one hand faithful to Scripture while, on the other, addressing the African experience?

This engenders the following sub-questions:

- How is the notion of salvation understood within African theological scholarship?
- What direct and indirect implications do the various African theological approaches to salvation have for a theological understanding of the Law-Gospel relation?

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<sup>1</sup> Here Mercy Amba Oduyoye observes this great injustice and submits that “We cannot posit the power for good of Bavarian saints and challenge that of Akan ancestors” (1995:84). Similarly, one group of the dead cannot be seen to be better than the other group of the dead – all must share the same state. This is also true in the South African context, where “The South African experience of racism included a Christian God who was *boss* (the South African secret police) and partial to the dominant group (Oduyoye, 1997:200).”

- What are the biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone?
- How can an African relate to the Law of God while holding the sanctity of grace as the only means of salvation?

### **1.3.1. Central aim**

The aim of this study is to indicate how a sound understanding of the relation between Law and Gospel can facilitate the formulation of a doctrine of salvation that is scripturally sound and able to address African experience.

### **1.3.2. Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study are the following:

- To study and evaluate the way in which the notion of salvation has over the years been understood within African theological scholarship.
- To identify the direct and indirect implications that the various African theological approaches to salvation have for a theological understanding of the Law-Gospel relation.
- To explore the biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- To establish how an African can relate to the Law of God while holding the sanctity of grace as the only means of salvation.

## **1.4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

This study holds that African theologies on salvation tend to misconstrue the biblical understanding of the relationship between law and gospel. Africans tend to accept salvation without shifting from their traditional ritualistic practices, which they use as supplements to Christianity. This results in a view of salvation that is performance-based and not firmly grounded in the biblical belief that we are saved by faith in Christ through grace alone. This study suggests that a biblical understanding of the relation between law and gospel which affirms the role of Jesus Christ as the champion of salvation attainable by grace alone, can assist Africans in liberating themselves from legalist religion, whilst affirming the fundamental tenets of African identity.

## 1.5. METHODOLOGY

Sarantakos (2013:1) postulates that “social research is about discovery, expanding the horizons of the known, of confidence, new ideas, and new conclusion about all aspects of life.” To respond to this, the present study uses a socio-historical method as described by Meeks (in Igba, 2019:11) while engaging in qualitative literature analysis and remains rooted in the Evangelical Reformed Tradition which holds to the authority of Scripture. Kaiser and Silva (2007:33-35) give advice on various tested methods of bible interpretation such as the reader-response and syntactical theological methods, and these will be employed here in order to get as close as possible to the biblical meaning of scriptures.

In responding to the research questions raised by this study, various methods will be employed, as follows:

- The first objective of the study requires one to study and evaluate the way in which the notion of salvation has over the years been understood within African theological scholarship. To achieve this, a descriptive analysis (Sarantakos, 2013:305) of historical African theological literature of Mbiti, Bediako, Maimela, and others will be carried out.
- The second objective of this study, which is to identify the direct and indirect implications that the various African theological approaches to salvation have for a theological understanding of the Law-Gospel relation, entails a comparative analysis (Osei-Asante, 2017:8; Sarantakos, 2013:305) of biblical exegesis and historical African “Theo-cultural”<sup>2</sup> literature.
- As for the third objective, which is to explore the biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, a historical-grammatical exegesis (Kaiser & Silva, 2007:21; Sarantakos, 2013:334) will be undertaken which takes account of social contexts, genres, word analysis within their respective semantic fields, and broad themes within the biblical canon.
- To deal with the fourth objective, which is to establish how an African can relate to the Law of God while holding the sanctity of Gospel as the only means of salvation, a coherent theological argument will be constructed.

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<sup>2</sup> In <https://elderj.wordpress.com/2013/12/26/theo-cultural-amnesia/>

## 1.6. ETHICAL RISK STATEMENT

Bailey indicates that research must be conducted in a manner that does not cause harm to participants, and submits that harm is not only “hazardous medical experiments but also any social research that might involve such things as discomfort, anxiety, harassment, invasion of privacy, or demeaning or dehumanizing procedures” (Kumar, 2011:245). In conducting this research, a low-risk rating has been identified owing to the methods of study such as “systematic reviews; review of literature available to the public; and studies based on theory analysis and theory development” (de Lange *et al*, 2016:16-21) which this study will employ, limiting human participation to the minimum. Moreover, the requirements for conducting ethical research as required by the NWU have been observed.

## 1.7. SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION

**Table 1:** Schematic presentation of the research method

<b>Schematic Presentation</b>		
<b>Research question</b>	<b>Aims and objectives</b>	<b>Research method</b>
How can a biblical concept of the relation between Law and Gospel assist evangelical African Christians in developing a doctrine of salvation that is on the one hand faithful to Scripture but, conversely, also addresses the African experience?	The aim of this study is to indicate how a sound understanding of the relation between Law and Gospel can facilitate the formulation of a doctrine of salvation that is scripturally sound and able to address African experience.	This study will be conducted from a Reformed perspective, relying strongly on Scripture as authority.
How is the notion of salvation understood within African Theological scholarship?	To study and evaluate the way in which the notion of salvation has over the years been understood within African Theological scholarship.	A descriptive analysis of historical African theological literature of Mbiti, Bediako, Maimela, and others will be carried out.
What direct and indirect implications do the various African theological approaches to salvation have for a	To identify the direct and indirect implications that the various African theological approaches to salvation have for a theological	A comparative analysis of biblical exegesis and historical African Theocultural literature to draw

theological understanding of the law-gospel relation?	understanding of the law-gospel relation.	conclusions will be conducted.
What are the biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone?	To explore the biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.	A historical-grammatical exegesis will be undertaken.
How can an African relate to the Law of God while holding the sanctity of grace as the only means of salvation?	To establish how an African can relate to the Law of God while holding the sanctity of grace as the only means of salvation.	A theological interpretation and analysis of scripture will be utilized.
Conclusion	To provide conclusions to our study and provide coherence around what has been said in this study.	Review of the entire study and providing chapter specific summaries.

## **CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF SALVATION AS FOUND WITHIN AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Sin and salvation are amongst the concepts on which the African Traditional Religion (ATR) differs greatly from mainstream or Western Christianity. Whereas some religions are primarily concerned about the salvation of the soul, ATR looks at aspects such as deliverance from witchcraft and oppression by world systems and evil spirits. It seldom if ever, speaks to the salvation of the person in terms of the soul. Mbiti (in Meiring, 2005) famously intimated that he preaches neither sin nor advocates that Africans were sinners before the dawn of Christ. Consequently, Igba (2019) asks whether salvation as viewed from a biblical perspective carries a different connotation to ATR. Is it therefore possible for anyone to interpret salvation anyway they deem fit and still call it salvation? This chapter must therefore aid in (1) understanding whether the Christian concept of salvation is foreign to Africa considering that before the advent of Christ, Africans did not see themselves as sinners, (2) the interpretation of salvation by Africans; and (3) comprehending their understanding of sin.

### **2.2. CHRISTIANITY AS AFRICAN RELIGION**

Mbiti (1969:229-231,262) views Christianity as indigenous to Africa and well established in the history of the continent, especially in North Africa, Egypt, parts of Sudan as well as Ethiopia. He cites that Christianity in Africa is so old that it can rightly be described as “an indigenous, traditional, and African religion” (Mbiti, 1969:229). Long before the start of Islam in the seventh century, Christianity had a footprint in the north of Africa and other parts of the continent, producing great scholars and theologians like Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine (Mbiti, 1969:229). He credits Christianity’s modern expansion in Africa to freed Christian slaves who began to return to western Africa towards the end of the eighteenth century. He affords little credit to Western clergy and missionaries for expanding Christianity in Africa, as they failed dismally in addressing issues such as ancestor beliefs and witchcraft (Mbiti, 1969:233, 267). Because of this, high responsibility is placed on scholars to reveal who Christ is to an African, especially if one considers Mbiti’s view that theology falls or stands on how it “understands, translates, and interprets Jesus Christ in a given time, place, or human situation” (Mbiti, 1971:190).

Mbiti's overarching view, in the same vein as that of Von Harnack (in Sundkler & Steed, 2004), is that Christianity is truly African since it had previously been propagated and defended by people like Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine. In contrast to Mbiti's view, Banda (2005) and Magezi (2016) speak of the foreignness of Christ in Africa as a problem that makes it onerous for Africans to relate to Christ and to wholly depend on him. They say that many Africans even find it difficult to describe Jesus Christ in African thought, primarily because Africans traditionally relate to God the Father. They submit that belief in Christ entered the African religious consciousness at a much later stage and as a new phenomenon (Banda, 2005:4; Magezi, 2016:7).

Here then surfaces the question of the universality and adaptability of Christianity as a new phenomenon amongst the Jews, Europeans, Greeks, etc.,<sup>3</sup> but in particular its presence in the African continent, where it seems to emerge in occupied spaces as a dominant religion with its norms, much to the resistance by indigenous cultures. This resistance emerges precisely because of the "foreign" Christ upon which Christianity is established, who also stands as God's obvious choice for salvation.<sup>4</sup> Niebuhr, in his book, *Christ and Cultures* (1951), attempted to forge harmony in this problem, stating five points<sup>5</sup> depicting Christ's interface with world cultures, with Oduyoye (1995:88) agreeing that only an integrated approach will suffice to address the interface of Christianity and cultures and by extension eliminate his foreignness in Africa.

In view of Niebuhr's points, Ottati (2003:122) surmises that as Christ is fitted in all these adaptations on culture, it means that "Jesus Christ points away from all worlds to the One who creates all worlds, who is the Other of all worlds," and by extension, all cultures. Therefore, if belief in God (the Other of all worlds) is primary, then all cultures are drawn out by Jesus himself and pointed to God the Father. The argument is made and by now should be put to rest that *all cultures rise to God*, for they claim knowledge of him. For Africa, Oduyoye makes a point that Africans have always been godly: "The fool says in his heart,

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<sup>3</sup> Oduyoye (1995) takes notice of this and submits that: "Today very few will associate themselves with the view that before Christianity Africans were without God or that "they bowed to wood and stone" as the quintessence of religious expression. Christianity had to do battle with the traditional religion of Akan as it did with those of the Romans and the Greeks and the Saxons" (p.83).

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16

<sup>5</sup> The five points of Christ and culture as raised by Niebuhr (1951) are: (1) Christ against culture; (2) Christ of culture; (3) Christ above culture; (4) Christ and culture in paradox; and (5) Christ the transformer of culture.

there is no God. In traditional Africa, there are no such fools” (1997:196). This means that Africans know the very same God who opted in the latter days to make himself known through Christ (Heb. 1:2-3), and by extension revealing himself through Christianity.

Consequently, universality and adaptability must rise on this fact: that all cultures (Basotho, Bapedi, Akan, Jews, etc.) are regional, and limited within spaces in which they exist. On the other hand, Christianity is universal, the very reason that it does not come across as culture but religion, with its message intended for the whole world (Mt. 28:18-20). Oduyoye succinctly captures this truth in saying – “There is only one religion called Christianity. It takes its origin from the Christ-Event. Blyden also says that from the onset Christianity appeared as a world religion and not a regional one (1995:88).

While acknowledging the advent of Christianity in Africa as early as 330 AD, Desai (1962:13-19) cites many examples of missionaries’ interpretation of Christianity which presented Africans as nothing but rebels to the faith, regrettably misplacing Christianity in Africa. He says the missionary’s desire was to plant a new religion. In the process, they ignored African religious systems and hastened to attain a clean sweep of all that was African, based on the premise that Africans were depraved and in need of the Gospel (Desai, 1962:25-26). Desai (1962:18-19) cites as problematic concepts such as the Father-Son relationship, which places the Son in equal terms with the Father; Jerusalem as a centre of worship of the new god as well as referring in their prayers to patriarchs and biblical figures such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses instead of the ancestors and forefathers that African people knew.

Desai (1962:22) holds that Christianity resulted in the displacement of native authority and that it led to disregard for the authority of the chiefs, revolt against parental control, the breakdown of family organization, and the weakening of tribal systems. His analysis is however problematic insofar as he seems to confuse Western Christianity with liberal morality. Liberal moral values had their origin in secular Western culture which arose after the Enlightenment, in protest against Christianity. Here, de Villiers (2012:7) offers that even in today’s circumstances where morality seems to have escaped the populace, Christian moral values still have a central role to play in redirecting humanity to sound principles and dealing with maladies such as religious extremism, corruption, racial conflicts, xenophobia and violence to name a few.

Indeed, what Christianity sought to do through the prophets and the Torah, according to Coward (2003:7-8), was not only to call people to religious observance, but also to cultivate their moral behaviour, which is still the case today. Phillips (2002:11), in defence of

Christendom, notes that it offers “higher set of standards and mores” which surpass the laws of individual nations. He notes that, throughout the ages, Christendom remained a primary form of cultural reference setting the standard of living for humanity. This must alert us to the importance of Christianity as well as its endeavour to instil in the universal populace, culture and morals that are tolerable.

Continuing with the origins of Christianity, Ukpong (2002:37) submits that it has had a footprint in Africa since the third century, notably evidenced by biblical exegesis of scholars like Tertullian, Augustine, and Origen, thus grounding Christianity in Africa beyond doubt, as indicated. However, during the period of colonization the gospel was presented to Africans in a manner that confused the values of the gospel with the Western values. For Western missionaries, to be a Christian meant that Africans had to adopt western styles of living. As Oduyoye submits: “becoming Christian was presented as ceasing to be fully African (1995:83).” She further says that charismatic Pentecostal churches have somewhat returned Africans to an anti-African culture of the western missionaries, citing to adherents that success lies in abandoning African ritual practices and therefore being delivered from evil and poverty through the church (1997:203).

Because of this perceived great injustice, Ukpong (2002:9) suggests that Africa must ready itself to engage the Bible in an African way. He asserts that by doing this, an African will not only gain back his or her identity, but in the process will be claiming the Bible as God’s Word. In owning the Bible for themselves, Africans will effectively rid it of external influences, especially those of the West (Ukpong, 2002:10), which were aimed at the inculturation of Africans, where they will eventually adopt cultures foreign to them and in the process strip them of their identity (Shabangu, 2005:38).

Gerald West (2002:67) says that African Biblical scholarship is marked by the missionary colonial encounter and avers that it is obvious that the Bible came to Africa as part and parcel of a missionary colonial package. However, he does not clearly acknowledge Christianity to be indigenously African, claiming instead that it is not to be assumed that the reception of Christianity and that of the Bible are necessarily one and the same thing (West, 2002:80). This may mean that the arrival of Christianity predates the arrival of the Bible (by missionaries) in Africa in light of the encounter in the book of Acts which involves an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). Of course, one has to be cautious to think that Christianity arrived in Africa with Western missionaries. With good arguments and historical studies, authors like Ukpong (2002:37); Desai (1962); and Sundkler & Steed (2004:9), have indicated that Christianity came to Africa as early as the third century.

West's stance however, does little to entrench the Bible or Christianity in Africa, resonating with, among others, Malukeke, who states that "the overt presence of the Bible among African Christians doesn't mean total dependence on the Bible only, but it is viewed as a larger package of resources Africans use to better their lives" (Maluleke, 2002:162). In my view, it is disappointing that, at this point, Africa fails to lay claim to the Bible and build on the great work done by the likes of Origen, Augustine, Tertullian, and many others (Sundkler & Steed, 2004:29-30; Ukpog, 2002:37; Meiring, 2005:68). Instead, as late as the 1930s to the 1970s, Africa was still focused on trying to legitimize African religion and culture, while remaining reactive and apologetic in going about it (West, 2002:69). Only after the 1970s did Africa and African theologians realize that African culture and religion present more than a preparation for the Gospel; they are indispensable resources for the interpretation of the Gospel message and the development of African Christianity (West, 2002:69; Maluleke, 2002:162).<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most telling statement that grounds Christianity in Africa is found in the words of Adolf von Harnack as quoted by Sundkler & Steed (2004):

As a Church province, Africa has a timeless endurance in the history of the Church through its three great sons Tertullian, St Cyprian, and St Augustine. (pp.29-30)

This statement and many others by different scholars who agree about the indigenusness of Christianity in Africa, should have propelled African scholars to abandon defending Christianity as African, and swiftly moved on to unpack how an African can lay hold of the salvation that is laid out in the bible, which is the greatest human need. We trust that this study will attempt to reveal that.

Further, recent writings by scholars such as Shabangu (2005), Lugira (2009), Bongmba (2016), and others, posited that Christianity is a timeless religion in Africa. Shabangu (2005:2-3) submits that Africa and her peoples are not strangers to the Bible and recognizes the contribution Africa has made to Christianity, saying that Africans played a significant role in the history of salvation, making Christianity indigenus to Africa just as other religions are. Tellingly, he quotes Maimela: "without Africa and its people, the world would not have had Christianity and the Jewish religion, both of which have been given birth through the African

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<sup>6</sup> Oduyoye (1995:87) submits that "All human cultures have elements that are incompatible with the religion of Jesus and the way of life he exemplified; the challenge of the good news he brought and lived is to all human cultures." It is perhaps important therefore as our study takes shape to bring into light those elements of African culture which finds mention in the bible and evaluate their compatibility as Oduyoye posits.

contribution” (Shabangu, 2005:4). He qualifies his argument by quoting from the Bible in relation to, among others, Ebed-melech (Jer. 38:13), who advised the king, subsequently sparing Jeremiah’s life; Abraham who was aided by Africans in Egypt during a drought; and Moses, Jacob, Joseph, and Jesus who also were hosted by Africa in trying times (Shabangu, 2005:4-5).

In addition, Lugira (2009:19) posits that, as early as 1300 BCE, the religion of the people of Egypt and Ethiopia had already taken after OT living, much like the Judaism that originated in the Middle East. He submits that Joseph and Mary ran to Egypt for shelter when they fled from Herod and, accordingly, claims that Christianity can be thought to have arrived in Africa even prior to its founding. He further indicates that, during AD 40, Christianity arrived through the doors of Alexandria, Egypt (Lugira, 2009:20-22) and concludes by noting that even Saint Mark (one of the 12 disciples) had visited Egypt around that time. Bongmba (2016:25) advances that Christianity was present in North Africa before it arrived in Europe, with its roots closely knit with the apostolic times. He cites Thomas Oden who says that “Africa has been the most fertile seedbed of intellectual depth in Christian reflection on Scripture” (Bongmba, 2016:25).

It is clear that Christianity is well established in Africa, even from before its founding, as Lugira (2009) alludes. As Christianity “moves South,” Phillips says (2002:15), “it is in some ways returning to its roots.” The arguments that Christianity is un-African or foreign to Africa can therefore only be restricted to the notion that Western missionaries brought it to the shores of Africa. This goes especially for the case of North Africa, which was subject to that kind of Christianity that Desai laments so much as having brought disorder. Yet Phillips (2002:15) avers that Christianity was founded in the Near East, becoming stronger in Asia and North Africa, while Europe became the Christian heartland for it much later, around 1400 BCE. To him Christianity remains a religion of cultural reference and moral compass and continues to transcend time; while the laws of those individual nations of influence lasted only for as long as those nations could last (Phillips, 2002:11-12).

One should therefore state that Christianity should not be determined by what mere mortals such as those missionaries did, but that it should instead be perceived as presented in the Bible, as Ntulii (2021) quotes Lawson: “The greatness of the Gospel is not found in the messenger but in the message.” Wagenaar also states that “Christianity is fundamentally universal and so beyond any language, tribe or nation” (in Magezi, 2016:38). Critically and most profoundly, Jenkins (2008) remarks that

“Christianity, too, has on several occasions been destroyed in regions where it once flourished. In most cases, the elimination has been so thorough as to obliterate any memory that Christians were ever there, so that today any Christian presence whatsoever in these parts is regarded as a kind of invasive species derived from the West.” (p. 2)

### **2.3. SALVATION WITHIN CONTEXT**

Talking about the salvation of an African remains precarious because it is still unclear from what an African must be saved. Perhaps the legacy of colonialism and oppression in the continent has shaped African mindsets to connect salvation with political liberation just like Jesus’ audience thought it to be the reason of his coming (Mt. 3:2). Phillips (2002:11) implies that Christianity itself rarely possessed any potential for common political action. The concern, however, has always been universal salvation, which centres on the spirit and the soul, which Christ brought for all humanity. Brand (1999) records that,

while the 'who', the 'how' and the 'whom' of salvation have received much attention, the 'what', in the sense of the 'wherefrom' and the 'whereto', has only seldom been thematised, much less problematized, with the result that the concept of salvation came to be characterised by a certain vacuity. (pp. 192-193)

In what follows, we examine how African scholarship understood salvation in times past.

#### **2.3.1. Defining salvation in African thought**

Brand (1999:196) submits that salvation can be defined as “the dynamic(s) by which human beings attain their good.” Mugabe (Banda, 2005:3) says that the Akan of Ghana see it as “the condition, context, or space in which human well-being and the ultimate fulfilment of the individual destiny are made possible.” Asante holds that the traditional African setting includes under the umbrella of salvation “getting answers for the problems of life and overcoming the agents of evil and the hard realities of life” (Shabangu 2005:186). For an African, Okorocho asserts, salvation concerns no less than “total well-being” (Banda, 2005:2-3), while Maimela (1985:72) rejects the salvation that concerns itself with the soul only, averring that the salvation that Africans require must address their worldly needs and also hold to the promise of happiness and prosperity here and now.

It goes without saying that these concepts regarding salvation all embrace the themes of the immediate well-being, fulfilment, overcoming of problems, and happiness. At the same time, there is silence on the saving of the soul or saving of humanity from the pangs of sin. The

line of thought by scholars as traced above seeks to insinuate that the Gospel's essential message of salvation is by itself unable to address all life's challenges as faced not only by Africans but by humanity at large. In contrast, Banda (2005) holds that Christ is indeed adequate to free an African from all life's troubles and set them free from all bondage. Further, in John 10:10 Jesus says that he has come that we might have life in abundance, which must assure us of total salvation not only concerning spiritually related issues but also concerning our physical wellbeing as was the case with many whom he had healed and provided relief for. Darko (2015) holds the same view:

Salvation must therefore be understood in its broader sense to include 'salvation' from corrupt conventions, demonic influence and desires of the flesh. (p. 51)

Further, Darko (2015:51) says that the NT use of the word salvation, carries the sense of being saved from illness, danger, crooked generation, sin, the wrath of God, and the state of being lost, thus alluding to the Christ who saves even to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). So, when dealing with salvation, we have to consider that it means total deliverance from the problems of life. Importantly, Christianity positions itself as that type of religion that offers complete salvation through Christ.

### **2.3.2. Salvation for an African**

Bediako, an African scholar of note, submits that on its arrival it became evident that Christianity does not meet the demands nor does it address the spiritual concerns of African people. He argues that Jesus fails to save Africans from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview (Bediako, 2004:23). In attempting to address this problem, he follows Pobee's thought that Christ should be relatable to Africans as a king, a priest, and an ancestor to the people (Bediako, 2004:24). However, he ascribes power and authority to Christ beyond Pobee's thought in that he views Christ as an ancestor for the whole of humankind (Bediako, 2004:26-32). To make this thought palpable to recipients, Bediako (2004:25) suggests that the African tradition describes sin as an antisocial behaviour, meaning it is a wrong act against equals, subsequently creating room for ancestor intervention. This view seeks to usurp Christ's accomplished work on the cross by assuming that ancestors do possess the power to save just as Christ does. Elevating ancestors as beings who are able to save, and who are therefore worthy of worship conflicts directly with Exodus 20:3, where God explicitly commands that human beings shall have no other gods before him.

Bediako further states that an African would be saved when the terrors and fears they encounter in their traditional worldview are addressed. In the main, deliverance and protection from evil spirits, assurance of wellbeing of members to the specific clan, and deliverance to pressing social issues are what Bediako (2004:23) alludes to when dealing with terrors and fears. It may seem that an African does not believe that Christ delivers from these. But is it true that Christianity provides half-baked salvation, or do we need to look critically at how the Gospel was in the first place presented to Africans? What motives were advanced at the expense of true Christianity, which questioned Christ's ability to save?

In dealing with the question of salvation, Pobee and Ositelu II refer to Jean-Marc Ela, who says: "In Africa, the confrontation between the message of the Gospel and the African universe must bring forth a meaning with the poor to transform the lives of African Christians (Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998:260)." Critically, they attach to salvation an element of culture, arguing that culture has always been the solvent of Christianity (Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998:260).<sup>7</sup> His position therefore seeks to suggest that Christianity is what it is because of the many cultures of the nations of the world. Pobee nonetheless notes that this concept of African Christianity does not suggest that there is a version of Christianity that is African or European for that matter. This poses Christianity as a universal religion for all humanity which does not subscribe to Jewish culture, much as it recognizes the role that the latter played in the arrival of the Messiah. At the same time, Africa could lay equal claim to it, considering how it aided the spread of Christianity from Abraham to Jesus Christ (Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998:1-9; Bongmba, 2016:26-27). Setiloane (1986:11,32) concludes that ATR accepts and affirms the Bible and that God has always been a part of Africa, known to the Basotho as "*Modimo*", the equivalent of "Yahweh" to the Hebrews.

Maimela, writing as an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, says that his work is to investigate the salvific power of other religions, specifically ATRs, where it is assumed that all religions are founded in God and are therefore able to save their adherents (1985:63-64). He avers that the negative attitude towards ATRs by missionaries found support in Scripture to conclude that traditions outside of Christianity were not adequate vehicles of salvation for their adherents. He submits that to deny God's saving activity in other non-Christian religions, including ATRs, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and others, will be to confuse our Christian ideas about God (Maimela, 1985:65,76). Adeyemo

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<sup>7</sup> Pobee and Ositelu II (1998:260) say that "whatever else it is and indicates, it reminds us that in the long history of Christianity culture has always been the solvent of the Gospel."

(1979:11-12) also seeks to know the possibility of other religions offering salvation, especially where the writ of Christianity is absent. This, he says, suggests that every world religion can act as a way of salvation and, consequently, Christianity cannot claim monopoly to salvation (Adeyemo, 1979:13). However, he maintains that Protestantism cannot be a thing of the past: people must take a stand and Christianity can in no way cohabit with idolatry (1979:14).

Surprisingly, Maimela (1985:66) says that we would do well to understand what sin and salvation are in terms of ATRs, instead of limiting ourselves to the confines of a biblical explanation of these terms. Perhaps the attitude of “tabula rasa”<sup>8</sup> displayed by missionaries who came to the shores of Africa with a foreign culture is to blame for misunderstanding the religion Africans feel they had since before the arrival of missionaries (Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998:9; Setiloane, 1986:1-2). This religion would have guided them in matters concerning salvation within ATR and would have shed understanding for external observers like Christians. In ATR, sin is therefore understood in terms of a breach of fellowship with our neighbours as well as the break in relationship with one’s ancestors; these are the maladies that constitute sin as an African seeks salvation and relief (Maimela, 1985:67-70). Maimela says that a number of protective rites and rituals performed by Africans do provide much-needed relief and salvation (1985: 69-70). He concludes his argument by saying that there is indeed salvation in ATRs, which are genuine channels of God’s redemptive activity in response to the sins and problems Africans experience (Maimela, 1985:75). However, Maimela’s view only conflates what should be clear: if adherents of African religions are confident of the salvation they receive from their religions, then there is no need for ATR to ancestorise Christ on account that they find salvation in their own religion.

Ngong (2010) seems to agree with Maimela that salvation is possible through African religions. He supports his position by acknowledging Mbiti’s view that Africans come to God in prayer because they stand convicted of God being the creator, holding the power of life and death. He says the main reason Africans come to God is “for the sustenance of life and the fending off of death and annihilation” (Ngong, 2010:126). He posits that this thought is defined by the Anlo Ewe’s people use of the word *Dagbe*, which means total wellbeing (Ngong, 2010:126). Shabangu (2005:196-197) also submits that this word, *Dagbe*, may at times mean salvation. To Ngong (2010), this is a goal of ATR in general – total well-being. In assessing Mbiti’s concept of salvation, he finds that it is apparent that salvation is

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<sup>8</sup> Tabula rasa, according to Pobee and Ositelu II (1998:9) refers to wiping the slate clean, a practice which they say made Christianity foreign and missionaries the bearers of a culture alien to Africa.

understood largely as material well-being, as evidenced by submissions of the likes of Maimela, Bediako, Asante, Mugabe, Okorochoa and others.

Ngong suggests further that, even though salvation in ATR terms concerns mostly the present, there is also an afterlife-element to it which is addressed through ancestry. To this he says that progressing towards ancestry and, by implication, salvation, can be impeded if one is left without offspring. He says it is granted that “having children increases the likelihood that one would become an ancestor and not having children diminishes this possibility” (Ngong 2010:24). Pobee holds the same view:

The ancestor is the one who lived to a ripe old age and in an exemplary manner or did much to enhance the prestige and standing of the family, clan and tribe (1976:8).

This thought is major in African tradition and is the means by which Pobee and Ngong postulate salvation for an African. They argue that God remains the Supreme Being whilst other gods, inclusive of ancestors, become intermediaries through which he can be accessed (Ngong, 2010:26; Pobee, 1976:18).<sup>9</sup> This demotes Jesus’ role as the only Savior and places ancestors on the same level as him. However, as indicated, Turaki (1999:29) argues that, if this is the view, then there is no need for Christ’s salvation offer.

## **2.4 THE DEFINITION AND INTERPRETATION OF SIN IN ATR**

The question to be discussed in this section is: how can salvation occur where there is no sin or wrongdoing? Mbiti (Meiring, 2005) leave us with African people who have no sin, which compounds our approach to salvation. On the other hand, various scholars (Desai 1962; Booth, 1977; Maimela, 1985; Setiloane, 1986; Bediako, 2000; Darko, 2015) hold the view that the sin committed by Africans occurs among humans, *and only by extension* towards God, because humanity is *Imago Dei* (The Image of God), and there is no direct sin that humans can commit towards God. Nyamiti (1969), Awolalu (1976), and Adeyemo (1979) in particular, hold that a better understanding of sin will come only when religions, ATR especially, view sin from a biblical point of view. Nevertheless, if we deal with salvation which entails Christ as the Saviour, some wrong must be committed against him in order to spring him into action. After all, Paul (in Romans 3:23) alerts us that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We therefore need to understand what sin is according to African

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<sup>9</sup> Pobee (1976:18) submits that, among “the spirit-world there is a hierarchy with God the Supreme Being as the first and the ancestors as his most important agents. The hierarchy corresponds to the social structure with the chief as the first citizen who is the link between the living and the spirit-world.”

thought. Can Africans hold a special view of what sin is, contrary to the biblical definition, and what are the implications of such a possibility?

#### **2.4.1. Definition of sin**

Meiring (2007:739) submits that “Africans’ view of sin differs greatly from that of significant segments of Western Christianity.” Although the present section may not deal extensively with Western Christianity’s thoughts on what sin is, it will engage with the view of African religion’s thoughts on sin. Awolalu submits that, for as long as humanity observes “the rules of conduct, they have the favour of the Supreme Being and His agents and they enjoy *shalom* (total well-being)” (1976:275). He further argues that acting contrary to this conduct amounts to the introduction of sin: if one fails to obey the command of the Supreme Being, one is a sinner.

Darko (2015:46) and Meiring (2007:739) suggest that wrongdoing in Africa relates to the contravention of specific codes of community expectations. They say that ATR places high value on cordial communal relations, including the keeping of taboos and moral behaviours which, when broken, result in sin against humans and therefore alienation from God; when these are upheld, there is a reconciliation with God (Darko, 2015:47; Meiring, 2007:740). Bediako (2000:26) argues that sin is “basically injury to the interest of another and damage to the collective life of the group,” equating sin with antisocial behaviour, and only a transgression of God’s will in terms of the *Imago Dei*. Shakuba (2004:3) is clearer: sin leads to evil and, consequently, murder, rape, and so on manifest. To him, “sin is a conscious decision to turn away from God” (2004:13).

It should be concluded that sin is a wrongful action that is not acceptable to either humanity or the deity. In a sinful life, evils manifest themselves among communities and against God. These maladies break the cohesion of societies and ultimately alienate humanity from God. Evidently, idolatry entrenches itself when people turn away from God. Moreover, it is clear that everyone, including Africans, do have the capacity to sin because of the many evils manifest in our societies today.

#### **2.4.2. Sin and its effects according to African thought**

The greatest controversy here is Mbiti’s submission that Africans regard themselves to be without sin (Meiring, 2005:70). This seems to be contrary to his earlier thought that most African peoples “accept or acknowledge God as the final guardian of Law and order and of

the moral and ethical codes,” so that murder, theft and other transgressions are deemed to be offences against God (Mbiti, 1969:206). In spite of this, Mbiti admits to not preaching about sin in his congregation in Europe because, as he puts it, “sin does not cross the lives of the people” (Meiring, 2005:70). Part of the work of the Holy Spirit, according to John 16:8, is to convict the world of its sin. Therefore, while Mbiti opts not to speak of sin, it is central to the issue of reconciliation and salvation that humanity needs from God. It is more so important and closer to all humanity, including Africans themselves, especially when structural sin is in view.

Structural sin, sometimes referred to as structures of sin or social sin, must therefore find ventilation in this regard. Maimela’s point can find traction if one sided explanation of sin is considered as stated by Pope John Paul II – “sin, in its proper sense, is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person and not properly a group or community.”<sup>10</sup> However, Africans are community oriented people (Bediako, 2004:25), and view sin as being committed between equals and societies (Maimela, 1985:69) and resulting in damage to a collective life of a group (Bediako, 2000:26). This aligns with structural sin as viewed by Hamilton (2021:360-380) and Nolan (1988:43) that it is something subjective (personal) as well as objective (social), something internal as well as external to humans.

Because this sin is both external and internal, our participation within institutions or our perpetuating of prevalent community behaviours, alienate us from people and from God. As such evil acts that are committed within African communities, especially in rural villages where chieftaincies are still in force, are punishable by the entire community. For instance, theft, rapes, and murders that are committed within a particular community attract the wrath of the whole community. Further, there exist even entrenched systemic sins such as racism, patriarchy, and discrimination, which to others who choose to be ignorant, appear as normal societal behaviours. These sins as well, because they are committed against humans, cannot escape the punishment of God because humanity is God’s image.

While Maluleke (Meiring, 2005:74) reckons that Africans should be reunited with God, Mbiti maintains that people, Africans in particular, have no need to reconcile themselves with God, arguing that the idea that God reconciles the world to himself was Paul’s (Meiring, 2005:70). Price Nyabongo (in Desai, 1962:38) in similar vein advocates that Africans do not have in their vocabulary the word sin, instead, are only conscious of the rights and wrongs they commit based not on Law but on conscience. Mbiti asserts therefore that people need not

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<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 1984, para. 16.

reconcile with God because, at the very beginning, their African worldview informed them that they are not sinners and are already in a relationship with God. Nevertheless, Mbiti (1969:99) admits that Christianity outclasses ATRs in that the latter fail dismally to offer hope of redemption and resurrection to humanity, whereas this is the heart of Christianity.

Resurrection and redemption would therefore not be central to ATR because these concepts rise on account of sin – something ATR does not accede to. Meiring (2007:739) puts this squarely at the feet of white missionaries who held that “Africans had no sense of religion and no sense of sin.” Although they may not have had a “sense” of these, the role of the Gospel is to convict the world of its sin and enforce its need for a redeemer (Jn. 16:8). At the very least, it makes humanity conscious of the presence of sin and their need for a redeemer. We may therefore say that the Gospel and the Holy Spirit came so that Africans could have a sense of sin, and ponder a redeemer who will best deliver them. If ATR stands opposed to this position, a question must rise: what did Christ die for if it was not for reconciliation and forgiveness of sins? To this, Ojike (in Desai, 1962:50) submits that Africans are capable of committing sin and also understand that it is to break the Law of God, given that they offer sacrifices to appease angry spirits.

Calvin Rieber (in Booth, 1977:271) on the other hand finds that African religion restricts sin to ritual impurity rather than including within its definition ethical unrighteousness. To Africans, therefore, sin is something that is apart from the soul and can be washed through means devised by humans. Ojike and Nyabongo (in Desai, 1962:38, 50) thus aver that ritual cleansing becomes necessary to put an African back to the right social standing. However, Vorster (2010:73) submits that humanity’s sin is not accidental; human beings have a propensity to commit sin. This informs us that sin is inherent in humanity: it goes deeper than the external looks and weighs heavily on the soul, and no amount of ritual cleansing will rid humanity of it - the same way the blood of animals failed in the Old Testament (Heb. 10:4).

Idowu in acceding that sin is restricted to humanity, classifies it in two categories: major and minor sins (in Adeyemo, 1979:54-55). He maintains that there is no sin against God and those engaging in sinful acts are concerned about people’s reactions; as they say in Sesotho, *Batho ba tla reng?* (“What will people say?”). It is here that I concur with Adeyemo (1979:58) and Khathide (in Meiring, 2005:71), who argue that people should view sin through the lens of the Bible. The obscuring of this lens indeed makes Africans believe that they have a perpetual relationship with God which cannot be broken, not even by the presence of sin. They will also continue to see salvation in terms of their traditional religions, especially relating to the pressing issues of everyday life, and not necessarily for the life

beyond the grave. In opting to explain sin differently from the Bible, Africans deny themselves an opportunity to see the impotence of their religion when it comes to providing the true salvation, which matters to the soul. Also, they will continue to fail to see their “true situation before God” as Duffy (1988:617) states. By not acceding to the Bible’s interpretation, Africans will continue to see every world religion as a conduit of salvation (Adeyemo, 1979:13).

Maimela captions Sawyerr’s list of four types of sins which he believes an African must be delivered from. These include day to day anxieties of life;<sup>11</sup> fear of evil spirits and malicious people;<sup>12</sup> injustices directed towards ancestors;<sup>13</sup> and loss of vital power, which subsists in the Supreme Being, supernatural spirits and people<sup>14</sup> (Maimela, 1985:68-69). To Maimela, it is what others do to you that constitute sin, which fails to point the doer of evil towards God for redemption. Everything which he refers to as sin is concerned with the well-being of the community and of humans who must be positioned such that they are able to manipulate and control forces of this world to ensure good life for themselves. The Bible warns: what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? (Mt. 16:26) The failure by ATR to be concerned about the salvation of the soul must alert us to the narrow mind by which they view salvation. This leaves out the need for humans to relate to God – the very reason Christ died.

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<sup>11</sup> Maimela (1985:68) explains – “Here we may recall the problems or oppressions that are caused by the inconsistencies of the harsh African weather, its droughts and devastating floods; the hazards of everyday life which are caused by encounters with wild beasts and poisonous snakes; the problems of hunger and poverty resulting in a high infant mortality rate.”

<sup>12</sup> Maimela (1985:68) further explains – “Accordingly, most Africans express an intense revulsion against all forms of diabolical evil embodied in witchcraft, because not only does it prostitute the laws of nature by a deliberate manipulation of the vital forces for destructive purposes, but also cynically poisons all human relationships, thereby threatening the corporate nature of society.”

<sup>13</sup> Maimela (1985:69) - This happens when a youngster takes an important decision without taking the ancestors' interest into account by, for instance, disposing of family fortune, or failing to care for one's immediate elderly family members, thus provoking the anger of the founders of one's extended family or clan.

<sup>14</sup> Maimela (1985:69) – “In order to achieve this objective, every member of society is brought up and taught to avoid all activities that would lead to personal defilement and uncleanness and therewith result in impotency and misfortunes for the community.”

Maimela (1985:68-69) continues that good relations with oneself and one's neighbour, and mastering the manipulation of evil forces as well as the respect we pay to ancestors, save one from sin and therefore rescue one from the troubles of life. Perhaps it is a good argument to make, but the lack of clarity as regards the way in which we connect humanity to God remains one of its salient challenges. Adeyemo (1979:52) and Shakuba (2004:3) rightly demonstrate that the prevalence of evil is a sign of the abiding sin in the lives of people. We also learn from the Gospel of John (Jn. 1:29) that the remedy for sin is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Here we stand waiting for ATR adherents to appraise us on how humanity can drive itself back to God in the absence of Christ.

## **2.5. CONCLUSION**

Many African biblical scholars agree that Christianity is indigenous to Africa, with its roots appearing within the continent in the earliest centuries. Africa, much like other parts of the world, played an important role in the formation and spread of Christianity, spearheaded by great Fathers like Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and Origen. On salvation question, ATR views it as a way out of immediate pressing situations such as witchcraft, poverty, and bad relationships. They see salvation as harmony between people and ancestors, neighbours, and society in general, disregarding the salvation of the soul and spirit. They hold that, contrary to biblical view, sin is ritual impurity, injury to relationships within communities, and separation from ancestors, amongst other things. They stand highly convicted that ATR is a solvent of Christianity and a preparation of the Gospel and that ATR should not conform to Christianity, instead, that the reverse should be upheld. Accordingly, ATR establishes that deliverance from one's sins is equivalent to deliverance from issues such as life's anxieties, fears of evil spirits, injustices towards ancestors, and loss of power.

One should however counter that humanity is capable of sinning. The presence of sin alerts us to our need of salvation. Confronted by these two critical issues (i.e. sin and salvation), an African must find a way of relief from maladies and lead a life of total well-being. The present chapter has clarified that Christianity is not a Western phenomenon but a universal one. Africans must thus engage with the Bible in a meaningful way so as to address critical concepts that should shape their religion not along Western thought as has been the case, but in accordance with African needs. Accordingly, the adopting of biblical interpretation of terms such as sin and salvation become the point of departure for meaningful biblical engagement.

## **CHAPTER 3: AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO SALVATION AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LAW AND GOSPEL**

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapter has outlined the position of ATR regarding sin and salvation, indicating a disjuncture between a biblical understanding of the themes against ATR interpretation. The implication is that, while Pentecostal Christians subscribe to salvation by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9), ATR adherents appear to believe in ritual performance as a vehicle for salvation. In this chapter, we will investigate how ATR perceives attaining salvation through the rituals they perform.

### **3.2. VARIOUS APPROACHES TO SALVATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS**

Over the years, much has been written concerning the subject of ATR. The crux was to establish ATR as a leading religion that Africans can relate to and, at the same time, elevate it to an equal footing with Christianity (Brand, 1999), which appears to be regarded as opposition. Thus Maluleke (2005:1) posits that the concern of all religions is reconciliation and by extension salvation: the benchmarks of Christian religion. He accordingly acknowledges that “in Africa, Christ is the healer, liberator, ancestor, mediator, elder brother, the crucified one, head and master of initiation and the black messiah” (Maluleke, 1994:57). Moreover, prominent scholars have over the decades also submitted that Christ is indeed the (great) ancestor (Bediako, 2004; Mbiti, 1969; Pobee, 1998; Nyamiti, 2006). Intentionally or not, Christ has been squeezed into a number of equations with an effort to adapt ATR to Christianity. In this milieu, a struggle has ensued between the two religions, where adherents of ATR pursue a voice for their religion, which they strongly feel has been suppressed if not entirely misrepresented by Western missionaries (Desai, 1962; Mbiti, 1969; Maimela, 1985).

In an attempt to right these wrongs, Christianity together with its fundamental concepts (sacraments) has been subjected to scrutiny. For instance, some scholars (such as Letšosa & De Klerk, 2019) investigated traditional African circumcision against the background of the Christian understanding of baptism, mapping out similarities and seeking to understand the value circumcision adds to the life of an African. Others (such as Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013) have scrutinized the Trinitarian concept where Christ is appraised as an ancestor and by implication placed on equal footing with African ancestors. It suggests that, if Christ is the ancestor with the power to save, then our clan ancestors also possess such powers and are

also capable mediums for salvation. Maimela (1985), Brand (1999), and Manganyi & Buitendag (2013) explored the concept of ritual killing (animal sacrifices) as means to attain total well-being and acceptance into a community. This gives rise to the view held by Mbiti (1969) and Idowu (1962) amongst others, who interpret salvation as acceptance into community in light of the submission that animal sacrifices aid acceptance into community. A question arises which this present study must answer: is it possible that this practice offers salvation seeing that it is one of the leading rituals in ATR?

Another aspect concerning salvation in ATR relates to the role of anthropology (Brand, 1999:196-202). Here ATR opts not to focus on traditional aspects of justification and sanctification but primarily on liberation and freedom from oppression for salvation (Brand, 1999:197). This invites Christ into the debate as a political figure like the one the Jews thought he was, bringing political liberation and freedom. Lastly, we will look into Brand's (1999:208-214) cultural accounts of salvation in ATRs which seek to adapt the Gospel to African cultural needs in order to bring salvation to Africans.

Therefore, the ATR rituals of circumcision, animal sacrifices, ancestral veneration, ancestral foods and libations, amongst others, will subsequently be evaluated as to whether they do indeed carry any salvific powers. This evaluation is important in light of Maimela's assertion that ATR is in itself salvific, given the rituals that are performed to deal with sin in the African worldview (Maimela, 1985:66-69). This assessment will therefore put circumcision in the place of baptism, the Eucharist in the place of ancestral food and libations, amongst others, so as to determine the strength of such ATR rituals as vehicles of salvation.

### **3.2.1. CIRCUMCISION AS A WAY OF SALVATION**

Letšosa and De Klerk (2019:1) begin by saying that there are similarities between Sesotho initiation (circumcision) and the Christian tradition of baptism. These two, they say, "give the individual entrance into a new stage of life." Correctly, Letšosa and De Klerk (2019:1) submit that the Sesotho initiation is a passage to manhood whilst Christian baptism is an etching of a believer into the body of Christ. Circumcision has long since been biblically documented as an important event during the time of Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). At the same time, ATR views this as an important rite in their custom and it is thus worthwhile to understand how it was perceived in OT times.

### **3.2.1.1. The origins and purpose of circumcision**

There are divergent views regarding the inception of circumcision. Robertson (1980:149) holds that it cannot be said outright that the practice of circumcision originated with Israel. Vos (1971:103) holds to the same view, citing that this practice existed prior to Abraham among non-Semitic races, Egyptians, American tribes and among those residing in Southern Pacific islands. While not much is said about circumcision during the times of Adam until Noah, Sasson (1966:473) is of the view that this rite was not adopted from external groups such as Egyptians and others.

Sasson (1966:473-474) further contends that Northern Syria practiced this rite and that it might have been introduced to them by peaceful invaders who inhabited their country in those times. He also completely rejects the idea that Egypt could have influenced Syria over this practice, citing lack of proof in literature and archaeology to support the Egyptian origin. Circumcision, as he puts it, “travelled from the north to the south, and not the other way around” (1966:474-476). Regardless of these divergent views, Vos (1971:103) correctly holds that in Abraham’s family it was “invested with a new significance.”

### **3.2.1.2. The biblical hallmarks of circumcision narrative**

Vos remarks that circumcision was introduced to Abraham in terms of a new significance (1971:103). The first time this concept is mentioned in the Bible is in Gen. 17, when God explicitly constitutes a relationship between Abraham and himself and gives him a mark that will stay with him perpetually. When it was first inaugurated in the OT, circumcision was intended to, amongst other things, be the seal of the covenant (Robertson, 1980:148), which God was entering into with Abraham and his posterity. Robertson (1980:149-150) states that it indicated the need for cleansing which subsequently followed. Vos (1971:103) regards circumcision as the removal of the unclean, in this case the foreskin.

With the passing of time, it became clear that God intended much more around circumcision. Vos (1971:103) rightly intimates that circumcision as a ritual was meant to convey ethical and spiritual truth. This evidently followed Moses’ understanding that it concerns the removal of disqualification of speech (Ex. 6:12, 30). Explicitly, Prophet Jeremiah (in Jer. 4:4) and Moses (in Ex. 6) agree to the circumcision of the heart as God’s central requirement to those who must relate to him. This will in turn cause people to love God and therefore make them ethical and spiritually upright.

The same sentiments are carried by the Apostle Paul who, notwithstanding the fact that the Jews of his time held strongly to circumcision, felt that a circumcision of the heart should be elevated above that of the flesh (Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11-13). By implication, what started as the setting apart of Abraham and his descendants bearing external markings became necessary to effect change internally in ethics and spirit.

### **3.2.1.3. An African approach and belief**

In a similar vein, Africans held to this practice, which predates their memories. Letšosa and De Klerk (2019:2) accordingly admit that this practice has a long history in Africa. Generally, circumcision is used as a sanitary measure (Vos, 1971:103). In addition, the South African government promotes male circumcision as a method for combating the spread of STDs; in particular HIV/ AIDS (Nxumalo & Mchunu, 2019:1). In non-Christian cultures, circumcision is perceived in light of marital requirements and in terms of an entrance into the state of manhood (Sasson, 1966:474; Letšosa & De Klerk, 2019:2). It is also established that in traditional councils only circumcised men are allowed into a kraal (known as *kgotla*)<sup>15</sup> where decisions concerning community affairs are taken (Letšosa & De Klerk, 2019:13). Only under extenuating circumstances are other people such as women and the uncircumcised allowed not to dish out opinions, but mainly to respond to matters concerning them.

Critically, those who practice this custom, especially in Africa, hold it in high esteem; it not only makes of them “*proper human beings*,”<sup>16</sup> but it secures for them an invitation to the table where decisions concerning clan or family are taken (Letšosa & De Klerk 2019:4). Further, it seals them as members of their clan or tribe as Vos states (1948:103). Africans are generally community-oriented people and their wellbeing is intricately connected to right standing within their communities. Many would prefer not to be outcasts and thus go through circumcision rites so that they become full members of their clan and community.

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<sup>15</sup> *Kgotla* is a Sesotho name that refers to a place where only men gather to deliberate on issues that affect the community. This is a highly traditional place and entry into this place is highly controlled.

<sup>16</sup> Letšosa & De Klerk (2019:4) state that, “prior to initiation and circumcision, boys are not yet regarded as accomplished ‘persons,’ but are rather perceived as ‘sub-humans.’ They are always addressed in derogatory terms and called *bashemane* [boys] or *dintja* [dogs].”

#### 3.2.1.4. Similarities between circumcision and baptism and the unintended outcome

Although circumcision appears the same in procedure (cutting of foreskin), it is perceived differently in terms of its function (what it can do). In Christianity, it is not a way of salvation, but a witness to salvation (Robertson, 1980:149). Abraham was not right with God because of circumcision but by choosing to, and walking dutifully in faith before God (Heb. 11:8-10). Biblical circumcision was a requirement on infants (eight-days-old male children) without power to consent, and could not have made infants righteous owing to absence of ability to consent (Sasson, 1966:474; Vos, 1971:103). Vos thus explains that circumcision was not an act of procreation but a direct confrontation of sinful human nature, hence the need to conduct it on infants (1971:105).

In contrast, ATRs hold that *salvation* is to belong to a community (Bediako, 2004:25); that it centres on one's ability to bear children and have one's name live long after death (Maimela, 1985). Circumcision is therefore regarded as an important rite for the sake of identity and procreation, and Pobee asserts that doing *culture* amounts to salvation (1998:260). Simultaneously, circumcision introduces people to their clan and community, and in the process, removes alienation they may suffer for not undergoing the rite.

Further, circumcision is a prerequisite for entering into marriage and, by extension, procreation. Therefore, the view of sin as ritual impurity and not ethical unrighteousness in ATR (Rieber, 1977:271), answers why the removing of the foreskin through circumcision is equated to cleansing a person of any impurities. Two strong views therefore come to bear on this act: that, through circumcision, alienation from clan or community is removed, and that all ritual impurities are cleansed.

Mbiti explains that initiation/ circumcision has many symbolic and religious meanings. He says withdrawal from society and absence from home to receive instruction during the circumcision rite period, is symbolic of the process of "dying, living in the spirit world and being reborn (resurrected)" (1969:121). The implication is that circumcision stands as that critical requirement that affords an African their *salvation*. After all, this idea develops following an interpretation of what salvation is in ATR – overcoming forces of life and belonging to a community of which circumcision is central to. This stands directly in contrast with a biblical narrative of salvation – cleansing from sin. Clearly, these are the dangers of trying to explain salvation from foundations different from Christianity, particularly if ATR wants to identify with the God who elected to save humanity through Christ.

### **3.2.2. ANCESTORS IN THE PLACE OF CHRIST FOR SALVATION**

The worship, veneration or serving ancestors is central to ATR and is perhaps the most important custom that adherents of this religion practice (Desai, 1962:19; Mensele, 2011; Turaki, 1999:177). The importance invested in the ancestors stems from the fact that, among others, they lived amongst the community and were dearly loved (Mbiti, 1969). Every effort is made by those left behind to appease the souls of these departed loved ones. This is most evident during burial ceremonies which must comply to customary burial rites where more often than not no expenses are spared (Ezenweke, 2008:3; Mbiti, 1969:149). Equally, a certain belief is held about the powers ancestors have, what they can do for their loved ones and how one should relate to them. This is subsequently examined further.

#### **3.2.2.1. Who is an ancestor?**

To define an ancestor accurately is critical for understanding the hope of salvation in ATR. While the definition of an ancestor should appear to be obvious, the belief in them or at least their veneration compounds the issue and makes for a complicated definition. The *Oxford advanced dictionary* defines an ancestor as “a person in your family who lived a long time ago” (Hey & Holloway, 2015:48). In simple terms, an ancestor is a dead person. Turaki (1999:176) holds this view and proposes that “ancestors are the dead members of a family, clan or tribe.”

Mbiti’s (1969:83) understanding is that ancestors are the living-dead who are elder members of the clan who also happen to speak the language of God. Ezenweke’s (2008:3) view that “the goal of life is to become an ancestor after death,” leaves us perplexed whether dying does not automatically mean that one is an ancestor, considering that ancestors are dead members of a family, clan or tribe. Bae (2007:23) surmises that “the concept of ancestors is closely linked to that of the departed kin.” A common feature in the myriad of definitions of ancestors, are that they are dead relatives who were closely linked to the family, clan, or tribe. This leads us to investigate the role of ancestors in salvation matters.

#### **3.2.2.2. What is the role of an ancestor in ATR?**

ATR adherents advance that, even though ancestors are dead, they are a part of the life of a community (Turaki, 1999:176). This makes ancestors active participants of the proceedings in the life of the people left behind. Many roles are attributed to the ancestors within the specific family and the community at large. For instance, Turaki (1999:178) finds that ATR

adherents believe that ancestors are guardians of family tradition and life; that they correct the errors committed by the living who fail to follow customs; that they stand as intermediaries between humankind and God and, by implication, receive requests from the living and relay answers from God, to name a few. Ezenweke (2008:4) suggests that ancestors are closely linked with the welfare of their immediate family, asserting that this linkage hinges on the elders of the family who are regarded as representative of the ancestors to the family group. She says that the roles of ancestors include, amongst others, protecting the family from diseases, evils, and wars; acting as mediators between the people and divinity; and disciplining those who go astray (Ezenweke, 2008:4-5).

Wanamaker (1997:294) avers that the ancestor is a source of benefit and a giver and sustainer of life. Bae (2007:26) submits that ancestors remain representatives of social Law and tradition and that they play a role as intermediaries between God and their descendants. Perhaps the most radical view about salvation found in ancestors is embodied in Mosothoane's idea that the meaning of "in Christ" was relatable to ancestors as "a bridge over the chasm of death." According to him, for ATR adherents and Africans in general, this bridge is the belief in ancestors (Mosothoane, 1973:86). He does not however explain the question of the dead who were not in Christ, but claims that the descent of Christ into Hades gives hope of cosmic salvation for such ancestors to make it possible for Africans to relate to them. He suggests that the paganism of those who died without Christ is removed and veneration of ancestors therefore becomes possible (Mosothoane, 1973:94-95).

Closer scrutiny of the role of ancestors reveals serious implications as regards the attainment of salvation by Africans. What is evident in all these submissions is that, in the minds of ATR adherents, ancestors are just as capable to deliver salvation, bearing upon themselves the salvific attributes of Christ. Ancestors assume the mediatory and reconciliatory role, receive prayers and send back answers, grant benefits and, further, give and sustain life. While Bediako (1992:224) argues for the supremacy of the Lordship of Christ amongst ancestors, his viewpoint becomes subdued in the myriad of expositions of ancestors as agents of salvation themselves, thus equating them to Christ.

Oddly, Mosothoane (1973:86) claims that, as Christ is the bridge of salvation for Christians, ancestors are the bridge of salvation to ATR adherents. But this contradicts the clear message of the gospel that no one comes to the Father except through the Christ (Jn. 14:6b). If ancestors possess such power, it follows logically that they are able to save just as Christ does. However, while ancestors remain dead, is offering salvation to their adherents not a bridge too far for them?

### 3.2.2.3. The making of an ancestor out of Jesus Christ (*Ancestorising Christ*)

Because it is apparent that ancestors on their own remain a bridge too far for salvation because they remain dead, what ATR devotees seek to do is to fashion Christ as one of the ancestors, which I will refer to for the sake of brevity as “ancestorising” him. The motivation lies in that power and monopoly of salvation are conferred upon Christ and cannot be divested. In failing to take the power away from Christ, which better way remains of making ancestors agents of salvation than making one true Saviour an ancestor of note? Is it even plausible that Christ can be *ancestorised*?<sup>17</sup> Arguments from leading scholars such as Bediako, Mbiti, Nyamiti and Pobee who advance the view of Christ as an ancestor are worth noting.

Pobee posits that Christ should be relatable to Africans as a king, a priest and an ancestor (1979:60-61). He argues elsewhere (Pobee, 1998:268) that no culture falls outside the purview of God and that positive elements within different cultures should be used to build upon – hence he asks how ancestorship can be positively employed in service of God. In terms of the Akan tribe, Pobee (1976:6; 1979:61) submits that God is “King *par excellence*” and, by virtue of his honorifics, he is also the *Opanvin*, meaning elder. He avers that God remains as a supreme king who can never be approached directly but through ancestors who act as his agents (Pobee, 1976:6,18). He says this is a quicker way of attaining results when one turns to the right jurisdiction. This understanding resonates well with a thought held by other African scholars that ancestors are elders of the clan (Mbiti, 1969:83; Mvunamandi, 2008:78). In that way, Christ cannot become an ancestor without African people holding him to be an elder first.

Nyamiti (1985:32; 1990:139) uses the concept of the Trinity to forge a relationship of ancestral kinship in which God is the Father and Christ the Son. The Spirit is then viewed as the conduit that makes communication between the two possible. This is further stimulated by rituals performed in Christianity, especially the Eucharist, viewed in comparable terms to rituals that adherents of ATR perform for their ancestors. ATR adherents view these Christian sacraments as relating to their religion, thus granting their religion significance, especially in the eyes of western Christianity which disparages African religions. Bae (2007:67) submits that, according to Nyamiti, “Christ can be considered our ultimate brother-ancestor,” which raises two pertinent questions as expressed by Manganyi and Buitendag (2013:4): if “Christ becomes one of the ancestors, what is the position of God the Father? If

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<sup>17</sup> “Ancestorise” is used here as referring to a process of making Christ an ancestor.

Jesus becomes an ancestor to the people, does the Father become an ancestor to the Son?”

This configuration (of Father-Son-Spirit relationship) compounds the issue of the Trinity as set out in the Bible. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one (1 Jn. 5:7). Further scripture alerts us that Christ is the only begotten of the Father (Jn. 3:16), meaning that because no one comes after Christ, he cannot be an ancestor to anyone. Further, God remains infinite, without beginning or end, meaning that there was none before him, and there will be none after him. If God becomes an ancestor, who begets that which came before him? The whole of Scripture fails to explain His beginning or His end except to confer upon him pre-eminence (Gen. 1:1).

In a similar vein, Bediako (1996:39-40) uses the concept of incarnation around the ancestral understanding to arrive at a point where Christ can be relatable to Africans as an ancestor. Bediako submits that, through incarnation, Christ assumed universal ancestorship for every Christian and African alike (1996:39, 2004:196). He positions Christ as our elder brother who shared in our African experiences except for our sin and alienation because of his sinless nature (Bediako, 2004:197). Bediako (2004:199) affirms that Christ relates to the concepts of King and Priest in line with the biblical context but rarely relates to the ancestral concept as he is not defined in ancestral terms in the Bible, making it a struggle to ancestorise him.

The skill with which Bediako cuts across the ancestral cult, and with lucid arguments submitting that Christ is nothing like ancestors; he is divine, more potent, incarnate, independent, and universal (2004:197-200) amongst other things, must drive him to find it onerous to ancestorise Christ. Yet he concludes that “Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors” (Bediako, 2004:200). This thought seems laced with inferences that dead and interred as they are, ancestors have something to offer the living. In this way, Christ can then be defined in ATR terms.

On the other hand, Mbiti (1970:153) does not struggle at all with ancestorising Christ. He avers that “the understanding of African Christianity is that since Jesus died and was seen by some walking the streets of Jerusalem, He is regarded as living dead.” In contrast to this view, Mogoba ignores the resurrection of Christ and concentrates on his death to argue that, because Christ has died, ancestorship is bestowed upon him, while every other ancestor has Christ as his or her ancestor (1981:34-36). Afeke and Verster (2007:53) argue that this approach places Christ’s providence on the same level as that of the ancestors. While some

writers claim that only a family or clan in proximity will be able to see their departed loved ones (Manganyi, 2013:4), for Christ the opposite transpired – members of his family, disciples, and strangers who were walking the streets saw him, not in spirit form but in the flesh (Lk. 24:13-16; 36). This categorically disqualifies a prospect where Christ is to assume the position of the living dead or an ancestor because he resurrected and is alive.

#### **3.2.2.4. Ancestorship as viable salvation vehicle**

Is ancestorship a viable vehicle for salvation? On many fronts, it appears that this vehicle fails to find its destination, as we have seen in terms of the limitations of ATR. The problem lies in the fact that ancestors identify with a particular clan or family whilst Christ holds universality. Bediako (2004:196) is correct in saying that Christ should be viewed in light of universality rather than his particularity as a Jew, affirming that the incarnation was of “the Saviour of all people, of all nations, and of all times.”

Whilst ancestorship concerns itself with race, culture, clan, and lineage (Bediako, 2004:198), it appears limited in terms of cross nationality issues. Christ, on the other hand, cuts across all these divides and comes representing the entire world (Jn. 3:16; Rom, 4:11-12; Gal. 3:8, 28). This must answer Pobee’s question why an Akan (or an African) should relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to their clan, family, tribe, and nation (1976:7-11). Whilst the message of the ancestors and their appearance can be heard and seen by their closest family, that of Christ is transcendent, visible to, and heard by all nations (Mt. 28:19).

Moreover, Bediako (2004:197) argues that Christ alone bridges the gulf between God and ATR through his atoning death. Here again it is conspicuous that, whilst our ancestors die and some fade into obscurity, their death is lacking in power to redeem the living. While Christians pray to Christ, the opposite is the case for ancestors, whose converted family members sends prayers to God on their behalf. Bediako (2004:197) sees this as “an important testimony to the depth of their understanding of Jesus as sole Lord and Saviour.” Christ’s presence has therefore endured, most certainly with the same potency it had at his incarnation - it is a force eternally refusing to be diminished.

Accordingly, Bediako (2004:197) should be heeded when he says that Biblical teaching shows that Jesus is who he is (the Saviour) because of what he has done and can do (save), and also that he was able to do what he did on the Cross because of who he is (God the Son) (Colossians 2:15ff). No human and not even the ancestors come close to this

achievement, given humanity's inherent limitations. Should one not therefore conclude that no salvation rests in ancestors because they also are sinners seeking clemency?

### **3.2.3. RITUALISTIC ANIMAL OFFERING AS REPLACEMENT OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE**

If Christians can lay hold of their salvation through Christ's sacrificial blood, why would adherents of ATR not see the same in the blood sacrifices they perform? There are many nuances hidden and many reasons given why adherents of ATR offer blood sacrifices. Chief among these are revitalization and vital force. At times, claims are made of possible reconciliation through these sacrifices. Upon scrutiny, these sacrifices mimic those of the OT and sometimes claim the same results as that of Christ's sacrifice. Whilst the present project may not look into many of these sacrifices, it will look into some of those which ATR adherents hold to be relatable to the Bible. It will thus evaluate the significance and the power of the blood in ATR.

#### **3.2.3.1. The OT sacrifices and their meaning**

Much of the freedom and expression that ATR enjoys is rooted in the Old Testament. This is the section of the Bible which abounds in rituals and customs performed for one or the other reason. To this extent, adherents of ATR profess that theirs is an OT religion, with Bediako (1995:69) stating that the OT validates African theology. Accordingly, ATR practitioners find resonance with Allison who remarks that, from earliest times, God insisted on blood sacrifice as the ground upon which he was to be approached (2016:47).

Ngubane therefore asserts that "African reconciliation rituals should be explored in order to utilize reconciliation models that can lead to true lasting reconciliation" (2004:1). Conversely, Meiring (2005:86) believes that reconciliation is the imperative of all religions and its aim is to heal and restore brokenness between humanity and God. Mbiti (1969:83) contends that, amongst other things, these reconciliatory sacrifices restore ontological balance between God, humans, spirits, and the living dead. Consequently, Africans push relentlessly for reconciliation and balance at the back of such sacrifices. Bae's conviction however, is that, in the OT, "sacrifices were never a means of revitalizing God or man" (2007:170). On the other hand, Allison (2016:47) notes that the ancient belief was that animal sacrifice nourishes the gods, prompting peaceful relations with the deity. Idowu shares this idea asserting that these sacrifices foster right relationships between humans and the deity (1962:120).

The position of God as regards sacrifices is explicit, as found in Leviticus 3:17, and he could neither be revitalized nor be nourished by such sacrifices because of his omnipotence and holiness, as Allison remarks (2016:47). Similarly, the conditions of his relationship with humanity are fully displayed in Christ's sacrifice. Yet, for mere mortals, the very reason they opt to use blood and drink it is centred on their belief that it can somehow strengthen and nourish them. Here Allison is of the view that, through these sacrifices, heathen nations seek to deify the powers of nature (2016:47).

Meiring (2005:106) submits that the general view is that some sacrifices "enhance the relationship between God and humans, while others atone for human wrongdoing and may also be intended for God by way of the ancestors." In essence, an assertion can be made that ATR views sacrifices as a way of vitalizing mere mortals by giving them standing before God and granting them that vital force they so need to manipulate forces of life. Allison (2016:48) also states that blood sacrifice was an integral part of Israel's life and was intended at restoring and maintaining the right relationship with God. Evidently, those who offered such sacrifices in Israel knew that their sins were forgiven, that they were reconciled with God, and that their standing before God was restored.

Mensele (2011:36) repeatedly shows the strength of the blood sacrifices performed by ATR practitioners. To an extent, the evidence he provides is hard to refute because it is based on the lived experiences of people. These sacrifices bestow power to sangomas (traditional healers) (Mvunabandi, 2008:73-74) and healing to those whose sicknesses are believed to have baffled medical doctors and Christian practitioners alike (Mensele, 2011:36). Mensele (2011:36; 78-80) says that these rituals transform even to a point of revitalizing a life that was on the brink of extinction. Ubruhe (1996) utters the same sentiments and sees in these sacrifices propitiatory action, a cleansing and communion with one's ancestors and God. He submits that a sacrifice,

"involving the slaughtering of an animal, its offering and the pouring out of its blood, immolation of some parts of the animal and the eating of other parts, can be intended as a [proprietary] act, a gift, a cleansing ceremony, a way to establish communion with the ancestors and/ or God or a reconstruction of community." (p. 20)

It appears therefore that these sacrifices, apart from establishing communication with ancestors and God, are aimed at cleansing sin – the barrier between God and people.

Theron (1996:119) also submits that at times when disharmony or disruption was occasioned by sin, rituals remained necessary for restoration. As such, Ubruhe (1996:20-21) says that these sacrifices are equivalent to propitiatory acts. The books of Leviticus and Exodus evidence that such actions were taken by the children of Israel to bring about restoration or harmony. These rules were given explicitly to afford Israel an opportunity to correct their standing with God. It is apparent therefore that an African religious practitioner is standing like Moses in times past, looking to the offering of sacrifices for cleansing. Bediako (1995:69) would then proclaim boldly that the OT authenticates African theology.

We therefore cannot be blind to the fact that instructions concerning sacrifices were documented in the OT, the same were carried out in the tabernacle, and transformation of people's lives was witnessed. Hindson and Mitchel (2010a:144) affirm that expiation had the effect of making propitiation – turning away divine wrath by a satisfactory, substitutionary sacrifice. Bae (2007) may want to read too much in the fact that sacrifices were not vehicles for restoration and harmony, but in light of Scripture, one is compelled to agree that indeed God guarded closely what he had spoken; he followed suit with concomitant action that made Israel return to him through such sacrifices.

As such, ATR adherents still conduct some aspects of their religion in accordance with the OT. Whilst the OT may validate some of ATR adherents' practices, Hindson and Mitchel (2010a:144) submit that sacrifices performed "were but shadows and had to be done over and over again until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." It is important to note that, regardless of the powers contained in such practices, it neither means that they are acceptable, nor that they are correct from a Christian perspective in light of Christ's universal sacrifice. Allison (2016:46) argues that "the use or misuse of blood sacrifice outside the basic OT prescription should not only be kept in abeyance but also be absolutely abrogated." His reasoning is that these blood sacrifices remain God's prerogative as the one who instituted them (Allison, 2016:46). However, one may submit that the biblical position in light of Christ's appearance is that animal sacrifices as contained in the bible are no longer applicable.

The continuance therefore of using sacrifices incorrectly would include those offered to the ancestors in the face of Exodus 20:3 clearly cautioning against it. God did not leave humanity to their own devices, but in Christ, instituted a new covenant established upon a better sacrifice around which humanity must rally (Heb. 4:14-16, 10:12-14). Thus Kaiser (2008:303) remarks that God's promised plan of atonement was finally met when he gave his Son as a "ransom for many." In other words, evaluating the strength of the blood of

animals requires a determination whether there is any salvific power in the blood of sacrificial animals.

### **3.2.3.2. ATR and the blood of animals**

It is challenging to disprove that the sacrifices that ATR adherents perform yield results for them - the sick are healed, the tormented in spirit get their calling, and the troubled seem to find peace. Compounding this issue is the general interpretation of ATR adherents of what salvation is: in this instance, total well-being. To assess this issue, the present thesis examines some of the sacrifices that ATR adherents perform. Ultimately, the issue is to consider whether in these practices, salvation is possible.

Mensele's understanding is that rituals such as healing, thanksgiving, invocation, cleansing, purification, and ancestral calling, are rituals performed to appease the ancestors (Mensele, 2011:32-33; Mvunabandi, 2008:66-87). On closer inspection, similar rituals were also performed in the OT to bring peace between God and humans (Hindson & Mitchel, 2010a:143; Allison, 2016:48). Concerning the ancestral calling ritual, Mvunabandi (2008:74) says that the process of becoming a diviner (sangoma) is often marked by a prolonged death of an animal. Mensele (2011:50) says that the trainee has to suck animal blood as it oozes from the wound inflicted by a spear or knife. Mbiti says that the Jie of Uganda compel senior men to drink blood from the ribs of the goat while kneeling (1969:58-61). Whilst ATR adherents do not claim salvation through this activity, Mensele submits that the belief is that the blood enables the trainee to communicate and establish a link with their ancestors for the sake of their calling (2011:50). Sawyerr submits that this practice results in "incorporation by participation" and that it also "revivifies the object to whom the offering is made" (Maimela, 1969:77).

In terms that are virtually identical with the gushing of the blood of Christ which signified Christians' perpetual presence in him, this blood accords the sangoma as well as the general populace partaking in such sacrifices the same benefits – perpetual connection to the ancestors through the establishment of the blood covenant. This ritual stand conflicted with God's word because Israel was warned against the drinking of animal blood. Without suggesting that animal sacrifices are permissible, Allison (2016:46) warns that partaking in such sacrifices outside the guidelines of the OT should be completely discouraged. Further, Mensele (2011:57) and Mvunabandi (2008:73-75) mention that those who have sicknesses perform healing and propitiatory rituals. They explain that this ritual is normally activated when all else has failed. Accordingly, a sick person will receive an instruction to visit sacred

sites for cleansing and healing and a white chicken will then be slaughtered to bring life and health (Mensele, 2011:59) – where the life of a chicken is brought in place of the person. This therefore suggest that ATR claims to draw from the blood of animals the same benefits Christians would claim to draw from the blood of Christ – association, life, and health.

Mensele writes also about the invocation ritual. He says that local user communities approach these sacred sites to ask ancestors to help them to pray to God (Mensele, 2011:81), stating that the intermediary roles of ancestors are necessary because the *Basotho* (Africans of Sesotho origin) regard God as too great and mighty to be directly approached. According to Mensele, prayers are therefore held at places called “the altar” and “the temple” which are both located within these sacred places (2011:82). These prayers are informed by reading the Bible and performing traditional functions as the need necessitates. Also displayed at these sacred sites are candles kindled as symbols of seeking light (Mensele, 2011:82). Again, whilst the intention is right that people seek audience with God, the medium through which this is done does not satisfy scripture (Jn. 14:6). Evidently, the Israelites in the past approached God through priests and other mediums, but at the death of Christ the veil was torn, and humanity was granted direct access to God, making us priests who are charged with bringing ourselves as sweet-smelling sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1).

ATR practitioners also offer sacrifices intended for peace making. Meiring (2005:113) notes that some sacrifices “are made as propitiatory offerings to turn away the anger of the spirits (or God).” Sacrifices are seen as means of thanksgiving to the gods and instruments to maintain peace with the gods. Therefore, a thanksgiving ritual activity “is of cardinal importance amongst Basotho people if the wrath of the ancestors is to be avoided” (Mensele, 2011:50). Mensele (2011), observes that, according to one of the informants

“at Motouleng sacred site, a thanksgiving of bread is special because it is yeast-free. The dough is made of bread flower and water only. Round and flat rolls like cake are baked from the dough. Then the rolls are eaten. Sometimes the rolls can just be burnt on fire. A cow or a sheep is at times slaughtered a day before the actual performance of this kind of ritual. It is usually (not always); a whole night function. *The food prepared for this purpose must have been eaten up and finished by sunrise* (emphasis mine).” (p. 66)

This excerpt mimics Leviticus 7:11-18 around sacrifices for peace offerings. To adherents of ATR, once more, these sacrifices seem to work. The testimonies that follow such practices are hard to refute because people stand as living proof of their effect. Yet, despite the skill

and precision that ATR adherents perform these rituals, one thing remains troubling: for whom are these rituals performed, because God has distanced himself from them?

About rendering ritual offerings, Kwenda exclaims: “this is salvation: entities in their proper places” (1999:8). Therefore, when people have performed rituals; when ancestors have been properly acknowledged and are heads of their clan, when offerings and libations have been poured, salvation is now achieved through ancestral bridges. This gives rise to the same question posed by Adeyemo (1979:41): are these sacrifices “redemptive in the biblical sense?” This is critical if the God of the Bible is the one whom ATR adherents still aspire to.

### **3.2.3.3. The symbol of blood in Old Testament sacrifices**

It is common knowledge that there is power in blood. This is the reason why most religions seek to exploit it in all ways possible. I may say provocatively that all religions rise and fall owing to their relation to blood. Allison (2016:47) remarks that blood stands as God’s grandest gift and highest prerogative. He concedes that life with God “was made possible by blood in the sacrifice” (2016:47). Murray (n.d:3) on the other hand submits that blood is so significant that “there can be no approach to God; no fellowship with Him by faith; no enjoyment of His favour, apart from THE BLOOD.”

Palmer Robertson likens the relationship of God and humans to a covenant and intimates that it is a bond in blood so significant that it represents life (1980:4, 11). Vorster (2012:130) holds that only the penalty of death (the equivalence of blood) is sufficient to restore God’s honour, because it is the greatest possible satisfaction. This aligns with Adeyemo’s submission that blood is so important that, without its shedding, there can be no remission (1979:40). Critically, Vorster (2012:130) notes that blood stands as “rational payment to appease God’s wrath covered by God’s emotional love that embraces the sinner.” “With blood the society announces its connection to the sacred, to the everlasting, and to the ancestors,” submits Ashanti (2009:127).

Foremost, we learn that the first animal sacrifice in the Bible was made when it became apparent that Adam and Eve had sinned (Allison, 2016:48; Robertson, 1980:91). Needham states that the wrath of God abides in us owing to that original sin (2000:136). To Needham, Christ’s sacrifice was enough to replace all other types and take away this wrath forever (2000:137). Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:21) therefore postulate that God clothing Adam and Eve in animal skins was symbolic and prophetic about the Messiah whose sacrifice would ensure that “the unrighteous sinner can be clothed in Christ’s righteousness.” In this

submission, we see that the blood acted as a covering for Adam and Eve, as Hindson and Mitchell indeed intimate. God graciously provided them with more effective clothing to cover their shame (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:21).

Allison also brings us to Noah's sacrifice in which he offered an animal to God. He says this prompted God to restate his purpose concerning humanity's supposed relationship to life (2016:48, 54). Robertson (1980:110, 114) postulates that, with Noah, God entered the covenant of preservation possible through the sacrifice that he (Noah) had offered, which caused God to restate what he said to Adam. We see here then that the shedding of blood by Noah through sacrifice prompts God to commit to preserving humanity. Murray (n.d:3-4) is of the view that, just as the old earth was destroyed with what he terms water baptism (flood), it was necessary also "that the new earth must be baptised also with blood." It follows that, in spite of the abounding sin on earth, the world is standing because of the blood. Murray (n.d:5) is of the view that God's vengeance and anger towards humanity could not subside without the blood; nor could atonement and new life be possible in absence of the blood. He states:

Neither the electing grace of God, nor His covenant with Abraham, nor the exercise of His omnipotence, which could so easily have destroyed their oppressors, could dispense with[out] the necessity of THE BLOOD. (Murray, n.d:5)

Murray (n.d:4) then submits that, in his dealings with Abraham, God's idea was to undertake the formation of the nation that will serve him. With the possibility of Isaac dying, Murray finds that the intention was to show that it is only through death that freedom from the self-life to life truly consecrated in God becomes possible. While it is clear that Isaac was to be offered up as a sacrifice to God, Murray (n.d:4), Kaiser (1995:50) and MacMillan (1997:144) recount that a substitute became necessary because on account of original sin, Isaac would not prevail over death. Vorster (2012:129) posits that, because of God's holiness, human guilt necessitated a sacrifice that was undefiled which humans could not offer because of their abiding sin – hence Isaac needed to be replaced. Towns (2003:212) rightly submit that only the death of Christ could satisfy God's demand when it became apparent that the death of sinners would not pass his test.

Robertson finds that the pouring out of innocent blood of Christ reflects the process by which curses of nations are heaped on a blameless substitute, while Isaac would not meet this demand because of sin (Robertson, 1980:144), leaving Christ to stand in much later. The blood of the ram offered by God himself became a fitting substitute of Isaac's blood, just like

the blood of Christ is our substitute. Because it is God who provides the ram of the sacrifice, it appears that he becomes the object and the subject of the sacrifice, just as Christ is. Vorster (2012:144, 146) states that Christ is both victor and victim; but he is also a priest and a sacrifice. Allison (2016:52) thus finds that his (Christ) was a verifying blood covenant between the giver of life and Abraham's descendants and humanity at large.

Moreover, Allison (2016:54) says the Exodus to the Promised Land represents "the remembrance of God's blood-tie" with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Murray opines that the blood of the Paschal lamb, the institution of the Passover, and God's undertaking to pass over Israel owing to the blood teaches that life can be obtained only by the death of a substitute (Murray, n.d:5; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:143). Robertson (1980:155) states that the Passover event is so deep that it assures those who participate, "comfortable security while the death angel sent from God passes over." Towns (2003:300) puts it simply: "when the death angel saw the blood, he would pass over." Thus, by the slaying of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on their doorposts, Israel would understand that on that fateful night, the slain lamb assumed their position, giving them life in the place of death. Murray (n.d:5) rightly remarks that life was possible for them "only through THE BLOOD of a life given in their place, and appropriated by 'the sprinkling of that blood'."

Further, Allison (2016:52) and Murray (n.d:5) recall the Sinaitic covenant which followed the giving of the Law and was founded on the blood with the words: "This is the Blood of the Covenant." Murray (n.d:5) notes the marked difference from all the previous blood offerings, saying that in this case, the blood was "sprinkled on the persons themselves" and that "the contact was closer, the application more powerful." Allison (2016:52) states that the consequence of this was that "all Mosaic rituals that [ensued] from Sinai had more sacredness attached to the blood." Murray (n.d) emphasizes this around the application of the blood in the arrangement and service of God's house in the vestibule that housed the altar of the burnt offering as well as the Holy Place where the Golden Altar lay, and Most Holy Place where God dwelled. He concludes:

"If you inquire further, you will be told that always, and for everything, THE BLOOD is the one thing needful. At the consecration of the House, or of the Priests; at the birth of a child; in the deepest penitence on account of sin; in the highest festival; always, and in everything, the way to fellowship with God is through THE BLOOD alone." (p. 6)

The dispensation that follows is that of grace which, according to Allison (2016:55), ended with the greatest sacrifice in the history of humankind – the death of Jesus Christ. Once

again, through this God-sanctioned sacrifice, we see forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God for those who believe in his Son. Unlike the previous ones, this sacrifice pays the price on behalf of humanity through the blood of Christ, satisfies the judgement on sin, and brings reconciliation of erstwhile enemies (Towns, 2003:212). Vorster (2012:131) thus finds that the death of Christ is: penal in the sense that Christ's death is a penalty for sin, it is substitutionary in the sense that Christ served as a substitute sacrifice on behalf of sinners.

Murray (n.d:6) says this sacrifice was meant to make an end to all shadow sacrifices by standing as the ultimate sacrifice and enabling fellowship with God. Accordingly, when all OT sacrifices ended with the sprinkling of blood, as in Sinai, and a stern warning against the drinking of blood (in Lev. 17:12), Christ's sacrifice calls us to eat his flesh and drink his blood (1 Cor. 10:23-26). This marks a radical shift from the established position of Leviticus 17:12, which prohibits the drinking of blood. Christ's blood revitalizes us and causes the life that is in him to flow in us. Murray (n.d:7) states that we cannot be partakers of that eternal life which Christ procured for us, save by the shedding and the drinking of Christ's blood.

It is therefore clear from the foregoing that God wanted to communicate covering as in Adam and Eve, renewal as in Noah's case and protection as in the Passover event. The evidence is irrefutable that once the blood flowed, people had standing before God. Allison and Murray correctly observe that God's relationship with Israel is of blood. Blood is thus God's insignia which cannot fail because he authenticates it (Allison, 2016:55). Accordingly, Christ's invitation to humanity to symbolically drink his blood ensures that the life that is in Christ flows in us perpetually. Consequently, the blood of Christ speaks better things: expiation, atonement, cleansing, salvation, reconciliation and life. No other sacrifice should thus stand apart from the sacrifice of Christ, and Christianity is firmly established on Christ's blood whilst all other religions, so to say, fail the blood test.

#### **3.2.4. ANCESTRAL FOODS AND THE EUCHARIST**

Groenewald (2006) argues as to whether it is "the Eucharist or the last supper," even querying whether Christ should be considered as the one who instituted the sacrament. However, our enquiry is not along this continuum as we accept that this important sacrament is conventionally associated with Christ and the church in general as recorded in all four Gospels. In light of its importance, ATR adherents find that it is possible to equate this sacrament to the slaughtering of animals and offering of ancestral foods as is their practice. As with many other rituals ATR is known for, is this one not also appropriated to the Eucharist to make it gain significance?

Mosothoane (1973:87) is of the view that “the Eucharist as means of communion had to be a rite into which ancestor veneration should be incorporated.” Ngcobo (2020:2) perceives the Eucharist through the lens of African cosmology so as to make “church rituals to be more appealing to the African worldview.” Mosothoane (1973:87) even suggests that “African Christians should communicate with their ancestors through the Eucharist” and that the clergy should bless such ceremonies. This is interesting in light of Apostle Paul’s thinking regarding separating God from other gods (in 1 Cor. 10:21). Mosothoane and Ngcobo seek to validate African religion at the expense of Christianity.

We may recall that this is the instruction that Christ gives to his disciples as he was about to be crucified (Towns, 2003:210). According to scripture, all this was done to remember Christ’s atoning death for humanity (1 Cor. 11:24; Lk. 22:19). The Eucharist thus stands upon the death of Christ. It is theologically impossible to extract the Eucharist from the death of Christ and use it for anything else. The command that he leaves with the disciples is the very reason the Eucharist concerns Christ alone (Mt. 26:26 & Lk. 22:19). Ngcobo (2020:2) argues that an encounter between the ancestral meal and Eucharist may lead to an Africanized Holy Communion which will be difficult to explain in biblical terms, without the presence of Christ.

The crux here is the prevalent belief that the Eucharist is Christ himself – he is physically present, his body is broken, and his blood is flowing at the very moment in which the sacrament is undertaken (Robertson, 1980:146). According to Bae (2007:189), this is the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist known as *transubstantiation* – the bread and wine actually changing into Christ’s body and blood. Calvin (1541:627-628) dismisses this as a Sophist view which, if accepted, fails to recognize “the mystery which the Lord sought to portray in his Supper” – Christ being the bread of life which came down from above. Nürnberger (2002:132) also stands opposed to this analogy and states that the communicative or redemptive presence for the community is lacking in it. While they are persuaded that the *afikoman* (bread) which Jesus distributed represents the Passover lamb’s flesh, Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:140, 479) accede only to the metaphorical significance of Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist. However, they do still find that, with that blood, a new covenant is ratified and redemption and atonement become possible (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:142).

Conversely, Edward Boehl (1946), a Reformed theologian, stands against the Lutheran doctrine of *consubstantiation* – the substance of the bread and wine coexisting with the body

and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. He finds that the Lutherans ascribe efficacy to sacraments (created symbols) which inevitably endangers the doctrine of justification. Indeed, this is much like the adherents of ATR who solely depend on rituals to offer them relief in times of need as has been noticed in Maimela (1985), Mbiti (1969), Mensele (2011) and Mvunamandi (2008:66). With regard to the Lord's supper (Eucharist), Boehl (1946:289) opposes this doctrine because, as he puts it, "they ascribe to this symbol an action [of] forgiveness of sins, strengthening of faith and of the new man". In contrast to these positions, he finds that the Lutheran reformer Phillip Melancthon leans towards the interpretation of "recalling the promises of Christ so that faith may be confirmed in us." Boehl (1946:289) submits that this is the Reformed position, speaking to the sign and seal of God's promises.

Regardless of these divergent views, Vos (1971:345) states that something real is conveyed by the Eucharist. Paul is correct to associate the sacrament with God's saving power. Paul accordingly argues (in 1 Cor. 11:30-31) that, because some drank the wine in an unworthy manner, they have become sick, have died and have taken judgement upon themselves. Even in the presence of sickness and death, Boehl (1946:290) observes that the Eucharist remains important and nothing can replace the comfort of knowing that "[t]hy sins are forgiven thee." Christ therefore deposited his power to make the Eucharist what it is: more than a meal and much more than libations and ancestral sacrifices.

The Eucharist is therefore found to be a meal of different manifestations, representing amongst others the covenant, unity and peace, reconciliation, mystical power, participation, hope, and transforming love (Kustenbauder, 2005:1-12). The Christian faith claims to draw more than the above from the Eucharist as found in Murray (n.d); Allison (2016); and Feingold (2018). The question is whether ATR can claim such from the sacrifices and libations offered to their ancestors. While in appearance and in administering the Eucharist may be relatable to African ancestral meals, it is the power that lies in these two that must set them apart. The critical aspect is Christ's continued presence generation after generation, whilst ancestral presence *changes hands*, so to speak. Feingold (2018:190) remarks accordingly that Christ's words bring this sacrament into being through that word by which all things were made, marking the perpetual presence of Christ by the word that abides forever (Mt. 24:35; Lk. 21:33).

Although Nyirongo (1997:72) surmises that both "Christ and *amadlozi* dare not to be forgotten; for to be forgotten means to cease to exist," Mbiti (1969:83) says that with the passing of time (after five generations to be exact), some of the ancestors disappear into

obscurity and become spirits that are eventually forgotten. Ancestral worship therefore unfolds in the past and is temporal whereas the Eucharist unfolds with a hope towards the future and enjoys permanence owing to Christ. Permanence, because Christ remarks: “I am the bread of life” (Jn. 6:35) and his body is present in it. He says, too: “I am the true vine” (Jn. 15:1), where his blood flows continually in it. Ngcobo (2020:4) correctly remarks that the Eucharist is not only about here and now but is inherently eschatological or futuristic, thus the continual representation of Christ in it.

Mensele (2011) unpacks the sacrifices that African religion is known for. However, he does not offer much to aid understanding about how the ancestors invest power in the sacrifices made on their behalf. In relation to the Eucharist, Mbiti (1971:153) says that “the saints commune with God and the whole of heaven.” He submits that the Christian practice of “sharing the [E]ucharist, eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood, is regarded to be the same as Africans sharing their meal with the living dead (ancestors)” (Mbiti, 1971:153). However, while ATR agrees to the presence and the universality of Christ in the Eucharist, the opposite seems to be the case regarding African ancestral meals where ancestors are regarded to be time barred and attend to issues of specific clan only.

Mbiti defines the dilemma that arises around belief in the ancestors. On the one hand, he views ancestors as bridges between God and the people (Mbiti, 1969:71) and, on the other, acknowledges the barrier that exists between the people and the ancestors owing to physical death (Mbiti, 1969:84). This amounts to an oxymoron to say the least. He says that people “know only too well that following physical death, a barrier has been erected between them and the living-dead” (Mbiti, 1969:84). He explains that it is not always with great enthusiasm that people welcome the living-dead; sometimes they are wanted, and at times they are resented” because they are thought to be a bad omen.

Critically, Mbiti (1969) says:

The food and libation given to the living-dead are paradoxically acts of hospitality and welcome, and yet of informing the living dead to move away. (p.84)

The opposite narrative here is astounding. When Christians seek the coming of the Lord and his continued presence in their lives, ATR practitioners would at times be wishing away the living-dead – symbols of their good life. Further, Ngcobo (2020:5) remarks that in Africa it is not only family and relatives that partake in ancestral meal but the whole community, including strangers. Yet when the celebrations are over, strangers cannot invoke these ancestors for their benefit because they are not their own. They are left to seek relief from

those ancestors within their clan (Mvunabandi, 2008:78). However, in Christ everyone is welcome to invoke his name and to identify with him. This bears true in his clarion call to the weary and burdened (Mt. 11:28). His sharing of meals with saints and sinners indicates his accessibility to all.

Vander Zee (2004:141) thus says that eating was an act of fellowship and acceptance, and it was understood that to eat with sinners was to accept them as friends and companions. This displays the strength of Christ as the founder of the Eucharist wherein everyone participates and becomes a friend and a companion. However, once more, while we eat an ancestral meal some of the ancestors have been forgotten already; they have become spirits who have disappeared, never to be remembered again. Nyirongo (1997:72) thus says: “those who are not remembered have met their ultimate end.” Christ thus submits to his disciples that they must do this in His remembrance (Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19). Accordingly, His end will never be.

### **3.2.5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS**

The symbol of blood becomes critical in matters of atonement and salvation. God speaks about the blood in this way: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).” Adeyemo (1979:40) reminds us that, “without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins” (Heb. 9:22b). We therefore cannot downplay the significance of the blood and that which it can do for mere mortals in need of salvation.

Consequently, when John lays his eyes upon Jesus, he remarks instantly: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Vos brings to our attention the uniqueness of the Lamb as spoken of by John. He says that, in the prophecy, the Lamb does not at the outset appear with ritual associations but primarily to depict innocence, meekness, and willingness to render vicarious service for the people through suffering and death (Vos, 1971:349). He continues:

But it immediately appears that these traits of innocence and meekness are not intended for the general purpose of idealizing the character of the Servant, but for the specific purpose of showing Him both fitted and willing to bear the sin for others (1979:349).

The uniqueness of the blood of Jesus Christ must lie in his innocence, which enables him to bear the sins of the guilty and in his meekness, which renders him willing to offer the ultimate sacrifice. Consequently, while the blood is significant, the Lamb that offers the blood

becomes equally important. The characteristics of the Lamb give rise to the significance and the value of the blood it gives. Christ's blood as the Lamb of God is different from any other blood humanity may want to look to for salvation because of his innocence and meekness; qualities which humans lack according to the Bible (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:10). Subsequently, differences between Christ's blood and that of any other being are itemised and briefly unpacked in each case.

### **3.2.5.1. It is better than the blood of ancestors**

While it is clear that blood is required for atonement (Lev.17:11), the ancestors offer none, while Christ offered his for the atonement of sins. This must be a prohibiting factor for them as agents of salvation. Some scholars talk of ancestors as the dead or the living-dead (Bediako, 2004, Mbiti, 1969, Pobee, 1998). However, not much significance is associated with their death. Christ not only died but also indicated the purpose of his death. Robertson (1980:144) sees the language of "pouring out" of Jesus' blood in similar terms with the sacrificial language of the OT which enables him to be the substitute capable of taking curses upon himself – the exact purpose of his death.

Needham (2000:158) suggests that the striking difference between Christ's death and ours is that he had "the power to lay down [h]is life, and take it back again". Accordingly, his death was *willingly* fused to the cross, and death by the cross was a necessary requirement for redemption and life (Murray, n.d:7; Robertson, 1980:144). We have seen that, as much as Mosothoane (1976:86) wants to make ancestors bridges that connect people to God, these bridges only stand upon nourishment by blood. Humanity is sinful before God, and sinless blood must incessantly flow to enable it to reach over to God, thus the bridge nourished by blood. Allison (2016:47) and Murray (n.d:8) are thus correct to say that God had long ago insisted on blood sacrifice as the way in which he may be approached; however, ancestors and humanity lacks sinless blood for atonement.

### **3.2.5.2. It is better than the blood of animals**

Animals were central to atonement in the OT, while Christ's sacrifice comes as the new way through which sinners can reach God. Animals lacked endurance and permanence: endurance, because their blood could only hold for the time during which they were sacrificed, and permanence, because the next transgression required another animal for atonement. In contrast, Christ's blood has both permanence and endurance, hence its ability to save to the uttermost (Needham, 2000:142). Robertson (1980:280) thus submits that

Jeremiah's call of the new covenant implies that God will act to redeem his people in an unfamiliar way to them, meaning that while they were used to sacrifices of animals that faded, he will offer them Christ's sacrifice which will stand forever. This decision by God, effectively dealt away with the core of the ATR religion, which in the main finds validation in OT and shapes itself after the many sacrifices it offers, including animal sacrifices.

### **3.2.5.3. It is better than the blood of martyrs**

Concerning Christianity, martyrs would be those who have lost their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Hassan asserts that the story "of how this small sect of 'Jesus Worshippers' attained dominance in the Roman Empire, although there were attempts at eradication, is one of blood" (n.d:1). It is therefore not accidental that God did not choose amongst his saints, martyrs, animals, and even our ancestors to satisfy humanity's sin. Hassan (n.d:16) would argue that that which the blood of martyrs could do was to at least serve as instruments for church expansion, but it could never be offered for atonement of sins.

Accordingly, Christ's blood stands as capable atonement for humanity's sins. Robertson (1980:145) states that it is the blood of Christ which he offers for curses that ultimately stands as the buttress for our deliverance. In a similar vein, Needham (2000:158-159) says that there are instances where Christian brethren died for Christian brethren while "no martyr's blood is ever shed for the forgiveness of sins." Martyrs would thus die, as Stephen, John the Baptist, Apostle Paul, and many others did, while elevating their hearts to Christ, the true redeemer.

### **3.2.5.4. The intent of Christ's blood**

Ultimately, it is upon the blood of Jesus that humanity must hope. Significant to this issue is the lamb behind the blood that makes the difference. Indeed, all animals of the earth and human beings have in their veins blood that derives authenticity from God (Allison, 2016:55). Christ took the form of humanity so that he, too, could be in a position to offer up his blood (Murray, n.d:11). God thus had to incarnate to be able to offer that sacrifice after which none could stand. It has accordingly been noticed here that blood sacrifices offered in the place of Christ fall short in one respect or another. However, the blood of Jesus Christ encompasses all that humanity wants to attain through sacrifices. It follows reason therefore that the blood of Jesus stands for judgement, sacrifice, substitution, and redemption (Allison, 2016:47). Accordingly, Heb. 10:1-4 says that past sacrifices were precursors to the final sacrifice that Christ would offer (Murray, n.d:6-9; Needham, 2000:143; Allison, 2016:55).

It is thus in the character of Christ that we see his sacrifice enjoying the capacity to deliver all and more than sacrifices must. As God incarnate, Christ took the form of humanity to enable himself not only to bring the blood but also to personally guarantee his sacrifice. Vorster (2012:146) puts it well: "Christ is the priest and the sacrifice." It is common knowledge that all those who offered sacrifices carried the blood of animals to the altar, not their own. Christ therefore came, fully human, yet still fully God, and presented his blood before God. This makes him not only the object but also the subject of the sacrifice because the sacrifice was made by him and was about him.

Further, his sinless nature makes him the perfect substitute for sinners, as was required by the lamb of slaughter (Needham, 2000:163; 167; Bediako, 2004:55). Indeed, many animals were slaughtered and later forgotten, lacking permanency and sustenance as indicated. The permanency of Christ's sacrifice must inform us that his is perpetual and will remain before God until the end of time. In this vein, Olowola (1993:57), Allison (2016:57), and Murray (n.d: 8) remark that no other sacrifice should stand after Christ's sacrifice. Moreover, Christ comes across as a willing participant in the proceedings concerning the depravity of humankind. Whilst animals were brought *forcefully (as victima)*<sup>18</sup> in their numbers to take away the sin of humanity, Christ came willingly. Allison (2016:50) indicates that, to Israel, the blood sacrifice was "seen to lead them to Him who was to come and pour out His soul unto death". This is indicative of the willingness of Christ in his coming to atone for humanity's sins.

Vos (1971:349) states that Christ's meekness gave him the willingness to die for the sins of humanity. The innocence with which he came enabled him to be the perfect substitute for sinners. Whilst all humanity is sinful before God, Christ remains without fault (Is. 53). Vos (1971:349) intimates that it is in this innocence that Christ is able to bear sins for others. Murray (n.d:4) remarks that even Isaac, the son of the righteous Abraham, could not be sacrificed because, on account of sin, he would not rise again, let alone atone for sins of humanity. In order for these animals' sacrifice to atone, Allison (2016:48) asserts that they were to be without blemish. This was necessary because "the offerer had to identify with the animal" by laying their hands upon it (Allison, 2016:48) because the animal will assume the position of the guilty. Consequently, sinful humanity identifies with Christ in his innocence,

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<sup>18</sup> Mvunabandi submits that *victima*, is a word that "passively refers to the sacrificial animal that is given without its consent, or through exercising its will" (Mvunabandi, 2008:2).

and in their place, we find his blood that secures the atonement for sinners perpetually (Robertson, 1980: 146; Needham, 2000:166-167).

### **3.3. THE ROLE OF CHRIST IN SALVATION FOR AFRICANS**

In light of the many rituals ATR adherents perform for the sake of salvation (viewed as total well-being), the question arises whether the fact that Christ may not be relatable to Africans gives credence to such practices (Magezi, 2016). Do these practices arise out of confusion or his inadequacy as some scholars aver (Banda, 2005)? The question that should be posed reads: what do we do with Christ in terms of salvation for Africans?

Some ATR adherents sought to demote Christ from his rightful position or, much worse, disregard him as the Son of God. In his place, they are happy to install ancestors whom they regard as bridges to God and agents of salvation (Bediako, 2004; Mbiti, 1969; Mosothoane, 1973; Nyamiti, 1985). Yet Christ has been much closer to Africans, perhaps even more so than the Westerners can claim. This is so because, in his infancy he graced the African soil in Egypt (Mt. 2:13-23). He shared in poverty (2 Cor. 8:9), went through circumcision (Lk. 2:21-39), and went on to speak to the dead in Moses and Elijah (Mt. 17:3). Maluleke (1994:57) submits that “in Africa, Christ is the healer, liberator, ancestor, mediator, elder brother, the crucified one, head and master of initiation and the black messiah.” It is in all these manifestations that Christ is seen, specifically those relatable to Africans, that I believe the confusion about him calls for elucidation. It has been demonstrated here that Africans are ritually inclined. Consequently, in looking to Christ, adherents of ATR should find all the rituals they perform well represented in him, thus enabling them to dump legalism and embrace grace.

Whilst African belief is grounded in ancestral worship or veneration, it should ultimately be an easy migration for Africans to put Christ in the place of ancestors owing to the shortfalls inherent in the character of their ancestors. Christ is universal and ultimate and remains the only viable bridge that connects humanity and God. Christ represents the thought in which Africans pride themselves, namely that they are people of community and unity. As indicated, a person who does not belong to a clan cannot call for relief or help from ancestors to whom he/ she does not belong, thus rendering the ancestors exclusivist. In Christ, as indicated, it is ever possible that all nations can gather. In addition, should Africans embrace Christ in this way they will engage with him strictly on their own terms and not as dictated to by the Western worldview. Everything that Africans seek in ancestors is to be found without limits in Christ.

Moreover, Africans remain traditional people: central to their religion is the question of circumcision, which Letšosa and De Klerk (2019:1) sought to adapt into baptism. Here Africans can take pride in the fact that Christ was in his infancy circumcised and appears to represent the rite of circumcision in his body just as they do. We may well infer here that the act of circumcision is not necessarily wrong in itself; however, it is what this action is established upon that complicates things. In the case of ATR, it is established upon ancestors whose names and traditions are invoked. For instance, it is not wrong to gather young initiates, send them away to a mountain, and teach them the Gospel/ morals of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Africans can capitalize by putting Christ and all that he represents as the foundation of their initiation schools.

Elsewhere we have seen that Africans also prefer animal sacrifices in the place of Christ as means to assure them of salvation, that is, once more, total well-being. Concerning the Eucharist, as indicated, Christ is the foundation. Whilst Christ as the Sacrificial Lamb represents presence and continuity (Bediako, 2004:196), ancestors at some point in their lives fade into obscurity and become forgotten spirits (Mbiti, 1969:84; Mvunabandi, 2008:78). Their participation in ancestral meals and sacrifices is marked by temporariness, as demonstrated, and accordingly fails not only the test of time but that of redemption. Though there is nothing ominous in sharing meals with family and community because relationships and friendships are built in this fashion, the subject of such gatherings must remain Christ. When he shared a meal with his disciples, Christ told them about himself and the things that would happen to him. If ancestral meals cannot be counted for mere social gatherings, Africans should rather in their own terms put Christ at the centre of their activities where people are related the Gospel of Christ that carries true salvation. This, again, will prompt Africans themselves to bring Christ into their African worldview.

Whether such incorporation into African experience will be ridiculed as adaptation or adulteration of the gospel (Brand, 1999:63-68) is trivial. What is clear is that adaptation into African terms is necessary, especially in matters that relate to language, liturgy, conduct of worship services, dress codes, and so on; one culture cannot claim perfection (Idowu, 1962:9-40). It is entirely up to adherents of ATR what they want to do with Christ; however, an opportunity is begging for them to see him through everything that shapes their worldview. In all ceremonies, Christ can be invoked in the place of ancestors as the legitimate bridge to God and total wellbeing. The time must come where Africans divorce themselves of what the Westerners have done to them, because the Westerners themselves cannot claim monopoly of scripture or even better scriptural interpretation (Idowu, 1962:49).

Simultaneously, an African cannot be on a mission to disprove Western salvific theories to the detriment of salvation that is attainable through Christ alone. Consequently, every rite/custom that stands as Law (even OT biblical Law) and is intended for salvation falls in the presence of Christ's sacrifice, calling on Africans to embrace salvation by grace alone as they make Christ the substitute, the sum, the centre, and the substance of all their ceremonies.

### **3.4. CONCLUSION**

It is apparent that humanity needs salvation. Accordingly, many religious groupings, including ATR, have sought to find salvation within their own terms. It has been shown that ATR adherents seek to find salvation in rituals that closely mimic the life of the risen Christ. The performance of circumcision, the veneration and worship of ancestors, the slaughtering of animals, the offering of food, and libations to ancestors are amongst the ceremonies performed with the hope of attaining salvation. Yet one finds that Christ has done more than ancestors and humanity in terms of his lived life here on earth as well as his continued existence in the heavens above to place himself as the only vehicle for salvation. The actions that ATR adherents perform outside Christ therefore prove futile and incapable of providing the salvation that they seek so ardently. Amongst other things, once more, Christ remains the bridge that connects people to God whilst ancestors fade into obscurity with the passing of time.

Consequently, there is no salvation outside of Christ and ATR adherents can find it by putting him firmly in the place of ancestors, which will however involve radical shift (Bediako, 1996:37) on their part. Olowola (1993:57) remarks that, as a result of the covenant between Christ and humanity, "all Africans are released from sacrifices and ancestor worship". We find that this release is not without an alternative and a solution: Christ becomes an option when matters of salvation are discussed. In order to overcome their Western apprehension, Africans can align with the suggestion made by Brand (1999:63) that "people are saved, not by being enculturated into some supposed 'Christian culture,' but by hearing and accepting 'the Gospel,' which of course had to be 'adapted' to local circumstances and 'rooted' in the local soil." Thus, Christ in the place of ancestors equals salvation attainable by grace and not Law (rituals), which ATR adherents can embrace for themselves.

## **CHAPTER 4: BIBLICAL TENETS OF SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

Salvation is a concern for humanity at large and, to attain it, varying methods are employed. While many seek to have it, it is the method through which it is attainable that compounds the issue. Leading minds in the discussion of salvation, grace, and faith such as Calvin, Arminius, Wesley, Luther and others have set the discourse on this debate. Chapter 1 briefly introduced the thoughts of some of these scholars on Law, grace, and salvation. While much has been written on the issue of free salvation by Western schools of thought, African scholarship has been lagging behind. However, contributions of scholars such as Bediako, Mbiti, Nyamiti, Adeyemo, Maimela, Setiloane, Maluleke, and others must be duly credited for providing crucial insights on ATR and its perspective on salvation.

Evidently, ATR centres on the performance of certain rituals to attain salvation as has been explored in chapter 3. Fairbairn (2003:12) intimates that some patristic writers held that salvation is largely a human task, rendering Christ as any other leader who had human calling and sought followers in this regard. Much of this is true of ATR as discussed in preceding chapters: that salvation is a human effort based on the performance of salvific rituals.

This brings into focus the biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith, where concepts of grace and faith will be unpacked as part of the discussion. Verses that speak about the salvation experiences of certain figures in the Bible will be examined by means of responsible exegesis so as to understand their true meaning. In concluding the chapter, we will engage the “I am” predicates of Jesus as statements of salvation.

### **4.2. OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG SALVATION, GRACE, AND FAITH**

#### **4.2.1. Grace**

Despite the considerable bulk of extant literature around grace, much confusion still exists as to what it is and how it should function, especially in matters related to salvation. However, there is no denying that grace is a critical pillar of our relationship with God. It is so important that Rahner (1974:177) states that grace “is God himself,” whilst MacMillan (1997:25) intimates that, without grace, “the true nature of biblical salvation will not be properly understood.” While grace is viewed as God himself; the underpin or the “seed-bed” of the

Christian faith and the foundation of the church today as held by Rahner (1974:177) and MacMillan (1997:25), it is still arduous to explain in clear terms to believing Christians especially given the range of Christian traditions and their varied understandings. Worse still, in ATR where sacrifices are the order of the day, mainly fuelled by OT rituals, it becomes even more difficult to sell grace as an alternative for attaining salvation. Given this chaos, it is imperative to take stock again of that which grace is and its intention for humankind.

#### **4.2.1.1. Grace: a definition**

Given (2001:322) says that grace “is the single-most important element of the believer’s entire existence in Christ.” Steele (2015:2601-2602) explains that the word “grace” is denoted in Greek with the term *charis*. Here grace is viewed through the prism of Christ in providing salvation for humankind; also, as God’s exercise towards humankind, which is the unmerited favour found in his revelation of himself to humanity (Rahner, 1974:177). It is also viewed as God’s exercise of conferring gifts, graces, and benefits on humanity. Williams (1996:31) submits that grace is God’s redemptive love that is always active to save sinners and that will maintain them in a proper relationship with him.

The Greek term for grace, *σάτιπ*, also signifies “favour,” “goodwill,” and “loving kindness” expressly granted by a superior to an inferior (see Bible Hub, 2021). Trueman (2017:6) therefore rightly states that grace typically means the “unmerited favour of God” and “the active outworking of God’s unmerited favour.” He continues by submitting that “grace “is that aspect of divine action by which God blesses his rebellious creatures, whether through preservation (common grace) or salvation (special grace)” (Trueman, 2017:6).

Trueman (2017:7) states that, had the world not fallen into sin, God would not have been able to display his graciousness, and would not have been known as the gracious God. By implication, he suggests that God consciously chooses to be gracious to humanity in order to invite humanity back to himself. McCool (1975:174) and Rahner (1974:177) say that grace is God offering himself to humanity. This must tell us that grace is who God is and that it is as timeless as God himself.

Fairbairn (2003:13) posits that Christological grace means the issue of what (or whom) God gives people through the incarnation and atoning work of Christ. Profoundly, he submits that Christological grace is closely related to salvation, which is what Christ gives to believing humanity (Fairbairn, 2003:14; McCool, 1975:178-180). Towards explaining John 1:4, he submits that Christ would not be able to grant us grace were he not the source of grace

himself. Because he is the source of grace, Kaiser (1990:235) intimates that this grace is not disturbed by the repeated failure of some or even all of those to whom grace is extended. This puts grace firmly as belonging to God and no one else, and further tells us that because grace is God himself, it stands perpetually.

Fairbairn (2003:12) posits that Christ first had to be the Son by nature (incarnation) in order to make us sons by grace. Accordingly, God has paved a way where Christ saves humanity, and salvation for humanity becomes possible through that way only. Trueman (2017:11) is correct to say that even the biblical sacrificial system was God's decision to establish – hence Christ should now take precedence. It was not an effort of humankind who, upon realization that God was angry with them, decided that bringing sacrifices would appease him.

Trueman (2017:11) states that God established this sacrificial system and also chose to accept such sacrifices as offered to him. These sacrifices themselves were therefore laced with God's grace, and the implication of this grace centres on the fact that humanity can render no performance to correct their standing before God. God's anger is already satiated by virtue of him being gracious (Ex. 34:6-7). Accordingly, this grace renders every other work aimed at salvation void, because God has already taken a position of loving humanity and making salvation possible to believing humanity, regardless of our disposition towards him.

What becomes apparent is that, in the main, grace is the work of, and a gift from God through Jesus Christ intended to save humanity from sin. Moreover, since it is a gift, it is not to be earned but to be freely received. Aquinas' utterance resonates here that "nothing comes before grace" (Needham, 2000:174) and by implication, nothing comes before God because he is grace (Rahner, 1974:177).

#### **4.2.1.2. Christian traditions on grace**

The reformed tradition within the protestant movements of Calvinism, Lutheranism and Arminianism, developed views on the five points of Calvinism which are central to salvation. While we will briefly detail what these movements say, we will also address grace as a focal of salvation under various movements. There is striking similarities within the reformed protestants movements which in the main address how salvation is attained. However, variances within the protestant movement along terms such as total depravity, unconditional election and predestination, as part of the five points of Calvinism, are worth noting here.

Here, concerning salvation order in particular, humanity's true condition before God is of a fallen state, unable to bring themselves up to the platform of salvation on account of total depravity, a condition they can overcome through God's intervention (Acodezin, 2018:58). To this effect, apart from any action of humans because they are unable to do anything meritorious (Vorster, 2012:73; Aquinas, 1954:139), God through his grace, unconditionally elects to offer salvation to them, giving faith and repentance to those he elects from the foundations of the world, causing salvation to take effect. Acodezin (2018:57) here surmises that those whom God sovereignly elected, He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ.

When John Calvin spoke of predestination, many arguments ensued that he advocated for damnation of predetermined sinners. In his own words, he describes predestination as "divine will that those whom God admits to be heirs of His kingdom are exempted from universal destruction."<sup>19</sup> Here, variance is that according to him, God permits that those who do not believe should be damned, rather than decreeing their damnation (Levering, 2012:102). Therefore, God's predestination is applicable to both damnation and salvation, however, those that are eventually damned is on account of their sin whereas those who are being saved is only on account of God's grace (Levering, 2012:105). Sproul (2021) thus surmises that as events unfold this way, "One group receives grace; the other receives justice. No one receives injustice."

Therefore, while God uplifts depraved humanity, unconditionally elects it and marks it for salvation, the overarching word which shapes our discussion is grace. While scholars put forward different types of grace, the present project limits itself to common and special grace as types that answer best the question of salvation by grace through faith. However, one first needs to consider different views on grace as held by various Christian traditions. Calvinists, Methodists, Lutherans, and the Roman Catholics, amongst others, have differed and formulated diverging opinions on the question of grace. Acodezin (2018:1) correctly records that history is "rich with the debates and factions formed out of this profound concept in Christianity".

Therefore, under the reformed tradition one finds the broad movement of Calvinism<sup>20</sup> that was influenced by John Calvin (1509-1564) and Theodore Beza (1519-1605). It found support from authors such as John Knox (1514-1572). It identifies with the position of five

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<sup>19</sup> Inst 3:33:10.

<sup>20</sup> The Institutes, 1536

*solas* (including grace and faith alone) as the seedbed of salvation. While the reformed tradition contains a number of theological strands, they generally agree on points of TULIP<sup>21</sup> and the five *solas* (Acodezin, 2018). Further, the Reformation opted for the term sanctification which according to this view, the “double grace” of God justifies and regenerates humanity (Acodezin, 2018:92). Grace is considered to be an irresistible gift of God that is devoid of human efforts (Schreiner, 2015:22-23). Biel, however, speaks of it as synergy between God and humans around grace, but this is decisively rejected by reformers mainly on the back of the irresistibility of God’s grace (Schreiner, 2015:22).

The Lutheran<sup>22</sup> tradition, arising from the influence of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Phillip Melancthon (1497-1560), held that only faith and grace are necessary for salvation, rejecting works as means through which salvation is attained. Luther regarded grace so highly that he did not want it obscured by works of the Law, preferring instead the redeeming glory of the grace of God to shine forth (Kaiser, 2008:249-260; Thielicke, 1966:133-134). Accordingly, the Lutheran message centres on salvation through God’s grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), and on the basis of scripture alone (*sola scriptura*).

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic<sup>23</sup> tradition holds that humanity can move itself towards God through grace, giving rise to what they call cooperative grace. They argue that humanity itself “is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it” (Kreeft, 2000:127). Critically, Roman Catholic identifies somewhat with semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism (after James Arminius, 1560-1609) by preferring salvation defined in terms of synergy between God and human beings where, according to Biel, the capacity of human beings plays a role in justification, making works central to salvation (Schreiner, 2015:22). Arminianism<sup>24</sup> as a line of thought holds that God provides enough grace to allow human beings to cooperate with him, emphasizing the concept of cooperative grace (Acodezin,

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<sup>21</sup> TULIP refers to the theology of Calvinism which states the five essential doctrines of Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Preservation of the saints.

<sup>22</sup> The Augsburg Confession of 1530

<sup>23</sup> Kreeft (2001) CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY – A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs BASED ON THE Catechism of the Catholic Church

<sup>24</sup> Five articles of Remonstrance, 1610

2018:92). Importantly, according to the *Remonstrants*, humanity can resist the grace of God, and this grace can only be effective in the lives of humans through cooperation.

The face of Methodism<sup>25</sup> has largely been John Wesley (1703-1791), whose contribution to the shaping of Christian debate cannot go unnoticed. On the question of grace, he preferred anthropological, Christological and pneumatological demarcations (Del Colle, 2002:175). More explicitly, he opted for prevenient (enabling) grace and stood against predestination as thought of by Calvinists, holding a position similar to Arminians and Anabaptists in this respect (Casni, 2018; Klassen, 1991:111-112). Coulter (2009:195) observes that the Methodists and Roman Catholics stick to the idea of prevenience grace and believe that the spirit is at work in the lives of people, even non-Christians; although Roman Catholics would prefer good works as part of attaining salvation. The Anabaptists<sup>26</sup> emphasize faith as related closely to good works while rejecting the idea of predestination (Fuller, 2007:338).

The Eastern Orthodox tradition puts emphasis on divine essence and energies of the Trinity (Barnes, 1999). They associate salvation closely with deification (*theosis*) (McGrath, 2005:3). John Zizioulas (2008:116), a prominent Greek theologian, argues that deification is only possible through the hypostasis<sup>27</sup> identical to that of Christ. He argues that *theosis* is union in Christ (Zizioulas, 2008:116) where humanity has to yield in order to inherit it. In this instance, he considers Christ to be “transforming one’s hypostasis through a relationship identical with that of the Son to the Father” (Papanikolaou, 2003:358-369) maintaining that the hypostasis of the Father is known in the image of the Son (Zizioulas, 2008:63).

#### **4.2.1.2.1. The types of grace**

Having postulated that God is grace and Christ dispenses it (John 1:4), one needs to assess the types of grace and understand how they are able to grant salvation. Whilst there are numerous grace types, consideration will be on common and special (saving) grace as points of our discussion as they closely address the question this study needs to answer.

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<sup>25</sup> The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church, in The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016

<sup>26</sup> The Schleitheim Confession, 1527

<sup>27</sup> Zizioulas (2008:50-62) clarifies that the Cappadocian Fathers held that the term “hypostasis’ should be understood to mean the same as ‘person’... something fundamental and unchanging, or the image”.

#### 4.2.1.2.1.1. Common grace

The notion of common grace is mainly found within the reformed tradition and has to do with God's preservation of his creation despite sin. As the name suggests, this type of grace is available to all (Rupp & Watson, 2006:52). What is important as Rupp and Watson (2006:52) argue, is that this grace remains with people regardless of their persistence in sin. Kuyper (2001:4) suggests that, in the case of common grace, God preserves his creation in spite of how it relates to him. He argues that, while Christ dispenses particular grace as "the light that *lighteth* every man coming into the world," he stands as the source of common grace which touches every human (2001:4). This etches the goodness of God since time in memorial, detailing how he chose to deal graciously with people who constantly rejected him and were underserving of his kindness.

Understood correctly, this shows God's love for all people and his persistently outstretched arm seeking for the sinner to repent. Accordingly, we notice common grace in people's ability to speak freely, be silent, sit down and get up, help the poor and read, and many other actions which God affords people (Rupp & Watson, 2006:52). Berkhof (1949:429) posits that this kind of grace differs from that of special grace in that it neither sets free nor removes sin: it is central in promoting good order and decency while restraining the outward manifestations of sin.

In the presence of common grace, God still elects to endow humanity with freedom to choose their own course of action (Deut. 30:19), whether it be pleasing or injurious, without his common grace diminishing. Calvin (1541:41-43) speaks of this in terms of "*sensus divinitatis*," the sense of the divine and of right and wrong, saying that humanity should naturally come to know God. He says that "[t]he whole sum of our wisdom broadly consists of two parts, knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves." Clanton (2017:2-3) finds that Calvin characterises *sensus divinitatis* as an innate sense of God's existence implanted by him in all human beings. Calvin (1541:9) thus states that God "reveals himself clearly to everyone" because knowing his name is an entry to happiness and blessedness. Berkhof (1949:428-429) ascribes this to God's forbearance at a time when he could have opted to deal harshly with the unbelieving, the impenitent, and the reprobate, opting instead to deal in grace.

Calvinistic views of Trueman (2017:2) centre on the notion that grace is that aspect of divine action by which God blesses his rebellious creatures, whether through preservation

(common grace) or salvation (special grace). On the other hand, Roman Catholic Father McCool has professed that this grace becomes the foundation of the relationship between God and his people. While his views are Roman Catholic in nature, McCool (1975:178) indicates that God chooses to communicate himself to the entire universe, regardless of how they perceive him. With this submission, it is evident that common grace rests with the divine and establishes a relationship with fallen humanity. Here, Candlish (2013:354) says that "the entire history of the human race [...] is a dispensation of forbearance in respect to the reprobate, in which many blessings, physical and moral, affecting their characters and destinies forever, accrue even to the heathen."

God had indicated primordially that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22-23, Prov. 21:3, Jer. 7:21-23) and that humanity should rend their hearts and not their garments (Joel 2:13). This makes it crystal clear that he demands higher accountability from humans than mere animal sacrifices. It was therefore not going to take human effort to have a standing before God, because he had already ordained common grace for humanity that is his image. Moreover, humanity could not meet God's highest demand on account of original sin (Murray, n.d.; Kaiser, 1999; Vorster, 2012) without the intervention of God himself.

Therefore, whilst God extends his common grace to all humanity (Jn. 1:4; Js. 4:6), ancestors, as we have seen in chapter 3, concern themselves with matters of their clan. We should accordingly conclude that ancestors lack universality and, by extension, common grace in this regard, because their first preference is for their immediate family members and relatives. They possess no means to invite others besides their clan relatives to partake in their dealings, in stark contrast to Christ's clarion call: "come to me all you who are weary" (Mt. 11:28). Ancestors of other clans or tribes also do not intervene on matters of another clan or tribe. If one finds himself or herself faced with a situation that needs ancestral intervention, they will have to bring it to their lineage ancestors. Failing to locate their own ancestors means they may be required to pass this issue to unknown spirits.

Whilst this disposition is troubling and dreaded by ATR adherents, it is not the case in Christianity, which exercises universality rather than particularity (Jr. 32:27. Is. 45:22). It is therefore important to declare here that common grace is God's platform on which he invites all humanity back to himself, regardless of their disposition towards him. Because of this platform, "all that the natural [person] receives other than curse and death is an indirect result of the redemptive work of Christ" (Symington, 1847:332).

#### 4.2.1.2.1.2. Christological or special grace

Berkhof (1949:429) submits that the Reformed tradition holds that special grace “is supernatural and spiritual: it removes the guilt and pollution of sin and lifts the sentence of condemnation.” Fairbairn (2003:13) refers to it as Christological grace and says it concerns the issue of “what (or whom) God gives people through the incarnation and atoning work of Christ.” Trueman (2017:16 -17) submits that Christ alone is the supreme manifestation of God’s grace and that, through him, God is answering the human need for salvation. Rahner (1974:166) refers to this as supernatural grace which enables humanity to learn through faith as well as to justify a person.

McCool (1975:178-179) also states that God has decreed that the order of grace should depend on the Incarnate Word through which he communicates himself hypostatically. Gause (1980:45) tenders that Christ is the atonement covering for our sins and that he provides protection from judgement, therefore making salvation possible to those who believe in him. It is apparent therefore that a view is generally held that salvation rests with God who chooses to dispense it through Christ. Therefore, Christ as this Incarnate Word is not only God, but also the sole bearer of grace, entering the world as part of the Trinity that founds a relationship of grace with humanity.

McCool (1975:179) intimates that this grace has a radical Christological character which makes it unique and Christ-like. He posits that, as a dimension of God’s grace, Christological grace deals with Christ’s embodiment of the unmerited favour of God towards the world for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, whilst people may act graciously towards others, this is temporary and intermittent, while God’s grace is eternal and consistent. By its very nature, special or Christological grace stands for as long as Christ stands (Num. 23:19; Mal 3:6; Heb. 13:8). Humanity, even in terms of their kind acts, fall short of this incomparable grace. It is therefore rather inane to argue whether it is in the nature of ancestors to possess Christological grace. God himself bestows this grace exclusively upon Christ (Jn. 1:14) who, in turn, dispenses it just because of who he is. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:251) emphasize that the very fact that John 1:14 states that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ clarifies that there is only one mediator of God’s grace.

It is important to distinguish that because God’s grace rests on Jesus (Lk. 2:40), does not mean that Christ needed grace to overcome sin, but grace was upon him so that he could carry it, as it were, to the world that was grappling with sin (Isa. 53). This is the very reason that sacrifices as a measure of providing salvation should be abandoned because God made

grace far more important and central to the question of sin and forgiveness. Scholars such as Berkhof, Faibairn, Trueman, Rahner, Gause, Hindson & Mitchell agree that this is the saving grace of God through Christ. Gause (1980:52) succinctly says that grace is the only answer God provides for dealing with sin.

This grace therefore saves, and one must therefore infer that ancestors cannot save because, from the onset, this Christological grace was not bestowed upon any person except Christ as the only begotten Son, rendering him the only answer for sinful humanity. Gause (1980:59) correctly submits that humanity (including ancestors) is the offender owing to sin and, accordingly, humanity is barred from determining the grounds of reconciliation. This ground for reconciliation was declared by John the Baptist upon laying his eyes on Jesus, declaring him as the Lamb that was to die in the place of humanity and take upon itself the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29).

Hindson and Mitchell argue that, unlike the sacrifice offered for the individual (in Gen 4) followed by a family (in Ex. 12) and the subsequent sacrifice for the nation on the Day of Atonement (in Lev. 16), Jesus' sacrifice is so broadened that it is the sacrifice for the whole world. Rahner (1974:173) correctly says therefore that there is absolutely no good in humanity which will serve its salvation without grace. By extension, nothing serves the salvation of humanity except Christ. Berkhof (1949:430) puts it well: "special grace bears on the things of the new creation." It is therefore upon Christ to make a new creation out of every human who comes to him for salvation and ensure a humanity reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:17).

Therefore, for humanity to be saved, Christ's righteousness must be imputed on the reprobate without effort on their part. Luther held that for humanity to stand righteous before God, alien righteousness (instilled from outside) is bestowed on it through grace, which leads it to "proper righteousness" as it toils in good works daily (Russell, 2012:119-125). Calvin (1541:359) maintains that God starts by not counting our sins against us and, in receiving us unto himself, he justifies us first, because no unjustified person can have union with him.

It is here that Paul's predicament (Rom. 7:24) finds attention in terms of the special grace of God so as to move him from a wretched to a righteous man through Christ. Consequently, Ormerod (2015:250-251) and Trueman (2017:61) predicate Paul's condition (and by extension humanity) as inherently sinful in nature and that if we are to be free from the condition of sin help must come from the outside. This allows Paul to submit that God's

grace was not without effect in his life (1 Cor. 15:10), literally working his conversion from Saul of Tarsus to Paul the Apostle of Christ. Paul here finds that he no longer lives but Christ is living in him (Gal 2:20), effectively arguing that Christ's righteousness has been imputed upon him (Rom. 4:6). We find therefore that Paul's struggles were answered fully through the work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, humanity, including adherents of ATR, ought to look outside themselves for help in matters pertaining to salvation.

However, this does not mean that it is good acts that save, considering Cornelius, whose alms and prayers were received in heaven, still needing to believe in God to be saved; him and his entire household (Acts 10:1-48). If one adopts stance of salvation through works, one may unwittingly validate ATR as a saving religion owing to the sacrifices they perform. Much as emphasis is put on humanity unable to do any good works by itself: the idea is to bring an understanding that it is not one's actions (right or wrong) that will earn salvation but grace and faith in God. Gause (1980:50, 55) states that neither Law as given to the Jews nor Law revealed to the Gentiles made any of them righteous. However, what put people right with God and by extension saving them is the grace of God, which is accepted through faith in Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, Calvin (1541:359) thus submits that justification is the work of God. Humanity must therefore accede to the fact that their good acts cannot save them; they must also accede to the fact that it is not incumbent upon another human to make salvation possible for them, including ancestors or the living-dead as they are often referred in ATR circles. Christ is the only foundation of salvation and the only name that delivers it to everyone who accepts his grace by faith (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 3:11; Rom. 1:16).

#### **4.3. GOD'S WORKS OF GRACE**

Trueman (2017:24-35) analyses grace from an Old Testament perspective and, to my mind, comes closest to its essence. This is particularly important because, in chapters 2 and 3, it has been demonstrated that ATR adherents feel that the OT validates their religion (Bediako, 1995:69), justifying their hold on ritual practice and performance. Trueman (2017:24-35) evaluates grace against covenant, confession, benediction, sacrifice and prayer and clarifies God's dealings with the patriarchs and Israel. If indeed these concepts are established through grace, then it entrenches the fact that relation to God and, by extension, the terms of participation in salvation remains God's prerogative, while those who participate do so by grace only. The submission by Trueman (2017) however, appears to elevate God as the author and founder of grace whilst humanity participates in the grace

proceedings as mere receivers of God's gift. Given that the present project argues for grace-based salvation through faith, it will therefore have to evaluate grace as Trueman (2017) does and contrast this to the tenets of ATR to see if these indeed offer any hope for salvation.

#### **4.3.1. Grace and covenant**

Robertson (1980:4) defines the covenant as "a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered." Trueman (2017:26) accordingly shows that God is the author of grace and covenant and states that, when tradition required that both covenanting parties pass through the sacrifice, only God passed through as a sign of his willingness to give himself wholly for humankind (see Gen. 15:8). He says this became clear at the incarnation of Christ who stood as propitiation for humanity's sin and accordingly satisfied God's anger. As Robertson explains, God always took it upon himself to ensure that he is reunited with humanity, even at the cost of giving himself wholly to the process. This finds credence in a submission by Ormerod (2015:250) that, the "operation of an effect is not attributed to the thing moved but to the mover" – in this instance, God being the initiator. One finds, therefore, that the absence of humanity at the cross indicates God's willingness to save humanity by himself and in his terms.

Trueman (2017:27) endorses the importance of the covenant and calls it God's administration of grace. The covenant is borne out of grace and is replete with God's character. Conversely, humanity is born in sin and can by nature not do anything meritorious (Vorster, 2012:73; Aquinas, 1954:139). This human condition threatens the process of the covenant, because humanity is inclined to sin. Yet, when God takes the stand, he ensures that this covenant can stand because he is infallible (Is.40:8). McCool (1975:178) says that this grace founds a relationship between humanity and the Trinity propagated by God who goes beyond that which mere mortals can comprehend. Therefore, in the proceedings of the covenant or bond that seeks to establish a relationship between humanity and God, humanity is an invitee participating merely on account of grace.

#### **4.3.2. Grace, confession and benediction**

Another point that Trueman (2017:28) raises is the question of confession and benediction which, he says, gives the Israelites their identity as they continue to remember what God has done for them. He intimates that their identity does not resume around that which they have done for God but, rather, it is incipient in that which God had done for them. As Trueman

(2017:26) puts it: their “identity starts not in their own activities, but in the prior action of God toward them” –God choosing Israel when it did not know him. Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:184) therefore posit that the *Aaronic* benediction will on every occasion lift up the people in remembrance of what the Lord has done for them, and imprint his name in the hearts of the Israelites – an avenue God established to connect with his people. This is critical when it comes to making grace an attribute of God: considering that grace gives humanity access to and their identity in God.

Elsewhere, Trueman (2017:11) reminds us that God, the offended party, sets the terms and conditions of reconciliation, with grace at the centre. It could well be argued that grace gives believers their identity and accordingly marks them to be the elect of God. Israel is who she is because she is the object of divine grace (Trueman, 2017:28). Whether it is in humanity confessing their sin to God or giving praise to him, grace enables us to move in the direction of God (Trueman, 2017:27; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a: 603,770). Importantly, these avenues are created by God in order for him to be accessible to sinful humanity.

#### **4.3.3. Grace and sacrifice**

It is important to notice the relationship between grace and sacrifice, especially given the ATR predilection of sacrifices. Remembering that all God’s accomplishments were not made without blood (Murray, n.d:8), we note that sacrifice is at the centre of our salvation and reunion with God (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 3:16). Trueman states that the importance of sacrifice reveals God’s seriousness in dealing with sin. To him, God does not pretend that sin does not exist, but would rather do something about it for the good of humanity (Trueman, 2017:29). Rahner (1979:207) says that, because God wanted salvation so much for a fallen humanity, Christ died and rose again signifying not only victory over death, but also the ability to save humanity who is dying in sin. Trueman (2017:29) stresses that it is God himself who established the sacrificial system, and not once should this be mistaken for a human effort to placate or even cajole God’s anger. Rahner (1979:207) says that, from the beginning, God had been gratuitous and merciful and accordingly shared himself with the world to overcome its sin.

The sacrificial system thus displays God’s grace in that, in carrying humanity in his heart, he decided to establish it so as to please him and also stood ready to accept the sacrifices of the children of Israel offered according to his precepts. Trueman (2017:29) states that, acting alone, God took the initiative to “establish the content, the terms, and the results of the sacrifices because his wrath needed to be satisfied in a particular way.” Similarly, grace is

reflected in Christ's death in that, while humanity could do nothing about their own sin, God was gracious enough to present him to the world and also stood ready to accept anyone who would come to him through Christ. Trueman (2017:30) puts it ever so well: "He establishes by grace the sacrifices which serve to satisfy his justice."

Trueman (2017:30), Kaiser (2008:57) and Rahner (1979:207), therefore agree that God willed to give himself as a sacrifice in that, even when he demanded that Abraham sacrifice his son as a test of faith, he ultimately provided the Lamb for the sacrifice. In the end of this encounter (Gen. 22:14), Abraham exclaims: "*Jehovah-Jireh*,"— that is, "God provides." This demonstrates just how important sacrifice is to God and indicates that there is nothing human beings can bring to him to satisfy his demands; instead, God chooses to provide the Lamb of the sacrifice as he did in Christ (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:46). He could not take a sacrifice from the hand of Abraham and, in the place of Isaac, he provided the Lamb. He will not take sacrifice from the hands of mere mortals, and this includes ATR adherents, for in the place of bulls and sheep they bring, he has brought in (provided) Christ to meet his demand.

#### **4.3.4. Grace and prayer**

Trueman (2017:31) further considers prayer to be part of God's gracious act to humanity. He submits that, just like sacrifice, prayer is important and stands as God's overall gracious action. Trueman emphasizes that prayer is not a communication of equals (2017:33) but, in his gracious kindness, God elects to come to the level of humanity and inclines his ear towards people. In prayer, humanity thus has an opportunity to come before God and plead their case for salvation or blessing alike. Trueman (2017:33) indicates that living in God's gracious cocoon has always been a perennial longing of the people of God, and submits that the psalmist (Ps. 42; Ps. 63) knows that the only answer to life's troubling questions is the grace of God.

Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:674) say that grace sets up a place for us to meet God when we come to him in prayer and in turn renders unto us the help we seek. To authenticate it, the Holy Spirit even assumes the position of interceding for us to the Father (Rom. 8:26-27), because prayer is so important that, even when our prayers do not make sense anymore, God graciously intervenes by his Spirit. It is therefore grace that allows humanity to approach the unapproachable God without fear of judgment whilst fully convicted that help is nigh (Heb. 12:18-22; Deut. 9:19; Heb. 4:16).

Solomon pleads with God that he should heed a prayer offered in or towards the temple he has built (1 Kn. 8:27-30), indicating to us that prayer is offered directly to God. ATR holds that prayer to God must detour via ancestors making their prayers a communication between equals. However, God has given humanity free access directly to him, as demonstrated in the crucifixion when the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holiest Place was torn into two (Lk. 23:45; Heb. 9:3,8).

Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:239) and Kaiser (2008:295) surmise that this symbolized Christ's opening the way directly to God. In teaching his disciples how to pray, Jesus tells them to always say "our Father in heaven" (Mt. 6:9-13), indicating that a prayer can only be offered to a higher authority and that it becomes effective that way. This is also the case in John 17 when Jesus himself is praying directing his prayer to the Heavenly Father, a higher authority. The Heidelberg Catechism<sup>28</sup> therefore rightly states that prayer is important for Christians because through it, God grants his grace and Holy Spirit to those who genuinely seek him, notwithstanding the fact that they are unworthy.

#### **4.4. GRACE AND SALVATION**

Timpe (2015:245) argues that the primary purpose of grace is to unite us with God. McCool (1975:178-179) shares the sentiment: "grace is not just a pardon for the sinner but participation in the divine nature and serves as the foundation for a relationship that humanity can have with God." This means that salvation is possible through grace only. Trueman (2017:31) posits that grace is a staple of the piety of the Old Testament. He further states that God's grace forms the basis of any salvific engagement with God (Trueman, 2017:31). What McCool (1975), Timpe (2015) and Trueman (2017) truly reflect is that our participation in God occurs solely by grace.

Therefore, to participate in the covenant with God is a gracious act where God is seen to be willing to enter into a contract with sinful humanity. To partake in the sacrifice of Christ occurs strictly by grace which is borne out of the love of God towards humanity. It is truly grace when God allows himself to be moved by words of confession and benediction from sinful creatures. To send words in prayer to God is also possible on account of God being gracious, not only by allowing himself to descend to the level of sinful creatures but also by hearing their petitions. It is therefore apparent that in the greater scheme of things grace stands as the only channel through which our approach to God is possible and salvation is

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<sup>28</sup> (Q. 116-117)

attained. Yet one understands that all these motifs are inextricably linked to faith, which is the subject of the ensuing section.

#### **4.5. FAITH**

While many scholars have written on the concept of faith, it is still not easy to define. However, it is vital in the realm of religion, especially given Fowler's (1981) submission that faith:

is so *fundamental* that none of us can live well for very long without it, so *universal* that when we move beneath the symbols, rituals and ethical patterns that express it, faith is recognizably the same phenomenon in Christians, Marxists, Hindus and Dinka, yet it is so *infinitely varied* that each person's faith is unique. (p. xiii)

Murray (n.d:20) appreciates faith so much that he says to grasp anything in faith is similar to a relationship we have with bathing water wherein we "enter into the most intimate relationship with the water, giving ourselves up to its cleansing effects." As if he infers that our lives should be wrapped in faith, Tillich (1958:4) posits that "faith is the most centred act of the human mind," and thus should naturally flow from our subconscious. He further reveals that "faith precedes all attempts to derive it from something else" (Tillich, 1958:8).

Faith, then, is so important that all things should start from it. Accordingly, it should be that we should not divorce ourselves from it because it is the heartbeat of our existence. Fowler (1981:5) finds that, prior to "our being religious or irreligious, we are already engaged with issues of faith." Faith therefore becomes the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). Acknowledging the importance of faith, Berkhof (1949:528) concedes that it forms part of the conversion process and is central to justification before God. Gause (1980:57) states that God gives it as a gift of his grace. These submissions lead us to ask what faith is.

##### **4.5.1. What is faith?**

Given that it is central to anything that we ought to attain, we have to ask ourselves: what is faith? Hellwig (1990) says that the term "faith" singularly and directly originates in the Hebrew scriptures. The writer of Hebrews gives an explanation that faith (*pistis* in Greek) is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1)." Critically, Hebrews 11:1 contends for faith on two fronts: substance, which means the assurance or

support and evidence, which centres on tangible proof or conviction. Hebrews 11 is replete with examples of people who heard God and believed what they had not seen and acted with conviction and imputed righteousness (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:692-698).

Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:692) say that “faith is genuine hope based on a genuine word and a promise from the Lord.” Berkhof (1949:529) finds that the meanings of terms in OT and NT centre on faith: specific to salvation or saving faith. He submits that the OT use of the word *he’emin*<sup>29</sup> finds connotation with the NT use of the word *pisteuein*<sup>30</sup> where both refer to the idea of faith in the sense of assent to the Word of God and of confident trusting in him (1949:529). *Pistis* (verb *pisteuein* in Septuagiant), denotes: (a) a conviction based on confidence in a person and in his testimony, which as such is distinguished from knowledge resting on personal investigation and (b) the confidence itself on which such a conviction rest (Berkhof, 1949:529).

He further states that *he’emin* is the most common OT word for “to believe” and is construed with the prepositions *beth* and *lamedh*, with the former referring to a confident resting on a person or thing or testimony while the latter signifies the assent given to a testimony which is accepted as true (Berkhof, 1949:529). He states that this amounts to “personal relation to the object of confidence, a going out of one’s self, to rest in another” (Berkhof, 1949:529). Keil and Delitzsch (1986:282-283) state that faith is “to lean upon,” thereby completely depending on God. This strikes at the heart of salvation because, in simple terms, salvation means the ability to remove oneself from a vulnerable state to the state of rest or shelter. Therefore, by leaning upon Jesus, the one who is seeking salvation concedes that it is not within their ability to save themselves, thus having to develop *he’emin* or *pisteuein*.

Calvin submits that faith “is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> This “favour” has much to do with the salvation that God has revealed to humanity through Jesus Christ, who must freely be received by faith. Closely linked to Calvin’s expression is *The Heidelberg Catechism* which says that true faith

is not only a sure knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also a firm confidence which the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the Gospel, that

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<sup>31</sup> *Inst.* III. 2,7.

not only to others, but to me also, remission of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. (Q21)<sup>32</sup>

In essence, we understand that faith amounts to confidence, in this case in God for salvation which humanity cannot grasp on its own. Faith therefore calls humanity to resign itself so as to go out of one's self and take abode in God who is the author of conversion (Ps. 85:4; Jer. 31:18).

#### 4.5.2. Faith as a response to God

All who come to God must *believe* that he exists and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6) – a statement premised on faith. Fowler (1981: xiii) therefore posits that God endows humanity with nascent capabilities for faith. Tillich (1958:8) states that faith is a total and centred act of the personal self while Calvin speaks of the *sensus divinitatis*,<sup>33</sup> which fills humanity with the sense of God. These pronouncements lead one to accept the importance of faith. Faith is therefore a virtue that is essential to all humankind, especially as it aspires to connect to and please God. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:693) say that the fact that “Enoch pleased God is proof of his faith,” thus the connection he had with God. Abraham was also imputed righteousness which connects him to God on account of his faith (Heb. 11). When it comes to faith, it is therefore apparent that God does not cheat humanity, he gives faith liberally to each who wants to come to him so that they can please him and be imputed with the righteousness of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Similarly, it was necessary for humanity to have faith in order to connect to God. When humanity connected to God, he in turn responded by giving each who believes a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3). Tillich accordingly declares that “faith precedes all attempts to derive it from anything else (1958:8),” meaning that it is God-given, and God-derived. Consequently, faith rises in human beings because it stands as the only response that it can render to God which he will in turn entertain. It must be said here that it is on account of faith that Christ was moved to heal the sick (Mk. 5:34; Mt. 4:23; Jr. 17:14) and save the lost (Mk. 10:52; Mt. 8:22; Jr. 17:14) who responded to his word in faith. Accordingly, Christ responds to faith only. In the end, regardless of where one is in this life, anyone who needs to have any contact with God must offer a response clothed in faith. And by giving faith to humanity, God gives each of us a prepaid opportunity to respond or engage with him should we choose to do so.

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<sup>32</sup> Q.21.

<sup>33</sup> S. 4.2.1.2.1

#### **4.5.2.1. Types of faith**

One sees therefore the need of faith as a basis for connecting with God. So important is faith that Tillich (1958:55) submits that all religions claim that their faith has a special effect, something he says creates the tensions and struggles among the different types of faith. This is evident in different religions, including Islam, ATR and others, which claim genuineness and originality. Varying backgrounds inform how these traditions understand faith and ultimately consider its use. For instance, Islam will differ with Christianity: while the latter holds that faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world is central, the former holds that Jesus and Muhammad are prophets and that faith in Allah is necessary (Power, 2016:39:45). On the other hand, ATR will advocate for believing in ancestors and seek to make Christ the great ancestor (Pobee, 1979:60-61; Bediako, 1996:39). Therefore, Islam holds Christ to be the penultimate prophet whilst ATR holds that he is the great ancestor. In contrast to these positions, the Bible holds Christ to be not merely a prophet but, most importantly, maintains that he is the only begotten of the Father upon whom salvation is bestowed (Jn. 3:16).

One need not dispute that ATR is also a faith, but its claim of having salvific effect cannot go unchallenged, because it may as well have paved its own road to salvation. What ought to be considered in terms of Tillich (1958:57) is that humanity's faith "is inadequate if [its] whole existence is determined by something that is less than ultimate." Bhawanie (2012:2) thus posits that any definition of faith "is incomplete without a consideration of the *object of faith*" (emphasis mine). This is strikingly true when evaluated against those religions that subscribe to ancestors or mortal religious figures such as Mary, Buddha, Muhammad, and others. We therefore discuss different types of faith and how they relate to Christianity and ATR.

##### **4.5.2.1.1. Sacramental/ ritualistic faith**

Kreeft (2000:5) submits that a sacrament is a sign and states that it "always signifies something, points to something real beyond itself," while Calvin (1541:561) holds that a sacrament is an outward sign intended "to sustain and strengthen the weakness of our faith." "This sacramental type of faith is the universal one; it is present in all religions; it is the daily bread of faith without which it becomes empty, abstract, and without significance for the life of individuals and groups" (Tillich, 1958:58). This type of faith, which Tillich views as ontological, argues that it is the state of being grasped by the holy through a medium (1958:58). Here, what Christians would have as sacraments, ATR would have as rituals.

Chapter 3 of this project evaluated some sacraments practiced in Christian faith and found that ATR has espoused some of them to form a core of their rituals. Christianity's position is that these are not the *ultimate*: they all point to Christ who must be remembered when they are performed. This is said on the strength of what Kreeft (2000:5) succinctly formulates: that sacraments point beyond themselves, in this case to Christ himself, who is God incarnate. Correctly, Rahner (1979:14)<sup>34</sup> states that the moment we think of the ultimate as a projection, faith becomes meaningless and ineffective in our lives, which means that at all times, the realness of the object to which sacraments are performed must imbue our minds. It is for this reason that Bhawanie (2012:5) wants us to view sacraments as commands of Jesus Christ to his church. A sacramental faith that shifts from the author of the sacrament to the sacrament itself is heresy. This teaches us that, while we appreciate signs or sacraments, God cannot be simply equated to these.

Must we then not view this as the trap of a faith based on rituals and objects which is prevalent in ATR? It may be contended that, even in some Christian traditions, the observance of sacraments gives rise to a trap where people leave the ultimate and cling to the *representation* of the ultimate, that is, they confuse the ultimate with its medium. For instance, Pastor Odeyepo of Nigeria states that his oil dispels evil and resuscitates dying careers and businesses to the extent where congregants rest their faith in the oil (Gifford, 2011:254). His position is sharply opposed to the Christianity of Jesus Christ which requires humanity to trust in God only (Jn. 14:1). Therefore, by its very nature, sacramental faith must enable us to see beyond the medium it projects.

When he gives sacraments to his disciples, Christ tells them to perform these in his remembrance (1 Cor. 11:24-26). To enable ourselves to do this, we must know the ultimate, and ask ourselves a question, as posed by Tillich (1958:59): does "the medium through which [we] experience ultimate concern expresses *real* ultimacy?" Sadly, whilst ATR may want to look beyond the rituals they perform, hopelessness continues to reside there because, beyond them, Christ is nowhere to be seen. They rest their hope on ancestors whom our previous discussions revealed their constraints, making them less than the ultimate, and certainly unable to dispense salvation. This gives rise to renewed questions around saving faith.

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<sup>34</sup> Rahner (1979:14) says "God is far from being thereby made a projection of my hoe into the void. For the moment I think of him as a projection, he becomes meaningless and ineffective in my life."

#### 4.5.2.1.2. The saving faith

Calvin (1541:184-185) candidly submits that, for purposes of instruction, there may be two kinds of faith, and Christian faith, which he describes as the “true faith,” is the only one that must stand. The position which he takes speaks to the issue of the real ultimacy, in which he sees Christ as the authenticating figure behind the Christian faith that has the power to save. At the centre of Christian faith rests what is called “saving faith,” which looks outside itself to the object of higher power in hope of salvation and deliverance from the grips of sin and death (Bhawanie, 2012: 2; Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005:280). All humanity is concerned with salvation from one thing or another and, in this instance, people are looking at ways in which they can escape death and move into what Rahner (1979:14) calls “unlimited existence.” Rahner (1979:14) accordingly says that the final destination of our hope in an unlimited existence must be sought elsewhere.

Our probe must reveal Christ as the author of salvation (Rom. 10:9-10). This is necessitated by the fall of humanity as recorded in Genesis. Saving faith becomes active when humanity realizes and accedes to their depravity and understands that salvation will not come within human ranks or ingenuity. Therefore, on account of sin alone, humanity cannot be the architects of their own salvation, save for them having faith in one true Saviour, Christ. Accordingly, Rahner (1979:14-15) postulates that a Christian must accept God as an incomprehensible mystery, as the beginning and end of his hope and, therefore, as his unique, ultimate, and all-embracing salvation. Bhawanie (2012:2) finds that “[s]aving faith has as its object the Person of the risen and living Christ.” Elwell and Yarbrough (2005:280) also submit that in Christian faith, “Christ is the basis and active agent in redemption.”

Calvin puts God’s word as a critical and central element required in saving faith. He argues that the absence of God’s word from faith activity renders faith itself obsolete. He says: “the word is the foundation on which faith rests and is supported; once it is removed, faith immediately topples. If the word is withdrawn, faith ceases to exist” (Calvin, 1541:185). Calvin (1541:185) argues further that Christ is the author of life and salvation and that true faith is one that seeks God and finds him in Christ. John. 17:3 invigorates the hope for eternal life after which humanity seeks and says: “And this is eternal life; that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Saving faith is therefore belief in God and Christ. Calvin (1541:207) surmises that “what we must understand about the Father can only be had in the Son.” This is because Christ himself is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his image (Heb. 1:3; 2

Cor. 4:6). He embodies a conscious decision God made to make himself known to fallen humanity. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about Muhammad, Buddha, Paul, Moses, and ancestors, not out of disrespect for such great figures and their accomplishments but on account of inherently human sinful nature. Christ occupies the privileged position of being the one through whom God reveals himself, entrusted with powers of salvation (Ac. 4:12). Bhawanie (2012:5) concludes that, unlike others, ours is not “a blind leap of faith,” but rather a faith “rooted in the flow of history, and in the infinite-personal, living God who has revealed Himself both in revelation and in creation.” Out of modest concern for other religions, one must therefore conclude that salvation rests in God through Christ. Accordingly, ATR and other religions fail to support the saving faith in terms of the modes they employ to seek eternal life. The concern for eternal life and, by extension, salvation, can only be satiated through Christ, whose atoning death makes this possible (Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005:266-267).

#### **4.5.3. Faith and works**

To understand the work of faith is to understand that faith is not work. Gause (1980:57) appropriates faith as God’s grace, detaching it from any performance of works. Gause (1980:49) shoots down any doctrine that advances works or merit above grace, arguing that the latter assumes the inherent goodness of people. While it is written in (Js. 2) that faith without works is dead, does it mean that faith is work? I would submit that it is not. This is so because James. 2:18 says that he will show us his faith by his works. This should indicate to us that works are not faith in themselves, but that they reveal the hope in whom our faith is invested. Elwell and Yarbrough (2005:280) posit that Paul rejects the notion of works (Rom. 3:27-31) and find corroboration in how Abraham is declared justified on account of faith only (Rom. 4).

Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:718) and Elwell and Yarbrough (2005:280-281) emphasize that works play no part in justification; however, faith without works is dead. They regard saving faith as that which believes in Jesus Christ and does not require the performance of any work (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:718; Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005:280-281). Accordingly, all religions that aspire to salvation must reconcile with the fact that there is no amount of work humanity can do to appease God and show themselves worthy of salvation.

As indicated, Maimela (1985:65-66) bases salvation in ATR on performance of rituals and complete trust in ancestors. The reliance on performance of rituals for salvation makes one agree with Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:718) and Berkhof (1949:534), who posit that

performing work to gain salvation amounts to works of Law which hinder justification and salvation. Elwell & Yarbrough (2005:280-281) stress that “[h]umans can do nothing to merit God’s acceptance,” but must stand ready to receive salvation as God’s free gift.

One infers that, while faith is not work, there is work in faith. As we have said, faith is not alone, and James concurs that, without works, faith is dead (Js. 2). The intention of faith is therefore to display belief through the works we do. Luther refers to that which scholars call double justification. He argues: “[b]efore God it takes place by faith, not by works; before men it takes place by works and love, which declare us just before ourselves and before the world” (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:718). Luther holds that faith is a single critical requirement that aids humanity to rise to God and, because God’s expectation is that all humanity must reach him, he chose to endow humanity with the gift of faith. Accordingly, the work we do in the faith does not make faith work so as to offer salvation, but renders them (works) a response to God’s grace and love displayed towards humanity. Luther summarizes this position: “works are a condition, but not a cause of salvation” (Schreiner, 2015:23)

#### **4.5.4. What faith does**

Gause (1980:58) posits that faith is an acknowledgement of human inability. Critically, he says that this acknowledgement must cover the limitation of humanity in terms of finiteness, sinfulness, inadequateness regarding Law and, lastly, the lack of righteousness owing to God’s infinite glory (Gause, 1980:58-59). These factors stand proven in scripture: that humanity indeed cannot cross from finiteness to infiniteness except through the help of Christ who defeated death (Fowler, 1981; Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005). Also, humanity’s sinfulness is the barrier that renders them to fall short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23), thereby failing to extricate themselves from death. By these alone, humanity must deem itself helpless and surrender to one true Saviour (Christ) who defeated all barriers that other *supposed Saviours* have fallen to, and commenced on a journey to bring “the lost” home (Wright, 2009:119). Accordingly, humanity must now focus “its supreme trust and loyalty in a transcendent centre of value and power” (Fowler, 1981:22).

Gause (1980:57) also submits that faith claims acceptance before God in Jesus Christ. He argues that this acceptance places the believer in a position to receive the reward of Christ’s righteousness, which is eternal life. Accordingly, this is the claim that we make in faith when we finally come before the mercy seat of God. Every believer now believes in their heart and confesses through their mouths the forgiving power of Christ which results in the cleansing of their sins (Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005:281; Wright, 2009:119). This is the only avenue that

humanity can pursue not only to be saved, but also to attain everything that Christ is, including finiteness and righteousness.

Further, we learn that faith abandons and repudiates any form or claim of human merit (Gause, 1980:58). When works are at the centre of justification, merit becomes a criterion to dispense salvation. Paul (Rom. 3:23) submits that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Further, Jn. 3:16 says that the love of God drove him to give, meaning to render the gift of his Son. We must realize that it could only take an act of grace, purely on God's terms, for humanity to attain salvation (Wright, 2009:121). Therefore, true faith will quickly realize this fact and distance itself from any meritorious acts in attempt of salvation. Gause (1980:58) states that this faith is a gift of God's grace and has its origin in God as its object of belief. Importantly, this faith is not only free, but also looks to God as the one who is able to aid it in attaining what it desires in him.

Gause also holds that faith in God gets believers to a point where they abandon all attempts to achieve eternal life except through the saving name of Jesus Christ (1980:58). What Gause means, which is central in how we not only view Christ but also relate to him, is the unwanted issue of coercion. This means that Christ becomes our concern out of reverence for him, not out of what he can do for us (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:718). This effectively removes any element of antinomianism in the lives of believers, because their works are not performed to gain salvation except out of pure obedience to God (Gause, 1980:58; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:718). This aids the development of the relationship between faith and works which James outlines (in Js. 2:14-26).

Calvin (1541:207) also submits that faith seeks God and finds him in Christ. Elwell and Yarbrough (2005:263), supported by Wright (2009:12), hold the same view: that Jesus is the human locus of God's incarnate self-revelation. Calvin's argument is that, if humanity is seeking God, there is no other place to seek him except in Christ through whom he is revealed. Calvin (1541:207) thus intimates that true faith emerges when the Gospel, as its aim, looks only for Christ who is the way (Jn. 14:6), the door (Jn. 10:7), the light (Jn. 8:12), and the image of God (Heb. 1:3). Thus, true faith is satiated by the Gospel, which Calvin says is summed up in Jesus Christ.

#### **4.6. THE SALVATION NARRATIVES IN THE BIBLE**

The preceding reveals that faith has much to do with removing ourselves as humanity from salvation processes and solely resting our hope in God. The Gospels and the book of Acts

lead a few narratives on salvation. These will be examined in order to find out how salvation was attained, again with a view to determining whether indeed we need to abandon our efforts (merits) in hope for salvation.

#### **4.6.1. On the salvation of the disciples in the Gospels**

The question of salvation of the disciples is complicated because Jesus makes no reference to salvation when he calls them to “follow him” (Mt.4; Mt. 9; Mk. 1). Bonhoeffer (1949:61) rightly notes the silence of the text regarding the call of the disciples. This presents a problem where a distinction is lacking between being a Christian (saved) and being a disciple (follower). Bonhoeffer (1949:61) admits that the call and the response in matters pertaining to salvation are of crucial importance – which is the very reason for re-examining the issue here.

Jesus clarifies the reason he is calling the disciples: it is to make them fishers of men (Matt. 4:19, Mk. 1:17b). Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:18) submit that the scope of work of discipleship was purely evangelical, which is central to setting it apart from merely being saved. This explicitly reveals that a call to be saved is not a call to be a disciple: however, a call to be a disciple rests on a call to salvation. In those days, to become someone’s disciple meant to be a student of the person and to “walk behind” them (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:255). Bonhoeffer (1949:63) stresses that discipleship is adherence to Christ who is the object of the very same adherence. Accordingly, the disciples of Jesus heard and responded to a call of salvation before they became disciples and chose to adhere to his instructions (Jn. 1:35-42). Jesus spoke of salvation to many people in the Bible (Lk. 7:36-50; 19:1-10 and elsewhere), but did not explicitly call them to follow him as he did with the disciples. One must concede that the disciples ought to have been saved owing to prior knowledge of Jesus. Yet this still does not answer the question: how did their salvation come about?

Some commentators use Rom. 10:9 and 1 Cor. 15:1-11 to measure the point of salvation as the resurrection of Christ and, because Christ was very much alive during the calling of the disciples, arguments are that disciples could not have been saved. If indeed this is considered to be correct, what would one make of the salvation and forgiveness that Jesus offered to Zacchaeus (Lk. 19) and the sinful woman at the table (Lk. 7)? Does this render impotent the work that John the Baptist did at the river Jordan (Jn. 1:19-34), preaching and baptizing in Christ’s name? Surely the resurrection event cannot be taken as the crowning

glory of salvation. This understanding amounts to misinterpretation of the scripture, particularly 1 Cor. 15.

Hindson and Mitchell say that what sets the Gospel truth in context is that: Christ is risen and, accordingly, those who believe in him can also hope in their own resurrection (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:489; Wells, 2014:254). It teaches then that salvation is not limited to different aspects or tenets about it (as contained in 1 Cor. 15:1-11), but it is about believing in Jesus Christ in whose name alone salvation is found (Wells, 2014:275). The underlying term in salvation must thus be faith in Jesus Christ (Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005:281). The introduction of faith therefore draws parallels with the salvation model of the OT (as in Heb. 11). The Bible carries a refrain that the disciples believed in Jesus Christ (Jn. 2:11), and Paul elsewhere stresses that we are saved by having faith (believing) in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). That belief in Jesus must have formed the basis of their salvation.

In other words, the disciples had faith, and that faith worked their salvation apart from the crucifixion and the resurrection. However, one may wonder: is it not through the blood that our sins are washed and we are saved? Scripture is clear (Jn. 3:16) that God requires belief in Christ for salvation. This also goes for the sacraments which, at times, are used to measure salvation: these are purely outward signs confirming belief (faith) in Jesus Christ. Therefore, at the heart of salvation is what Bhawanie (2012:4) calls content, assent, and trust<sup>35</sup> in Jesus - the essential conditions for salvation.

#### **4.6.2. On the salvation of the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50)**

The story of salvation of the sinful woman who attends Jesus while seated at the table in Simon's house is another example that talks to salvation owing to faith (Lk. 7:50). The question of forgiveness in this narrative is coupled with love. This woman utters no word, but performs what one would call acts of love upon Jesus. Because Jesus is the great prophet, he sees the need of this woman – the forgiveness of sins. That the woman was a sinner is not in doubt (7:37), with some commentators saying she was a prostitute (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:184).

What becomes difficult to prove is the question of faith that must lead to salvation because no mention is made of her faith. Already it is evident that when sinners come to Jesus, the

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<sup>35</sup> The use of these words by Bhawanie (2012:2-4) mean to inquire to the right object which is Jesus (content); to agree to the Gospel of Jesus (assent); and to depend completely on Jesus (trust).

outcome is the forgiveness of sins. Jesus met many sinners who came to him and when they left his presence, their sins were forgiven (Lk. 7, Jn. 4, Mt. Lk. 23). Often in these encounters, Jesus would utter the words “Your sins are forgiven you,” and to those who are sick he would say, “your faith has made you well” (Mt. 8:13; Mt. 9:22; Mt. 15:28). It could therefore not be different in the case of this woman who expressly invests her attention and resources in Jesus. The question is, where is this woman’s faith that grants her forgiveness of sins and salvation? Mchunu (2013:57) poses a valid question which we must decipher – “[i]s she saved because she loves Jesus or does she love Jesus because she is saved?”

The answer comes wrapped in the exegetical meaning of the word ἀγαπάω<sup>36</sup> (*agapaō*), which means “to love.” But is love enough for salvation? It is submitted that “overflowing love is the natural response to forgiveness and the appropriate consequence for faith (Barton, 1993:1839).” When the scribes ask Jesus to formulate the greatest command (Mk. 12:28), he replies that it is to love God wholeheartedly. Hindson & Mitchell (2010a:132) submit that love for God is a complete response of devotion, *trust*, and *obedience*, which a person must give to God. The woman in question has demonstrated her love beyond doubt - she did not only surrender her riches (expensive oil), but she also completely gave herself (body, mind, and soul) as a sign of trust and dependence on Jesus. One could say that she came to total dependence on God, and this must prove faith which results in salvation. She went out of herself to trust in another for her condition – a sign of the faith in terms of whom she is trusting, namely God.

Mchunu (2013:57) indicates that this woman thus shows love as a consequence of the forgiveness that she had received from Jesus. One may conclude here that, although love does not save, it is through acts of love which yield perfect obedience to God that our faith is demonstrated (Col. 1:4; 1 Thes. 1:3). This is something which Jesus saw in this woman which prompted Jesus to settle the matter: “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (Lk. 7:50).

#### **4.6.3. Salvation of the sinner at the cross (Luke 23:39-43)**

One of the salvation episodes in the Bible is the time Jesus spent with the sinner at the cross. This story does not only deal with the question of faith but also with the attitude with which we meet Jesus Christ. When one sinner mocks Jesus, the other glorifies him and realizes that his helpless state can only find attention in him (23:41-42). Unlike the preceding

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<sup>36</sup> ἀγαπάω is a Greek word which translates to love (in a social or moral sense).

story, here Jesus does not end with the words “your faith has saved you.” However, his utterances to this sinner lead to the same outcome as in other instances of the sinful woman and Zacchaeus – the forgiveness of sins.

The story reveals a sinner who acknowledges his sins and accepts the condemnation he is due for. Although he is dying at the hands of the merciless, he turns to Jesus for help – hence looking outside himself for help. By accepting his depravity, he places his trust on the object of higher belief (Christ). He gives up on himself in order to cling onto Christ who appears to be dying as well, yet has proclaimed himself as “the Life.” This sinner realizes this and holds onto Jesus for dear life. The sinner pins his hopes on being remembered (*μνάσθαι, mnaomai*) by Christ. Although it is not made explicit in terms of expression for salvation or forgiveness, the seeking to be remembered by Christ is much profound than mere remembrance by mortals. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:27) posit that the use of the word “remember” in the Bible is not merely to recall to mind: it is to express concern and act with loving care for someone. Although a sinner, the man on the next cross needs to be remembered as a person who took interest in Jesus and, because he concerned himself about Jesus, hopes for his sins to be remembered no more. His concern for Jesus is marked by four things: acknowledgement that Jesus is God; knowing that he must be feared; knowing that he is not deserving of what he is going through; and knowing that he is innocent (Lk. 23:40-41). These give rise to content, assent, and trust in Jesus (Bhawanie, 2012:4) – again, the essential conditions for our salvation.

Accordingly, those who turn away from their sins are remembered by God in a special way (Gn. 30:22; Ex.2:24; 6:5; 1 Sam.1:11; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:27). These words are not unique to the sinner on the cross only. We also find them when Joseph asks his fellow prisoner to remember him from jail – hoping for freedom (Gn. 40:14). Also, it is written that “God remembered Noah,” an event that can be taken to mark his freedom after his long stay in the ark (Gn. 8:1). Towards the sinner on the cross, we again see Christ responding to the faith that seeks him out – today you shall be with me in paradise. This event clearly shows that salvation rests not in the death of Jesus Christ, but in believing in him.

#### **4.6.4. The Zacchaeus encounter (Luke 19:1-10)**

The salvation of Zacchaeus hinges on his desire to see Jesus (19:3-4). It is recorded that he sought to see Jesus, meaning that he had already decided in his heart to see him (19:3). What follows in (19:4) is the manifestation of his desire. The word as used here, εἶδω, does not mean a casual look but it embodies an intentional look that goes beyond mere observance. Steele (2015:2379) submits that this word carries two meanings: to see and to

*know*. Zacchaeus' deep thought to see Jesus resulted in his persistence, otherwise he could have let the opportunity pass by, owing just to the tediousness in the presence of multitudes. This indicates that the desire was just too great to ignore, more so because of what he had heard about Jesus (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:222-223).

Having established contact with Christ, Zacchaeus is standing ready for his conversion. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:222) say that he *made haste* to respond to the invitation and he was "already interested in being a disciple." When Jesus invites him to dinner, he not only agrees to this invitation, but also commits to reparations of those he wronged as a symbol of outward repentance. However, while Jesus declares that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house (19:9), the refrain we have come to know, "your faith has saved you," is missing in this context. Mchunu (2013:62) observes Luke's silence about faith, repentance or forgiveness in relation to Zacchaeus' salvation. Could we assume that faith is lacking in this encounter? I would shudder to think that. The Christ we have come to know does not respond to anything but faith.

The silence of Luke must therefore not nullify the presence of faith in Zacchaeus. Firstly, while many people were around Jesus, seeing and touching him, it was Zacchaeus who purposed in his heart to *know* Christ. Secondly, when Christ addresses the question of salvation, he refers to Zacchaeus as the son of *that* Abraham who needs no introduction on matters of faith (19:9). This bodes well for Zacchaeus because, to be addressed in this manner makes him a true Jew who, according to Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:223), "walked in the steps of Abraham's faith (Rom. 4:12)." Accordingly, Jesus' response results not only from the steps Zacchaeus had already taken to mend his ways through reparations, but also from honouring Christ's invitation (19:8). Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:223) refer to this as repentance that demonstrates Zacchaeus' faith. The fact that he wronged people does not mean he lacks faith. It makes him a candidate that has an opportunity to rise to Christ in faith for salvation. Mchunu (2013:69) concludes correctly that "Zacchaeus' response to Jesus speaks volumes of his faith in him." We may therefore surmise that Luke does suggest Zacchaeus' faith owing to his interaction with Jesus. In concluding this matter, Jesus said: "Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a Son of Abraham" (Lk. 19:9). This means that Zacchaeus exuded faith that Jesus took notice of.

#### **4.6.5. On the salvation of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19)**

Saul's salvation account is one of the most explicit that the Bible records. Of all the Apostles in the Bible, it is Paul who shares his account most lucidly with his fellow brethren (1 Cor.

9:1; 15:8-9; Gal. 1:15). The conversion moment of Saul is found in Acts 9:6. Contrary to his confident pose in the opening verse, here he is full of fear (trembling) and without knowledge (astonished), owing to the events that are unfolding before his eyes. At this point we need to examine whether his salvation is centred on fear and astonishment or surrender and obedience borne out of faith in God. Critically, we need to investigate the faith that underscores this story because it is central to salvation (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9).

That Saul had to feel the way he felt is warranted, because an encounter with God is no trivial matter. God's power literally overshadowed Paul and trivialized the authority he thought he had all these years (Acts 9:3-4). When Saul heard God's voice, he was beside himself and immediately showed signs of complete surrender because a higher power was in operation. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:354) correctly point out that what Saul says in (9:6) is an expression of surrender – it amounts to going out of himself and resting on the object of higher authority, which was at work at the time (Berkhof, 1949:529; Fowler, 1981:23). Accordingly, Berkhof (1949:528) says that faith is the benchmark for conversion.

Jesus told Saul to go into the city for further instruction, which indicates that he received further testimony (content) which he had to believe (assent) in order to convert. It appears that, while God was sending Ananias to pray for Saul, conversion had already happened. Barton *et al*, (1993:1992) benchmark this on the fact that "Paul acknowledged Jesus as Lord, confessed his own sin, surrendered his life to Christ, and resolved to obey him" – again exhibiting content, assent, and trust in Jesus for his salvation (Bhawanie, 2012:2-4). This resonates with Rom. 10:10, which says: "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The baptism happening here (9:18) is an outward sign confirming the inward conversion owing to faith. This also indicates that Saul is now entirely concerned with his newly found Lord and gives his total cooperation to him publicly through baptism. His concerns seem to have shifted and his new journey, which can only have begun in faith, is about to start. When he asks, who are you Lord? (9:4), Saul is in a state of ultimate concern about Christ, and Tillich correctly submits that that state of ultimate concern is faith (1958:1), which converts Saul to Paul.

#### **4.7. CHRIST AS THE FOCAL POINT OF SALVATION**

Where does Jesus place himself in the greater scheme of salvation? Calvin's (1541:207) allusion that the whole Gospel finds meaning in Christ underscores the importance of this question. If the Gospel is Christ, then all the tenets of salvation must be identifiable with him – that is grace and faith. The "I am" predicates of Jesus allow one to test the salvation that

rests in him only. The question is: when it comes to how Jesus describes himself, is one able to infer elements of faith and grace, setting the tone for the salvation that ought to follow? These predicates of Christ are therefore important and central for examination here. Ball (1993:182) suggests that the use of ἐγώ εἰμί (I Am) on the lips of Jesus elucidates the salvific purpose of the Gospel, and thus we accordingly investigate.

#### **4.7.1. I am the bread of life (John 6:35)**

The sustenance of Israel from Egypt to Canaan became possible because God provided them with manna – the bread from heaven (Ex. 16; Num. 11). Throughout the years, parallels have been drawn between the manna and Jesus as the bread of life. More importantly, Ridderbos (1997:226) indicates that the Jewish writings upheld that the manna was the gift of the *eschaton* (the future life) which brings into focus the issues of death, judgement, and the final destiny of the soul. If this view is upheld, then Jesus as the bread of life becomes accentuated in the lives of those who concern themselves with the question of life after death.

Consider here that the whole walk of redemption inextricably links to God's guidance of Israel out of Egypt into Canaan. Manna was the essential meal that satiated the hunger that the Israelites experienced along the way. Christ introduces himself as the bread of life which satiates whoever shall eat it (6:35b). Critically, we ought to note that God gave this bread to the Israelites out of grace, just as he also gives Christ to us in grace. Here grace is to be found in the gift itself: God giving himself through Jesus Christ just like heavenly manna (Ridderbos, 1997:227). Ridderbos (1997:235) states that, in responding to the many questions, Jesus exclaims that "the bread that I will *give* is my flesh." This makes for an explicit point that, if anyhow, it is purely by grace that we are given Jesus who is the bread. The same flesh that was taken to the cross is also the *antitype* of the flesh that is continually placed on the Eucharist table for all those who believe in him to eat.

In stronger terms, Ignatius wrote about forty years after John the Baptist that the breaking of bread (Jesus' body) is "the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which prevents us from dying" (see Carson, 1991:216). Further, while the thought of cannibalism was repulsive to the Jews and was prohibited in Lev. 17:10-14, Jesus opts to use metaphors of eating and drinking to aid belief in him (Carson, 1991:223-224; Gundry, 2011:305). He infuses, so to speak, believers unto himself. Unfortunately, Moses' bread (manna) ended with ancient Israel. It failed to create eternal life in contrast with Christ's flesh that endures eternally and aids salvation perpetually.

Accordingly, Ridderbos (1997:227) states that the point of comparison is not "bread," not even "bread from heaven," but the "true" bread from heaven." Gundry, on the other hand, posits that, in equating himself metaphorically to the bread of life, Jesus is both living and life-giving (2011:305). Jesus states in Jn. 6:32 that, while the ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, they died: however, the true bread from heaven gives eternal life which those who eat it shall receive. Although similarities can be drawn between the two images, it is clear that, in terms of significance, Jesus is the bread of life. This outweighs the manna which we may say stands as one of the symbols pointing to Christ, whereas Christ is the bread himself. One may aver here that manna was the anticipation of what Christ would be at his appearance. One matter is therefore salient: that this bread is a gift, making it free, and thus a form of grace which can only be received by faith. As the bread of life, Christ freely sustains those who believe in him for the entire walk of redemption.

#### **4.7.2. I am the light of the world (John 8:12)**

Secondly, Christ defines himself as the light of the world (Jn. 8:12). Often, a lost humanity would be described in terms of darkness (Gundry, 2011:307), so this pronouncement is important. Light and darkness are opposites that cannot exist in unison. Accordingly, the fact that Christ calls himself the light of the world indicates his solemn purpose to lead humanity out of darkness into God's precious light (Jn. 1:5,9).

In the OT, Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan was defined by God's presence in the form of a pillar of light by night (Ex. 13:21). It is explicitly mentioned that, without this light, Israel could not move, therefore adopting an understanding that they would move only in its presence. Importantly, Ridderbos (1997:293) mentions that the light as referred to in Jn. 8:12 is of existential significance, meaning that it is intended to illuminate the way and enable life. It follows then that Jesus becomes the light that humanity needs to live. Ridderbos (1997:293) and Gundry (2011:306) rightly submit that Jesus stands as that light through which humanity can escape darkness. Put bluntly, Jesus is the only way through which humanity can escape hell (Mt. 8:12; 2 Pt. 2:4) and enter light. Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:281) submit that darkness connotes the darkness of this world and that of Satan, whereas light refers to Christ, validating the grand truth that God is light (1 Jn. 1:5).

By distinction, this light appears not as a general grace but as the salvific grace of God that is efficient for the whole world but received by those who *accept* him as Christ. The consequence of accepting him enables those who do so to move away from darkness and

live in the light of God with God, thus declaring them saved. Gundry (2011:306) and Carson (1991:262, 279) believe that the custom of keeping the four huge candelabra burning during the Feast of the Tabernacles bears resemblance with Jesus calling himself the light of the world: this makes him the light of eternal life for all who believe in him. Again, we may infer that faith is central to accepting the *light* that makes itself freely available to all men (Jn. 1:9).

#### **4.7.3. I am the door (John 10:9)**

Further, Jesus portrays himself as the door. Here we see again the plainest descriptions concerning the salvation that Jesus Christ gives. As the door that enables sheep to enter the fold, he guarantees blessings and protection and, by extension, salvation (Barton, 1993:1925). This is explicitly coined when Jesus says: “if anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (Jn. 10:9). Ridderbos (1997:358) states that “[t]he sheep's salvation happens because Jesus has access to the sheep as the one who alone controls the flock.” Carson (1991:292) suggests that the shepherd functioning as the door lets the sheep in and offers them protection; Jesus stands as the legitimate door to God's salvation for humanity. In entering through him as the door, salvation becomes possible.

Gundry (2011) finds significance in the fact that Jesus does not only call himself the shepherd in the verses that follow (Jn. 10:11,14). He submits that, in calling himself the door, He offers himself as the protection and defence for the sheep. He says He does this “in accordance with the necessity that the shepherds themselves guard the opening of the sheepfold with their sleeping bodies in absence of the porter” (Gundry, 2011:309). Carson finds that it was customary for shepherds in the Near-East to sleep at the gates of their sheep pens and keep marauders out (1991:297). However, Christ is more than just a shepherd taking after the Near-East tradition. He is the door and he is the fold around the flock, thereby sheltering and sequestering everyone who believes in him. By implication, entry into the fold is not automatic. It is possible because of God's grace which welcomes everyone who responds to Christ's call for shelter and walk through the door by faith.

#### **4.7.4. I am the good shepherd (John 10:11,14)**

Ridderbos (1997:360) states that the meaning is different to those worthless or evil shepherds mentioned in Ezekiel 34 and Zechariah 14;17: here it indicates Jesus' absolute significance as the good shepherd. This, he states, is central to Jesus' Christological and soteriological significance as commissioned by the Father. The soteriological significance appears to find its climax in Jesus' willingness to risk his life for the sheep in order that the

sheep can remain safe. Ridderbos (1997:360), as well as Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:290), suggest that the text reference to “that they may have life” points to the vicarious sacrifice Jesus would have to make for his own sheep.

The distance Jesus went into shepherding his flock, as shown by Gundry (2011:309) and Carson (1991:297), included laying down his life by the gate in place of the porter. This indicates that Jesus is the kind of shepherd who does not leave the sheep on their own, especially in the night at the hour of their need. “He will neither leave nor forsake” (Heb. 13:5) those who depend on him like the sheep depend on their shepherd. This points to Jesus’ uniqueness from hirelings and thieves in that he has “the will and the courage to stay with the flock during its moment of peril” (Carson, 1991:299; Ridderbos, 1997:361; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:290-291).

Ridderbos (1997:361) thus sees Jesus as the fulfilment of that which God promised his people: that he himself will shepherd them by appointing one shepherd over them (see Jn. 10:16; Ezk. 34: 15ff, 23ff.). In Jesus, therefore, the sheep of God's flock will know him and hear his voice. This means that, as the sheep of Jesus, by faith we resign our abilities to care and protect ourselves and take refuge in him as the only capable shepherd over our lives. And by his grace he enables us to be the flock of his fold and, on account of this faith we invest in him.

#### **4.7.5. I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)**

One of the critical aspects of salvation concerns deliverance from the power of death. The Lazarus narrative depicts Jesus’ power and victory over death. It follows from the earlier “I am” predicate of Jesus as a true shepherd that he not only concerns himself about protecting the sheep from death and destruction but also with giving life to them. As the good shepherd Jesus is not only willing to die but also gives resurrection and life to his sheep. This rings true that he saves to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Because he resurrects those who are dead and instead gives them life, he not only mediates death but also serves as guarantee of life (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:682).

Ridderbos (1997:396) accentuates the element of faith that connects us to Jesus: “all who face the recurrent death situations of life and wrestle with questions of death and life can find an answer only through faith in him.” In saving to the uttermost, those who come to him in faith can be sure of completeness and permanence of life now and hereafter. Elsewhere, it is said that He has come that we might have life in abundance (Jn. 10:10). While Martha (in

Jn. 11:22) wanted Jesus to petition God concerning her brother's situation (Gundry, 2011:310), Jesus wanted Martha to understand that the Father gave all things into his hand and that the resurrection and the life were not only his to bestow but were resident in him, as realized through personal faith in him (Carson, 1991:320). Accordingly, he is not only life but, by his salvific power, he resurrects that which was dead, as indicated, confirming that in his presence death does not reside, as he himself rose from the dead, distinguishing him from any other purported Saviour that might want to arise.

#### **4.7.6. I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)**

Again, no "I am" predicate speaks louder and more directly to salvation than Jesus calling himself "the way." The Bible introduces many ways in which people travel of which some lead to perdition and a life away from God (Prov. 10:29; Mt. 7:13-14). Ridderbos (1997:493) states that Jesus' equation of himself with the way is appropriately termed the core of the entire Gospel. His coming to seek and find those who are lost (Lk. 19:10) occurs for the sole reason that they can be sent back to the right way, which is Jesus himself, and this leads to the Father. Carson (1991:384) and Ridderbos (1997:493) say that He not only points this way but also *is* the only way that gives access to the Father (see Acts. 4:12; Heb. 10:19-20). Carson further states that His way is so solid that none should continue to claim to know the way "on the basis of *antecedent* revelation of bygone epochs (1991:381)." As is also evidenced here, Jesus not only ends by being the way but also stands as the truth and (Jn. 1:14) the resurrection and the *life*.

Accordingly, Jesus offers the only access to the Father and the guarantee for the ongoing life of the believers in the world, as Ridderbos (1997:493) finds. Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:303) state that, while Thomas thought of *the way* in a geographical sense, Jesus' answer gave him the coordinates and the additional words (truth and life) of that way, elucidating why Jesus *is* the way. This marks Jesus' deity and supremacy above *all others who want to be Saviours*. Whilst we know where the dead go (to the grave), it remains a mystery as to what happens beyond the grave. To Jesus, this is not a mystery but a road well traversed, thus guaranteeing everyone who believes in him not only safe passage but also a safe destination to the Father's house (14:2), where they will find him seated at the Father's right hand (Mk. 16:19; Heb. 12:2).

#### **4.7.7. I am the true vine (John 15:1,5)**

Lastly, Jesus defines himself as the true vine. While the vine imagery is often used to denote Israel in the OT (Ps. 80:8; Is. 5:1-7), the nation is often shown to be lacking in some way whilst Jesus is presented as the true vine that is without lack (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:305; Gundry, 2011:315, Carson, 1991:401). Ridderbos (1997:515) states that this saying by Jesus emphasizes distinction from or even the contrast with persons or things that have assumed the same position. Carson calls Him the *genuine* antitype of the vine (1991:291), becoming the exact representation of *it* and accomplishing all that which *it* fulfils.

The culmination of the “I am” sayings comes to the point where all those who believe must cling to Jesus not only for nourishment and support but also for yielding much fruit – a mark not only of salvation and fellowship with Christ but also of discipleship (Mt. 4:19). That “the disciples’ belonging to Jesus as the ‘branches’ of the vine (Jn. 15:5) denotes not only a personal relationship but also their incorporation into the great community of the people God has appropriated for himself out of the world (Ridderbos, 1997:516); Carson, 1991:401).”

Christ, as the one sent by God gathers a community, a fellowship of life, in which his word exerts a redeeming, life-creating, continually purifying effect (Ridderbos, 1997:516; Gundry, 2011:315) and enables humanity to cling to him as branches to the vine. It follows that being everything that he said he is, Christ is concerned with keeping believers to himself, nourishing them, giving life to them from himself as the vine, and purifying them so that, in the end, they serve the purpose of the Father (Carson, 1991:401-402, Gundry, 2011:315).

Similarly, believers now need faith in Christ to be able to persevere, cling to him like the branches cling to the vine, and have an intimate relationship as the vine has with the soil in which is planted. Once more, it is not out of our own merit that we become the branches of his vine: we attain it through God’s grace. Accordingly, to hold on to the vine we ought to surrender ourselves and hold on by faith to Jesus who will sustain us in the process.

#### **4.8. CONCLUSION**

This section discussed the concepts of grace and faith. Grace centres on identity, relationship, sacrifice, covenant, and prayer. These and more make it possible for humanity to have a standing before God. Having set the terms of reconciliation, Christ becomes the fulfilment of what God is doing in the lives of people. God, the offended party, gets to decide how his anger will be satiated and, in his place, we find Christ as the only sacrifice that can

atone for and placate his anger and wrath. It is thus important to stress that we partake in God's affairs and salvation by grace only, while grace remains the only channel through which we are able to approach God. God has therefore set the avenues of covenants, sacrifices, confessions, benedictions, and prayers as means to make himself accessible to humanity. Even before faith, humanity's hope hinges on God's grace, because it is the first avenue through which he looks at depraved humankind.

When God determined that he would show grace to humanity, faith became the enabler for humanity to reconnect with him. Faith, as indicated, concerns itself with the ultimate. Tillich posited that the ultimate only qualifies to be so if *it is the real ultimacy*. Given that ancestors die and do not have the power to resurrect themselves, they cannot be considered the *real ultimacy*. Christ, by virtue of his incarnation, death, and resurrection, stands as the only real ultimacy: not only for ATR but also for all those religions whose hopes are locked in graves. Christ has explicitly defined himself through his "I am" predicates and we find that he is the only way to true salvation.

In the end, there is no salvation without grace. Also, faith connects us to God for our own salvation, made effective through clinging to the real ultimacy. Christ came full of grace and truth; no other human can lay claim to such; even great biblical figures fail the *ultimacy* test. Carson (1991:384) helps us formulate a conclusion of the matter: "now that Jesus has come as the culminating revelation of the Father, it is totally inadequate to claim that one knows God, on the basis of the *antecedent* revelation of bygone epochs, while disowning Jesus Christ." Therefore, ATR adherents should consider switching their faith to the real ultimacy, which is Christ, through whose grace God can accept them as his children.

## **CHAPTER 5: RELATING TO THE LAW OF GOD WHILE MAINTAINING GRACE AS THE ONLY MEANS OF SALVATION**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapter observed the possibility of salvation through faith and grace. These two are regarded as the tenets of salvation through which any person who needs it can attain it. In this chapter we investigate how an ATR adherent can relate to the Law of God while looking to grace as the only means of salvation. If salvation is an ideal for humanity, then all religions must meet at the point of grace and faith for attaining it. Accordingly, we will deal with how ATR as a subject of our enquiry can be migrated from ATR-based methods of salvation to grace and faith-based salvation as founded on Christ.

This, however, cannot be done without addressing the reasons that keep people of other religions firmly rooted in their own. After all, salvation is about feeling safe, and human instinct directs people to where they feel most safe. Therefore, we ask: is Christianity safe for all humanity to converge there? What are the insecurities, especially relating to ATR, that would hinder them from migration? Upon migration, how best can ATR adherents lead meaningful lives as they observe grace as the ultimate truth? In concluding this chapter, we will then propose a model that will help an ATR adherent move from ATR to Christianity within a safe space.

### **5.2. THE CHALLENGES AFRICANS HAVE WITH CHRISTIANITY**

Generally, people remain in places that they feel safe in. This is also the case with religion, where people remain because they feel amongst other things that they are best understood and their immediate spiritual and personal needs are catered for. Chief among these needs are salvation from terrors of this world and assurance of security in their object of belief (Mbiti, 1969). Banda (2005:24) says that the “chief purpose of religion is the security of life, the maintenance of peace and the defence of prosperity.” Ngong (2010:106) and Maimela (1985:72) say that these provide security that concerns itself with the totality of life. These needs are reasons that compel people to remain in their religions, because they feel that it is in their religions that they are met best.

Accordingly, some Christian groups such as African independent churches have tilted towards traditional practices in an attempt to accommodate even the staunchest adherents

of African religion. Whilst some independent churches openly accept the worship and veneration of ancestors (like Osofo Damuah's *Afrikania*), others have made use of subtler methods to attract traditional African adherents, such as anointing oils, holy water, and prayer cloths. These practices are increasingly penetrating Christian churches today (Gifford, 2011). Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:72) observes that these amount to syncretism or "extensions of faith." In this segment, we look at the reasons that make people reluctant to migrate from their traditional religions even when Christianity sets itself as an appealing option. We also look into how Christianity can best accommodate or secure them as they migrate without feeling lost or vulnerable.

### **5.2.1. I am a traditionalist**

In Osofo Kwabena Damuah one has an interesting character: he not only defends Reformed ATR (which he calls *Afrikania*) but also writes as a former father (minister) of the Roman Catholic church in Ghana. His *Afrikania Handbook* is a polemic against Christianity in Africa, seeking to promote what he calls the *Afrikania* movement as an alternative (Damuah, 1983). Damuah (1971:8) takes the view that ATR should be informing the lives of Africans because apart from its profundity, it holds the key to Africa's search for freedom and self-determination. Culture therefore becomes his contention. He says: "[a]ll of us have to serve God, and the best way to do so is through our culture" (Damuah, 1983:1).

Obviously, because he associates culture with freedom and self-determination, he amplifies the stakes for ATR adherents who would rather see themselves remain in their religion. Compounding the issue is the outlook on Christianity as that religion that enslaved and relegated Africa and Africans to the bottom of the scale (Bediako, 1995:5-6). But Christ, a Jew, did not campaign on a ticket of physical freedom and self-determination of his people, his cultural type, but opted instead to deliver a universal message that addresses salvation of the soul (1 Pt. 1:9, 1 Pt. 2:25).

Accordingly, Magesa (2004:142) deduces that the incarnation of Christ in the Jewish culture is the model for the Christian message that must take root in all cultures in which it is proclaimed. However, his proclivity towards the role played by intermediaries such as ancestors (Magesa 2004:240-241) finds no support in the present argument, because Christ is the real ultimacy that must abide as argued (Tillich, 1958:57; Bhawanie, 2012:2). If ATR is concerned about its own culture, it misreads the intention of the God they purport to worship: Christ's message touches all cultures without elevating any particular culture.

Tjaart van der Walt (2007:78) accordingly says: “in the Old Testament the Messiah was promised first of all to Israel, but he would also come to the nations” (Is. 42:1 & 6; Ps. 117). Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:805) in Ps. 117 find that “what God was doing in and for his people Israel involved the destiny of *all people*.” Herein then lies the greatest failure of ATR which wants to insinuate that Christianity is culture, which is not the case. What is clear about cultures is that they fail to accommodate people from other cultures within their own space. They may accommodate one in their religion (within a culture), allow them to worship and partake with them, however, on issues of rites and rituals, it is a closed space for outsiders. Christianity is the exact opposite, and making it a culture assumes that those who migrate to it may not enjoy it fully owing to limitations that are prevalent in cultures. Therefore, Christianity stands as a *religion* that all other *cultures* must identify within (Cragg, 1968:48; van der Walt, 2007:78; Rm. 3:29f) in hope of finding salvation in the incarnate Christ who is God himself.

Some scholars argue that Christ represents all traditions of the world (Magesa, 2004:142; Maimela, 1985:65), however, it is important to submit that these traditions must come to identify with him, especially on account of real ultimacy.<sup>37</sup> Opinions offered by the likes of Maimela (1985) and Ranger and Kimambo (1972:2), that “there is salvation in other religions,” make adherents fall more in love with their own cultural religions, albeit that “this salvation” which they hold offers no real salvation from the pangs of depravity and hopelessness.

While Maimela compares Christian religion with ATR (1985:77) care should be taken to underline that although ATR is culture specific, it is Christianity that welcomes all cultural groups (Magesa, 2004:142, Cragg, 1968:48), making its intentions clear from the onset that it is a world religion and not a regional religion (Blyden, 1994:21). All humanity is born into one tradition or another, and no one should be forced to abandon their tradition because it is less appealing for the next person. Similarly, no one is born a Christian, however, as people become conscious about what they want, they make decisions to embrace Christianity as their religion. Staunch traditionalists should be aware that, while it is acceptable to identify with their traditions, it is not religions that save, but belief in Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:1-21). By extension, Christ authenticates Christianity, and it becomes a religion that can save because of the object upon which it is founded (Bae & van der Merwe, 2008:1322).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ch.4, Sec. 4.5

<sup>38</sup> Oduyoye provides a refreshing thought here, she says – “There is only one religion called Christianity. It takes its origin from the Christ-Event. It has institutional expressions called churches

I find accord with Bolaji Idowu (1962:23) who lamented the failure of the Nigerian church to formulate a theology that is distinctly African in its thinking and meditation. We should understand this not as an alternative to salvation but as means through which people are able to conduct themselves from their cultural backgrounds, touching on those liturgical elements such as worship, language, dress code, preaching styles, set-up of worship places, and so on, without substituting the object of worship (Christ) with ancestors. Whilst all these liturgical elements may be permissible (Mt. 15:11), Christ cannot be substituted, because he himself is the author of salvation for humanity and God himself discourages the worship of other gods (Bae & van der Merwe, 2008:1322; Ex. 20).

I am also in accord with everyone who postulates that Western missionaries cannot dictate to an African how they should worship; but the question of whom to worship must reach a universal consensus cutting across all cultural divides. Christ is the real ultimacy, calling all cultures to his worship (Tillich, 1958:57), and Africans are short-changing themselves by imitating Western missionaries as patterns behind which they must rally, irrespective of their fallibility. Accordingly, Africans must welcome Magesa's (2004:142) advice that African identity should be respected just as the Gospel's identity is because both have a divine origin. Blyden (1994:22) correctly points to the error by saying "[n]ot so much by what Christianity said as by the way in which, through their teachers, it said it, were the [African Americans] influenced." Here, disparities are evident between the original idea of Christianity as expressed by Christ and the practice of it by his professed followers which led to the disrespect of African tradition. This is the basis why Africa and her people cannot measure herself against Western missionaries who modified the Gospel of Christ according to their own minds and idiosyncrasies. Accordingly, an African should rest easy, knowing that Western Christianity is not the standard, but the Gospel of Christ as contained in the Bible is, according to 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

### **5.2.2. What about my ancestors?**

Gabriel Setiloane (1976:406) posits: "to take the ancestors from an African is robbing him of his personality." Bediako (1995:216) explicates the difference between ancestors and divinities and finds that, because of their proximity to humans, "ancestors represent a more enduring reality in the African world-view." Baëta (1955:60) states that "Africans live with

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and they vary in liturgy, practices, affirmations and discipline. It is coloured by the cultures in which it lives." Therefore, the debate rightfully shapes itself around Christianity and cultures of the world because according to Oduyoye, the world is "dealing with two living organisms — Christianity and culture. For both only an integrated approach will suffice (1995:88).

their dead.” Accordingly, ancestors are still regarded as heads and dominant parts of families and communities to which they belonged (Bediako, 1995:219). For ATR, ancestors are prominent and the appearance of Christ in what Bediako (1995:99-100) calls “*the world of distributed power*” is destined for a power struggle. Christ appears as the one who seizes the power which is perceived to belong to ancestors away from them. It follows then that the apprehension of ATR adherents lies in the role the ancestors will eventually play in their lives upon acceptance of Christ. This discomfort must therefore unambiguously find expression in the present submission.

To downplay this power struggle, African scholarship has at one point attempted to ancestorise Christ to make him part of the ancestral world and the living-dead as indicated (Pobee, 1979; Nyamiti, 1985; 1990; Mbiti, 1969; Mvunamandi, 2008). However, Danquah (1968:33-34) submits that “God and Christ are not ancestors in the sense that we Akans (Africans) consider our forefathers.” He argues critically that God has never stayed physically with us on earth whilst Christ’s body never saw corruption in the grave, and Christ’s spirit can therefore not be considered to be an ancestor. While ATR holds ancestors as the living-dead (Mbiti, 1969:83) who are closely related to their families and the community in which they belong (Bediako, 1995:219), the debate about the role of ancestors must reach a stage where they are accepted for who they truly are – our dead relatives (Bae & van der Merwe, 2008:1321-22). However, their significance cannot go in silence owing to their contribution while they lived (Setiloane, 1976:406). One accepts therefore that, in their silence, ancestors will continually play a role in our lives. These are after all, our parents, our children, and our relatives, whom our hearts will continue to carry long after they are gone.

Much as we remember the contributions made by those biblical ancestors and their heroics, we will similarly continue to remember our immediate ancestors as people who impacted our lives. However, this should not be construed as an avenue to pursue rituals, worship, and veneration of such figures in hope for salvation and the easing of burdens. The Bible itself does not offer examples of praying to or venerating the dead, except to acknowledge that our God is also of those departed who, on account of faith, were made righteous (Heb. 11:8ff). Whilst the Jews also held Jacob in high esteem as their ancestor of note (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:263; Jn. 4:20), and Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:33, 31-39), examples are lacking where these became objects of their faith. Instead, their ways of life were followed and their exploits remembered. At this point, one must boldly submit that the existence of ancestors cannot be denied because to do so will be sheer dishonesty. However, there should not be any confusion about how we should relate to them. ATR adherents and

Africans in general can hold ancestors dearly in their hearts as people with whom they shared their lives, while rendering worship to Christ who is the ultimate object of salvation.

### **5.2.3. Christianity is inadequate for me**

The presentation of the Gospel by Westerners who delivered the meek and mild Jesus as a Saviour for black souls (Thomas, 1971:282) gave rise to the question of insufficiency of Christ for an African. This has to a large extent rendered Christ as a foreign figure in African affairs (Banda, 2005; Clarke, 2005:163) because of his perceived weakness. However, the preceding chapters of the present study firmly place Christ as a critical and in fact the sole player in matters of salvation for Africans. Africans are concerned about their primal relations with God who was able to save before the advent of Christ on earth, who must now offer this salvation through the perceived “weak Christ”. While its intention was to bring the message of salvation, the apprehension caused by Christianity towards Africans is to be laid largely at the doorstep of Christian missionaries. Blyden (1994), Mbiti (1969), Setiloane (1976), Pobebe (1979), recognize the manner in which the Gospel was brought to Africans as suspect and denigrating to say the least, eroding everything African in favour of Western liturgical styles of worship.

Blyden (1994:22-34) says that, whatever the missionaries brought, “instead of being pure is superstitious, instead of being genuine, is only nominal, instead of being deep is utterly superficial, and not having fairly taken root, it cannot flourish and become reproductive.” This is the core of the problem which drives the conclusion that what has been brought by Westerners to African natives fails to satisfy them – hence the perceived inadequacy of Christ. However, Blyden (1994:21-22) recognizes that “[t]he Gospel of Christ was travestied and diluted before it came to him (an African) to suit the peculiar institution by which millions of human beings were converted into chattels.” This must lead us to agree that the Gospel has its own life and does not owe its origins to the missionaries; and, because of its universal intent, it does not carry European cultural connotations, much as it does not carry African cultural connotations. Europeans themselves, just like Africans, must find the genuine Gospel that does not prescribe one culture over another but allows people of different cultural milieus to converge under the true Gospel. Accordingly, Christ reminded his disciples (in Acts 1:7-8) that theirs is a world-wide calling, witnessing to the ends of the earth (Van der Walt 2007:78).

Perhaps the Apostle Paul offers the best example when it comes to preaching the Gospel to world cultures. Unlike the missionaries who enculturated Africans (Shabangu, 2005:38), he

opted to be whatever his audience was – a Jew to the Jews, a Hebrew to the Hebrews, and a Gentile to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:20-21). This, however, he did while keeping to the letter and spirit of the Gospel, charging “that I abuse not my power in the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:18),” unlike the missionaries who violated and abused the trust of their fellow humans. This adaptation by Paul did much to bring people of differing milieus to the grace of Christ (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:474); a book which European missionaries of the time could have taken a leaf from. In delineating the past abuses from the core of the Gospel, Ukpong (2002:9-10) finds that an African must engage the Bible in an African way so as to rid it of external influences. Therefore, all cultures must not be a tool that delays the world in reaching a consensus about what the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is.

One wonders, given that the missionaries seasoned the Gospel with their predilections to achieve a particular end, what is the true Gospel? The answer lies at the heart of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pt. 2:20-21) in Christ whose Gospel must be accepted as truth. Of course, arguments may ensue that the Bible itself is culturally influenced and cannot be accepted as the only truth. However, Van der Walt (2007:51-57) speaks to the authenticity of the Bible that shows on the one hand the flaws in the arguments of those who oppose its authenticity as well as deficiencies contained in the apocryphal books against the canon as we know it.

Here, Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:763) advance that God was in control of the authorship of the scriptures, firmly subjecting writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to cater for human need. Therefore, nothing hinders the Bible from satisfying either the missionaries or the Jews only: it caters for all cultures of the world, including Africans. After all, as John Drane (2000) succinctly says, “there is something here for everyone’s taste and for many different moods and emotions.” Blyden thus concludes that “the Bible will be our textbook, the Bible without note or comment” (1994:20-26). And to this truth, Africans are invited.

### **5.3. THE SECURITY IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST**

By its design, the Gospel ought to be the centre of security not only for Africans but for humanity at large. Banda (2005:26) asserts that Africans view theirs as an all-encompassing religion answering their pertinent issues about life. If Christianity wants to occupy this space it must assert itself as an answer fitting to an African’s holistic needs. This firmly puts security at the centre of the relationship between Africans and Christ. Elsewhere, Thomas (1971:282) says that the Westerners preferred the weak Jesus for Africans while, to them, Christ was appropriated as the source of power and dominance. However, just as Blyden (1994) and others lament the idiosyncrasies pervading the Gospel because of missionaries,

we must object to the idea of “the meek and mild Jesus” and reflect on the assertive and powerful Christ who is the source of security to those who run to him for refuge (Mt. 11:28-30), irrespective of their cultural inclinations. Accordingly, Banda’s (2005:39) thought that “Christological security is security that is given by Christ to Christians,” must incite the investigation of the security found in the Gospel of and the person of Jesus Christ.

### **5.3.1. Christ as the source of security**

Can Africans move from God the Father to God the Son without feeling any anxiety in terms of the work and the person of Christ himself? Undoubtedly their apprehension is observed by Desai (1962:25-26) who intimates that Africans have always been opposed to the idea of the Son being placed on equal footing with the Father who is considered the security of the family, in total disregard of Africans’ familial relations. This departure occasions knowing who the Son is and what he has done in order to answer the disconcerting question of sufficiency and security for an African.

We observe that, not only are issues of forgiveness of sins and deliverance from death contingent upon the person of Christ, but also the abundant life (Jn. 10:10b) which he promises to those who believe in him. Therefore, in acknowledging the Son as God’s persona, we intend to discuss briefly three things about him that qualifies him to provide security needed by an African who is concerned about inadequacy. The first thing is to elucidate the Godship of Christ which in effect does not diminish the role of the Father in matters of salvation, but rather complements it. Secondly, we should demonstrate that Christ’s power is God-derived (that God’s power is Christ’s power) and is just as unfailing. Lastly, we should submit that it is God’s decision to save and secure through Christ only; these are the terms that the Father himself elected to satisfy him.

#### **5.3.1.1. The Godship of Christ**

Banda (2005:41-45) brings us closer to who Christ is in terms of the God-Man. This is particularly important given that Africans took the God-Man and made him an ancestor so that it was easy to relate to him (Bediako, 1996:39, 2004:196). Therefore, at least on the part of an African, an investigation was made to see how Christ could be of help to the ominous situation that many Africans face – salvation and security. Van der Walt (2007:71,77) indicates that the Jews found it difficult to accept Christ partly due to the prolonged coming of this promised Messiah, which resulted in people formulating their own ideas about how or who he would be. Africans are no different when they see Christ in their ancestors borne

partly by the tainted Gospel message that landed on their shores. Be that as it may, Banda (2005:41-45) surmises that Christ is the one who existed face to face with God and is the express image of the invisible God. This is not mere rhetoric to appease or reveal Christ in a better light, but is the factual statement revealing the true identity of God in terms of who he is and what he can do. Christ does not carry his identity distinct from God, rather, he appears in the express likeness of God (Jn. 10:30; Jn. 14:9). Therefore, Africans must understand Christ as the God they need so much in their lives.

In John. 1:1 we read that “The Word was God,” which refers to Christ who became incarnate. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:249) express that the “Word” is here referred to as *Logos* which is identifiable with Jesus. They clarify the *Logos* (Jesus) is God in the fullest sense, ascribing to him a likeness with God and the power of all things created. Calvin (1541:207) and Gause (1980:45,59) say that God chose to reveal himself through Christ, and that which we therefore need to know about God can only be had in Christ. Accordingly, Christ is not only the Saviour but the author of the very same salvation (Trueman, 2017:16-17). The consequence of this Godship conferred upon the person of Christ and the fact that God chose to reveal himself through Christ is that he saves just as God saved. Because Christ is the *Logos* that was with God in the beginning (Jn. 1:1), he has always been the Saviour. The implication of his ability to save means that from him salvation and security are derived. Accordingly, Christ stands as God himself and by contrast does all which God has been doing for humanity. In Christ therefore, salvation is vested and derived – the only avenue God elected to placate his anger towards humanity.

### **5.3.1.2. Derivation of Christ’s power**

The question of the power of Christ must find climax in the victory he has over death (Jn. 20:1-10). When comparisons are made, it appears that Christ is presented as the likeness of other gods, a fallacy which ATR is culpable of (like Maimela, 1985:65-66; Mosothoane, 1973:86). However, the resurrection of Christ from the dead puts him shoulders above the rest. Further, Christ is the perfect display of his power when coming to matters of sin and salvation. His life’s struggles did not make him a God who does not share in our experience: he identified with humanity to the end (Heb. 4:15). While his birth, his teaching in the temple at the tender age, his baptism, and his death were all miraculous events, it is in his resurrection that the power of God is displayed most clearly (Eph. 1:19-20). Hindson and Mitchell view this power to be supreme, with nothing coming close to it (2010b:556). They offer that the power working in Christ and in believers is above “every conceivable power, natural or supernatural (2010b:556),” placing Christ above all principalities.

The start of Christ's ministry is marked by his baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit, which displayed the power of God upon his life (van der Walt, 2007:153). Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:16) and Carson (1991:118-120) see the action of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus as a form of equipping him for the work he was about to undertake. The same sentiment is carried regarding the announcement of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples which was the bestowment of power for them to witness for God (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:329). The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the life of Christ positioned him as the sole possessor of God the Spirit, which rested on him and never departed (Carson, 1991:116-117). It imbued him with power to do the works that God the Father had appointed him to do. It therefore became incumbent upon Jesus to declare: "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10 and the parallels)," and to further intimate that, because of God's Spirit upon him, he was anointed to set free the captives (Lk.4:18).

Therefore, it is in the company of God the Spirit that Jesus is able to conquer the temptation and shrug off the devil decisively after 40 days of hunger, becoming according to the words of Van der Walt (2007:151), "the first human to defeat the rebel king." Accordingly, Christ became just like humans: he went through their struggles and died vicariously, yet in all these he conquered, placing himself as the one possessing power to deal with all human struggles. His power, as it were, is derived because of the Spirit of God upon him (Lk. 4:18), the very same spirit he promises to those who will believe in him. They enjoy the same power to conquer life's most troubling questions (Rm. 8:11), not discounting Africans who are in peril as regards salvation. The mainstay of his Godship is therefore the fact that he lives on whilst all other purported Saviours are dead - he lives to "make intercession" (Heb. 7:25) for believers. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:682-683), note that "the priesthood of Christ is superior to that of Levitical priests because they die," giving impetus to the power imbued in him to continue his existence to this day. Accordingly, his continued existence signifies his power over sin and death and his ability to offer salvation.

### **5.3.1.3. Salvation upon Christ**

The conferring of the Lamb *status* upon Christ positions him to be capable of shedding blood for the purpose of remission of sins. As we know, at one point God, on his own volition, accepted the blood of bulls and animals to placate the sin of humanity (Gause, 1980:59; Barton, 1993:1900; Trueman, 2017:28). However, time proved that this was not the final, permanent solution to the sin problem. Barton (1993:1900) recognizes that, in terms of the sacrificial system of the time, morning and evening sacrifices of a lamb were necessary for the sins of the people. Because of this, Christ came and lived a perfect obedient life which

made him the perfect sacrifice in the place of animals (Carson, 1991:117; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:253).

How Christ becomes the bearer of salvation is not only a matter that was prophesied in times past (Jr. 11:19; Is. 53:7), but was also a matter of how he lived through his incarnation. Though it was a norm that bulls would cleanse and placate sin, at the appearance of Christ, the shadows lost significance and Christ became prominent. For instance, Simeon, a devout Jew who is versed with Jewish sacrificial system, recognizes that Christ is a light to Israel and the Gentiles and that he would die for the sins of many (Lk. 2:25-35). John specifically calls him the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). What John is saying is significant, because it talks about Christ in terms of that which the Jews of the time were acquainted with; lambs that placated sin.

In referring to Christ this way, it is as if John is calling the Jews of the time to shift focus, as it were, from the animals they used to slaughter to Christ who is the real Lamb. Murray (nd:3) remarks that, in dealing with sin, it was not without the blood that remission was realized. This must not only provoke Jews to desert temple sacrifices and cling to Christ, but it is a call for all humanity, performers of sacrifices for salvation, to abandon this way of life and invest their hope in Christ as the sacrifice God set before the nations. Accordingly, African practice of rituals and slaughtering for ancestors in hope of better life and salvation must find that true salvation rests in Jesus who epitomizes the security and adequacy displayed in his life.

### **5.3.2. Christ as the image of security**

Banda (2005:54) states that “Christological security is a soteriological position.” This means that Christ’s security manifests itself upon those who have believed and accepted him in their lives; in other words, those who are saved. By way of admission, the adequacy of security in terms of religion should manifest itself on the object of belief. Consequently, Christ as the object of belief in Christian faith, must answer all aspects of security concerns for an ATR adherent to feel safe in making a shift to Christianity. Christianity by itself is security and, by virtue of making a shift, one is secured. However, the challenge lies in how we ought to demonstrate to non-Christians this security that is found in Christ.

This is what Banda refers to when he says that “Christological security is a fact that is already there” (2005:35). However, he laments that ATR adherents are blinded to this fact owing to their Afrocentric worldview which deprives them, like Elijah’s servant, to see the presence of this real security in Christ. The question of security in Christianity is therefore

best answered by the powers vested, the promises spoken, and the victories attained by Christ on behalf of those who turn to him. Therefore, in dealing with Christological security, we expound the power, the promise, and the victory borne by Jesus Christ himself, which should deal with the progression of life for any concerned human being.

### **5.3.2.1. The power of Christ**

Security is achievable in terms of the power and authority that one has. Therefore, Christ must answer the question of power to offer a response to the question of security. Prophet Isaiah (in Is. 9:6) speaks of the coming Christ as the Mighty God whose sole purpose will be “to deliver people from their slavery to sin” (Barton, 1993:1190). In their analysis, Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:922) submit that this text signifies Christ’s divine power as Warrior and that, as Everlasting Father, he is a “compassionate provider and protector of his people.” In Matthew 28:18, Christ declares that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to him. Barton (1993:1748) claims that it is on the basis of this power that Jesus’ authority is established. We may also say here that this power which Jesus refers to is the power that enables him to secure believers to himself (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:310). Accordingly, because Christ possesses all power, he is able to, amongst others, answer life’s pertinent questions about the resurrection (in Phil. 3:10; Rm. 8:11); of salvation to those who believe (Rom. 1:16); and of concern for abundant life (in Jn. 10:11).

Further, unlike ancestors, Christ gives the same power and authority to his followers to enable them to realize abundant life and overcome the terrors of this life (Luke 10:19). Whilst other religions may claim a degree of power based on the things that they do which deliver their people from pressing situations at times, we submit that Christ remains the only one with true power. According to (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010b:310; Carson, 1991:117-118), this is adequate for every need and secures believers. Just like Moses, who interfaced with Pharaoh’s false prophets when his rod swallowed theirs, Christ swallows all powers of purported Saviours and remains the one with unfailing power (Eph. 6:10). Peter declares that Christ has “gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him (1 Pt. 3:22). His power, as it were, breaks the frontiers which all world powers cannot. The same is available to everyone who chooses to identify with him – the only avenue God chose to dispense his power.

### **5.3.2.2. The promises of Christ**

Because Christ answers best the question of power, he is in a position to deliver promises that can stand. We admit that a promise can only stand in proportion to the power that establishes it. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul accordingly finds that God's promises in Jesus Christ are "yes" and "amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). Barton (1993:2121) therefore comments that all God's promises find fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ. Further, Barton posits that it is God's faithfulness that makes us confident about his great promises for the future (1993:1401). In view of Lamentations 3:20-22, Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:1023) advance a similar point: The Lord's mercies (*hesed*) denotes God's faithfulness to his covenant promises whilst his compassions (*racham*, denoting womb), positions God as possessing parental kindness and tenderness. Just as a parent would remain faithful to their children, God stands faithful to all who accepted him.

This informs us that the promises of God do not only stand on account of his power, but very much on account of the fact that he is our Father. It is for this reason that it is noted in (Heb. 10:23) that he who has made the promise to us is faithful. Unlike mere mortals who turn against their words, God's sole purpose according to Jeremiah (Jr. 1:12) is to guard against the occurrence where what he has spoken should not come to pass. Hindson and Mitchell (2010a:974) submit that He not only ensures that it comes to pass but also hastens it to fulfilment. Accordingly, all cultures must come to the realization that Christ delivers on his promise based on his power and faithfulness. The promises He makes to us stand in proportion to His unlimited power, and there can never be a time where we feel vulnerable owing to his failure.

### **5.3.2.3. The victory in Jesus Christ**

The assurance of our victory lies in the fact that the object of our belief is victorious – Christ has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33). We are not in a position to derive any victory that our object does not derive. This suggests that our success or failure in life is intricately linked with the resting of our hope. Accordingly, assurance comes on the basis that those we believe in are victorious. Banda (2005:45-46) states that the security concerns of a Christian rests squarely on God, inferring that it rests not in our hands, but is outsourced to the object of hope. Accordingly, because God never fails, we are able to score victories that we would otherwise not have achieved had we been toiling on our own. Christ accomplished many victories, including victory over Satan in the wilderness and victory over death (Mt. 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 21:4; 2 Tim 1:10; Col. 2:15). This is significant in view of the depravation

of humanity (Barton, 1993:2113). We therefore become victorious on the basis that he is victorious.

Therefore, in making Christ the centre of our belief, we also are able to claim considerable victories, especially victory over sin, death, and Satan, because our God has transferred these to us. He is able to promise that he has come to earth for humanity to access abundant and eternal life because he is that life (Jn. 14:6). Banda (2005:45) therefore rightly finds that all religions will do well to rest their hope in Christ. Amongst others, he intimates that God is the acting subject in Jesus and that, on the basis of this, resting our hope in Christ in effect amounts to resting our hope in God (Banda, 2005:46). Accordingly, Christians score victories on account of Christ; and God is the one working in Christ.

Therefore, on account of ATR identifying with God the Father who works in Christ, there should not be any apprehension at all in seeing adherents making a shift to Christ, who epitomizes security from all terrors of life. On this account, Banda submits: “The African Christian must relinquish trust and confidence from African Traditional Religions and depend on Christ only because he is God” (Banda, 2005:46). Not only should an African Christian adopt this line, but also ATR adherents, and all humanity in need of salvation.

### **5.3.3. The extent of the security of the Gospel in the believer’s life**

The extent to which a believer in Christ is secured rests upon Christ himself. Pertinent to this issue is the infinitude of Christ which is central to him as the standing object of salvation and security. In this regard, Nürnberger states that “God is taken to be the creator and redeemer of humankind in general and Israel in particular” (2002:77). According to Nürnberger (2002:77), the perpetual existence of God further lies in “the mastery, benevolence and vision” God had, which finds expression in the covenant that displays his commitment to Israel and humanity at large. In similar vein, Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:682) say that His completeness and permanence serves as the guarantee that He abides perpetually with those who come to Him.

This must therefore address the extent of the security we find in Christ because, unlike other mediators and purported Saviours who are limited by time and space, Christ is permanent and abides. John holds him up as the *Logos* that was there in the beginning (Jn. 1:1) and amplifies this by crediting the entirety of creation to this Word. Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:249) underline that, in offering the true identity of Jesus, John highlights the fact that “the agency of the Creator revealed the preeminent role of the Word, or *Logos* (Jesus) in the

action of creation.” Further, John states that “the word was God,” perhaps stating in clearest terms who Jesus is. These declarations by John suffice to convince us not only of the Godship of Christ, but also of the security offered to every believer who comes to him which is complete, permanent, and guaranteed owing to Christ’s perpetual standing.

Moreover, His victory over death sees Him located at the right hand of the Father (Mk. 16:19; Acts 2:33), interceding there for believers (Rm. 8:34). While many have perished and are alive no more, Christ is alive, and his security and adequacy stand in proportion to his existence. He is therefore able to promise that he will neither leave nor forsake us (Mt. 28:20; Hb. 13:5). With this promise, we find that the “in Christ” motif characterises believers as they surrender their lives to him. Paul (in Rom. 6:11) positions believers as those who are “alive in Christ Jesus.” He is taking the motif of “in Christ Jesus” seriously and uses it at different focal moments of his writings (Rm. 6:11; 8:1; 16:3,7; Eph. 2:10).

Two possible meanings are apparent in this motif; firstly, that Christ is the instrument of the life believers live. This suggests that, because Christ lived the life of power and victory, those who are in him also are enabled to live just like him. This is critical when considering that humanity searches outside itself in order to conquer life (Tillich, 1958:57), and finding themselves in Christ, they live victorious life (Rom. 8:37). Secondly, Christ is the location (the place) in which believers live their lives (Gal. 2:20, Col. 3:3-5). Christ’s call, “come to me all you who are weary and heavily laden” (Mt. 11:28) seeks to bring believers to himself so that they can be safe and burden-free in his fold. Therefore, those who believe in Him find existence and shelter within His confines, and He does not only protect them when walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but also draws and leads them to green pastures (Ps. 23).

For those who are migrating from what was their former hope (in this case ATR) it is of utmost importance to know that they have an instrument and a place in which they can hope for better things for their lives. This is critical, as Banda (2005:39) posits that Christ is the Gospel himself – the absolute sense of Christianity. While we may appreciate the metaphorical sense of being “in Christ,” it is not disputed that those who believe in him find security in him. The rewards of walking *into* Christ is that believers are crossed from death to life (they are alive); are under the fold of the true Shepherd who guards their lives with his (they are protected); are in the light and are sure of their path to destiny (they are directed); and are with the bread of life and will thus not hunger anymore (they are fed).

These images of Christ must alert anyone who wants to make the shift to Christ of his ability to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19) as the Lord who established the worlds (Jn. 1:1). Further, Paul carries the refrain that those who believe in Christ are “alive.” In terms of the many objects of belief in circulation today, Christ answers best the question of life not only through demonstration of his power in raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:43), but also by raising himself up from the dead (Rm. 6:9). Those who take refuge in him are now guaranteed eternal life.

#### **5.4. THE NATIONS CONVERGING IN CHRIST**

For salvation to touch across all cultures and types of humanity, Christ must be seen as the common place into which all humanity converges. One of the main reasons He came was to seek and find the lost, a task which took the cross to complete. The act of hanging on the cross was a show of Jesus’ surrender and obedience to God who sent him (Calvin, 1541:801). It serves as an example for those who converge under his cross that obedience to God is paramount (1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 21:3; Amos. 5:22-25; Mt. 12:27). Life under the cross or in the presence of Jesus is of the highest discipline and requires yielding one’s life completely to God (Jn. 14:15). Keeping God’s Law and acknowledging his grace by faith, amounts to yielding our lives to him and finding salvation. How then are believers (humanity) to converge under the cross of Christ?

##### **5.4.1. Living under the Law of God**

In dealing with life under the Law, we do not interrogate what the Law is, except to determine how believers can live in obedience to God’s instruction. Contemplating this, one finds that living according to the Law of God does not mean performance of the Law but obedience to his instructions. Calvin (1541:109) intimates that, through his Law (God’s instruction), God “teaches us to revere his deity and shows us what this reverence entails.” VanGemeren (1996:15) finds that the Law is “the divine self-disclosure, and the progression of God’s revelation and redemptive history.” Any act where humanity is not placing itself under God’s Law will amount to rebelliousness. VanGemeren (1996:16) and Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:261) assert that what unites us under Christ is our eternal obedience to the Law of God as a rule for life.

Paul is correct in surmising that, to us, the Law is a pedagogue (Gal 4:1-3); in this instance teaching us how to yield our lives to God. Calvin (2014:797) posits that life yielded to God amounts to self-denial. And we find this aspect in the calling of disciples where Jesus

proclaims that anyone who wants to follow him must deny himself (Mt. 16:24; Lk. 19:23), implying that we commit to do what Christ instructs us. Calvin states that humanity often falls short of self-denial because “we are quite unbridled in our fierce craving for recognition and honours” (1541:797), while Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:117) submit that our inclinations to self-preservation, comfort, self-justification, and protection of reputation and status make us fail the self-denialism test. Failing to deny ourselves makes us fall short of being disciples of Christ who are obedient to the Law of God, thus denying the opportunity to converge under his cross. The refrain that: “they will be my people and I will be their God,” is prevalent the Bible (Jr. 32:38; Ez. 14:11, 2 Cor. 6:16). Clearly, the message of obedience to the Law of God entails a humanity that must embrace him in order for him to be their God (Barton, 1993:1428; Hindson & Mitchell, 2010a:1003).

Consistent with this, Colquhoun finds that, in failing to obey the Law, we fail the test of holiness, which is only passed through obedience to God’s Law (Kistler, 2009:271). Hindson & Mitchell therefore warn that “[t]he church must therefore not evade the rigorous conditions of discipleship” (2010b:117), which keeping of the Law is one of those obligations under which believers reside (Kistler, 2009:260). The Greek word ἀπαρνέομαι (*aparneomai*) means to “deny utterly, disown, abstain,” suggesting that Christians ought to deny themselves completely. Further, according to Steele (2015:2315), it is taken to mean “disown and renounce self, to disregard all personal interests and enjoyments.” It follows then that there is no free reign under the Law of God, certainly not at the cross under which all humanity must converge. The convergence rests on accepting as an obligation the performance of the will of God, hearing his Law and giving it pre-eminence and preference in our lives. In Calvin’s (1541:791) mind, therefore, “every Christian, to be sure, should so strain himself as to think that, as long as he lives, it is with God that he must deal.”

Accordingly, to deal with God decisively and earnestly, God must be preeminent in humanity’s existence. This means that all other gods must fall (Ex. 20) and worship must be rendered to God alone (Ex. 20). Therefore, converging under the cross as believers of Christ must lead ATR adherents to abandon their worship of ancestors and the performance of obsolete rituals. VanGemeren (1996) says that submission to God’s law:

may well create a deeper longing for God, develop a greater zeal for interpretation of God’s Word, kindle the flame of a renewed commitment to personal and societal ethics, rebuild relationships, and reconstitute vibrant Christian communities (p.14).

This is therefore the kind of life that humanity should aspire to, and it is only found in perfect obedience to God's law. As VanGemeran (1996:16) notices, "[m]an's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever." Accordingly, the convergence under the cross is the only place where humanity can satisfy this highest end, and it is only possible if our ears are inclined to hear God alone.

#### **5.4.2. Living through the grace in God's Law**

Colquhoun (in Kistler, 2009:144) says that, "[i]f awakened sinners are ignorant of the leading points of difference between the Law and the Gospel, this will discourage them much from attempting to come to Christ for salvation." As the theory goes, Law is work and grace is free. Therefore, we assert that performance is possible only while people feel that they are able to do it. At the point where "the going gets tough," people resign themselves and give up. The discouragement that Colquhoun speaks of condemns people to sin and destruction by placing a high demand on humanity that it cannot fulfil. The important thing, not only for Christians but also for ATR whose faith, by their own admission, is validated by the OT, is to realize that Law and grace are aspects of one God and are not antithetical to each other (VanGemeran, 1996:15; Kistler, 2009:156). It is therefore important to see grace in the Law of God which will make coming to converge under the cross of Christ an attractive option that is free of burden.

Now, when Law and grace agree, we find that the Law also stands because of God's graciousness (Kistler, 2009:161). God calls us to perform his Law under the auspice of grace. In any case, humans are unable to perform anything meritorious (Aquinas, 1954:139; Kistler, 2009:161), let alone come to this God if grace is not at work to pave a way for us to reach to him. Grace, therefore, is an instigator and sets in motion the process of reconciliation with Him. We ought to be mindful that God did not really have to call sinners back to himself, except on account of the very same grace (Jn. 3:16). Therefore, God calling humanity to himself amounts to a call to abide by his words which are in fact his laws. Here then, grace is overarching, and if the Law itself has no measure of grace, humanity cannot even begin to yield to it.

This makes our obedience to the Law voluntary, mindful of the fact that, because we are children of God, we must lead lives that bring glory to him. Wentz (1959:72) says that "[n]o Law, whether of [humans] or angels may rightfully be imposed upon Christians without their consent, for we are free of all laws." Moreover, Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:162) submits that freely believing the Gospel presents perfect obedience to the commands of the Law as a

covenant. The Law as a rule of life exhibits grace in that it is through it that God allows us to attain to life living in total obedience to him and permitted to do so by his grace only. Forde (2014:242) and Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:162) rightly hold that God's Word is both Law and Gospel, and it stands as the means through which God chooses to speak to humanity which, by itself, is an act of grace.

Of course, there will always be the danger of falling into the trap of those who opine that Law and Gospel (grace) are different and find no common ground. For instance, Tiefel says:

"[w]hen Christ brings grace and salvation, he transfers believers from the Law to the Gospel, from wrath to grace, from sin to righteousness, from death to life" (Tiefel, 1967:22), hinting at an antithetical relationship between the two. I concur with those scholars such as Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009), Forde (2014), Calvin (1541), and Warfield (1909) who find that God's Word is both Law and Gospel, while any separation of this may lead to incomplete comprehension of his Word. Dolamo (2018:6) holds that God's command is God's *Logos* that created everything and sustains everything created. And if both are *Logos*, then both are infused with grace so that humanity can stand before God. If taken literally, Jn. 1:1 tells us that the Word was in the beginning and that this *Logos*, again, is Christ who came full of grace and truth (1:14). If Christ is the Word full of grace, then everything that God spoke as his Word is grace, including his Law.

It is therefore through the spectacles of grace that Law can be performed, as Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:162) intimates that believing the Gospel translate to perfect obedience, and in this instance, obedience to the Law of God. That which grace does therefore enables yielding obedience to the Law of God which, in turn, enables humanity to converge under the cross of Christ.

#### **5.4.3. Living by faith in God's Law**

If humanity is to live, it should receive the Law of God with all faith and commit to keep it. This must be understood in the sense of keeping the Law not as a condition of attaining salvation, because the Law cannot deliver it (VanGemeran, 1996:41), however, the Law must be retained as a rule for life (Kistler, 2009:197-198). Accordingly, Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:198) finds that the Law has nothing to demand from Christians, because "[i]ts demands of perfect obedience as the condition of eternal life and complete satisfaction for sin have, by their divine Surety, been fully answered for them." Obviously, some in the faith detest the Law as a bad phenomenon that is not applicable to the children of God, citing that they are released from the Law according to Romans 7.

However, Paul argues that the Law is the pedagogue (Gal 4:1-3) and that it is holy (Rom 7:12). This amplifies the fact that that which God has given cannot be regarded to be without use in the lives of people, including the Law itself. VanGemeran (1996:51) thus submits that “[t]he Law is the heart and core of scripture,” while Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:426) underline that the Law belongs to God and has its origins from him alone. Colquhoun lays it plainly: The Law is so important that God has put it “into the hands of His Eternal Son as Mediator [...] invested with all the sovereign authority that ever belonged to it [...] together with what God the Son as their great Redeemer has added to it” (Kistler, 2009:261).

Therefore, convergence under the cross of Christ requires a relationship to the Law of God that is infused with faith from the onset. The Law by itself is given infused with hope and faith that there shall emerge those who will accept it as a rule of life and by faith yield perfect obedience to it, just as Christ accepted it and added to it significance. It is therefore not for Christians to divorce themselves from the Law on the basis of Romans 7.

The scripture is clear that what becomes of the Law is that, while it stands, it loses its power to condemn. This is owing to the fact that Christians are dead unto Law (Rom. 6) and alive in Christ who answered all its demands. Christians can therefore not offer anything short of that which the patriarchs offered as a response to God’s Law, because this embodies a response to his grace as Colquhoun charges (Kistler, 2009:264). By faith we have seen patriarchs yielding to the Law of God and being imputed with righteousness (Heb. 11). VanGemeran (1996:20-22) reminds us of Abraham, whom he calls the Law keeper, as well as Noah and Enoch, asserting that their keeping of the Law was a response to God’s grace.

Further, Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:178) holds that it is incumbent on the doctrine of faith to show humanity the firmness and irreversibility of the Law as a covenant. In this vein, Kevan (in VanGemeran, 1996:45) holds that “[a]ny change in relation to the Law that occurs in Christianity is *not* in the Law but in the believer”. We may add here the findings of Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:425), that the Law belongs to God with all its origins. This firm and irreversible Law thus comes across as God’s instrument for transforming the Christian into a servant of the kingdom of God (VanGemeran, 1996:45). Further, VanGemeran (1996:54-55) notes that this Law (1) forms the basis of obedience; (2) brings real freedom; (3) yields perfect righteousness; and (4) brings Law and order.

This Law therefore makes convergence under the cross possible because it keeps those people who are obedient to God’s voice (Jn. 10:27), sets free from bondage those who yield

perfect obedience to it (Jn. 8:36; Rm. 5:21; 6:12), aids those who seek righteousness over evil in their affairs with God and people (Eph. 2:10; 1 Th. 5:15), inclines people to love the Law of God and to abide by it (Js. 3:17-18), and lastly, makes servants of the kingdom (Jn. 10:27). It is the intention of the Law to mould those who yield to it in the shape of Christ and make them partakers resting under his cross. While this Law notifies all sinners of their inability to justify themselves, faith pushes them to incline their ears to the same faithful Law of God that reveals to them righteousness and justification (Rm. 7:9; Colquhoun, in Kistler, 2009:179).

#### **5.4.4. Relating to the Law of God in faith**

It is clear, then, that there is no salvation in the Law of God. However, the fact that salvation is not rested in this Law does not call for its abrogation, and our opportunity to divorce ourselves from it. Consider what the jailer asked: “what shall I do to be saved?” (Rom. 10:9; Acts 16:33; Mark 16:15) – he was faced with the prospects of making a shift to Christianity hoping also that there would be something he could perform to attain salvation. We also see Saul, who would later become Paul, faced with this predicament, asking: “Lord, what would thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). It is apparent that humans expect to do something in order to attain God’s salvation, thus the performance. However, Bonhoeffer (1949:87) states that, when Christ called the rich young man “Levi” and asked Peter to come to him over the waters, it became clear that coming to him relies on one thing: “to rely on Christ’s word, and to cling to it as offering greater security than all the securities in the world.”

In contrast, Nürnberger (2002:230) states that “the Law originally defined an attitude and behaviour which falls in line with the prerequisites of human well-being.” If this view is upheld, then good works may be a prerequisite for salvation. Since ATR surmises that performance of rituals earns you salvation from your ancestors (Maimela, 1985:65-66), this would be true for them in particular. However, VanGemeren (1996:13) says we must perform the Law because it is “the rule of life for the redeemed.” With that said, the notion that salvation is free comes across as hard to comprehend not only for other religious beliefs but for some Christian movements as well, even though it is clear from Scripture that our adherence to, and performance of the Law comes after the salvation fact.

It is important therefore to note that God’s Law is necessary to mould us into the image of Christ, as indicated. In so far as Paul and the Jailer are asking these questions, the response which they receive is critical around asserting that the Law by itself provides no salvation. For instance, when the jailer had apprehension, it was Paul and Silas that

explained to him that salvation is possible only through believing in Jesus Christ (Bonhoeffer, 1949:87; Acts 16:31). Hindson and Mitchell (2010b:376) state that the word “belief,” as used here, means more than mental assent: it means that the jailer was called “to actively trust in or rely on Jesus”. With further explanation of the Gospel, the jailer and his household understood the Law of God and accepted salvation through hearing the Gospel. Colquhoun (Kistler, 2009:175) finds that the very same Law is established by the Gospel and theirs is not an antithetical relationship. Salvation in God’s Law becomes an unintended consequence in that while we are being saved, we perform good works. Calvin says that the Law of God, being the Gospel, remains a teacher to point to and to reveal the need for a redeemer irrespective of our inability to keep it (Calvin, 1541:179; Warfield, 1909:330).

Colquhoun (Kistler 2009: xxv) further finds that, should we get ourselves to understand how these two complement each other, we will enjoy all the goodness Christ’s salvation has to offer. This is because believing in Jesus amounts to believing in the Gospel, given that Jesus is the Gospel himself. VanGemeren (1996:42) correctly points out that in its intention the Law aids Christian growth in grace and not justification or merit. Being saved by him and being loved by him compels us to obey his instruction and allows us to grow in His knowledge. Accordingly, all religions that advocate for keeping of the Law as a basis of salvation are antinomian and at best heretical, because they nullify the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. However, keeping the Law out of voluntary obedience and love for God unintentionally leads to salvation, since this is the process that follows belief in Christ.

Nürnbergger (2002:230) therefore submits that, “in its crudest form the human act of obedience can either be perceived to be the precondition for the divine act of grace, or the human act of obedience can be taken to be a consequence of the divine act of grace.” The latter is more plausible, because the condition of coming to God is clear: we come as we are (Is. 1:18; Rev. 22:17). Accordingly, all acts performed by ATR and all hope invested in ancestors and objects of worship like Buddha, Muhammed, and others, are deficient and destructive if salvation is in view. For there is no salvation in any other name, except the name of Christ (Acts 4:12).

## **5.5. THE MODEL OF SALVATION FOR ATR ADHERENTS**

If Law fails, and by extension all works performed towards salvation fail, what can an African traditionalist do to be saved without ever feeling that their religion is being trampled upon again? We ought to be careful not to appear to be demonizing the religion of Africans again like missionaries did in times past. In the same spirit, we must come up with a model of

salvation that will map a road for the ATR follower to see how Christ best answers their concerns as they migrate to Christianity. Of particular importance is to make it vivid to ATR adherents that, without feeling that they are being uprooted from their religion, it is possible to be saved in Christ and still identify with their culture. This section therefore proposes a model for an ATR adherent to follow in order to attain salvation.

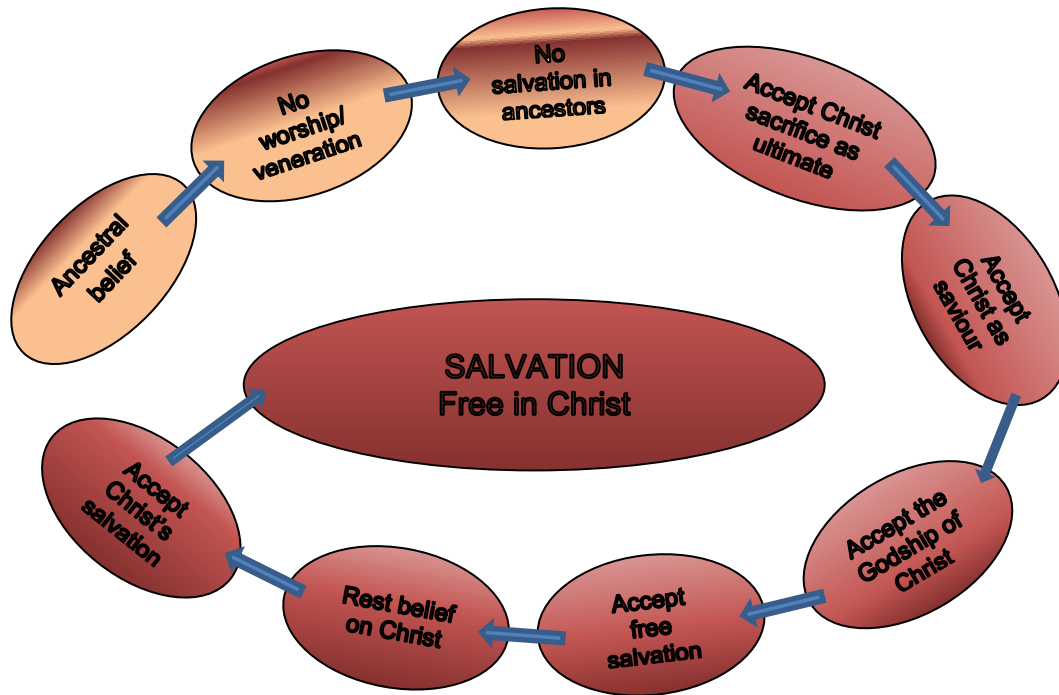
### 5.5.1. The model

Concept	ATR	Christianity	Marked difference/ agreement	Safe-way migration
<b>On ancestors</b>	Believe in their existence	Accept their existence	ATR accepts their existence and their worship/ veneration Christianity accepts that they exist.	ATR adherent to believes that they exist and accept them as departed members of family or clan, however no veneration/ worship of them
<b>On relationship with ancestors</b>	Believes and prefers that they are prayed to and venerated	Against their veneration and worship	ATR holds that they should be allowed to partake in their affairs through prayers and worship, while Christianity acknowledges that they have no role to play at all	Recognize ancestors as our dearly departed but cannot be venerated
<b>On role of ancestors</b>	Intermediaries, Saviours, head of families.	Considered to be dead people	Active role in ATR affairs No role at all in Christian's affairs	ATR must accept that they play no salvific role, except to be remembered for their heroics as in the cases of Nelson Mandela, Jacob, Isaac, Moses and others
<b>On rituals/ sacrifices</b>	Belief that libations and ancestral foods are due to them	Considers that they are dead and should not be sacrificed for	ATR believes that sacrifice of animals suffices for salvation Christianity talks and accepts Christ's sacrifice only	Shift the object of sacrifice from ancestors to Christ, the Lamb of God (Jn. 3:16)
<b>On role of sacrifices</b>	That they appease ancestors and make them care more for family	That they should not be sacrificed for, no foods should be offered because they are dead	In ATR: That the animal sacrifices, often tribe or clan specific, are effective in getting ancestors to pay attention In Christianity: That Christ is the ultimate sacrifice for the whole humanity, not just clan or tribe specific	Accept that the sacrifice of Christ has laid the foundation for all who seek salvation, it is the only acceptable sacrifice before God (Heb. 10:1-18)
<b>On Christ</b>	Views him as great ancestor Problematizes his equality with the Father That Christ lacks the ability to secure them That Christ is foreign to them and their needs	That he is the Son of God and God himself That he is the Saviour and all that humanity needs That he is the author of salvation and is not indifferent to the greatest human need, salvation	ATR holds that Christ is not God, but a great ancestor who cannot have equal standing with God the Father Christianity holds that Christ is the cornerstone of salvation and answers the human need to the fullest. That only He can answer this need and no one else	Accept Christ as the Saviour of humanity on the basis that He is the SAME God that Africans knew before the advent of missionaries (John 1:1-2) Accept that there is a difference between Christ and ancestors (He lives and they are dead) (Heb. 10) Accept that Christ does not replace their ancestors, they can continue loving their ancestors, but they must believe only in Christ for salvation

<b>On God</b>	Recognizes God more than it does Christ	Views him as God who is active in his creation, having elected to save through Christ	The two religions agree on the existence of God and the role he plays in creation and salvation:	Accept that Christ does not replace God, however, acknowledge that God is Christ and Christ is God who came to humanity in their image
<b>On grace</b>	Does not give much account on the doctrine of grace. Often hinders those without means to offer sacrifices, condemning them further into their misery	Central to the message of salvation. De-merits human effort, making salvation free for all who believe, poor and rich	ATR is completely silent on grace but advances human effort in the form of rituals to appease ancestors, whereas Christianity holds that all people can receive salvation if they believe in God and the reconciliatory work of Christ	Accept that salvation is free and does not have to cost them a thing, therefore inviting even the less fortunate to God's salvation through Christ
<b>On faith</b>	Faith on ancestors that answers their petitions	Faith in God in hope for salvation	ATR rests faith on ancestors, whereas Christianity prefers faith on God the Father and the Son	ATR can put their faith on the true object of salvation which is Christ who cuts across all cultural divides. In putting their faith in Christ, their needs can best be answered without the limitations that ancestors have. For Christ continues to live and intercedes for us
<b>On salvation</b>	That ancestors do save as intermediaries to God That rituals performed provide relief and salvation	That Christ is the only Saviour That ancestors cannot save just as they hope for their own salvation	ATR believes ancestors save and provide relief Christianity puts God as the only Saviour through Christ	Accept that the ancestors upon whom their salvation rest, depend on God for their own salvation. By extension, notice that the same God the Father they claimed to have known before Christ, is also God the Son (Christ) who came in human form to answer humanity's greatest need - salvation

### 5.5.2. Schematic representation of the model

On the basis of the table above, the following schematic representation reflects what ATR adherent can adopt and follow to attain salvation:



Our model suggests that ATR adherents can still identify with their ancestors as people with whom their paths crossed. However, issues of worship and veneration must not be directed to such figures because they have no salvific role. Bae and van der Merwe (2008:1322) say that the “salvation of [hu]mankind is based on Christ’s ransom sacrifice on the cross and therefore sacrifices which are made for the dead are of no value.” Ancestors must therefore be accepted as departed members of our families who are now rested from all their work. ATR adherents can now migrate to Christianity as a religion that welcomes all world cultures and offers salvation to anyone who believes. Importantly, ATR adherents must know that, unlike our ancestors, Christ lives on to offer hope, and offers salvation to everyone who comes to him. Further, Christ must be accepted by ATR adherents as the high priest who sympathizes with us (Heb. 4:15), meaning that he is not indifferent to our greatest fears; in fact, he experienced them in human form and has accordingly mastered a response in relation to all those fears and insecurities. ATR adherents must accept Jesus Christ as the only Saviour (Lk. 2:11; Hosea 13:4) and also accept that Christ is God himself (Jn. 20:28; Col. 2:9; Jn. 10:30).

Further, it is to be stressed that coming to Christ for salvation renders performance of any works obsolete because he has performed all that was necessary for humanity to attain it. In accepting this, ATR adherents will thus receive their salvation without doing any work for it but only by resting their faith in Christ and accepting him as Saviour (Eph. 2:4-9). Of importance is to stress that any person is at liberty to remember their own ancestors. Much as we call the names of the patriarchs like Jacob, Abraham, and Isaac, as indicated, ATR adherents are at liberty to remember and ruminate their ancestors' contributions in their lives. However, this should not be elevated to libations, worship, and veneration, and resting one's hope for salvation in them. As the Bible guides in Acts 4:12: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

## **5.6. CONCLUSION**

Africans and their religion are where they are today because of the kind of Gospel they have received from missionaries which did much to devalue their lives (Blyden, 1994:21-22). At the same time, Africans in their quest for self-discovery have spent much time dealing with the question of their own culture which they felt was oppressed and neglected to deal with the question of what the true Gospel is. In the process, both Westerners and Africans carried on without effectively dealing with the question of the true Gospel. The answer lies in what Blyden (1994:20-26) proposes: that only the Bible without notes and comments should be the standard.

When this is done, an African, knowing the true Gospel, can overcome their insecurities about the Christ who saves and accordingly see the limitations embedded in their ancestors as alluded to by Bae and van der Merwe (2008:1322). Most importantly, Africans should come to embrace Christianity or, at least, Christ as the only Saviour for those who rest their confidence in him for salvation. Here, they may be able to embrace Christ as their Saviour and recognize ancestors as their departed relatives in whom no salvific power rests. This they will do, as they realize that the works (rituals) they perform towards ancestors for salvation, are actually not salvific. Pertinent to the question of accepting Christ is his permanency. Whilst all other purported Saviours are time-barred and limited in their exploits, Christ transcends time; he has been in the beginning with God; he also is the active player in our current affairs of salvation; and he will stand in the end as Saviour of those who believe in him as Clarke (2005:163-164) states. Accordingly, we find that Christ himself is the Lord "who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1:8) upon whom all humanity must look for their salvation.

## **CHAPTER 6: SUMMATIVE CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. INTRODUCTION**

The study set out to investigate how an African can achieve salvation that is of faith and grace through Jesus Christ. In attempting to deliver on this task, pertinent questions were examined in terms of the project's chapter outline. Chief among these was to develop a model for an African to adopt in their quest for salvation. Consequently, we asked: How can an African from a traditional background relate to God's law while holding the sanctity of grace as the only means of salvation? In the main the intention was to establish a biblical understanding of the relation between law and gospel that affirms the role of Jesus Christ as the champion of salvation attainable by grace alone. This understanding was shown to be able to assist ATR adherents towards liberating themselves from a ritualistic African religion which offers no real salvation. In the present segment I summarize conclusions of chapters in order to present an overarching view of what has been said and also to offer overall coherence.

### **6.2. RESEARCH SUMMARY**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduced the study as centred on the biblical Law, Gospel, and African theology. The study set out to answer five questions relating to how an ATR adherent can find salvation without losing their identity upon migrating to Christianity. The ambivalence that exists around how ATR relates to Christianity has brought hesitation for African traditionalists when the need arose for migration to Christianity. This remains the greatest challenge that scholars have acknowledged: that ATR adherents remain rooted in their own religion and practices mainly owing to what they deem to be the insufficiency of Christianity to answer to their entire need basket.

Accordingly, ATR adherents opt to render worship to ancestors and refer to them as the living dead who play a critical role in their daily lives. We have seen ATR adherents' relationship with God as that which in the main is premised on ancestral mediation and sacrificial offerings for the departed. Further, ATR adherents deem themselves to be without sin and claim to have had relations with God prior to Christ's incarnation, muting the importance of salvation and the core of Christ's message. This introduction engendered a formulation of questions that, when answered, would delineate salvation as intended and

articulated by the Bible against an ATR adherent's view of salvation. Most importantly, this study aimed to present a model which an ATR adherent could follow towards attaining salvation without feeling apprehensive about the firm securities that Christianity offers.

## **Chapter 2: Understanding the notion of salvation within African traditional scholarship**

This chapter's main focus was to understand sin and salvation as seen through the eyes of ATR. We have found that, in ATR, the belief is that human beings do not sin against God but only against other human beings. The argument has been that sin does not exist in African terms and that humanity's relations with God have never been severed as Africans always had relations with him. It held that sin centres on ritual impurity, injury to relationships within communities, and separation from ancestors. Accordingly, ATR adherents do not believe that humanity needs salvation of the soul except when it comes to being delivered from the terrors of this world which Jesus appears to be too foreign to attend. ATR adherents therefore hold that ancestors do have the power to deliver Africans from such fears and terrors as they face on daily basis, thus offering salvation. Salvation for an African therefore concerns itself with building right relationships, maintaining relations with ancestors and, in a way, leading a prosperous life free of this world's terrors.

## **Chapter 3: African theological approaches to salvation and its implications for a theological understanding of Law and Gospel**

This chapter set out to investigate the possibility of salvation as found in mediums outside of Christ. It was established that ATR over the years has been fashioning their religion in terms of the OT and accordingly mimicked rituals that were performed there in hope of salvation. The adherents of ATR asserted that OT validates their religion and accordingly performed circumcision, the veneration and worship of ancestors, animal sacrifices, and the offering of food and libations to ancestors in hope for salvation, that is, total well-being. However, the chapter found that Christ stands as the only way of salvation. We have shown that salvation is found through Christ's blood only, and is accepted by God as payment for humanity's sins.

Accordingly, Christ's blood was found to be better than that of ancestors, of animals and of martyrs. In conclusion, the chapter found that sacrifices that ATR adherents perform through the animal sacrifices and performance of other rituals fail to save and are therefore defunct. The very same systems that ATR adopts as means of salvation have been found to be obsolete and no longer accepted by the God of all humanity. Therefore, it was found that the

terms that God has set out for salvation point to Jesus Christ alone, who stands as Saviour until today. This way, God's anger is satisfied.

#### **Chapter 4: Biblical tenets of salvation by grace through faith**

Given that salvation rests in Jesus alone and no other medium can deliver it, it was important to discuss its building blocks in this chapter. Grace and faith were discussed and it was found that the former is the first tenet to salvation. Here it was found that, for humanity to even have audience before God, grace must stand in the way so as to enable him to glance at humanity. It is through grace that God made himself accessible to the deprived humanity. Out of his graciousness he allowed humanity the avenues of covenants, sacrifices, confessions, benedictions, and prayers as means to make himself accessible. Because grace is present and Christ is the grace of God, humanity is able to appear before him through Christ. The work of Christ's sacrifice, therefore, is to placate God's anger so that humanity can stand in relation to him.

Faith is the only way humanity can respond to God's call of salvation, as indicated. Here humanity acknowledges their failure and inability to save themselves and deposit their trust in God. Accordingly, that which God offers to humanity through Jesus Christ, humanity lays claim to through faith. This is the step that brings humanity to accept the salvation offered by Jesus Christ as narrated through numerous salvation stories in the Bible and the *I am* predicates of Jesus Christ. In terms of these, Christ sets himself as the only way through which salvation can be attained by anyone who believes in him.

#### **Chapter 5: Relating to the Law of God while holding grace as the only means of salvation**

This chapter attempted to develop a model that an ATR adherent could follow for attaining salvation through Christ whilst being true to their African identity. It became evident that migration from ATR to Christianity is a challenge because of ATR adherents' insecurities about Christ. Amongst other things, ATR adherents are deeply entrenched in their tradition and view themselves as traditionalists. Also, they have developed strong attachment to their ancestors in whom they see salvation. At the same time, they feel that Christianity is inadequate to address their life's needs. In addressing these concerns and others, it was argued that Christ stands as the only hope of salvation because of his Godship, his power and the security and victory that he embodies.

Propositions were thus made around how to migrate an ATR adherent safely to Christianity, providing for them avenues in terms of how they can engage their faith and live under the instruction of God. In the end, a model was rendered which in the main concedes to ATR adherents that it is not for Christianity to term their ancestors demons. However, ATR adherents can in fact hold their ancestors to heart by virtue of the relations they had with them whilst they lived. It was accepted that ancestors are after all family members who lived in our presence and will forever be remembered. However, an important distinction stands – that veneration and worship should not be directed to ancestors but to Christ in whom true salvation rests. In the end, this model allows an African to acknowledge his ancestors and hold them dear but to give worship to Christ alone.

### **6.3. RESEARCH CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this research acknowledged the position of Africans in terms of their primordial relations with God. It recognized that African religion very much supported and gave impetus to the spread of Christianity in Africa and around the world. This therefore suggests that Africans are by no means strangers to God and his affairs. However, the presentation of the Christian Gospel by missionaries left Africans destitute in terms of how they should relate to God when their religion was termed diabolical and primitive.

This study concludes that Africans do have relations with God and are by all means no strangers to him. Further, God's plan for salvation is intended for all humanity, including ATR adherents. Importantly, the knowledge that God has set the terms of reconciliation in Christ is an important piece of information ATR adherents should grasp. Accordingly, the study finds that ATR cannot offer salvation. Most importantly, it cannot conjure its own terms of how to attain it nor give it a meaning contrary to God's Word. Christ is the only one whom God chose to placate his anger. He is also presented by the Gospels as the model and norm for human conduct. Once more, this study therefore advises Africans to hold their ancestors in esteem; however, they should not look towards them for salvation, except to Christ alone.

The model adopted here says: acknowledge your ancestors, reminisce about your past experiences with them, remember them as your dearly departed, but never offer sacrifices and libation towards them in hope of salvation, nor worship them as purported messiahs who can offer salvation. The offer of salvation is rested upon Christ by God's own election and he is pleased with this choice.

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